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Monday, March 8, 2004

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 8, 2004

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

•(1100)

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to a point of order raised by the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke when the House last met.

The member asserted that a document tabled by the President of the Treasury Board did not adequately respond to the concern raised by the member for Edmonton—Strathcona. Specifically, she suggested that the document the government tabled did not include the years 2003-04 to which the Prime Minister had referred.

The document in question is actually the response to a question brought forward by the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik last year and was subsequently tabled by the President of the Treasury Board on February 18, 2004. If the member inspects the entire document she will find what we found, which is that it does in fact cover the years in question.

I would be quite happy to table the document once again should that be the wish of the House.

•(1110)

The Speaker: The hon. member indicated that the document was in fact the answer to a question. Was it made an order for return or was the answer printed in *Hansard*?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, the answer was printed in *Hansard*.

The Speaker: I think if it has been printed, it hardly seems necessary to re-table the document. Obviously, it is available. The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke may want to inspect the document and perhaps that will close the matter.

I am sure we will hear from her later if there is a continuing problem.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CONTRAVENTIONS ACT

The House resumed from February 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-10, an act to amend the Contraventions Act and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: When the bill was last before the House, the hon. member for London West had spoken and there remained five minutes in the time for questions and comments on the speech of the hon. member for London West.

I therefore call for questions or comments.

Seeing none, resuming debate, the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ):

Mr. Speaker, the bill before us today is making waves both inside and outside the House of Commons. Talking about decriminalizing simple possession of marijuana is an important issue that has raised much interest in the general public. A number of us have been contacted by various groups that would like to present their points of view.

As the Bloc Québécois justice critic, I have had the opportunity to talk with various people and groups that have given me their comments. Because it is an important issue with considerable symbolic value, it is the duty of the members of this House who want to address this issue to do so calmly, without demagoguery, and with enough perspective for a clear analysis of the situation and the bill before us. We must analyze what has led to this bill and what its results would be.

Therefore, I call upon the members of this House who are going to speak to this bill to do so without personal attacks, without grandstanding, with a cool head, in short, as rigorously as possible. That would be the least of the expectations of the women and men who have elected us to this place.

This is the third reading of Bill C-10. One of the reasons we are examining this bill is that there is a movement within the population that has been asking for some liberalization of the Canadian legislation. One of the most influential groups, in my opinion, has been the Forum Jeunesse of the Bloc Québécois, which has been battling on this front for a number of years. This week, it can finally see the result of its lobbying efforts.

Government Orders

Once again, I would like to congratulate the Forum Jeunesse. It has held forums, discussions and debates on this subject of considerable interest to the population group it represents.

We are at this point today because there is a fairly solid, fairly firm, awareness of what should be done. A policy based exclusively on repression will not work in this matter because it does not lead to the desired results. It is an expensive policy, and definitely not a cost-effective one.

So, we must take note of that. We must also keep in mind what we know does work and yield tangible results, which is to increase public awareness.

To smoke marijuana is not good for anyone. In order to fight this phenomenon, we must increase public awareness of course, and particularly that of young men and women, of teenagers who may want to experiment with this substance, which is harmful to health.

•(1115)

I want to be clear. Those who, both inside and outside this House, support a degree of flexibility in the criminal legislation on the possession of marijuana are not promoting its use. They are not promoting the use of a substance which we know can be harmful to a person's health. What these people are saying is that, currently, the punishment is worse than the crime, and this is what this legislation seeks to correct.

This bill seeks to ensure that, while a person caught with a small amount of marijuana should, of course, be punished and suffer the consequences of his or her action, such punishment and consequences should not be worse than the crime itself.

It is important that, in conjunction with this liberalization, this vast awareness campaign that I am calling for be launched, but with the following caveat: this awareness campaign dealing with education and health must be run by Quebec and the provinces. The federal government must not, yet again, use a commendable objective to interfere where it does not belong. It is time that steps be taken to allow Quebec and the provinces to run widespread awareness campaigns against the use of marijuana.

From the beginning, I have been saying that we must debate this issue calmly and objectively, which does not mean not being involved, but rather being objective, in order to examine the situation properly. Most of this work has been done in committee. It is important to repeat in this House what was said in committee, including the fact that other countries that have decriminalized possession have not seen an increase in marijuana use.

For the benefit of those who say that decriminalizing penalties for simple possession of marijuana would send a bad message and entice more young people to use, when we take a cold look at the situation and the studies that have been presented and analyzed in committee, we see that this is not the case. We can all agree that this removes quite a significant amount of rhetoric from this whole debate.

Despite its partisan and ideological differences, I believe the committee did excellent work, which resulted in the a new bill being put before the House, which is better than the one the committee examined.

•(1120)

There are four main reasons. First, many of us feared that there would be problems, despite the fact that individuals charged with and even found guilty of simple possession of marijuana once this bill is passed will not have a criminal record. Many members of the committee from both sides of the House feared that, even if an individual had no criminal record, this information could end up in some database somewhere and that even, for example, if a charge were dropped and the Canadian government did not retain that information, it could end up in the hands of a foreign government or an international organization, such as Interpol. Also, many feared that individuals charged or convicted in Canada for such an offence might still suffer the consequences, for example, when they wanted to travel abroad.

That is why I moved an amendment, the essence of which the government has retained, to include a prohibition on disclosure of a charge or conviction to a foreign government or an international organization, thereby ensuring that the consequences we wish to lessen in Canada will not continue to have as much impact outside Canada and throughout the world. This first improvement was supported by a strong majority in committee. I believe this is an extremely important improvement to this bill.

The aim of the second major improvement is to conduct a review in three years. I supported this amendment because I strongly believe that in three years, once the review is complete, people will realize that those naysayers inside and outside this House who predicted that the earth would all but stop turning and that Canada would basically become a land of junkies were wrong and that these predictions will not come true. The important thing, when it comes to such as a sensitive issue, is to conduct a rigorous analysis of the facts. This amendment will ensure that, in three years' time, the consequences of this legislation can be reviewed. I firmly believe we will conclude that we were right in passing this bill.

The aim of the Bloc's third major amendment is to ensure that anyone possessing from one to three marijuana plants is not charged with production, but is recognized as possessing small amounts of marijuana. I want to explain.

Everyone in the House knows that drug trafficking is controlled by crime rings. We all know and agree that our intention here is not to encourage these crime rings. We do not want to provide any encouragement whatsoever to these criminals.

The occasional user ought not to be forced to buy on the black market which is run by the underworld, thereby criminalizing him or her even further, although they are regular members of society in everyday life, paying taxes, raising families and so on.

Government Orders

• (1125)

The purpose of the amendment passed in committee is, therefore, to prevent the occasional user from having to buy on the black market and deal with hardened criminals.

The fourth element, not an amendment to the bill but rather a report tabled in this House by the committee chair—because there were two reports—has to do with driving under the influence of drugs.

I had introduced an amendment in committee to that end, but it was deemed out of order because it fell outside the parameters of the bill. The committee agreed with me, however, and so we raised that point in an additional report. One of the concerns frequently, and quite rightly, expressed by the public in fact relates to people driving under the influence of drugs.

What we want most emphatically to see is for the government to introduce a bill on driving under the influence of drugs, and to do so as soon as possible. We are aware of the results of the present legislation, as well as the numerous campaigns against drinking and driving. The same sort of approach needs to be taken to driving under the influence of drugs.

Driving under the influence of drugs is as dangerous as driving under the influence of alcohol. We must therefore come down very hard on those who contemplate driving under the influence of drugs.

I therefore wish to reiterate the support of the Bloc Québécois for Bill C-10. I also wish to reiterate our most impassioned plea for a bill on driving under the influence of drugs to be introduced and passed. I call upon my colleagues in this House to debate this without rhetoric, to analyze it coolly and rationally, even if they may feel very strongly about the issue. This is definitely a symbolic debate, but it is also a very important debate for the future of our society.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague's comments very intently. This is an important piece of legislation and I have a couple of thoughts on his presentation.

He presented the example of an individual driving under the influence of marijuana and that we should follow it up with another piece of legislation to ensure that it is looked after. Is that not getting the cart before the horse? Would we not be a lot wiser to bring that in before we bring forward a piece of legislation such as this that sends the message that in society it is okay to smoke marijuana? He is saying that is not what is happening. I would challenge him on that.

I want to ask him, how would he respond to the high school principal I talked to this fall when he said that just the idea of this piece of legislation going through this House has sent the message to the students in his school that it is okay to smoke marijuana?

Most of the citizens who walk the street do not follow the legislation as closely as we do here, but the message is clear to them, and to the students in that school, that it is okay. The courts are not enforcing it and the police are not enforcing it. This piece of legislation would send the message that we are going to go soft in society on this illegal drug.

I know that the bill does not necessarily say that, although it does send a message to our youth that they would get a lesser \$50 fine if they were under the age of 18. So, under this piece of legislation, the repercussions to students would be far less than if they were adults. I think there is some justification to the idea that this piece of legislation sends the wrong message to society.

He is saying that the sky is not going to fall and that drug use is not going to increase. I would ask him to explain to me, how would he answer the principal that has seen the drug use in his school double this fall because of the message that is being sent by this legislation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member from the Conservative Party of Canada for his question. I, too, have met with educators. First of all, there is a role for him to play when he meets the principal of his school and the students.

We are often invited to meet with students in secondary schools. At such times, we must clearly state that it is still illegal. It is still forbidden to have marijuana on one's person. We must convey this message. That is the first thing to do.

When certain people inside or outside this House say, "Everything is legal now; you can go ahead", these people also have a responsibility. If the message that is sent to the public and the message the public receives is that it is legal; well, it is not. Make no mistake. What we are discussing is not that we are going from a system where it is illegal to a system where it is legal. We remain in a system where it is illegal. It is still illegal.

However, the penalty or punishment may differ from a criminal record with all the attendant ramifications. Often, for young people who get caught because they tried it once or twice, the consequences of a criminal record have an impact on job opportunities later, as well as on the possibility of travel to such countries as the United States. And God knows that to travel outside Canada, one often has to wait for a connection in the United States. Thus, the consequences for these young people are worse than if they were to be punished with a ticket and eventually a fine.

What I would like to say to my colleague is that it is a question of balance. What we must do, in the most solid and most logical way possible, is to ensure that the punishment for these young people is not worse than the crime, that is, that they do not lose job and travel opportunities that will have an impact on the rest of their lives, because of a minor offence—still illegal, but minor.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the answer by the hon. member opposite.

In his question, the member for Yellowhead implied that the bill is leaving the impression that the government is legalizing marijuana, and that is not the fact at all. The points made by the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier were very clear and I appreciated hearing that from him.

Government Orders

The problem we are having in the school system and the misinformation that is getting to principals and young people is a result of the rhetoric coming from the likes of the member for Yellowhead of the Conservative Party who is implying that the bill would legalize marijuana. It could not be further from the truth.

The fact of the matter is, as the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier indicated, it is still illegal to use drugs in this country under this legislation. It lays out the penalties more clearly than in the past and brings some consistency to the law.

The hon. member spoke about the need for a roadside test. I agree with him on that point. We do need a roadside test. Moneys are being applied in the bill whereby we are going to increase the funding for research into a roadside test and there will be greater training for police officers in order to detect the physical elements of those under the influence of drugs. Does he not feel that this is a step forward in terms of improving the situation and catching those who may be driving under the influence of drugs?

• (1135)

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Marceau: Madam Speaker, first of all, I wish to thank the hon. member for his question. This is indeed a step in the right direction. Do we need to do more? Yes. Do we need to speed up the process so that this bill will be passed, as I have so fervently wished right from the start? Yes.

This is a step in the right direction, but only the first step. I hope the process will move on as quickly as possible.

[English]

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Madam Speaker, I would like to comment because I was challenged a little bit about the message that is being sent under this piece of legislation. It is not saying that it is legalizing marijuana, but it is sending a message to our youth that it is okay.

It says that the punishment for possessing under 15 grams of marijuana is \$150 for an adult; however, if one is a student with a student card, it is only \$100. What message is that sending to our youth?

If it is one gram or less of cannabis resin, then it is \$300 for an adult, but only \$200 for a student or a youth. That sends the message loud and clear to our youth that the government is going soft on the idea of using marijuana. That is where this piece of legislation is sending a wrong message to this nation. We had better get serious about it because it is not just marijuana use that is the problem in my riding.

On *The National* this week there was a report of the massive problem that we are having with methamphetamine which is linked very closely to marijuana. There have been massive marijuana drug busts in my riding and the marijuana is laced with methamphetamine. The addiction to the product is unbelievable. Communities are outraged because of the damage that is being done in schools and in society. They are fighting back with everything they have.

As they are fighting on the home front on this war against illicit drugs, we have a piece of legislation here that is not working in tandem with them. It is actually working against them. This is an absolute mistake. It is a piece of legislation that is sending all the

wrong messages for all the wrong reasons. I would like my hon. colleague to comment on this.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Marceau: Madam Speaker, there are two points to be made. First of all, we see the Conservatives' attitude toward our young people. We realize—and I hope he realizes—that a student, with the high cost of a university education these days, will be forced to cut back even more on the necessities of life if the fines are hiked to that level. We know, moreover, that many students have trouble making ends meet.

In my opinion, the figures given by the hon. member are substantial enough to make a cegep or university student think twice. I remember my university days. If I had had to find \$200, I would have had to do without an awful lot of other things.

Second, I would encourage the member to look at what was said in committee, including the Health Canada study which reported no increase in marijuana use in places where simple possession of marijuana has been decriminalized. These are facts, and facts are what all speeches in this House ought to be based on.

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure on behalf of the NDP caucus to join in the debate on Bill C-10.

I would like to begin by paying tribute to and recognizing the effort of the NDP social policy critic, the member for Vancouver East. I think most people who are involved with the bill will agree that she has dedicated a great deal of energy, resources, time and personal capital to try to develop a mature 2004 approach to the issue of substance abuse, specifically the issue of marijuana use.

The member for Vancouver East recommends to our caucus that we not support the bill in its current form. I believe we went into the process with the best of intentions and in the spirit of some cooperation, or at least willingness on our part, to work with the government in the recognition that the current approach to the prohibition of marijuana had failed in the overall strategy to reduce substance abuse, whether it was among youth, or for marijuana alone or for the broader issue of substance abuse.

I would like to recap where we are.

During the previous session of Parliament, Bill C-38 was examined by the special committee for the non-medical use of drugs and was amended through that process. Through that committee, the member for Vancouver East and the NDP pushed for a number of changes. I might add that the touring, travelling committee on the non-medical use of drugs did very necessary and important work, and it heard from Canadians. I want to be balanced and fair and say that we did get some movement from the government on certain aspects of this bill, and I want recognize that.

Government Orders

When Parliament was prorogued in November and the new session commenced, Bill C-38 became Bill C-10. That is how we find ourselves now working on the bill in the House of Commons today.

Let me say that there is a great deal of misunderstanding about the bill across the country. The misunderstanding is between those who support more decriminalization or true legalization and those who are opposed to what they believe is too much movement in terms of decriminalization. Both sides are not happy with the bill. Often that is a measurement that we have a good piece of legislation when no one is happy with it.

In this unhappy circumstance, we have to speak against the bill. It not only fails to achieve what it sets out to achieve, but it has the reverse effect in the decriminalization measures imposed by Bill C-10. We have been reminded time and again by the former minister of justice that it is not decriminalization and it has never been decriminalization. However, the shift to a fine regimen for simple possession may have the reverse effect and this level of decriminalization could lead to even more people being punished rather than fewer.

The original role was to take a softer approach to the very small personal use levels of one or two joints. In fact there was a time recently when police would overlook that type of minor offence. However, now that there is an automatic fine associated with even the smallest level of marijuana, it has a net widening effect.

Criminologists have often found that lowering, but not eliminating punishment, results in more people being punished. Previously the police would let people off with a warning and a wave under the old system. However, they definitely will be charged with a fine under this proposed system. In other words, decriminalization could lead to more people being punished, not fewer.

This would be a cutting edge plan if this was 1968. It is not 1968 and our approach toward substance abuse and our understanding about drug abuse has matured since 1968. It has matured since 1920 when this whole mess began.

● (1145)

Today is International Women's Day, and I would like to be one of the first in the House to recognize that March 8 is a very important day around the world. I raise this with all respect, but one of the famous five, a Canadian suffragette who has a statue within the smoke rings drifting from the House of Commons today, had a profound effect in shaping our views toward the criminalization of marijuana through the naivety that existed in 1920 about many social issues. Some of the most socially progressive people in the country at that time were advocating eugenics because they were naive, and they were plain wrong.

I put it to the House that the first female magistrate ever appointed in the British Commonwealth, Emily Murphy, was fundamentally wrong about marijuana. What has been called her vitriolic diatribe against using marijuana set the tone for the legislation that was to follow, and set the tone for what I believe is 100 years of abject failure in our treatment of substance abuse. She was a prohibitionist.

Let me explain some of how this terrible bit of history came about. She was an admirable woman, and a hero today to women for

fighting for the vote. She was a prolific writer. She turned out four books and scores of magazines under the pen name Janey Canuck.

Some of her famous publications were stories on the grave drug menace, which bordered on being racist because it really was tied up with the use of opium on the west coast among the Chinese community. It was their fear that marijuana, opium and opiates were all one issue, and they pointed to the menace on the west coast. Some say that the country's war on weed was prompted by little more than a racist, erroneous dossier on the non-existent marijuana menace in a 1922 essay penned by Emily Murphy, with the help of a seemingly delusional Los Angeles police department chief.

It is galling to hear groups who support prohibition argue that there must have been some sound reason for criminalizing this drug in the first place, when there was no such thing in 1922 or today. Unfortunately, it was based upon misinformation that stemmed back to Emily Murphy, who is clad in her sensible shoes in her statue among the famous five. We have all had our pictures taken under her broad-rimmed hat and her sensible shoes.

However, this misinformation has caused us years of clogging up the court systems and the criminal justice system, with kids being busted for a bag of pot. We were trying to lock up a whole generation of children over some naive position taken in 1922 by a woman who was not an authority. It has been crazy and frustrating for me to have grown up in a generation where I saw friends arrested and their careers jeopardized for simple possession.

There are still kids in Texas jails serving the final years of 30 year sentences, having been busted in the 1970s for marijuana. Those who believe that tougher penalties will deter substance abuse are naive to the point where they are ignoring everything we know about substance abuse and what leads people to abuse narcotics, alcohol or anything else.

Locking people up does not work. We know that because the tougher the penalties get in the states, the worse its drug problem gets. It is a directly inverse scale that is 180 degrees wrong-headed and stupid. At least Canada, I believe, will not follow the Americans on their war on drugs, which has been so fundamentally counter-productive that they have had to privatize their prison system because their jails are bursting at the seams with people locked up for simple things like substance abuse, people who may need treatment but certainly who do not benefit from years in prison.

I raise that only because it is a cruel irony that Canada has been following misguided recommendations. Because of her concerns about opium use among Chinese immigrants, particularly at a time of growing unease in B.C. over B.C.'s growing Asian population, Murphy, an Alberta magistrate, launched a high profile campaign against drugs of all kinds. She was a prominent suffragette and social activist, but that does not mean she could not be wrong.

Government Orders

• (1150)

The police chief for Los Angeles, Charles A. Jones, who she was influenced by, was quoted throughout Murphy's editorials. They were being influenced by somebody in the United States who was wrong.

I do not have time to go through as much as I would like to on this matter. Twenty minutes is not long enough to do justice to this issue. However, I want to go through a brief history of the prohibition of marijuana in Canada as we know it today. I am trying to defend why the NDP will vote against the bill.

In 1908 the Opium and Narcotic Act created a framework for prohibiting illicit drug use in Canada. In 1922 Emily Murphy's book, *The Black Candle*, sounded an alarm about drug addiction in Canada. One chapter was devoted to "Marahuana—A New Menace".

The addition of cannabis indica, not cannabis sativa, to the federal schedule of prohibited drugs in 1923 made marijuana illegal in Canada, killing an industry on the prairies. Prairie farmers were growing marijuana, or hemp, for rope. Anyone my age probably knows the difference between cannabis indica and cannabis sativa. We learned metric by those things.

In 1932 marijuana cigarettes were seized by police in Canada for the first time. Ten years went by between the passage of that law and the first time marijuana cigarettes were seized by the police.

In 1938, reflecting on the reefer badness scare, the *Toronto Daily Star* ran a story from a United States headline, "Marijuana smokers seized with the sudden craze to kill". That was sensationalism.

In 1961 Canada signed the UN convention on narcotic drugs. It toughened its laws for possessing, cultivating and importing marijuana.

In 1966 the number of cannabis related offences nationally exceeded 100 for the first time. Look at how much this has escalated since 1966. How many court cases per year have there been since that time? The number has grown exponentially. It has crippled and bogged down our criminal justice system to the point where it is handicapped.

In 1973, with thousands of young people then being convicted annually for smoking marijuana, the federal Le Dain Commission recommended ending criminal charges for possession. The report was never implemented.

In 1980 a growing consensus in Canada on decriminalizing marijuana possession was derailed by the U.S. declaration of the war on drugs under President Ronald "star wars" Reagan. Thanks a million Ronnie. We really appreciated his valuable contribution to the issue of substance abuse. That was another bright move by the bright light of American politics, Ronald Reagan.

In 1984 New Brunswick Premier Richard Hatfield was charged but later acquitted. Rich people do not go to jail. We save those spaces for Indians who steal a loaf of bread. We do not put rich white guys in prison. Indians steal a loaf of bread, they go to Stoney. Even though the bag of marijuana was found in his luggage before being loaded on to a plane during the royal visit by the Queen, we were

willing to forgive that. He brought dope on to the plane with the Queen. That was no great hazard.

In 1992 marijuana advocate Umberto Iorfida was charged with promoting the use of illicit drugs. The case was thrown out of court two years later by a judge who ruled it was an infringement of free speech to advocate the use of marijuana.

In 1992 the federal Conservative government introduced a bill doubling the penalties for marijuana possession. I guess it went arm's length with Ronnie. When Irish eyes were smiling, the Irish eyes were also doubling the penalty for marijuana possession. What madness was that? Did that party not read any textbooks about substance abuse? Did it not talk to any scientists about the treatment of substance abuse? Was it completely stupid? Fortunately, that party was kicked out in 1993 and the bill for doubling penalties was never implemented.

• (1155)

In 2003, an Ontario judge ruled that Canada's law on possession of small amounts of marijuana was no longer valid and dismissed the charges against a Windsor youth. Finally a judge said it was time to stop clogging up our criminal justice system and ruining the lives of young people by giving them a criminal record for the simple possession of marijuana, something we on the prairies used to make rope out of, for a profit, until unfortunately a misguided magistrate from Alberta started her own vitriolic campaign against marijuana and put us in the trouble we are in today, almost a century later.

Let me back up a bit to 2000, when the Ontario Court of Appeal declared that federal law prohibiting the possession of marijuana was unconstitutional and gave the government a year to amend it. The highest court in Ontario declared a federal law prohibiting the possession of marijuana unconstitutional and gave the government one year to amend it.

That was about the time that Chuck Guité and others were right in the heart of the sponsorship scandal, so I can imagine why the Government of Canada was seized with other issues in the year 2000. That was essentially a lost year for progress in terms of social issues in Canada.

The law was deemed a violation of the rights of sick people who were using marijuana for medical purposes, which was an interesting development. In July 2001, Canada became the first country in the world to legalize the use of marijuana for medical purposes. That is not bad. I commend the government for doing that.

Government Orders

In 2002, the special Senate committee on illegal drugs sparked a national debate by recommending the legalization of marijuana. It caused a huge furor and uproar, even though that was 2002 and not 1922, when the fearmongering was such that people tried to convince others that by stiffening penalties we could influence social behaviour as it applied to addictions and substance abuse. What absolute folly. What a terrible and tragic mistake. Not only do the people who are sick and have a substance abuse problem not get the help they deserve, but we are clogging up our police departments, the courts, prosecutors' departments and the criminal justice system with unnecessary offences and we are perhaps ruining the lives of some innocent young people who may in fact just be dabbling with that biodegradable substance.

The NDP tried to push for changes. Amnesty provisions regarding past changes or convictions for simple possession were to be erased. Records for contravention and for the receiving of fines for simple possession or cultivation for personal use were to be sealed and not shared with Interpol or other foreign jurisdictions. These are all things that the member for Vancouver East raised at the committee.

There was also the non-commercial transfer of marijuana. Currently, even simply giving marijuana for no money—in other words, passing a joint—is trafficking. If somebody says “don't bogart that joint”, under Bill C-10 that is a non-commercial transfer. That is trafficking. We argued that a gift of up to 30 grams should not be considered trafficking. We lost on that issue.

The NDP strongly believes that the bill needs to contain amnesty provisions for people who currently have criminal records for simple possession. If simple possession of marijuana no longer risks a criminal charge, those who now have a criminal record for similar conduct should be entitled to automatic amnesty. We should erase it from their records and stop messing up the careers and the lives of young people who may have been convicted under a law that we now accept to be wrong-headed. If we have now come to the conclusion that we have been wrong for the last 80 years, why are people still suffering from that persecution?

The federal NDP believes the federal government must move beyond decriminalization and examine and introduce a non-punitive, rules based approach to adult marijuana use, with an emphasis on prevention, education and health promotion. Marijuana policy needs to eliminate the criminalization of users and focus on reducing harm and preventing crime.

The federal government should be putting resources behind public education, not criminal prosecution. Even for the fines regimen it is putting in place, what if people do not pay the fine? They would wind up in the courts because they would then be guilty of the offence of not paying the fine. The government has not really simplified or decriminalized to the extent we are advocating.

Taking the example of tobacco, consistent and strong messaging on the health risks of tobacco has greatly reduced tobacco use. It is not necessary to use criminal law to discourage harmful forms of drug use. In many cases, it is counterproductive.

• (1200)

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Thornhill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there is a question that I would pose to the member opposite. It would appear to me that his party's position is inconsistent with what he has had to

say and that is because the law is being inconsistently applied today. We have a situation where in the big cities the police are, rightly, looking at grow operations as a priority and are often not clogging the courts and not charging young people with simple possession, while in the smaller towns across this country young people are ending up with criminal records that affect their lives and careers.

I would add to this analysis that at the very same time he and his party are very supportive of anti-smoking laws because he knows that smoking is bad, whether it is smoking tobacco, marijuana or any other substance. We know that cancer causing carcinogens are in marijuana as well as tobacco. Therefore, surely this legislation, which says marijuana is bad, should be supported by his party in that instead of having the criminal law applied inconsistently across this country, a series of fines and penalties hopefully will send out the message that smoking is bad.

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, it has been long recognized by public policy that prohibitionist laws continue to fuel organized crime and other violent organizations in our society and that prohibiting drugs creates a black market that greatly inflates the value of those drugs and the profits to be made by selling them.

Governments and police agencies claim that organized crime in Canada obtains most of its funds from the illegal trade in drugs, a trade that interests organized crime only because our laws prohibiting certain drugs have created an enormously lucrative black market. Yet those same governments and police bodies refuse to acknowledge the role that prohibition plays in creating that black market.

Canada needs to look beyond its closest neighbour and come up with a comprehensive and safe marijuana policy. The U.S.-driven war on drugs is not a made in Canada solution and Canada should not be intimidated by the U.S. record. Canada should look instead to the United States as an example of a country with a disastrously failed drug policy, a policy that has failed because of its perennial reliance on prohibition.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the last few speakers on this topic. The party of the member for Winnipeg Centre talks so much about the need to put more funding into health care. Not only his party talks about it, but we all talk about it, because it is the most important issue in this country. Any poll that anyone takes will tell us that the concerns about health care and the cost of health care are extremely important in everyone's view.

However, if we are going to bring in legislation that further opens the door to substance abuse, which will eventually lead to more health care costs, how can we justify that in light of the concerns of our already overburdened economy in relation to paying for the country's health care needs?

Government Orders

There is another question I would like to ask him. I am not sure what his experience is, but in speaking to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or the local constabulary, I have yet to find one single police officer who agrees with the present legislation for the decriminalizing of marijuana.

I have real concerns about what we are doing here. I would like to ask the member where he sees this in relation to increasing the need for health care funding. Second, what is his experience in dealing with law enforcement agencies in relation to this legislation?

● (1205)

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for a very sensible question and the very valid points he raises. First, on funding, obviously the NDP is advocating that the government bridges what we call the Romanow gap: that we come up to 25% federal funding for our national health care program to the provinces and stop listening to the Kirby report. A person who actually sits on the board of directors for private insurance companies should not be allowed to comment on our not for profit publicly delivered health care system.

Second, in terms of dollars, this issue versus health care, the introduction of Bill C-38 in June 2003 was also accompanied by an announcement of the renewal of the Canada drug strategy providing \$245 million over five years. But the Auditor General's report on illicit drugs sharply questioned the reliance on enforcement and pointed out that 95% of those federal funds spent on illicit drug use in Canada is used toward the enforcement and interdiction rather than education and any measures we take to actually reduce the number of people involved in substance abuse.

I would argue, then, in answer to the hon. member's question, that we do not have to take money away from other important budget lines and social policies. We could redirect or re-prioritize the use of the existing \$245 million and dedicate more of it toward prevention, education, health promotion and a rules based and non-punitive approach to marijuana use.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was going to get up and ask the same question that was asked by the member for St. John's West and was not answered by this member. I learned a long time ago that good laws are only as good as the enforcement of those laws, the case in point being the gun registry. The police have indicated that they will not support any kind of decriminalization of marijuana, but I am confused about this. There is a bit of a contradiction. We have just heard that in fact those same police officers are not enforcing the law for simple possession.

Here is where my difficulty comes in. I will ask the member from Winnipeg this: Why is it that the police themselves are not prepared to look at changing the current laws if they are not enforcing them? Why is it that they are not supporting that change but at the same time not enforcing the laws on the books at present?

It just does not make any sense to me that they would not look forward to changing the law so that it could become better for our society, as was mentioned by the member from Winnipeg. Why is it that the police departments and the officers are not prepared to enforce the law or not prepared to change the law, but want the status quo?

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, I can only say that the latitude police officers currently enjoy has really been taken away from them. I share the frustration of enforcement officers who pick up somebody with 15 grams of marijuana and spend the rest of the shift processing that particular charge. It takes police officers off the street. They are unable to do the work they probably believe they were hired to do. No cop wants to spend his or her time arresting drunks or arresting kids for a half a lid of pot, but the decriminalization contemplated by the federal government would have the effect of even more people being punished, not fewer.

Police used to have the latitude to say, "It's only a few joints, let's just seize it from the kid, flush it down the toilet and send the kid home". Now that person will get a ticket. Some people will not pay their tickets. Then a bench warrant will be issued. Then they will be in the criminal justice system, not for the marijuana but for not paying their fines, and we will be clogged up again.

The prediction is that there will be literally hundreds of thousands more of these fines given out than there are prosecutions and charges laid currently. Many of those people will default and fail to pay them, so again we will be wasting our resources on something that is really meaningless.

As I said, the Liberal government is proposing what would be viewed as a cutting edge plan if this were 1968. It is not even as progressive as the Le Dain commission of 20 years ago.

● (1210)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the third reading debate on Bill C-10, which is really a follow-up and re-introduction of Bill C-38 from the previous Parliament. I had the opportunity to speak at second reading, but after reviewing some of the remarks by some members I feel it necessary to speak again.

Some people say that the bill does not go far enough and therefore we should not pass the bill. Just a moment ago the member for St. John's West said that the bill would further open up the door to substance abuse. He could not be more wrong. The bill would not open up the door to substance abuse. It lays out the specifics and the law in a consistent fashion across the country.

Those who say the bill does not go far enough could not be more wrong. Does anyone in the House actually believe that if we do nothing things will improve? The bill is a major step in the right direction. If we do nothing, how many more lives will be destroyed? How long will it be before the House is again this close to changing the laws on marijuana use and making them consistent?

Government Orders

The bill would increase penalties for marijuana grow operations and it sets out some conditions to the courts. It sets out clearly in law how to handle small amounts of marijuana. It is not about legalization or decriminalization. It is still illegal to use marijuana. The bill would set out in law clear penalties by which the police forces should abide. It educates the public, and especially youth, on the harmful effects of drug use and that it is still illegal to use drugs. It brings consistency to the law.

Let me put it quite bluntly. If we do not act now and the current situation is allowed to prevail, then the House and all members would, by our lack of action in my view, allow more lives to be destroyed. That is a tremendous loss of human potential. The bill would move us forward.

As a former solicitor general, I have had the opportunity to see firsthand the impact of drug use and its devastating effects; lives destroyed. In downtown eastside Vancouver, where drugs are the scourge in that community, lives have been destroyed, loss of human potential, families disrupted and just human disarray.

I also had the opportunity to see the dangers of marijuana grow operations. These operations are run by people who profit from growing marijuana through illegal means. It is a crop that destroys lives and human potential. It is a product that is used by some within our high school systems. It could be used by a son or daughter of anyone in the House. It is not necessarily the fault of those young people that they get on marijuana. They give it a try but they become addicted and as a result they lose the potential of their lives.

I want to refute some of the remarks that have been made by other members. I will quote from *Hansard* what the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough said on February 23. He was talking about a Statistics Canada Report. He said:

● (1215)

It, in essence, points out that drug use and crimes related to drug use have increased substantially in recent years. In police reported drug crimes the rate has gone up an estimated 42% since the early 1990s and now stands at a 20 year high.

That is absolutely true. I agree with his point but he argues against the bill. The bill is a new drug enforcement strategy. The current laws are not working. We have to make them consistent. This bill would move us forward. It would change the laws so they would in fact work. Therefore, I encourage everyone in the House to support the bill.

On the part of the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, who was the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party for a spell, his point in spouting the statistics, admitting there is a problem but saying that we should stay with what we have and not change anything, shows an extreme lack of leadership. To lead one has to address the issue and that is what the current bill before the House would do. It addresses the issue so we can change the drug situation in Canada.

It does it in these ways. It would implement a prevention and education program with dollars attached that will enhance the regional and national coordination. With increased funding it will utilize better the Canada Centre on Substance Abuse with better research into the impact and in terms of some of the solutions on how to get young people and people of all ages off drugs. It would

increase the level of contribution to international drug bodies. That is the intent of the national drug strategy. The intent is also to increase enforcement and protection.

We cannot bury our head in the sand, as the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough implies we should do. We must address the problem, which is what the present bill tries to do.

The current laws are not working. They are not being enforced by the police consistently across the country. That is well-known, as was mentioned in the previous debate in the House. If people are caught with marijuana in my community, in a rural community, then probably they will be charged, they will have a criminal record and it will affect their lives for years to come. If they are truck drivers they may not be able to cross the Canada-U.S. border and as a result their livelihood suffers. However if they are in one of the bigger Canadian cities, they may get a little slap on the wrist. That is not a consistent application of the law.

What the bill attempts to do is to make it a consistent application of the law across Canada. Yes, I know, as some people have said, not all police forces in the country are in favour of the bill. To a great extent the reason is because they lose police discretion.

Yes, I would like to see them have police discretion in most instances but the current law is not working. Therefore, in this case, from zero to fifteen grams, they would lose police discretion. I personally would have favoured lowering the rate to five grams instead of fifteen. I lost that fight but I still believe the bill moves us a giant step forward.

The penalties right now are not applied to the extent intended by the law and differ considerably from one province to another. The bill would change that. I do not have time to go through how it would change that but it is in the bill in proposed 10(2.1) where it lays out the kind of criteria that the courts must apply. Proposed subsection 10(3) states:

If the court is satisfied of the existence of one or more of the factors enumerated in paragraphs [above], but decides not to impose a custodial sentence, the court shall give reasons for that decision.

● (1220)

I have seen this firsthand in terms of my meetings with police forces. The legitimate feeling right now is that the courts are not imposing the penalties intended by the law.

Why is it necessary to outline in legislation better direction to the courts? It is because the courts have not been proposing heavy enough penalties on those involved in marijuana grow operations. The court has consistently let people off with a slap on the wrist. This legislation would force the court to explain itself if the penalties are not applied.

Government Orders

I feel very strongly about this section of the bill. During my experience as solicitor general, I had the opportunity to meet with RCMP officers and other police forces across this country. One of the meetings I remember most vividly was in Richmond, British Columbia where I held a round table with a number of RCMP drug enforcement officers who take down marijuana grow operations. They said that they put their lives on the line, that doors are sometimes booby-trapped and that one of their colleagues or themselves could lose their life or limb.

They take these people in and charge them. However, all too often, before they arrive at the office the next morning these people are out on the street. I did a tour with those officers and saw the houses with marijuana grow operations. I saw the dangers to the neighbours, the booby-trapping of doors, the stealing of hydro electricity and the damage to real estate. It is absolutely unacceptable. The courts have a responsibility to close them down when the RCMP and other police forces take those people in and charge them. This bill would move us a giant step forward by laying out the conditions by which the courts should lay down those penalties.

I vividly remember the frustration of some of those police officers, who had been in the ranks for perhaps just 18 months to a year, nearly in tears over the work and the effort they put in to dealing with the people who run marijuana grow operations that destroy lives and are so frustrated by the courts when they do not impose the penalties intended by the law.

We cannot lose our highly trained police officers. We need them but we need to help them deal with their frustration. The bill would move us a step forward to laying out better directions to the courts in terms of the intent of the law so they do impose the penalties intended by the law. The bottom line is the bill would more effectively deal with marijuana grow operations than is currently the case.

If we are going to stand with police officers doing their job, then we need the bill. We need the stronger directions to the court outlined in the bill. We need the increased penalties outlined in the bill. We need the increased financial resources for enforcement outlined in the national drug strategy.

I was rather dissatisfied, would be putting it mildly, when I heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs who spoke in the House in opposition to the bill. He said:

It is so much so that as confirmed by Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, this product is becoming the product of choice for members of organized crime, who I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, are not, and I repeat not, marijuana enthusiasts. Instead, they see opportunities of renting or buying a house and for \$25,000 they can make a \$600,000 return on investment.

● (1225)

In terms of the problem, his point is correct. However, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in opposing the bill, is leaving the situation the same. The bill would improve the situation. It would lay out the penalties, as I already said a moment ago.

The same Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs opposes the bill because there is no roadside test. Again, let me quote him:

Number one, there is no protocol to take roadside sampling for individuals who have imbibed the product. We now know through studies in Ontario, through various organizations, and I am not just talking about MADD Canada, that young people are choosing marijuana as a means of evading detection.

The national drug strategy that accompanies this bill would move us ahead. It would put money into greater training for police officers. It would put money into research for creating a roadside test.

It makes no sense to bury our heads in the sand and not deal with the problem because we do not have the test. We would be putting moneys in place, through the national drug strategy, to find the test. This bill would move us forward substantially. As part of the national drug strategy, moneys would be put in place for police officer training and research.

Before I conclude, I would like to deal with the misperception promoted by those in this House opposed to the bill. I want to quote the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough who said on February 23:

The legislation sends entirely the wrong message as far as the public perception is concerned.

There are some members in this House who oppose the bill, and they have reasons for doing so. To say that the bill would legalize marijuana is wrong. Those people who are talking about this bill as if it would legalize marijuana are in fact creating a misconception out there that would move some young people to greater drug use.

This bill is about laying out the criteria, establishing the penalties, and keeping drug use illegal in Canada. It is about improving the situation. Members should be upfront and say what the bill is trying to do because that is what the bill spells out.

In fact, the bill is not about legalizing small amounts of marijuana. It is about changing the penalties. It would bring consistency to the law by ensuring penalties are imposed.

The legislation is based on four pillars. The first pillar is prevention, through drug awareness, community programming for youth, parents, athletes, coaches, the RCMP community actions programs for children, et cetera. It is about a prevention program that talks about the harmful effects of drug use in Canada and how it can destroy lives.

The second pillar is enforcement of the law and laying out before the courts the criteria that they should follow, in terms of imposing penalties under the law.

The third pillar is treatment. There are substance abuse pre-release programs and, through the Canadian Centre for Drug Abuse, treatments—for those people who, for whatever reason, get drugs—to get people off drugs.

The last pillar is harm reduction. It would ensure that human beings do not harm themselves as a result of drug use.

● (1230)

The bill would move us a huge step forward. We may differ in terms of the amount, from zero to 15, and on the front end penalties. However, as a whole, the bill would move us a giant step forward from where we are currently. If passed by the House, the bill could save the loss of human potential as a result of drug use now.

Government Orders

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the speaker from the government side articulating the reasons why we should support Bill C-10.

The former solicitor general articulated some of the problems that we have with drugs. Articulating those problems and recognizing them in no way improves the fact that this is extremely flawed legislation. I listened to him very carefully and I would say that good intentions do not make good legislation.

Because the government intends to do something about the increasing drug problem in this country does not mean that this legislation does that. The member started out by asking, is this better than doing nothing? It probably is better to do nothing than to introduce extremely flawed legislation.

I will give the House one example. In my hometown of Yorkton, I have young people coming to me because the problems have increased in the high schools in Yorkton. Yorkton has several high schools. However, in one particular high school problems are already being increased in the classroom and the legislation has not even been passed. I have already raised this in the House the week before last.

The member talked about all these things and how we should get on side. What has been put into this legislation is virtually unenforceable. If we were to talk to the police, they would tell us that there is no mechanism to collect fines from these people.

The fact that young people have a reduced fine compared to older people may in some cases communicate the message to youth that it is not a serious problem.

The way this legislation has been put together is deplorable. The government does not have an overall drug strategy. The greatest problem with this legislation is that it is not part of a greater effective framework. The government will tell members that it is, but there is no effective drug strategy.

I will be speaking in a few minutes and I will make all of these points. However, I want this member, because he is before me, to answer some of these questions. He talks about the grow operations. Why not deal with that problem? The legislation does not do it. I challenge the member to tell me how decriminalizing marijuana would create a stronger penalty for grow operations? It does not.

He talked about putting money into research to find a roadside test to check people who might be on marijuana while they are driving and creating a hazard on our roads. The test should be put in place first and then the legislation should be passed. It is not done the other way around. The horse is put in front of the cart.

There are huge problems and I will deal with them in my speech. However, it is incumbent on the member to come clean and answer just a few of the questions I have raised.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, the hon. member kind of half made his point when he said we should put the test in place first, in other words, bury our heads in the sand. When is the test going to be available? Will it be two months, will it be two years?

I would encourage the member opposite to go to downtown Vancouver's east side, and see and talk to some of those individuals,

see the loss of human potential there, and see the lives that are being virtually destroyed. How many more lives must be destroyed before we deal with the problem? Waiting for the test implies that we are basically sitting back and waiting another little while.

The bill and the national drug strategy will put in place funding for research work and for the training of police officers. We did not always have a breathalyzer test for alcohol. In my time, we used to have to walk the white line, but eventually a breathalyzer test came along. The police forces used to use observation and training to detect if people at that time were driving under the influence of alcohol. The same training could take place for being under the influence of drugs.

The member opposite accused me of articulating the problem but not proposing solutions. He obviously did not want to hear what people had to say. He did go to great lengths to emphasize that people are coming to him and saying that there are problems in high schools. He is blaming it on what he claims is the decriminalization in this bill.

As I said earlier, this is not about decriminalization. If the Conservative Party would go to western Canada and tell the people what the bill is really about, that it is about changing penalties, then maybe those young people would not have to come to him. They are coming to him on the basis of the misinformation that is put out by the Conservative Party. That is the problem.

The bill talks about changing the penalties, doing a better job, education, getting people off drugs, increasing the penalties and closing down marijuana grow operations, and about finding the solution to roadside testing. If he were to state those facts then maybe young people in the schools in his riding would recognize that the bill moves us forward and then they would not need to come to him.

If he were to put out the right information instead of the wrong information, we would be moving forward.

• (1235)

Hon. Sue Barnes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his continuing interest in this bill. He has a special area of knowledge about the workings of this bill and its passage through the House, which has not been the easiest passage because people are still debating the misinformation as opposed to the actual bill, and that makes it difficult for people.

There are some myths that have taken hold. One of the myths is that the U.S. will not like this legislation. I know that, as a former solicitor general for this country, he has had discussions with the representative from the United States. I would like to hear a little more about those conversations.

I would like to tell the House that grow operations are becoming a big problem in just about every community. They are becoming a safety issue and they are an issue in and of themselves.

Government Orders

I would also like the member to address these questions. What do we say to the police who have to work on these difficult issues? If we were to stick with the status quo and not pass this legislation, what would happen to all the measures in this bill that would help police get at the grow operations, involve more parents, and issue fines that younger people would pay on smaller amounts? What does this say about where we want our resources to be expended in this country?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary has worked extremely hard on this bill. Yes, it is difficult to get the real facts out as they relate to the bill and the positive direction in which the Government of Canada is moving.

Her first question related to the United States. I have had the opportunity to discuss the proposed bill with Attorney General Ashcroft and the drug czar in the United States at the cross-border crime forum. There is no question that they are not overly enthused about the moves we are making, but when the facts were explained to them, not the propaganda put out by those on the other side, they could see the merits of the bill. They are willing to live with it. They know their own system is not working well either.

I certainly believe that to a great extent we can bring the Americans onside because we are showing some leadership on this issue that has not been shown elsewhere around the world. We have to explain the correct information. I know it is very hard for members opposite in the Conservative Party to put the accurate facts out there, but if they would, I think they would see a different response.

With regard to grow operations, I said earlier in my remarks that there are serious problems with them in this country. The bill addresses that issue by increasing penalties and by laying out the direction to the courts in terms of the imposition of those penalties. Therefore the bill does move us forward. If the bill carries, I think that three years down the road we will look back and say that we made great decisions in the House.

• (1240)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to discuss Bill C-10 which was introduced not by the present government, but by the former government under Mr. Jean Chrétien. We are sometimes given the impression that the legislation we are debating is new, but that is not the case.

I would like to begin by expressing some of the concerns expressed to me by young people in my riding. They are the ones who are witnessing firsthand the drugs flowing into their schools. The problem has become worse because of the signal being sent to them by the government in decriminalizing the use of marijuana. I must correct something for the record. It is not the Conservative Party that is giving that impression; it is the government that is giving that impression right across Canada.

Bill C-10 sends the wrong message to our youth and it has not yet been passed. With discounted fines for youth, teachers and parents will experience much more difficulty than they already are in convincing their children that drug use is wrong. Meanwhile the government is unwittingly encouraging the use of marijuana by giving out discounted fines to youth and decriminalizing the drug. The Liberal government is communicating the wrong message to the

citizens of tomorrow with Bill C-10, a bill to decriminalize the use of marijuana.

Not only are our youth receiving the wrong message, but police officers are left with no way to legally prosecute offenders. Drunk driving is already a huge problem and now we are introducing drug driving. There are currently no effective and legal ways for officers to determine if a driver is under the influence of marijuana. Appropriate roadside assessment practices must be developed for detecting drug driving offences before Bill C-10 is passed, not after. I made that point previously.

Penalties for the production of marijuana have decreased when they should have increased. Growing fines were decreased further at committee stage for fewer than three plants. The fines set out in the bill are too lax.

There also needs to be increased fines for repeat offenders. An individual should receive an increased sentence on the second offence and an even greater one on the third. I will talk more about that later in my speech.

Canadians deserve much better than this. This open-ended decriminalization of marijuana is extremely detrimental to our youth and our society as a whole.

I and most of my Conservative colleagues believe that the use and possession of marijuana must remain illegal. Possession of marijuana greater than five grams must be considered a criminal offence. Decriminalizing marijuana will not only send the wrong message to youth, but it will also increase difficulties with border crossings.

Canadians need to keep our border crossings with our neighbour and largest trading partner free flowing. This legislation will put that free flow of trade greatly at risk. With the BSE situation we have seen how even a small incident with one mad cow has really disrupted trade with our partner.

Police must be given the resources they need to combat organized crime. Grow operations have become multibillion dollar businesses for organized crime. Police do not have the manpower nor the resources to effectively combat this serious issue.

Bill C-10 hands out discounted fines to our youth, has no deterrent to stop repeat offenders, metes out reduced maximum sentences for growing 25 plants or less, and results in more drug driving with no tools to legally prosecute individuals. There will be increased trafficking because 30 grams can be in one's possession without it becoming a criminal offence. There is no national drug strategy to fight the use of drugs. No resources have been provided for police to crack down on organized crime. That is deplorable.

Canadians and Canadian youth will be negatively affected by Bill C-10. It is my view that Bill C-10 should be put on the shelf and left there until such a time as we can come up with an effective strategy to combat drug use in Canada. I will now outline some of the problems.

Government Orders

The THC content of marijuana has dramatically increased in the last 30 years. Back in the 1960s it was about 3%. Now the THC content of marijuana can be as much as 10 times higher, as much as 33%. It is 10 times more potent. We are not dealing with a harmless substance when we are dealing with marijuana. It is an extremely detrimental drug.

• (1245)

Here are some of the negative effects of marijuana. It can cause changes in the brain chemistry. It can lead to difficulty in concentration and attention to detail. It makes learning new things more difficult. Complex information cannot be processed as readily. It increases the work of the heart. It is 50% more irritating to the lungs than tobacco. It decreases blood flow to the limbs. Of course it has an extreme psychological negative effect on the brain. Also it is a gateway drug to many other drugs because, as I have said, the THC content is much greater than it used to be.

Bill C-10 establishes a new system of fines. I want to briefly outline those so people who are listening to this via television will know what we are talking about. Possession of 15 grams or less of marijuana would be punishable by a fine of \$150 for an adult or \$100 for a youth. Possession of one gram or less of cannabis resin would be punishable by a fine of \$300 for an adult and \$200 for a youth. For possession of between 15 and 30 grams of marijuana, the police officer would decide if the person should receive a ticket or a summons for a summary conviction. The ticket fine would be \$300 for an adult and \$200 for a youth.

The fines that would be imposed are almost laughable if it were not so sad. We all know that the profits being made in the drug trade are huge. Thousands and millions are being made. A fine of \$150 or \$300 will simply become a business expense. It is similar to slapping a fine of \$1,000 on the CEO of Enron or fining Martha Stewart \$1,000 when she may have made hundreds of thousands on insider stock trading, or giving a minimal fine of a few thousand dollars for dumping waste to the owner of Canada Shipping Lines. That is the context of what we are talking about here when it comes to fines. They are laughable. They will not deter anything.

There was a lot of fanfare recently when the human resources minister announced the \$8 million commitment from the federal government for Ontario's crime prevention program. This is good of course. We need to target the root causes of crime. I have been calling for this ever since I began exposing the Liberal folly called the gun registry. I want to deal with this a little bit. A big deal was made about committing \$8 million.

The Liberals have been wasting \$100 million a year. In this year's budget they will be spending over \$100 million just on the gun registry, which does not target the root causes of violence in our society. It does nothing to deter the use of firearms in our society. It is a huge paper-pushing exercise. With that \$100 million, or \$130 million, or by the time the supplementary estimates are done it may even be \$150 million, and I am not sure because they keep hiding the amounts from us, they could have effectively put in place something that would do a lot more than what this legislation does in dealing with the drug problem.

Surely money could have been diverted from the useless gun registry. The government is now spending \$273,000 a day on the

useless gun registry. Just think what we could do with that money if we used it in the right area, especially in combating the illegal use of drugs.

The \$2 billion that has been spent on the gun registry could have paid for eight years of salary for 4,444 police officers. We could put that many more police officers on the street for eight years. Just think what that would do to combat some of the illegal grow operations or the organized crime that is associated with drugs.

By the way, the minister announced this commitment for Ontario. There is a drug problem in Vancouver. There is a drug problem in Edmonton. There is one in Regina. There is one in Saskatoon. There is one in my riding. The Liberals do not seem to get it.

I also want to quote from an international source, the 2003 annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board, which is a United Nations agency. Sometimes members opposite will say that the Conservative Party raises issues that have no basis in fact.

• (1250)

Here is what we have a United Nations agency telling us. I would like to quote the concerns it has expressed. The International Narcotics Control Board, a UN agency, "is concerned that the revisions could contribute to the mistaken perception that cannabis is a harmless substance". It is not the Conservative Party telling the world that this legislation communicates the wrong message to Canadians. Here we have a UN agency saying that it communicates the wrong message, especially to our young people.

The bill also amends the law with respect to the production of marijuana. Currently the production of marijuana is an offence punishable by up to seven years of imprisonment. Among other things, the proposed legislation provides that an individual found growing one to three plants would face a summary conviction offence with a fine of not more than \$500, or \$250 if the offender is a young person. For persons growing from four to twenty-five plants, under this bill there could be a fine of up to \$25,000 or 18 months in jail. For persons growing more than that, of course the penalty would be even more severe and could include jail time.

Levels of fines do not increase for subsequent trafficking offences or growing offences, so in fact this becomes a business expense: get caught and pay the fine, get caught and pay the fine. Why are there not increased penalties in the legislation for repeat offences? This is a serious problem that the Liberals have not addressed.

There is no process for the collection of fines. The police will tell us right now that this is virtually unenforceable. They will not be able to collect these fines from young people. This will simply become a joke. There should be a progressive fines schedule put in place. That is not done in this legislation. There should be some kind of consequence for the non-payment of fines.

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No provisions have been made to amend for the proceeds of crime. People make money in the drug trade but there is nothing in this legislation that would remove the profits from them. That needs to be addressed. It is not now.

There is no provision in the bill to deal with those who have damage to their property in a neighbourhood where there might be a grow operation. We see this right across Canada. Grow operations spring up and the neighbours suffer greatly because of decreased property values.

No legislation has been developed to curtail financial institutions from funding mortgages to grow operations.

I also have to add that no resources have been provided for the police to crack down on organized crime, which is profiting from lax enforcement. The legislation will likely increase the demand for marijuana and therefore make the illegal production and distribution of marijuana even more lucrative for organized crime. The legislation is going to have the opposite effect, just like the gun registry has increased smuggling in the black market for firearms. The Liberal government is going to put in place legislation that would make this worse than before, worse than if it had done nothing.

We need a comprehensive strategy. Already I have made that point. There are huge flaws in the legislation. If there are problems with drugs in Canada—and we all know that—before the legislation, this is not going to address it. We need a national drug strategy, a drug strategy that works at the street level. It is not working now. In fact, it is having the opposite effect.

It must be self-evident. There are three obvious omissions. Growing and trafficking must become criminal offences. “Drugged driving” laws and roadside assessment must be in place before we put this in place. I have mentioned this. We need an appropriate roadside assessment developed for detecting drugged driving offences. We have known for years that this is a problem. The Liberals have done nothing about it. Why not?

They have liberalized Canada's drug laws without providing law enforcement with the tools needed to determine whether someone is drugged driving through a roadside assessment test. The hon. member who spoke before me said that they will get it done. We have heard that promise before. Good intentions do not make good legislation.

Because of relaxed laws, Canada will have increased refugee claims and illegal entry into the country through the underground railroad. It is going to become more of a problem. The borders are going to be even more of a problem for Canada than they are now. Why did we not have proper discussions with the U.S. before we undertook this? The effect of cross-border traffic will be very negative. The BSE crisis we are going through just now has been compounded because of deteriorating relations with the U.S. over unrelated matters.

• (1255)

We are poking our nearest neighbours in the eye repeatedly with totally uncalled for comments. If we pass Bill C-10, crossing the border will be much more difficult. It will seriously affect trade

between the two countries and we need that trade. We need to develop a strategy that is agreed upon with our neighbour nations.

This is sending the wrong message to our youth, as I have already said. It now makes it much more difficult for families, parents, teachers and schools and for crime prevention in our communities. It is making all those areas more difficult.

Houses in our neighbourhoods are being destroyed. Property values will undoubtedly suffer. These cultivators are not caring, contributing citizens within our communities. An excellent comprehensive report published by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Criminal Intelligence Directorate in November 2002, titled “Marihuana Cultivation in Canada: Evolution and Current Trends”, is available on the Internet. I would like to quote from it in the conclusion of my speech:

The link between marihuana cultivation and organized crime cannot be overemphasized, and neither can the consequences for society. The huge profits associated with grow operations are used by many criminal groups to purchase other much more dangerous drugs or even weapons, and finance various illicit activities.

High profitability, low risk, and relatively lenient sentences continue to entice growers and traffickers, making it difficult, if not impossible, for law enforcement agencies to make a truly lasting impact on the marihuana cultivation industry in Canada.

This bill does not address the problems we have. I have touched on a variety of issues. I could go on to explain more of them in detail, but why does the government not bring in effective legislation? Half measures will never do it and good intentions do not make good legislation.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I would like to move an amendment. I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “that” and substituting the following therefore:

Bill C-10, an act to amend the Contraventions Act and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time, this day, six months hence.

I would like to take more time to speak to this. I would like to have the government set this aside and do this right six months from now, not rush it through now and have many of the detrimental effects of this legislation being experienced.

• (1300)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The amendment is in order.

[*Translation*]

The debate is now on the amendment. The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are definitely not in favour of the amendment.

For a clear understanding of what is going on here this morning, I should point out that we are dealing with Bill C-10, formerly C-38, which was studied in parliamentary committee—

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, but I neglected to allow the 10 minutes for questions and comments after the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville spoke. The hon. member for Red Deer.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend our member for his statements and I would like to know what his point of view is or what he is hearing from the people out there, most importantly from the RCMP and the police officers on the ground. Certainly the message they are giving me is that legislation like this is sending the wrong message.

It in fact is sending a message that marijuana is okay and that if one is young and uses it, it is even better. In fact, this is the sort of thing the RCMP and police see day after day in their working careers and which leads to the use of much more dangerous drugs. They also see the severe problem of crystal meth being put into marijuana, hooking kids at a much younger age and in a much more severe manner. I wonder if he is hearing that same thing from the RCMP and police forces across this country.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, in speaking to some of the police, especially in my home province of Saskatchewan, I have heard a huge concern that we are not ready for the bill.

I have already mentioned the fact that there are no roadside tests to find out whether someone driving a vehicle is under the influence of marijuana. We need to develop that. The police want that test developed. It is already a problem. The Liberal government has not addressed it and has not tried to get an effective test that would tell us whether somebody is under the influence of marijuana while driving.

The police are also telling us that there is increased drug use in our schools. My riding of Yorkton—Melville is a rural riding. We would think that maybe an urban school would be experiencing some of the problems, but crystal meth is becoming a huge problem even in some of the very small towns in my riding. The police, community groups, parents and churches, all of the people concerned with this, do not have a solution. They feel that the wrong message is now being sent with this bill that decriminalizes the use of small amounts of marijuana.

The police also have huge concerns about mixing alcohol with marijuana, which makes it even more difficult to detect. Also, it will put many people on our highways at risk from those who are under the influence of this. We do not have an effective test. Despite what the member for Malpeque said, we cannot get somebody to just walk the line and charge them accordingly. That will not stand up in court. It is almost laughable that the Liberals would suggest that maybe we would have the discretion of police officers to try to determine whether somebody is under the influence of marijuana. We need those roadside tests, as we have the police telling us right now.

I want to bring up something that was raised in a report by the RCMP, who said, "The link between marihuana cultivation and organized crime cannot be overemphasized", adding that it has an extremely negative effects on our society. Crime is devastating many of our communities. It is impacting on people's lives. The police are raising this issue. There are huge profits associated with the drug

trade, say the RCMP. Those people will simply laugh at a fine of \$150 or \$300.

Going beyond that, the huge profits made in these drug operations are resulting in more illegal weapons, in more guns and ammunition being imported into Canada. It is bringing in a lot of other things. It is increasing illegal immigration to Canada. It is financing illicit activities around the world. Possibly even terrorist activities are being financed by drug activities within Canada. These are comments made by the RCMP.

The RCMP concluded that "High profitability, low risk, and relatively lenient sentences continue to entice growers and traffickers...". People are encouraged and enticed to get into these operations. Law enforcement agencies will have a very difficult time keeping our communities safe because of what is happening here today and the message that is being sent out.

We should be increasing our policing activities. We should be enforcing the laws that are presently in place. Instead, and I have said this before, we have put money, big bucks, into a useless gun registry rather than putting more police on the street to try to control some of these things.

• (1305)

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to echo the comments of my colleague, the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville. Speaking as a former prosecutor, certainly the problem with prosecuting impaired driving when we do not have an approved roadside device or other device to measure the content of the drug or alcohol is a very difficult thing to do, whereas with .08 there is what is called a presumptive offence: that we are presumed to be impaired if we blow over .08. When we have just a straight impaired driving charge with no appropriate roadside detection device or other device, it is a very difficult thing to prosecute. One only needs to look at the Martin's annotated *Criminal Code* to look at all of the cases that deal with this issue and realize how easy it is to avoid conviction. I am very worried that we are doing the same thing here.

The second point I want to raise is the issue that the marijuana bill appears to me to be tailor-made for organized crime, that is, it encourages youth to use marijuana and indeed to traffic in marijuana and at the same time it leaves the source of the marijuana illegal and criminal, thereby in fact increasing the potential for profit for an organized criminal.

I am wondering whether my colleague sees that same association: that at the same time as we are increasing the use among children and thereby creating a bigger demand, we are keeping it illegal in order to raise profits for organized crime.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, the member makes an excellent point, a point that maybe has been missed by the Liberals in the House.

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By having decreased fines for young people, this will encourage senior people to associate themselves with young people and get them involved in the drug trade. It is the same now with the Young Offenders Act. If older people can get younger people to go along with them in committing crimes, they maybe can get the sentences put on to the younger people. In many these cases sentences are much more lenient. It encourages a person to get involved. It encourages older people to involve youth in drug activities.

Also decriminalizing the whole possession of marijuana under 30 grams really sends the signal to youth that it is all right to experiment with a few of these things.

Thirty grams is 60 joints. That is a lot of marijuana. Many people do not realize that this is a significant amount of drug. With the high THC content now, that will have a very negative effect on our young people.

I do not think I have to say any more on this. The RCMP has said the same thing, that the high profitability, the low risk and the lenient sentences will entice growers and traffickers, and will make it very difficult for law enforcement agencies. We have to listen to these people.

We pass laws in this place, laws that impact the entire country. We had better get it right, and Bill C-10 does not get it right.

• (1310)

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has said that 30 grams amounts to about 60 cigarettes. What I see happening, with this half measure being put forward by the Liberal government and by moving toward legalizing, is that people will use more marijuana.

What about the person who has 60 plus one marijuana cigarettes? Will the argument be made that why would the government penalize and put this guy in jail for having one more cigarette, when his buddy standing next to him has only 59 cigarettes? One goes to jail for 10 years and the other one does not.

The bill is so foolish, as it relates to the drug laws in the country. It is incredible that it will be supported by the backbench Liberals and passed. What does the member have to say about that argument?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, the member makes a very good case. There are loopholes in this law. The Liberals say that they will allow officers to have discretion in some of these cases. This is a recipe for disaster. This will not work. By the way, some of the government's own backbench members have huge concerns with this.

The government should take into account the amendment I just raised, put this on a six month hoist and let us get it right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before getting into the bill, I want you to know that I am not holding the little mistake made earlier against you.

I am pleased to speak to Bill C-10 and the amendment before us. We will not be able to support the amendment because we think that the legislation should not legalize, as is often assumed incorrectly, but decriminalize marijuana.

In the next 20 minutes, I will try to clarify the confusion. I have met people who are part of civil society or groups, who think that, by adopting Bill C-10, parliamentarians are going to legalize marijuana. The Bloc Québécois presented amendments at report stage, and we would like the bill to be passed. As I hope to prove, it is not very reasonable for young people who are arrested for simple possession of marijuana to suffer extremely serious legal consequences when they are looking for work or travelling.

Let us start from the beginning. Like the U.S., Canada has had a prohibitionist strategy over the past 80 years, in the sense that the possession and growing of marijuana are prohibited under drug legislation and punishable not only by a fine, but imprisonment under the Criminal Code.

Are we to understand that, while Canada has maintained a prohibitionist strategy for the past 80 years, it has in a way deterred large segments of the population from using marijuana? Obviously, the answer to this question is no. Despite this prohibitionist strategy prohibiting the use and possession of marijuana, there are extremely conclusive statistics.

The latest statistics have been presented to the justice committee and the special committee. As a member of the Bloc Québécois, I represented my party at the committee which reviewed the whole issue of non-medical use of drugs. As hon. members may recall, a colleague put forward in this House a motion and, for one year, by order of the House, a special committee reviewed the whole issue of non-medical use of drugs.

The work done by the other House, with Senator Nolin, was perhaps a bit more elaborate than what we did in our committee, but both Houses reached the same conclusion. The prohibitionist strategy, which Canada followed for more than 80 years, did not give the expected results.

The statistics are clear. More than one in ten Canadians uses cannabis despite the fact that it is illegal. Over 30,000 Canadians are charged each year with simple possession of cannabis. In Quebec, the province I represent, 80% of those charged with simple possession of cannabis are adults.

So there is a clear gap between our legislative system and the statistical results on possession and use. When our committee considered the whole issue of drug use, it became quite clear that the legislative framework was completely out of date. There is a consequence to maintaining the prohibition, as set out in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and the Criminal Code. Consequently, for decades—I am certain that my colleague from Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier will agree—Canada invested considerable resources in the war on cannabis possession.

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•(1315)

In fact, when the parliamentary committee heard testimony from the RCMP and representatives of the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, it realized that millions of dollars, as much as \$500 million, had been invested in the war on drug possession. However the war on drugs in Canada has meant to a great extent a war on marijuana.

No one is saying that using marijuana is good. In terms of public health, we are well aware that the message we need to send young people in schools and everyone in our communities is that it is better never to use marijuana and, obviously, any other drugs.

However, it is not true that the use of marijuana justifies the repressive approach taken these past few years. That is the distinction we need to make.

And so, when we looked at the figures with the RCMP and the CCRA, we found that the repressive approach—which costs \$500 million—does not justify the results it produces. Bill C-10 is not asking us to legalize marijuana. There will still be legal consequences for simple possession of marijuana and certainly for growing it. There will still be sanctions but they will be more in the nature of a ticket and fine system. People will be fined amounts ranging from \$100 to \$400, but they will not have criminal records. We all know what it means to have a criminal record.

Let us imagine a young man of 16 who has 5 grams of marijuana. This is a fictitious example, but it is real nonetheless. If we do not change the law, this young man who is going to smoke marijuana—and we know, medically speaking, that moderate use of marijuana is much less harmful than using drugs or tobacco—and who finds himself in possession of 5 grams of marijuana, would end up with a criminal record that would follow him for years, with all that can mean to a working person changing jobs.

We know that young people who are now 17, 18 or 19 are likely to have at least 5 careers while in the labour force. The days when a person worked for the same company for 25, 30 or 35 years are over. Today, both people and their jobs are mobile, meaning that every 5, 6 or 7 years, they change jobs. There are job-related consequences of having a criminal record, as there are consequences of having a criminal record with respect to travelling to the United States or elsewhere. We believe these consequences are out of proportion to an offence that has no victims.

Moreover, if we did a little test with our colleagues in Parliament and those in the galleries and asked how many of them were in possession of 2, 3 or 4 grams of marijuana, there would be at least a 1 in 10 chance of hitting the mark. I can see some knowing smiles and that does not make them bad citizens for all that. Perhaps if we asked the members how many of them have—experimentally—used marijuana, I am certain that hands would go up. We would not want these people to have a criminal record.

The bill addresses this issue. That is why the Bloc Québécois will be voting in favour of this bill. Once again, I repeat, it is better never to use drugs. We do not need drugs in our systems. They are not natural. However, this does not mean that creating an offence for which a person would receive a criminal record—with criminal sanctions—would be desirable. That is the main reason we will support Bill C-10.

The parliamentary committee worked extremely hard. We looked at the whole issue for at least one year. We realized that, all in all, young people were not getting a lot of information.

•(1320)

The situation in Quebec is a bit different because various public health networks offer various community outreach programs, particularly within the CLSCs. Quebec adopted this model in the 1970s. Some of the CLSCs go into the schools and provide information on the consequences of drug use. Obviously, the distinctions between marijuana or cocaine and heroine are outlined. There are major distinctions to be made in terms of consequences. The point is, obviously, that people should get through life without using marijuana.

However, we are not here to judge. Just because a prohibitionist strategy has been in place since the 1980s does not mean that people are not using marijuana. We need to create a framework in which people can obtain information on which to base informed decisions about their lives, so they do not start abusing marijuana.

Certainly, using a little marijuana to relax from time to time does not have much in the way of consequences. Moreover, and the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier will correct me if I am wrong, an editorial in *The Lancet* of November 1998 stated that moderate cannabis use had little effect on health and that the decision to ban or to legalize cannabis ought to be based on other considerations. This is, of course, a very serious and well-known British medical journal, an authority in its field, a learned scientific journal. The other considerations taken into account in this bill are, of course, the consequences of a criminal record on a person's life.

This is not a new debate. One of the reasons we will not be able to vote in favour of the amendment is that we appear, from what I have just heard, to require additional information.

I believe you were a student back in 1969, Mr. Speaker, if I recall correctly. I do not have much trouble imagining you with long hair and a luxuriant beard and a bit of a rakish air. That was the year the commission of inquiry known as the Le Dain commission was created. The member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier was not even born. He came into the world in 1970.

So, the Le Dain commission looked at the entire marijuana issue in 1969. I had the opportunity to meet a criminologist who was to become a leading light in her community, professor Bertrand. As far back as 1969, some felt that the prohibitionist regime in place in Canada—following the U.S. example—was not based on any practical reality.

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Throughout our deliberations, we kept hearing from witnesses begging us to put an end to this system of offences which does far more harm than good. Something we did right in the parliamentary committee was to go to the United States, Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands.

This afforded us the opportunity to see that, statistically speaking, there are prohibitionist strategies in place in certain countries. Let us compare, for instance, the 18 to 30 age group in the U.S. and the Netherlands. Can you imagine this: despite the ban in the United States, with all of its system of very strong repression, there are more people in the United States in that age group using marijuana than in the Netherlands?

Just because there is a prohibitionist system does not mean that young people are automatically deterred from using marijuana. For instance, look at the U.S. and the myth around the war on drugs, a myth that is upheld at the highest levels.

• (1325)

Think about the statements made by Presidents Reagan and Bush. Nevertheless, in countries such as Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, where the governments are much more liberal with respect to drugs, fewer young people use marijuana than in the United States.

Of course, we agree that there needs to be information and public health policies. I hope my friend, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, will agree with me that, if we want there to be fewer young people smoking marijuana—even though they may not be his target clientele—it is important for this information to be available with respect to different aspects of public health. Naturally, this is not the role of the federal government.

The member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier also pointed out at every opportunity in committee that we could not talk about a national drug strategy. It is not the role of the federal government to implement a national drug strategy. It is the role of educational establishments, parks and communities; in other words, the municipalities and provincial governments. We do not think the federal government is the best interlocutor when it comes to drugs, except maybe for aboriginal people, toward whom we acknowledge the federal government has a fiduciary responsibility. For the rest, we do not think this is the federal government's responsibility.

That is so true. When we discussed this national strategy, we looked at the federal government's expertise and found that the government that knows the least about the issue of drug use is the federal government. I am asking the Minister of Veterans Affairs to bring before cabinet the idea of investing in transfer payments and making sure the money gets to the provinces so that they can make the best use of it.

Once again, there is no correlation with a prohibitionist strategy. There are at least 10% of Canadians, according to statistics and national public health surveys. Moreover, I wonder if all the ministers in this House have not, at least once, tried cannabis. Obviously, it is not my place to be an inquisitor and ask the question directly. I believe we would be well advised, as parliamentarians, to ensure that we have a new legislative system, which is what we are considering in Bill C-10.

In closing, I would like to say something about the question of international treaties. As we know, Canada is not a country where international law can produce immediate change. For international law to have an effect in Canada, we must vote on ratification. That stands in contrast to some countries where international treaties are automatically incorporated into national law—Canada is not that type of country. For international treaties to have an impact, those treaties must be ratified.

As the House is aware, Canada ratified two treaties during the 1970s concerning what were known at the time as psychotropic drugs. That was the term used in the treaties.

I will end with three points. The Bloc Québécois worked very hard on the special parliamentary committee on the non-medical use of drugs and on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, so that Bill C-10—Bill C-38 as it was then—would be amended.

We support Bill C-10 because we believe that the legislative system must be changed and that it is not rational for people accused of simple possession of marijuana to find themselves with a criminal record. We hope that money will be made available to the provinces in order to assist in the distribution of as much information as possible about the consequences of drug use. We believe that people should not use drugs and that they do not contribute to personal growth.

• (1330)

[*English*]

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I noticed in the fairly fine speech by the member from the Bloc that he detracted from his argument in regard to enforcement, the strength of that enforcement and whether we should continue to fight the use of drugs.

He also talked about former President Reagan trying to fight drugs and President Bush continuing the fight on drugs in the United States through a hard enforcement action. However he failed to mention people like Bill Clinton who did not do anything either. The fight on drugs was ongoing while Bill Clinton was the president.

Does the member believe that it is just individual political people who are causing the problem or is it the United States as a whole? I think he should clarify that.

The second point concerns what has happened in Vancouver. I do not know whether Montreal is going the same way but in Vancouver the municipality and possibly the province decided that we needed to have safe injection sites so people could use whatever drugs they wanted, in particular heroin but also marijuana, free from police activity.

It sounded like a good idea but the United Nations and the World Health Organization, or the committees that work on drugs, said that Canada was not only contravening international standards and regulations in regard to setting up drug use centres but that it was a bad idea. The World Health Organization and the United Nations have said that drugs are bad and that their use needs to be fought. Why would the member argue that drugs should be more readily available and allow everybody to use them if they want?

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I think that our colleague needs to qualify his statement.

I have said it before and I will say it again, when representatives of Canada Customs, which along with the RCMP is responsible for drug detection, appeared before the committee, they said that, despite the fact that \$500 million had been invested in the war on drugs in Canada, year after year, no more than 10% of drugs in circulation are intercepted by the agencies responsible for law enforcement.

As a society, we need to ask ourselves if it is logical to invest so many resources in prohibition, when our control over the amount of drugs in circulation is disproportionate to the amount of resources we invest.

Second, there is a strategy I do believe in, as the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, and that is the harm reduction strategy. I would prefer to live in a society where no one takes drugs. I tried drugs once in my entire life, but other than that, I have never smoked cigarettes or taken drugs. I know that this is not true for everyone.

We believe the following about safe injection sites. If people shoot up, it is better for them to do it somewhere safe, in the presence of health professionals and in as controlled an environment as possible, and that dirty needles not be circulated among users.

The goal of the harm reduction strategy, in setting up safe injection sites, is to put people in contact with health professionals and ensure they use drugs in the safest environment possible. We hope that the creation of drug injection sites will help these people to stop using.

One thing is clear, if we leave people to their own devices, in an environment without nurses, social workers or health professionals, those who overdose may die. However, when a doctor, health professional or nurse is present, users who overdose can be saved.

Clearly, our goal is abstinence.

• (1335)

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand on behalf of the people of Yellowhead and speak to this issue, which is important especially in the Yellowhead area which has been dealing with the problem over the last number of years, as long as I have served them as their member of Parliament. I think it will go on for a considerable amount of time.

What we first have to ask is: Who is driving this agenda? Why are we having a debate today on this legislation? Why is the legislation saying what it is saying and who thinks our society should go soft on narcotics?

My colleague from the Bloc, who just spoke, suggested that it would be great to have an abstinence with regard to the use of marijuana and there are others who are saying that would be a great thing. However the legislation sends the message that it is wrong to criminalize everyone for simple possession. To some degree that may be true but the message in the legislation goes beyond that. It sends the message that we should go soft on drugs, that we should go

soft on marijuana, particularly for youth. One section in the legislation actually states that the fine should be reduced if one is a youth or a student. That message is loud and clear to the youth in my riding, which is unfortunate.

I want to go back to the question of who is driving the agenda. Why is the legislation coming forward the way it is? Is it the parents who are calling for the decriminalization of marijuana? I do not think so. Is it the police? No. We have heard from the police forces and they are saying no. They are the frontline officers who deal with this on a daily basis and they are saying no. It is also not coming from our communities.

Canada has three orders of government, municipal, provincial and federal, all with specific roles. One would think that on something as important as this, which would have an impact on every man, woman and child and for a considerable amount of time, that those orders of government would be dialoguing with regard to this legislation, that those who are closest to the problem, the municipalities, would be bringing forward their recommendations, then it would come to the provinces and then up to the federal level. That is not really the case.

This legislation is driven on the federal side. This is federal legislation. The municipalities are not being heard. In fact, the message coming from the municipalities in my riding is that this is a bad legislation and that the problem is intensifying. The legislation is sending them the wrong message. The Liberal government is saying that we should go soft on drugs.

It is very difficult when one is sending that message to a municipality or a school system. I was chair of a school board in a regional school division so I know firsthand the complexities of the problems those individuals face within the school system.

Last fall when I talked to some of those principals, who I know very well, they told me that the problem was that drug use had increased significantly because the message getting through to students was that marijuana was almost a legalized substance. They do not follow the legislation as closely as we do here and therefore do not know how it would impact them.

When the Senate came out over a year ago recommending that we legalize marijuana and this legislation says that we should decriminalize it, the message getting through to the individuals walking the street was that Canada should go soft on drugs and that it was not a big problem.

It is a big problem. It is a huge problem in Yellowhead. Last week CBC had a documentary showing just how intense the problem was along the Yellowhead Highway. It is not something we are proud of in Yellowhead but it is not something that we are prepared to run and hide from and neglect dealing with.

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Yesterday at the airport I was talking with one of the mayors from one of the communities in my riding. He was saying how the mayors felt somewhat ashamed of the black eye the drug abuse and drug use in their communities was giving them. They were questioning whether they should have gone forward with the documentary on the CBC. I encouraged them by saying that we either had to stand up against the abuse and misuse of drugs in our society or fold our cards and walk away from it and to think of what our society would look like 10 years from now when would we see the actual intensity of the problem that is happening.

• (1340)

It is not so much the marijuana problem in my riding, although that is a serious problem, as it is the drug busts on a routine basis of grow ops within the riding. The amount of damage that is causing is unbelievable. In fact, the very first year that I was a member of Parliament the drug use and abuse became so intense that there were vigilante threats coming from our society to those individuals who were known in the community to be causing a problem. I come from a rural area where most neighbours know each other. They know who the drug users are and they know where the problems are coming from.

This group was so intent on theft and on breaking in to supply the money to be able to deal with the habit that they were addicted to it became very intense. Vigilantism came to the forefront. We had to call in K division to be able to push back against the drugs. That was done. It is settled in one area but it just spilled out along the highway a little further to our neighbouring communities. This problem is absolutely severe.

It is not so much the marijuana problem as it is the methamphetamine problem. Methamphetamine has only been around for about a decade. It is important that we understand just what this drug will do to our society if left alone and we just turn a blind eye to it.

In our school system they are lacing the marijuana with methamphetamine. The drug experts have told me that 46% of those who smoke methamphetamine for the first time will be addicted for life. For those who smoke it twice, over 90% will be addicted for life. This is an unbelievably toxic product that is very addictive and is permeating our society in Yellowhead.

In Alberta where I come from four out of the five worst communities for drug use are in my riding. Therefore I am not speaking off the top of my head. I experience it when I go into the communities. I talk to the mayors and reeves and the school people.

I was at a meeting just before Christmas where they were talking about this problem. They were throwing their hands in the air saying "We have to do something about it. We are not prepared to just sit back and let the RCMP deal with this problem". They brought the school division in, the health authorities, the RCMP and social services. All of the different services within the community came together in a meeting to decide how they were going to deal with it. They decided that they had to link arms as a unit to be able to push back against the abuse and misuse they were seeing of marijuana and methamphetamines.

We heard in a debate here today that marijuana use is not a gateway drug. I suggest that it is a gateway drug. It is said that those who smoke cigarettes, those who get involved in alcoholism and those who smoke marijuana all lead to methamphetamine abuse which is also being laced in cocaine and other drugs within our communities.

We have to deal with these serious problems. Therefore we have a decision to make as leaders in the House. We can just stand back, put forward legislation and not deal with it, or we can put forward legislation that will deal with the problem, which is what I encourage us to do. However this legislation sends the wrong message, a message saying that anyone under 18 years of age will only receive a fine of \$100. That is the maximum fine, by the way. I did not realize that until I spoke to some of my colleagues who were sitting on the committee who said that it was the maximum fine for simple possession up to 30 grams, which is about 60 cigarettes. The maximum fine is \$100 but the minimum fine could be \$10 or \$25. The problem is that our courts are not dealing with this.

It is fair game and I think it is a good healthy debate to say that if the courts are not dealing with it perhaps we should give it to the frontline workers, the RCMP, and give them the resources to push it back.

The message should not be that we go soft on it. It should be that we are sick and tired of the courts not dealing with it. It is time that we took it out of the courts and gave it to the frontline people so they can push back aggressively against the misuse of this narcotic that will be there as long as we are here in Canada.

We need to start protecting and standing up for our youth. We need to begin looking after our society before this problem gets so intense that we are not able to deal with it. I am saying that the methamphetamine problem that I have described has only been here for a decade. What happens if we leave it alone for another decade? Imagine the intensity of the problem. If this legislation spins us into that, we would be making a terrible mistake to pass it in the House at the present time.

• (1345)

My colleague said that we should give it six months and then look at it again. He wants us to wait a little longer before we drive this country down a road on which we should not be driving. Let us send a message to the organized crime dealers and the grow ops in our ridings that we are not prepared to take it any longer.

I am concerned about the issue from another perspective. The people of Yellowhead have this problem and, as their member of Parliament, I am in the process of having a private member's bill drafted which would give the RCMP the tools that they need to deal with the methamphetamine problem. Products that go into the cooking of methamphetamine can be purchased from any drug store. Anyone who has the Internet can find out how to do it in a flash. This is happening at an unbelievable rate, not only in my riding but in ridings across the country. The RCMP should have legislation that would allow it to charge anyone found in possession of those ingredients. We need to start there.

Government Orders

In the last couple of months there have been a couple of drug busts in my riding. One involved a \$50,000 grow op operation and another involved a \$3 million operation in a community in Drayton Valley. We cannot afford to sit back and do nothing. We have to send the message that we are sick and tired of allowing our youth to be victimized by this product. As far as the methamphetamine problem is concerned, it not only involves youth, it involves people of all ages and in all professions. We need to have a national drug strategy. We need to bring forward legislation that will support our RCMP in its endeavours.

I was talking to another member of Parliament who represents the neighbouring community of Morinville. As a point of interest, he went down to the courthouse and asked how many stayed sentences for simple possession of marijuana were in the court system. Morinville is a rural community of 7,000 people. The number of stayed sentences was 782. If that was extrapolated across the country, we would realize the intensity of the problem and the fact that we need to do something about it.

Colleagues from all sides of the House want to go soft on this because everybody is doing it and they claim it is not a big deal. It is a big deal and we had better do something about it. If we do not do something about it now it will continue to victimize our society in ways we have never thought of.

I was my party's senior critic for health during the discussions on the medical use of marijuana. What is interesting is that the government brings forward legislation that would go soft on marijuana, but on marijuana for medical use it brought forward the idea of licences for those who use it for medical purposes. Individuals licensed to use this product for medical purposes could have grow ops in their backyards or basements.

However there are a few problems with that. There would be no way to determine exactly how much those licensed people would be growing. Professional counsellors in my riding have told me that this could be a problem. They said that licensed individuals growing this product for medical purposes could now traffic in it. They could supply five different individuals with marijuana at a cost of \$300 a week, and it would not be used for medical purposes. How would we control that?

Not only do we have a problem there, but marijuana is much different today than it was 20 or 30 years ago when the THC level was 3%. It is now up to 33%. The toxicity of the product is much different now. That was the problem with the Flin Flon experiment where the seeds were taken off the street. The government realized, once the product was grown and some tests were done, that there were 165 different varieties growing from its experimental plot.

• (1350)

If that is what it had with the product that it was experimenting with, saying that it was going to be used for medical purposes, my question is, who knows what the toxicity level is for the crop that is being grown and licensed to be grown for this government?

I can say that nobody knows, not the Minister of Health, not Health Canada, no one. That is a very serious medical marijuana problem because it has not been licensed. That is why the Canadian Medical Association says it has not jumped through the litmus test

and has not had the proper testing to prove that it is the product of choice.

We can get it in the form of a pill in any pharmacy across the country. But when we talk to those who want it for licensing to be able to have a grow op in their own house or backyard, they will say they do not want to take it in a pill form, they want to smoke it. There is another problem with that because it has twice the toxicity as far as tar level and problems for health down the road.

I am not saying that medical marijuana is all bad. I am saying that it has not jumped through the hoops. We should be doing the proper testing before we allow it to be grown. If we grow it, we should know the toxicity level of the stuff we are growing. If we do not do those things first, we are making a terrible mistake.

Medical marijuana is a serious problem. When we think about it, we are having a real problem with Health Canada letting in natural food products. These are just natural food products—vitamins and minerals—from the United States. It is a product called Empower Plus used for bipolar disorder. It is being stopped at the border not allowed in for individuals who are using it for their own consumption.

The problem I have with that is that we are told it is not licensed to be used as a natural food product in Canada. Compare that with what the government is doing with marijuana and it is saying that there is some consistency. This is absolutely ridiculous. We are licensing marijuana with no proof whatsoever of what it can do as far as being a benefit to the user and yet we are stopping natural food products from coming into the country with which there is absolutely no problem and from which there is a tremendous amount of benefit.

In fact, I have had reports from individuals who have had this held up by Health Canada and because of that they have gone into depression and committed suicide in at least two cases already. This is absolutely crazy. This government is so far out of touch from its electorate and the people it is trying to serve.

We see what is happening with the World Health Organization. There is a treaty that was signed to reduce the amount of tobacco use but not ratified. We must ask ourselves, why would the government sign this treaty against tobacco use and yet not ratify it? We have this mixed message all over the place, especially when the World Health Organization also said that we should be involved in pushing back against drugs. Yet, we have a piece of legislation that is going the other way on this whole idea.

All of us in the House must soberly ask ourselves, what are we doing with this piece of legislation. Why are we doing this? Do we understand the impact that it will have on our youth and society?

The amendments that we tried to bring forward are very clear. Decriminalization may be fine up to five grams, which is three to six cigarettes, but the fines should not be \$100 for youth and \$150 for adults. They should be significantly higher than. We want to give the power to the RCMP to deal with the problem as aggressively as possible because the courts have failed to do it.

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I am sick and tired of being a member of Parliament and giving up power to the courts. We are not taking the responsibility that we have been entrusted with by the individuals who put us into office in this place.

It is time that we stand up in this place and give ourselves a little more credit for who we are trying to represent and give ourselves a little more authority to deal with the problem. We should not skirt around our responsibility by giving it to the courts. I am sick and tired of a Prime Minister who stands up and says that the time does not fit the crime, that we have to go soft and a criminal record is a problem.

I would be much more proud of a Prime Minister who would stand up and say that we have a problem in this country and we are going to fix it, and that we are sick and tired of the courts not dealing with it, and if the courts will not deal with it we will.

• (1355)

That is the kind of Prime Minister we need. It is about high time that we started having that kind of leadership in this country. We have had a leadership vacuum for a decade and we have to fix it.

I hope there is an election come April and the people of Canada have an opportunity to vote. I would be excited about going to the people of Yellowhead on this issue alone. I would love to see a Liberal candidate come into my riding and explain this piece of legislation to the people who are victimized by the narcotic use in my riding.

I am sick and tired of it. I believe everyone in the House is as well. The drug problem is not unique to Yellowhead. If members do not have it in their backyards, they are going to, and members in this House need to understand that very quickly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. member for Yellowhead is still entitled to 10 minutes of questions or comments after question period. Statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

COMMONWEALTH DAY

Hon. Susan Whelan (Essex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to draw the attention of the House to Commonwealth Day.

Today's Commonwealth is home to more than 1.7 billion people in 54 countries, large and small, spread across every continent and ocean in the world.

This year's Commonwealth Day theme "Building a Commonwealth of Freedom" is about finding ways to overcome barriers to freedom, such as oppression, terrorism, hunger, poverty, disease and ignorance.

As a founding member, in 1931, Canada is one of the Commonwealth's strongest supporters and promoters. The dynamic and vibrant networks of partnerships that exist among the

Commonwealth give the organization its unique strength in promoting democracy, development and cooperation.

Today is a day to mark and encourage the efforts that Commonwealth partners are making towards greater and lasting freedom for all. The Government of Canada congratulates the Commonwealth for its work.

* * *

MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton Centre-East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, RCMP Corporal Jim Galloway was laid to rest in Sherwood Park, Alberta. He was killed by Martin Ostopovich, a paranoid schizophrenic, who could not afford the \$300 per month for medication to control his delusions, which involved a hatred of authority figures. He killed Corporal Galloway with a gun that he was legally permitted to own. A judge said his illness was under control.

Martin should not have had to pay for the drugs to control his illness and should have been regularly monitored. He should not have been permitted to own firearms and could have been institutionalized for his own health and safety, and that of others.

Harsh suggestions? Ask the schizophrenia societies of Canada. Freedom does not encompass the right to irrational destruction of self or others.

I hope that the deaths of Corporal Jim Galloway and Martin Ostopovich will finally cause changes in our care of the mentally ill. My sincere condolences to both families.

* * *

• (1400)

KOFI ANNAN

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Oak Ridges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Mr. Kofi Annan, a Nobel peace prize winner and the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations, and to welcome our esteemed guest to Canada.

Kofi Annan is serving a second term as Secretary-General of the United Nations. This is certainly a reflection of the Secretary-General's deep commitment to revitalizing and reforming the UN.

Mr. Annan has been a strong advocate of human rights, the rule of law, and the universal values of equality, tolerance and human dignity found in the United Nations charter.

As Secretary-General, Kofi Annan has managed several delicate political situations: the transition to civilian rule in Nigeria; an agreement to resolve a stalemate between Libya and the Security Council; forging an international response to the violence in East Timor; the certification of Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon; and further efforts to encourage Israelis and Palestinians to resolve their differences through peaceful negotiations.

Congratulations on your achievements, and welcome to Canada, Mr. Secretary-General.

[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I received a letter from Claude Lebel, president of the Festival forestier de Senneterre, in which he wrote:

We recently learned about the cancellation of your government's sponsorship program. This leads us to fear for the financial survival of our event.

—Last year, we received a sponsorship of \$7,500—

For ten years we have gone to great lengths to provide our fellow citizens and our visitors with a top quality event—

—it is never easy to finance such an event, particularly in a region like Abitibi.—

The Festival forestier contributes significantly to economic and social development.—The Festival plays an important role in the community and has made it possible for the Canadian government to inform citizens of its priorities, programs and services.

* * *

[English]

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since arriving in Ottawa, I have heard from numerous stakeholders about the need for the federal government to commit to improving rail services.

Recently, in a meeting with the mayor of Stratford, and in a letter from the mayor of St. Marys, it was made clear to me that local rail service is an area of much concern.

Rail service is very important to the people of southwestern Ontario. Tourism and manufacturing industries rely on the rails. The railway lines are what helped to bring prosperity to this region of the country and, if the federal does its part, can promise to deliver continued success for the future.

If Canada is to meet the lofty goals set out under the Kyoto protocol then, surely, safe, efficient and environmentally-friendly rail lines will be a major part of meeting these obligations.

Instead of cutting back service, the federal government needs to commit to provide the resources necessary to offer the best level of service possible.

* * *

CANADIAN DIABETES ASSOCIATION

Mr. Janko Peric (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today after question period members will have an opportunity to meet and welcome a group of dedicated volunteers from the Canadian Diabetes Association.

More than 2 million Canadians have diabetes, with 3 million projected to have it by 2010. This chronic disease costs our health care system over \$13 billion a year.

The 150-plus branches of the Canadian Diabetes Association work hard to prevent diabetes and to improve the quality of life for those affected through research, education, service and advocacy.

Its success comes from the generous support of volunteers and donors like my constituent, Mr. George Sutton, who is here today representing the Cambridge and District Branch.

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I know that all members will join me in welcoming Mr. Sutton and the many other dedicated volunteers from across Canada who are here today.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, March 8, marks International Women's Day. This day highlights the centuries' old struggle and determination of women around the world to be recognized as human beings, persons of dignity and freedom.

Today, in Canada, we celebrate the many accomplishments of women, from the seats of government to the Olympic hockey rink, from outer space to the familiar rooms of our hospitals, schools and universities.

Canadians have a history that is shaped by the significant contributions of women. While this day provides us with an opportunity to acknowledge the leadership and courage of Canadian women, we, in solidarity with women worldwide, must remain committed to addressing gender inequalities with the principles of equality and freedom both at home and abroad.

A woman's work is never done; much remains. But the foundation upon which women seek empowerment and equal rights is strong, thanks to the many courageous women who have made this possible.

* * *

●(1405)

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S WEEK

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on this second day of International Women's Week, I join all Quebeckers who yesterday demonstrated their confidence that together, anything is possible.

Women are demonstrating in 2004 to put an end to the setback they have suffered ever since the federal government decided in the 1990s to cut transfers to the provinces, when a true fight against poverty would involve taking into account their needs in health, education and social housing. Yet the current Prime Minister withdrew from these three areas when he was finance minister.

The Bloc Québécois is asking the federal government to correct the fiscal imbalance that is preventing Quebec from implementing a family policy that would grant better parental leave than that currently being offered by the federal government. That would be the first step toward respecting the needs of the women of Quebec and respecting the jurisdiction of Quebec.

S. O. 31

HAITI

Hon. David Price (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe it is important to focus attention on the role Canada will be playing in maintaining stability in Haiti, during the very troubled times that country is going through.

Last week, my colleague, the hon. Minister of National Defence, announced that 425 Canadian soldiers will be assigned to duties in Haiti. Helicopters will be sent to assist this contingent in fulfilling its mission.

The situation in Haiti has attracted the attention of the international community. The community of nations is aware that the people of that country are at great risk because of the unrest. That is why Canada has a duty to intervene.

I believe all my colleagues will agree that the government has a duty to take action in order to restore peace in Haiti.

* * *

[*English*]

PROPERTY RIGHTS

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week several of our newspapers reported that communist China is changing its constitution to embrace the most fundamental principle of capitalism, that being the protection of private property rights.

The question our Prime Minister must answer is: Why is Canada not doing the same? Surely he must know that the protection of private property was purposely omitted from the Canadian Constitution.

The leader of the Liberal Party has so many things in common with the chairman of China's party. For example, chairman Paul has his CSL ships built in China, not Canada. Both Chairman Mao and chairman Paul wrote red books and then did whatever they wanted.

Farmers on the Prairies, environmentalists and those analyzing Liberal legislation all recognize that the omission of property rights from our Charter of Rights and Freedoms has undermined the very fabric of our free and democratic society.

Why does our Prime Minister recognize what China has just recognized; that property rights are the foundation of a strong, vibrant economy?

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S WEEK

Mr. Christian Jobin (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to quote Alfred de Musset: Take time as it comes, the wind as it blows, woman as she is.

I am taking this opportunity today to pay tribute to our mothers, our sisters and our daughters. This year, the theme for International Women's Week in Canada is "She's on a role".

Today is the ideal occasion to reflect on the progress that has been made and thus to advance equality for women. Still more important,

it is a day to celebrate women from all over who have left their mark on the world.

Over the ages, regardless of place of origin, age, culture and status, women have always worked. In Canada and everywhere else, when they were not busy raising very large families, they were involved in such activities as running schools and hospitals. They worked in the fields, took over in the factories during wartime and excelled in a number of areas.

We thank these women and celebrate their invaluable presence within our communities.

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his report made public today, the Canadian Forces ombudsman chastises the Department of National Defence for breaking promises to Canadian soldiers.

Ten corporals who volunteered to be away from their families for four months in order to learn how to operate a new Canadian Forces air traffic control system were ordered to repay 65% of their per diem. Not only has this forced some of these soldiers to take out loans to repay this money, it has negatively affected the morale of the Canadian Forces and has discouraged other soldiers from volunteering to take this course.

The NDP finds it very ironic that the government has been so slow to reclaim the millions of dollars it disbursed to Liberal-friendly ad agencies while being so quick and so harsh in its attempts to reclaim meal allowances from 10 Canadian Forces corporals.

I call on the Minister of National Defence to reverse the clawback rather than visit any more hardship on the families of these NCOs who are willing to acquire a needed skill in the Canadian armed forces.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on this day, March 8, International Women's Day, a day to commemorate the many battles for equal rights of men and women, I would like to raise the issue of salary inequity at the CBC, a crown corporation that should set an example when it comes to equal employment rights.

The CBC has chosen an underhanded way of favouring its male employees, by paying them, in the form of a bonus, the sum of \$3.9 million, divided among 31 people, 22 of them men and only 9 women.

In order to correct this flagrant injustice, both vice-presidents of the French network have promised to put an end to this inequality by February 28, 2007. This is only a moral commitment.

The union believes that the initiative would have been more credible if CBC management had allowed something to be written into the collective agreement. I invite the new Minister of Canadian Heritage to put pressure on the CBC to ensure that the union's demands become reality.

* * *

•(1410)

DENYS ARCAND

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have one more reason to be proud of their country and of their fellow citizens.

After winning acclaim at Cannes and other top honours from the film industry, *The Barbarian Invasions* by Denys Arcand won the Oscar for best foreign language film last week in Hollywood.

This Oscar is the crowning touch to the worldwide triumph of Mr. Arcand's film. Mr. Arcand has already indicated that he is not about to rest on his laurels and that he will be getting back to work very soon.

I think Denys Arcand's outstanding success deserves our recognition. I am certain that Mr. Arcand will be a source of inspiration and an example for all Canadians and I ask my colleagues to join me in offering him our warmest congratulations.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unsettling as the government's performance has been on the sponsorship scandal, Canadians have growing concerns also about the Liberals' disturbing handling of files which affect our international image.

The recent documentary of the Khadr family exposed a chilling disconnect between our government's elected officials and our nation's diplomatic and intelligence services. Questions continue to go unanswered.

Why would the former prime minister successfully lobby for the release of one of Osama bin Laden's top lieutenants? Why will our present Prime Minister not simply say no to those members of the Khadr clan who are vocal advocates of terror and suicide bombing and who want to waltz back in to Canada after being guests at bin Laden's training camp?

What does the Prime Minister plan to do to deal with the alarming questions that have been raised in a written documentary released today, which pictures Canada as a soft spot for those who are enemies of democracy? What message in terms of decisive steps of action, not words, will the Prime Minister convey to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who is here today, to let him know that Canada is concerned about its international image and wants to be a strong link, not a weak link, in the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

S. O. 31

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today on International Women's Day we celebrate the progress made in opportunities and choices for women, but we also have to face the fact that violence against women remains a pervasive poison in societies around the world.

For the past ten years, The Body Shop Canada has actively campaigned across the country to stop violence against women. It has raised funds to support violence prevention programs and shelters, contributing more than \$1 million to the Canadian Women's Foundation and local non-profit organizations. The United Nations has recognized this campaign for bringing awareness to a crucial social issue.

To celebrate this 10th anniversary, many Canadian celebrities have signed on, including David Suzuki, Avril Lavigne and Natalie MacMaster. To commemorate National Women's Day, a candle was lit at noon today in every Body Shop across the country, including Ottawa West—Nepean.

I congratulate The Body Shop Canada for leading the way for other corporations to fight violence against women.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Liberal government lurches from scandal to scandal, some very important and terrifying announcements have come from the mouth of the environment minister.

His zeal to implement the flawed Kyoto accord has no bounds; \$5 billion will not be enough to pay for his boondoggle. Now the environment minister wants to raise gas taxes or income taxes to feed his Kyoto monster.

When this government made a commitment to Kyoto, we said that the only way it could reach the goals was to shut down entire industries or implement a carbon tax. Well, we know which way the environment minister is going.

One would think, after a week away from this place, that even the Liberals would have been able to hear what Canadians are saying. Canadians cannot stomach another tax and they cannot stomach a government that takes their taxes and gives it to Liberal friends. It is time to shelve both Kyoto and this Liberal government.

* * *

•(1415)

SISTER PEGGY BUTTS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I inform the House today of the death of Sister Peggy Butts. Born in Bridgeport, Cape Breton, Sister Peggy earned her Ph.D in political philosophy from the University of Toronto.

Through her career as a high school principal and later as a professor at St. Francis Xavier University and the University College of Cape Breton, she earned a reputation as a brilliant educator who dedicated her life to issues of social justice.

Oral Questions

She committed her life to a wide variety of health care and social projects and assisted numerous social groups from across the country. She served as the director of the social justice office for the Diocese of Antigonish.

In 1997 our former prime minister, Jean Chrétien, called Sister Peggy to the Senate, leaving in 1999 after she reached the mandatory retirement age of 75. During the two years she served in the red chamber, she donated her entire salary to charity.

All of us who knew Sister Peggy appreciated her kindness, wit and of course great passion for the game of hockey and, more particular, the love she had for her Montreal Canadiens.

Indeed, Sister Peggy Butts was blessed with a brilliant mind and a dogged determination to work every day to improve the state of those less fortunate. She led a wonderful life and has left an indelible mark on the lives of many.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*English*]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has now admitted publicly that the Liberal Party of Canada received hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars, dirty money I might add, through ad scam. For the past seven years the Liberals have campaigned with this dirty money.

Why did the Prime Minister permit Public Works to be used as a vehicle to launder money for the 1997 and 2000 elections?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure exactly what the member is referring to, but there are four processes underway. There is a judicial independent inquiry; the public accounts committee, which they are well aware of; RCMP investigations; and a special council for recovery.

Rather than make accusations, the hon. member should put evidence before these processes to make sure that, as we have insisted, the truth comes out.

Hon. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister says he will not spend all this dirty money, in fact he will give it back. That is a little bit like a bank robber, when he is caught, saying, "If I give the money back, will you let me go?"

Would the Prime Minister explain why the sponsorship program was used to funnel money into Liberal coffers for the 1997 and 2000 elections? Why was that?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to my colleague that before he makes allegations he should check the facts.

The Liberal Party of Canada has decided to conduct an internal audit into the sources of financing for our party, which by the way no other party has tried to do so far, even though we have invited them to do so.

The facts are going to speak. There is a legal council in charge of getting to the money wherever it has gone, and there is a commission of investigation in place which is charged with finding out what the facts are. I would suggest my colleague should wait and see what the facts are before talking.

Hon. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no other party has to do it because no other party took the money.

[*Translation*]

Not only did the Liberal Party receive this dirty money, but cabinet ministers also received donations: the current Minister of Industry, the Minister of Social Development and the President of the Privy Council, to name but a few.

Will the Prime Minister ask them to pay back this money; yes or no?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am having a hard time understanding why my colleague keeps on talking about dirty money when there is not an ounce of evidence. This is a purely gratuitous allegation. I do not see any basis for his claim.

What I propose is extremely simple: instead of throwing around accusations that only serve to smear reputations, if there are documents or facts to present, then he should put them on the table and we will consider them. Until then he should stop throwing mud just for the sake of it.

[*English*]

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, evidence keeps leaking out about just how close the President of the Queen's Privy Council was to Claude Boulay, head of Groupe Everest, a notorious player in ad scam. Today revealed a birthday video for Boulay with the minister front and centre on camera. Then there is a revealing e-mail proving bureaucrats knew the minister wanted them to hire Everest because Boulay was his friend.

Heads of crown corporations are rolling on suspicion they knew about the ad scandal, yet the minister remains in cabinet in spite of his cozy relationship with a key player. Why the double standard?

● (1420)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has made it plain that any of his cabinet ministers, if called upon, will appear before both the public inquiry and the public accounts committee. The Prime Minister has also indicated that he has asked each one of us whether we had any knowledge in relation to wrongdoing in relation to that which was the subject of the Auditor General's report.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister probably believes in the tooth fairy too.

Oral Questions

When evidence of how close the minister was to Boulay first surfaced, the minister denied it as “damn nonsense” and said, “No, not at all”. Then his word that he had not lived at Boulay’s home proved to be false. Boulay’s take of government contracts shot up after the minister received a cabinet post. The Auditor General fingered Boulay’s company in her report on ad scam.

Is it not true that the minister was deeply involved in making sure his crony got a generous share of ad scam pork?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is making a specific allegation in relation to the President of the Privy Council, I suggest that if she has information, she should put that before the public inquiry or the public accounts committee. Let me reiterate that on this side of the House, the Prime Minister has asked every one of his cabinet ministers that if they had any knowledge of wrongdoing in relation to that which was the subject of the Auditor General’s report, to come forward with that information.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 18, the Prime Minister assured us that no minister was aware of the sponsorship scandal, and that he had personally verified that.

Now with the video, we see that the links are even closer than we thought between the President of the Privy Council and Claude Boulay of Everest—one of the people who profited most from the scandal.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether he is still as sure of his minister, when there is a videotape showing him and his friends joking around about the entire Canadian visibility enhancing operation in Quebec, an operation funded by public funds that benefited friends of the government?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand that my colleague across the way is so obsessed by politics that he forgets that we are human beings first and foremost. I understand that he has forgotten that, if we have friends that go back more than 20 years, the fact that we are elected does not mean that we should completely eliminate everything we experienced before we entered politics.

Before he was even a candidate for the first time, there was a friendship between Mr. Boulay and the colleague in question dating back more than 20 years. So, let us stop throwing around accusations that are pointless and even scandalous.

The real scandal is this systematic smearing by the opposition.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that performance deserves an Oscar.

In 1997, the President of the Privy Council stayed in the home of Claude Boulay, the President of Everest. That is a fact. In 2000, a departmental employee wrote that the company the Secretary of State wanted to hire was Everest, which did get the contract. In 2001, a videotape on the occasion of Claude Boulay’s birthday shows the minister and his friends joking around about the government’s visibility operation.

In this context, did the Prime Minister check whether the President of the Privy Council was the one who, at the June 10, 2002 cabinet committee meeting, continued to defend the companies after the Auditor General’s report? That is a fact. Can we have an answer on this?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is something rather vicious about connecting facts that have absolutely nothing to do with each other.

A commission of inquiry has been established. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts is also dealing with this. If there are any allegations to be made, let them be made there and let any supporting documents or other proof be tabled there.

But enough of these unfounded accusations. They are both pointless and unhealthy and, in my opinion, reflect badly on everyone in political life.

• (1425)

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minutes of a cabinet committee meeting, which were made public, showed that one minister had defended the communication firms.

Now, there is a videotape proving the great friendship between the President of the Privy Council and Mr. Boulay. The Prime Minister had assured us that, before appointing his ministers, he checked if any had any knowledge about the sponsorship scandal.

I light of this new information—and my question is directed to the President of the Privy Council—did the Prime Minister meet with him again to discuss his involvement in this matter and the videotape that was made public?

[*English*]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, the Prime Minister asked everyone in his cabinet whether they had any information in relation to wrongdoing in relation to that which was the subject of the Auditor General’s report.

The Prime Minister has also made it plain that he and his entire cabinet, if called upon to do so, will appear before the public accounts committee, will appear before the public inquiry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, clearly the answers we are getting have nothing to do with the questions.

We can see that no one in this government knows anything; no one saw anything; and no one did anything.

My question is the following. Is the government not blaming public servants just to bury the issue for a few weeks, until an election is called, to keep the public in the dark? It does not matter what happens after, the problem will be dealt with, but for the time being, no one will know—

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, the government and the Prime Minister are committed to transparency and accountability.

Minutes after the Auditor General's report was released, the Prime Minister announced a comprehensive package of measures to get to the bottom of the situation and to answer the questions that the Auditor General identified that she could not answer.

It is unprecedented for a Prime Minister to do the things the Prime Minister has done: call a public inquiry; reconvene public accounts early; bring in whistleblower legislation; a review of the Financial Administration Act; ensure the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona.

* * *

OTTAWA CENTRE BYELECTION

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. It has to do with the fact that the Prime Minister called a byelection in Ottawa Centre for November 29. This creates a situation where the citizens of Ottawa Centre could possibly be left without representation, if there is no spring election, for up to 15 months, which I believe is a record.

How does the Deputy Prime Minister reconcile this with trying to address the democratic deficit, this abuse of the democratic rights of the people of Ottawa Centre?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, far from being a democratic deficit, the Prime Minister called the byelection. It is his responsibility once a vacancy occurs to call a byelection within six months. That is exactly what the Prime Minister did.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that has to be one of the weaker answers I have heard in a long time. The fact is he called it only when he absolutely had to and he called it in a way that if there is no spring election, the people of Ottawa Centre will be left without representation. This is clearly at odds with any respect for democracy or for the question of addressing the democratic deficit.

I want to ask the Deputy Prime Minister again, does she really believe that leaving the citizens of Ottawa Centre this way, without representation for possibly up to 15 months, is in harmony with addressing the democratic deficit?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, the law requires that once a vacancy occurs, a byelection be called within six months. That is exactly what the Prime Minister did yesterday.

Let me reassure everyone in the House that the constituents of Ottawa Centre continue, and will continue, to receive constituency services until such time as the byelection is held.

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Friday's *National Post* it says, "the government fired VIA Rail president Marc LeFrançois for his alleged role in the sponsorship program". Saturday's *Globe and Mail* quotes the transport minister as saying, "The decision to fire Mr. LeFrançois was based on the Auditor General's report".

The public accounts committee has not yet heard from Mr. LeFrançois and no recommendations have been made at all about his future, so why was he fired? What is the standard for firing heads of crown corporations?

● (1430)

Hon. Tony Valeri (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said and as the hon. member quoted, the firing of Mr. LeFrançois was based on the Auditor General's report. Mr. LeFrançois had an opportunity to provide a submission. He did so on March 1. I subsequently met with Mr. LeFrançois. We discussed his submission. Based on that, Mr. LeFrançois' appointment was terminated.

[Translation]

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is still on the table. What Canadians really want to know is whether the government is cleaning up this scandal. What we need to know is the standard the government will apply to terminate the employment of bosses like Mr. LeFrançois. What is the standard? Is there an equal standard or is there a legal or a political standard? What standard will the government use to clean up this terrible scandal that is dividing the government and preventing it from governing the country?

[English]

Hon. Tony Valeri (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, it is not preventing the government from governing. We are governing. We are engaged in policy and we are doing a lot on this side of the House. If the opposite side would actually ask a question that had relevance for Canadians, we might in fact get some answers.

With respect to the question that was asked, Mr. LeFrançois was provided due process. It was based on that process that we made a decision. That decision was one that was made after reviewing and receiving that submission and the government stands behind that decision.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we would rather have the member from Hamilton back.

Alfonso Gagliano is back from Denmark and he is talking, but the Prime Minister does not like what he has to say. The other day Mr. Gagliano said, "Naturally, the Prime Minister wants to get re-elected. He wants to distance himself from the previous government. But he can't. He was part of it".

Oral Questions

Why does the Prime Minister pretend that he was not part of that corrupt government? Why was he always in the other room when the loot was being divvied up? Was he really the most senior minister in the Chrétien administration, or was that just his evil twin?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier in question period, the actions the Prime Minister has taken to get to the bottom of this matter are unprecedented. Where before have we seen a Prime Minister release cabinet documents earlier than the 30-year period? Where have we seen a Prime Minister within minutes of an Auditor General's report come forward with a comprehensive response such as that of the present Prime Minister? In fact, everyone on this side of the House, we take responsibility. We take our responsibilities seriously, that is why we want to get to the bottom—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Southeast.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Let us be clear, Mr. Speaker. Nobody over there is taking responsibility for this. The public accounts committee has heard from senior bureaucrats. All of them knew nothing. They saw nothing. They heard nothing. The former Minister of Public Works knew nothing. The President of the Privy Council, even though he was hip deep in it with his cronies, knew nothing.

When will somebody in the government take responsibility for this? When will somebody tell us who among the Liberals was responsible for this scandal?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. With all this yelling it is very difficult to hear the Deputy Prime Minister, who has the floor and is trying to answer the question asked by the hon. member for Calgary Southeast. I am sure he will want to hear the answer too.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am not sure but I think I may have forgotten the hon. member's question with all the shouting.

In fact, let me reiterate again that we are committed to transparency and accountability. We are committed to answering the questions that the Auditor General identified in her report and could not answer. We want to get to the bottom of this matter. That is why we have a public inquiry. That is why we have public accounts. That is why the Prime Minister released—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Drummond.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the governments of Quebec and the provinces are denouncing the serious fiscal imbalance in Canada, citing a new study by the Conference Board. The fiscal imbalance consists of the \$10 billion

surplus for next year, which will gradually rise to \$80 billion in 2019.

Will the Prime Minister admit that there is a fiscal imbalance in Canada and that the only way to solve the serious problems in the fields of health, education and poverty is for the federal government to agree to correct this fiscal imbalance once and for all?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the study being referred to, done by the Conference Board, is in fact a static linear projection that as we stand here today is already out of date because its assumptions are out of date.

That projection does not include any investments in municipalities. It does not include the most recent thrust with respect to health care. Obviously the study suffers from some very major statistical defects. In fact, the evidence of the government's performance is in the investments that we make in children, in education, in health, in communities—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Drummond.

[Translation]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has enormous budget surpluses at hand without making any effort, while the provinces and Quebec that have to provide the services directly to the people.

Will the Prime Minister admit that, as he is getting ready to budget enormous surpluses, despite his encroachments on the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces, the latter are about to announce deficits even though they have made major cuts and painful choices?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hate to disillusion the hon. member, but I am afraid there will be no enormous surpluses. I would point out that on the analysis filed by the Conference Board a 1% variation in either revenue or expenditure changes a projected surplus of \$80 billion to a deficit of \$10 billion.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonnette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec and the provinces have just launched an ad campaign explaining that, in 1976 and 1977, the federal government was paying 50% of all health care expenditures but now pays no more than 16% of these same expenditures.

Will the federal government admit that, over the past 30 years, it has gradually withdrawn from health care funding, forcing Quebec and the provinces to shoulder this increasingly heavy burden? It is disgraceful.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Questions

[English]

In fact, all of the expenditures by various levels of government on health in Canada today total about \$87 billion. The federal contribution to that is about \$34 billion. That is 40%, not 16%.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are only three weeks left in this fiscal year.

Will the Prime Minister admit that there will be an approximately \$7 billion surplus—an amount much greater than his government announced—and that the entire surplus will go to paying down the federal debt on March 31, when health should be the top priority?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answers to those two questions are no and no. In fact, I hope the budget will be in a position to make some important contributions to Canadian quality of life, but I would point out to the hon. gentleman that extrapolations of the surplus are grossly exaggerated and in fact we are dealing with a very tight fiscal situation.

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SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to testimony from the public accounts committee last week, we understand that the sponsorship program was financed by a slush fund, money made available by this Prime Minister.

As the vice-chair of the Treasury Board, this Prime Minister had to know how extraordinary it was for the PMO to directly request funds for the sponsorship program, but he remained silent through all of that. Later, he received a letter from a very credible source alleging criminal activity in the sponsorship program, but he did absolutely nothing.

Why did the Prime Minister ignore all the warning signs of what has become the biggest government scandal in Canadian history?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this extraordinary announcement was that the document released by the government shows that the Prime Minister signed, as it is his right to do so when he makes a referral to the Treasury Board, a document putting money into the sponsorship program.

● (1440)

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Well, stupid is as stupid does, Mr. Speaker.

High-ranking Liberals across the country had access to this fund. Rumours were flying for months in Liberal ranks alleging fraud in the sponsorship program.

The Prime Minister says he wants to get to the bottom of this. If that is the case, why did he fail to call in the RCMP when he received a letter in February 2002 alleging criminal activity in the sponsorship program? Why did he not blow the whistle?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): One more time, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has called the most open review possible. He has put in a judge who can subpoena people and

compel testimony. We have a special counsel seeking the money and we have the public accounts committee. We have had an unprecedented release of confidential information, which is the information upon which they are asking these same questions. All the information is on the table. If the member has a substantive allegation to make, he can add it.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the *Bluenose II* has become the latest victim of the Liberal sponsorship scandal. Public works documents show more than \$3 million was allocated to the *Bluenose* through a Liberal friendly communications firm. One contract in 1997-98 was for \$2.3 million, yet the *Bluenose* trust insists it received only \$359,000.

Will the Minister of Public Works explain how his department wrote a cheque for \$2.3 million and only delivered \$359,000?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that the government did issue a cheque for \$2.3 million to go toward the *Bluenose* event. We are now in litigation with the communications company. We are withholding funds from it and are in litigation to trace where the funds went to. This is the very action that we have said we are going to take across this whole range of communications contracts. This one has come to light and we are tracing.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians absolutely deserve to know where the sponsorship money allocated for the *Bluenose* has gone. This taxpayer money was only accessible to high-ranking members of the Liberal Party. Will the Minister of Public Works table all documents showing the application, assessment, contracts and analysis relating to the *Bluenose* since 1996? Maybe then we can find out where the money went.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said many times before, all documents related to these issues of sponsorship are available, will be available and will be tabled. People can come before the various processes and answer questions on them. As well, we have said we are tracing funds that may have gone adrift and we will be getting them back. In this way, with Lafleur Communications we are withholding funds and we are also suing to recover them.

* * *

[Translation]

HAITI

Mr. Claude Duplain (Portneuf, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for more than one month, the international community has done nothing to stop the situation in Haiti from deteriorating. Now, despite the presence of a provisional international force, the situation there is getting worse.

Could the Minister of National Defence tell the House what the Canadian government intends to do to ensure peace and stability in Haiti?

[English]

Hon. David Pratt (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the international community is very concerned about the situation in Haiti, as are Canadians. The Prime Minister was certainly speaking on behalf of Canadians when he indicated that we would be taking a leadership role in the Haitian situation.

I had the pleasure on Friday, with the chief of defence staff, of announcing Canada's contribution to Haiti, which consists of approximately 425 personnel, some of whom are going to be coming from the second battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment, a company group, as well as a helicopter detachment from the 430 squadron based in Valcartier.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here we are on International Women's Day and what do we get from the government? Hit lists, slush funds and slamming the door on women.

Liberal policies since 1993 have directly harmed Canadian women. There is no home care program to help women cope with an aging population and the Prime Minister simply broke his own red book promise on child care.

What a horrible, awful record. Will the Prime Minister apologize to women for breaking his promises to them so he could afford corporate tax breaks for his friends?

• (1445)

[Translation]

Hon. Hélène Scherrer (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in reply, I would mention the programs relating to, in particular, women, multiculturalism and violence, and would inform my colleague that the Department of Canadian Heritage is one of seven departments receiving a special allowance from Treasury Board for initiatives to stop domestic violence.

For example, the Department Of Canadian Heritage received \$460,000, \$215,000 of which was allocated to multicultural and women's programs.

[English]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the women of Canada deserve a government that is committed to equality, but what do we get from this government, a government that kills the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, a government that ignores the UN recommendations on equality, a government that refuses to protect immigrant and visible minority women from domestic violence, and a government that ejects women candidates. It seems revenge is the Prime Minister's only gender neutral policy. What exactly is the government's commitment to the women of Canada?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I quite truthfully cannot believe what I just heard. Over the past 10

years this government and our new Prime Minister have done more in relation to ensuring women's equality within our society. Does the hon. member forget, for example, the national child benefit? Most people describe that program, which helps women and their children, which helps families, as the single most important initiative since universal health care.

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SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal sponsorship scandal has already tarnished the RCMP and now it is dragging another Canadian icon through the mud because of this ad scam.

The Minister of Public works has just said that he was conducting a criminal investigation. That contract was in 1998. If he knew in 1998 that there was a problem, why is he now saying that the government does not know anything about it and it is all a big surprise?

We want to know how much money was stolen from the *Bluenose* and how much went to the Liberal ad firms.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the member's reference to 1998 is, but with respect to today, the \$2.3 million contract through Lafleur Communications to the *Bluenose* foundation is now being investigated. We have heard that the services were not provided. We have withheld funds from Lafleur Communications and we are suing it in court to recover the funds. This is not a criminal investigation. We do not conduct those in government, but we do conduct litigation and we do withhold funds until we get to the bottom of this.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe the government should conduct criminal investigations.

The minister said the cheque was written for \$2.3 million. He also said he was withholding funds. How does the government do that? If it wrote the cheque, it is gone. Did the government write the cheque or is it withholding the funds? Not only that, there are six grants altogether, with three different ad firms. We want to know how much money was stolen from the *Bluenose*.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we as well want to know how much money has gone astray, which is why we have a public inquiry, which is why we have a special counsel for financial recovery, which is why we have referred 18 matters to the RCMP and which is why we have the public accounts committee, in which all members of the government are participating and cooperating.

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SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister of public works, formerly the minister for western economic diversification, stated in July 2003 that his department was ready to provide direct support to workers laid off due to the softwood lumber dispute.

Oral Questions

Instead, the softwood lumber money was diverted, stalled, fought over and delayed by internal fighting within the federal government. Four hundred and forty-five days after the original announcement on December 2002, this money has not reached these workers.

Why did the public works minister fail to deliver this money to the people who deserve it; the softwood lumber workers in British Columbia?

Hon. Rey Pagtakhan (Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would say that to have \$32 million for 83 projects, creating 2,000 jobs and leveraging another \$68 million is good news for the members of the British Columbia community.

• (1450)

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is absolute nonsense. The government announced this program in December 2002. Four hundred and forty-five days later, the only money the public works minister has spent is \$5 million to hire 60 bureaucrats. Not one dime has gone to the workers who deserve it.

The Liberals has made big announcements on softwood lumber and beef exports, but the money never gets to the people to deserve it. Why is the government failing to deliver to the softwood lumber workers who deserve this money?

Hon. Rey Pagtakhan (Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member should check his information correctly. They are not bureaucrats. They are members of the community futures development program. We have started due diligence and, therefore, that explains in part the delay in the delivery of the program.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Ghislain Fournier (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since 1997, changes to employment insurance have allowed more fishers to be eligible for two claims for benefits a year. Nonetheless, HRDC has never personally advised them that they were eligible for supplementary benefits.

How could the government stay quiet for all these years while the fishers have been publicly denouncing the terrible conditions they and their families have been living in for so long?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, there have been appeals about the current situation. The member has just reminded us that there were different responses, as can happen with a process that allows people to appeal past decisions.

That said, I am happy to announce that the department will respond in a very positive manner to the solution proposed by the court.

Mr. Ghislain Fournier (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how could the government be so negligent toward workers when it could have spared them a great deal of hardship by personally informing them of their rights with respect to employment insurance?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not a matter of taking away employees' rights. I just said that there was a process in place. There

were problems that have just been corrected because, obviously, employees are able to appeal past decisions.

We are now implementing a process that will prevent problems like the current one.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the military ombudsman's report released today found the government forced soldiers into debt by breaking their promise to pay them a mere \$50 per diem while on a training course.

George Radwanski, Charles Boyer, Pierre Théberge, Denise Tremblay and now Lucie McClung have spent over a million tax dollars shamelessly on their extravagant meals and lavish travel.

Will the government refund what it has clawed back from our soldiers and instead go after these bureaucrats who have blown hundreds of thousands of dollars?

Hon. David Pratt (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can say in all honesty that I am not entirely happy with the way this matter was dealt with by the Department of National Defence, especially because the soldiers involved appear to have received some mixed message with respect to what they were or were not entitled to.

I am in the process of talking to my officials on this. We want these soldiers to be dealt with fairly and equitably. I am hoping we can bring this matter to a satisfactory conclusion within the next few weeks.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government and that defence minister have now had three months to deal with this blatantly unfair decision. It took the ombudsman making his report public before that defence minister decided to ask his officials to look at it. That is shameful.

Why does this government punish our soldiers for a paltry \$50 a day, while turning a blind eye to the soldiers' commander-in-chief, Governor General Clarkson, when she blew over \$5 million on just one trip?

• (1455)

Hon. David Pratt (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Department of National Defence in this circumstance is trying to follow the Treasury Board rules, which were put in place to safeguard the taxpayers' interest. I am attempting to do that. I think we can reach an end state where both interests are protected in terms of the Treasury Board rules and the interests of these particular soldiers.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs about a very important health issue. In May 2003 the World Health Assembly, with the support of the Canadian government, approved the tobacco convention framework to control tobacco use. At the time, we said in Canada that we would ratify it as soon as possible.

Will the minister now commit that the Government of Canada will ratify this important convention, while at the same time remembering to provide incentives for Canadian tobacco farmers to produce other crops?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for his important question. As he and the House know, Canada played an important role in the negotiations of this important convention. We are committed to ratifying it as soon as possible.

As the hon. member also knows, Canada does not ratify conventions until such time as provincial, regulatory and stakeholder engagement has been done. This is what we are doing.

As he points out, the convention has important provisions in it for farmers. We will be working with all stakeholders to ensure that the convention applies in Canada, for the good of our health and for the good of our farming community.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week Veterans Affairs issued 12,000 health care identification cards. These cards contained confidential and personal information, but they were sent to the wrong people. How did this breach of privacy take place?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there was an unfortunate incident in which Blue Cross erroneously sent out quite a number of cards to the wrong destination. I am informing the House that those individuals are being contacted and are being written to by my department.

In addition, my department has been in contact with the privacy commissioner to ensure that there are no serious breaches in this regard.

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, who is responsible for protecting the security of our veterans' personal health information, the government or a private contracted company?

Is the Minister of Veterans Affairs willing to stand here today and take personal responsibility for this critical error?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is certainly regrettable when errors of this kind occur. My department has acted immediately. I am told the great majority of these individuals will receive a telephone call by 6 p.m. today. In addition, my office has been in contact with the privacy commissioner.

We are doing everything in our power to ensure that there is no breach in this important area for these important veterans.

[Translation]

TAXATION

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week in Montreal the Prime Minister acknowledged the quality of Quebec's daycare system. What he did not say, however, was that the federal tax deduction system, which does not take into account the low cost of the Quebec system, has meant a \$1 billion loss for Quebec families over the past six years.

Will the Prime Minister admit that the taxation system he himself put in place is depriving Quebec families of billions of dollars because the Government of Quebec has set up a good daycare system?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously on the eve of a budget I am not in a position to comment in any detail upon any fiscal or tax matter, but I will take the hon. member's question as a representation.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Ajax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today across Canada we are joining with friends around the world in celebrating International Women's Day.

Could the Minister of Justice tell the House what he is doing to help protect women who are innocent victims in such dreadful things as international sex trade transgressions and trafficking?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, trafficking women in particular is one of the most heinous of crimes. It is the new global slave trade and it violates all the rights of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular the rights of women.

Accordingly, today on International Women's Day I am hosting a two day international seminar, releasing a 10 point proposal in order to prevent trafficking, in order to protect victims and in order to bring the perpetrators to justice.

* * *

● (1500)

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Compass Communications, owned by Liberal strategist Tony Blom, received \$2.3 million for a sponsorship at the Winnipeg Pan Am Games. Yet the executives of the games now tell us they received only \$640,000, a pretty hefty commission for the Liberal ad firm; a \$1.7 million commission for \$600,000 worth of sponsorship. We want our money.

Privilege

What is the minister doing to get our \$1.6 million back from the Liberal Party and its agent, Compass Communications?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, we have hired a special counsel for the recovery of finances. Second, we have a public and judicial inquiry which is looking into such allegations. Third, we are referring cases to the RCMP whenever there is any evidence of criminal wrongdoing. Fourth, we are participating in the public accounts committee to get to the bottom of these issues.

We are doing everything possible in as open and transparent a way as possible.

* * *

[Translation]

THE COMMONWEALTH

The Speaker: In September, the federal, Quebec and Ontario branches of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association will host that organization's 50th conference in Ottawa, Quebec City and Toronto.

In order to celebrate this event and to mark Commonwealth Day, which is today, March 8, 2004, I would like to read the message from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of the Commonwealth.

[English]

The lives of many of my generation were profoundly changed by a world war fought in the name of freedom. I have often reflected with pride on the huge contribution made by the peoples of the Commonwealth to that cause of liberty in which millions perished.

In the years following the war, a succession of countries emerging into independence chose to join the Commonwealth as free and equal members. As a result, the Commonwealth became rooted in all parts of the world and developed into the modern organisation we know today.

[Translation]

Democracy, national self-determination, individual liberty and human rights—all these are fundamental to that which binds the Commonwealth together.

[English]

The importance of these principles was clearly in the minds of Commonwealth leaders during their discussions at last December's summit in Abuja, Nigeria. Living up to principles is never easy. It can involve difficult and painful decisions. But the affirmation of those values provides common ground for the Commonwealth as a whole to grow stronger.

The Abuja meeting also made the crucial link between democracy and development. Democracy is important to sustained development—and underdevelopment can be democracy's greatest threat.

Nowhere is freedom perfectly realised—and its enemies are not only those who terrorise and torture, they are also hunger, poverty, disease and ignorance. That is why it is important for the Commonwealth to do all it can to tackle these challenges directly, whether in alleviating poverty or in promoting education and health. It is also essential to strengthen the rule of law, protect democratic freedoms and build strong civil societies.

I firmly believe that if the Commonwealth is to increase its role as a force for good in the world, strengthening democratic freedoms must remain at the heart of its purposes.

Elizabeth R.

8 March 2004

The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the right hon. member for Calgary Centre.

PRIVILEGE

ORDER IN COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question of privilege concerns the failure of the government to honour its obligation to give Parliament, through its committees, the opportunity to consider and examine appointments made by order in council. That is particularly important given the government's professed interest in increasing the scrutiny of appointments by Parliament. In fact, by breaking the existing rules, the government is limiting that scrutiny by Parliament.

Standing Order 110 imposes a clear obligation. It states:

(1) A Minister of the Crown shall lay upon the Table a certified copy of an Order in Council, stating that a certain individual has been appointed to a certain non-judicial post, not later than five sitting days after the Order in Council is published in the *Canada Gazette*. The same shall be deemed to have been referred to a standing committee specified at the time of tabling, pursuant to Standing Order 32(6), for its consideration during a period not exceeding thirty sitting days.

Standing Orders 110(2) and 111 are relevant to the argument but I will not detain the House by quoting as hon. members would be familiar with them.

Standing Order 110(1) imposes both a clear obligation and a timeframe “not later than five sitting days after the Order in Council is published in the *Canada Gazette*”.

I have a list here of several order in council appointments published in the *Canada Gazette* from December 20, 2003 through February 7, 2004. By the rules, all these orders in council should have been tabled before the House adjourned on February 27. Sir, none was tabled.

That meant that the relevant standing committees were denied the right to consider and examine those appointments, a right conferred by an explicit order of the House.

Some of the appointments were routine, such as returning officers in various constituencies. Some might not be considered to be at the heart of public administration, such as the appointment of the new chef at 24 Sussex Drive. However some of the appointments were to new positions which reflect important new initiatives of the government and which would clearly benefit from the scrutiny of Parliament and the public.

I came upon this breach of the rules because of my interest in the appointment of Mr. Robert A. Wright as the “National Security Advisor” to the Prime Minister. That appointment was gazetted on January 17. The House sat from February 2 until February 27. Despite the clear order of the House, the order in council making that appointment has never been tabled in the House of Commons.

The security czar is a new position. It relates to security and intelligence matters which are of profound importance to this country and to Parliament. That is a field in which Canadian parliamentarians have consistently been denied the access to information that exists in other parliamentary systems, like the United Kingdom, Australia and in the United States. Breaking the rules on this appointment has denied Parliament an opportunity to look into this issue, an opportunity ordered by Parliament.

The government also failed to table orders in council respecting the new position of head of the Canada-United States Secretariat in the Privy Council Office, a position that had not existed before and that has significant implications of policy and other kinds for the Government of Canada, as well as appointments of the Commissioner of the Northern Pipeline Agency, the vice-chair of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, members of the Immigration and Refugee Board and other senior and sensitive positions.

You will know, Mr. Speaker, that Speaker Sauvé ruled in 1980, as quoted in Marleau and Montpetit:

...while our privileges are defined, contempt of the House has no limits. When new ways are found to interfere with our proceedings, so too will the House, in appropriate cases, be able to find that a contempt of the House has occurred.

• (1505)

The government has a clear and explicit obligation to table these orders in council. It is spelled out in the standing orders. Its failure to act on that obligation has impeded the ability of the House to perform its function on important issues of public interest. By that failure, the government has also disobeyed a clear order of the House of Commons.

If you find it appropriate, sir, I have a motion to present.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened quite carefully to the hon. member's comments. I will have to take that under advisement to verify if indeed all the positions he mentioned were gazetted order in council appointments that required tabling and automatic referral to committees. We will clarify that rapidly and get back to the Speaker in due course.

• (1510)

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member from the government's side has said that they intend to look into this to see whether what is being alleged by the right hon. member from Calgary is true. However it seems to me that on the face of it, it is true and that the government should have been aware of this, especially a government that has made a big deal, and particularly a Prime Minister who has made a big deal, about addressing the democratic deficit, and about how there would be more opportunity for Parliament to review appointments, and how this process would be enhanced and enriched.

In fact, we have a government that is not even willing to live up to that which is provided for now in the standing orders. I commend the right hon. member for bringing this to the attention of the House. I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that you would see this for what it is. It is a contempt of the House and, unfortunately, in keeping with the general pattern which we begin to see on the other side of the House.

I raised a question today, which I think is probably not an appropriate point of order, but the government is also in contempt of the House for calling the byelection in Ottawa Centre for November 29. What could be more of a contempt of the House of Commons than to create the possibility that a seat will be vacant in the House for up to 15 months only to serve the political agenda of—

The Speaker: I know the hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona is trying to be helpful but I think he has perhaps strayed off the

Privilege

subject of the question of privilege that we are discussing at the moment, interesting as his argument may be.

Is the hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona going to go back to the question of privilege? Fine, splendid.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I was just diverting for a moment until such time as you stopped me. You are doing your job, so let me return to the main point of order. I was just on a sub-theme of the main point.

I also want to agree with the right hon. member, not just with respect to the whole question of reviewing appointments, but with some of the appointments that he mentioned. I do not say this out of any particular criticism or concern about the people who have been appointed. We have not had a chance to really review those appointments or to have those people before committees. However the right hon. member has made a good point, particularly when it comes to these new appointments, such as the creation of a national security advisor, again by a government that made a big deal out of the fact that we would have a committee on national security and we would involve parliamentarians in the whole question of national security in a way that we never have before, but when it had a minor opportunity, or an already existing opportunity to involve parliamentarians in something having to do with national security, it did not do it, just like it did not do it with the new head of the Canada-U.S. Secretariat and a number of other positions.

I would urge you, Mr. Speaker, to find that the point being raised by the right hon. member is a legitimate one and that the government is, unfortunately, as in so many other cases, in contempt of the House.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the former speaker about the government. I know the Liberals are very busy these days and that they have a lot of things on their minds but surely they should be aware of the laws and rules of this place.

I would remind the Speaker that on November 21, 2001, the Speaker delivered a ruling in regard to a complaint by the member for Surrey Central when he cited 16 examples where the government failed to comply with legislative requirements concerning the tabling of certain information in Parliament. In all of the 16 cases raised on November 21, a reporting deadline was absent in the legislation. As a result the Speaker could not find a *prima facie* question of privilege.

However, he said in his ruling on page 1515 of *Hansard*:

Were there to be a deadline for tabling included in the legislation, I would not hesitate to find that a *prima facie* case of contempt does exist—

I would invite the hon. member to move the usual motion. The standing order establishes a deadline in this case and it has clearly been breached. Therefore the right hon. member for Calgary Centre has a very valid point and we certainly support him in his submission.

Routine Proceedings

●(1515)

The Speaker: The hon. deputy government House leader has indicated that he is taking the matter under advisement and will get back to the House. I assume he is not ready to get back to the House yet, so perhaps we could just let the matter rest until he comes back to the House.

The Chair is quite prepared to make a ruling on the matter but it would seem to me to be premature until the Chair has had an opportunity to examine the facts alleged by the right hon. member for Calgary Centre and supported so ably by the hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona and the hon. member for St. John's West. We will get to hear a little more from the deputy government House leader in due course on this point and then there will be a ruling.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-22, an act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals).

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

[English]

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-10B was at the time of prorogation of the 2nd session, 37th Parliament.

Accordingly, pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 10, 2004, the bill is deemed adopted at all stages and passed by the House.

(Bill read the second time, considered in committee, reported, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, consultations and discussions have taken place among the parties and I believe that if you were to seek it you would find consent to adopt the following motion:

That, on Wednesday, March 10, 2004, immediately after "Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers", the House shall proceed immediately to the taking of any divisions that stand deferred to any time on that day, following which the House shall proceed to the consideration of private members business, following which the House shall proceed to a take-note debate pursuant to Standing Order 53.1 on the situation in Haiti, provided that, notwithstanding the provisions of section 3 (d) of the said Standing Order, the said debate may be continued for no more than six hours.

The Speaker: Does the deputy government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[English]

Mr. Howard Hilstrom: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The translation that I received said that it would go until 6 o'clock but the motion I am looking at says that it continue for no more than six hours.

Could the member clarify that, please?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, the member for Selkirk—Interlake is correct, that it go for no more than six hours. That was what was read in French as well.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

Mr. Peter Adams: Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent to return to presenting reports from committees.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert to presentation of reports from committees?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the question of privilege raised by the member for Yorkton—Melville and referred to the committee on February 6, 2004.

* * *

●(1520)

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Mr. Janko Peric (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the pleasure to present to the House a petition dealing with marriage. It is signed by close to 500 Canadians.

The petitioners wish to draw to the attention of the House that the traditional understanding of marriage has deep historical roots in our society and it should not be modified by the courts.

The petitioners pray and request that the Parliament of Canada take every possible action to maintain and protect the present understanding of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting five petitions from a variety of citizens across Canada.

The petitioners indicate that marriage is the lasting union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of others and it cannot and should not be modified by legislative act or a court of law. They are requesting that Parliament take whatever action is required to maintain the current definition of marriage in law in perpetuity and to prevent any court from overturning or amending that definition.

ACTIVE SONAR USE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 36 to present two petitions.

The first one deals with the use of intense active sonar. The petition sets out in detail the significant detrimental impact on marine life, mammals and fish. There are approximately 250 signatures on the petition. The petitioners call on Parliament to intervene with the navies of the world to reduce, if not totally eliminate, that type of sonar and replace it with less intrusive and low frequency sonar.

FORESTRY

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition deals with the cutting of trees that is going on in the county of Kent in southwestern Ontario as an attempt to head off the emerald ash borer which is flowing through that area. There have been many reports about the way trees have been destroyed.

The petitioners are calling on the government to intervene and provide for an environmental assessment that would determine whether in fact the cutting of trees is an ecologically sound practice and to stop the cutting of trees until that assessment takes place.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Ovid Jackson (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 and on behalf of the constituents of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, I would like to table a petition.

The petitioners ask that Parliament pass the appropriate legislation to affirm the traditional definition of marriage as between one man and one woman.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting two petitions calling on Parliament to recognize in federal law the definition of marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

The petitioners are from Ontario and there is a total of 783 signatures.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Joe Jordan (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CONTRAVENTIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-10, an act to amend the Contraventions Act and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the third time and passed, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: When the debate was interrupted for question period, the hon. member for Yellowhead had 10 minutes remaining for questions and comments.

Government Orders

The hon. member for Provencher on questions or comments.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was quite interested in the speech given by my colleague from Yellowhead.

The issue of methamphetamine is a very important one which he brought to the House's attention. He indicated that organized crime is treating marijuana with methamphetamine. That certainly brings a whole new dimension to the use of marijuana.

Back in 1997 to 1999 when I was directly involved in a provincial government in a cabinet position, we dealt with the American authorities. At that time they were warning us about the spread of methamphetamine, that methamphetamine was devastating communities right across the United States. They told us at that time that over 80% of child welfare apprehensions in the state of California were directly related to methamphetamine abuse. They told us about the deaths of police officers and emergency responders who would go into methamphetamine labs and would be overcome by the fumes of these very dangerous and inexpensive labs.

Has the member heard of actual meth labs operating in his area? Has he had contact with the police? Does it not put a whole new perspective on the issue of legalizing marijuana when it is being treated with methamphetamine?

• (1525)

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what is happening in Yellowhead. It is such a severe problem that communities are linking arms with all of the resources they possibly can muster to push back against the problem of the methamphetamine within their communities.

This started in a smaller area but the history the member talked about with regard to the experience in the United States is absolutely right. We have been warned that wherever methamphetamine takes hold in a society, it will be absolutely devastating. We had better wake up and realize what we are dealing with on this issue because it is severe.

Not only have communities gone so far as to link arms but the community of Drayton Valley in my riding has hired a police officer and another individual who has actually recovered from methamphetamine use to set up a program to deal with the situation within its schools. One social studies teacher told me that a third of his students are hooked on methamphetamine. If the numbers are anywhere close to being accurate, the repercussions to society are going to be enormous and absolutely phenomenal.

When we link that to this bill which sends the message that we are going soft on marijuana, it is going absolutely in the opposite direction to where municipal governments, local communities and the provinces are going. The federal government is out of step and out of tune with where society needs to go with regard to marijuana use and the repercussions of illicit drugs throughout society.

Government Orders

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a police officer in the 1970s and 1980s in the city of Calgary, I became very much aware of a problem which is building right across the country. It has to do with the prosecutions regarding marijuana and other drugs. Being that it was all done by a federal prosecutor back in the 1980s with the stroke of a pen, there were judges in this country who would strike the charges off the ledger. Thousands upon thousands of those who were charged with the use of either soft drugs or small quantities of even hard drugs walked free.

My colleague has examined to some degree the nature of the use of drugs and the enforcement side of it. What would he suggest as a solution to this particular problem when it comes to federal prosecution?

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, that is the nub of the problem. The courts are going soft on this. They are sending the message to society that they are not going to prosecute. That is why so many of our policemen are refusing even to enforce the charge on the small possession of marijuana.

We should send a message to the RCMP and to society that we have had it, that we are sick and tired of the abuse and we are going to push back against the illicit use of drugs. We could do that by changing the bill in the way that we recommended, which is to only allow three to five grams as a small amount that would be decriminalized but increase the fines. We would give the tools to the front line RCMP to ticket aggressively. We would be pushing back much more aggressively in society on the damage that this is doing. We would be taking it out of the hands of the courts. A ticket could be issued rather than taking it to court which would plug up the courts, and the courts are not enforcing it at any rate.

The solution is not to send a message to society that this is not really a problem and let us go soft on it. The message should be that we are sick and tired of the problem, that we have had it and we are going to push back with everything we possibly can. That is what the message should be from the government. That is what we would do. That is what the bill should be reflecting and it is not. That is why we are so opposed to it.

• (1530)

Mr. Andy Burton (Skeena, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I come from British Columbia and marijuana growth is a big business in B.C. It is really unfortunate, when we look at the economy in parts of British Columbia, how significant that is compared to other legal lines of business.

I want to ask the member a question, but I will make a comment first. I live in a small community in northern British Columbia. The other day I looked across the street and saw a house being boarded up with plywood. I thought it was another family leaving town because of the tough times in the north. This is right across the street from where I live and I live in a pretty decent part of town. I was shocked to find out on Saturday that it was a meth lab and that was why it was being boarded up. The police had raided it. I had no idea that this sort of thing was even going on in my community. It really brings to a head the comments that my colleague made earlier.

Quite frankly, there is concern for the future of our kids—I have children and grandchildren—and I cannot see how anybody would advocate their kids smoking. They sure as heck do not advocate

cigarettes. Why would they be even considering supporting legislation like this that tends to encourage young people to possibly pursue these kinds of things when we look at the effects of meth and so on?

Could the member expand a little more on the future potential societal effects of these kinds of problems?

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question and his concern. He is absolutely right.

As I said earlier with regard to this piece of legislation, all members of the House have these problems in their own ridings and if they do not, they are either just not knowledgeable about it or it has not quite hit them yet, but it will.

This problem with methamphetamine has only come up in the last decade. Where are we going to be a decade from now? That becomes the question. The victims are the children. The victims are also those who rent the facilities because once a meth lab is set up, it permeates the entire facility. Cleaning out a facility is a horrendous thing to do because it is very toxic.

Many of these meth labs are blowing up. The fumes are very flammable and fires are being caused because of them. Good landlords are renting to bad tenants unknowingly and these meth labs are being set up, not in their facilities but in someone else's. It is a problem with organized crime. If members think the problem we have with marijuana is bad, wait until they see the amount of dollars and crime involved when it comes to methamphetamine.

This is serious and we had better get serious about dealing with it. I encourage all members in the House to consider the repercussions of this piece of legislation.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am appreciative of the fact that I can stand in this House and deal with this particular topic.

Being a former police officer for over 20 years, I have seen the usage of marijuana and other drugs and how they can affect, not only the lives of those who have used it and their families, but also society.

I can recap one situation. I was patrolling in the streets of Calgary one evening and a vehicle in front of me, which had just driven out of one of the local bars, was all over the road. I stopped that particular vehicle to determine if the driver was impaired. I thought he was impaired by alcohol. He was placed on the final breathalyzer test and actually blew under the limit, advising me as a police officer that he wasn't impaired by alcohol. He had been smoking marijuana at the same time. It was a small quantity of marijuana that he had actually smoked but with the enhancement of the alcohol, his ability to drive was severely hampered.

Government Orders

That is what is happening in too many driving situations today. The roadside testers do not have the ability to detect the use of marijuana on the breath of a driver. In fact, there are accidents happening where drivers are impaired by a drug and not by alcohol. They often, unfortunately, slip through the checkstops and never end up being charged.

There is major problem with the direction that the government is taking when it comes to the legalization or the decriminalization of marijuana, even small quantities. The small quantity, up to 30 grams, is enough to impair any driver. Any person getting behind the wheel of a car would be considered a hazard. And if there is alcohol mixed with that, it is even worse.

I think that sends the wrong message to Canada's youth. Unfortunately, I can recall the statement of a previous Prime Minister who made reference to "marijuana brownies". That remark was irresponsible and absolutely uncalled for. For it to come from the top person of the land was offensive.

The use of marijuana is not a joke. The use of any drug is no joke. It destroys family. It destroys even those outside the purview because it is costly in treatments and it is costly to fix the damage that is being done by those who are using drugs.

I will relate another situation. Some say that it is not an addictive drug. I beg to differ with that comment. I have arrested individuals who went on house break-in sprees just to get enough money to buy marijuana. The marijuana of today is not what it was 50 years ago or 40 years ago. It is a lot different. It is addictive in many of its forms. It is also being mixed with other more lethal drugs nowadays that make it even worse.

An individual who had been responsible for 400 house break-ins got to the point, just to support his marijuana need, of even using violence if he was confronted by people in the house he happened to enter, which was not very often. However, two or three times is two or three times too many. He kicked an elderly woman so he could make a clean escape with the goods he had stolen from her house.

● (1535)

He was a marijuana user with a habit. He wanted money, no matter how he could get it. In this particular case, he went out to get it by entering houses unlawfully. He stole the goods of ordinary people that were sometimes artifacts that they had saved from one generation to the next. He sold them for peanuts so he could support his drug habit.

I find it reprehensible to think that our government is moving down a path that will make marijuana usage more acceptable by lowering fines and by taking away what should be strong court action to deter this kind of activity. Unfortunately, our government has not taken into account the societal needs of restriction or abstinence from this kind of drug.

Those individuals in the highest governmental position in the land are condoning the use of marijuana. They are saying that marijuana brownies or chocolate brownies could be used to the same degree, but they are also starving our law enforcement agencies from enforcing the law that would restrict those who want to violate the law by distributing and growing this particular drug.

What does it take to crack down on organized crime? It takes organized police action across the country and internationally. To have organized police action we need a national drug strategy. We need strong communication links between police agencies within the country. We need strong communication links to police agencies outside the country. These grow operations and marijuana distribution links are outside the country. They are not just in Canada. People are getting fat off of this kind of activity. Lawyers will go to any length to defend them because they know there are lots of bucks involved in the drug trade.

This legislation could very well increase the demand for marijuana. Bill C-10 could make the illegal production and distribution of marijuana even more lucrative because it is such a minor measure. It is more enticing to those who want to use marijuana. It is more enticing to those who distribute it knowing they would get more of their product out. They would grow their quantities of marijuana in a more aggressive way because the legislation would allow them to do so.

Enforcement agencies always have a hammer that they can hold over individuals who use marijuana. They could use this hammer as a lever to charge those who use small quantities or use it as a lever to determine where individuals receive it or who is pushing the drug in the community. However, that lever has been watered down more and more. The police no longer have that as an advantage to enforce the law. That is a travesty in itself.

The legislators on that side of the House are aware of what they are doing when they diminish the effectiveness of law enforcement to determine who on earth is pushing a serious drug in the community.

● (1540)

If we look at the fines that have been set out, we know right away these are minor fines, especially with young people. I noticed that a 14 year old youngster was caught recently in Alberta. He was looking after one of these grow ops. What will they do with him? The law really will not affect him a whole lot. However, because he is a youngster, he is subject to more leniency within the system because the fines attached to the legislation are considerably different than what they were years back. Law enforcement agencies do not have the leverage over those who even possess small quantities of this product.

Let us now turn to industry itself. Because of the messages being sent from the government side, industry has another fight on its hands, whether it is the trucking industry, or heavy equipment operators or machine operators. Employers are very concerned about the increased use of marijuana by machine operators. Now, many of them insist that their employees take tests and if they are using marijuana, they are not acceptable.

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Fortunately with that drug, it stays in the blood stream for a few days and random tests, or even more than random tests, will detect the drug in their systems. However, the problem is that people are using it while operating equipment and while driving trucks on our roadways. Even within police and security fields, there are all kinds of restrictions about usage of marijuana, but the government is not following through with its legislation. Industry and others are bearing the brunt of government legislation that tends to want to make things more lenient.

Where do we go from here? Bill C-10 does not address the issues broadly across our society. It seems to only address those who want to use this substance and makes it lighter on them. The message being sent to our youngsters is that this is an acceptable way to go.

We in the House have a lot on our plates with which we have to deal. As members of the opposition, we are dealing with the scandals on the government side and are spending our time rooting out the truth. We have to look at our farmers who are suffering. These are issues that have grave importance. We are the highest taxed OECD country. It actually is crippling our productivity and our economic growth.

Our health care system has all kinds of demands on it and it is disintegration. The provinces want this to be dealt with too, on a national level. These are answers that come out of this Parliament. On top of all that, our military is in a state of decay. Yet here we are in the House dealing with Bill C-10 on the possession of marijuana.

Where are we going when it comes to our priority list? I cannot understand it. What is our priority list? Is it investigating a scandal? It should be. Let us get down to the bottom of it right now before an election. Is it fixing medicare? No. Is it restoring our military, our troop strength and equipment? No. These are not the subject of a lot of bills when we look at what has gone through the House, but there sure has been a lot of time spent on bills like Bill C-10. All we are talking about in this bill is making the smoking of dope easier. Basically that is where we are.

• (1545)

I think the bill is not worthy of support and I will ask my colleagues not to support it. We should be putting our efforts into something that has much more significance.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Calgary for his speech. He is one who has been in the field as a police officer and has dealt in the past, day after day, with the effects of all kinds of drug use. Certainly, marijuana use back then was the drug of choice and very prevalent in the city in which he lived.

He mentioned part of something with which my question deals. When I look at legislation like Bill C-10, I think what is the upside? What are the positives of the bill that would bring a government, as he already mentioned, to sit down and consider taking us down the road toward legalization, toward a much more liberalized way of dealing with drugs?

We do not have a drug strategy in our country. A couple of years ago a committee was struck, the non-medical use drug committee, to study drug strategy. Not since the 1970s, with the Le Dain Commission, had there been any type of study of the drug strategy.

When we come out with Bill C-10, which brings out summary offences and has a fine structure, what is the upside? Does he see any upside in the bill?

Another point I would like him to make reference to is what message is being sent to the children? We heard in another member's speech that in one small community of about 7,000 people, already 780 possession charges have been stayed. Charges have been laid, but the courts have stayed those charges pending the outcome of Bill C-10. Therefore, we have young people running around, many who believe we already have legalized marijuana. Many of them believe we have said that pot is not that harmful, that it will not hurt them, and that is why the government is working toward legalization. I agree with those members who have said that this does not make marijuana legal, but the public believes that it does.

Therefore, could he comment on the upside of this, if there is any, and could he comment on what our messaging to our young people is?

• (1550)

Mr. Art Hanger: Mr. Speaker, I guess there is one upside in the bill and that is maybe to bring some attention to the issue of drug usage. I believe there should be a lot of health debate in reference to drug use. However, I do not think that is what will come out of all of this, given the fact that the fines have been diminished for those who have been charged.

There would be a broader distinction now in the Criminal Code between adult and youth when it comes to fines levied against those who use it. I do not see that as being an advantage. If there is a determination on the part of the government to discourage users of drugs, users of marijuana, then I think the fine issue would be reflected in the bill and even beyond that. There would be an even stronger position taken against those who distribute it. I do not see that in the legislation.

I think we are bent on an even more aggressive, organized element within our society to ensure that marijuana gets into the hands of the youngsters. That scares me. I do not believe the government has really taken into account what the use of marijuana has done to families, such as their breakdown and the lack of enthusiasm or productivity of those who use it. We have not had a sound debate in reference to that side of drug usage, which I believe has been missing in this Parliament. The legislation on the government side continues to flow.

Just for once, I would like to see a bill come before a committee for honest debate, and not necessarily laid out in stone. For too long the process in committee has been a top down process. It comes out of the legislative branch, it hits committee, the Liberals tout it as gospel and it goes through committee with very few changes. Let us for once have a good debate in committee and see where this all goes. I will bet the outcome would be a lot different than what we see here.

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Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, one thing that has come out in the media over the last number of months has been the increase in grow ops. There are places throughout probably every province where people do not even realize they live next to a grow op.

A year or so ago the former finance minister said that she believed that if we continued with this type of legislation, and I will paraphrase basically what she said, that we could expect to see marijuana use spike, that we could expect to see an increase in usage.

Given that we will see increase in use and given that we would very likely see an increase in grow ops, does the member believe the government would then keep up with a stronger commitment to resourcing the law enforcement agencies that would be asked to basically handcuff themselves and then go out and prevent crime? They would not go out and lay a criminal charge. They would go out and catch these guys and bring this small pittance of a fine back into the coffers. Does he believe we would see a commitment from the government to radically adjust the level of resourcing that would be needed to enforce these laws?

•(1555)

Mr. Art Hanger: Mr. Speaker, if we were to poll the leaders of all drug units in every police department in Canada and ask them what this legislation means to their operations, we would find that the government, if it were to respond to that need, would be spending millions more dollars in helping to enforce the law.

The government has failed at this juncture to put resources forward to enforce our laws. Even within the courts, it has failed. Law enforcement is using precious resources just to deal with the events on the street without having to get into specialized areas. However, they have to get into specialized areas. For instance, grow ops have sprung up all over the country. It does not matter what the climate is, they are there.

For the police to go after them, they will need every tool they can get. One of those tools is to have a criminal charge on simple possession so they can follow the chain. If they do not have that and there is no hammer for them, then it will be by chance, and it will take a lot more resources to find out where all these operations are.

This legislation operates against enforcement. The resources will have to be much more substantial. If we have some teeth in the law, we will knock it down. Unfortunately, the Liberal government has no intention of putting any teeth in it.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand in the House today and debate Bill C-10. Only a number of weeks ago, we in the House had the privilege of debating Bill C-10 at report stage. At that time I stood in the House and brought out some of our major concerns about the bill. I brought out some of the concerns we have with a government that is moving toward decriminalization.

I really believe that deep down the government is moving toward legalization of marijuana. Although this bill does not make it legal, we are moving in that direction. The government is moving in that direction and to that I say shame. I say shame on stepping forward and coming up with a program or a plan that would tell people, tell Canadians and tell young people that using marijuana is not all that bad, not even as bad as not wearing your seat belt and not as bad as

drinking. It is just not that bad, says the government, because the level of fines the government has included in this bill sends the wrong message to Canadians.

First, let me mention that about two years ago a committee was struck to study drug use and our drug strategy. It was called the Special Committee on Non-medical Use of Drugs. At that time my leader asked me to sit on that committee. We had a government that was bent on recognizing a drug problem in our country and felt that the answer to the drug problem was to build safe injection sites, clean places where people could shoot illegal drugs into their veins. The government felt that it would certainly help solve a drug problem that is even more prevalent in our nation today.

Besides a drug strategy, there was another part of what that committee was studying, which was whether, because heroin on the streets is so dirty, the government should provide clean, pure heroin to drug users in what we would call a heroin maintenance program, that is, should heroin addicts be given clean, pure heroin free or at a greatly reduced price? It would then be guaranteed that the drugs were clean and it would help prevent problems down the road.

I have a problem with that type of philosophy. I have a problem with that type of strategy of the government. I believe it is the wrong message. I believe it is the wrong way of dealing with the drug problem. Certainly the longer we went on in that committee, the more we realized that the government had no plan. It had no indication and no idea of how to fight one of the problems that hurts so many families, hurts so many Canadians and hurts productivity.

Therefore, our committee began to travel. We travelled across the country. Indeed, we travelled to many countries. We went to Germany and Switzerland and we travelled to Amsterdam. Many times on that trip I had the opportunity of looking into the eyes of young people who had lost hope. I had to keep telling myself that somewhere those young children had mothers or fathers who cared for them and loved them. Yet these young people had lost any type of hope and any type of opportunity that they ever might have been able to attain.

As I went into that committee, I did not know how much of a problem this drug use was in my constituency. I have what is basically a rural riding. I found out very quickly and to my own shame that this is not only a problem in the urban centres. It is a problem that is throughout our country and too many people have given up on it.

I believe the government has given up. I believe the government has looked at it, thrown its hands up in the air and said, "We surrender". It has said that it has no plan so it will try to help in some type of so-called harm reduction. Again, that sends the wrong message: that as long as people shoot drugs in a clean environment it will be all right, that as long as people shoot drugs that are clean they do not have anything to fear.

That is not the case.

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•(1600)

At the time, the government was committing \$4 million to safe injection sites and pilot projects. When it came to bringing up the point of having more resources for detox centres, my colleague, the member for Langley—Abbotsford, and I went to that committee and said that we were committed to fighting drugs. We asked that we make sure that if people needed or wanted adequate help they were going to be able to get that help.

We heard the member from Calgary talk about the number of break and enters because of people needing money for drugs. When we brought up the point that perhaps we should have detox centres right within the prisons, we were met with total opposition. The government asked why we would want to put detox centres in prison, why we would want to bring people down off their drugs while they were in prison. It was almost like the government felt that would be going against their rights. We have a prison system that believes in zero tolerance, yet when we go there we see that this is indeed not the case.

Then, right in the middle of the study, one day the government suddenly dropped the whole ball on the question of decriminalizing marijuana right on the table of our committee. It upset the whole strategy and plan that we were going through as far as hard drugs were concerned. It suddenly became the focus point. It became the focus point of the minister and the government. It became the focus point of the media. Every media call was saying to us, "Forget the safe injection sites and forget the heroin problem. What is the committee going to do about marijuana now?"

It really pre-empted the committee's study when suddenly the minister told us what the government was going to do. He said the government needed to move toward decriminalizing marijuana. There was the committee, set up to study marijuana, set up to study illicit drug use, and the minister pre-empted it and basically rendered everything we had studied and brought forward inconsequential, because, he said, "This is what the government is going to do".

Now we see legislation, Bill C-10, that again is what the government is planning to do. Let me make it very clear that this opposition party, the Conservative Party of Canada, is going to oppose this type of open-ended decriminalization that basically sends the wrong messages and tells Canadians this is all right.

What would this bill do? It would establish a new system of fines for possession of marijuana. Right now we have a problem with courts that are not bringing down any type of deterrent sentences for marijuana use. We have a problem with courts that are in some cases giving a little slap on the wrist and putting people back into society. There has to be some recognition that the status quo is not working right now.

The government said initially that possession of 30 grams or less of marijuana should be punished by a fine of \$150, and for youth, by a fine of up to \$100. I can tell members that this type of sentencing, this type of fine, will be no deterrent to anyone starting to use marijuana.

We believe we need to send the message to Canadians that marijuana is harmful, marijuana is illegal, marijuana should not be

tried, and they should stay away from all these mind-altering drugs. This type of legislation does nothing to do that.

I ask Canadians and I ask the government, when was the last time that any court sentenced anyone to a maximum fine on a drug charge? If I get a seat belt violation while puttering around in rural Alberta, I am going to get hit harder than I would if I were caught smoking a joint of marijuana.

•(1605)

Again we say that this type of summary offence and this type of sentencing show how out of touch the government is with what is going on out there. I had the opportunity over the last couple of weeks to travel throughout my constituency and speak to different RCMP detachments. In the southern part of my riding, Strathmore and Gleichen, the new part that will become part of Crowfoot, I asked the members of those detachments how prevalent drug use is in their communities. Again, drugs are the driver of crime. As my colleague from Calgary, a former police officer, has said, drugs are what drive crime. When I look at these kinds of fines and sentences, I realize the government has no commitment at all to deterrence.

I have already talked about the fact that this sends the wrong message to Canadian youth. I talk to some of the teachers and principals at schools and they say young people already believe that marijuana has been legalized. Again, this is the wrong message coming out of the House. It is the wrong message coming out of the Parliament of Canada, but that is what young people believe.

The question is, how do we enable our law enforcement officers to go out there and uphold the law? Anyone who is caught at a check stop for drinking and driving realizes that when a person blows into the breathalyzer and is told he or she is over the legal limit of alcohol, the police have substantive evidence that they can bring to any court to say the person blew over .08 and was impaired.

I can only imagine the types of trials dealing with drugs that are going to take place because of this legislation. The question will be whether the person was impaired or was over any legal limit. How are officers going to explain it? Are they going to say they tried to make them walk the line and they were not able to do that? Is that going to hold up in court? I can say absolutely that this bill is going to make it very difficult for any prosecutor to prove that someone was driving while impaired with marijuana. There will be much more use of marijuana. We will see it in our driving, on our highways and in our cemeteries. We will see it with people who are buried because someone was driving while stoned.

I had a chance to chat with the member for Yellowhead about crystal meth. We have a problem in some of our provinces. Even in my constituency of Crowfoot we are seeing much more crystal meth being brought in and used. That is why one of the things we are looking at is a private member's bill to deal with precursors of all the ingredients that go into making crystal meth. We are also looking at ways to help families that are being torn apart by people who use crystal meth.

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Today I do not want to get into the argument on whether or not marijuana is a gateway drug, but I want to say that we are seeing marijuana being used with other drugs to heighten the high. The member for Yellowhead told me about marijuana being soaked or dipped in crystal meth and then smoked for a better high. I met with police officers who say that sometimes people soak toothpicks in it. They are driving trucks, the toothpicks are in the visor, and they will just suck on toothpicks that have been laced with crystal meth.

We are seeing more and more drugs out there all the time because we have not sent the right message on marijuana or on any type of drug; we have not sent the right type of message. We are reaping what we have sown. Unfortunately we are reaping it with kids, with families breaking up, with productivity going down and with education opportunities being lost. In every high school across the land, we are seeing the effects.

• (1610)

We should have the courage in this place to put in tough laws that show we really care about the effect these kinds of drugs are having on Canadians.

At committee I recall a question being asked of one of our witnesses: "Do you believe that people who are caught with marijuana will pay their fines?" At that time we were talking about a \$500 fine as a deterrent. A number of witnesses said no. They did not know how we could force anybody to pay a fine.

In that committee we had a blackboard behind us. We wrote down things that we believed had to happen if there ever were to be decriminalization. We talked about the roadside tests. We talked about having the methodology for determining if someone is under the influence of any type of narcotic or marijuana. We talked about fines as a deterrent. We also discussed whether we could structure something that would force people to pay their fines, or would it just be another fine that would never be collected. We referenced tying it to the driver's licence, but that would come under provincial jurisdiction.

This is a bill that does not set out how we force people to pay these fines. People simply will not pay them. Until I hear someone on the government side say that we have a way to do roadside tests, we have the ability to have substantive fines in place, we have the ability to make sure those fines are paid, I do not really want to hear any more about the road we are on in decriminalizing marijuana.

The use and possession of marijuana must remain illegal. Canadians must realize that not only is it illegal but that there must be a substantive fine to show the damage and the harm that it can cause.

Every year police officers take the DARE program to schools. They talk to young Canadians about the damage that is caused by violence and drugs. There are ads on television and in newspapers showing the terrible effects of drugs. There are some good drug abuse education programs happening. However we have a government that wants to move toward decriminalization and in effect is telling Canadians that it is not as bad as we once thought it was.

Someone gave me a piece of information a while back which talked about the difference between today's marijuana and the marijuana of 30, 40 or 50 years ago. The high that one gets from the

drug now is so different and yet we are saying that it is time to decriminalize it. The marijuana now is so powerful, with B.C. bud and some of the other types of marijuana, in toxicity levels. It is so much different from that of the 1960s during the hippie movement and the 1970s and 1980s when I was growing up and in high school. It was harmful then but it is much more harmful now. We knew it was wrong then and we know it has no benefits today, but we want to make it easier for young people to possess.

The government is wrong. The government has missed the mark. That is why this party does not support Bill C-10.

• (1615)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Before we go to questions and comments, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency; the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, Employment Insurance.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague a question with regard to the issue of youth, which he spoke about to a great extent today.

It is kind of ironic, when some of the polls report that marijuana use among Canadian teens is higher than tobacco use, that the Liberal government promotes an aggressive campaign to dissuade youth from tobacco but its proposed changes to the marijuana legislation actually sends the very opposite message.

I wonder what remarks the member would have in respect to that hypocrisy of the Liberal government.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, an individual who met with our caucus, and probably with many different parliamentarians, told us about the crisis that we have in the demographics with an aging population and a health care system that, in the way it is going right now, will not be able to sustain itself.

We constantly need to be looking for ways that we can tell Canadians that we need to be very mindful of the health that we are in. We have set up wellness clinics because we recognize the value of them. We have other people who are busy, as the member said, educating us about the harmful effects of many things.

We are educating Canadians that obesity is harmful. We educate Canadians that drinking may be harmful and that drinking and driving may be harmful. We educate Canadians that smoking is harmful, and rightly so. We recognize that lung cancer, emphysema and other illnesses are caused by inhaling any type of smoke into our lungs and using it as a drug.

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The member is right. This drug is harmful and we need to have a balanced strategy. There is no strategy. We need to have a balanced plan. There is no plan. We need to educate. Let us pour money into the resources we need to educate people on the harmful effects of drug use, including marijuana. We need to have more resources for enforcing the law.

The RCMP and police officers have told me that we are basically handcuffing them while telling them to go out on the streets and uphold the law. They do not have the ability to detect if someone is driving impaired by drugs. They can tell if someone is under the influence of alcohol through tests but not if they use marijuana.

The member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin mentioned that some of the statistics show that there are more Canadians who have smoked marijuana than tobacco. I have not seen those statistics but in talking to a lot of young Canadians, they know the harmful effects tobacco has on them. If we ask them about marijuana, they say that we have legalized it. In the high schools they believe we have moved toward legalizing it.

I am not sure if it is that we have not done our job as far as educating the public. I am not sure if it is the media that has just run with this story of marijuana for so long and the whole question of decriminalization and legalizing from the Senate and other places that we have not done our job, but young Canadians feel like there is no problem with marijuana. Our courts have turned a blind eye to it; 780 charges stayed in a small community in northern Alberta. If this law goes through I guarantee those guys will get a free walk, and it is not right.

We need to make sure there is a balanced plan in how we tell our young people and all Canadians about the harmful effects of this drug.

• (1620)

Mr. Andy Burton (Skeena, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we look at the one billion dollar-plus gun registry; the softwood lumber committee adjustment fund of some \$55 million for British Columbia where very little of it has gone to the people in the communities that need it at this stage of the game, some 450 days later; the ad scams, some \$450 million program; shoot-up sites in big cities like Vancouver; and then we get legislation, such as Bill C-10, which will likely exacerbate the problem; it appears to me that the government needs to change its priorities.

How does the member for Crowfoot feel about a suggestion that the firearms registration be cancelled and that the government cut its losses and put future funds that would have gone into that ridiculous program into crime prevention, including developing an adequate roadside test for marijuana use and firm enforcement of existing marijuana laws? Would that not make a whole lot more sense to Canadians?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to the member's question is yes. We do need to look at all kinds of ways to get the message across to Canadians that it is wrong.

He is also right. Here we are on a Monday afternoon in the House of Commons. We have issues that are absolutely devastating, especially to my constituents, and the legislative agenda has us debating Bill C-10. That is fine.

We have BSE right now that is absolutely killing the cattle industry and the agriculture sector as a whole and we are here debating a bill to decriminalize marijuana. I guess the bill has to be debated but there are so many other things that should have the attention of the government but does not.

We have a billion dollar gun registry that is so ineffective that it is not preventing crime and yet over \$1 billion will be pushed into the registry regardless of what effect it has. There will be dollars for that.

We have a softwood lumber industry with as many people in the unemployment lines now as there were months ago.

There are so many issues, especially the beef industry issue, that I feel I should be here debating but we are on Bill C-10.

I believe we need all the resources possible to educate the public. We have already seen many grow ops being raided. People with homes worth hundreds of thousands of dollars or maybe even millions of dollars have cut out rooms in their basements for marijuana grow ops. If we were able to confiscate the money from this type of criminal activity the money could be put right back into fighting crime. Let us take the money that is tied up in these grow op houses and put it back into fighting crime and to educating Canadians about the harmful effect.

The government acts as if it is only one joint or two joints that people are smoking. However, where are they getting this drug? They are getting it from organized crime.

The government says that if we decriminalize it and allow people to grow their own then it will no longer be organized crime any more. That shows that this is a government that does not have a clue how to fight this kind of crime and how to recognize the problems that we have in this country.

I appreciate the question from the member for Skeena. Yes, let us fight crime using the criminals' resources. Let us shoot the money back into fighting crime. Let us take the gun registry and absolutely get rid of it.

We have a budget coming up. We have a new Prime Minister. I ask the Prime Minister to show Canadians that he understands what is happening out there and get rid of the gun registry. If he wants to fight crime and he wants gun control, all he has to do is tell people that if they perpetrate any type of crime using a firearm they will be on a registry and they will never own a firearm again. That is the gun registry that I can accept. It is not going to cost anything.

If the Prime Minister wants to have gun control he should tell Canadians that we will stop the illegal smuggling of guns that are coming across the border daily and that we will have a greater commitment to stopping them, because we do not.

Instead, we are debating Bill C-10 on how we should tell Canadians and young people that marijuana is not all that bad. Shame on that government.

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• (1625)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Please address your comments to the Chair and not directly to any other member.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-10 on behalf of my constituents of Calgary Southeast.

This has been an unusually difficult issue for me to analyze and on which to arrive at a position. I find the argument offered by libertarians in favour of the decriminalization of minor possession of marijuana or the decriminalization of marijuana all together reasonable and compelling.

Their argument is predicated on the notion that marijuana is not a harmful substance. Therefore, it does not damage the users of marijuana, is not addictive in a destructive sense, and does not endanger the broader common good or society. I find that a reasonable and compelling argument, although I am not sure that I agree with the predicate that marijuana is in all instances a harmless drug.

I balance that reasonable libertarian appeal on this issue against the personal experiences that I have heard from many constituents and other Canadians, particularly parents. Those who like myself do not have children do not have to worry about the difficulties that young people have growing up in today's society and perhaps are not as concerned about the deleterious effect of marijuana on young people.

However, I know many parents who believe very passionately, from their firsthand experience, that they lost their children, that their children became ensnared in an entire lifestyle that was unhealthy and unproductive, and that it was in fact destructive of themselves, their families and their relationships because of their principal use of marijuana.

It is my sense that a majority of my constituents believe that there should continue to be significant sanctions for the production, sale and possession of marijuana. On the other hand, most Canadians and most of my constituents do not believe that individuals who are arrested and in possession of one joint should face a lifetime criminal blemish because of perhaps an isolated mistake in their youth.

I do believe that this is a complex issue. I am quite frankly someone who sees things in black and white. This is one issue where I see reasonable arguments on both sides.

However, as I do more research on this issue and talk to more constituents, and look more closely at the bill, I have come to the conclusion that the bill is an inappropriate response to the desire to prevent an undue lifetime penalty of the burden of a criminal offence on someone. That is understandable and the bill simply goes too far.

Basically, Canadian society is seeking a balance on this issue and that is a reasonable thing to expect. I do not think this is a balanced bill.

Effectively, the bill seeks to decriminalize possession for amounts of under 30 grams, for all intents and purposes. The expert testimony is that 30 grams of marijuana can produce as much as 60 marijuana joints, which is certainly more than what most Canadians and certainly most parents would regard as minor possession.

Indeed, the position that the previous Canadian Alliance arrived at, which has now been adopted by the new Conservative Party, is a reasonable one. It is to decriminalize possession of cannabis for amounts of less than five grams, which is essentially one or two marijuana joints. That would be a reasonable balance. It would take into account the circumstances where young individuals made one small mistake in their lives. It is a desire to give them a second chance without burdening them for the rest of their lives with a criminal record.

• (1630)

On the other hand, if we were to adopt the five gram limit proposed by my party, we would still maintain a significant criminal law disincentive for the production and distribution of marijuana.

This is really a critical issue which the bill fails to adequately address; that is, the enormous proliferation of marijuana production in Canada and the involvement of organized crime in that field.

We have all read and seen the stories about the thousands of so-called grow operations that exist in disproportionate numbers in the Province of British Columbia. I think the bill fails to take that into consideration.

My colleague from Provencher points out that apparently some of these very prosperous grow operations were helpful in financing the recent leadership campaign of the right hon. the Prime Minister in acquiring memberships in British Columbia. There is now a very serious criminal investigation in that province.

If we were to decriminalize for amounts of 30 grams and under, essentially, we would be giving a green light to trafficking and a green light to a grow op production on the scale that we have before us today. In fact, these grow ops, which are fuelled by organized crime, are growing like top seed right now under the current law, which criminalizes any kind of possession or trafficking of marijuana.

It seems to me that if we were to send a signal that Parliament is less interested in prosecuting possession and trafficking of marijuana, we would only get more grow ops, which would mean more resources for organized crime. That seems to me a rather perverse, perhaps unintended, consequence of this bill.

Another aspect of the bill which I find troublesome is that it would create a two tier law. The Liberals always demagogue about the notion of two tier health care, but they seem to be rather attached to the idea of two tier criminal law. They have passed amendments in this place which make certain offences even greater offences if they are committed for particular reasons. Rather than simply making all acts of violence equally abhorrent under criminal law, they have identified acts that are motivated by certain subjective impulses as carrying greater penalties.

Similarly, in another field of course, we know that the government has legislated less strenuous penalties for people who violate the law based on race, which I find quite an outrageous offence against Canadian liberal democratic values. Similarly, in Bill C-10, the government would propose separate fines for the minor possession of marijuana for adults versus youth.

Government Orders

Surely we can all agree in this place that Canadians are equal under the law and that if a young person commits an adult crime, then he or she should face the consequences. To suggest that young people are somehow less responsible for their actions is demeaning. It creates all sorts of perverse messages and unintended consequences.

If a 17 year old is able to transport 60 joints, under this law, and face potentially a third less fine than somebody who is 18 years old, that means that 17 and 16 year olds would become pigeons for drug traffickers. That would be one of the perverse outcomes of this bill. In a sense, it would encourage drug traffickers to use younger people as stooges in their businesses. I do not understand why the government does not see this.

• (1635)

Furthermore, the government has actually decreased penalties for the production of marijuana in this bill through its schedule of fines related to the number of plants. Again, this is completely naive.

Grow operators can limit themselves to a potential fine of \$25,000 for growing up to 25 plants, but if they have 26 plants they could face 10 years in jail. Guess what they are going to do? Instead of having one grow op with 100 plants, they are going to have four grow ops with 25 plants.

This is such an absolutely and transparently absurd understanding of human nature that we find in this bill. It is an incentive for marijuana producers to be even more stealthy in the amounts of marijuana that they grow to avoid the penalties under the law. The police, instead of identifying one significant grow op, are going to have to chase dozens and dozens of smaller ones that are established precisely to avoid the 26 plant limit in the law.

Similarly, the bill does nothing to assist police in cracking down on organized crime that is currently profiting from lax enforcement. The legislation will increase demand for marijuana and therefore make the illegal production and distribution of it even more lucrative for organized crime.

The fines set out in this bill do not increase for subsequent offences either. This is a major flaw. It seems that if we want the law to have an instructive capacity, to teach people, particularly young people, about what constitutes acceptable conduct, then we should increase the penalties with the number of repeat offences.

If a college student is caught with one marijuana joint, I personally do not believe that the person should face a lifetime criminal record, but if a young person is arrested and found to be a serial user and possessor of marijuana, chances are that there is more to it than just the possession. Chances are that the person is involved in trafficking or has a serious habit, and the law needs to assist in breaking that habit. I would propose that the bill see increased penalties and consequences for repeat offenders.

I have mentioned some of the deficiencies in the bill. My colleague from Crowfoot spoke about the need for a broader national drug strategy. I believe that there is compelling evidence, certainly anecdotal and I believe empirical evidence, that marijuana is—not in every instance, but can be in many instances—a gateway drug to more serious narcotics, narcotics that destroy and kill people.

If there is anybody in this place who thinks that the drug trade in narcotics is just a lifestyle choice and that we ought not to make any moral judgment about the use of such drugs, then I invite them to come down to the lower east side of Vancouver and literally see hundreds of mainly younger people whose lives have been completely, for all intents and purposes, sucked out of them by the addiction to narcotics.

I would venture to guess that virtually every one of the junkies on the lower east side of Vancouver whose lives have been destroyed will tell us that the first contact they had with drugs was with marijuana.

We have to be very alive to the connection between marijuana and the larger drug culture in terms of more serious narcotics. There is no national drug strategy attached to this bill. No provisions have been made to amend the proceeds of crime legislation. No provisions have been made to deal with damages to real estate through residential grow ops, a very serious problem. No legislation has been developed to curtail financial institutions from funding mortgages related to grow ops that would require them to exercise due diligence to stop the money laundering that occurs through these operations. No coordination has been proposed by the government to work with provincial welfare departments and federal authorities to stop welfare fraud, which is used to fuel the drug trade.

• (1640)

No commitment has been obtained from the judiciary to increase penalties within the limits set out in this bill in terms of maximum penalties, or to follow the established possession guidelines. No provisions have been made to deal with the increasing toxicity of THC content.

My colleague from Crowfoot discussed the fact that toxicity of cannabis today is several times greater than it was when the former minister of justice, the former minister of health and much of the frontbench of the government were recreational users of marijuana, according to their own admissions, in the 1960s. They look back at that as some kind of romantic period.

The former minister of health, Alan Rock, no longer a member of this place and now our ambassador to the United Nations, glories in his hippie days, hanging out with John Lennon and he snickers about illegal drug use. We can let him have his psychedelic romantic memories from his youth in the 1960s, but that has no relevance to the lives of young people today who are dealing with a product in cannabis that is 10 to 20 times more potent than when the current ambassador to the United Nations was a recreational user in the 1960s.

I would ask the members of the Liberal government to put aside their romantic attachment to this as the drug of the summer of love. I ask them to look at real families and young people whose lives are being negatively affected by addiction to what can in many instances be a very damaging drug. I would ask the government to reconsider the bill.

Government Orders

In closing, I would support amendments to the act that decriminalized possession of very minor amounts. I do not seek to penalize in perpetuity young people who make an occasional mistake, but we do need to use the law to stop the enormous and unchecked growth in the organized criminal drug trade in this country. Therefore, I will oppose this bill unless the government agrees to substantially amend it along the lines proposed by my colleagues.

• (1645)

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's speech was very well done. I learned some things and some other things were reinforced for me.

It is a very important and crucial matter because we do so much trade with the Americans just over the 49th parallel. The Americans have made it very clear that new soft on pot legislation will probably result in tighter border restrictions between our two countries.

I would like the hon. member to respond to that in terms of its effect and impact. We already have problems at the border and if we make this kind of a change, how much more significantly will it hurt trade and the flow of goods back and forth between our two countries?

Mr. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that was a very reasonable question.

I serve as the opposition critic for Canada-U.S. relations. In that capacity I have occasion to meet frequently with American law enforcement officials, legislators and administration policy makers. This issue of Canada liberalizing its marijuana and drug laws is very much on the radar screen of policy makers in Washington.

In the post 9/11 environment, we have a critical national imperative to make Americans comfortable with sharing an open border with Canada. For our economic survival we need to ensure an open border that right now encompasses \$1.8 billion Canadian in daily trade. Bill C-10 would only increase pressure in Congress and in other sources of authority in Washington to increase border inspections and to increase the number of customs officers for surveillance of Canadian vehicles and passengers going into the United States, all of which would mean longer lineups, more hassles, and a greater cost for the Canadian economy.

I am afraid that this will have an unintended economic cost in terms of greater American border vigilance as they seek to intercept the increase in the supply of marijuana in Canada which they anticipate will be the unintended result of the bill. Let us be very mindful of that.

Let me make a related comment. It is interesting to note that three U.S. states, Oregon, Nevada, and one other, have had referendum campaigns on decriminalizing marijuana. They had very vigorous debates in those states. In each instance, the voters in those states decided to maintain the prohibition against production, trafficking, and possession of marijuana.

I am not suggesting that we should always govern ourselves according to American domestic policy trends, but we have to be mindful of them. When we look at the post 9/11 security environment and we add on to it the growing American unease

about Canada as an exporter of drugs, particularly cannabis, into the United States, the bill is particularly unhelpful.

• (1650)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important and timely debate to have in the chamber today about the decriminalization of marijuana. After listening to some of my colleagues debate this issue, I am reminded that one of the reasons the government seems to be in a hurry to address this is it is trying to pretend there is a perception that the vast majority of young people believe that pot should be decriminalized.

I have had the opportunity to speak in high schools throughout my riding of Prince George—Peace River. I have found that young people are not unified on this particular issue. There is no big hue and cry from young people for the decriminalization of marijuana or for the full legalization of it.

I put three different options to young people: legalize it, and thus be able to tax it and treat it like alcohol, for example; decriminalize small amounts as Bill C-10 would do; or leave the status quo, where it is a criminal act and against the Criminal Code of Canada to possess marijuana. The young people were split on this issue, as I would suggest would be society at large. There was no clear consensus even among young people that we should rush pell-mell, full speed ahead, to decriminalize marijuana.

My colleague from Calgary has been active on university and college campuses across Canada speaking to young people. I wonder whether he has run into the same situation as I have in my riding.

Mr. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I would say in response to that question that I do not find this to be a top of the mind concern of young people whom I speak to on campuses or in high schools.

I would have to admit that probably a majority of young people who do raise it as a concern do favour decriminalization. The vast majority of young people whom I encounter do not rank this as one of their concerns. Their concerns are related to ensuring that they can get quality higher education, that they can get a job in the country when they leave university or high school, and that they have economic opportunities.

Young people are some of the principal victims of crime and violent crime. It is in the interests of society to do what we can to eliminate the pressure that organized crime has that often affects young people. Certainly in the United States the vast majority of homicide victims are young men between the ages of 16 and 25 and it is associated with the drug trade.

I think that this is not a top of the mind concern and I really do not know who is driving this agenda. As I said, I think it had a lot to do with the former ministers of health, the current ambassador to the United Nations and the former minister of justice, who kind of see this as a legacy project, something about commemorating the romantic idea of their 1960s pot-filled youth or something. Is that not special, Mr. Speaker? I am happy for them that they have such romantic ideas about their illegal activity in the 1960s. It is so charming but I think they should leave their youth behind them and focus on what is best for today's youth, which really means we should focus our resources on pummeling organized crime in the country rather than accommodating it.

Government Orders

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, I live in a border riding, Provencher, in southeast Manitoba. Much of our trade goes south of the border, manufactured goods, agricultural goods and all kinds of goods.

I have heard various reports about the Americans being concerned about this bill. Even a small delay of an hour or two in that border traffic translates into a cost of millions of dollars. If that kind of cost is evident in a riding like Provencher, what would it be like in a place like Windsor where the volume of traffic is much higher? Perhaps I am putting the member on the spot, but do we have any firm figures as to the cost of a delay of a few hours when we deal with just in time delivery and that kind of thing?

• (1655)

Mr. Jason Kenney: Madam Speaker, there have been estimates made of the incremental economic cost of lengthening border checks going into the United States and it is very substantial. I do not have those statistics with me but I can tell the member that the daily trade between Canada and the United States now is \$1.8 billion. That is phenomenal. That is the largest bilateral trade relationship in the history of the world by an order of magnitude. This is enormous. We are talking about tens of thousands of border crossings every day carrying \$1.8 billion of merchandise or services of that value.

To invite the Americans to respond to this bill by increasing vigilance of Canadian traffic entering the United States will inevitably mean longer waits and checking times. It will impact our economy. There is an economic cost to the bill. It may not be evident or may not be direct but I believe there will be more American vigilance to intercept Canadian contraband because of the increased production of marijuana that will result because of the bill. It will hurt Canadian jobs and the young people who need those jobs.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know we have had reference thus far in the House today by individuals who have spoken of the tremendous impact it will have on lives and the harm that will be created. Others have brushed it off, saying that it is mostly a personal choice which affects maybe only the individuals themselves but has no affect on other people.

As we debate Bill C-10, which is legislation to amend the Contraventions Act to allow for certain offences to be prosecuted by means of a summons or a ticket and in short to decriminalize marijuana possession under 30 grams, I want to begin by making the point about the carnage created and the in the lives of other people in a couple of pretty significant ways. I will sketch them out off the top here.

In questions and comments in the House I have questioned the justice minister's concern about the carnage caused on Canadian roadways by impaired driving. I have drawn to the attention of the minister one of the many concerns raised by police chiefs, in particular by Toronto Police Chief Julian Fantino when he spoke about the government's agenda to soften Canada's marijuana laws.

I asked a question of the minister some time ago. Julian Fantino, chief of police for Toronto, stated in a letter to me his many concerns about the government choosing to decriminalize marijuana. In that letter he referred to research indicating that if this bill were to come into place in the draft form as it was at that time, the number of

drivers under 25 years of age under the influence of marijuana might increase by as much as 400%. That is the number of drivers under 25 years of age under the influence of marijuana or, in other words, driving while drunk.

Police Chief Fantino spoke of the added hazard this would then create on our roadways and highways. He spoke of the kind of unbelievable carnage and the grief and heartache families would experience when they lost a child, or a spouse, or a father or a mother because of somebody driving under the influence of marijuana. He spoke of the awful scene of a tragic accident where lives were lost.

I ask the question again today. Does the minister and the government not understand the tremendous carnage that could be caused on a yearly basis by such impaired driving? This is not only about oneself and a personal lifestyle habit. It is also very much about the very tragic impact it could have on others around us, as we are out on the highways and the byways.

Widely reported in the media over the last number of months has been the bad news about marijuana use and the violence and gang warfare, which is far too prevalent. The government's soft on drugs legislation before us today was referred to a special committee. We really had hoped the committee would show a lot more respect for the views of Canada's frontline police officers and emergency workers than the Liberal government has thus far.

Back on October 28, the *Globe and Mail* reported on a gang-style double murder in Toronto, with police officers directly tying that incident to a growing problem of marijuana and gang warfare in the city. I had an exchange with the member for Crowfoot earlier today about a poll that came out the very next day, on October 29 of last year. The media reported widely on a new poll which showed that marijuana use was higher than tobacco use among Canadian teens. That is significant and it is something we should all sit up, take note of and pay attention to, as I mentioned in my question to him.

We have the Liberal government promoting an aggressive campaign, with lots of dollars being put into it. Across the country we have posters, seminars, lessons and all kinds of messaging to dissuade youth from tobacco use. However, the proposed changes to marijuana legislation send the very opposite message.

Government Orders

Canada's frontline police officers remain distressed over the Liberal's soft on pot law. I have talked with them in my home riding of Saskatoon—Wanuskewin. The Canadian Professional Police Association and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police have again written to the Prime Minister. They have asked for stronger legislation against the most serious drug related offences. Very bluntly, Canada's police officers are dismayed at the government's attempt to fast track this premature and seriously flawed bill.

• (1700)

The Conservative Party opposes Bill C-10, but it takes the position that if the Liberals are going to force it through, it must first set up a national drug strategy. Other members, at least from the Conservative Party, have referred to that today.

We need a national drug strategy that works at the street level in all our cities and all our communities across this great country. It must establish a progressive fine schedule with fines and penalties, increasing with the number of convictions, and significant consequences for non-payment of fines. That is not in the bill.

Minimum sentences are required to reinforce the seriousness of the crime of marijuana grow operations. Drug driving laws and roadside assessment must also be in place. We need to have a handle on that. We need to have that set up and ready to go before the legislation is passed. The police need legislation to enhance their enforcement powers in situations where drug impairment is suspected.

The very fact remains that the lower the penalties for drug use and drug running, the more lucrative this illegal activity will be. The more lucrative drug running is, the easier it will be for drug dealers to attract young people into this very dangerous and criminal activity.

The member from Calgary in his speech made clear, and I could not agree more, that the older ones will simply use the younger ones who will be more lightly prosecuted. They are the ones who will get off with a lighter sentence. They will be use them to be the stooges, the runners and those who take the hit. It will be simply an invitation to drug dealers to invite and lure younger people into this very dangerous and criminal activity. Those who already use marijuana will be more easily lured into trafficking.

New data indicating a rise in the number of teens using pot should be of grave concern. It is a serious issue, especially in view of the fact that recent polling indicates we have some real problems with greater use of marijuana than tobacco by teens in Canada. There has been reference to this by a number of people through the course of the day so far. Some of the questions and interventions have also revolved around this.

Putting aside the harm it does on the road, the carnage on the highways, the violence, the drug trafficking, the gang warfare, et cetera that will be created by the very soft on pot legislation, we also know it will harm all Canadians. It is not just a personal thing where people can say that it is their business and that it does not affect anyone else. As has been drawn out a couple times already, it very significantly will affect businesses. The member for Provencher talked about this. When big companies want to get deliveries in pretty quickly, but are held up at the border, it costs them hundreds

of thousands of dollars in the course of the day. It does not just affect the individual. When regimes are put in place with more serious surveillances, it affects good people all across the country, including business people. It will probably result in tighter border restrictions between our two countries.

I really do not know what constituency the Liberal government is trying to attract with this new approach to drug legislation. It certainly is not the law-abiding citizens back in my constituency who love their children, love their youth and who want to live in safe communities.

Bill C-10 has a detrimental effect, not only on the person who uses it. We know there are harmful ill effects from that, medically. There have been studies that have proved that. However, it also affects carnage on the highways with drugged driving. We do not have the regimes in place to prevent or to detect that. It also affects the violence and the gangs in terms of the increased criminal activity related to this. It is also a gateway to harder drugs. As well, it affects the business community. It affects anybody exchanging goods between Canada and the United States. Therefore, there are some pretty serious consequences.

• (1705)

I find most appalling that they are setting up this discrepancy or difference between adults and youth, and fining youth at a much lower rate. What kind of a message does that send to say that it is okay for young people do it, but if adults do it that is a more serious thing? I find it most disturbing when we have lighter fines for young adults. On one hand the Liberals are saying that they are trying to prevent youth from using drugs. On the other hand, they are effectively eliminating any real penalty for them if they do so.

When we look at any kind of legislation, we want to have something in place so the effective and proper enforcement can take place. In this case we do not have the resources in place for the police to crack down on organized crime that is profiting from lack of enforcement and will all the more as the bill is put into effect.

The legislation might in fact increase demand for marijuana and, therefore, make the illegal production and distribution of marijuana even more lucrative for organized crime, using our vulnerable youth in a greater way as their runners, stoolpigeons and so on. That is very troubling.

The fines set out in the bill are much too low. They are a light slap on the wrist. It is the cost of doing business, and no more. There is nothing that would deter somebody from becoming involved and moving clients on to harder drugs where there is an even more serious effect.

Also, a tremendous drawback with the bill, a flaw, a negative, is there is no increase for subsequent offences. As the member from Calgary said if somebody has done it once, that is one thing. However, if it is done again and again that obviously should be taken into account. For repeat offences, there should be more serious and tougher consequences along the way.

Government Orders

One might say that the Liberals have really liberalized Canada's drug laws without providing the proper kind of enforcement. That is always troubling. When we get into the billion dollar boondoggle, the gun registry, having not thought this through in advance—

Mr. Jay Hill: Two billion dollars.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: It is coming up to \$2 billion, and it is going to get there.

We need to close the money tap and shut the flow down. The Liberals are throwing out these little teasers before the election, such as decriminalization and fines. We still have this mammoth bureaucracy in place with all the dollars being expended as ever before. Besides that, they are still making law-abiding gun owners, duck hunters and others pay these fines. That is not a good thing.

We believe there needs to a whole lot more care and attention when we draft bills so we have something with common sense in place and we can then enforce the bill. What is the point of a bill if there is no appetite for it publicly, if there is disdain for it by the public and if we bring law enforcement in disrepute in the country? That is always the folly of going down the road of putting something in place where there is no appetite for it, no public support, as would be the case here, and no particular regime, no tools, no resources for the police to carry out their jobs.

It is very demoralizing. I have spoken to policemen and done ride alongs in my city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. They say it is very demoralizing for them when we heap these new things on, these twisted and quirky kinds legislation, and then have nothing in place for them to carry it out their jobs.

By effectively decriminalizing possession of 30 grams of marijuana, the government has made it a lot easier for traffickers to operate. As was said, approximately 60 joints of marijuana can be made out of 30 grams, and that is clearly enough for an individual to traffic at the high school, down at the street corner, at the corner store and elsewhere in the country. We think that is a problem. The use and the possession of marijuana must remain illegal and possession of marijuana greater than five grams must be considered a criminal offence.

We have also made the point already that fines for possession of marijuana should increase significantly. When there are subsequent offences then the hand of the law needs to come down a little heavier at that point. We need to have appropriate roadside assessment penalties developed for detecting drug driving offences.

● (1710)

That takes us back to the beginning of my speech. My heart will be greatly burdened if this brings down upon us, as we suspect it will and as Police Chief Fantino says it will, carnage on the highways. There will be lives lost, with the incalculable cost of individual lives lost, those of fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, and the tremendous grief and heartache this causes for families throughout their entire lives. Lives are never the same after the disruption of a drunk driving or drugged driving loss of a loved one.

We need to have those things in place so as to detect the drugged driving offences. The police need to be given the kinds of resources to combat what will probably be a greater thrust or a greater push by

organized crime for control of those marijuana grow operations. It will be a major, multi-million dollar business for organized crime.

These are the kinds of things that we think need to be changed. The bill sends a wrong message to Canadians, to young people in particular, and it makes it more difficult for families to deal with drug use.

Some of the things we have suggested would help. It would be the common sense kind of approach that would resolve this in a fair-minded way: fines would specify an amount and increase significantly for subsequent offences and payment would be vigorously enforced. This is not just something that people would be lightly let off for. We need people in place to enforce if we are going to make sure the fines are paid. We need those roadside assessment practices developed for detecting drugged driving offences.

Most important, we also need improved and stronger prosecution sentencing practices, agreed upon between the federal government and the provinces. There needs to be agreement. Until there is, we have a kind of Mexican standoff. The provinces are not going to be able to enforce something that the federal government dreams up but which is flawed. Then the provinces would be the ones caught in the middle, trying to enforce these strange laws put in place by the federal Liberals.

Several provinces, the Canadian Police Association, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and many Liberal backbenchers have expressed concern over this legislation, so the Conservative Party continues to point out its flaws. We will stand against it. We will oppose it with the hope that either it will collapse at election or there is some way we can stall this off to get it right, because it is the crucial kind of bill that will have an effect or an impact on so many people.

We do not want that carnage on the highways, the violence, the gang warfare and the impact on our borders in terms of the business and the international trade back and forth, all things that harm not just the user but those individuals around them, those across our country. We as a party will continue to oppose this until those very common sense changes are made.

● (1715)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the comments on Bill C-10 made by my colleague from Saskatoon—Wanuskewin. He raised a number of relevant points about this legislation, as have Conservative members one after another.

I am a little dismayed that the Liberal Party, which has put forward this legislation, is not debating it. That is the Prime Minister who has said that he is increasingly concerned about the democratic deficit, not only in the chamber, in the people's House of Commons, but at committee and in other areas where members of Parliament are engaged in other venues. He has said he is concerned about the democratic deficit and yet today we see this legislation before the chamber again. It is a retreat. It is flawed legislation that was put forward by the Prime Minister's predecessor, Jean Chrétien. It is back once more, yet the Liberals will not even get up to try to defend it in this place.

Government Orders

One of the concerns the member touched on is that the fines and jail terms are too low. One of the concerns I have is that once again we see a situation where the government sees fit to bring forward a range of fines and/or jail time that encompasses maximums.

Concerning the production of marijuana, I would like to read into the record the fact that an individual found growing one to three plants faces summary conviction and a fine of not more than \$500, or \$250 for a young person. It was subsequently amended at committee, but the key words that people need to understand are "not more than". Four to twenty-five plants would constitute a offence punishable by "up to" \$25,000. Growing twenty-six to fifty plants would result in a sentence of "up to" 10 years. The maximum penalty for growing more than fifty plants would be 14 years.

This is one of the problems that we consistently see with government legislation brought to this place. There are no minimums. We have argued this time and time again. People who resort to criminal activity in this country—and production and trafficking is big business for big crime—have to understand that not only will there be a maximum sentence, they will face a minimum sentence if they are caught and are convicted of this crime. The police, the prosecutors and our justice system depend upon criminals getting the message that if they are caught they are going to be dealt with swiftly and severely for this type of criminal activity.

I wonder if my colleague from Saskatoon—Wanuskewin is as concerned as I am that once again we see the government bringing forward legislation that contains no minimums. Criminals can get away with a slap on the wrist and go through the revolving door right back out of the courtroom, right back to work, and laugh in the face of the police, the prosecutors and everybody who is working diligently to try to protect society. They are back out on the street conducting criminal activity, preying on our young children, the very future of Canada.

I for one am getting quite fed up with this type of activity and this type of attitude from the Liberal government. I have been in this place for 10 years. We have debated a lot of legislation dealing with the Criminal Code of Canada and criminal issues. Time and time again we see the results: the Liberal government talks a good talk but refuses to get tough on crime.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague. I have not been around as long as the member who has asked the question, having been here for only seven years. From the day I arrived on the scene here, it certainly baffled me and puzzled me as to why we did not have minimum sentences for a lot of things across the justice piece. I still do not know why. The Liberal mindset on this whole thing seems to be only maximums and no minimum. What happens then, of course, is that it is left up to the discretion of judges. For the most part, these individuals seems to have a kind of a liberal mindset as well; it is that very light slap on the wrist and they are out.

I do not disagree that case by case there sometimes should be a little range in some extenuating circumstances, but that can be done with minimum sentences. A minimum is put in. Between that minimum and the maximum the judge can come down in view of the circumstances and in view of the detail at hand. That is what we need to be doing, but the Liberal mindset is to do no minimums at all, just

a maximum. Then there are judges that are soft at heart in court and on the benches day by day.

I will say this tongue in cheek. It is possible that the Liberals do not want minimum sentences, because we have government members over there who squander billions of tax dollars. As the member before me reminded us, close to \$2 billion in the gun registry was squandered in a criminal waste of dollars there. We had it in HRDC when I was the critic there. It was unbelievable. There were no paper trails and no documentation; it was money out the door just like that, with phone calls only. Now we have it with the Quebec ad scam all over again. With that ad scam going on, maybe they do not want minimum sentences because people would be in the clink. They would be in jail. This is looking at another side of it, but unfortunately all through the justice system we do not have minimum sentences. I think that is a problem.

The member for Provencher was attorney general of Manitoba and he can give us a lot more detail on the disastrous kind of scenario that is set up when there are no minimums. We need to put in minimums so judges do not have that loosey-goosey latitude such that we do not get justice. There is no justice for victims when this kind of thing occurs.

We have seen it time and again. Someone has been a victim in a theft situation or in a murder situation. The family members receive no justice. They see a judge go in on a particular day and give the lightest sentence possible. That is plain wrong. That is not justice.

We need a change of government. We need a Conservative government that would have this approach and would provide the kinds of minimum sentences in respect of this kind of law and other laws throughout the Criminal Code in our country.

● (1720)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member for Prince George—Peace River. He talked about the fact that the government does not seem to be interested in debating this issue at all. We sit here with only the official opposition taking this issue to heart and thinking it is important. It is also interesting that we consistently see their leader out campaigning. He is not interested in being around here and governing and doing his job as Prime Minister of the country.

I would ask a question about the fact that the government is setting aside so many things. The government has set aside every issue that has come up and has challenged it. I think of Maher Arar and how they put off that issue. The government is trying to bury that issue until after an election, which it is planning.

We see things with the sponsorship scandal and the government not coming clean at all. Every day it is like going to the dentist; we have to keep pulling one tooth at a time, until finally these people will be as toothless as they appear to be.

Government Orders

There are changes to the gun registry that should have been made a long time ago. We hear rumblings that the government might tinker with it, but interestingly enough, the review will come back after the election. It is one thing after another. We see this in other areas as well, with defence issues and with various issues that were raised today.

The Liberals are definitely a tired government. They clearly have no direction. They have no motivation to govern well here. I would ask the member for his thoughts on this. Is this the government that should be bringing forth an important issue such as the issue we have been discussing today when it is clearly not interested in discussing it or dealing with it?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the excellent questions.

My colleague from Prince George has done an excellent job in the criminal justice area. The member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands is an able colleague who works hard in respect to the agricultural issues and the Wheat Board. He is our question period coordinator as well. He is a capable member of Parliament. Both individuals could serve well in ministerial roles, were we to be on the government side.

Clearly the government would want to dodge a whole lot of discussions these days. Particularly it would want to divert things from the scams and scandals that have gone on in Quebec. That will be the focus. That is what the public is upset about. The government has lost the trust of the public and it wants to deal with stuff like this as a bit of a smokescreen, a diversion from the real issues that trouble people in this country.

Canadians have lost trust in the government. It cannot handle their tax dollars wisely and appropriately. Liberals are fighting each other. Now there is this diversionary tactic. We are coming up to an election and people need to have a clear understanding of what went on in terms of those lost hundreds of millions of dollars, and the HRDC and the gun registry boondoggles, all those billions of dollars. The government will plainly be held to account in the weeks ahead.

• (1725)

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to participate in this debate today.

The issue for me on this bill is that we, as parliamentarians in coming to vote on this issue, need information. We simply do not have the information available to us to make an informed decision. The government, rather than providing the opposition, its backbenchers and Canadians with the necessary information to make that informed decision, has simply chosen to push Bill C-10 through for one reason or another. We owe it to our country, we owe it specifically to our children, to get answers from the government and the minister as to why the haste on this bill.

There are a number of issues I would like to see addressed. There are a number of substantive matters which I believe need answers and those answers have not been provided by the government.

The first thing that strikes me about Bill C-10 is that the bill is tailor-made for encouraging trafficking among youth. We are lowering the prohibitions in the law. We are basically stating that anywhere from 15 cigarettes to 30 cigarettes to 45 cigarettes,

depending on how they are rolled, could be carried in a youth's jeans and sold at, say, \$5 to \$10 a piece, but we would have to catch that youth in an individual transaction in order to prove trafficking. It is very low level trafficking but at a large scale and it will make money. It may not necessarily mean that much money for the youth involved in the trafficking but the youth would probably make enough to support his or her own habit. That is the other aspect of the bill.

Bill C-10 would increase the influence of organized crime. It would perpetuate bigger profits. We are increasing demand through low level trafficking and all the other trafficking that goes to support it, and at the same time we are keeping the source of the marijuana illegal. What do we do? Prohibitions are down, but the profits are up. This would provide a wonderful opportunity for organized crime to expand. That is what Bill C-10 is all about.

A fundamental question would be why are we setting up the bill in this way, one which profits illegal enterprises and hurts our children? That is the consequence of the bill. I have not seen an answer. The Liberals have not refuted that that is the consequence of enacting this legislation.

The second question to which Canadians want an answer is the issue of impaired driving as a result of drug use. I spent a lot of my career in the attorney general's department as a prosecutor in constitutional law. Back in the late 1980s, the number of deaths and injuries on the highways was increasing.

• (1730)

Even back then the federal government was unwilling to take the necessary steps to stop this carnage. Back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and I am proud to say that Manitoba was a leader in this, we saw new initiatives to decrease impaired driving through administrative methods, administrative seizures of licences and administrative seizures of motor vehicles from those who drove after their licences had been suspended. These initiatives were tremendously successful.

The biggest challenge that Manitoba had was to convince other provinces that this was the right thing to do. It was not just the defence lawyers who were saying that it was unconstitutional and we should not do it, it was other attorneys general. The federal government was skeptical about it well into the 1990s. Yet if we look at the history of that initiative, most provinces have adopted that model, and to a good end. Fewer people are dying. Fewer children are being killed on the highways. Fewer adults are being killed and injured on the highways. This is a good thing, but we risk undoing the gains that we have made through hard, diligent work.

When we are encouraging an increase in the use of marijuana, the inevitable result will be an increase in the use of marijuana and driving. Why are we going down that road? We know that marijuana coupled with alcohol has a much more dangerous cumulative effect in terms of impaired driving. Having one marijuana cigarette and one or two beers is not the same as having three beers. There is a multiplier involved. The impairment is severe. We do not have an effective roadside screening device, or other devices, that will detect that.

Government Orders

Why are we proceeding at this time? We do not have those answers. Why are we putting hundreds and thousands of people's health and lives at risk by going down that road?

I do not have that answer. I cannot give that answer to my constituents because the government has failed to provide that information to me as their representative. How can I in good conscience tell my constituents not to worry, that the Liberals have some secret plan that will overcome this fear that their children may be injured on the highways and that their spouses may be killed on the highways? How can I tell them not to worry, that the Liberals have a secret plan?

That is not good enough. Canadians are entitled to know what response the government will put in place if the law goes into effect and impaired driving through the use of drugs is increased.

I have another concern to which I still do not have an answer. Many people view marijuana as a harmless drug. We could speak to virtually any drug addiction counsellor. Marijuana, especially with the THC content that it has now, is an extremely physically addictive drug. There is no debate about that issue any more. It is an addictive drug. I do not know on what scale it is addictive, whether it is the same as heroin, cocaine, crack or crank, but the guidance counsellors and addiction counsellors say that it is addictive.

●(1735)

We are not dealing with a harmless drug and yet we do not have a local or national strategy to deal with the problem. Why are these issues not being raised and answered so that I can go back to my constituents and say that the Liberals are prepared to allow their children to become addicted but that they should not worry because the Liberals have a secret strategy in place to address this, a national secret strategy, and we should trust them?

In view of the Liberals' record over the past couple of months, I cannot go back to my constituents and ask them to trust the Liberals. They are not worthy. They have not earned it. They have lost the trust of Canadians.

The other concern I have is the issue dealing with methamphetamine and the soaking of marijuana in methamphetamine. I do not know if members know how horrible a drug methamphetamine is. On the street it is called crank or white ice. American officials who I dealt with back in 1997 through 1999 warned Canadians that this was coming. It was devastating rural America. These law enforcement agencies told me that what crack did to urban black areas, crank or this white ice will do it to blue collar, white, rural, small town America and Canada. It is happening. It certainly happened in the United States. What crack did not complete, crank is finishing in our rural areas and in our small towns. It is a horrible problem.

I will tell the House what crank or methamphetamine does to people. People do not just go on a 12 hour run with methamphetamine. They go on 30 day runs where they virtually do not sleep for 30 days. Does anyone know how they go to sleep? They take heroine to calm down so they can go to sleep. It is a horrible addictive drug. Now organized crime is soaking marijuana with methamphetamine.

These labs are nickel and dime labs. They can be set up virtually anywhere. They are set up in hotel rooms, in rented rooms,

anywhere. The ingredients are cheap and the process is simple. It is an explosive thing. It is a very dangerous thing to make methamphetamine. The explosions occur as quick as lightning and the death that follows from those explosions is immediate.

I have seen video tapes where the first responders go into a hotel room where the meth lab has been in the washroom and the explosion has occurred in the washroom. The person in the washroom is dead immediately. The person at the doorway staggers a step or two. The person on the bed who tries to make it to the door makes it about three or four steps. The gas kills immediately from those explosions.

We might say that those are the people involved in making this. Well, if we have no sympathy for those human beings, we should at least have sympathy for the first responders who open up the motel room door and are hit by that cloud. They die as surely as the drug dealers who are making the methamphetamine.

●(1740)

In 1997 and 1999, agencies in the United States told us that over 80% of all child welfare apprehensions in California were as a direct result of methamphetamine. There is an explosion in apprehending children from parents addicted to methamphetamine. I am certain that the rates would be similar in terms of crack use in urban America. Now we hear of the same problems developing in Canada.

The Americans back in those years were saying to us that they had outlawed the precursors, the ingredients to make methamphetamine, but the American drug dealers were coming across the border, especially from Montana, into Alberta, going into drug stores, literally cleaning out the shelves of over the counter drugs, boiling them down and using those ingredients back in the United States. We were oblivious to this problem. This problem is now hitting us with a vengeance.

One other area where methamphetamine has hit very hard in the United States, and it is finding its way into the same areas in Canada, is in our first nations communities. It has been a horrible problem in first nations communities across the United States and now it is coming here. We look at all the problems that some of our first nations communities have and now they are going to be met with this problem.

I am worried. We are moving in this direction with marijuana, marijuana soaked with methamphetamine which is addictive after one or two uses. It is almost certain that people will become addicted. Imagine kids trying marijuana soaked in methamphetamine, waking up and realizing they have a monkey on their backs, and it is a horrible monkey.

Government Orders

Where are the answers? The government has not provided me with those answers. How can I go back to my constituents and tell them not worry about these aspects because the Liberals have assured us that its drug policy will work? Will it work like their drug policy in east Vancouver, which now has the highest crime rate in property crime in North America second only to downtown Miami?

The people in organized crime are telling everyone that if they are caught with drugs anywhere in Canada they should waive those charges into British Columbia because they will never go to jail. The laws are not being enforced there. The judges are not enforcing them. The efforts of other judges in other areas of the country are being undermined as these charges are being waived into British Columbia, and judges there simply do not seem to care.

We need things like sentencing guidelines or minimum sentences to establish a floor right across the country so that if some judges do not care about our kids and our communities, at least Parliament says that they had better do their jobs by following these sentencing guidelines or these minimums. Why do we not see that in the bill?

Those are some of the questions that I have been asked by my constituents. How do I go back to my constituents and tell them to trust the government when the government simply does not have the answers? If the government has the answers it has not yet decided to share them with the opposition and with the people who we represent.

• (1745)

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Madam Speaker, my concern with the bill is that it would lessen the protection for our children, our vulnerable young people, by making it simply a fine for possessing and using drugs. I have two examples.

My niece in Saskatchewan, Kaila Hilstrom, who is a grade 12 student, says that in her school the kids who are using marijuana are the poorest ones in class. She says that they are dopey, do not necessarily show up in class and that the kids have divided themselves up into non-drug users and drug users. That is one problem I see, which is why we need to continue to tell these children that drugs are not good and to enforce it.

The second example, which the member will probably remember, is from the town of Winnipeg Beach in Manitoba. A father got so frustrated with the marijuana that was being supplied to his daughter in the small town of Winnipeg Beach that he was driven to taking a firearm and killing the drug dealer to save his daughter. The kind of message being sent out by the Liberal government is that parents just have to accept what it is going to do. It is going to tell their kids that it is okay to use drugs and that it will only be a fine.

Can the member comment on those two positions?

Mr. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, let me deal with the second issue. I think the issue of vigilantism deals with the fundamental question of what should a law be. What is the purpose of a law? A law needs to provide a level of comfort to people that they need not take the enforcement of justice into their own hands. When people are no longer confident that justice is being done in the court system because the laws are not being enforced, they will take that vigilante action.

I do not condone vigilante action. I think it is wrong because the very fabric of society is destroyed as a result of vigilante action. However there is a corresponding responsibility of government to enforce certain standards so people are confident that they do not have to resort to that kind of action.

We see that in our drug laws generally. That is something that will happen. It will spill over, not just into the enforcement of the drug laws, to which the situation in Winnipeg Beach refers, but the fact that there is no more protection for one's own property or the safety of one's own person. Once people and police lose confidence in the system, our society begins to break down. We need to address that, not simply for the sake of a few junkies or drug addicts but also for people in general in our communities.

With respect to the issue of kids dividing up into non-drug users and drug users, I think that is a very natural reaction. However this is not just young people saying that they think drugs are bad because they do not allow them to perform well in terms of school work. It is also in terms of their own protection. What they are doing is creating a gang to protect themselves because the system is not protecting them any more. These kids group together to protect themselves against the drug dealers and the drug users. That is the kind of message that is going out into our schools. We are talking about small rural communities, as well as large urban centres.

The government has not provided the answers as to what it is doing with its drug policy and the repercussions of that are that our children are having to band together to protect themselves because the government says that their interests are second to the interests of those who want to use drugs.

• (1750)

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, the sad part about all of this is that the House of Commons studied drugs for the first time in 1972 for 18 months and made 41 recommendations, many of which could have been implemented. The government looked at the recommendations and said that they were more conservative than they should be so it got rid of this issue and threw out the decriminalization of marijuana idea.

Meanwhile, as my colleague has just said, we in Canada suffer from the lack of a drug strategy. We suffer from many young people dying from and getting addicted to other serious drugs. The government is basically doing nothing about it. Canadians should know that the government's philosophy on drugs is probably one of the poorest in the world and that would include Holland.

One of the things that is a real problem with the bill is that the government will tell all Canadians that this marijuana bill will get tough on marijuana grow ops. It has put maximum penalties in place. There has not been a maximum penalty issued in British Columbia, as near as I can find, for about 10 years. That is under the old regime, so what the government is saying is that we will have penalties for \$25,000 for grow ops.

Government Orders

People will virtually walk away with a \$200 fine or a \$500 fine. In my area in particular, we have over 400 grow ops ruining houses for young people who are buying them. Crystal meth labs that the government is not even dealing with are ruining houses, and killing people and addicting kids at a faster rate than heroin.

I would like to ask my colleague, who is a former attorney general of Manitoba, a question. What purpose would a law serve if there is a maximum penalty or a ceiling on a penalty that says if there is a grow op of a certain number of stalks, the offender could be fined up to \$50,000 or X number of years in prison, when in the courtrooms many lawyers and judges are saying we should legalize it. The maximum penalty issue is not there because they are getting minimum penalties.

What is the purpose of establishing a law that in effect will not be applied?

Mr. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, the purpose is very evident. It is to mislead Canadians into thinking that the government is serious about the problem.

The Liberal government knows that judges will not impose maximum sentences. My colleague from Langley—Abbotsford has already indicated that, and I do not need to give him information on this because he has been at the forefront of this fight for a long time.

The Liberals know judges do not give maximum sentences, but they stand up and say they are getting tough. Look at the maximum sentence offenders could get. Yet, if they were asked about a six month or a one year minimum sentence for trafficking, well, they could not do that. They do not want to tie the hands of the judges.

This is a government that defers to the judiciary so it does not have to make the tough decisions. That is what the government is all about. It wants to be all things to all people. If we want to be Liberals, vote for them. If we want to be hard core Conservatives, well vote for them also because look how tough they are getting on crime.

Both the Liberals and Conservatives in society are being misled because the philosophy that the government adopts through its legislation does not rehabilitate, and does not punish or deter. It does absolutely nothing. What we get is the mess that we have now in east Vancouver.

• (1755)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague from Provencher gave an insightful speech to this legislation. I thought it was very informative unlike what is coming from the government side.

I would suggest to him that what the Liberals intend to do is what they always intended to do. Despite their so-called new Prime Minister and his so-called wanting to address the democratic deficit, he intends to have a whipped vote on this. He will ram it through with the majority of backbench Liberal members standing and voting for it even if they have the same concerns that the member for Provencher just expressed so well. Would he agree with that?

Mr. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, my colleague from Prince George, who has done such a good job for his constituents over the past 10 years, has expressed my concerns and my assessment of the

Liberal government very concisely. If we want change, we should not elect a Liberal.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Provencher for his speech. It was a tremendous wealth of information and knowledge. I was dismayed, as I looked across the way, to see that there was only one Liberal who was even paying half attention to what he had to say.

The message he shared earlier is very important. The people who are trying to make the decisions, as my other colleague pointed out, will be whipped in their vote very shortly. They need to listen to what the member for Provencher had to say about the issue of marijuana decriminalization.

We are debating Bill C-10, which will amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act with respect to the possession and production of marijuana.

What is the objective of the legislation? As I look through it, the objective is really not clear. What should the objective be of legislation dealing with drugs in our society? The best objective would be to remove the influence of addictive substances from people's lives as much as possible. That would be a noble goal if we were writing legislation dealing with addictive substances.

What do we do with addictive substances in other areas? An obvious example would be tobacco. Over the last 10 or 15 years we have seen what the government has done to the tobacco industry. It basically destroyed the industry. It spent billions of dollars trying to stop people from smoking cigarettes. It applied heavy taxation to the industry in order to ruin it. In many ways it has been successful. That was a good goal: to get people away from smoking.

The second example is alcohol. The government has a program, which is not as extensive as that of tobacco. The objective is to restrict the consumption of alcohol to some extent. It does that through taxation and restrictions on advertising.

When it comes to soft and hard drugs, we seem to have a different situation. When we look at hard drugs, the experiments we have been conducting in Vancouver have been a failure. The member for Langley—Abbotsford is familiar with that.

I found it interesting that even the United Nations is calling our small drug plan a failure. In fact, the International Narcotics Control Board condemned the experiment that is going on in Vancouver. It took aim at us in a number of ways, particularly the lack of a drug strategy in this country.

I want to talk a little bit about its criticism of the government initiative that was launched. It argued a couple of different things. First, the Vancouver safe injection site, which opened only last September, violated the fundamental principle that elicit drugs should only be used for medicinal or scientific purposes. It went on to talk quite a bit about that.

Government Orders

When drug abusers can acquire illicit drugs and take them into premises which are managed by the state or the town, there is definitely complicity. It could not accept that under the international drug control convention. That is the United Nations speaking, which is definitely not a Conservative organization.

Second, it took issue with the proposed changes that the government was making to the federal marijuana laws. The government claimed it would contribute to the mistaken perception that cannabis was a harmless substance. The United Nations was concerned about the type of leadership the government was failing to show.

The board was also opposed to the medical use of marijuana, which has been another failed experiment of the government, until its efficacy as a treatment could be determined. When we look at what the government has proposed so far, even the international community sees it as a complete and total failure.

We move on from hard drugs to marijuana use. What is the government doing in terms of marijuana? Its policy looks just as schizophrenic as it is in other areas. On the one hand it is trying to leave the impression with the public that it is fighting drug use, but with its legislation it seems to be saying it really encourages it.

I want to talk about some of the provisions in Bill C-10 and discuss where the bill will be taking us. The bill amends the law with respect to the production of marijuana. Apparently the production of marijuana is an offence that will be punishable by up to seven years imprisonment.

We will hear a lot about "up to" in a few minutes. The proposed legislation breaks down the sentencing in two or three different ways. One of the things that it says is that an individual found growing just one to three plants will face summary conviction with a fine of not more than \$500. Four to 25 plants would constitute an offence punishable by up to \$25,000 and/or 18 months in jail. Growing 26 to 50 plants would result in a sentence of up to 10 years and the growing of more than 50 plants would be 14 years.

• (1800)

As we have said this afternoon, and we will continue to say, one of the problems is that there are no minimum sentences in this legislation. We have seen this in so many other pieces of legislation that the government has brought forward. It has happened one more time here. Basically, with no minimums, we are sending no message. We get things like conditional sentencing, house arrest, and small fines. The penalties are just not appropriate for the crime that has taken place.

I think that in a lot of ways the government has just given up. It really has. It has decided that it will not fight this battle anymore. What this society does not need now is one more way to get high. It is not as if this society is not being provided with enough options as it is.

The bill provides a whole new system of fines for the possession of marijuana. The possession of between 15 and 30 grams of marijuana is left up to the police officer as to whether a ticket will be issued or a summons for a summary conviction. With no minimum sentencing, we would expect that police would likely turn to whatever the judges were enforcing. It would seem to be that police

would be just giving out tickets and nothing more because the judges would not enforce it if the police did anything more than that.

Possession of one gram or less of cannabis resin would be punishable by a fine of \$300 for an adult and \$200 for a youth. That sends a tremendous negative message to our youth. It actually encourages them to use drugs. It encourages adults to use our youth to use drugs as well. Those are maximum fines. The younger people would be encouraged then by the older people to carry the drugs and have them in their possession because their fines would be less.

Possession of 15 grams or less of marijuana under this legislation would be punishable by a fine of only \$150 for an adult and \$100 for a youth. Again, those are maximum fines, so it basically wipes out any penalty at all for using marijuana.

This legislation is really flawed. Despite what people say, we all know that marijuana is a gateway drug. If young people are going to start using drugs, marijuana is the drug of choice. It is the drug that they are usually first exposed to and the drug that they use to begin to get high. This legislation sends the wrong message to our young people.

Penalties for the production of marijuana have actually decreased. That is not something we want to have happen and that is something that the government is claiming is not true. However, where small amounts of marijuana are being produced, which would probably be most of the local, homegrown operations, the penalties are decreased. It encourages people to get involved in it.

One of the concerns that I have, and we heard about it this afternoon as well, is that there are a lot of young people who do not want to use drugs. They feel they are being put in a tough situation. Peer pressure comes into play, the other kids are saying they can use it, it is not a big threat, the government and adults do not seem to be worried about it, so they go ahead and use it.

I have young people who tell me they do not want to be using drugs. They are living in an environment where more and more younger people around them are trying to push them into it. It is not as if they do not have enough peer pressure to take up some of these choices as it is. Therefore, it is not wise for the government to be setting up a situation where our young people are actually being pressured into using more drugs.

One of the problems with the bill is that it provides absolutely no resources for police to begin to track down organized crime. We all know that organized crime is involved with a lot of the grow operations. It is making billions of dollars off this industry. The government has come out with legislation that basically decriminalizes marijuana possession, but it does not give the police anything in terms of being able to enforce the legislation.

The fines set out in the bill are low to begin with, but one of the other problems is that they do not increase with subsequent offences. There is no incentive for people to get away from dealing drugs and living in that environment. Repeat offenders must face more serious consequences if they are going to continue to break the law.

Government Orders

There are no law enforcement tools in the bill. The Liberals have gone ahead and liberalized our drug laws without providing the police with the tools they need.

One of the areas where police will not be able to do their job is in roadside assessments. If we are going to have people driving around and doing drugs, we need to determine at some point if they are impaired or not. This legislation gives absolutely no direction or help to the police when they stop people to see whether they are impaired.

That is one of the points that the Canadian Alliance made and, now as the Conservative Party, continues to make. There needs to be some way of determining whether someone is impaired at the roadside before we take a look at changing our marijuana laws.

• (1805)

The bill also encourages trafficking. By decriminalizing possession of 30 grams or less, the Liberals have made it easier for traffickers to operate and have removed the fear of any real sanction on these people when they move their drugs. Thirty grams of marijuana can provide as many as 60 joints. That is certainly enough to make a fairly good salary if people are selling them to their friends and neighbours. We just see that everything about this bill encourages our young people to move in a direction in their lives in which they do need to move.

Another big concern is that the Liberals do not have a national drug strategy. There is nothing in place to enable them to deal with the problems that would come out of decriminalizing marijuana,

We understand, and I hope they do as well, that there will be consequences to this decriminalization. There will be more drug use. There will be consequences within families and consequences within communities. I suggest that we will see an increase in crime as well. The Liberals do not have a strategy to deal with that. As my colleague from Provencher mentioned earlier, if they do have a strategy, they are keeping it secret from all of us. The last thing we need is for the Liberal government to be keeping secrets on any level from anyone.

Another interesting issue is that there has been no legislation developed to curtail financial institutions from funding mortgages relating to grow ops. There are companies that are well aware that grow ops are concentrated in certain areas. There are financial institutions that are willing to finance those buildings because they understand they will get their money back fairly quickly. Something needs to be done to deal with the financial institutions. If they are aware of what is going on in those houses and buildings and they are not turning people over to the police, then we need to have some legislation to deal with that.

One of the other problems has been the judiciary. We need a commitment from the judges that they will begin to enforce the legislation as it stands. Unfortunately, with the lack of minimum penalties, the judges will not be enforcing this in any way that will bring any kind of fear to anyone who is involved in this activity.

No provisions have been made to deal with the increasing toxicity of marijuana. Over the years marijuana has become stronger. The drug the government thinks it is decriminalizing in fact is not the drug that it is decriminalizing. It has become much more toxic and much more addictive over the years. The government needs to be

ready to deal with the problems that arise from that. Added to that is the problem of the marijuana and methamphetamine being mixed together.

The Conservative Party has some solutions. We are opposed to the open-ended decriminalization of marijuana. There are things that need to happen in this country with regard to marijuana. One of them is that the use and possession of marijuana must remain illegal. Possession of more than five grams of marijuana must be considered a criminal offence.

Fines for possession of marijuana should increase significantly for subsequent offences. If someone insists on going back to the well, that person should pay an ever increasing price for doing that.

One of the key things is roadside assessment. We need some way to determine if people are impaired. We know that if we decriminalize marijuana, people will be taking it and likely will be driving their vehicles. We have to give our law enforcement officers the tools they need in order to do those assessments before we change this law. We do not have those tools or that ability to determine impairment at the roadside. The government should put this law on hold until they have those tools and the police are given the resources that they need.

The Canadian Alliance was consistent throughout its history. We had a good position. Our new party has a very similar position, which is that possession of greater than five grams of marijuana must be considered a criminal offence.

We want fines specified in amounts and increased significantly for subsequent offences. We need to vigorously enforce fine payments. We need appropriate roadside assessment practices. We need improved and stronger prosecution and sentencing practices, agreed upon between the federal government and the provinces. It has been good to see that the Conservative Party is taking a strong stand against this legislation.

• (1810)

I need to ask the question, why are we here? Is this an issue that is spellbinding for Canadians and holding their attention? It really is not. There are a lot of other important issues that need to be dealt with and the government seems to be setting those aside. Unfortunately, it seems to have no direction. The only legislation the government has brought forward in the last few months has been reworked legislation from prior sessions. The government does not seem to have any real goal or direction.

Fortunately, the official opposition has taken the leadership in a lot of areas. One of them is agriculture. We have waited almost 10 months for the government to do something about the BSE problem in this country. The government has basically done nothing. It came out with a couple of programs. The money was absorbed. It disappeared and we really do not know where it went. We have sat through this session waiting for the agriculture minister and the department to make some commitment to people and to farmers who are stressed and there has been nothing.

Government Orders

The opposition has stepped forward in many areas but particularly in agriculture. We have come out with a good plan. I am sure members are interested in hearing some examples of what the opposition would do if we were government. There are a number of things the opposition would do.

We would top up CFIP. In the last few years the government has shorted farmers. It told them it would pay them so much money and when the time came, it shorted them of their money. We would put in enough money to pay out 100%.

We would top up the new CAIS program to try to make it work for farmers. We do not believe it is a good program, but maybe with some more money in it and some of our suggested changes, it could possibly be a good program for farmers.

We have suggested things like putting some money into increasing processing capacity. We have called for a cull of cows. That needs to be done to bring the numbers down to a place where the market can begin to respond.

Agriculture is just one of the areas on which the Conservative Party has taken a strong stand and shown some tremendous leadership.

I am disappointed in the government. I look to it to lead the country. We heard this afternoon in question period that sponsorship money has disappeared in two more places. The *Bluenose* has been a Canadian icon. For some reason the government committed money to it but the money never showed up. It disappeared. Today the minister said he does not know where it is. The government is going to launch legal action but it has no idea what happened to the money. We heard later in question period that the government committed money to the Pan Am games in Canada. Did the cheque get there? Only a very small part of it was received.

It is frustrating for Canadians who are facing the issues every day, paying their taxes and being threatened if they do not. Over the last year and a half we have seen, particularly with EI and the GST, people going after ordinary folks if they have not received every cent from them. Those folks are paying their taxes, living their lives, trying to get ahead, and the government continually disappoints them.

Defence issues arise weekly. We have submarines that do not immerse. We have planes that do not fly. We have trucks that do not move. We just heard today that the government sent troops on a training exercise, gave them their \$50 per diem and after the training exercise, turned around and told the corporals that they would just get \$17 a day. At the same time the bureaucrats on the other side are dining out. There are no restrictions on what they are doing but those poor soldiers are required to pay the money back. We would expect the government to at least listen and do something about that.

The government is not dealing with the issues of leadership in this country right now. It is foundering. It is incompetent. It is corrupt. It is disappointing to see that it has pushed ahead with legislation like this—

• (1815)

Hon. Sue Barnes: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I heard words that I do not believe are parliamentary language.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): I would ask hon. members to please remain calm. I realize that this is an emotional issue. I would ask the hon. member to try to stay within the confines of parliamentary language.

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, I have a question. Was the unparliamentary language the word “incompetent” or was it the word “corrupt”?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): It is getting late in the day and people's tempers are flaring. I would ask the member to be cautious of the language.

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, I am not emotional about this at all. I see those as statements of fact. I am encouraged by the Liberal cabinet minister across the way who actually found himself involved in the sponsorship scandal telling us that he thinks that we are not going to be—

Hon. Joe Jordan: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think that we have certainly allowed a lot of leeway in terms of the breadth of discussion in the debate today.

I think when you, Madam Speaker, ask hon. members to be cautious in their language and they come back with a retort that it is a statement of fact, they are questioning your ruling. I would suggest you check the blues because I think we have a case of not only unparliamentary language but complete disregard for the authority of the Chair.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Thank you for your comments. I will take that into consideration.

Hon. Sue Barnes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I look forward to your looking into that matter.

I have sat here all day. We started the day in the chamber doing third reading debate on a very important bill for the government, Bill C-10. It is a bill on which many people have worked long and hard. The chamber was engaged and all parties were working together debating the objectives of the bill. We also heard the dissenting viewpoint from a party but we were debating at third reading stage so we could go to the vote at third reading.

This afternoon we saw the use of a valid procedural tool, a hoist motion. What I have been listening to for the last number of hours was not the debate on the bill but the debate on the hoist motion, which would put this bill on hold for six months. It was perfectly legitimate to move that motion. That is not a problem.

However, I have been listening attentively to every speech today. I have been listening as a representative of constituents who have the same concerns for community safety, the same concerns about grow operations, the same concerns about young people and education. I wanted to hear a valid reason for not proceeding with the bill, for not proceeding to the vote on the bill, for not moving the legislation forward.

Government Orders

Even though all parties in the chamber have been engaged in third reading debate, surprisingly I have been listening to one party debate this motion. This motion was not about the bill, it was about the motion to hoist the bill, to delay it. That is the position of the opposite side. What have I also heard members opposite say? I have heard them say that mandatory minimums are the solution.

Perhaps we should look at one state in the United States because they refer to that country a lot. California has some of these three strikes and you are out bills. What do we see there? We see a state that spends more money on incarceration than it does on education, which is a shame because it does not work. If it worked, perhaps I would be willing to embrace something like it, but what works is really important.

I listened to the debate all afternoon. Members were talking about the government allowing or encouraging certain things. That is not so. In fact, I have only heard that type of message from the opposition. In reality all we are doing in the bill is making the sanction efficient and consistent in a manner that police organizations and prosecutors across the country will be able to free up the resources in the courts and make it a ticketing offence on the streets. If a minor were involved, the parents might be advised, something along those lines, something that might have an impact on young people.

I have heard the criticism about the differential in the fine rates between the younger person and the adult. Maybe we want the young person involved in paying the fines. Maybe these sanctions are not about putting kids in the cycle of not being able to pay fines and therefore escalating a system that does not work.

Millions of dollars for the drug strategy have been announced. It is very difficult to get the honest answer out if misinformation is put on the table and I have seen that strategy used before in other areas where it has failed. In fact, on other bills there have been lots of strategies used. I can remember a time when I stood as the chair of the aboriginal affairs—

• (1820)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): With all due respect, there are a number of members who wish to ask questions. I would appreciate it if the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada would ask her question or shorten her comments. There are a number of people waiting.

Hon. Sue Barnes: Madam Speaker, I believe I have up to 10 minutes for questions and comments.

An hon. member: No, you don't.

Hon. Sue Barnes: I will put my question then to the hon. member, seeing as Madam Speaker wants to limit my involvement, even though I have sat here all day.

I will ask the member how he can justify not giving the judges discretion—

Mr. John Williams: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I find it rather strange that the hon. member is taking issue with the rulings from the Chair. The fact that she has been here all day, she has had every opportunity like every other member to speak

whenever she has wanted to speak. I would suggest that the Chair ensures that the member stays to relevant issues.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Thank you for your valued advice. I am quite capable of knowing when I am in the wrong position here. The hon. member has the floor for a few brief moments. We do have other questions.

Hon. Sue Barnes: Madam Speaker, does the hon. member find that there is a place for the justice and the judiciary to take into account the individual situations of those people standing before it in a courtroom, so they can use their judicial discretion when they go to sentencing?

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, we are not opposed to the use of the judiciary. We are opposed to the abuse by the judiciary of some of the lack of minimums and lack of sentencing commitments.

If the members opposite were as interested in debate as they were on points of order, we would have had a good debate this afternoon. It took a little controversy to stir them up to where they would even get out of their seats. It has been frustrating that we are the only ones who have been debating the issue throughout the day.

I will leave it at that. I know there are other people who want to ask questions.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is interesting that once in a while we get an intervention from the other side. However, there have been basically no speeches from over there. I guess it shows the lack of understanding, although the hon. member across the way tried to explain what the government was doing. The lack of understanding of what we are saying shows that this is not going to register well with most Canadians.

The government has brought in a bill to decriminalize marijuana. It has not got straight the amounts that it is decriminalizing. It has options. The fines differ for young people and older people for some reason. They have put maximum penalties instead of minimums because the judiciary is not giving anywhere close to the maximums.

The government has not addressed the roadside assessment capability of drugged driving and drunk driving and a combination thereof. It has not dealt with the severe damage, and there goes the member. The member does not even stay in the House.

• (1825)

Hon. Joe Jordan: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The offences pile up. The member has been here long enough and he knows that he cannot refer to the absence or the presence of a member opposite in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): If the hon. member will bear that in mind, please continue and stay within the rules.

Mr. Randy White: Madam Speaker, they are getting a little excited. The problem is there are all kinds of flaws with the bill. There are issues that are not dealt with in the bill.

Adjournment

The government has not even looked at crystal meth. It has not looked at grow ops or roadside assessment. It has not looked at the damage done in the country by way of heroin and cocaine. It has not looked at advertising to young people and to those who are doing it. It has not looked at the mess that Correctional Service Canada and Health Canada have created.

I would ask my colleague this. We come to the House of Commons in a partisanship way. Why can we not as adult politicians in this place come together and try to get a national drug strategy that is meaningful to all Canadians, young people and their parents? Why can we not do that together instead of a government—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands has 30 seconds to respond.

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge my colleague from Langley—Abbotsford and the years of dedication he has put into the whole issue of drugs and prisons. He certainly deserves the applause he is getting.

Once again I will just say that unfortunately we are dealing with a government that is in disarray. It is more interested in looking ahead and trying to campaign than it is in governing the country, and that is to the loss of everyone in the country.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Resuming debate for three minutes, the hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, although I am allocated three minutes, I believe I have a further 17 when we again resume debate.

In the next three minutes I will again try to summarize what the problem is. My colleague from Crowfoot and I spent about 18 months on a committee that we initiated in the House of Commons. The government had no impetus whatsoever to initiate a drug strategy or an investigation into the drug situation in Canada. We had to do that from opposition.

At the end of the committee, we had 41 recommendations, many of which I and my colleague subscribed to and some of which we did not. By the way, the overriding recommendation was that abstinence would be the overriding policy throughout the drug strategy. We found out subsequent to that, that the government was into safe injection houses and that it was supporting all kinds of harm reduction techniques. What the government did was take these recommendations, set them aside and brought in this little bill on the decriminalization of marijuana. For goodness sake, I do not know what motivates those people on the other side.

We are talking of hundreds, if not close to one or two thousand people dying every year from the overdose of drugs. If it were from being shot, there would have been a bill effectively dealing with that. If it were for other reasons and if that many people were dying every year, there would have bills all over the place. Instead the government lets this stuff die on the side.

I do not understand for a minute why the government will not deal with crystal meth addiction, with cocaine addiction and with heroin addiction by advertising to our young people, and not through bureaucrats but through the Canadian Medical Association, the people to whom young people will listen. I do not understand why those issues are not dealt with by the government.

During our discussions in the drug committee, time and time again my colleague and I tried to point the committee in the right direction. We found two departments getting the bulk of the money. We also found that, without exception, everybody on the committee freely admitted that those two departments were the worst offending departments. They had no idea where they were going. They had no objectives. They did not know what they were accomplishing or where they were spending the money. What happened? The government came out later on and said that it would give \$248 million to these two departments.

The failure is in government. Again it is the government's spending habits about which my colleague just spoke.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

CANADA CUSTOMS AND REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Madame Speaker, on February 27, I asked the Minister of National Revenue a question, but the President of the Treasury Board answered. My question mentioned that 22,000 members of the Union of Taxation Employees and the Public Service Alliance of Canada were engaged in negotiations at that time and were asking the employer to remain at the bargaining table, as it was feared that negotiations would come to a halt if an election was called in early May.

The President of the Treasury Board gave the following answer:

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to say that we are in bargaining with our employees. I am not going to discuss those issues here in the House. They are issues that are to be discussed at the tables. There is a process for that.

I am sure the very competent leadership in our unions and in the department will conduct this in a professional manner rather than in the way it is conducted on the floor of the House. This is not where we bargain.

I never asked the President of the Treasury Board to bargain here in the House. I asked him to send the parties to the bargaining table. I agree with him that bargaining takes place at the bargaining table.

We were not trying to negotiate on their behalf, but it must be kept in mind that the new Prime Minister of Canada has said he wanted to freeze public service salaries. These people are worried, when the new PM then turns around and gives his senior staff or ministerial assistants increased of 32%, while public servants are getting 1%.

This is not the negotiation public service workers wanted. They wanted to negotiate, to come to the bargaining table. This is where the government can get involved. One can only conclude that, when it comes down to it, the government is the one paying, and it is the one halting the negotiations.

Adjournment

My question to the minister was about returning to the bargaining table. If the minister had been listening that day, he would have understood the question. It is a matter of getting back to the bargaining table and negotiating in good faith.

For example, it is unacceptable to have a 1% increase in Bathurst, New Brunswick, while it is 1.5% in Ottawa. Gas costs the same everywhere. In fact, I would say it costs even more in Bathurst, New Brunswick than in Ottawa, Hull or Gatineau.

The question is clear. It is a matter of getting back to the bargaining table, and staying there until a collective agreement is reached.

I would like to hear the parliamentary secretary, who is here this evening, reply on behalf of the government. I know that he has a prepared response, but I would like to hear what he has to say about what was asked, that is about getting back to the negotiations.

• (1835)

[*English*]

Hon. Joe Jordan (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I hope I can shed a little light on the specifics of my hon. colleague's question.

Since last August, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency has been engaged in collective bargaining negotiations with members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

The CCRA is committed to bargain in good faith in a modern, transparent manner. We respect the role of the unions in collective bargaining. At the same time, our responsibility is to uphold the business obligations of the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and satisfy the rights and obligations of our employees.

In 1999, when the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency became an agency, it also became a separate employer. This meant that the Treasury Board Secretariat would no longer conduct collective bargaining negotiations on our behalf.

However, according to the CCRA Act, Bill C-43, the CCRA was required to consult Treasury Board on our human resources plan, including collective bargaining and salary issues.

Recently, at the union's request, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency did agree to continue negotiations using a conciliation process. The parties met the week of February 16, 2004 with the assistance of a conciliation officer. Progress was made and the parties agreed to meet again to continue the conciliation process the week of March 15, 2004. Under the terms of this process, the Public Service Staff Relations Board determines the dates of the hearings in consultation with the CCRA and the union.

The Public Service Alliance has complained that the CCRA is bargaining in bad faith because negotiations are proceeding too slowly. I think most would agree that collective bargaining is never a speedy process.

I would like to reassure the House that CCRA employees will not be inconvenienced as they will continue to work under the terms and conditions of the previous agreement. The new agreement will provide a retroactive salary adjustment.

The CCRA is doing its best to bargain in good faith and is not trying to delay the process. Last August, when negotiations began, the union agreed to the timetable for meetings. In fact, at the union's request, the CCRA added two extra days and adjusted the schedule to accommodate union requests.

The CCRA has successfully concluded two previous collective bargaining agreements as an agency. The CCRA is committed to achieving a fair settlement for its employees. I am confident that will successfully conclude this agreement to everyone's satisfaction.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Madam Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board has said in his answer on behalf of the minister he represents that there will be negotiations on March 15. It is now March 8. There has been no negotiation for over two weeks. A collective agreement cannot be negotiated when each party stays in its own office. Negotiation takes place around a negotiating table.

When we see the Prime Minister's flip flop, giving 32% increases to those working close to him, while others are dragging along with 1%, it is obvious that the Prime Minister, or the Liberal government, is not prepared to negotiate now, before an election. They are dragging their feet, that is not returning to the table. Negotiating is not done at home, nor in separate offices. Negotiations take place around a table. That is the reason for the term negotiating table. That is the only place negotiations can take place.

That is why the union is saying that the negotiations are not in good faith, because of the impending election. People do not have to wait seven or eight months for a collective agreement. A new one ought to be negotiated even before the old one has expired—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The honourable Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board.

[*English*]

Hon. Joe Jordan: Madam Speaker, I think I also said in the answer that the timetable for meetings was something that was determined through the conciliation process and agreed to by both sides.

Clearly the government has a responsibility to enter into good faith negotiations and reach fair settlements for employees while at the same time balancing its responsibilities to the tax treasury.

I would end by cautioning my friend that I think we are all interested in an outcome here, but I do not think we serve that process by trying to micromanage it on the floor of the House of Commons.

Adjournment

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Madam Speaker, on February 27, I asked the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada about the situation in southern New Brunswick, where hundreds, if not thousands, of people had supposedly banked or accumulated hours.

My question was as follows. Did the minister agree that the other people, caught in the same situation, should also have their cases reconsidered?

For example, is the government prepared to act retroactively and give money back to people from Richibouctou-Village, Petit-Rocher, Tracadie-Sheila, Caraquet and Lameque, New Brunswick, who got caught in the same situation with regard to banked hours, wherever they might be?

This evening, I spoke to someone in my riding. In 2001, these people—there were 200 forestry workers in the region—were caught by employment insurance for doing the very same thing. They were from Cap-Pelé. They had to repay the government between \$10,000 and \$15,000. They received employment insurance benefits of \$18 per week. They had to accumulate twice the number of required hours.

My questions are the following: Is there a double standard? Why did the government take this decision right now? If the government acknowledges that there is a problem with banking hours, that there is a problem with the small weeks, why does it not change the legislation immediately and return this money retroactively to people who had this employment insurance problem across Canada, whether construction workers in Toronto or Alberta, people working in fish plants, or forestry workers? It is not fair and it is not right that the problem was resolved only in Cap-Pelé. The problem has to be resolved across Canada. It is a problem for which the federal government has a national responsibility, not just in one riding or region of the country. People are suffering and they want there to be justice everywhere.

Will the government act retroactively and resolve the problem for everyone who was caught with respect to banking hours?

• (1840)

[English]

Hon. Sue Barnes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would be happy to give my hon. colleague a response. The government is committed to ensuring that employment insurance remains responsive to the needs of all Canadians and that is why the Canada Employment Insurance Commission monitors and assesses the program each and every year.

The commission recognizes that some regions and groups of workers such as seasonal workers can face very particular challenges. The member should know that the government has not stopped working with all the various partners, because we know that workers in seasonal industries want more opportunity to work. The Government of Canada will continue to stimulate local economies to provide sustainable employment opportunities.

However, the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development is responsible for administering and protecting the integrity of EI benefits in a way that is fair to all contributors. EI is a national program. As such, the government has an obligation to ensure that the program is administered fairly and that employers and employees adhere to the regulations governing the program. Because of this, investigations take place regularly on all sorts of issues related to EI in all parts of the country.

Let us be clear on one thing, and I believe the member would know this: the vast majority of claimants are honest, but for the very few, the minority who are not, the department has programs in place to detect fraud as well as prevent and deter fraudulent activity.

To protect the integrity of the EI fund, the department of HRSD conducts investigations into suspected fraud and abuse of the EI program as well as performing an educational program for employers and claimants on their rights and obligations.

The department does conduct several investigations of varying degrees in EI every year. It stands to reason that some of these investigations are more complex than others.

With regard to the specific issue of banking of hours raised by this member, investigations into this practice have been regularly conducted both prior to and since the 1996 legislative reform, in all parts of the country and in a variety of industries.

Just like the bulk of investigations done by the department, I imagine some of the investigations into banking of hours are more complex than others, but I think it is worth mentioning that I am not an investigator nor do I imagine that the hon. member is an investigator in these matters, so it is difficult for either of us to say that two separate investigations should yield a similar or same result. I would imagine that if there are different facts they yield, in different and changing situations, different conclusions. In fact, it is rather presumptuous of us to assume that anyone who is not part of the investigation team could draw such a link.

The bottom line is that each case is individual and decisions regarding consequences are made on a case by case basis by the EI commission at the conclusion of its investigations. The member opposite should know that EI legislation provides for all sorts of consequences, including overpayments, fines, penalties and violations as well as criminal prosecutions that may result in imprisonment. There is quite a range, so I do not think that it is very easy for us here to compare one investigation to another. I hope this assists the member opposite.

• (1845)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Not at all, Madam Speaker; the hon. parliamentary secretary is missing the point.

The federal government recognized that there was a problem in the southeast of the province, but rather than go after the employees, it decided to go after the employers, and not just one case at a time but as a group of 1,500 to 2,000.

Adjournment

The parliamentary secretary is not saying what happened. The member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac directed the question to the minister, who said he would negotiate. He did not say he would not obey the law, but that he would negotiate with the employers to pay the debt.

Will everyone be treated the same way or will only a few people in one corner of a province or a small village be treated that way? Now, in many ridings, people are asking for justice for all workers. It goes without saying that people are abusing the system. The government recognizes that employment insurance is not—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

[*English*]

Hon. Sue Barnes: Madam Speaker, I will just reiterate that every investigation is unique. Every fact situation is unique. We are well aware that seasonal workers have a special challenge. They do face special challenges and we will continue to work with all of the people in the region.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to order made on Tuesday, February 24, 2004.

(The House adjourned at 6:47 p.m.)

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