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Monday, October 5, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 5, 2009

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: It being 11 a.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CANADIAN NORTHWEST PASSAGE

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 387

That, in the opinion of the House, as the various waterways known as the "Northwest Passage" are historic internal waters of Canada, the government should endeavour to refer to these waterways as the "Canadian Northwest Passage".

He said: Mr. Speaker, several months ago a constituent dropped into my office with a concern. He had just returned from a tour of the Northwest Passage, something literally unthinkable a number of years ago. He said to me, personally, "Daryl, in the past this certainly would not have been possible, but now with the specialized vessels and the changing climatic conditions, this tour has become a conditional reality". He questioned why this historical internal waterway was not known as what we all believe it to be, the Canadian Northwest Passage. To him it was obvious. I could not agree more. That is why I rise today to emphatically and proudly state that all reference to what some call the Northwest Passage should now and in the future be referred to as the Canadian Northwest Passage.

The Arctic is a fundamental part of Canada's history, and certainly a priority in our government's actions on foreign policy. It is central to our national identity. Canadians see in our north an expression of our deepest aspirations, our sense of exploration, the beauty and the bounty of our land and our limitless potential. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs has said:

Canada's sovereignty over the lands and waters of the Canadian Arctic is long-standing, well-established on historic title.

The area is also an emerging region on the verge of major change. Sea ice has steadily decreased in the Canadian Arctic and this trend

is likely to continue. As it does, shipping in the Arctic could become significantly less costly.

The various waterways known to some as the Northwest Passage are opening up for longer periods in the summer and their use is gaining international attention. Our sovereignty over these waters is not contested. Our government has repeatedly made it clear that the waters of the Canadian archipelago are internal waters of Canada by virtue of historic title, and we will protect them and exercise our sovereignty over them. Building the Canadian north is an essential part of building our nation. The government clearly understands the potential of the north, perhaps more than any other government before it.

The internal character of the Northwest Passage is derived from historic title and not the drawings of base lines around the Canadian Arctic archipelago or the amount of ice in Canada's Arctic. Though the ice levels have changed, it has no bearing on Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic and the government will continue to protect our Arctic.

The issue with the United States over the various waterways known as the Northwest Passage relates only to navigation rights in these waters and not to whom the waters belong. To be clear, no one disputes that the waters are Canadian. The United States contends that an international strait runs through these waters, which would limit Canada's right to regulate navigation. This government does not agree. I do not agree and I would certainly hope our colleagues on all sides of the House do not agree. We have made it collectively clear that the waters of the Canada Archipelago are internal waters of Canada. Our legal position is well founded in fact, in history, in tradition and in law.

The United States argues that the Northwest Passage is a strait used for international navigation, and according to this view, foreign-flagged ships have the right of transit through these waters. The answer to such arguments is that our historic title, as well as the absence of any regular international shipping, undermines any characterization of these waters as an international strait. With the exception of sporadic voyages by specialized vessels at a very tight framed time of year, the Northwest Passage has never been used for international shipping.

Canada has been clear that the waters of the Canadian archipelago are internal waters of Canada by virtue of historic title. In 1985 a U.S. icebreaker called the *Polar Sea* transited the Northwest Passage. Three years later Canada and the U.S. entered into the Canada-U.S. Arctic cooperation agreement.

Private Members' Business

The U.S. government pledged that navigation of all U.S. icebreakers within waters claimed by Canada to be internal, including the Northwest Passage, would be undertaken with the consent of the Government of Canada. We agreed to disagree without prejudice to the positions of our respective governments. Quite frankly, this has worked very well for both of us.

To be clear, the single disagreement over the waterways known as the Northwest Passage relates only to their legal classification and the navigation rights in these waters, not to whom the waters belong. We are confident that our position is well-founded in fact and law, and well recognized by all the signatories of the circumpolar convention, which the United States has yet to sign.

The fact that the waterways known as the Northwest Passage are internal waters means that they are subject to full regulation and control by Canada. The drawing of the base lines around the Arctic archipelago was done to clarify the extent of these historic internal waters under the Oceans Act of Canada. As a consequence, all waters landward of the base lines, meaning those inside the base lines, form part of Canada's sovereign territory, which makes them no different than Lake Winnipeg, Great Slave Lake or Lac Saint-Jean.

International law does not allow for passage into the waters of the Arctic archipelago enclosed within the base lines without Canadian permission. As a matter of policy, Canada is willing to permit international navigation in and through the Northwest Passage so long as the conditions established by Canada are there to protect the security, environment and interests of the Inuit.

Our government currently has legislation, policies and programs in place that allow us to monitor and control the waters of the Canadian Arctic and to ensure that these interests are protected. For example, these measures include pollution monitoring and control under the terms of the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, air surveillance, a system of notification before ships enter Canadian waters, as well as ice information and ice-breaking services, which have been used on a number of occasions to help those in distress.

As marine traffic to the north increases, this government will adapt the regulations and the systems already in place to continue to protect Canadian interests in its environment and its people. While previous governments of many stripes talked a lot about Arctic actions, we are taking action. This government has taken real action and is making real investments to protect our north.

Our government has continued to exercise control over Canadian internal waters, including the Northwest Passage, by providing for Arctic patrol ships and expanding aerial surveillance. We have continued to invest in our Arctic by building a new docking and refueling facility; by increasing the size and capacity of the Canadian Rangers, our feet on the ground there, with their own local and personal knowledge; by setting aside specific land for Nahanni National Park; and by establishing a deepwater port in Nanisivik on Baffin Island, which will extend the operational range of the navy in the Arctic.

It is the reduction of the Arctic ice and the increased opportunity for shipping that is attracting attention to the international waterways, known by some as the Northwest Passage. Though the ice in

Canada's Arctic has reduced significantly over the past few years, the Northwest Passage is not likely to be a reliable commercial shipping route for decades to come, if ever.

Indeed, between 1903 and 2008, only 113 distinct vessels sailed through the Northwest Passage, amounting to a total of 254 transits in that time. One hundred and thirteen of these transits were made by Canadian Coast Guard vessels for proprietary use. This does not amount to being a strait used for international navigation.

• (1110)

The various waterways known collectively as the Northwest Passage are internal waters over which Canada exercises full sovereignty. Canada enforces laws protecting the region, and as a matter of policy, allows foreign ships to pass through the Northwest Passage so long as the conditions established by Canada are respected. In short, the Northwest Passage is, and always will be, Canadian. Our government will always protect the interests of the north.

As such, Motion No. 387 seeks to reinforce our sovereign identity over this internal waterway. With the passage of the motion, all reference to the internal waterway would hereafter be referred to as the Canadian Northwest Passage.

I thank my colleagues from all sides of the House for their consideration, their thought and their input in assisting me in preparing a motion that has broad-based support from many if not most of my colleagues in the House. Today, as a proud Canadian, I respectfully ask for their unanimous support for this motion.

• (1115)

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the mover of this motion for his passionate and moving speech.

He talked about the issue of Canadian sovereignty and he brought up some valid points, and I wholeheartedly agree with the gist of what he was saying.

Over the past 20 years at least there has been an issue involving the 200 nautical miles off the east coast of this country. Over time the European Union and other partners of NAFO have wanted more influence over what is inside the 200 nautical miles off the east coast.

I was wondering if my colleague could help us in solidifying the fact that sovereignty is sovereignty on the east coast and the other countries have no say within our 200 nautical miles. Would he be the defender of east coast sovereignty as well as the north?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Mr. Speaker, I am going to give a clear and unequivocal response to my colleague's question. Yes, on every boundary that we have, we not only must but we should and we will respect the 200 miles.

Private Members' Business

There is some discussion among the five circumpolar countries as to whether or not the 200 miles should be extended perhaps even to 350 miles based on subterranean land formations. It is conversation at this point. There has been no agreement. At a bare minimum, the 200 miles is emphatically within the government and within myself, and all supporters of the motion a statement that we would not deny and we would concur with.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for bringing up the idea of a name change for a somewhat amorphous region of my riding, the Northwest Territories. It is good that he is in this vein.

The Northwest Territories is not recognized by the House as a riding name for my riding, yet Yukon and Nunavut have that distinction. I have been after getting the name changed to represent the people in the Northwest Territories for the past two years, but that member's party has been blocking unanimous consent to right this particular wrong that comes out of the time when the Northwest Territories was divided into Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. The name change was not put in place.

It is almost outrageous that the motion would not pass with the unanimous consent of the whole House of Commons for such an important region in our country. It would show proper respect.

Would my hon. colleague support my efforts to achieve unanimous consent in the House of Commons as soon as possible for my riding of Northwest Territories?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Mr. Speaker, we are talking apples and oranges here, not a comparison with respect to the member. Provincial issues, national issues and international issues do have different obligations and, therefore, different rights and responsibilities.

I certainly have no difficulty with the member supporting his position on a Canadian national identity for his region, and that is admirable. Quite frankly, what I am dealing with here in this motion is the recognition by international sources that look at a pan-Canadian definition that will hold throughout the entire world.

There is a bit of a difference there. However, the member has a very valid point and I would be open to discussions with him to see if we can further his considerations.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today in support of Motion No. 387.

I commend the member for Prince Edward—Hastings for bringing the motion forward and for his interest in the Canadian Arctic.

The member is asking:

That, in the opinion of the House, as the various waterways known as the "Northwest Passage" are historic internal waters of Canada, the government should endeavour to refer to these waterways as the "Canadian Northwest Passage".

I am delighted the member has followed up on my idea to add the word "Canadian" to this famed passage. I was honoured, as the official opposition critic for the Arctic, to make the first motion in the House of Commons to add the word "Canadian" to our beloved passage when I moved it in the last Parliament.

Unfortunately, it never reached the floor of the House before the election and again I have introduced the bill in this Parliament but I

am not on the schedule for some time. I am delighted, therefore, that the member for Prince Edward—Hastings, who has an earlier slot on the schedule, has followed up on this idea.

My motion calls for the government to modify its policy on Arctic sovereignty and actually rename the Northwest Passage the Canadian Arctic passage which is slightly different but has the same basic intent as the motion we are debating today.

My motion asks that the future Canadian produced maps, textbooks, government and other documents recognize the renaming of these Arctic waters as the Canadian Arctic passage. Most of the detailed maps of the passage are and will be Canadian, so this will help spread our message around the world.

I believe the stamp of Canadian identity and ownership will be more clearly stated and imprinted on the world community by using the reference of Canadian Northwest Passage or Canadian Arctic passage. This will be a strong, meaningful and peaceful declaration of our Arctic sovereignty for all to heed and respect.

I also point out that with global warming and the melting of the polar ice, the Northwest Passage will be crossed from east to west and, just as frequently, from west to east, which is one of the reasons why I refer to the waterways as the Canadian Arctic passage. As most familiar with the north also know, the Northwest Passage refers to a combination of several routes across the north, which is another reason for my use of the term Canadian Arctic passage.

On the other side of the coin, the Canadian Northwest Passage is a more specific geographic identifier and means a connection with a storied historical past.

I will be interested to hear from people after today's debate which name they prefer: Canadian Northwest Passage or Canadian Arctic passage, and the reasons for their preference.

Although some have challenged our sovereignty before it was not much of an issue as almost year round ice made navigation and water access very difficult but the member for Prince Edward—Hastings has wisely acknowledged the dramatic effects of man-made climate change on the Arctic and the attention that it is bringing to Arctic navigation.

With global warming, of course, northern resources will be easier to access and we are all expecting significant development in the north: new mines, industries, resource development, tourism and other activities as a result of global warming.

The Canadian Arctic passage will prove to be a vital link for a number of existing and new communities for supplies and new materials to be used to nurture the inhabitants, mostly indigenous, for new developments in the north and for the protection of the pristine environment.

Many think of the Northwest Passage as one of the last frontiers of exploration with adventurers seeking the shortest routes to the markets of Asia and the Far East. Canadian students learned of the expeditions of Martin Frobisher, Sir John Franklin, Roald Amundsen, the RCMP vessel *St. Roch*, Sir William Edward Perry and Robert McClure, the person who in 1850 to 1854 proved such a route existed and was awarded a £10,000 prize for doing so.

Private Members' Business

What we do not remind Canadians enough of is that the Inuit people and their predecessors were the first explorers of the Arctic. They have been part of the Arctic land and waters since time immemorial. Many of their travels are undocumented but the Inuit are considered to be the rightful discoverers of the Northwest Passage. It is, therefore, important to hear and respect their views, collectively and individually and our partners in sovereignty, the Inuit before we make any change.

In Canada, we have the Northwest Passage but across the Bering Strait there is the northern sea route which is defined as a shipping lane from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. It is more commonly known in Russia as the northeast passage, a vast route from Russia's northern Arctic waters to trading markets in Japan, China, Korea and, in the opposite direction, there are the capitals and huge economies of the European nations.

• (1120)

Just last month, two German container ships travelled from South Korea to Vladivostok. Then, travelling along Russia's Arctic coastline, the northeast passage, they headed on to Rotterdam in the Netherlands. This northern route saves about 3,000 nautical miles and 10 days from the usual southern route, which is down through the South China Sea, past Singapore, around the bottom of India, through the Suez Canal where they pay a toll, across the Mediterranean and up the west coast of Europe. That means lower fuel and other operating costs and also represents greater shipping potential.

The Russians are in a better position to take full advantage of the commercial opportunities from the Northeast Passage. They have a large fleet of icebreakers that are commissioned to travel with merchant vessels, ensuring safe passage through waters and ice floes.

As proven last month, regional warming has brought about the possibility of navigating the northeast passage without the assistance of icebreakers during the warmer part of the year. Previously, Russian authorities would only permit vessel passage when assisted by their icebreakers, thus incurring prohibitive costs. Permission for vessels with reinforced hulls to pass without Russian assistance has only recently been granted.

As the ice continues to disappear in the Arctic, not only will the northeast passage be an option but the direct route over the North Pole will be faster, shorter and less dangerous in a more intricate and confined Canadian Northwest Passage. Even so, under any circumstances we do not want to cede our view of our sovereign control over this route.

Our Inuit live by and depend on these waters, both when liquid and frozen. The ecology is fragile and needs monitoring and protection. Were Canada's Northwest Passage to become an international strait, it would allow overflights of the war planes of all countries of the world.

The corporate world is also preparing to take advantage of these northern routes. It was reported in June 2006 that companies had recently invested \$4.5 billion in ships that can navigate Arctic waters. This imposes another responsibility on northern governments. We have a responsibility to protect the fragile, pristine environment that makes up Canada's Arctic.

As an example, we know that with the state of today's technology, if an oil spill of some kind were to occur, there is no way to clean it up once it gets under Arctic ice. As a result, no amount of money will be able to pay for the damage done, the cleanup costs or the prevention programs. Government must quickly invest significant funds to develop technology to deal with hydrocarbon spills in this fragile, harsh, ice-packed environment.

If the government is sincere in protecting the Arctic environment with the projected increase in shipping traffic through the Canadian Northwest Passage and other Canadian Arctic waters, it would look at accelerating the mapping and installation of navigation aids in the treacherous and sometimes very shallow sections of the passage.

In closing, I will once again say that I will be voting in favour of Motion No. 387 and I look forward to the next hour of debate. Hopefully, the member for Nunavut, an Inuit person, will be speaking so we can hear her views and the views that the government has obtained by consultations with the Inuit.

Perhaps this would have been better as a bill duly legislated and passed by the House. It would have had considerably more authority when it was presented to countries like the United States that has long held the view that Canadian Arctic waters of the Northwest Passage are in fact international waters, not Canadian territorial waters.

It is also ironic that while I believe there is support from the House to brand our Arctic waters with a Canadian label, unfortunately, as a motion, even though it might pass in the House, there is no onus for the government to act on it. I hope my colleague has strong assurances from the cabinet and the Prime Minister that when Motion No. 387 passes, it will actually be implemented.

The Canadian Northwest Passage is embedded deeply in our identity. Let us call it like it is.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois on Motion M-387, which reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, as the various waterways known as the "Northwest Passage" are historic internal waters of Canada, the government should endeavour to refer to these waterways as the "Canadian Northwest Passage".

First, I would like to say that the Bloc Québécois will not oppose this motion. However, it is important to understand what the motion is about. Obviously, for those who are watching, but also for our children and grandchildren, this is a historic moment. We are discussing the Northwest Passage, when these waters have long been considered a frozen desert. That is the reality. I understand that we have come to this point, but this is a terrible thing for humankind.

Private Members' Business

All this is happening because climate change is having a dramatic effect on the north. Scientists say that a temperature increase of 1°C to 2°C at the equator can create an increase of 6°C in the Arctic. We are witnessing global warming, because countries like Canada are not controlling their greenhouse gas emissions. That is the reality, and that is why today we have to discuss a motion so that Canada can assert its authority over this passage. We never should have had to discuss this motion. The Northwest Passage should have remained a frozen desert.

Clearly, no one in this House is worried about this. I am not surprised that the Conservatives are holding this debate or introduced this motion. It is not important to them to take action on greenhouse gases and climate change. It is unbelievable that the Conservatives are investing so much in the oil sands, which international scientists consider the biggest polluter on the planet. The oil sands are the biggest contributor to global warming, yet the Conservatives want to increase oil sands production fivefold.

What does it mean when Canada has such a terrible record as far as greenhouse gases are concerned? The earth heats up, which causes the ice in the Arctic to melt, which leads to major changes. I will speak about some examples.

Climate change will have a serious environmental impact on the Arctic. The climate in that region is warming up more rapidly, which triggers even more drastic changes, such as a change of vegetation zone and a change in the diversity, range and distribution of animal species. For example, we are seeing a rapidly increasing number of polar bears drowning, because the distance between ice floes is constantly increasing. Climate change will also cause the disruption and destabilization of transportation, buildings and infrastructure in the north. It has a major impact on the lifestyle of aboriginal peoples. It has led to increased ultraviolet radiation, which affects animals, people and vegetation. Since 1960, the surface area of the permanent ice pack has decreased by 14%, with a 6% reduction since 1978. The ice pack has thinned by 42% since 1958.

The Bloc Québécois, as well as scientists from around the world, has been talking about these warning signs for years.

We can talk about a motion like this, which would add “Canadian” to the words “Northwest Passage”, so that Canada can once again assert its authority over this territory.

• (1130)

But that is not the battle we should be fighting. The real battle should motivate us to do whatever we can to bring the ice back to the Arctic. That is the real battle, not fighting to assert our authority over territory that will soon be ice-free, an ecological disaster. That is what the Conservatives are doing, day after day, slowly but surely, with all kinds of bills and government assistance for oil sands exploitation. We will see. At every major international environmental meeting, the Conservatives have not budged: they do not want to comply with the Kyoto protocol, and they are careful to emphasize that the Liberals did not comply either. The Liberals were no better. The ice cap is melting. The Liberals were in power for two-thirds of that time. They are no better when it comes to fighting greenhouse gases and climate change.

Personally, I am proud to be part of a political organization that serves as Quebec and North America's conscience. Once again, the United States is the biggest polluter on the planet, and Canada's oil sands operations are the most polluting on the planet, all in the name of money. The only reason this is happening is so that oil companies can line their pockets and pay dividends every three months. They are destroying the planet, our children and grandchildren's heritage, just to pay shareholders a quarterly dividend. This is not an enviable position to be in. It is terrible, but it is reality, a harsh reality that we must face, a reality that leads to debate over motions like M-387 here in the House to assert Canada's authority over the passage.

I mentioned a moment ago the changes, disruption and destabilization this causes, particularly for aboriginal communities living on those lands. Other bills aimed at developing that region have been introduced, seaports are being built and some people want to explore the area for oil. That is absurd. Some people will do anything to make sure the ice disappears forever from the Arctic. From one bill to the next, the Conservatives are destroying the planet a little more every day, and all to line shareholders' pockets. That is frightening. At least we have the opportunity to rise here in the House and denounce the situation. Our words here are part of recorded history. My children and grandchildren will be able to hear me, and they will see that I did not want to take part in destroying the earth. The Conservative members of this House, however, will have been complicit. That will also be written in history. Their grandchildren and children will be able to read about what they did to try to destroy the planet.

This brings me to talk about why the Bloc Québécois will support the notion that Canada should exercise its authority over this territory, over the Canadian Northwest Passage. It does present an excellent opportunity. Canada has definitely withdrawn all protection of the arctic territory in recent years. Oil interests and other financial possibilities have emerged in that area, which is why the Conservatives have become more aggressive. However, this occupation or assertion of ownership of this territory must be done peacefully and respectfully. Canada must not take up arms or build ships or submarines, which could be used as weapons, in order to avoid, or to think it is avoiding, attacks from neighbours. This must be done while showing full respect for our neighbours.

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off by saying I support this motion. What is not to support? It is symbolism. Symbolism is important in this country. It is important to understand how symbolism can make a difference for Canadians and for others across the world. This is an easy thing for the government to do.

What would be a little more difficult, but, I feel, more appropriate would be Motion No. 110, which calls to amend the motto of Canada so reference is made to all three oceans.

Private Members' Business

If this Parliament were to take this type of step, it would clearly indicate that the symbolism we are putting forward is intrinsic to the essence of our Canadian state, and it would carry much more weight in everything that we do. That would not exclude the need for us to establish boundaries, but including a third sea in our motto would be a clear indication that Canada includes the Arctic.

Perhaps the hon. member for Prince Edward—Hastings would ask the Prime Minister to decide whether my motion is worth supporting. The Liberal leader has come out in favour of it. On May 12, I hand-delivered a letter to the Prime Minister's Office, suggesting, because of his interest in Arctic sovereignty, he might be willing to throw his support behind changing the motto. Unfortunately, I have not even had a letter back acknowledging receipt of that letter.

Symbolism is important. However, the people of the north want more than symbolism, because the people of the north, in occupying the north, create more sovereignty than anything else that we could do.

Recently, the Standing Committee on Finance held a pre-budget session in Yellowknife. Here are some of the things that northerners think should be done.

There should be devolution. The north does not control its resources. Northerners do not control their resources as do people in every other area of the country. Decisions about resources can be better made by the people of the north, who understand how to develop to the north, and whose interests should come first. Their interests will drive Canadian interests. Their interests in building roads and proper transportation systems and strong communities will trump the interests of anyone else doing that work. So, we need to see the government moving toward devolution of the resources in the Northwest Territories and of control over the land and resources.

Proper funding of government programs and services was brought up very strongly. The current territorial financing formula set three years ago did show an increase, but it did not tie the level of funding to the actual cost of delivering services across the north. Over the last number of years, we have seen a marked increase in the only energy form that is commonly used throughout the north, that is, diesel fuel, home heating oil. Those prices have gone through the roof, and every territorial government, whether it is in the Yukon, the Northwest Territories or Nunavut, has to bear that cost. We need to see a better formula. We need to see a formula that really does take into account the cost of delivering services.

As we progress with resource development, as we find ways to bring more revenue to Canada, that will help the situation. However, without that, what are we in? The Northwest Territories, over the last number of years, has had the highest GDP per capita in the country for any jurisdiction. Yet what happened to the population last year in the Northwest Territories? It declined. Why did it decline? It declined because the cost of services in the Northwest Territories is so high, the cost of living is so high there, that people simply cannot afford to continue their lifestyle in the Northwest Territories, in the Yukon, and especially in Nunavut.

I am sure no members of the House are surprised that it costs more to live in Canada's north than anywhere else. If they are, I would suggest they take one of their special trips across the country and

visit the north to understand the kinds of pressures that northerners are living with in their communities across the whole north. Then perhaps they will come up in the next budget with more than a 10% increase to the northern residents' tax deduction after 20 years of no increases.

● (1140)

Perhaps then they will understand the importance of supporting the people right across the north. Until that happens, we are not going to achieve the kind of sovereignty that we are looking for in the north.

It is important to move ahead with land claims and self-government in the north. I point to the Mulroney government which did many good things to promote land claims and self-government in the northern regions. I had hoped some small part of that attitude would exist in the current Conservative government when it came to power three years ago, but what have we seen?

As an example, I will refer to the Hay River reserve. The federal government last fall simply rejected the 14th draft of the comprehensive land claim proposal, after negotiating 13 other drafts. On the 14th, the government said, "No, that is the end of it". How is that fair to northerners? Foot-dragging at the negotiating table is something the government seems to be very good at. We need to see progress in that area.

My last point is about the Northwest Passage and the Beaufort Sea. The biggest problem we have with sovereignty is with the U.S. on the Alaska-Yukon border. The U.S. has decided unilaterally that it has possession of 21,000 square kilometres of offshore land within the 200 mile limit. Most of those territorial waters lie within the jurisdiction of the Northwest Territories and within Canada.

In April of this year, the government sent a letter to the U.S. stating that it opposed the concept of the U.S. putting a moratorium on the entire Beaufort Sea, including the disputed area. On August 27, just after the Prime Minister was on a ship off Baffin Island promoting Arctic sovereignty, the U.S. unilaterally put in place that moratorium on Canadian waters. Has the government responded to that challenge?

Parliament passed the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act last year. We did it ostensibly to provide us with more control over offshore waters. What is the U.S. doing with this fishing moratorium, the fishing issues for the U.S. off Alaska, in Chugach Bay and the Bering Strait? The Americans' decision to move ahead with a moratorium on our territorial waters is a direct challenge to Canadian sovereignty, and the government has chosen to remain silent.

Yes, the U.S. is our trading partner and yes, it is our best friend, but we must stand up for ourselves regarding the Beaufort Sea or we will lose.

● (1145)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Prince Edward—Hastings for his commitment to Canada's interests in the Arctic region.

Private Members' Business

The Arctic region is undergoing rapid change. The increase in interest and activity, the search for natural resources and the effects of climate change on the sensitive environment are presenting new opportunities and challenges for the region.

As the Prime Minister stated on his visit to our country's vast north in August:

With immense natural wealth and the growing potential for new global trade routes, the strategic importance of Canada's Arctic is heightened as never before.

Canada is an Arctic nation and an Arctic power; our sovereignty over the land and the water is long-standing. This government has and will continue to protect our sovereignty and promote the development of Canada's Arctic and the north.

With over 40% of our land mass in the north, Canada is in a strong position to shape the stewardship, sustainable development and environmental protection of this strategic region.

Canadians see the north as the embodiment of our aspirations and our limitless potential. This is why our government's vision for the Arctic region is that of a stable, rules-based region with clearly defined boundaries, dynamic economic growth and trade, vibrant northern communities, and healthy and productive ecosystems.

The Arctic ice has been steadily and significantly reduced over the past years in a trend that is expected to continue. As a result, the various waterways collectively referred to as the Northwest Passage are opening up for longer periods in the summer and their use is gaining international attention.

Canada's sovereignty is not impacted by the changing amount or quality of ice that covers these waterways. Canada's sovereignty over these waters is not contested, nor is there a challenge to Canada's right to exploit the resources in and under these waters.

Though this ice reduction has no bearing on our sovereignty over the Northwest Passage, it has however attracted attention to these waters and the increased opportunities for shipping that are becoming available.

This is despite predictions that the Northwest Passage will not be a viable or reliable commercial shipping route for decades to come, if ever, and that current and historic shipping through the Northwest Passage remains infrequent and costly.

Despite the low volume of shipping, these waters must be protected, and they will be, because they are internal waters of Canada, our waters.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs has stated,

The Canadian government clearly understands the potential of the North. Canada is an Arctic power. We hold a vast, magnificent treasure in trust for future generations.

To clarify where our internal waters actually are, Canada drew straight baselines around the Canadian Arctic Archipelago in 1986. All waters within those baselines are internal waters and form part of Canada's sovereign territory, subject to all of the rights and regulations of Canada in the same way that Saskatoon, New Brunswick and Vancouver Island are our sovereign territory.

International laws grant that no right of innocent passage or of transit passage exists in the waters of the Arctic Archipelago enclosed within the baselines.

As a matter of policy, Canada permits international navigation in and through the Northwest Passage, as long as the conditions established by Canada to protect security, environment and Inuit interests are met. Canada currently has legislation, policies and programs in place that allow the government to monitor and control the waters of the Canadian Arctic and to ensure that these interests are protected. These measures include, for example, pollution monitoring and control, air surveillance, a system of notification before entering Canadian waters, as well as ice information and ice-breaking services.

As marine traffic to the north increases, our government will adapt the regulations and systems already in place to continue to protect Canadian waters.

While the previous government talked a lot about the Arctic, no action was taken. This government is taking real action and making real investments to protect our north.

Our priority is not just national parks. We do not believe the Arctic is an international picnic spot. We are committed to continue delivering real action for Canadians.

This government is committed to ensuring that Canada remains a regulatory leader with respect to shipping in the Arctic, including the Northwest Passage. We exercise control over foreign shipping in our Arctic waters and navigation is taking place under Canadian regulation and control, like any other internal waters of Canada.

• (1150)

We currently maintain a broad set of guidelines and regulations that we apply to shipping in the Arctic covering important aspects of shipping such as hull structural requirements and proper waste disposal for ships. These regulations include the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, the AWPPA for short.

In August 2008, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, the AWPPA was expanded from 100 to 200 nautical miles from the baselines of the territorial sea so that it now applies to and protects all the waters of Canada's exclusive economic zone, up to 200 nautical miles.

Parliament passed the AWPPA to underscore Canada's commitment to protect the Arctic environment and its resolve to exercise sovereignty over Canadian Arctic waters. There is no question that the exclusive economic zone provides Canada with the legal authority to exercise sovereign rights and jurisdiction over living and non-living resources up to 200 nautical miles from the shore. Our government has done more to secure Canada's place in the Arctic than any government before us.

Private Members' Business

In addition to the AWPPA, under this government we are developing the regulations to formally establish the NORDREG zone which would make the current voluntary reporting by ships entering Canada's Arctic waters mandatory. NORDREG's objectives are to enhance the safety and efficient movement of maritime transportation, prevent pollution, and most important, to exercise our sovereignty in Canada's Arctic waters.

We have delivered on the real action in the Arctic and in Canada's north. Budget 2008 allocated \$40 million over four years for the mapping of Canada's Arctic seabed. The government has announced new Arctic patrol ships and a deepwater port in the north. We have expanded and re-equipped the Canadian Rangers.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs has announced 20 graduate fellowship awards aimed at fostering innovative research and policy development on issues related to Canada's role in the circumpolar world.

By rebuilding our capabilities and standing up for our sovereignty, this government has sent a clear message to the world: Under this government, Canada is a leader on the international stage. Through our actions we have made it clear that the Northwest Passage is Canadian. We are proud to call these waterways the Canadian Northwest Passage.

• (1155)

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on this private member's business, focusing on the naming of what a lot of people have up to now called the Northwest Passage.

This has a lot to do with the issue of Canadian sovereignty. I cannot imagine anybody in the House dissenting from a purported exercise in Canadian sovereignty, and I will speak to that at the end of my remarks if I have time.

A bundle of issues are associated with the issue of Arctic sovereignty and they are all apparently made more urgent at this time in history because of changes in the environment. Global warming has made more of the Arctic territory ice-free for at least part of the year. Improved transportation technologies have allowed humans greater access to that part of the world. Improved technology allows us all to view and monitor what has happened in that part of the world.

The world's voracious appetite to find and exploit natural resources is what brought the Europeans and the Vikings into the Arctic in the first place. All of this is going on at an enhanced pace now and there is focus on the Arctic Archipelago. I have never been there myself, but I have seen it on maps, winding its way through.

I recall the story of the RCMP vessel, the *St. Roch*, that made its way through the passage one summer in the 1940s. Canadians were proud at the time. It was strange for the mounted police to make a passage as opposed to a military vessel, but the Mounties opened up the European settlement in the north. They took the king's law and order into the north, so it was probably pretty natural for the RCMP to make the first voyage through.

In any event, the geography up there is badly in need of regulation to protect the environment and to regulate human activity. That

should not be a surprise because the United Nations has pretty much done the same thing in Antarctica, where there are all kinds of significant and strict regulations on what can happen there. Treaties have been signed by many countries, including Canada, on just those kinds of regulations.

That has not happened in the Arctic for other historic reasons. One of the reasons is because Canada is there. The Arctic Archipelago is part of Canada so there would not appear to be a need for an international treaty.

Other countries have made claims to portions of the Arctic and for this reason there is an ongoing international process. A number of countries have come together and embraced the process for delineating the boundaries of their countries in the Arctic region. That is not to say in the Arctic Archipelago, but even further north of that. I refer to Denmark for Greenland, Russia, the United States for Alaska and maybe Norway. There are a few other countries and Canada itself. That process, which is being done in a peaceful and science-based basis, should come to an end in just a few years and it will establish the boundaries.

That process does not deal with the passage, but someone has to take care of the Arctic. Canada has been taking care of it and we are going to continue to do so.

The passage runs right through the Arctic Archipelago. It is part of our inland waters. We are not just going to talk the talk, but we are going to walk the walk. Canada will continue to regulate what goes on in the passage and in the Arctic Archipelago.

• (1200)

The motion proposes a name change to cosmetically impress upon everyone that it is not just the Northwest Passage for anyone. It is actually the Canadian Northwest Passage. They are internal waters. We will continue to view them that way, and I support that. In case the member had any doubt, I support the motion in this instance. Perhaps we could have given it a whole new name. Maybe we should have named it the Sir John A. Macdonald passage. Then it would be clear.

However, there is one point I will make. Passing this does not only involve a name change. It is an exercise of our sovereignty. If we pass the motion, we are saying that those waters and that passage are Canadian and it will be an exercise of our sovereignty with respect to that. It should be clear to all. I cannot imagine any other country even thinking about doing anything like this. This is our job. I do not know how the members will vote, but I will support the motion when it comes up for the vote.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I might just ask a question of my colleagues across the floor today. I have been very grateful for their unanimous support in conversations, albeit with their concerns about particular government action or non-action.

Because I think it is important to advance this motion, I might respectfully ask if the members of the opposition would consider advancing the motion, with unanimous support, at this point. I ask because I made that preface statement and its intentions in my opening comments. Otherwise, I would not spring that on them.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

The House resumed from September 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-37, An Act to amend the National Capital Act and other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

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

* * *

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed from September 30 consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, be read the second time and referred to a committee, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this matter today.

As debate in the House indicates, the issue before the House is a complex issue, regarding the ratification of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. There are very strong arguments in support of the ratification, and I will acknowledge that there are strong arguments against it also.

At the outset, several people in my riding came to visit me, people who I admire and respect deeply, and they urged us not to ratify the agreement, mainly for ongoing human rights abuses in the country.

The arguments for it are clear and I do not think they are debated. The basis is that the agreement will be of considerable advantage to both Canada and Colombia. I believe that debate has been settled. Certainly any nation that is successful is a trading nation, and the country of Colombia has to get beyond the existing regime it is into now, mainly with the trade with the Venezuelans.

On the other side, the arguments against it are also clear and they have some merit. There are and have been for many years human rights abuses in that country. These are serious matters and they are still ongoing. They do deserve discussion and debate in the House. As has been pointed out many times, Colombia is a country with a difficult past. A civil war has been going on for quite some years, which has morphed into a narco war that is very serious. It requires not only domestic, but probably international attention.

In a situation like this, when we look at what comes first, the chicken or the egg, if we took a snapshot in time and still saw some abuses, we could argue that perhaps we should not. I believe, and that is my argument today, that this has to be looked at as a continuum. As a developed country, we have to look at the progress and the improvements that have been made in that country over the last eight years, especially since the election of President Uribe. We have to consider the agreement in its totality, especially the ancillary agreements regarding the environment and human rights. We also have to consider the international thinking, the present dialogue going on in the United States and the dialogue going on in the European Union.

Considering everything, it is my view that Canada and Canadians and the country of Colombia and Colombians will be better off if the agreement were ratified by this Parliament.

I did not come to that decision lightly. When President Uribe was in Canada, I attended the briefing session. I met him. There was a lot of tough questions put to him during the hour and a half session. I was quite impressed with the president. I have spoken, as I indicated previously, with Colombians in my district, the city of Charlotte-town. I have certainly spoken with our critics, the member for Toronto Centre and the member for Kings—Hants. I believe they spent four days in Colombia meeting with a number of NGOs, politicians and other interested parties on this agreement and the Senate committee on foreign affairs.

We are dealing with the business case, the economic case and the moral case. It is my position that these two issues really cannot be separated. The business case is very strong. There is very little economic risk to either country. There is no direct competition. What we import from Colombia is not really in competition with other domestic producers and what we export is not in competition with some of their manufacturing sector there. Trade is not large. Canada does have a trade surplus with the country of Colombia, but there is a very persuasive argument that this will form a platform for enhanced trade for both Colombia and Canada.

Government Orders

When we deal with the human rights issues, the waters get a little murkier. As I indicated already, Colombia does not have a good history. It is rife with some abuses, and the troubled country over the last eight, 10, 12 years has morphed into having a very serious ongoing narco trade. That has ancillary violence and gangs. We all know the problems that country is undergoing right now.

• (1205)

However, we have to look at the progress that has been made. We have to take note of the progress and state of affairs. We have to read all the reports, especially the one from the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights and the reports from the special rapporteur and the other NGOs that have reported on the progress, and I would say it is real progress, that has been made in this particular country.

I do not want to be seen in the House as downplaying the problems that remain. They are a very serious issue, but we cannot take a snapshot in time. We have to look at, within a continuum, the progress that has been made, especially in the past six to eight years. We have to take note of the other reports from the NGOs, politicians and senators in Colombia, of what is going on in the region, not only with regard to the narco trade but also as far as the influence from the Chavez government in Venezuela goes.

When we consider everything, it is my premise and my argument to the House that there is a very strong argument for signing this agreement. Of course, this has to be relayed in other agreements that I hope will take place, considering the comments from President Obama. There is a very strong case that this will spur on and result in other improvements being made in the country of Colombia.

As I said before, I do not believe we can separate the moral arguments from the economic ones. When we look at the poverty and lack of opportunities for the people who live in that country, I do not believe this agreement will be the whole answer. There is not a great deal of trade, though hopefully that will improve, but it will give certain people in Colombia an economic opportunity so they can move forward as a society, a culture and a country. I hope that eventually living standards will be raised, further progress will be made on the corruption there now, and they will move onward.

I know this is a very interesting debate for many people, myself included. I listened carefully to everything that has been said. I have read a lot of the reports that have been written with respect to this particular situation.

As I indicated when I first stood, there are sound arguments to be made for or against, but it is my belief that when we analyze everything, our country, but more importantly the country of Colombia, will be in a much better position to continue on that road of progress that it is on now. That is why I will be supporting the ratification of this agreement.

• (1210)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem, especially for us on this side, is that we do not believe we can separate economics from human rights. Colombia is a country that has systematically destroyed and taken away the collective bargaining rights of individuals to form a union or

association or to argue those points with the current government, and I would say that quite emphatically.

The reality is that this trade agreement has workers' rights and human rights as a side agreement, not in the main body of the text. We have seen other agreements in which human rights and environmental standards have been included as side agreements, which says, in other words, that people will get around to those kinds of discussions later. First come the profits and the interests of the big companies, and then we talk about the people and the environment later.

My question to the hon. member is this. If he honestly believes, and I know he does, in the care and well-being of the people of Colombia, their respective unions and associations and most importantly the Colombian environment, why would he not insist that those things be in the main body of the text of the trade deal?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, in the preamble to his question, the member indicated that we cannot separate economic arguments from human rights, and that is my point. That is what I did say in my speech. We cannot do that.

The point I am making is that I am not going to stand here in this House and downplay the existing problems in Colombia, but I believe that we have to take note of the considerable progress that has been made over the last six or eight years.

We have to take note of the many reports from the United Nations and other NGOs, but most importantly, and this is perhaps lost in this debate, we have to take note of the existing labour agreement between the country of Canada and the country of Colombia. It is all part of this package. This, I believe, is the strongest labour agreement ever signed by this country. It contains very tough measures to enforce the provisions and this will just lead to further progress.

Again my friend across makes some serious points, but I believe this agreement will assist Colombia and Colombians in getting beyond some of these existing problems.

• (1215)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleague from Charlottetown today who has provided some very thoughtful commentary on the situation in Colombia and the potential effect of a free trade agreement with Canada.

He spoke of the issues of civil war in Colombia. It is a country that for 40 years has wrestled with a civil war that began along ideological grounds but that has evolved more into just a drug war, in which there are former paramilitaries now, who are drug gangsters, effectively, and FARC, which is still active, not on the ideological side as much as on the drug side. It is a civil war that continues to be fueled by drug money.

When I was in Colombia a couple of months ago, some of the former paramilitary members with whom I met, who have been demobilized, told me that the reason they joined the paramilitaries in the first place was the lack of real economic opportunity in a legitimate economy or through legitimate trade. It is the same with FARC members. They joined FARC because the only job they could find was something to do with either the war or the drug trade.

Government Orders

Does the hon. member see the potential of the legitimate economy and legitimate economic trade with Colombia as providing opportunities for these people so that they do not have to go into either the drug trade or a civil war?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is yes, I do, and I have described in my earlier remarks that this will provide an opportunity so that people will be given a choice, that they perhaps do not have to join FARC or one of the paramilitary operations, that they will have a legitimate opportunity to engage in the legal economy.

However, one other point I will make very briefly is that there are Colombians living in every riding in Canada and it is important to talk to them. They want their country to succeed.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the subamendment to Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

It is extremely irresponsible for the Conservatives to push a free trade agreement with Colombia, a country that has the worst human rights record in the western hemisphere and that is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for trade unionists.

The belief that trade will bring human rights improvements to Colombia is completely contradicted, not just by the facts but also by the text of the agreement. The full respect of fundamental human rights must be a precondition of any trade agreement.

There are four aspects of this free trade agreement that we completely oppose. Labour rights protection is something that is not happening in this agreement. Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries on earth for trade unionists who are regularly the victims of violence, intimidation and assassination by paramilitary groups linked to the Colombian government.

The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement does not include tough labour standards. Having labour provisions in a side agreement outside of the main text and without any vigorous enforcement mechanism will not encourage Colombia to improve its horrendous human rights situation for workers and will actually justify the use of violence.

The penalty for non-compliance is determined by a review panel that has the power to require the offending country to pay up to \$15 million annually into a cooperation fund that can be summed up as "kill a trade unionist, pay a fine". A key fact is that almost 2,700 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia since 1986. In 2008 the number of murders was up by 18% over the previous year, and this year 27 trade unionists had been murdered by September, not a number that inspires confidence.

The second aspect of the failure of the bill relates to environmental protection. The environmental issue is addressed in a side agreement with no enforcement mechanism to force Canada or Colombia to respect environmental rights. This process is seriously flawed. In the opinion of the New Democrats, this is just a smokescreen.

We have seen in the past how these side agreements are unenforceable. For example, there has not been a single successful suit brought under the NAFTA side agreement on labour. Another

fact that should be noted is that nearly 200,000 hectares of natural forest are lost in Colombia every year due to agriculture, logging, mining, energy development and construction.

Copied from NAFTA's chapter 11 on investor's rights, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement provides powerful rights to private companies to sue governments, which are enforceable through investor-state arbitration panels. In the opinion of the New Democrats, this is the third fault of the bill.

This is particularly worrying because there are many Canadian multinational oil and mining companies operating in Colombia. The arbitration system set up by chapter 11 gives foreign companies the ability to challenge legitimate Canadian environment, labour and social protections.

I can speak to how this impacts Canadian communities. Right now in my riding of Sudbury there is a labour dispute between Vale Inco, a Brazilian company, and the United Steelworkers Union, Local 6500.

We see first-hand what happens when governments refuse to act. Workers are laid off; families struggle to make ends meet; there are cutbacks to worker's rights, especially in pensions or in years of bargaining, and natural resources are sold to the highest bidder. Giving this opportunity to private business in Colombia and elsewhere will even further erode Canada's and Colombia's ability to pass laws and regulations for public interest.

Let us not forget that Colombia's poverty is directly linked to agricultural development in a country where 22% of employment is agricultural. With an end to tariffs on Canadian cereals, pork and beef will flood the market with cheap products and lead to thousands of lost jobs. In a country that already has almost four million people internally displaced, 60% of this displacement has been from regions of mineral, agricultural or other economic importance where private companies and their government and paramilitary supporters have forced people from their homes.

● (1220)

It is irresponsible for us to turn a blind eye to the Colombian situation. We know human rights abuses are happening. We know trade unionists are losing their lives. If we approve this bill, our actions would essentially give the Colombian government a green light to continue its abuses. We cannot overlook our responsibilities. Human rights are just that. They are not trumped by trade interests.

Government Orders

With all of that being said, even the Colombian government has been accused by international human rights organizations of corruption, electoral fraud, links to paramilitary and right-wing death squads, and using its security forces to spy on the supreme court of Colombia, opposition politicians, government politicians and journalists. Many government members, including ministers and members of the president's family, have been forced to resign or have been arrested.

What we do need, though, is fair trade. Fair trade means fully respecting human rights as a pre-condition for all trade deals. The Canada-Colombia agreement is fundamentally flawed and does little more than pay lip service to the serious damage it could do to human rights in Colombia.

What we mean by fair trade is new trade rules and agreements that promote sustainable practices, domestic job creation and healthy working conditions, while allowing us to manage the supply of goods, promote democratic rights abroad and maintain democratic sovereignty at home.

How can we promote fair trade?

New trade agreements should encourage improvement in social, environmental and labour conditions, rather than just minimize the damage of unrestricted trade. Federal and provincial procurement policies should stimulate Canadian industries by allowing governments to favour suppliers here at home. Supply management boards and single-desk marketers, like the Canadian Wheat Board, for example, could help replace imports with domestic products and materials.

Why fair trade and not free trade?

Fair trade policies protect the environment by encouraging the use of domestically and locally produced goods, which means less freight, less fuel and less carbon, and by promoting environmentally conscious methods for producers who ship to Canada. By contrast, free trade policies, even those created with the environment in mind, do little to impede multinational corporations from polluting with abandon. The environmental side agreement of NAFTA, for example, has proven largely unenforceable, particularly when compared with other protections for industry and investors.

A system of fair trade can encourage the growth of Canadian jobs, both in quality and quantity. Fair competition rules and tougher labour standards would put Canadian industries on a level playing field with our trading partners and slow the international race to the bottom that has resulted in a loss of Canadian manufacturing jobs.

Free trade rules, on the other hand, have hurt Canadian job quality. Since 1989, most Canadian families have seen a decline in real incomes.

• (1225)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think many of us in the House have serious concerns about this particular bill, recognizing the benefits on one hand that could possibly come to our country, as well as other countries, but also the concern about ensuring we pay attention to any human rights violations. However, most important, as I continue to go back and forth on this issue, I would like to know if there is the opportunity for us, through an

agreement like this, to demand better treatment of the country's citizens and to extract something on the positive side as a part of this agreement if we were to go forward with it.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, when I started my speech on this debate, I talked about the four initial flaws that we see in this. There is no way to protect the environment. The labour practices are horrendous in Colombia. We see problems with agriculture, the poverty and many other things. I believe the member's colleague said it earlier talking about the chicken and the egg and which one do we put first.

We in the New Democrats think we need to put human rights as the first issue that we must address before moving forward with a trade deal.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the whole debate, as well as this member's contributions, with great interest.

One of the things that troubles me is that there seems to be an incongruity between the position the government is taking domestically and what it is doing abroad. We know, for example, that in Colombia, as the member detailed so eloquently, violence, crime and corruption are rampant and yet here at home the government would want us to believe that it is all about getting tough on crime.

I wonder if the member could comment on why it is okay to take that position here and yet say, in the rest of the world, that it does not matter what we stand up for, they can do as they wish. Is there not some hypocrisy in the government's stand with respect to this free trade deal between Canada and the Republic of Colombia?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, it does seem to be a little hypocritical when we look at how those two are playing out.

However, we have New Democrats in the House of Commons to ensure we stand up to the government and ensure we bring forward the issues that are affecting people, not only in Canada but right around the world. When people are being affected by poverty, when people do not have the right to bargain fairly and when individuals are affected by poverty, New Democrats will be the ones who stand up and ensure we have something done, fairly and equitably for all.

• (1230)

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had to stand up after the last comment from my hon. colleague.

As a member of the international trade committee, I had the honour of spending some time in Colombia. I met with the president when he came here and spoke to our committee. I would be the first to admit that it is far from perfect and that there are a lot of challenges in that country with the labour agreement and the environment agreement under this free trade agreement.

Government Orders

Would the hon. member not concur that from the discussions that we have had with witnesses who came forth that they support the free trade agreement? They are looking at a rising tide lifts all boats. Would it not be better from the human rights perspective to engage in dialogue with the Colombian people rather than isolating them and giving them no opportunities for the betterment of their society as well?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, once again, it just comes down to what we want to put as our priority. Do we want to put economics first, ensuring there is a trade deal in place so we can get products out, or do we want to ensure human rights?

That is what we have been saying and that is why we are opposing this. We believe that human rights are the fundamentals on which everything should be based. After that issue is addressed then, of course, the economy could come forward, especially when dealing with Colombia.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if I sound a bit repetitious of my hon. colleague, I probably will be. First, I want to say at the outset that the NDP is not against trade, in fact, Canada is a trading nation, and we know that. We need to seek out new trading partners around the world in order to export and import goods and services. However, what we in the New Democratic Party are so concerned about is that the rights and privileges that we enjoy as a society are part of those benefits in terms of any fair trade or free trade deal that we have.

There is a difference. We in the NDP have advocated for many years for fair trade, not necessarily free trade, but fair trade where coffee growers in South America, for example, get a fair return on their investment, as well as textile workers, et cetera. We want to ensure that those people from formerly third world countries are not exploited to the benefit of a few companies or a few individuals here in Canada.

Most important, what is imperative from our perspective is that when we open up trade deals with countries, such as Colombia, that the environment and human and labour rights be first discussed long before anything about economics.

I heard my hon. colleague from Kings—Hants talk about when he was in Colombia and how he met individuals who joined the military or the other group because there were no other economic opportunities and thus they may have slipped into the drug trade and so on. If free trade, in the eyes of the government, were to prevent that from happening, what is going on in Mexico right now where we have a NAFTA deal with that country and there are thousands upon thousands of people involved in the drug trade. In fact, many people are being murdered in Mexico on a weekly basis because of this. The reality is that trade did not stop that.

When NAFTA and free trade were signed 20 years ago, it was the NDP that said that human and labour rights and environmental rights must be included in those deals, but it did not happen. They were put in as side deals. Where are the documents and the conversations that talk about those side deals? Where are those human rights and environmental rights for all Mexicans right now? One would need to search long and hard to be able to get them and to see what concrete action Canada, or any other nation for that matter, has taken.

This is our fear. We believe that if the Canadian government signs a free trade deal with Colombia, the next thing it will talk about is other deals with countries similar to that. Human rights and environmental rights in Colombia will not be monitored by the Canadian government nor any other foreign agency. It will just continue on as business as normal, which is our greatest fear.

We have a kindred spirit with the workers of Colombia and their unions, associations and religious institutions. We believe they have a right to live in peace, freedom and democracy. Yes, trade will expand those aspects but they cannot be used as a side deal. They cannot be used as something we will talk about later. They must be paramount in the initial discussions.

If Colombia is serious about forming a fair trade deal with Canada and Canada is serious about forming a fair trade deal with Colombia, then those issues can be discussed. They could be imprinted on the front pages of that trade deal and there could be serious cross-monitoring and observation to ensure that the human rights abuses, the labour abuses and the environmental degradation going on in that country come to a stop.

On a sidebar, we in this country, through something called schedule 2 of the mining regulations, allow mining companies to take a perfectly healthy lake like Sandy Pond in Newfoundland and destroy it and use it as a tailing pond. Instead of having an independent tailing system free and clear of any aquatic systems, we allow this perfectly healthy lake to be destroyed just for the benefit of the mining companies. If we do that in Canada, what makes us think that any mining company in Colombia would do any better? In fact, it would probably do worse. This is the type of hypocrisy we have in Canada.

We talk about environmental and human rights from the government perspective but the reality, in many cases, is that we do not even practise it in our own home. If we have these types of domestic laws in Canada, what would the Colombian government allow in any kind of a trade deal?

• (1235)

It sort of has the cart before the horse in this particular regard. We have said very clearly that human and environmental rights are first and economics, profits and companies are second. We believe that is the way to go. If we did that and set that as a shining example for Colombia, imagine what we could do in those particular aspects right now in the entire southern cone.

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While I am up here, I have to give special kudos to a company called Just Us! Coffee in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. This company has done a tremendous job in fair trade tea, coffee and chocolate. It has gone completely past the government and organized these deals themselves to ensure that the producers and growers of these beans and chocolate get fair remuneration for their products. If one group of individuals can do this, imagine what we should be doing as a government. We should be ensuring that those on the bottom of the economic scale get the hand up we have been asking for.

I have heard the expression that a rising tide lifts all boats. It is absolutely correct, but a rising tide can also sink boats if it comes up too fast. The government and the official opposition like to talk about human rights in a parliamentary sense, but we never really get down to the brass tacks and actually see them negotiate these things first, long before the economic opportunities exist.

We want to reconfirm that the New Democratic Party is not against trade deals with countries around the world. We would like to ensure that the workers of Colombia, especially the union leaders, have the opportunity to engage in discourse with their government without fear of being murdered.

Many years ago we celebrated and commemorated the 40th anniversary of the Hungarian revolution. Thousands of Hungarians came over to Canada and commemorated the anniversary of being here for 40 years. I will never forget the sign they were displaying in the National Arts Centre. If I am not mistaken, some of Elvis Stojko's relatives said that it was nice to move to a country where politicians could retire and they are not executed.

That is what Canada is all about. We should be exporting these ideals around the world and especially in the country of Colombia. If we did that, I am sure the government would have our support. Until that happens, we have to raise our objections to these types of trade deals. In the long run, history has shown that it is workers and the environment that will suffer and very few companies will profit from this type of undertaking.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned the notion of safety for retiring politicians. I support that wholeheartedly, although I have no intention of retiring for the time being. However, one never has a lot of choice in these matters.

That raises a point. President Uribe's father was murdered by FARC some time ago. The violence in Colombia, during the civil war between ideological factions, with the paramilitaries on the right and FARC on the left, wreaked tremendous damage on the people of Colombia. The government has made progress. We have a trade relationship with Colombia right now, but we do not have a robust, rules-based system to enforce better labour or environmental practices now.

Given that we already have a trade relationship with Colombia, how does having the most robust rules on labour and the environment of any trade agreement Canada has ever signed make things worse for the people of Colombia? The member mentioned Just Us! Coffee, a great company in my riding that the Martin government made an investment in supporting. I agree that it has made a difference, but it is one company.

We want to see rules that govern the activities of all Canadian companies there to strengthen the rights and environmental protection of the people of Colombia. The people we met with there believe that legitimate economic opportunity that weans them off of the drug trade that is destroying the environment, destroying lives and creating violence can actually help.

How does having more rules make the situation worse? I have an additional question. Can the member name one free trade agreement that the NDP has ever supported? He said that the NDP—

• (1240)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, if the member is serious about a rules-based system then why not rules for union leaders? Why not rules for the environment? Why not rules for the poor?

There is no question that when a country ups its economy, a lot of downcast people may take part in that and become a bit more better off. We hope fair trade deals allow that to happen.

When Canada looks at a country like Colombia for deals, examples have shown that it is always the people in labour, the people in unions, the poorest people, the people who are trying to protect their environment who are always pushed to the side to make way for the economy.

There is nothing wrong with a growing economy, but to quote the hon. member, "robust environmental and human rights legislation" must be in trade deals before we talk about any aspects of the economy.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my friend talked about the record of trade deals. There was a question from a Liberal suggesting that the trade deals that his party and the Conservatives have negotiated have somehow been of benefit to the environment. I am thinking about some of the pesticide laws that the U.S. enforced upon Canada, increasing our acceptable limit of pesticide use on fruits and vegetables that we produce in this country, never mind the ones that we accept from the U.S.

I am wondering if my friend could comment on that or any other aspects of trade deals that have since affected Canada's own sovereignty and ability to construct laws to protect the health and environment of our country, never mind the countries that we trade with.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, a classic example is chapter 11. When we first came to the House in 1997, the Ethyl Corporation was suing the Government of Canada because Canada wanted to remove MMT, a known carcinogen, from gasoline. Not only did we have to pay heavy legal fees but we had to keep MMT in our gasoline. We were one of the few countries in the world that had to have that. Plus, we paid Ethyl Corporation \$20 million. The government said it could not do anything because of the trade deal.

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We just need to look at Hudson, Quebec and other cities in this country that want to ban the use of pesticides within their jurisdictions. They are being taken to court by these multinational companies because of these trade deals. That happened as a result of our deal with the United States, so imagine what could happen if we deal with other countries.

This is what we are repeatedly talking about. We implore the government to ensure that environmental and labour standards are put first and then the economy and business rights after that.

• (1245)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today on the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. I want to compliment my colleague, the critic, who has done a very good job of dealing with a very difficult situation and trying to balance our deep concerns for the human rights situation taking place in Colombia with our need to understand and support our free trade initiatives that remove the barrier to trade that we know is going to liberate people, particularly the poorest in the world, from the poverty trap.

We recognize that while aid is a useful primer, foreign direct investment enables countries to have active, vigorous private sectors, where jobs and wealth can be created and moneys can be utilized by responsible governments for the social needs of a citizenry. It is something we support and, hence, that we pursue and support with some provisions.

As has been mentioned before, our goal is to ensure there is improved access. We want to balance it and ensure that elements within this bill are going to be supportive of the social concerns that many Canadians have due to what they have seen in Colombia.

I draw to the attention of the House to two parts. The critic has done a very good job of trying to highlight the parts that we want to ensure were going to be included. The side agreements involve labour co-operation and the environment.

I know that our colleagues and friends in the NDP have spoken about this, but it is very important for us and Canadians to understand that there are two side agreements and they involve the following. The first is the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, the absolute importance to abolish child labour, the elimination of forced or compulsory labour, and the elimination of discrimination.

We are also supportive of a \$15 million annual budget to ensure this agreement is going to be honoured and not violated. There are, however, some concerns.

There is one point I always try to bring forward. I had the privilege of travelling to Colombia some years ago. We know that the ELN, the FARC and the paramilitary are really driven financially by the moneys they are able to accrue from drugs, primarily cocaine and, to a lesser extent, heroin. There are, in effect, all groups of narco-terrorists. They may have started at one time, particularly the FARC, as having some political constituency and pursuing a certain political ideology, but for a long time that has not been the case.

Mr. “Sureshot” Marulanda died a couple of years ago. We saw the devolution of that individual from becoming a political revolutionary

into a pure blooded narco-terrorist. It has been instructive to see how these larger groups are now operating.

In fact, what is happening now in the large context, which the government needs to be aware of and has not brought forward, is the input and responsibility of Venezuela, which is now harbouring the FARC and has for a long time been supporting it and other paramilitary groups to the detriment of the people of Colombia and the region. Frankly, we do not do a good enough job of holding to account the individuals in groups, like the government in Venezuela, to account for their destabilizing activities, in this case in South America.

President Chavez is engaged in activities that some in his country see as being supportive. In the larger context of stability within South America, he is a destabilizing factor. I do not know how anybody can countenance the fact that Mr. Chavez is selling the most vile of all weapons, landmines, to the FARC, that are being used now, despite the fact that Colombia is a signatory to the landmines treaty, the Ottawa process that was started by the Liberal Party.

Despite the fact that Colombia is part of invasive, destructive elements such as what Mr. Chavez is doing, it is killing people. Half the casualties are soldiers; half, however, are civilians.

I was in a different party at the time we were pursuing and pushing hard for the landmines treaty. Part of it was the fact that the majority of casualties were actually civilians. In fact, landmines are the poison that prevents a country from being able to be financially stable.

• (1250)

Imagine if there were one landmine in downtown Ottawa. What would that do for the commerce in Ottawa? It would shut it down cold. Therefore, imagine a country that has thousands of these landmines. The people live in fear because at any moment they could be blown up. It kills the economy. It kills the social infrastructure of a country. The foreign affairs minister and the Conservative government need to do a much better job in that area to deal with the external influences of what takes place to destabilize Colombia.

The other point is there would not be a FARC if there were not a demand for illegal drugs. The government unfortunately takes a position on substance abuse and harm reduction as something to be discarded or discounted. We can see the troubles we have had in the ideological oppression and position that the government has taken against scientifically proven harm reduction strategies, such as Vancouver's Insite or the North American opiate medication initiative, headed by Dr. Julio Montaner at St. Paul's Hospital.

Those things work. Why in heaven's name does the government not get its own House in order and work with the provinces to help reduce the demand of drugs, which are fuelling the internal problems taking place in countries such as Colombia and the Middle East? They are in fact fuelling, in part, the Taliban and al-Qaeda, which are killing our soldiers in Afghanistan.

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The need and the desire to have effective, scientifically-proven harm reduction strategies is critically important in the larger context. It is also very relevant to the situation we are talking about today. The harm reduction strategies that my colleagues in the Liberal Party have championed and allowed to occur today must continue. The government must work with those who are experts in the area of harm reduction to ensure that Canadians from coast to coast will have access to those initiatives that work.

The bill also has another very important part and it deals with the issue of the environment. We know that in South America, one of the two great lungs of our planet are in Amazonia. We know Amazonia is being destroyed. We also know that addressing deforestation is one of the simplest and easiest ways of addressing and reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, particularly for developing countries.

Dr. Eric Chivian and Dr. Ari Bernstein of the Harvard School of Public Health and Dr. Michael Fay, a *National Geographic* scientist in residence in Washington, have put forth some very compelling solutions as to how we can look at areas that are critically important for the collective health, not only those countries but the world, and use those areas so they will be seen as assets.

Right now we look at forests as an asset when the trees are cut down, but in reality forests are public utilities. They take carbon dioxide from the environment and put oxygen back. That has a value. If we put value on carbon, we can put value on these wild spaces and a country can receive moneys for preserving those carbon sinks. It very important that there are ways of doing this.

I encourage the government to also construct an independent group to oversee this bill. The Liberal Party is very concerned with how the bill will be implemented. This is why we are supportive of the existing oversight mechanism. However, I also suggest there is a very important role and opportunity to bring in civil society in Colombia and Canada, to bring forth a group of independent experts, arm's-length from the government, who can oversee the implementation of the bill to ensure the labour, human, environmental and social benefits of it will be accrued to the people of Colombia.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure members of the House would agree that the member has given a very circumspect and balanced commentary on the bill. The member has addressed some of the concerns that have been raised through other members with respect to oversight, accountability, particularly in the area of human rights and the environment. A previous speaker, the critic for the opposition, talked about a robust rules-based regime that would drive this free trade agreement.

It has been said that side agreements really detract from the opportunity to make these oversight mechanisms work. Does the member think, given the oversight mechanisms that are subject not only to bilateral agreements but to multilateral institutions, there would be an argument that these side bar agreements would in fact reinforce the kind of accountability that all members of the House on all sides would like to see built in to this free trade agreement?

• (1255)

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's excellent question really hits the nub of the matter.

Side agreements are important to support the central agreement. They are the ying-yang of the agreements. They provide a check and balance to ensure, in this case, a free trade agreement will not be utilized in a way that will not ultimately benefit the people.

The weakness I see, historically, is oversight mechanisms have been wanting. Part of the reason is that we might have an oversight mechanism without a proper enforcement mechanism. What has to be built into this is an enforcement mechanism.

It also gets to the heart of the need to rewrite and strengthen our Special Economic Measures Act, the SEMA, which a lot of the private sector companies in Canada want. They want to have discreet and defined parameters upon which they wan work. In that way, they will be able to work in a way that is commercially effective but also socially responsible.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I implore my colleague, who has spent a fair amount of time looking at trade agreements, to check with his consistent adoration of these side agreements being as purposeful as the agreement itself. If the meaning and support for rules around labour regulations and environmental regulations were so critical to the Government of Canada and the government of Colombia, then they would have been in the body and context of the official agreement, the one that is truly enforceable by both countries' courts and parliaments. Putting it to the side is in fact putting it to the side.

We have seen this with NAFTA in the side agreements around labour, environment and other important issues about which I have spoken very strongly. They were always put into these side agreements that had far less effect than the main body of these trade policies. This has been borne out in the fact of how the agreements come into force in the years that follow.

If he is so insistent, has he made the petition in the government to include these very important issues into the main text, the main body of the agreement, the one that gets all the attention, money and focus in the courts and in the parliaments?

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, it does not preclude the fact of being able to have side agreements that are effective. We make the side agreements as effective as we want based on the negotiations in which we engage.

We need to look at this perhaps in a different way. Let us say that we did not have this agreement at all. Then we would not have any agreement on labour or on the environment. There would be no vector or roots at all to deal with these very important issues that not only affect Colombia, but also affect our country in the larger context.

Therefore, the question I think the member needs to ask himself is this. Is it better to have no agreement than an agreement that gets our foot in the door to deal with these larger issues that are critically important? I would submit that it is important for us to have strong side agreements to deal with these issues about we are mutually concerned.

PRIVILEGE

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in connection with the question of privilege raised by my colleague, the member for Mississauga South, last Friday morning. I would like to confirm that I witnessed the Minister of Natural Resources make a rude gesture to the hon. member last Thursday during question period, when he rose on an issue, and clearly that gesture was directed at the member.

* * *

• (1300)

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, be read the second time and referred to a committee, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commit to you and the House to make no such gestures whatsoever, regardless of how passionate I become around this debate, the so-called Colombia free trade agreement. Right now we are dealing with a subamendment that was moved by my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

I spent, as did many Canadians, a number of years working in Latin America as a volunteer and as a student. I was trying to, at first intentions, help out a subcontinent friend but I learned that the help was coming back to us. So many Canadians and Americans have benefited from their experiences in Latin America and have learned that the context there is critical for our engagement as a country. Having some understanding of the local lay of the land, some of the politics and history of the place is absolutely essential, whether we do business at a formal level or we do trade agreements as proposed.

The context of Colombia, which I spent some time living and working in as well, is so utterly different than the context that we work in, legally through the actual system of how voting happens or does not happen, the use of paramilitary forces, the drug trade, which the demand from North America and Europe throws, literally and figuratively, a grenade into the societies that produce these drugs. There is so much demand in our countries. Rather than properly deal with the issue at home, in the U.S. and Europe, where the primary markets are for these drugs, we joined the Americans in the war on the drugs and went there to impose upon them our ideas about how to stop the drug trade, which was napalming a bunch of fields and going after folks at every level rather than going at the demand side of the equation.

Knowing the context is so critical to the way Colombians see Canadians and North Americans, in general, and their European trading partners, when we get to the table that describes how we will trade with one another, the Colombian context has bearing.

We also have to understand the opinions and attitudes of the Colombians toward trade deals in general. How has it worked out for

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other trading nations, both within Mercosur and the trading blocs within South America, and the experiences of NAFTA in North America or the European Trading Union? When a developed country and a developing country get together, hopefully in a symbiotic trade relationship, the people particularly in the developing nation, nations like Colombia, Peru, Mexico, have a very keen interest because the impacts are much greater there than they are here.

We have not recognized this in our debate to this point. The decisions that we make, the and yeses and the noes that we implicitly put into a trade deal with a country like Colombia, have far greater impact there than they will for Canadians.

That is not to say there will not be an impact here. That has also been felt, obviously through agreements like NAFTA. We have watched the hollowing out of our manufacturing base in our country. We continue to lose value-added jobs and replace them with service sector jobs. The great economists within the Liberal and Conservative Parties, if there are any, say that this is a fantastic trade policy, this continual sliding slope of just not making stuff any more, allowing it to be made somewhere else. We buy it and send them raw resources instead.

The records of trade policies and instigating some of the change that the Liberal and Conservative members have talked about has been poor. To not recognize that pattern is critical. It then says that the negotiators on behalf of Canada did not recognize that context, did not recognize that history as well. They have brought forward an agreement that will continue the disastrous record of the so-called free trade policies that we have seen so far.

Also in this context, again utterly ignored by the government, is a Latin American arms race going on, basically hinged between Colombia and Venezuela, with Peru and Ecuador getting involved. Now Brazil has come in as well as Chile and Argentina and they are buying more weapons per capita than anywhere else in the world. This is after two decades of not having done so. To enter into that context and not recognize those realities for a place like Colombia, where weapons and violence against union activists, labour activists, NGOs, environmental groups and indigenous groups has been on the rise for the past 15 years, seems to me folly.

It seems to me to be that we are putting on blinkers and saying that all we are doing is a trade deal. On the other hand, we are saying that this trade deal will lead to so much benevolence for the people and that the good people will be so much more secure, better off and so much richer after it happens.

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•(1305)

It is also a question of asking what we actually want in our trade deals. The New Democrats have asked time and time again in this House for environment and labour accords, basic social justice that our party fights for in a Canadian context also to be implicit and put into the central agreements in the trade context. Yet time and time again we see them as after the fact footnotes to trade agreements. The central parts talk about other things, but at the end of the day when the government feels a little bit of heat and pressure from some NGOs, a little side agreement is thrown in to deal with serious issues such as the environment and labour.

To suggest that trade is a path toward a more benevolent, fair and equitable world is to ignore the many decades that these trading patterns have existed, all the way back to the sugar and spice trades in the Caribbean, and the African slave trade. All of these were great trading patterns that went on. They were trading for trading sake, and the benefits were declared in parliaments around the world, saying that it was good for business and therefore it must be good for the general population. We know the sugar and spice trades did not work out that way. We know the textile and mercantile trades did not work out that way.

We have seen the elites of two societies get together and hammer out a deal but they do not return to the general populace for any type of confirmation or understanding. The current government has done this and the previous government did it as well. There is no information campaign by the government around this trade proposal, nor is there any in the lead-up to a South Korea trade proposal which it is suggesting. Members of the Canadian public have learned about this trade deal through other means, through non-profit organizations and through MPs like our friend from Burnaby—New Westminster. They have engaged the public town hall by town hall, in church basements. They have talked to Canadians in a much more respectful way about what is being done on their behalf. That is what this place is meant to stand for.

The government spent \$35 million on its outreach about its economic turnaround program. It spent \$35 million to say how wonderful it is. It spent not a dollar to talk to Canadians about the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, not a dollar to talk to Canadians about the impact on their communities and their homes. It suggests to me that rather than being proud about it, the government hopes this slips through under cover of night.

Negotiating a trade deal for its own sake is folly. We know this. To go into a negotiation to simply be able to say that there is a negotiation one or that another deal has been made does not make any practical sense. One has to go in with a certain intention, a certain principle and purpose that one hopes to get in the end.

We hear all the lamentations and cries from the two parties. The Conservatives and the Liberals say that this will improve trade. One point that was raised earlier was that the fierce and violent drug trade in Colombia would somehow be alleviated by the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. I would point to Mexico. Mexico signed on to an extensive trade deal with this country and the United States. Mexico's narco-traffic trade has gone through the roof. The violence amounts to a state of civil war in many states in Mexico. It has a trade agreement in place, which has rules defining how trade is

meant to cross the boundaries. Yet colleagues from the Liberal Party this morning said that if we enter into a trade deal with Colombia, it should help alleviate the pressure on those citizens who are dying at the hands of narco-traffickers. That is truly living in another dimension.

We know that the connection between the narco-traffic trade and free trade represents two other worlds. If we want to talk about how to curb the violence and the trade in illicit drugs in Colombia, we could have that conversation, but let us not pretend that the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement could do anything about it.

On the environmental side, I have spent a great deal of time working with Latin American environment groups and their perspective of countries like Canada is not exactly exemplary. Many of the companies that work in countries in Latin America and South America do not have a great record. Every parliamentarian should check the Omai gold spill.

There is a good bill by a Liberal member to enforce Canadian environmental laws on Canadian companies when they operate overseas. That is a trade policy we would support. That is a trade policy that actually talks about having some sort of equivalency when we are dealing with other countries. However, to suggest that a blanket trade agreement will somehow cause Canadian companies and their Latin American counterparts to do better by the environment is an absolute falsehood and must be pushed to the side.

In fact, it is a side agreement. It is not nearly as enforceable as the main body of the agreement that Canada has negotiated. It shows the relative lack of importance the government and its supporters in the Liberal Party have placed on the environment and the treatment of labour activists in the Colombian context. This so-called trade deal is not a deal for the Colombian people any more than it is a deal for the Canadian people. We should instruct our negotiators to make these issues front and centre. If we believe in them so much, they should be the first two chapters of the trade agreement, not two throwaway subamendments at the very end of it.

•(1310)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned the geopolitical challenges faced in Latin America and Central America today, particularly the issue around the Venezuelan President Chavez. President Chavez' regime is threatening to cut off all trade with Colombia.

We have spoken with labour unions, businesspeople and workers in Colombia who are very concerned about the effect of Mr. Chavez' potentially cutting off all trade relations with Colombia, virtually shutting down industries in large parts of Colombia, particularly those contiguous with Venezuela.

Furthermore, the Chavez regime is supplying landmines to FARC in Colombia. We heard an intervention by one of my colleagues earlier today about the pernicious effect of landmines in Colombia, landmines being put in the ground by FARC, being supplied by Venezuela.

We also know of the relationship between Iran and its leadership and Venezuela now, and the fact that there are three direct flights between Caracas and Tehran every day.

Is it not important to the people of Colombia that we provide them with legitimate trade to help protect them against the thuggery being imposed on them by the Chavez regime in Venezuela?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague is trying to understand the mind of someone as diabolical as Chavez, he should go to other places. Maybe a house filled with psychologists would have a better shot than a house full of parliamentarians would.

His supposition is that a trade deal with Canada would somehow subvert the efforts of Hugo Chavez.

This trade deal would give access to Canadian arms manufacturers, point in fact, into a place that is buying more weapons per capita than anywhere else in the world. It is not mentioned in the trade agreement whether any consideration has been given to that fact.

Canada must understand the level of violence in these countries, the escalation of an arms race like we have never seen before. We must also remember that there were so few arms purchases in the last 20 years in Latin America because all the dictators the western world supported getting into power in the 1960s and 1970s eventually got the boot by activists on the ground, the same activists we are trying to protect by destroying flawed labour agreements.

There are few arms being traded right now but it is increasing exponentially because of trade agreements with countries like Canada that produce the very arms that some of these countries are looking to import. Obviously this should be a consideration we should be seized with in this House.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the member's historic and economic analysis with respect to the two examples: one being the issue with Afghanistan and the military results of not having developed any relationships economically with Afghanistan in the past; and his theory with respect to economic determinism in Latin America and the Caribbean. His experience has been in Latin America and mine has been in the Caribbean. There was a tremendous infrastructure and history. It was not just the spice trade. In the 1960s there were agricultural relationships with the West Indies federation. It was retaliation, quota setting and capital concerns of investment that stymied the efforts of the West Indian federation to do the very thing he is talking about.

Here, we are talking about globalization in terms of lowering those kinds of barriers. Is that not a different time? This is not the time to pick up for developing countries, given that we do have a robust rules-based system. But is this not the time at least to make a start and not let those military, gang and thuggery types go forward?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I would remind my colleague that those very dictatorships that have since been removed from

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Latin America established trade negotiation parameters with this country and with the U.S. That is what enabled many of those dictatorships to thrive and survive. Let us not make the mistake of saying that trade for trade's sake will always give us a positive result.

We traded with Pinochet. We sent our merchandise there and bought from him. We traded with South Africa until, finally, public pressure forced the Brian Mulroney government to switch policies. We are seeing the same thing here.

We have no problem with trade. Canadians are simply asking that if we are going to trade with these countries that we trade for ultimate purposes. There should be a lightening of the load for the people in places like Colombia. It should not be some trade policy for trade's sake. We should not be absolutely blind to an arms race going on in the country. We might end up exacerbating the problem.

● (1315)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the committee on international trade, I want to add my voice to this debate. A couple of years ago I had the privilege to chair the committee and now I am the vice-chair.

I just heard the NDP member say that they are not against trade. Earlier, the trade critic for the Liberal Party, the member for Kings—Hants, asked the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore to name one free trade agreement that the NDP supported. There was not one. Who is telling Canada and Colombia that they are prepared to support this no matter what the terms are?

We hear the debate at committee and in this House, but let me refer to some of the experiences we have had at committee and the witnesses we have heard and the comments that have been made, by the ambassador for Colombia, for example. The president of Colombia was here just before the recess. I had the privilege of chairing that committee meeting. The man sat there and opened his heart. He said, "We need help. We want to create terms and conditions whereby both our nations can benefit". Trade does not benefit one side. It is not a one-way venue. It is two-ways.

As a nation we trade goods, services and technology. Why? We want to keep Canadians employed. We want to generate revenue so that we can invest in new technology, in post-secondary education, in research chairs, in new product lines, for example, so that not only can we export them, but we can use them here as well.

We received a letter from the house of representatives in the Republic of Colombia. For the record, I would like to read some of the comments with respect to this trade deal:

As members of the national legislative entity and the representatives of the people of Colombia, we consider that the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and Colombia is a major factor in the establishment of stable, transparent scenarios for commerce and investment, which generate employment, allow for the improvement of living conditions of our citizens and blocking out the paths for drug trafficking.

This is very important also.

The Free Trade Agreement between Canada and Colombia is composed of a series of chapters in which the rules of engagement for trading goods and services and investment processes are determined—

The letter goes on. Another area of the letter to our Parliament states:

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—as well as the Labor and Environmental Cooperation Agreements, allow us to assert that the conditions to strengthen the relations between Canada and Colombia are on the table, by means of instruments designed to contribute to the high and sustained growth of our economies by way of increasing exports, diversifying markets, increasing productive investments and generating employment.

It goes on, and then there is even better stuff, which hopefully will satisfy the NDP:

Likewise it is important to indicate that these instruments reinforce the commitments of Colombia regarding human rights and labor conditions creating suitable scenarios to improve the alternatives of our citizens, such as better working conditions and balance between trade and sustainable development.

We consider that supporting the approval and implementation of these instruments is a step in the right direction, for it will represent support for our nation in the challenges it faces regarding these sensitive issues, and the confirmation of our understanding in the defence of the fundamental rights of our citizens.

The letter goes on and on. The closing part is very important:

—as to the advance in the achievement of our goal to overcome poverty and generate appropriate conditions for the creation of stable and dignified employment, and to protect and guarantee fundamental rights.

It is signed by the Republic of Colombia house of representatives.

Colombia has gone in whichever way it can right now to try and improve. Earlier I asked in questions and comments what we should do as a nation. Should we stay away? Should we just say we will wait until Colombia gets its house completely in order, until it reaches perfection? Perfection does not exist.

● (1320)

We look at some of the trade agreements that Canada has engaged in in years past. It is an evolving issue. We look at the North American free trade agreement, or the free trade agreement prior to that and the evolution of it. We look at what is happening in Europe, for example, and the nations that are coming on board continuously, year after year.

I will not name any, but there are some nations within Europe, especially since the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, where there have been abuses, human rights violations, labour violations, and the list goes on. What has Europe done? The European Commission has set certain criteria and prerequisites. Within these agreements that we are engaging in, we all know very well that these conditions are also there.

Let me point them out, if I may. This article has to do with free trade with Colombia. These are not my words but the author's:

The pact is broadly modelled on others Canada has signed with the United States, Mexico, Israel, Chile and Costa Rica in the past 15 years.

There was a benchmark set that we are following as a nation. Of course, we know the NDP's position. They have not signed on to or been prepared to support one free trade deal. If they had their way, we would be an esoteric country. We would not deal with anybody or talk to anybody. We would just ask to be left as we are. Unfortunately, that is not how jobs are created. That is not how we are going to prosper as a nation.

Let me point out something else. A senator from Colombia visited us. He is from the opposite side of the spectrum. Senator Robledo asked to meet us before our committee and we invited him. He was accompanied by the ambassador of Colombia. He had his say and expressed his concerns. We asked a lot of questions. We asked him

what he would like us to do. We asked if we should just close our doors, period. He told us that we can move forward constructively to engage and hopefully look at improving some of the difficult issues that Colombia is facing today.

What has Colombia done? The office of the president appointed a gentlemen by the name of Frank Pearl. Mr. Pearl was appointed as high presidential counsellor for social and economic reintegration by President Uribe in September 2006. His responsibility, and they are investing money in this, is to help bring people from post-conflict reintegration programs back into society. His responsibility is to help these people rejoin their families, get retrained, find new skills, find gainful employment, find some dignity and come back into society.

I met with this gentleman a year ago and at that time he pointed out that 45,000 ex-combatants from both paramilitary groups and guerrilla forces have come back into society. For me, this is a sign that this country is serious about addressing the very difficult issues that it is facing. I am reaching out to everybody here. We as a nation have to make sure that human rights, labour rights, and others are not violated. areas.

I will close with this. I believe we have a duty as a nation to do two things. First, we must show them our way, which I believe is second to none. Second, we must create opportunities for ourselves as a nation so that our people have an opportunity to get their fair share of the pie out there.

● (1325)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague and his home country for voting the right way for a green socialist party, a party to the left. We thank Greece for leading the way once again in Europe.

My hon. colleague talked about these trade deals and he talked about Alvaro Uribe himself. He should know that in a letter from Mr. Rick Arnold of Common Frontiers Canada dated October 2, which was copied to him, there were a lot of comments and concerns. I am sure that Mr. Arnold would like some answers from the member to his enquiry.

The member is hinting that if we sign on to these free trade deals and we just click our heels three times and make three wishes, all of the human rights abuses and all of the environmental degradation will go away and life will be better for everybody.

The opposite happened during the apartheid regime in South Africa. We did not continue trading with South Africa but instead put sanctions on that country. I remember the world got behind that movement. When economic sanctions were put on that country, it changed its evil ways to the point where Nelson Mandela, who spent 27 years in jail, became the president. That was a historic day, but it could not have been done if we had continuously traded with South Africa. We had to put sanctions on that country to ensure that it was taught a lesson.

I wish the member could highlight one instance of a trade deal with a country like Colombia where labour rights and environmental rights were paramount to any economic rights.

Government Orders

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, South Africa at that time was not doing very much and that is why there were sanctions. Colombia is moving aggressively and practically forward and that is why we need to engage with that country.

I thank the member for his comments with respect to the elections in Greece. If he follows his politics very closely he will understand that the PASOK party has evolved from the socialist party that it was 30-odd years ago to a modern, state-of-the-art, centre type of party.

The only difficulty I have is trying to understand why after 60 years the New Democratic Party keeps calling itself new.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an important issue has received some attention during this debate and that is the trade in illegal drugs, the driver of the human rights abuses that have plagued Colombia for so long.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague from Toronto if he does not think that the Conservative government is actually working in opposition to the initiatives that are needed here to reduce the demand for illegal drugs in Canada. If we were able to do that, then the financial driver of FARC, the ELN and the paramilitary groups in South America would be severely undermined.

In other words, the absence of support by the Conservative government for harm-reduction strategies is actually playing into the hands of FARC, ELN and the paramilitary groups that are committing the human rights abuses that all of us are deeply concerned about.

Does my colleague not think that the government needs to seize on harm-reduction strategies like Insite and NAOMI and ensure that medical establishments across Canada have access to these programs?

Mr. John Cannis: I agree with my colleague, Mr. Speaker. There is a lot of merit in what he says. There is no question about it.

I would like to focus on my contribution to this debate. This trade agreement is multi-dimensional. We have talked about mining companies and forestry companies. We have talked about labour rights and human rights violations. We have talked about everything. My comments were focused primarily on keeping an open mind as we move toward voting on this piece of legislation.

We have to move forward with the thought in mind that it is not a perfect agreement, but it is the right direction for us to take. As we move along, we can make changes, a suggestion that my colleague has made as well.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in this debate today.

My friend said earlier that we do not face death or the extinguishing of our life when we finish this job as parliamentarians, and he meant that tongue-in-cheek. In my previous profession as a trade union activist and educator, I had the great privilege of meeting a trade union activist and educator from Colombia who came to this country for two reasons. One was to share his story and experiences of what it was like for him as an educator and trade unionist in Colombia at the time, and the other was to be safe. Not only had his life been threatened by paramilitaries in this country, but indeed numerous attempts had been made on it.

I had a personal discussion with that gentleman and we talked about our families. He recounted a story that was very moving. It was a horrendous story, and he was very brave to tell it. He said they came for him one night in jeeps and machine-gunned his house, but they had the wrong night. He was at a meeting in another village, but unfortunately his wife and two children were at home and all three of them died.

Those three individuals died only because that woman's husband and those children's father was a trade union activist and educator. He had not committed a crime. He belonged to legitimate organizations. Folks were saying he was doing great work in the countryside and villages that he was engaged with, yet they came for him anyway.

He came here to be safe and of course we made him safe here, but the horrible things happening to trade unionists, which he told us about, happened not because of illegal activity. They were murdered for speaking up, the thing that we do here on a daily basis, speaking up for those citizens across this great land of ours who expect us to come to this place and speak up. When they do that in Colombia, however, they face great threat and great danger. In some cases they actually face death, and in all too many cases they die.

We have all acknowledged this in this House. I do not think there is anyone in this House who refutes that. We accept it as being fact, but then we diverge from that into the sense of whether we should have a trade policy with a group and a country that we know cannot make all of its citizens safe. Some might say that not all of our citizens are safe either, and that is true. Murders happen in this country, but we do not have murders targeted at individual groups such as trade unionists and teachers, as Colombia does. Murders happen here as acts of violence, in the commission of a crime. These premeditated murders in Colombia are targeting groups to keep them quiet.

One must ask why. Why would a country allow a group to be silenced, unless of course it does not want to hear the voice? That voice is really the people of Colombia itself who are saying, through its representatives, "This is not a good deal for us. We do not believe in the free trade sense".

My colleagues in the Liberal Party are saying that New Democrats have never stood in their places and said yes to free trade. I will agree we have not, because we do not believe in free trade, but that does not mean that we do not believe in trade. Of course we do, but we believe in a fair trade policy that takes labour and environmental rights and makes them part of the whole agreement, not something to be added at the end. When we add something at the end, we give it less significance and less weight. All of us who go through arbitration, mediation or bargaining processes know, and in fact I am sure even some lawyers in this House will explain it to me as well from a legalistic perspective, that when we put things at the end, make them addenda or reference points, they do not carry the same weight as they would if they were in the agreement.

I would say to my colleagues in the Liberal Party that if that is the case, if they really believe it, then they should amend it. They have the opportunity to amend the agreement, to take the labour and environmental rights and insert them into the free trade agreement, but I have not heard them say that yet.

Government Orders

•(1330)

What I have heard said is that they know it is not the best. A colleague in the Conservative caucus talked about a rising tide lifts all ships. I came from an island so I guess it makes me somewhat of a maritime type person. Coming from Scotland, I suppose I was close to the sea. However, the problem is that if one does not have a boat when the tide rises, one might drown.

When we debated chapter 11 last week in the House, we talked about how Canadians were doing under chapter 11 of the free trade agreement from an economic perspective. The Statistics Canada report was quite evident. The majority of us who live and work in this country are not doing as well or are about the same as we were in 1985. The Statistics Canada report actually says that we are less well off or about the same. If we take inflation into account, it is less.

Here is this agreement that did not give Canadian workers any great deal of joy and we want to give it to Colombians. What we are saying is that it did not help us, but we want them to have it as well. I find that really reprehensible from the perspective that we are trying to inflict upon Colombians a free trade agreement that the vast majority of them do not want.

If President Uribe really believes in it, I guess he could take it to the people of Colombia and ask them, as part of a referendum, whether they want free trade. Then, of course, it would need to be explained. As my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley said earlier, we do not explain it to Canadians. The government has not spent \$1 explaining the free trade agreement to Colombia or to Canadians. If the Government of Canada is not willing to do it, then it is highly unlikely that President Uribe will be.

My colleagues in the Liberal Party have said that if we just sign it the human rights conditions will get better. The human rights violations in Colombia are deplorable and they agree. However, I would suggest that if they believe President Uribe who says things are getting better without free trade, it is like the old adage of the carrot and the stick. At the moment the stick is working in the sense that if we do not give Colombia the free trade agreement, perhaps it will get better.

When President Uribe appeared in committee on the day I happened to be there to listen to him, he said that there were less deaths but that he does not have a free trade agreement. The logic seems to be that, if that is the case, why would we rush to give it to him when he says, by his own words, that things are getting better without it as far as the violence is concerned?

I would suggest that my Liberal colleagues tell President Uribe, because I will not propose free trade to him, to eliminate the violence against trade unionists and teachers' organizations and to cut out the paramilitaries and then we will talk. Ultimately, lots of things get done with the carrot and the stick. At this time, if we hang out the carrot to Uribe, I think he may just eat it all and then we will no longer have any leverage, because once it is done, it is done.

At the end of the day, human rights is paramount for us. We have it enshrined in this country. If we are suggesting to Colombia that it must follow suit, then we cannot simply allow it to have free trade at no cost. Ultimately, this is what it will be about. When Colombia gets it, there is no more leverage for Canada.

I heard my colleagues earlier talk about the congress of Colombia and Senator Jorge Enrique Robledo who was here with a minder because he was not allowed to come by himself. A minder accompanies someone to ensure he or she does not say things that are out of line. What he did say was:

You can be sure of the fact that should this free trade agreement be ratified, Canada will become extremely unpopular and disliked by the people of Colombia,

That person was Colombia's representative who said that. We did not elect Senator Robledo, Colombians did. He speaks for Colombians and I think we ought to hear what Colombians have to say to us, which is that they do not want this deal at this particular moment in time. What they do want is a fair trade agreement.

We need to enter into negotiations with Colombia but, first and foremost, we need to ensure human rights are protected in Colombia and that Colombian trade unionists and educators are safe.

•(1335)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises an important point when he talks about violence toward trade unionists. I would call his attention to a *Washington Post* editorial from April 19, 2008. The editorial had some analyses of the attacks on trade union members and leaders in Colombia. In fact, it was determined that of the murders in Colombia in 2007, only 0.2% of those murders were trade unionists compared to the fact that 2% of the overall population of Colombia are members of trade unions. Trade unionists are in fact 10 times safer than the general public in Colombia. Based statistically, Colombia is a violent country.

Does the hon. member realize that 1,800 trade union leaders in Colombia are provided with full-time security by the Uribe government? That has resulted in the fact that trade union members are safer than the general public under the Uribe government's leadership. Does he understand that? Is that one of the reasons that President Obama is supportive of free trade with Colombia?

•(1340)

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague answered his own question about whether we should agree with free trade and enter into the agreement when he said that trade unionists are safer than ordinary Colombian citizens because they actually have folks walking around with submachine guns to look after them. If they have armed guards looking after them, that speaks volumes to the fact that they are under threat.

I know the Prime Minister has a security detail, but the hon. member for Kings—Hants and I do not have security details. Therefore, if trade unionists in Colombia need a security detail to look after them, what does that say about Colombia? Does it say that it is safer? I would suggest that it does not.

Government Orders

What I would suggest, albeit the hon. member continues to say that we need to go forward and all of his talk about the human rights piece, why not put the human rights piece first? The member has a good relationship with President Uribe, and I do not say that in any kind of sense other than an honourable sense. He has spoken to him on numerous occasions. I would ask the member to reach out to the president and tell him that when he fixes the issue we will come back and talk to him. The member has that opportunity because he actually has that type of relationship with President Uribe.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member for Kings—Hants seems to be the biggest supporter in this House for this trade deal with Colombia, basically under any and all circumstances.

However, he has made previous comments to this House and there is a particular individual with common frontiers who is quite outraged by the comments of the member for Kings—Hants because of his sort of analysis of the situation in Colombia.

I would just like my hon. colleague from Welland to just highlight a few of the concerns that the gentleman in question has raised.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right. The hon. member has said that paramilitary groups have been disbanded in Colombia and yet he seems to be one of maybe two in the House who believe that. The rest of us do not. President Uribe certainly believes it but provides no absolute proof of that.

The gentleman who actually wrote the letter said that he thinks perhaps it is an hallucination suffered in the House in the sense that these paramilitary groups have actually disappeared when all of the human rights groups across this world are saying that it is not true, that they still exist. We still hear of folks getting murdered.

When we look at 2008, the murders of trade unionists increased by 18% from 2007. We actually saw a blip back up in 2008 over 2007. It still continues to this day.

One wonders, if it is still happening, then how can one say that the paramilitary groups have gone away, that they are no longer in existence? Maybe they are just a little bit more clandestine than they used to be because they are still there today.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the members of the NDP caucus and, in particular, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster for his consistent and principled fight to put an end to the free trade agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia. His fight against this unacceptable trading arrangement is truly the fight of every fair-minded person who cares about labour rights, human rights, environmental protection and the individual's right to freedom from violence and displacement from home and agricultural land.

Violations of labour rights and violence committed against unionized workers are among Colombia's foremost human rights challenges. Colombia is the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist. A deep seated anti-trade union culture exists in Colombia both within government and among entrepreneurs who see the autonomous organization of workers as a threat.

Two thousand, six hundred and ninety trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia since 1986, with 46 deaths in 2008 and so far in 2009 27 murders.

Impunity rates for these violations is unchanged. There is only a 3% conviction rate for those who murder. Tragically, these crimes are tolerated by the Colombian government.

Canadians must never be a party to tolerance for violence. It goes against everything that we believe about ourselves. The Uribe government continues to inaccurately denounce union members as guerillas, statements considered by the unions as giving carte blanche to paramilitaries to act, putting workers in extreme jeopardy.

Substantive labour rights protections remain in a side agreement rather than in the body of the free trade agreement. Enforcement of these rights is entirely at the discretion of the signatory government. It is not a matter of discretion. It is a matter of life and justice, and justice has been denied because the complaint process is not investigated nor evaluated by independent judicial or even quasi-judicial bodies that could lead to real remedies for the affected parties. It is, as I said, only a matter of discretion in this agreement.

Unlike the provisions for investor's rights, the agreement offers no trade sanctions, no countervailing duties or abrogation of preferential trade status in the event that a party fails to adhere to the labour rights provision. What it does institute is fines, fines for murder, and that is beyond credulity. Investors have rights but workers do not. It defines any kind of logic that killing a trade unionist means paying a fine. This is hardly acceptable or effective. Fines neither address the causes of the violence nor generate substantive incentive or political will in Colombia to address the crisis and bring an end to that violence against trade unionists. There is no justice.

Given the scale and the depth of labour rights violations in Colombia, neither the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement nor its labour side deal will be an instrument to guarantee labour rights and freedoms. In fact, it is more likely the agreement provisions for market liberalization and investor rights, which are substantive, will exacerbate conflict and violations of worker's rights. How on earth can we be a party to this?

I would also like to address the investment chapter of the CCFTA. Canadian oil and mining companies are well established throughout Colombia, including in the conflict zone. Canada's embassy in Bogota estimates the current stock of Canadian investment at \$3 billion and predicts it will grow to \$5 billion over the next two years with a focus on the oil, gas and mining sectors. Regions rich in minerals and oil have been marked by violence, paramilitary control and displacement.

Government Orders

The ongoing human rights crisis undermines the roles of citizens and communities in deciding which foreign investment projects proceed in their region. It also hampers their ability to advocate for greater community benefits, decent wages and working conditions and improved environmental protection. Canadian companies operating in conflict zones are not neutral actors. Even when investors are not directly connected to the violence, their interests are often intertwined with the perpetrators. Canadian companies cannot evade their responsibility. The CCFTA investment chapter pays mere lip service to corporate social responsibility with best efforts provisions, which are purely voluntary and completely unenforceable.

• (1345)

Almost 4 million people in Colombia are internally displaced. Sixty percent of this displacement has been from regions of mineral, agricultural or economic importance, where private companies and their government and paramilitary supporters have forced people from their homes. Agriculture in Colombia is pivotal for addressing poverty and human rights. Twelve million people live in Colombia's countryside. Agriculture provides 11.4% of the GDP and accounts for 22% of employment, nearly twice the level of manufacturing.

The CCFTA aggressively opens the Colombian agricultural sector to Canadian exports, including the immediate elimination of duties on wheat, peas, lentils, barley and specified quantities of beef and beans. Small scale wheat and barley producers in Colombia will be the hardest hit by a free trade agreement with Canada. Twelve thousand livelihoods will be undermined by Canada's industrially produced wheat and barley exports. A voluntary best efforts clause is not good enough. This trade agreement means additional displacement of the rural poor.

In addition, African palm is also critical. It is the fastest growing agricultural sector in Colombia. Colombia's President Uribe wants to take advantage of the growing global demand for palm oil and biodiesel by promoting the industry. However, the palm oil sector has a dark side. In all four palm growing zones, palm companies have been linked to paramilitaries and human rights violations, including massacres and forced displacement. Human rights groups have documented 113 murders in one river basin by paramilitaries working with palm companies to take over Afro-Colombian owned land.

I would like to also address the environmental side of the agreement in the CCFTA. Colombia is the second most biologically diverse country on earth, but it is losing nearly 200,000 hectares of natural forest every year. This deforestation results from agriculture, logging, mining, energy development and infrastructure construction. The environmental side agreement, or ESA, is unable to provide an effective buffer to counter the pressure of enforceable investor rights that undermine environmental measures.

We have repeatedly heard from the government and others that trade can support the realization of human rights if it brings benefit to vulnerable people and allows willing states to promote developmental outcomes. However, neither the political conditions in Colombia nor the terms of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement provide these reassurances.

While Canadian officials have argued that the FTA will strengthen democracy and improve human rights in Colombia, Colombian civil society organizations are concerned that the effect will be the reverse. They point to the deep connections between human rights violations and commerce in their country. The systematic attacks on trade unionists that resist liberalization and deregulation of local industry, as well as the dispossession and disappearance of peasants and Afro-Colombians as an expedient means to clear land for export plantations and mining investments, are serious problems.

In 2008, our parliamentary Standing Committee on International Trade undertook a study on human rights and environmental considerations of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. That committee report was important for making issues of human rights and the environment, issues in which Canada has numerous binding obligations under international law, central to debates on the deal. The committee concluded that the FTA with Colombia should not proceed without further improvement in the human rights situation in Colombia.

I think that it is imperative that we take that kind of advice. This FTA, signed behind the backs of the Colombian people without any real participation from civil society or any study on the impact, has caused great problems and violence in that community.

I would like to conclude my remarks. At the beginning, I said that the fight against the CCFTA was principled and truly a fight that every fair-minded person should support. After listening to the debate in the House, I have not changed my mind.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to take action when I was the Minister of Labour. I went to Colombia and Peru to speak about this free trade agreement and, among other things, a side agreement on workers' rights.

I had discussions with the President of Colombia. Naturally, Colombia wishes to have Canada's support for the implementation of this free trade agreement, which is going in the right direction. It will make progress in the area of workers' rights for unionized workers and all Colombian workers.

With respect to workers' rights, there is a side agreement in which Colombia confirms that it will respect fundamental labour rights. It also confirms its intention to grant the right to form unions, to not condone child labour and to ensure that there will be annual discussions among unions, workers, the government and entrepreneurs.

Either we allow them to be isolated or, on the contrary, we help them move in the right direction.

Statements by Members

I therefore ask the member why do they not want to allow Colombian workers to hope for better days and ensure that Canada will partner with them and make it possible for them to head in the right direction?

• (1355)

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I would echo what we have said before. Why is the labour agreement a side agreement? Why is it not integrated into the main agreement? Why does it have to take second place? I would suggest that it is because in the House, among some members, human rights are an inconvenience. They certainly seem to be an inconvenience in Colombia. It is absolutely integral to our values as Canadians that human rights be first and foremost.

I would like to also offer an observation in regard to a meeting I had this spring with a young woman, a trade unionist. She was a union steward for a service union. She came here with the help of the Canadian Labour Congress, but we had to meet very quietly. She did not tell me what village she came from. She only talked briefly about her family. She said her visit to Canada was kept absolutely secret from authorities in Colombia because were she to return and they had found out, she would be killed. She worried very much about her children while she was gone. She was very concerned that her children were in danger.

The point is, last spring a trade unionist feared for her life. What has changed in Colombia?

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words of the hon. member. She has said she does not believe we should have trade with a country wherein there is violence, as there is certainly in Colombia.

We also have to consider not just trade relations but also our aid relations. Canada does have quite a robust relationship with Colombia in terms of Canadian aid. We have agreements, for instance, where we provide funding for labour enforcement in Colombia. We provide money for human rights development in Colombia, for security in Colombia. That is our aid development.

Is the hon. member saying that we should continue our aid investment but not our trade investment because that would not make a lot of sense to me. Is it the official position of the NDP that we should continue to provide aid to developing countries, but we should not provide trade opportunities to developing countries? Is it the official position of the NDP that we should give the fish to the developing world, but we should not give them the fishing rods that would help them develop their own economy? Is it the position of the NDP that we should keep the developing world enfeebled and cowering to us and taking our aid, but not buy their products?

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I can safely say that the position of New Democrats is for fair trade, the kind of fair trade that respects human rights, that promotes human dignity, and that means at the end of the day that there is not the kind of imbalance that we have seen in many countries.

I would ask the member how free trade has helped Mexico. I can recall many instances of Mexican workers being murdered because they wanted to have a union or to increase their wages. I can recall the situation in Chiapas, where Mexican labourers, farmers, were

removed from their land at gunpoint, so that multinational corporations could grow cheap strawberries for the North American market, a monoculture that destroyed the land and a methodology that destroyed the lives of these people. Murdered peasants, murdered workers in Mexico and environmental degradation, the trade agreement did nothing for Mexico.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is World Teacher Day and many of us are honouring teachers. I wonder if the member could tell us about some of the concerns that Colombian teachers have with regard to this free trade agreement.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, interestingly enough, there is a huge migration of Colombians into my riding of London—Fanshawe. Many of them are teachers and I have had the opportunity to speak with them. They talk about the war against teachers.

If we look back at totalitarian governments or regimes or those who used violence to get what they wanted, very often their first move was to kill the teachers, the intellectuals, and those who had the ability to speak up to analyze a situation and to talk about justice. That is precisely what has happened in Colombia. Teachers and their families have been targeted because they have the ability to speak up for justice and fairness.

We have a great deal to learn from past agreements and from the teachers of Colombia.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*English*]

PINK RIBBON CHARITY BALL

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was proud to attend the 12th annual Pink Ribbon Charity Ball in Kamloops this past month and I would like to pay tribute to its founder, Anthony Salituro.

When Anthony learned the devastating news that his aunt, Josephine Bruno, was diagnosed with breast cancer, he decided to hold this event. Fortunately, Josephine survived with treatment, but Anthony was so moved by this experience he decided he personally had to do something to help others who face this terrible disease.

On his initiative, with a handful of friends and family, he started the Pink Ribbon Charity Ball, which has now become one of the largest fundraising events in Kamloops. Anthony has raised over \$300,000 for cancer research and spent countless days organizing this beautiful event that honours and celebrates survivors as well as those who are not as fortunate, with a candle lighting ceremony.

Anthony's efforts show how one person can do extraordinary things to improve the lives of others in his community and his country. I know Anthony's efforts will help eradicate this disease that affects so many lives.

*Statements by Members***WORLD TEACHERS' DAY**

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World Teachers' Day and I am certain that all members of the House have special memories of those teachers who have played a major role in shaping their lives.

To mark the occasion, the *Toronto Star* received over 150 nominations for its first ever Toronto Star Teacher Award. Of these, four teachers characterize all that is special about their chosen profession.

Maria Campodonico came to Canada from Ecuador when she was 13 and has taught for 10 years in the Parkdale community in Toronto. According to the principal, Maria is so compassionate and is so much about what happens outside the class that she inevitably affects what goes on in class.

John Driscoll, a grade six teacher at Mother Theresa Catholic School, uses everything from Smarties to the length of his beard to motivate students to achieve their goals.

Retired English teacher, Glen Hayes, is a published poet who brought his love of literature to his classes while encouraging students to write their own stories and verse. He is inspiring and full of fun.

Kirk Moss who came from my old school York Memorial Collegiate is always setting ambitious goals with his students. His ultimate goal is to have students—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

* * *

[Translation]

RÉAL MELANÇON

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to Réal Melançon, a pioneer in bush flying who succumbed to leukemia on September 11, at the age of 82.

He practised his craft with a passion for over half a century and was still flying his commercial seaplane until last fall. Throughout his long career, he patrolled the Upper Laurentians and flew over Quebec's far north to take stock of wild animals such as wolves and moose.

For nearly 40 years, he directed his company, which at one time included a fleet of six planes and three exclusive territories. When Mr. Melançon created the company he wanted to “bring Quebec's backwoods within everyone's reach”, “demystify planes and bush flying” and “unveil the...treasures concealed in Quebec's forests”.

My colleagues in the Bloc Québécois join me in expressing our most sincere condolences to his family and friends.

* * *

[English]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we saw the Prime Minister's attempt to sing a new song on the weekend.

While those in attendance at the National Arts Centre's gala enjoyed the Prime Minister's show, the question is will he honestly change his tune when it comes to supporting the arts and take a sad song and make it better?

For example, will he check the math of his Heritage minister? The minister has inflated the costs of the proposed national portrait gallery by \$50 million. Money cannot buy love, but we can invest in a portrait gallery with many fewer notes.

Will the Prime Minister clarify the minister's *Twist and Shout* on the portrait gallery, or will he allow disharmony to continue and *Let it Be*?

Millions of dollars have already been invested in the former U.S. embassy for use as our national portrait gallery. Canadians want to know what the government is planning to do with this space since it has cancelled the gallery. Do Conservatives have a plan, or is it just a *Magical Mystery Tour*?

If he truly wants to sing a new song on the arts, not just be a *Day Tripper*, I ask the Prime Minister to stop hiding his love away and start supporting the national portrait gallery.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

CHARLESBOURG OPTIMIST CLUB BURSARIES

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on September 20, four young people in my riding of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles were honoured by the Optimist Club. They received awards of excellence in recognition of their exceptional contribution to the artistic, scholastic, community and athletic life of their schools.

The honourees are: Jérémy Boulanger-Bonnely, from Les Sentiers secondary school; Michaël Bouchard, from Le Sommet secondary school; Anne Cotton-Gagnon, from St-Jean-Eudes private school; and Véronique Chabot-Allard, member of the Charlesbourg Sea Cadet Corps.

In addition to bursaries, they received awards acknowledging their success throughout their secondary school studies. It is important to recognize the efforts of young people and to encourage them to continue.

I also want to commend the Charlesbourg Optimist Club, which, since it began presenting awards of excellence, has awarded more than \$45,000 in bursaries to young people who have both succeeded in their secondary school studies and been involved in various aspects of their school life.

Statements by Members

[English]

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week and weekend, His Holiness the Dalai Lama travelled to Vancouver, Calgary and Montreal where thousands of Canadians welcomed him and heard his inspiring message of peace.

From eastern Europe to South Africa and many other places in the world, struggles for rights and dignity have succeeded using the Dalai Lama's approach of non-violence, compassion and dialogue over conflict.

We are aware of the irony that there has yet to be the progress His Holiness seeks for his own Tibetan people. The Canadian government, which extended no official welcome on this trip, must be consistent in support of the Tibetan struggle for basic human rights.

The Dalai Lama is a tremendous inspiration to peace-seeking people the world over and I am sure all members agree he is deeply welcome in Canada. We look forward to hosting him again in Toronto next October.

* * *

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, of which I am a member, will begin a very important study into section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act.

This section prohibits electronic communication that is “likely to expose a person or persons to hatred or contempt by reason of the fact that person or those persons are identifiable on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination”.

I am very concerned about this section of the act. Any legislation which limits the ability to speak freely, without fear of government reprisal, is inappropriate in my view. While it is important to protect Canadians from discrimination, there are already provisions in the Criminal Code for recourse in such matters. In my view, this section of the legislation needlessly limits freedom of speech.

As Voltaire famously said, “I may disagree with what you have to say, but I shall defend to the death your right to say it”.

I look forward to a thorough and comprehensive study of this legislation at the justice committee, leading to a conclusion which protects Canadians from discrimination without compromising freedom of speech.

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[Translation]

WORLD PROFESSIONAL 10 DANCE CHAMPIONSHIP IN TROIS-RIVIÈRES

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, the city of Trois-Rivières hosted the best dancers in the world as part of the World Professional 10 Dance Championship. Some 20 countries were represented.

Dance enthusiasts were thrilled by this major event, held for the very first time in Trois-Rivières. Over three days, dance fans were treated to top-level shows and competitions.

Holding this prestigious event was a way to showcase the vitality of the dance community in Trois-Rivières and to put our city on the map of the world.

Congratulations to the organizers and to the many volunteers whose involvement and dedication helped make this weekend a huge success.

* * *

[English]

SISTERS IN SPIRIT

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Canadians from across the country gathered at the fourth annual Sisters in Spirit vigil to honour the lives of the many aboriginal women and girls who are presently missing, and we offered support to the suffering families that bear the terrible burden of grief.

Today, as a nation, we cannot stand by while over 500 aboriginal mothers, sisters, daughters and aunties have been taken so violently from us. Ending this type of violence and bringing to justice those who have committed crimes is a shared responsibility of all levels of government as well as law enforcement agencies, the justice system and civil society.

I personally worked on missing aboriginal women's cases as a police officer and I continue to work toward reunification and justice.

Our government continues to work together with aboriginal organizations, provinces and territories to protect the rights, freedoms and safety of aboriginal women and girls. We also reiterate our commitment to protecting and advancing the equality of aboriginal women and girls.

We urge all Canadians to take a moment to reflect upon this grave injustice and the ways we can collectively fight against it.

* * *

● (1410)

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while some Canadians might be interested in seeing Michael Moore's new exposé on unscrupulous corporate criminals, they should know that Canada has its own intrepid whistleblower, a truth seeker, man of the people and true blue Canadian hero, former Conservative candidate Gordon Landon.

Landon revealed on CTV's *Power Play with Tom Clark* last Friday that the Prime Minister's Office required that the truth be “sanitized” for public consumption.

What truth, might members ask? It is the truth that tens of millions of taxpayer dollars have been funnelled into Conservative ridings, money that was meant to be distributed equally in order to address the economic crisis but instead was used as part of the Prime Minister's cynical cash for votes electoral strategy.

Statements by Members

Why would the Conservatives ever do this? Is that not the party that rode to power on the promise of cleaning up government? Is that not the government led by a man who spent his entire career criticizing abusive government spending?

How quickly the tables are turned. Now the government is engaging in the worst type of pork-barrel politics, borrowing money at an equivalent of \$150 million a day, mortgaging our nation's future for the purpose of the Conservative Party's narrow political aims.

* * *

[Translation]

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the controversy surrounding his resignation, the member for Bourassa claims to have no regrets. Once the toothpaste is out of the tube, there is no putting it back in. A lot of Quebec journalists agree. Here are some examples of what they have to say: no good ideas, the leader's empty words about the economy, the environment, regional development and even Quebec.

The Liberal plan for what happens next has more to do with wishful thinking than political reality. Here is what people are saying: nebulous notions instead of new ideas. Surrounded by Toronto advisors who have exaggerated his qualities, the Liberal leader is a poorly shod shoemaker who will not make much more progress on the path to power.

While our government fights the recession, the Liberal leader is fighting recovery.

* * *

[English]

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is World Teachers' Day and I am proud to rise in the House to pay tribute to all teachers whose passion and commitment to their profession and their students makes such a vital contribution to our society.

It was in 1994 that UNESCO designated October 5 as World Teachers' Day. That day coincides with the anniversary of the adoption, in 1966, of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers. In adopting the ILO/ UNESCO recommendation, governments around the world unanimously recognized the need and importance for every society to have competent, qualified and motivated teachers.

This year in Canada the theme for World Teachers' Day is "Peace. Live it. Teach it". I cannot think of a more powerful theme than one that links with peace education. Peace education is about empowering people to create a safe world based on justice and human rights and to build a sustainable environment and protect it from exploitation and war.

These are certainly the values that guide the NDP and I am proud to salute all active and retired teachers for fostering those goals. I thank them for serving our communities with such passion and distinction. Our future depends on their success.

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader continues to prove why Canadians should not trust him. He says one thing in public and another in private. He says one thing in the west and another in the east. Now he says one thing in English and another in French. This is not leadership.

In early September he criticized the HST, but then his office told the Ontario premier that he supported it.

In B.C. he says that no money should go to the auto sector, yet in Ontario he says the opposite. Just this weekend, he complained about auto sector aid again, but this time in French. Does the Liberal leader support helping this crucial sector or not?

A real leader says the same thing in both official languages, says the same thing in the west and the east and does not say one thing in public and the opposite behind closed doors.

It is becoming clearer every day that the Liberal leader is not in it for Canadians. He is in it for himself.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL IN RIMOUSKI

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the 27th anniversary of the Carrousel international du film de Rimouski, which, every fall, presents a week of film-related activities for young people.

This year, 123 films from around the globe entertained audiences young and old. Members of the film industry led workshops and attended open animation workshops for secondary and CEGEP students. In short, it was a week of exciting cultural exchanges between international connoisseurs and young film fans.

One of the distinctive features of this festival remains its panel of international judges made up of about 20 young people aged 12 to 17, who determine the winners of the Camérios, the awards given out at that festival.

Congratulations and thanks to the volunteers, the organization's leadership, and particularly its president, Denis J. Roy.

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● (1415)

MEMBER FOR WESTMOUNT—VILLE-MARIE

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark the 25th anniversary of the first space flight by a Canadian astronaut.

In the years since that first flight, we have created the Canadian Space Agency, deployed the Canadarm and helped build the international space station. We have sent eight astronauts into space on fifteen missions.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Today, 25 years after his first mission, we honour the first Canadian astronaut. We recognize his three trips to space, his six hundred and seventy-seven hours as a payload and mission specialist and his service as president of the Canadian Space Agency.

He is a Canadian hero and we in the House are privileged to count him as a colleague.

[Translation]

To the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, congratulations, my friend. We are proud of you.

* * *

*[English]***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government remains focused on what matters to Canadians, our economic recovery, and help for those hardest hit by the global recession. That is precisely why we introduced Bill C-50. This bill would provide extra weeks of EI to help support unemployed long-tenured workers who have worked hard and paid premiums for years as they look for new employment. That is the fair and right thing to do.

Last week, the Liberal leader instructed his party to vote against this bill and help for those workers. He should be ashamed. This is yet another example that shows the Liberal leader does not care about unemployed Canadians; he cares only about himself. The Liberal leader wants to force an unnecessary, opportunistic election that Canadians do not want. He needs to explain why he is fighting our economic recovery and why he wants to prevent long-tenured workers from getting the support they need.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[English]***THE ECONOMY**

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, even before the recession hit, the government had spent its way through a \$13 billion surplus left by the previous Liberal government, and over the past six months it has changed its fiscal projections no less than three times, each time painting a worse picture. Now we are told to brace for a \$56 billion deficit and future deficits stretching until who knows when.

With recovery stalling and unemployment rising, will the government finally admit to Canadians that it has taken this country back into a structural deficit?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. Our immediate priority is to focus on jobs, to focus on the economy, to focus on hope and opportunity for the many Canadians who, through no fault of their own, are unemployed and looking for work. That is why we came forward with the economic action plan, an action plan which, I should note, his party supported in this House some 79 times.

We recognize that there are important priorities out there. We recognize that paying down debt is a priority. That is why the Prime Minister and this government paid down almost \$40 billion of debt for Canadians. That is good news for our country.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe that the minister is still in the yellow submarine with his Prime Minister.

Every time that the government gives Canadians an update about the budget the facts speak for themselves: things are going from bad to worse. The government is now telling us that we will have a \$56 billion deficit. That is not what we voted for.

How long will we have a deficit? Will the Prime Minister and the government admit that we already have a structural deficit?

● (1420)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case at all. We presented our economic action plan to this House in January. We were supported by the Liberal Party 79 times. The reality is that we have to work on creating jobs and economic growth. That is the goal of our Prime Minister and our government.

It is absolutely vital that we balance the budget. That is why we created a real plan that the Liberal Party supported 79 times and that is the plan we will continue to follow.

[English]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this House is not going to get the facts about Canada's economic situation from the government or the minister. Here is a thought.

The Conservatives proposed the creation of a Parliamentary Budget Officer and then they shackled him. The question is, will they unshackle the Parliamentary Budget Officer? Will they provide him with the resources he needs and open the country's books so that Canadians can finally get the truth about the nation's finances?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have run an open and transparent government. It was this government that brought forth countless measures to get a hold of the public finances of this country—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The Minister of Transport has the floor. I can tell everyone wants to hear the answer that he is about to give.

We will hear the Minister of Transport.

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, the truth is that this government has put in place countless measures to ensure that we monitor public finances, to ensure that we run the country as it should be run, conservatively and fiscally responsibly.

Every single day in this House the Liberal Party stands up and demands more spending and more programs, and every time we try to put some fiscal sanity into the debate in this place, that party can be counted on to shout it down.

Oral Questions

The Parliamentary Budget Officer, Mr. Speaker, reports to you and we have every confidence in you and your fine staff.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 2 the House leader for the official opposition asked the Prime Minister about his government's abandonment of Canadian citizens abroad. He asked which ministers were involved in the Suaad Hagi case, what the role of the Prime Minister was and when he first became aware of the plight of Suaad Hagi. What date exactly did the Prime Minister learn about the case of Suaad Hagi?

Now that he has had the weekend to research his files, will the Prime Minister tell this House truthfully when he knew and what he did with that information?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on any given day the Department of Foreign Affairs deals with thousands of open consular cases. The Department of Foreign Affairs handles more than 500 calls per day on consular matters. In fact, every minute of every day consular services receive three requests for assistance. Most of these are dealt with by officials and do not reach the political level.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister refuses to answer.

When it comes to protecting the rights of Canadians abroad, the cabinet seems to be speechless, if not indifferent. In July, the Minister of Foreign Affairs ceded final responsibility for the Suaad Hagi case to the Minister of Public Safety. This minister promised to make public the results of an inquiry into the abandonment of a citizen for several weeks.

Two months later, still nothing. Why the delay? Is the minister also involved?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the roles of border services officers is to ensure that Canada's immigration laws are enforced, that people who are admitted to this country are able to be admitted.

In the first eight months of this year over 4,000 people were stopped while attempting to enter our country with passports that were not theirs or were false.

I believe an affidavit in the case in question has been filed with the courts which speaks to this quite thoroughly.

* * *

● (1425)

[*Translation*]

CINAR

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a team working for the television program *Enquête* showed that the RCMP was all set to lay criminal charges in the CINAR case, but decided not to following what appears to have been political intervention. According to a former RCMP investigator, Justice

Canada sent a memo stating that the CINAR case was not a public matter and that it did not have enough evidence to lay charges.

Can the Prime Minister explain why the RCMP decided not to go ahead with criminal charges when it was prepared to proceed? Did it have something to do with political pressure?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are taking this matter seriously. Clearly, intellectual property rights in this country must be respected. One thing is for sure: we are encouraging the Bloc to support our getting tough on crime agenda.

There is a lot to do and many issues to address when it comes to justice reforms. The problem is that the Bloc Québécois does not seem to want to help us help victims.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the CINAR case has been in Justice Canada's hands since they came to power, and they have not done any more than the Liberals did.

This case involves shell companies, tampering with contracts and other violations, all right under Telefilm Canada's nose.

Does the Prime Minister agree that it is about time for a public inquiry to reveal the details of Justice Canada's involvement in this case and to explain why the RCMP never laid charges under either the Liberals or the Conservatives?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, it is important to emphasize that intellectual property rights must be respected in this country. The government is addressing the issue. One thing is for sure: justice will be done, and Justice Canada will see what it can do in this case.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, still on the subject of CINAR, in 2000, Revenue Canada, with Martin Cauchon at the helm, refused to cooperate with the RCMP. This lack of cooperation put an end to the investigation.

Now that new allegations are surfacing about CINAR, can the Minister of National Revenue tell us if he plans on cooperating with an RCMP investigation?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot welcome back the Bloc to the whole question of justice in this country since those members have never expressed any interest in this whatsoever. As a matter of fact, when bills have been before the House to crack down on white collar crime, or crack down on individuals involved with trafficking in children, we have never had support from the Bloc.

We will look into this. Why do those members not look into supporting our tough on crime legislation? Why will they not do that for a change?

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, clearly, the government is unable to answer the question I asked because it has something to hide.

With Martin Cauchon at the helm, Revenue Canada, which is responsible for the voluntary disclosures program, settled its dispute with CINAR behind closed doors. At the time, this settlement was a scandal, because CINAR was already suspected of having committed fraud.

Now that the fraud has been confirmed, does the government plan on calling for the repayment of all the money it is owed?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the House what we do know, that when it comes to standing up for victims and law-abiding Canadians, we can never count on the Bloc.

Within the last couple of weeks, Bloc members would not support a bill that would crack down on people who traffic in children. At the same time they made sure that people who commit fraud in this country get to go home under house arrest afterwards.

I want to put a question to them. Which is the more dumb move on their part? They have lots of them to choose from.

* * *

TAX HARMONIZATION

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, small business owners across the country are worried about the impact of this new so-called harmonized sales tax that the government wants to impose on Ontarians and British Columbians.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has come out opposed to the HST and no wonder, when only 6% of its members, the small businesses across Canada, think that there would be any improvement in their competitiveness. Most of them realize that it is going to take money out of consumers' pockets and make it less likely that they can buy the goods and services that small businesses provide, so it is bad for the companies.

Why, if consumers and businesses are against it, is the government going to tax?

• (1430)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the decisions to enter into a provincial harmonized tax with the federal GST are taken at the provincial level, as it happened in Atlantic Canada and other provinces.

For the leader of the NDP to take on the role of a tax fighter is something that is quite unprecedented. Where has he been?

When we wanted to cut the GST, was he for it or against it? Against it. When we wanted to cut income tax for all Canadians, was he for it or against it? Against it. When we wanted to lower the business taxes that he speaks of, where was he? Against it.

Shame on him.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Ontarians and British Columbians are furious about this new federal tax that is going to be coming in. It is fun to hear the members laugh because I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, the taxpayers are not laughing in their ridings.

Coffee, haircuts, shoes, and funerals; try to explain a new tax on funerals to your constituents, Mr. Speaker, and you will find that it is not funny. Even Conservatives are seeing this.

Let me quote a Conservative to the hon. members opposite. Bruce Fitzpatrick, president of the Peterborough Federal Conservative Riding Association, a Conservative riding, called the HST an unaffordable tax grab at the worst possible time.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP complaining about high taxes would be like Colonel Sanders complaining about the rights of chickens.

Where was he when we tried to cut the GST? He was leading the charge to keep the GST at its historic high level.

This side of the House would have none of that. That is why we cut taxes and that is why Canada is in the economic position that is enviable in the rest of the industrialized world.

No one in Canada speaks up for lower taxes more than this government and this Prime Minister.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats opposed the imposition of the GST and a New Democrat government in Saskatchewan cancelled the HST that was brought in by Conservatives in that province.

[Translation]

The combined debt of Canadian households is \$1.4 trillion. That is a record.

Things are going from bad to worse for families.

Statistics show that for every dollar of disposable income, households have \$1.45 of debt.

Adding a harmonized sales tax to all of that would be a huge mistake.

Why does the government want to add the HST—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he cites the example of Saskatchewan. To hard hit taxpayers in Saskatchewan, the previous NDP government was not satisfied with a 5% sales tax. It increased it to 9%.

Oral Questions

Then the federal NDP comes into this place and votes against every single tax cut that this government has brought in. Whether it is for seniors, whether it is for students, or whether it is for folks with modest incomes who are struggling through some hard times, the NDP could always be counted on to want to keep taxes high.

Thank goodness for the leadership of our finance minister. Thank goodness for the Prime Minister's leadership. We are keeping taxes low. We are working to create an economy that will create jobs and open opportunities.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Military Police Complaints Commission is conducting an investigation into allegations that the Canadian military police knowingly sent Afghan prisoners to be tortured.

Why did the government order all its employees to refuse to testify under oath before the commission? Why is this Conservative government trying to muzzle our diplomat Richard Colvin?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the hon. member would understand that this is an arm's-length commission taking place under the Military Police Complaints Commission's rules that apply under the Federal Court. There is case law and precedent that applies to these matters.

Surely the hon. member is not suggesting that the government would involve itself in the proceedings that are currently before the court. Surely she is not suggesting that.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government is trying to crush the life out of the Military Police Complaints Commission by indicating that it will not renew Peter Tinsley's mandate as chair. The government knows full well that having an independent commission guarantees the credibility of our military men and women.

Why does the government want to stop this investigation into allegations of bungled investigations by the military police? Why is it compromising the credibility of our armed forces?

● (1435)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as usual, these allegations are totally false.

[English]

Mr. Tinsley has in fact been the commissioner for four years. This is now the end of his tenure. As has been the case with all previous commissioners, there is a four-year term.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: There has only been one previous commissioner.

Hon. Peter McKay: Mr. Speaker, if the member will allow me to answer her question, this is the normal process that has always been

in place. Mr. Tinsley has others serving on the commission with him who will continue to hear evidence. We have absolutely no intention whatsoever of ending these proceedings.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The minister will be aware of the reports yesterday that Ambassador Peter Galbraith, who was the UN's deputy Secretary-General's representative in Kabul, indicated that to his knowledge there were at least 1,500 polling centres in Afghanistan that were closed. They were ghost centres that were not open. These centres produced several hundred thousand votes for President Karzai.

What is the position of the Government of Canada with respect to the conduct of that vote?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the depth of fraud in the election is something that is being looked at by the ECC. We will wait for a determination by that body. It is an Afghan-led organization. When that report comes out, we will then be able to comment on the election and the eventual winner of that election.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that Ambassador Galbraith is no longer there. He lost his job because of his position on fraud. I hope that Canada will take a clear position on the election and that democracy and the integrity of the vote in Afghanistan will be paramount to the Government of Canada.

What is the government's position? That is my question.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the position of the Government of Canada is well known. The extent of the fraud is something, as I mentioned earlier, that has to be determined by the agency in charge, in other words the Electoral Complaints Commission. The commission is in the process of doing its work and once it has finished, we will be able to comment on the result of the election.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the bill for long-tenured workers disqualifies Quebec forestry workers who have been laid off intermittently. In addition, the government is still refusing to improve EI eligibility for young people, women and seasonal workers. The proposed parental leave for self-employed workers does not give workers in Quebec anything more, as they already have access to the Quebec system.

Does the government realize that the changes it is proposing to the employment insurance system will have no effect on unemployed workers in Quebec?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder why, when the time comes to help the unemployed, the Bloc member votes against our bills. The Bloc wanted an extra two weeks of benefits. We decided to add five weeks for unemployed workers. The Bloc and this member voted against that. We also wanted to help people who were willing to share their work time to help their co-workers keep their jobs, so we added 14 weeks. We are helping the unemployed. The Bloc voted against that as well.

What sort of thrill do the Bloc members get out of always being against the unemployed and, in this case, against Quebec's interests?

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Quebec introduced its own parental insurance system for self-employed workers at its own expense.

Since the federal government intends to set up a similar system in the rest of Canada, will it compensate Quebec?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I want to remind the hon. member that the employment insurance program helps workers and people in difficulty in various ways. Earlier, the member asked a question about long-tenured workers. We want to help some 189,000 people who are in this situation and could benefit from employment insurance.

Why is the Bloc against that? Why is it against the fact that we want harsher sentences for child traffickers? Why is it against the fact that we want to make an additional \$20 billion in tax cuts? Why is it always against the interests of Quebec in the House?

* * *

• (1440)

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the newspaper *Les Affaires* has revealed that, under the procurement agreement the federal government is negotiating with the United States, Quebec's crown corporations and municipalities will be forced to open up their purchasing to American suppliers. Free trade within the European Union is very well-established, and yet its member countries have maintained some exceptions concerning certain sectors. NAFTA also has provisions for this.

Does the minister intend to establish similar exclusions in his negotiations with the United States?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have worked in partnership with all the provinces to protect their interests. Yes, we are against protectionism, but it is also important to protect the interests of the provinces. That is exactly what we plan to do.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows the European Union has certain exclusions, particularly for areas in difficulty, small and medium-sized businesses, security and defence, infrastructure and transportation equipment.

Given that such exclusions are possible, does the minister plan to demand them in order to avoid jeopardizing the Bombardier plant in

La Pocatière, for example, just when the Montreal subway system is about to purchase new trains?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our way of doing things is different from that of the previous government. We are going to include the provinces at the federal negotiating table.

That is unprecedented, and the provinces have indicated that they are very pleased with the process. We want to protect the interests of the provinces and, at the same time, we want a free trade agreement with the Europeans.

* * *

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the transport minister has admitted that the use of government resources for political fundraising for the Minister of Natural Resources was totally wrong and totally unacceptable, but the minister and the Prime Minister both have refused to be accountable.

As a consequence, today I have filed formal requests to the ethics, lobbying, privacy and election commissioners to conduct all the appropriate investigations.

Why has the Prime Minister refused to be accountable when it appears that the Minister of Natural Resources has broken every rule in the book?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for a Liberal to stand in this House and accuse anyone of breaking every rule in the book, I think that phrase was originally spoken by the Auditor General in relation to the political fundraising scandal involving the Liberal Party.

It is this Prime Minister who banned big money from politics. It is this Prime Minister who established an independent Commissioner of Lobbying with which the member is now in touch. It is this Prime Minister who strengthened the Lobbyist Registration Act.

Let us be very clear. We have brought in the toughest accountability rules in the history of this great country. We are committed to running a clean, open and transparent government, which was something that was sorely lacking in the previous administration.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the political fundraising scandal is not about an executive assistant at the Toronto Port Authority. It is about the Minister of Natural Resources.

The minister is not above the law, and silence will not do in the face of unethical conduct. Accountability requires explaining or justifying one's actions or decisions in a manner which is true, full and plain.

Why has the minister refused to be accountable for her misconduct?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was this government which strengthened the independent officers of Parliament in the areas of ethics, lobbying and cleaning up the sorry state of political fundraising we inherited from the previous government.

We do have an independent commissioner of ethics. We do have an independent commissioner of lobbying. The member opposite has asked for their opinion and we look forward to receiving it.

* * *

• (1445)

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I tried last week to get some answers on government advertising. There were no answers and no numbers, so I will try again. I will ask the President of the Treasury Board, because after all, he is the one responsible for the spending and he should know.

How much exactly have Canadian taxpayers paid for the government's partisan, pat-itself-on-the-back advertising so far?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada does not bill the taxpayer for that kind of advertising. The Government of Canada gets out key messages that reach a large number of Canadians on important issues—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Vic Toews:—and they laugh—such as H1N1, elder abuse, the home renovation tax credit and Canadian Forces recruitment. That is what the role of government is and we will continue to do that.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not exactly sure who the President of the Treasury Board thinks actually pays for government spending if it is not the Canadian taxpayers.

I am not sure which is worse, the fact that he does not have the numbers, he does not know them or he is trying to hide something. Look at the TV campaign alone. We are talking tens of millions of dollars, forty, sixty, a hundred.

Once in government, the Conservatives did away with the rules restricting ad spending and they have gone wild ever since. In 2007-08 they spent double what the previous government spent.

I challenge the minister once again to give us a number. How much has the government spent on its advertising—

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us deal with the issue of H1N1. This is an issue all Canadians need to be familiar with. They need to understand what the risks are, what the problems are, and indeed the steps that the Canadian government is taking in order to address this issue.

Members across the way continuously ask the Canadian government what it is doing, and we are telling the Canadian people directly.

MARINE SAFETY

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pirates continue to pose a security risk to merchant ships in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden area.

In the past, Canadian frigates have successfully participated in multinational efforts to fight piracy efforts in the Arabian Sea. Does the government have any plans to further deploy Canadian ships in the fight against piracy?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Miramichi and Canadians would know, our country has taken a more robust stance when it comes to having a presence on the international scene. In fact, that means living up to our responsibilities and standing up for our values and for those who cannot.

I am pleased to tell the House that we have tasked the HMCS *Fredericton* for a six month mission in the NATO-led fleet to fight piracy in and around the Arabian Sea. The *Fredericton* will follow the good work done by her sister ships, the *Ville de Quebec*, which protected the World Food Programme shipments, and the *Winnipeg*, which deterred acts of piracy.

I know all Canadians and members of the House would join me in wishing the good captain and crew of the HMCS *Fredericton* a successful mission. We are very proud of our magnificent men and women of the Canadian Forces.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Peter Tinsley, chair of the Military Police Complaints Commission, leading the Afghan torture probe will be forced from office by the government before his hearings have been completed.

The minister has denied his request to be allowed to finish his work. He could have completed the probe within his term of office, but government delays have made that impossible.

Running out the clock on Mr. Tinsley's term of office will not make the allegations of torture, abuse and extra-judicial killings go away. Why will the minister not allow Mr. Tinsley to finish his important work?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the hyper-partisan rhetoric of the member opposite, Mr. Tinsley has finished his four year term as commissioner of this inquiry.

He has followed the precedent that has been set previously. There has been no commissioner, to my knowledge, who has served a second term. There is continuity in that other commissioners will be able to follow this evidence.

We are not interfering in this process. We are letting this process continue. We are cooperating. Despite what the hon. member might allege, this commission will continue.

Oral Questions

I would ask the member to show a little patience and a little respect for a process that is arm's-length from government.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Tinsley's forced exit jeopardizes the entire process.

Granting extensions to commissioners whose terms end during lengthy proceedings is a well-established practice. Independent tribunals have been recognized by our Supreme Court as having quasi-constitutional status.

The minister's decision not to reappoint Mr. Tinsley is clearly politically motivated and undermines the credibility of all arm's-length agencies.

If the minister will not reappointment Mr. Tinsley, will he at least grant him an extension to complete this very serious investigation of Canadian knowledge of torture and killings in Afghanistan?

• (1450)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have no intention, nor I suspect would the member opposite, to interfere in what is a very important probe that is currently under way.

There are matters that are being overseen by the Federal Court, which go directly to the mandate of the Military Police Complaints Commission. There is a process in place to have a new commissioner take up his role. There is continuity in those on the commission continuing with the work.

I would ask the hon. member to loosen the chin strap on his tinfoil hat, get away from the conspiracy theories and let the commission do its important work.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government's withdrawal is depriving the under-housed and the homeless of 52,000 social housing units in Quebec. The Conservative government is turning a deaf ear. This situation has been denounced by FRAPRU and protesters who gathered in eight Quebec cities to mark World Habitat Day.

When will this government put aside its ideology and help these families escape poverty?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we have done with the economic action plan. We want to help those who cannot find affordable housing. That is why we have allocated \$2 billion for repairs to social housing, \$1 billion for repairs and improvements, \$475 million to help seniors and the handicapped and \$400 million for aboriginal peoples.

We deliver the goods.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we note that the government has not changed its ideology since it is doing nothing for families.

At present, more than \$8 billion in retained earnings is sitting idle in CMHC coffers.

Does the government intend to use these funds now to build new, decent and affordable housing to meet the needs of Quebec families?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed, we have invested significant amounts of additional funds to help the homeless, to help those who need social and affordable housing.

I just recited in French a list of things that we have done recently, but even that is on top of \$1.9 billion for social housing to help the homeless, another \$1 billion for renovation and energy retrofits, and \$1.4 billion in housing trusts and the affordable housing initiative.

We are investing in helping those who need it most in every single town.

[Translation]

The Bloc is voting against it.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government made a choice, a choice not to act. Instead, it simply released a statement on the missing and murdered aboriginal women.

We know that families are wondering how many more mothers, sisters and daughters they have to lose before real action is taken by the government.

When will the government launch a real, comprehensive, national investigation into this matter?

Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government takes the issue of murdered and missing aboriginal women very seriously.

We are supporting Sisters in Spirit. Sisters in Spirit is a five year multi-research project that is also a policy initiative and a public awareness project. It is aimed at quantifying and identifying the number of murdered and missing aboriginal women. It is scheduled to end sometime in 2010.

I and this government continue to work with NWAC, the Native Women's Association of Canada. I actually would like to recognize the new president, Ms. Jeannette Corbiere-Lavell, and tell her that I look forward to working with her on this very important issue.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, policy, research and education, indeed they are important, but they are simply not enough. The time for action is now. Yesterday there were 71 vigils to honour the memory of the missing and murdered aboriginal women.

Our calls for action have received nothing but a tepid and gratuitous response. Why will the government not show respect for aboriginal Canadians? Pretty words are not enough. Why will it not launch a full investigation into this matter now?

Oral Questions

●(1455)

Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have assured the member a number of times, our government support for Sisters in Spirit and for identifying the root causes of racialized and sexualized violence that our aboriginal women are experiencing in overwhelming rates is not questionable. We absolutely support the great work that Sisters in Spirit has done. I want to give my respect to the families and to the victims for the courage they have shown, that they continue to show, as we complete this research project.

* * *

SALMON INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives used to care about the B.C. salmon industry that supports tens of thousands of jobs. With the loss of two million fish in 2004, some B.C. Conservatives actually spoke on the issue, not very well of course, but at least they spoke. That was then, this is now.

In 2009, with the disappearance of nine million sockeye salmon, far worse than in 2004, the sound of B.C. Conservative silence is deafening.

When will an emergency summit be held on this crisis? When will the fisheries minister take effective action to address this catastrophe?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already met personally with harvesters from British Columbia to hear their views on the situation and to provide input on how we should respond. I will be meeting with more British Columbians. The situation is serious; we do realize that. We are working hard to ensure that the response reflects the views of the fishermen out of B.C. interests and that it responds to their needs.

The NDP member should at least wait until we present our plan before he starts to criticize anything.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): That is the whole point, Mr. Speaker. Where is the action plan? Where is the rescue package? In 20 years, salmon enhancement funding has been slashed in half under Liberals and Conservatives. Decisions being made in Ottawa by Conservatives are crippling our B.C. salmon industry. The minister has not held a summit or provided funding to move to close containment for fish farms. The minister has not undertaken any meaningful action to address this crisis.

Why did the Conservatives commit to taking action in 2004 if they had no intention of doing so in government? Why the utterly deplorable lack of action?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a serious issue and we take our response seriously. We want to do the right thing. We want to thank all the parties for their patience waiting for the response, but serious issues call for a very well planned and well thought out response. We will be bringing our plan forward.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's hog farmers have faced difficult times with U.S. imposed country of origin labelling requirements and the H1N1 virus. The Liberal approach is to start a trade war with the United States by distorting the market through countervailable per head payments. Even the member for Malpeque knows that the Liberal policy is wrong in that he told CFRA radio "it could be seen as a trade violation" and that is true.

Could the minister tell the House what positive steps our government is taking to save Canada's pork industry without sparking a trade war with the U.S.?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Huron—Bruce for his great work on this file. He certainly serves his constituents extremely well.

What we have done, working in conjunction with the Canadian Pork Council, to stay away from trade challenges, is we have come up with a three-pronged approach. The first prong is more money for marketing domestically and internationally, some \$17 million. The second prong will administer \$75 million by the Canadian Pork Council for those people in the hog industry who wish to exit. The third prong and a very important stability item is long-term loans available to pork farmers out there that will be administered by the lending institutions in Canada.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many American states and cities will receive their first pandemic H1N1 vaccine doses tomorrow. Most will distribute the first doses to health care workers and some will also distribute to young children. American officials confirm that there should be enough pandemic vaccine for anyone who wants it by late October.

Could the minister tell us why Canadians must wait until after the Americans are done?

●(1500)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is not a race. Our goal is to ensure that the vaccine in Canada is safe and effective. We are working very closely with the medical experts as well as the chief public health officers in Canada in regard to the development of our vaccine, but our number one priority is to ensure that it is safe and effective.

The rollout will be the first week of November, which we have been saying for the last three months.

[Translation]

EXPORAIL

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 27, 2007, this House passed a motion calling on the federal government to designate Exporail in Delson as Canada's National Railway Museum with dedicated long-term funding. On June 16, 2009, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages refused to do so, saying there were other priorities.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages explain what he intends to do to comply with this House's request and to save this precious piece of heritage?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are six national museums, including the Canadian War Museum here in Ottawa. We have increased funding for each of these museums here in Ottawa. We have also created the new Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg and the new Immigration Museum at Pier 21 in Halifax.

Our investments in this type of Canadian heritage have been unprecedented. We are still working on Exporail in Montreal, but our government has already created two new museums and has increased funding for the others. We are very proud of this.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government committed, under the U.S.-Canada clean energy dialogue, to listen to Canadians on proposed clean energy initiatives. The NAFTA environmental side agreement also commits Canada to notify and consult anyone concerned about proposed environmental laws or policies.

Unlike the United States, which has engaged its public, the Canadian government thinks stakeholders only include industrial lobbyists.

Could the environment minister inform the House why he continues to violate these commitments and when Canadians will have their say on our energy future?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my friend is misdirected. The public continues to have generous input into the development of our climate change policies.

I would point out, for my friend's benefit as well, that in the moments after I was sworn in as the Minister of the Environment, I actually met with David Suzuki and the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy.

Since that time, I have met with every environmental group that has approached my office requesting a meeting. I will continue to meet with all interested parties to strike the right balance between protecting our environment and protecting the economy.

Points of Order

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, London and other cities in southern Ontario, especially those built on the manufacturing sector, have felt the pain in this global recession.

Our government is delivering economic development tailored to the needs of people, businesses and communities in southern Ontario. Our focus remains on rebuilding our economy.

This past Friday in London, our Conservative government announced the southern Ontario development program, which will help communities create an environment where business can thrive.

Could the minister of state advise communities in southern Ontario how this new program will make a difference at this critical time?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was in London on Friday to launch the new southern Ontario development program. Businesses, communities, aboriginal organizations and municipalities can now all apply for funding that will help them improve the economic development and diversification in southern Ontario.

This is just one of many programs we are supporting to create jobs and stimulate the economy.

While the Liberals—

The Speaker: I am afraid the hon. minister of state's time has expired.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Jackson Lafferty, Minister of Education and Minister of Justice for the Northwest Territories.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

● (1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-32

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, October 2, I responded to a question regarding Bill C-32, which is currently in the Senate. I said that Bill C-32 had passed the Senate with no amendments. I should have said that Bill C-32 had passed the Senate committee with no amendments.

The Speaker: I am sure the House appreciates the hon. member's clarification.

*Routine Proceedings***PRIVILEGE**

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN PRESENTATION—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe concerning access to an event that took place in Saint John, New Brunswick on September 28, 2009, publicizing the government's third report on the economic action plan tabled in the House on the same day. I would like to thank the hon. member for raising this matter in the House.

The hon. member argued that his lack of success in gaining access to the event prevented him from performing his duties as a member of Parliament. I undertook to come back to the House with a ruling on this matter.

[*Translation*]

On a number of occasions, members have raised concerns about being denied access to press conferences, briefings and similar events and about the release of documents on and off Parliament Hill.

As I pointed out on September 29, the first question that concerns me is what, if any, jurisdiction the Speaker has in respect to such activities occurring off the Hill.

In a ruling I gave on November 21, 2002, in the *House of Commons Debates*, on pages 1741 and 1742, I stated:

Matters of press conferences or release of documents, the policy initiatives of the government, are not ones that fall within the jurisdiction of the Speaker of the House unless they happen to be made in the House itself.

...

It is very difficult for the Chair to intervene in a situation where a minister has chosen to have a press conference or a briefing or a meeting and release material when the Speaker has nothing to do with the organization of that [event].

[*English*]

Even when such events take place on Parliament Hill, Speakers have consistently ruled that it is not a breach of privilege to exclude members from briefings and lockups. I pointed this out in a ruling on March 19, 2001 in the *Debates* at pages 1839 to 1840.

In a ruling on a similar matter, Deputy Speaker Kilgour noted on April 11, 1997 in the *Debates* at page 9589 to 9590:

The question raised did not involve access to parliamentary proceedings, either in the Chamber or in a committee meeting room.

He went on to say:

The Speaker has no control and should have no control over such events, whether it be the manner in which they are organized or how access to them is managed.

● (1510)

[*Translation*]

In order to find a prima facie question of privilege, a member has to prove that his or her ability to carry on his or her duties as a member of Parliament has been impeded and that the member is acting in the official capacity that is protected by privilege. The following quotation from pages 91 and 92 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* summarizes the view taken by successive Speakers:

[*English*]

—rulings have focussed on whether or not the parliamentary duties of the Member were directly involved. While frequently noting that Members raising such matters might have legitimate complaints, Speakers have regularly concluded that Members have not been prevented from performing their parliamentary duties.

In the case before us, the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe may have grounds to complain that this event was not managed differently, but the Chair must conclude that there are not sufficient grounds for a finding of a prima facie breach of privilege in this case.

[*Translation*]

I thank the House for its attention.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(b) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to four petitions.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association OSCE respecting its participation at the eighth winter meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly held in Vienna, Austria February 19 to 20, 2009.

* * *

WILLIAMS SYNDROME AWARENESS WEEK ACT

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-453, An Act respecting Williams Syndrome Awareness Week.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a private member's bill to establish Williams Syndrome awareness week in Canada. I thank to the member for Winnipeg North for seconding the bill.

I am pleased to support the work of the Canadian Association for Williams Syndrome, which supports people with the syndrome and their families, friends and neighbours. Williams Syndrome is a rare, incurable, non-hereditary genetic disorder. Like Down Syndrome, it is caused by a chromosomal abnormality and there is a wide variation in ability from person to person.

Individuals with Williams Syndrome have a unique pattern of emotional, physical and mental strengths and weaknesses. Various forms of hyperactivity and a hypersensitivity to noise are two of the key psychological factors related to Williams Syndrome, and children with the syndrome all have distinctive facial characteristics.

Routine Proceedings

For parents, teachers and support people, increasing awareness of the syndrome can be key to understanding an individual with Williams and helping them achieve their full potential. The incidence is approximately 1 in 20,000, but as the medical profession and public become more aware, more cases are being diagnosed.

Marking Williams Syndrome awareness week in August each year will lead to a better understanding of the needs of those who live with it, ensuring happier lives and relief and support for parents and caregivers.

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

* * *

CANADIAN SOLDIERS' AND PEACEKEEPERS' MEMORIAL WALL ACT

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-454, An Act to establish a Memorial Wall for Canada's fallen soldiers and peacekeepers.

He said: Mr. Speaker, whereas Canada has yet to properly honour, at a suitable location that is accessible to the public at all times, all of our fallen soldiers and peacekeepers; whereas over 115,000 of our fallen soldiers and peacekeepers have their graves in 75 countries and hundreds of cemeteries around the world; whereas their remains cannot be repatriated to Canada; whereas we must establish a suitable national shrine to honour our fallen soldiers and peacekeepers; and whereas proper recognition for those soldiers and peacekeepers will show our love for them and our respect for their sacrifice, I am honoured to introduce my private member's bill, the Canadian Soldiers' and Peacekeepers' Memorial Wall Act.

This enactment requires the minister responsible for the National Capital Act to establish a memorial wall that would comprise the names of Canada's fallen soldiers and peacekeepers and have it located on a suitable area of public land.

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

* * *

● (1515)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I move that the first report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development presented on Thursday, February 26, 2009 be concurred in.

I thank my colleague, the member for Sudbury for his support.

The foreign affairs committee tabled a report on Afghanistan. We now have an opportunity to open up the debate on this report and, of course, on Canada's mission in Afghanistan but also perhaps, I hope, about where we are going.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have to tell you the concerns that Canadians have, that members of this Parliament should have and that the world community has in terms of what is going on, not only in Afghanistan but in the region.

The list of recommendations that came out of the foreign affairs committee report with regard to Afghanistan was fairly thorough. There were 35 recommendations.

We heard from people who had been in the field and had a military point of view, people who were there who had a diplomatic point of view, and certainly from people who were there who had a development point of view. We heard from Afghans themselves directly, through video conference. We also heard from people who have worked in Afghanistan, and who looked at it from a Canadian perspective.

Hopefully what the report did was give some helpful advice to parliamentarians as to where we should go in Afghanistan. In particular what was important about this report was that it actually talked about diplomacy, and it talked about the role of Canada when it comes to diplomacy in the region.

I think most Canadians have been seized with the mission in Afghanistan, but most recently with the concerns, the problems and the challenges. What they have seen is that the rhetoric we have heard in this place has fallen to the side and that reality has taken over.

We have seen a mission that has had many problems. I think the focus has been, with all due respect to the government, too one-dimensional. By that I mean that while the government was seized with the military option, the opportunity cost of that was that they forgot what the other options were.

Sadly, I think when we look at the Manley report and what was in the Manley report, certainly the testimony, the details of that report showed a cause for concern. The report said that if we carry on in the present manner without looking at the diplomatic side and doing development differently, we will find ourselves in a great muck and in a situation that will be hard to resolve.

That is where we are. I say this respectfully to those who have sat on the Afghanistan committee and indeed to my colleagues on the foreign affairs committee and certainly to those on the defence committee.

I do not think we have had enough debate in this country when it comes to Afghanistan. I do not think we have had all the options put in front of us. That has not served any of us well, be it those who are serving in the military who I have had the opportunity to visit when the defence committee went to Afghanistan, or especially those who serve in our diplomatic community.

What we are doing right now is a sad testament to the history of Canadian diplomacy, and it is because of a failure of imagination, a failure to listen to those who have said that we must do more when it comes to the region, not just focus on the country of Afghanistan but be seized with the region.

We have seen that the new administration in Washington has at least opened up the debate and looked at the region a little more. They have looked at Pakistan and Afghanistan. What I think is crucial, as we see in this report, is that we look at the entire region.

Routine Proceedings

It is interesting to look back to 1998 and 1999, when the UN sent a special envoy to Afghanistan and to the region. Mr. Brahimi, who was instrumental in putting together the Afghanistan Compact in 2001, was sent to the region by the secretary general of the UN of the day. He was sent there with a gentleman by the name of Mokhtar Lamani, a Canadian.

• (1520)

At the time, they found three things that are very important to note for this debate today. They said that right then the Taliban were training foreign fighters. They said there was a problem with the drug economy and they said there was a problem with human rights in the country.

If one reads those reports, as I have, and puts their hand over the date, they could be representing exactly what is happening in Afghanistan right now. We have a problem with adherence to human rights. We more or less have a narco-economy and we have a problem in terms of foreign fighters. One simply looks at the growth of the Taliban in the last couple of years and it is hard to deny those facts.

I think those facts are certain. I do not think anyone disputes them. I think everyone from every side agrees on the proliferation of fighters. We agree that the drug economy has proliferated. We agree that there are problems with human rights. Certainly, we just have to look at the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission's reports to look at the concern around human rights.

The problem is that we have not done anything different to seize an opportunity that is in front of us. The opportunity in front of us is to say that what we have done in the past has not worked. We need to set a new direction, a new course. I would ask the government to look at this report, look at what others have suggested and consider that new path.

Our party has said that what we should be focusing on right now is ending the war. Ending the war that is happening should be everyone's primary focus right now. The work that has been done by our military, development and diplomacy components has hopefully been to that effect. However, right now we are stuck.

I think we are stuck because the government is saying that when 2011 comes, we are out. That is what I hear. That is it, except for the odd time when we hear the Minister of National Defence say that we might stay in the PRTs and train military or police. However, we have not heard from the government about exactly where we are going.

I suggest a couple of things as a member of my party and caucus and as a foreign affairs critic. I think that the government should be pushing those who are saying that we need to have a Bonn II, so to speak. We need to take a look at the reality on the ground in Pakistan and Afghanistan but also in the region. We have seen the proliferation of insurgency beyond the south into the north. Right now, we should be engaging with countries in the region. We should be engaging with Russia, China and Turkmenistan. We need to talk to Iran. We need to make sure that we talk to Pakistan as well.

These are the countries in the region and we have done nothing to engage them. There are countries that want to engage those countries because it is in their self-interest. After the Taliban took over, the

first people they went after were Iranians. There is no love lost between these two countries. Somehow, perversely, what has happened in this conflict is that refugees who fled the Taliban have safe refuge in Iran. Right now, the Iranians and Russians are sitting on the side, watching us spend our treasury and spill our blood. They are just waiting until we say that we need to do something different.

The time is now and I will explain why. Up until a year and a half ago, it was not a problem for those countries in the neighbourhood to watch the rest of us do the work that they had tried to do on Afghanistan before. They thought we would eventually learn the lesson. Right now, there is an opportunity because the threat to those countries is omnipresent. The insurgency is growing past the point of the south. It is going to the north. It is going to other regions of Afghanistan, which means it will effect those other countries.

I plead with the government to look to diplomacy to push for special rapporteurs like Mr. Brahimi, who knows the region, who can talk to pretty well everyone in the region, with the exception of al Qaeda, and who knows this file. He would be the person to help set dialogue in the region. The fact that we need to end the war has been missing in our policy. To end the war, it means that we have to set up negotiations.

• (1525)

One of our goals is reconciliation. The problem with that goal is usually reconciliation is after a conflict ends. The same goes for development. We set up PRTs and if we bend to them, they are fortified. There is not a lot of back and forth with everyday people. There is ongoing training. The problem is it is not spread out and integrated into the area. This is the reason a war is still going on.

From our perspective, we cannot have reconciliation in the middle of a war. We have to end the conflict first. To do that, we need to identify the people to whom we can talk. That is why Canada's policy should be pushing to have a special rapporteur, a group of imminent persons is how I put it before, or whatever we want to call it. We need to have someone to engage those countries in the neighbourhood.

We should also be offering our expertise and diplomacy. I already mentioned Mokhtar Lamani. He was working with Mr. Brahimi when he was there in 1998. Mr. Brahimi was the person who put together the Afghan compact that followed the Bonn conference. We need to seize these components.

In the list of recommendations, there are four or five that push the government to this direction, to say that we need to take a new direction, set a new course, put more resources into diplomacy and put Canada in its rightful place in the world, where we can take a leadership role when it comes to building a consensus toward diplomacy. We have the people and the knowhow to do it. As I just enumerated, we have people who have done this before.

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Mr. Brahim and Mr. Lamani have spoken out on this. They said that one of the challenges they saw after the Bonn conference was there was not enough attention paid to bringing in those who would be reasonable, to talk to those who would want to see an end to the conflict. That opportunity was lost. However, it is not too late. In fact, it is never too late, when it comes to ending a war.

The report states that Canada should re-calibrate its focus in Afghanistan, that when it comes to our role post-2011, we should put more resources into the diplomatic side, on a regional basis.

We should do this by identifying those countries in the neighbourhood. This war will not be ended by Parliament. I am certain of that and I understand it. However, the war can end if Canada pushes with like-minded countries to identify those who are willing to take up the cause of ending the war, of ensuring that the people in the region are going to be responsible partners. To date, this has not happened.

If we look at the recent events, as was mentioned by my colleague from Toronto Centre today in question period, we have concerns around the follow-up to the Afghan elections.

Mr. Galbraith, who has written extensively on Iraq, was being honest when it came to Afghanistan. He was clear in saying that if we were going to call this a free and fair election, then we were obviously sending the wrong message to the people of Afghanistan. Why?

When we have ghost polls that come through with results that show 90% support for the president, what message do we send to the people of Afghanistan? Do we think that will not be noticed by the people of Afghanistan? If we ignore the Galbraiths and others, we will basically tell the people of Afghanistan that all the rhetoric about democracy, that the notion they should be able to decide who runs their affairs, is something we did not mean, that we actually do not care.

When it comes to corruption, it is the same. There is rampant corruption going on right now in Afghanistan. It is totally linked to the drug trade. People are sitting in the cabinet of the present president who are part of that.

Do we think the people of Afghanistan do not know that? They are not stupid. They understand their country better than we do. If we do not heed their call, then what will happen to them? They will not be willing to listen to us. Nor will they be willing to work with us when we try to help them.

● (1530)

Sadly, one of our recent messages to the Afghans was that if they did not tell us all the facts of what was happening on the ground when it came to reporting on the insurgency, then we would withdraw aid. I guess that shows the fatigue of the mission. We send a message to the people we are trying to help, that unless they tell us what we want to know, then we will not help them.

I think that is the frustration of people on the ground right now. The direction we have taken has been one that has been the same over and over again. We say this is not a war that is won militarily speaking, but we add the same ingredients every time.

I plead with the government to read the report. I know in its dissenting report, it took issue with some of the concerns that were laid out by the committee. However, I look at some of the first recommendations that were made. They basically said that we needed to have NATO-led international security forces in Afghanistan, ISAF, continue to focus on avoiding Afghan civilian casualties and minimizing property damage. The government's response to that recommendation was that the Canadian Forces made every reasonable effort to do so.

That is not the point. It is not about the Canadian Forces. It is about what was happening in the whole mission.

We cannot look at this mission in isolation. It is not only about what we are doing. The fact is when we have our allies call in air strikes that take out civilians, every time that happens it sends not only the wrong message to the people we are trying to help, but it helps the other side because that is used to recruit members for the insurgency.

When we talk about recommendation 3, which states that the Government of Canada should reinforce efforts on the diplomatic military development levels to promote the creation of conditions favourable to a peace process in Afghanistan, I would hope the government would say, yes, that it believes this is a good idea.

Again, I go back to the goal the government has set out as reconciliation in its own reporting. It has not been able to make any real progress when it comes to reconciliation. I know there are some pilot projects ongoing on the ground. Those are important. We have to build that capacity. However, the key focus is how to end this war. If we try to have reconciliation before we end a conflict, it will be very difficult. Talk to any expert who deals with conflict and post-conflict. The reconciliation piece is after the conflict ends.

When we look at the report and recommendation 3, I hope the government takes this seriously and pushes beyond the notion of what it has set up as its goal for reconciliation and goes further to tell us how we end this war.

Again, I plead with the government. It needs to talk and work with our allies. It needs to talk to people in the neighbourhood. If we do not talk to the Russians, the Chinese, the Iranians and Pakistanis about what their self-interest is when it comes to Afghanistan and when it comes to Pakistan, then this will be ongoing for a very long time, much longer than we already have been engaged.

It is important to note how long we have been engaged.

In summary, I hope this place and our country will debate the war in Afghanistan more than we have. I hope we will provide solutions that come from all of us to ensure that when we get to the point of saying, "what's next", which is where we are at right now, we will have a plan, a consensus to take us from what we have had in the past and move to the future to end the war in Afghanistan, to use our diplomatic muscle and ensure that all is not lost, that in fact Canada can reclaim its rightful role in the world as a nation that ends conflict and builds societies in a post-conflict situation.

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●(1535)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, who was very much involved in this file, will have some pretty good questions for my colleague across the floor.

As a parliamentary secretary for three and a half years in Parliament, I have debated quite a lot on the Afghanistan issue.

First, I must remind every member that when it first started, the NDP opposed the mission completely and voted against sending any troops there or even bringing any peace and stability to this. Therefore, let us keep the record very clear.

Now the New Democrats talk about finishing the war and they want a withdrawal date. The point is if we do not provide security and a secure environment, where will we get the development about which he has talked? Let me give him a typical example of what is happening.

The neighbouring country of Pakistan has a democratically elected government. He says that the Taliban became strong in Pakistan, ultimately to provide security. They were blowing up schools and everything they could. There was no development taking place there until the Pakistani army went back in and provided a secure environment.

He knows that at this current time, the Afghan army cannot provide a secure environment, although Canada is training it. That is why this is a UN-mandated, NATO-led mission to provide a secure environment so the development he talks can take place.

The facts do not support the whole idea of withdrawal from the war and doing development there.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the question was. I think what the parliamentary secretary forgets is it is very difficult to do development in a war. We have seen that and we have heard it from development workers who have been frustrated. They were able to do development in the beginning of this war, but presently they have given up.

That is not odd. If we think about it, in the middle of a war, how can we look at the success rate of the schools, for instance, which they herald. Often they have been targeted again by the insurgents. That is just a fact. What I am saying to the government is that it is time we took a different direction on this. We have what we always consider on this side as an imbalance between where our resources are and putting more resources into trying to end this war. I think most Canadians are ready for that.

We heard Vice-President Biden say that there needs to be a different take. It might not be exactly what everyone is saying in this place, but at least they are asking that question. That is my whole point.

Let us have a debate about changing things. We have not had that in this place, certainly not from the government. We have had report cards that are questionable in what they assess, the results of which are even more questionable.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the initiative of my colleague from Ottawa Centre in initiating this discussion. I am quite happy to participate in it.

I have two questions for the member.

When there are talks of a political solution and a reconciliation, one of the things we have to ask ourselves is this. Who are the people we are reconciling with, what are the implications for human rights and for women's rights and for the kind of democracy that we might want to see emerge in Afghanistan if we are simply to walk away and say that we are prepared to do a deal with anyone?

The second question is this. Could the New Democratic Party imagine any kind of future presence by our military if that role were confined or focused exclusively on training and was not based in Kandahar?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's first question is extremely important. That is why I have said we need to have people who actually understand the region well. That is why I offered two names, Mr. Brahimi, and everyone on this file and the government's side will know who that is, and Mr. Lamani, a Canadian who is often brought to the White House in Washington to advise and who worked on this file back in 1998. These are the people from whom we need to find out to whom we can talk. The last thing we want to do is regress. We want to find people not only in Afghanistan but in the surrounding countries who are willing to be accountable for what is going on in the region as well.

That is the first step. We have to find and identify those people and start to set a table for dialogue, which then hopefully will lead to ending the war. I think it is pretty evident to everyone around that that is what is needed.

On his second question of what our party's position would be with regard to the military, we should get to the first point first, but we have always supported peacekeeping missions and ones where we are reinforcing what has been a peace negotiation. I could see us supporting that, just like we should be in the Congo and in Sudan.

●(1540)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we first went into Afghanistan, it was under a Liberal government, as I recall. At that time people in the public generally felt that we were there in a peacekeeping role. That was the role of our armed forces. Many people were surprised to find out that our role had changed to active fighting in the most dangerous area of the country.

Just today I heard a military source on the radio claiming that leaving in 2011 would be viewed as abandoning Afghanistan. We can see the campaign has already started to prolong our involvement in this war without end. We should not forget that this war has been going on for many, many years. The Russians were in there for a number of years and other countries have had deep involvement and it has never concluded.

I want to applaud the member for his excellent presentation and ask him whether he could review these options that he has talked about and explain them in a little more detail.

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Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, what we are hearing is more debate around Afghanistan, which is something I welcome. My concern, however, is that the reason we are hearing about Afghanistan again is because things are going so badly. There was an election that did not go well, to put it mildly, we have drug proliferation, corruption in government and recruitment in insurgency in another country across the border. Some have made the comparison to an unpopular war fought back in the sixties.

Canadians and members of Parliament need to ask, what are we doing there? What can we do better? What can we assure Canadians that we can achieve that is realistic and within our tradition?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am having a little trouble following the line of reasoning. My colleague from Calgary asked about the role of the military, and I think we are getting into a bit of a discussion about what comes first, the chicken or the egg.

The issue is, how can these discussions that my colleague is talking about take place without any kind of stable civil or military presence? That is the question the House has to come to grips with. If we actually go to Afghanistan and ask the NGOs which one of them think that the military should be withdrawn from Afghanistan, not one of them would say they should leave. They understand the necessity for the military being there. I am just wondering what is wrong with leaving the military there while some of these discussions that the hon. member mentioned go on.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised to hear that from someone who is at the cabinet table. Maybe we are hearing it from him first. I just heard about an extension beyond the deadline of 2011. I am not sure if that is what he was saying. That is what it sounded like to me. If he was trying to clarify, he has just confused.

The minister might want to tell his colleague, the Minister of National Defence and indeed the Prime Minister about that policy he just announced. However, if I cut through that, what he was getting at was how do we do development without security.

I was very clear. I have been to Afghanistan and I have talked to people on the ground. They want to see something change. If we cannot win a war militarily, as has been mentioned and he has heard that, then why do we continue with one option? Why are we not looking at other options? If he cannot think that one through, I would have to ask him to maybe debate—

• (1545)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a debate I have participated in on many occasions in the House in the past and the NDP keeps bringing the same old argument out when as a matter of fact many things have changed. I remember when this report was being prepared and the member was there. At that time the Prime Minister created the Manley panel which did an extensive review and came back with recommendations that were brought to the House. The House passed a motion on how to handle Afghanistan and what Canada's commitment would be.

Let me remind all members that it was the NDP which opposed that motion. Under the motion, the direction that Parliament gave was very clear. The NDP has been talking about the historic peacekeeping role that Canada has played. Yes, Canada has played many peacekeeping roles. It is our traditional role and we have earned an international reputation for that. As a matter of fact, I was in Congo to see how the peacekeeping forces under the United Nations work. It needs to be understood that peacekeeping forces are mandated by the United Nations. We do not pick up our guns and try to go and bring peace between two parties when it is not mandated by the United Nations.

I would like to remind my friend on the other side that this mission is also mandated by the United Nations. It is the United Nations that asked NATO to take on the role of providing security in that region. This needs to be understood. This is where the NDP keeps changing its tune.

This is not a war. We are providing a secure environment in a country in which there was a complete loss of security. Let us get it very clear so the NDP can understand what a secure environment is and what a war is.

A war is between two nations; a war is between two parties. There are not two parties there. This is a different kind of war. We are facing a terrorist organization that does not respect any rules of engagement. As a matter of fact, it has the most hideous way of running a government on record. It will provide no rights to its own citizens. That is why the citizens of Afghanistan want us to bring peace and security. Peace and security can only be provided by NATO forces.

The member keeps forgetting one thing. Every NATO member is providing assistance to the Afghan national army. The Afghan national army is being built, the Afghan police is being built, and an Afghan regional system is being built. They are all being built by NATO forces and native people.

We have debated this mission in the House on many occasions and this government knows where Canada is going. That is why the member and my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, are part of the special committee on Afghanistan. It meets regularly to view the progress being made by our forces. The member who just spoke is a member of that committee, so he is well aware of what our forces are doing. That committee is televised and we bring in everyone involved to see exactly what this successful mission has accomplished on the ground.

It pains every Canadian whenever there is the loss of life of Canadian soldiers. It pains every one of us to see that, but we must recognize that their death must not be in vain. It must finish in Afghanistan. Afghanistan must run under secure conditions, not by threats and terrorists who live in the dark ages in that country. Everybody knows the rule of the Taliban when it was in that country, what they did to the rights of women and the rights of citizens.

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● (1550)

If there is anyone with any doubt, they can clearly see what is happening in the neighbouring country, Pakistan, where the government of Pakistan finally had to have the army go in and fight the Taliban because they were destroying all development that was taking place.

Let me say also this. Canada has a huge amount of development money pouring into Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, Afghanistan is our number one development strategy. We are very proud of all the development efforts taking place there. We would like to see more effort taking place there. There would be more money in that country if there was a secure environment there.

At the current time the most important aspect for our engagement in Afghanistan is to prepare the Afghan people to take over from ground zero. The national army is being trained by the Canadian army. Their police officers are being trained. The judicial system is up and coming.

As they take control of their own destiny, Canada will be more than happy to give all things back to Afghanistan and continue the way we are. That is why we have a motion in the House that says that 2011 will complete our military engagement. Thereafter, we do expect to be there, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs said today, in a development aspect in order to help that country because Canada stands for some basic human values. It stands for the basic values of human rights and the rule of law, and we should be there to help that country achieve those objectives.

I could go on and on, however, I do not need to go on and on because I do get an opportunity at the special committee to see the progress being made. My other colleagues today will elaborate on many of those things.

Nevertheless, I do want to say this to the NDP members. I was part of the report that they were talking about. That report had lost relevance because of the motion that came from Parliament. Indeed, there were some good suggestions. Good suggestions can always be taken, but the most important thing is to build an Afghanistan based on what the Afghan people want and we are helping them to do that.

We are helping the Afghan people. After years and years of fighting, years and years of terrorism in that country, the world is finally standing by and helping them. The NDP members should stand behind that motion and say, "Yes, we should do that". They should be proud to do that and not oppose when Canada wants to do something.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could perhaps enlighten us and say what process he envisages the government following to determine what the future of Canada's mission will be after 2011.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that when the mission is debated after 2011 by Parliament, he, as the Liberal foreign affairs critic, will have an opportunity to fully participate in that debate. The committee will participate. Canadians will participate to indicate how the mission after 2011 should go, while taking into account the strong values and past contributions.

I can tell the hon. member that we are looking forward to that debate.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could enlighten us on one question that bothers me. It seems to me that the confidence of people in this country in the ability of Canada to achieve anything meaningful in Afghanistan has been seriously eroded. It is not surprising when we see the shifting sands in the kinds of commitments that are expected, that the international community expects to happen in Afghanistan.

The London compact of 2006 had an aim of expanding by the end of 2010 the Afghan national army to a ceiling of 70,000 personnel. Yet, we see in today's *Globe and Mail* reports of an expectation by the Americans that the Afghan national army would go from its current strength of 96,000 to 124,000 by next year. This is what U.S. General Stanley McCrystal wants. He wants it to be doubled by 2013. So we are talking double that number by 2013. We are talking, in four years, about an expectation of 250,000 troops in the Afghan national army. Then they will be able to take over security within four years.

If we are not dealing with a war in Afghanistan that people want to see an end to, what are we dealing with when we are looking at 250,000 troops to maintain this situation?

● (1555)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear so people understand. We are creating a secure environment so the development process can take place. The only way a secure environment can take place in that country is by building the Afghan national army so Afghanistan can make its own decisions about providing security. What is important here is that the army is starting from ground zero. We must make that very clear.

Canada is proud to help build the Afghan national army. We will continue to provide all the logistic support.

It is important to note that it is not war as the NDP likes to say because those members have this notion about peace building. It is by providing a secure environment so that development can take place.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to get my colleague's comments on reconciliation.

Our NDP colleague across the floor said there can be no reconciliation during conflict, and I frankly reject that. Even in a conventional war, like World War II, behind the scenes activity was going on, perhaps not with Adolf Hitler but with others, that could be called reconciliation. This is not a conventional war, obviously. The reconciliation that went on all through the conflict in northern Ireland was part of ending that conflict.

I would like my colleague's comments on that. Can reconciliation be part of any conflict? It does not necessarily have to follow after the conflict has ended.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, when does reconciliation take place? It takes place when both sides know they cannot win and they realize that going to the table is in both their interests.

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The NDP wants us to get out and then go to the reconciliation table. To reconcile what? The Taliban would ask why it should reconcile. The Taliban would say it wants its old style of government, the dark ages, with no rights for women. That is what the Taliban is working for and what it is fighting about. Why would the Taliban come to the table to reconcile with us?

That is why it is important for the reconciliation process to take place. People would see that everyone would be a winner as a result of the reconciliation process.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify something with the government. If this is not a war we are in, I would like to know what it is. This is the first time I have heard the government say that this is not a war. I ask the parliamentary secretary, if this is not a war, then what in Heaven's name is it?

The NDP has taken the position that we need to change the direction of what we are doing in Afghanistan. If no one on that side of the House believes that we need to change direction, I think they are out of sync with most Canadians and the rest of the world.

This war is not going well; every indicator shows that. The elections have been called a fraud. There is drug proliferation. The parliamentary secretary talked about human rights. We heard at committee, and he heard it as well, that the human rights of women and others are not great and in fact are getting worse.

Does anyone want to go back to the Taliban? Of course not. I started off my speech by saying that we have reports from 1998-99 on the Taliban and they were dutifully ignored. It is time to change the way we do things.

If this is not a war, what does the government call what we are doing in Afghanistan? A tea party?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, about this issue of war and a secure environment, there is no question that Canadian soldiers are dying, Afghan soldiers are dying, as are other coalition soldiers. People are dying. It is important to understand that we are trying to make it a secure environment.

The House passed a motion stating its principles as to what is to be achieved. The Parliament of Canada set its priorities through that motion.

The member and I sit on committee and we measure on a quarterly basis the progress made.

That is the real success in Afghanistan.

• (1600)

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to downgrade the importance of this debate because it is a debate about the fate of our armed forces, the people currently serving and those who have given their lives.

I do however want to raise the cover on why the debate is happening right at this second. The NDP wants to delay Parliament because those members do not want the free trade bill to proceed. The second thing is they asked for—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, it is the right of every parliamentarian to bring forward a concurrence motion on a committee report. He is impugning motive and that is unfortunate, but that should not be allowed. Mr. Speaker, you should be ruling in fact that this type of motion is allowed in Parliament.

For a member, whether he is on the government bench or not, to stand and suggest that we cannot do what we are doing I take issue with, and so should you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. The member for Ottawa Centre is correct that he has the procedural right to move a concurrence motion and other members have a right to agree or disagree with that decision, but we will go on with the question.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments.

The second thing is that the NDP wants to slow down the EI bill so that we can remain in the House, which is a good thing because, indeed, that is what the Conservatives and the Prime Minister want to do.

That said, having raised the cover as to why this is happening, I would like the parliamentary secretary again to underscore why in the world the NDP thinks that we can achieve the rebuilding of Afghanistan without first creating security for the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, that is a question everybody is asking: How does the NDP expect development to take place when there is no security? In the meantime, the NDP wants us to withdraw, providing an insecure environment.

Events are taking place in Pakistan and Afghanistan even now and reports are saying it is a difficult mission and the insurgency is gaining ground. All of this indicates why it is important to ensure there is a secure environment and that the Afghan national army is built so that it can take care of its own country and destiny.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to express my thanks to the member for Ottawa Centre and my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for participating in this discussion.

Historians will argue for generations the reasons that the New Democratic Party moved the motion on this particular day, and I do not take anything away from that. It is important for the House to take the opportunity to reflect on the Afghan mission and, certainly, if there are families of soldiers whose lives are at risk and families of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, we, as members of Parliament, owe it to them to provide some reflection on the mission in Afghanistan.

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First of all, as a member of the Liberal Party, when I participated in some discussions before I was elected to the House with respect to the mandate of the mission, I appreciated very much the efforts that were made by the Prime Minister and others to involve a number of people in those discussions. I certainly have never regarded this mission as a matter of partisan politics or as a matter of partisan debate. There is no more important decision for a member of Parliament, indeed for a government and certainly for a prime minister, than the decision with respect to Canada's putting its military and civilian operations in a theatre of conflict, putting their lives at risk and asking them and their families to make the ultimate sacrifice. When we go back to our constituents and we argue and debate these questions, it is not a matter of political philosophy or a matter of abstract ideology; it is a matter of very real questions for the people of Canada and certainly for those families.

Those who were in the House last week would know that I did not hesitate to give what I hoped would be a fairly lively partisan intervention in a debate on the confidence motion. This will be a very different kind of intervention, simply because of the nature of the subject, and I appreciate the opportunity to do so.

It is important for the House to continue to keep its eye and focus on the most important and difficult questions which we have. The first one is that while we as a country have this debate, we should never make the mistake of thinking that this is somehow a conflict in which Canada alone is involved. There are over 40 members of the United Nations that are engaged in some way or other with respect to their activities in Afghanistan in support of the United Nations mandate and in support of the mandate which flowed from the London conference. Canada, Canadian troops, Canadian CIDA workers and Canadian diplomats are engaged in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, and in the neighbouring region, and we are not engaged in it alone. Our troops are not alone. Our diplomats are not alone. Our aid workers are not alone. Somehow, that reality has to filter down more powerfully into the discussion in the House of Commons.

Of course, all of us are responding to national mandates from national parliaments.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

It is only natural to have a discussion on such an important mission in the House of Commons, but we have to remember that Canada is not alone and that Canada will not resolve the conflict in Afghanistan alone. It is not a Canadian mission. It is a UN mission and a NATO mission. It is not just a mission for our army and our military forces, but a mission for our diplomats and our CIDA workers.

We as Canadians have to better understand that we are not in this mission alone. We are in this mission with all our allies. It is an effort that is both difficult and important.

[*English*]

Let us go back and remember, because somehow we seem to need to do this over and over again, and remind ourselves as to how we got there, what NATO and the United Nations is doing there and what we are trying and attempting to accomplish.

Let us recall that is a country that has been at the centre of a conflict that has been under way for over 30 years, initially a civil war, a conflict within Afghanistan which proved to be difficult and violent, then in 1979 an invasion from the Soviet Union in which, by the end of the invasion, over 100,000 Soviet troops were in Afghanistan, in which literally hundreds of thousands of Afghan civilians were killed, in which thousands of Soviet troops themselves were killed, and which invasion was resisted. It was resisted by mojahedin fighters who were based in southern Afghanistan, as well as Pakistan and who were supported by the intelligence and military forces in Pakistan, as well as by our friends in the United States.

Ultimately, the Soviets decided to withdraw and after their withdrawal there was a continuation of a civil war. There was another civil war and conflict. Out of that conflict, came a regime known as the Taliban regime. One of the ironies of life is that there were elements in the Taliban regime that were supported by the Pakistanis, by the Americans, by ISI and by the CIA. This has been widely documented. It is not a wild assertion by anyone. It is well-known, well-documented and thoroughly researched and understood.

It is that Taliban regime that harboured al-Qaeda and allowed Osama bin Laden to operate within the country and within its jurisdiction and which provided harbour, support and allowed free rein to al-Qaeda and bin Laden to launch his attacks initially in the region and then ultimately the attacks of 9/11 on the World Trade towers.

NATO invoked the doctrine for the first time in NATO's history that said that an attack on one is an attack on all of us. This is our attack. The United Nations was engaged because of the nature of the conflict and because of the risk that was posed to the entire security of the region by the regime that was in place in Afghanistan. As a result of that, Canada, as a member of NATO, became involved. We became involved through our work at the United Nations and through our work at NATO.

A decision was made by the Canadian government to support the decision of NATO, which was sanctioned by the United Nations, that we would remove the Taliban regime, get rid of that government and launch a military attack that would allow that to take place, which is exactly what happened.

Canada participated in the initial conflict in Afghanistan. We supported the NATO operation. As a result, the Taliban regime left the major cities of Afghanistan and the rebuilding operation began. The rebuilding operation began under the aegis of the United Nations, of which Canada was a strong member and supporter, and NATO was asked and sanctioned by the United Nations to continue to provide the security services that would be necessary to rebuild Afghanistan.

At the time the rebuilding started, it is important to remember the level of destruction, the physical destruction that had taken place in Afghanistan, the level of poverty that affected the country of tens of millions of people and the extent to which we were starting from the most difficult and tragic of circumstances.

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Hundreds of thousands of people had been killed, indeed, deaths in the millions, refugees in the millions and homeless in the millions. Poverty was at the very lowest levels of income and ability to survive of any country in the United Nations. It was a country that had been literally devastated by 30 years of violent conflict, to say nothing of the psychological and physical trauma; the number of people without arms, hands, legs and limbs; the number of people who were disabled; and the number of people who were absolutely devastated by the extent of this conflict.

• (1610)

The Taliban was not defeated. It left Kabul and Kandahar and the major cities of Afghanistan but it did not disappear as an organization. For reasons that historians will debate, the United States decided that it would not focus solely on the question of rebuilding Afghanistan but would extend the war on terror, as it described it, to Iraq.

In my opinion, which is an opinion I have expressed on a number of occasions, that was a mistake of historic proportion. When Richard Clarke, the security advisor to President Clinton, was called to the Senate to testify he said that this was an absolutely fatal mistake because it did two things. He said that it first let Osama Bin Laden and his cohorts off the hook and gave them the ability to regroup in the mountains of southeastern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan, which they have obviously done to a tremendous extent. Second, he said that it meant that the destabilization of the world was passed through to Iraq and Iraq itself became a major training ground for terrorist and guerrilla activity, making life more difficult all around.

It must be said that many mistakes have been made, both tactically and strategically, by all of us, including NATO, in how we thought we would solve this problem. The Prime Minister came into office and asked Mr. Manley and others to look at the war. They looked at the war and said that there had to be a change in strategy, that we had to get the whole of government involved and that we had to get CIDA, our defence effort and our development effort working together. We had to understand that there would not be a classic military victory. We would not have a VA day the way we have a VE day or VJ day. They said that this was not that kind of conflict and that it required a different approach altogether.

I think it is fair to say that the report that Mr. Manley chaired has had an impact today and at other times in saying that there needs to be a refocus of our efforts. We need to continue to refocus those efforts. I think it is fair to say that the report that the New Democratic Party has suggested we debate today is a report that points to that change in direction.

We are now in the middle of a national debate under way in the United States. The President of the United States has said that he wants to continue to discuss with General McChrystal and his other advisors as to how they will proceed. The Americans have increased substantially the number of troops that they have in Afghanistan, but we understand that there is now a request for even more troops with respect to the next two-year period for creating greater stability in the country.

I have been able to get to Afghanistan twice as both a private citizen and as a member of Parliament. On the basis of those trips, it

is not possible for me to say that I am in any sense an expert or that I have any particular dramatic insights that are greater than those I have read.

For my colleagues in the House, I want to say that I find the membership on the special committee on Afghanistan; the foreign affairs committee work that I have done; the amount of reading I have been able to do; the travels we have been able to take to Washington; the discussions that I have had in New York, Washington and other discussions with other countries that are engaged; the very late night discussions I have had with several ambassadors in Kabul who were kind enough to come around and agree to an off-the-record conversation; the conversations I have had with our military officers and with members of their families; and the discussions I have had with our aid workers and NGOs in Afghanistan have all been fascinating, important and interesting. I think we all need to figure out how we go forward and the best way to move forward.

• (1615)

I am convinced that we have suffered a little from what I call mission creep in Afghanistan. Too many people started out with the rhetorical ambition that we would turn Afghanistan into a liberal democracy in relatively short order.

I am trying not to be too partisan here but part of the difficulty I had with the Bush doctrine was that it talked a lot about how we take freedom to other countries, we impose it, it is there and it will be quickly embraced, but my entire experience in life is that life does not work that way.

This is a deeply feudal, tribal society. This is a divided society, a badly damaged and traumatized society. This is a society with very high rates of illiteracy and very low levels of economic development. It is a narco-economy with over 50% of its GDP coming from the production and manufacture of highly illegal drugs. It is a society in which what we define and see as corruption is widespread.

We are having a great challenge now with respect to the election, which I asked the minister about today, and there will continue to be serious issues on this side of the House about the conduct of that election and what more needs to be done to ensure credibility for the national government in Afghanistan. There is a serious issue with respect to the credibility of that government in the eyes of a great many of its people, let alone the allies who are making such a significant contribution to the life, safety and security of Afghanistan.

This is not a crusade for anything. This is about providing security. It is about ensuring that that country and that region will not become a base from which terrorist activity can threaten the security of the world. That is what it is all about. The more we can do to advance freedom, to advance the rule of law and to advance equality, the better off we will all be. However, let us not lose our focus on what must be the central activity. The central activity is not a crusade. The central activity is security and it is a security that cannot be achieved in Afghanistan alone. It is a security that must be matched by the security we find in Pakistan.

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People talk about Vietnam or other conflicts and say, “Wait a minute, let me understand. If there is a full scale retreat, there is a Taliban government in Kabul, there is greater destabilization in Pakistan and the possibility of a more radical fundamentalist government in Pakistan which has access to nuclear weapons and is an ally of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, what is the effect of that on the security of the world?”

No thoughtful person can look upon that result and say that we have peace. If we have peace, then why do we worry? Our troops are not there so no one is getting killed, so we will be at peace. However, what kind of peace will it be? If it is a peace in which the security of the rest of the world is deeply threatened, then we are simply putting our heads in the sand and pretending as if we found a solution.

I have never been one who felt that going to war or taking military action was something that could be taken on lightly. I have certainly never thought of myself as somebody who believed that democracy comes at the end of the barrel of a gun.

• (1620)

[Translation]

Nonetheless, I am certain that Canada has a vital interest in the security of the world. We must first find a way to ensure the security of the area around Afghanistan, so the people of that region and the people of the world, including Canada, are no longer subject to terrorist attacks. That is why I believe it is important for us to continue to provide the necessary focus and support to a mission that can work and that will have the chance to succeed.

[English]

In conclusion, I simply want to say that the Liberal Party and the Liberal caucus will continue to be, as much as we can be, a constructive and, I hope, effective voice in the House with respect to this mission. I do not see it as an ideological mission. I do not see it as exclusively a military mission, and we do not see it as one that is carrying on a crusade for anything. We see it as something that we hope will provide greater security for Afghanistan, greater security for the region, and yes, greater—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Westlock—St. Paul.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for his intercession. As informative as it was on the history of Afghanistan, I would like to ask him some questions on what he sees for the future of Afghanistan.

I have the privilege of representing men and women from both CFB Edmonton and 4 Wing Cold Lake who have served in Afghanistan. When I talk to these men and women, they do not obsess about the past in Afghanistan. They do not obsess about past military ventures they have been on in Afghanistan. Truly this is not Vietnam. This is not Afghanistan in the 1970s. This is Afghanistan in 2009.

These men and women tell me more often than not about the amazing difference they have made in this country from the beginning to the current date. When I talked to the development and aid workers who have been there, all they talked about was the future of Afghanistan. They are not weighed down about the past, as others are, though I do not want to be too partisan with this question.

The member talked a lot about the past and the history. I would like to know about his vision and how he sees Canada's engagement moving into the future, past 2011. Surely from the sounds of it he sees Canada being engaged in some role. I would like to know exactly what he foresees for us and what vision he has for Canada's role in Afghanistan past 2011.

• (1625)

Hon. Bob Rae: I appreciate the question, Mr. Speaker. I have difficulty collecting my thoughts in 20 minutes, so I can assure the hon. member that I would gladly have spoken more had I been given the opportunity.

Let me just say as briefly as I can that I think there is a very important role for us, an ongoing role for us in Afghanistan. I do not believe that Canada's commitment to Afghanistan can, in any way, shape or form, end in 2011. I do not believe our commitment to the region can end in 2011. We are beginning to understand better that what happens in Pakistan, particularly in the northwest but in fact in the whole country, is every bit as important as what happens in Afghanistan, and I think Mr. Manley helped us do that.

I noticed Ambassador Holbrooke said the other day that it is only when we deal with these two questions together, only when we see them together, that we will be able to succeed as we go forward.

First, from my visits to Afghanistan, my sense is that there is still a major role for us to play in the whole field of development. There is a major role for us to play in the rule of law and the governance of the country. There are significant issues with respect to how the government of Afghanistan actually operates and how the governance can operate. Finally, there is a very significant role for us to play in training the military and in training the police.

There is a very strong consensus, which I found for example in the speeches by Prime Minister Brown of the U.K. last week, in what has been said by many others, and indeed, in what has been said in the House. There is a tremendously important role for us with respect to making sure that the Afghan army and the Afghan police are in a position to do the job, which simply has to be done. If hon. members accept my argument that security is the key, then those institutions are obviously key and critical.

My visits with General Formica and with the Canadian military in Kabul persuaded me that there will absolutely be a strong role for Canada in the period after 2011. We have to take a long hard look at that as we look at what our role has to be in order to be useful. The resolution is clear that our military deployment in Kandahar will come to an end, but I certainly do not see that our role in Afghanistan with respect to development will come to a conclusion.

Let me give just one example: the whole question of polio eradication. We need to see this as a long-term campaign, one that involves Pakistan as well as Afghanistan.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the other day, at the economic club dinner at the Chateau Laurier, four-star General Wesley Clark was there and was asked a question on Afghanistan. He said basically two things.

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First, he said that anyone who believes we are not in Afghanistan or Iraq for energy security is sadly mistaken. I am paraphrasing now. That is not exactly what he said. However, he indicated one of the major reasons we were there was for energy security.

Second, he said that if we do not deal with Pakistan, we cannot deal with an Afghanistan.

When I spoke with him on a more private level, he indicated he meant to elaborate more on the region, not just on Pakistan.

As my colleague from Toronto Centre has said, the reality is there are many countries in that region that need to be taken into the dialogue.

And, yes, the hon. member for Toronto Centre is absolutely correct. Canada will have some role to play in Afghanistan. The question is this House and this country have to decide in a thoughtful manner what that role should be after 2011.

My question for the hon. member is, does he think that General Wesley Clark was correct in his summation on energy security of Iraq and Afghanistan?

Also, I would like to give him an opportunity to elaborate more on what Canada's role, not just with Pakistan but with the other countries in the region, should be, as he says, in going forward on this very serious issue.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, from a factual point of view, I do not know what the energy security issues in Afghanistan would be in relationship to Canada.

Certainly with respect to Kazakhstan, which is not a neighbour but which is reasonably close by, there is obviously an issue with respect to the energy question, and obviously the supplies of oil and natural gas that come from that part of the world are of interest to all of us.

However, if the member were to ask me if I think that is the reason Canadian troops are in Afghanistan, I would have to say, no, I do not think it is. And I do not think that is why NATO is there either.

I am sorry that time did not permit me to respond to the broader diplomatic issues that were raised by my colleague from Ottawa Centre. I am very much in agreement with him. I think we need a stronger diplomatic presence in Islamabad, Delhi and Kabul, as well as whatever we can bring to Iran and the neighbouring countries. I think it is critical for us. I think it is critical that Canada be able to play a stronger role in those diplomatic discussions and in those development discussions.

I certainly would agree, and I think I said in my speech, that I believe very strongly that we cannot solve the security situation in Afghanistan until the security situation in Pakistan is addressed. As long as that border is as porous as it is, which it will be forever, we will have to deal with all of the issues around Pashtun instability in the northwest of Pakistan and also in Balochistan. There are serious internal questions in Pakistan that we have to deal with. I do not think our diplomatic capacity is as great as it could be given the strength and the quality of the people that we have.

The last point is that when we take something as basic as polio eradication, we cannot eradicate polio in Afghanistan alone because

that population is travelling back and forth between Pakistan and Afghanistan all the time. So, unless there is a major public health intervention in Pakistan, we are not going to be able to solve a major public health issue in Afghanistan. That is just a living proof—

• (1630)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. There is enough time for one more question. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, want to thank my colleague from Toronto Centre for an excellent intervention.

I have two quick questions. One is philosophical and one is a little more specific.

We talk about progress or no progress; the glass is half full or the glass is half empty. Would he agree that the glass is at least fuller than it was when we started? Anybody can decide what that means, but is it at least fuller?

Now, I have a more specific question. General McChrystal in his recent well-publicized report basically said that we should be putting more forces on the ground, concentrating on stabilizing an area and then staying there. That is precisely what the Canadian Forces have been doing now for a number of months. What is the hon. member's view on General McChrystal's strategy and the fact that we have in fact been doing that ourselves and perhaps leading the way again?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, first of all, when we ask if it is getting better, we have to ask better than what when? My own judgment is that if we look at the situation, as I have tried to describe it, when we first went in there, it was absolutely devastating in terms of basic infrastructure, schooling, public health, or access to anything. So there are many respects in which things have improved in Afghanistan and many parts of the country in which things have improved quite dramatically. However, we also have to recognize that in the last while, the security situation in a number of parts of the country has not gotten better. Just on an anecdotal basis, I found that the security situation in Kabul when I went there last June was significantly more difficult than when I went there three years before, and that is just a fact of life.

General McChrystal's strategy from what I know, and I am not a military strategist, has a lot of common sense to it. It makes a lot more sense than just whacking away at a few people and then leaving, and then they come back—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Social Programs; the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona, Product Safety.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this difficult debate.

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This mission has cost the lives of 131 young Quebeckers and Canadians. We always hear about how these young men and women were the pride of the troops they shared their lives with, and the pride of their families and hometowns. This is a high price to pay. We must find that this is a necessary and appropriate price. Canada has lost 131 soldiers in Afghanistan, while all other countries, excluding the United States, have lost 426. That means that our losses represent well over 25% of the combined losses of all the other countries.

I am not saying this to imply that we have regrets, but to explain that the Bloc Québécois did not support the proposal to extend the mission to July 2011. The Bloc would have liked the mission to end at the start of 2009. Is that because we do not believe in the mission? Absolutely not. But we think that other countries could have taken over. I will even say now that they should, because Canada will withdraw its troops in July 2011, and other countries will have to step in. Afghans will still need help from other foreign armies to ensure that they are safe.

Having asked representatives of other countries on a number of occasions—at parliamentary meetings in various European locations or during missions to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)—to come to the assistance of those in Afghanistan, and having seen that there was little enthusiasm, I know that the Government of Canada, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of National Defence must continue to search for support to have others replace the Canadian Forces when they leave.

I said that it is not true that we do not believe in this mission. Rather, we want other countries, who have not yet stepped up, to share this difficult task as they should. I would like to spend some time discussing what I believe should be done in Afghanistan and why it is such a difficult task.

I would start by pointing out that President Obama's advisors are divided, as reported by the *New York Times* on Sunday. It is the only paper I read; it is substantial and I have the time to read on Sundays. Some advisors, such as General McChrystal who was just appointed, say they would like to have 40,000 more soldiers. Others say that it is futile and there would be nothing to gain from it. They are also experienced people.

•(1635)

I have not yet gone to Afghanistan—I may go and I would like to—but I have read a great deal and thought long and hard about it. A few weeks ago, either in the *Globe and Mail* or in the *National Post*—I know it was an English-language paper—there were two full pages about women who were pleased with the 2001 mission, not just ours but the mission in general. However, they were still afraid to intervene and to live, just as they felt when the Taliban were there.

Thus, there is something wrong. I heard Ms. Soraya Sobhran, the chair of the human rights committee, say in her concluding remarks that Canada was doing good things and that the people were telling her so. But they were also telling her that they were afraid they would not be alive the next day.

I know that by saying that I am raising the issue of security. Does anyone in this House believe that we can get to the bottom of this

issue simply with weapons or soldiers? I do not think so. I think the Taliban and all these young people and not so young people are prepared to give up their lives to chase out the foreigners and go back to their old way of life. We have not spoken with them, as a matter of fact, but there needs to be more than security to deal with the situation in Afghanistan.

I heard the drug issue get mentioned. It is awful, but the Taliban have resumed responsibility for 90% of all heroin production. The numbers I have read indicate that. I have heard in conferences that eradication is not possible. It was possible in some countries where security was widespread and where those who continued to produce heroin could be punished. But what can we do about Afghanistan at this time? Some propose convincing farmers to grow profitable fruit and vegetables that are sought after abroad. To do so, the farmers would need to be protected during that time and they would also need infrastructure, roads and the means to transport these products and sell them abroad. They would also need security. Indeed, it still boils down to security, which cannot be provided by soldiers alone.

Some say we have to get along with the Taliban. Some have said that. Women there say we cannot get along with the Taliban because the Taliban want to take away from women all the rights we want to give them.

•(1640)

Moreover, others are saying—I have also heard this—that, among the Taliban, some of them are at times farmers and at other times, Taliban. Not all Taliban are Taliban all the time. Indeed, we could probably convince some people.

This brings me to the country's structures. Many wanted Afghanistan to become a democratic country, and the UN has worked very hard in that regard. A great deal has been accomplished and we are told that some progress has been made, but President Karzai's entourage seems to be showing signs that it could be less than squeaky clean. At this very moment, the ballots of the last election are being recounted, with the knowledge that, there too, there was a major split between two groups. Some were convinced that ballot box stuffing was so obvious that there was no way that President Karzai was democratically elected. Others said that it was not that serious, that some of the ballots would be recounted and that President Karzai could then be recognized. However, we know that President Karzai has some allies who do not necessarily make good friends, and those allies have tainted his entire government, or a large part of it.

I am going over all these points because I think they will be important to knowing what to do in the coming years. Of course, the Liberal critic, whom I cannot name, was right when he said—and I think almost everyone agrees at this point—that the United States made a serious mistake when it abandoned Afghanistan after defeating the Taliban and went to Iraq to attack Saddam Hussein, who, by the way, was the only non-religious figure to defend the Sunni Muslims and allow the Iranian Shiites complete freedom. Not only are they responsible for the disaster in Iraq vis-à-vis the Iranians, for example, but they also brought about a disaster in Afghanistan by abandoning the mission just when more support was being solicited.

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The people believed that they were going to have a country, that they would be allowed to participate, and that there would be rules. Unfortunately, since the necessary efforts were not made at the outset, we now find ourselves forced to operate in a situation that is much less favourable, because the Taliban are back and fear has again taken hold, particularly of women.

We have to start over. That is what we are doing, and I know that Canadians and Quebeckers are doing it well, but, as I said, at a high price. They are doing it well, but it means that they have to train Afghans so that they can begin to withdraw. They have to train the police and the Afghan national army, and that is a good thing.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs is gone. He would not have liked me.

I reread the motion—I will read some excerpts—that was passed to say that we would stay until July 2011, on the condition that

Canada's contribution to reconstruction and development in Afghanistan should:

(a) be revamped and increased to strike a better balance between our military efforts and our development efforts in Afghanistan;

• (1645)

That is what we have to do.

(b) focus on our traditional strengths as [nations], particularly through the development of sound judicial and correctional systems and strong political institutions ... [People are trying, but it is not always easy to get involved in] ... addressing the chronic fresh water shortages in the country;

(c) address the crippling issue of the narco-economy...;

(d) be held to a greater level of accountability...;

I have to skip nearly a page, but I want to get to this:

that with respect to the transfer of Afghan detainees to Afghan authorities, the government must:

(a) commit to meeting the highest NATO and international standards with respect to protecting the rights of detainees, transferring only when it believes it can do so in keeping with Canada's international obligations;

(b) pursue a NATO-wide solution to the question of detainees through diplomatic efforts that are rooted in the core Canadian values of respect for human rights and the dignity of all people;

(c) commit to a policy of greater transparency with respect to its policy on the taking of and transferring of detainees including a commitment to report on the results of reviews or inspections of Afghan prisons undertaken by Canadian officials.

I am pleased to have read that because we are in the middle of a debate on this issue. I am not sure that what has been passed here has actually been done.

• (1650)

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, whom I have known for a long time, has served with me in a foreign affairs capacity for many years. I respect her judgment and we have good working relations. The member is on the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan as well.

During her speech, she mentioned a very good point, which was we were not going to win a military war. She is absolutely right. Everybody understands that. The military war is just one component to provide the security aspect. However, we must not leave the impression in the debate that this is what the Canadian Forces or NATO forces are doing. That is not their primary purpose.

The most important purpose there is to provide the institutions for nation building. As many have stated, this is at ground zero. She has rightly alluded that the NATO mission's main object is to train the national army, train the police, train the judicial system, put in the relevance of an administration in that country, which will be the key element in running the country and which will allow all of us to leave Afghanistan and provide security to Afghanistan and its people.

The NDP members keep talking militarily to end the war. We can only do that if the other institutions are there to take over, the Afghan army, the military, the institutions.

Is that not what the member agrees with us on in the special committee? Is that not what our primary focus is? Is that not what we are there for? Is it not what the member supports we do?

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, could the hon. member repeat the question?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, does the member support what I said, that our main mission over there is to build the administration of Afghanistan, which is the army, the police, the judiciary and the remnants of an administration? Is that not what our main purpose is? Does she not agree with that and not with what the NDP members keep talking about of stopping the war, getting out of it? Does she agree that this is the main reason why we are there?

• (1655)

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, of course, and I made that point a number of times during my speech. It is important that Afghanistan be able to administer and manage itself and be a country. That is what the people who believe in what we have done expect. Yes, that is what is important. I believed in that when I said we had to leave Afghanistan in 2009 because there are other things to do and we have to be there. Other countries have to agree to provide security, and this is something I have called for at meetings of parliamentary associations. Some countries have not done their part. In my opinion, Canada has done its part, and other countries must do theirs. We know that the army has had enough. There is a military base in my riding, and that is what I hear from the people there. So I am pleased to answer yes to the parliamentary secretary.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member rightly said that the solutions are in a complex use of our three tools of defence, diplomacy and development. I would like to ask her three questions related on that.

First, how does the member see coordinating those? How does she see that working and coming to a solution?

Second, does the member think we have not been successfully supporting all those tools equally, perhaps more on just the defence?

Third, because she is an experienced member of Parliament, the structure of government having these three tools in different departments, does that make it more difficult to coordinate those efforts?

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[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I may have experience, but not in government. I am sure that it is difficult to coordinate, but at the same time, it is absolutely necessary. The member's question is valid, but I believe that the answer should come from Parliament.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I sit on both the Afghan committee and the foreign affairs committee.

She made one point that was extremely important, and that was sharing the burden. In my comments I tried to underline the importance of having those other countries in the region take responsibility for the conflict, the war in Afghanistan and certainly the challenges in Pakistan.

Does she not think it is time that Canada push as our primary focus right now, looking at post-2011 in policy terms, to have all those other countries in the neighbourhood, China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, et cetera, take responsibility for what is going on there?

The member quite rightly mentioned that Canada had been there a while. Our military is absolutely fatigued. In terms of changing things and doing something positive, should we not be pushing to have those countries seriously involved, particularly in the area of diplomacy and negotiations?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, yes, Canada should push, but I would say that all parliamentarians that belong to international associations could do so as well. It is not necessarily easy to do, because taking part in missions like the one in Afghanistan is not an attractive prospect. But all parliamentarians must also make a compelling case to convince other countries that, using the proper means, they need to help the Afghans out of this terrible life they are forced to lead.

[*English*]

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate this afternoon in the debate.

First, both as the vice-chair of the national defence committee and vice-chair of the special standing committee on Afghanistan, I want to salute the great work our soldiers do there.

I visited our troops in Kandahar on two occasions and from personal experience, every one of them believes, as and this side of the House believe, and I am sure all sides of the House believe, that they are making a significant difference to the lives of Afghans.

I want to talk a lot today about re-engaging particularly with the population, which I think is the key.

The point we have to look at first is that we live in an age of instant gratification. We all expect suddenly that things will happen. Obviously in Afghanistan the road to a political solution that is meaningful in terms of empowering Afghans, to improving the economy, to improving the living standards, to improving the social networks in that part of the world is not going to come overnight. A country that has been ravaged by war for many years will not be able to find a solution overnight.

Canada is certainly part of the work going on there, but an Afghan solution must be found. In fact, the Department of National Defence, in a very important document in October of 2007, talked about the 3D Soviet-style approach on the issue that national reconciliation and not military victory was the likely outcome, that if we really wanted to see peace in Afghanistan, we must do it by working with all parties effectively to establish a long-lasting peace.

Stability is obviously imperative. We cannot do all the other things we would like to see done unless we have stability on the ground.

Canada, along with 40 other NATO countries, is working with the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police to try to bring stability on the ground in Afghanistan. We see that in northern parts of Afghanistan. Some areas are certainly much more tranquil than others. We happen to be engaged in the Kandahar region, a very volatile area and an area that is the home to the Taliban.

We currently have a crisis of governance. Are we going to get success or are we going to get failure? How we approach this is extremely important.

I commend the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development for its report, which contains 34 recommendations. For quite a while I was a member of that committee and happened to contribute to a number of those recommendations, and they are worth reviewing.

The role of the special committee on Afghanistan is to inform Canadians as to the progress or lack thereof that we have achieved in terms of the benchmarks we have established. It is important that we have established certain benchmarks to see where we are in terms of, for example, the training of the Afghan National Army.

By turning that country back over to the Afghans without really being able to provide security, nothing will happen. We need to engage local Afghans. We need to ensure they have a reason to support the ongoing efforts both by the Afghan government and the international community.

There have been significant changes on our strategy and the way we operate. One of them is the issue of the training of the Afghan National Army. When I was there in May of 2008, I learned of a particular Afghan mission in which Afghan-led forces went out into the field. Canadians were supporting that effort, but did not take the lead. We saw, for example, a unit that was able to go out and with the right tools, the right morale and the right support, they were able to engage and inflict significant casualties on the Taliban.

The effectiveness of the Afghan National Army and that of the police, which is one of the benchmarks we are looking at in the House, is extremely important. The Afghan National Army is much further ahead for many reasons. One of them has to do with pay and one has to do with the resources that are put in the Afghan National Army. However, the police force is absolutely the critical element because it is in every town and village. Often the only contact people have with the government is through the police force.

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•(1700)

What is required is a police force trained both in terms of dealing with crime but also dealing with the issue of human rights and respecting the local Afghans in that community. To ensure that respect is the key element is extremely important in being able to not only get the support of the men and women in the community but also to hold on to that support within a community.

The change is obviously in terms of the operational culture that we are involved in. We went into Kabul in 2001. When we rotated out, the Turks came in. Part of the debate we had before the resolution of March 13, 2008 was passed was on the issue of future direction and clearly the issue of rotation, informing NATO that we will not be there after December 2011 in a combat role in Kandahar. It is very clear.

One of the debates we are going to have to have, and I will touch upon some of it later, is a healthy debate as to post-2011 in terms of a reconstruction role. Some people say we cannot have reconstruction without having a military presence. The provincial reconstruction team, the PRT, has 150 Canadian soldiers. We cannot have a PRT unless we have 150 Canadian soldiers there, otherwise the chances are it is going to be overrun.

Do we want to continue that? That would be a question. Do we, in fact, engage in the training of the Afghan national army if we are there after 2011? Canadians have to understand that our soldiers are going to be outside the wire. In other words, they are not going to train them in a parade ground. They are going to be outside and they are going to be subject to enemy fire. People need to know that training does not mean that there will not be casualties because unfortunately there will be.

If we are going to do governance, we do not need soldiers. We could have governance in terms of different ministries: ministry of health, ministry of justice, ministry of foreign affairs. We could have advisers assisting in Kabul.

If we are going to deal with support, one of the organizations which we have not used, and it was going to go to Afghanistan in June but due to a number of factors it did not go, is the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. I can tell members, as a former president of the FCM, that it does outstanding work internationally. It must be because CIDA funds it on a five year basis.

For capacity-building at the village level, we could bring in Canadian experts in the fields of engineering, rudimentary health care and the development of laws. We have a resource called the Federation of Canadian Municipalities which has put forth a proposal to actually engage in Afghanistan, to be part of the solution.

We need to look at those kinds of solutions which will help the men and women in Afghanistan. It is really important because without that kind of engagement, we cannot have success.

The field of education is another area, and of course we have witnessed over six million young Afghan children, particularly young girls, going to school for the first time. That is a great success.

We have experts on the ground here, so much so that the government of Vietnam, in an unrelated matter, is going to be looking for 15,000 teachers from the province of Ontario because it

is going to mandate English in Vietnam from grade three on. What does that mean? It means that Vietnam realizes that Canada has tremendous resources in terms of expertise which it needs.

The Afghans need that too. One of the biggest resources we have in this country is the diaspora. The largest Afghan diaspora outside of Afghanistan is here and quite frankly we have not been very effective in utilizing it. These people know the language and the culture. They could be that bridge to assist us in ensuring the kind of development that we would like to see and that certainly the Afghan government would like to see.

Using that diaspora effectively is an important element that we need to utilize not only post-2011 but right now. We need to engage it effectively. These people want to be engaged and that is an element that we should be doing immediately.

•(1705)

There is no question of our contributions both on the military side and on the development side. On the military side we know that we clearly are making a difference. On the development side the creation of clinics or schools cannot necessarily be measured because if six months later they are destroyed, that is not very effective. When a clinic is built, it is not simply a building, it is the training of individuals to work in that clinic. How do they give shots, how do they deal in terms of cleanliness, dealing with making sure the floors are clean, making sure that everything is spic and span, because without that, the clinic itself is of no value, so we need to do that.

We need to be much more effective with our Afghan allies particularly in the area of corruption which is still a major problem. That was one of the issues with the police. The money was not going to the people on the ground, it was going through their commanders. Fortunately that stopped, but what is the incentive if people are not getting the proper dollars? That is an important issue.

There is clearly a crisis of confidence in Afghanistan, particularly in the government and in the international coalition. Therefore, we need to again engage Afghans to ensure that they understand and that we are able to provide them with a better way of life. We are seeing for the first time that more wheat is being grown than poppies. Afghanistan actually is a major producer of wheat. The people get a lot more money for that. It is the drug lords who get all the money for the poppies.

The Dahla Dam, which the government identified as one of our signature projects, when it is up and running, it will provide needed hydroelectricity but also irrigation to hundreds of thousands of Afghans. The question of course is defending that dam because it is going to be a clear target. Whether it is done by Canadian soldiers, by Afghan soldiers, by contract, or whoever, we need to ensure, that with Canadian taxpayer dollars being put in, that the dam is operational and continues to be operational.

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The resolution that the House passed did not give the government a blank cheque. The special Afghan committee's role is to hold the government accountable on the benchmarks. It is to hold the government accountable so that Canadians understand where we are on this mission and to ensure that we are delivering. In regard to the training of the Afghan national army we have not delivered. At the moment only one out of eight units would be up to snuff. Unfortunately, we are behind and that is one of the concerns that we have on this side of the House. Canadians expect results with the resources in that regard, so why are we failing in that area?

We are going to ensure that the appropriate witnesses come before committee. As a clear explanation, we reported on this just before the summer recess, again informing Canadians of where we are.

This is not and has never been a Canadian mission, therefore, NATO and all our partners need to be there and to step up. Some countries like the Germans have certain caveats. That is pretty hard and is pretty rich. I remember meeting with members of the German defence committee urging us to continue the fight and stay longer which is very nice, except when we are not allowed to go out at night because the Germans are not out there, then that seemed to be a bit much.

We met with members of the Pakistan parliament in May. We had some very frank discussions with Pakistan and the Pakistani government, over the last few months, certainly recognized the fact that the main threat was not to its east in India, but that earlier this year the Pakistani Taliban elements had come together. They were very close to Islamabad until the Pakistan government had the political will and political courage to take them on.

• (1710)

Without a regional approach and without the support of regional players like Pakistan, any kind of approach for peace or some kind of national reconciliation among some of the more moderate elements out there would fail, and President Karzai has made attempts in that regard.

Pakistan is a key player and Iran is another key player to the west. And of course there is Russia, China and others, but we need to have a regional approach. We on this side have been pushing to ensure that we have that because diplomacy is a critical part of this whole issue.

We are not going to win militarily. The national defence department clearly showed that from the Russian situation. It is on reconciliation. We need to have building blocks there.

We have to do that not only at the diplomatic level to ensure that we are all on the same page but if it is a NATO mission we have to say to our NATO allies that they need to step up and take some responsibility. Countries like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have maybe 150 to 200 troops there on a per capita basis. They have more troops in Afghanistan than some of the other countries. They realize what we realize and that is, if we do not deal with this Afghan situation effectively, then those elements who would come back to Kabul and other cities would be quite a threat not only in the region but obviously in the export of terrorism around the world.

A deeds-based information environment is important. What perceptions do the Afghan people have of NATO, of the

government? We hear of tragic bombings in which civilian casualties occur because someone has bombed from the air. The immediate reaction is not only negative but it turns people who otherwise may not be pro-Taliban into supporting the Taliban.

In terms of deeds-based, how has the average Afghan's life improved because of the intervention of the international community in support of the government?

The government of Afghanistan has a lot to do. It faces a long road ahead in areas of corruption and in the area of governance. We have heard of the disputed issues with regard to the election, and that is very disturbing.

As much as 40% to 45% of the international aid has not been spent because the Afghan government cannot spend it. The government does not have the capacity. So capacity-building in terms of governance and at the village level is important in terms of ensuring that the lives of individuals are improved with clean water, with health care, with a job. Obviously, employment is extremely important.

How do we interact with that population? Canadian soldiers have done an outstanding job working in the local villages and befriending local Afghans and children. They need to see Canadians and others not as a threat or as the enemy but as their friends. How quickly things will improve if that kind of engagement goes on.

What is Canada's role, if any, in terms of Afghanistan? Are we going to be there at all? If we are going to be there, are we going to be in another part of Afghanistan? How can we contribute? Our contribution needs to be based on the needs of the Afghan people. This Parliament has to have that debate and we have to have it for more than six hours.

The Conservative government is fond of saying that we have had this debate, but the reality is that we have to have a debate which involves Canadians. We have to ensure that as the representatives of Canadians in this Parliament that we clearly speak.

The one thing we can assure Canadians is that every member of the House supports our military as long as it is actively engaged overseas. We support our military 100%.

• (1715)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member for Richmond Hill talk about what is happening in Afghanistan. Of course we support all of our troops and every Canadian in Afghanistan who believes they are providing something important to the Afghan people.

However, I have a problem and perhaps the member can help me. We do have some very knowledgeable people. I will quote Scott Taylor, who is a well-known military writer, who recently said:

IT WOULD SEEM that even the most hawkish of pundits have now come to the conclusion that the war in Afghanistan is unwinnable, and that this conflict is fast becoming a quagmire akin to the American fiasco in Vietnam.

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The second point I would put to him is the suggestion today by the spokesman for the Afghan national army that it will be four years before they can take over security. General McChrystal has said that he would like to see 124,000 Afghan troops by next year and to have that doubled by 2013, which is four years from now, to 250,000 troops.

The third thing I would put to him is the incident that happened in Dand last week where General Vance berated the local villagers because of a roadside bomb incident. It seemed to me that he was saying that it was up to the Afghan villagers to provide security to the Canadian forces and not the other way around.

Those three facts put together seem to indicate that we are heading in the wrong direction there and that this is not going the way we would like to see it go. I would like to know whether he thinks that Canada could be doing more to achieve peace instead of figuring out how to continue to fight a war that cannot be won.

● (1720)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, in his report of 2009, General McChrystal very clearly said that the direction they were taking was not simply about more troops. The solution is not more troops. The solution is better engagement with the local populations.

With regard to my colleague's comments about General Vance, clearly we need to do more engaging. I hate to use the term "winning the hearts and minds", but I will use it because it does bring up certain images. There is a need get people on board and the only way we can do that is to show progress on the ground that affects local Afghans.

I do not know if it is true that General Vance berated the local population, but we will not win the hearts and minds if we do that. We will win the hearts and minds by the deeds that we do. We need to do more, particularly in the areas of better development and diplomacy. We also need to look at why the Afghans have announced that it will be four years before they can take over. In another two years they could say that it will be another six years.

Some of our allies in NATO need to do more on the training aspect and they have not done so. Obviously we have concerns with the Dutch and their decision to leave and what this will mean for us? The Italians have already indicated that they will go.

We not only need to ensure we do more on the training aspect, but that we are also much clearer in terms of using our diplomatic leverage in the region. We will be hearing very shortly on those issues at the Afghan special committee. However, we need to be very frank and say that we are not going to win, but we are trying to create the conditions for not only national reconciliation but also for better development.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Liberals, with whom I have had the opportunity to go to Afghanistan and be on the Afghanistan committee as well.

I have two very quick questions. One of the things we have raised during the debate and that all members have talked about with regard to what happens post-2011 is the role of training the Afghan military and police. I want to point to the recent publicity that was covering the police in particular and the fact that there had been an instance

where the Afghan police had been handing over their arms in a very cordial manner. They were not cornered or taken hostage by the Taliban. If that is what is happening, we really need to look at what is going on here.

My second question is on human rights. He knows that I have raised this in committee. We have the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission documenting the abuse of citizens by law enforcement officials who we happened to train. If our role is training police after 2011, does he think that is a worthy thing, in light of these instances? What needs to change in light of what I have just mentioned?

● (1725)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, my colleague referenced our trip in May 2008. We did see Canadian police on the ground doing training. One of the key elements is on the issue of respect for human rights. I do not think we can preach human rights at home unless we practice it abroad.

This is not just about giving a police officer a gun or giving him the basic training of how to enforce the law. This is about the respect for human rights aspect and ensuring they understand that. We need to know how that impacts in terms of getting to the hearts and minds of individuals in the community.

By doing that, then we can be successful. The training of the police is probably one of the most paramount roles that we can play because it is the people in the communities, in those villages and towns, who, unfortunately, have the highest casualty rates. Having met some of them, I must say that what they are going through is really moving.

The human rights aspect of training and then ensuring it is carried out is absolutely essential.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a lot of Canadians are very supportive of this mission and back up our troops to the maximum degree. However, when we start talking to them, they get a little concerned that we do not seem to be winning the hearts and minds of the Afghani population. They see the election irregularities, the vote rigging, the things that are clearly corrupt practices and they see some of the difficulties raised by the hon. member for Ottawa Centre about basic human rights standards. They see progress being made on one front with aid and then progress being rolled back entirely with a Taliban raid or something of that nature. We have been there a fair bit of time.

I would be interested in the hon. member's comments on how he sees us changing that perspective, changing that dynamic within the next two years where we have committed withdraw.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, one of the ways is certainly through the special standing committee on Afghanistan, which is televised. We need to begin looking at very specific examples of development, for example, microcredit. Microcredit has been one of the most successful programs, particularly with young Afghan women, that we have had. It has made a major impact on the lives of those individuals. That is a success story we have not really talked a lot about.

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We have not talked about the fact that last year 600 doctors graduated in Afghanistan and, for first time in Afghanistan, half of them were women.

Real progress is going on but the difficulty is that the progress is often overshadowed. When we lose a soldier in the field, then we tend to focus on that, understandably, because a Canadian has lost his or her life.

We need to give Canadians a sense that we are making progress in certain areas but that there is much more to do. Again, those kinds of issues and reports need to come out.

We need to engage the NGO community more. Our own NGO community is an example in terms of what it can do over there. I mentioned the FCM as an example of one that could have a very good news story because it has done it in places like Durban, South Africa after apartheid, and in Chile after Pinochet, et cetera.

However, those are the kinds of things that I would like to see dealt with more.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this report today.

I will start by saying that since we first started our debates on Afghanistan, the Bloc Québécois has been disappointed over and over. Things did not get off to a bad start. After the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, everyone agreed that something needed to be done; we needed to take action. The international community needed to join forces to fight terrorism.

Shortly after the 2001 attacks, all eyes turned to Afghanistan, because everyone agreed that terrorist training camps, al-Qaeda and the Taliban made for a very dangerous mix for western countries, and we needed to take action.

I remind members that this was the first and only time until now in NATO's history that article 5 was invoked. Article 5 is a NATO provision that states that if one of the 28 NATO countries is attacked, it will be considered an attack on all the countries. The day after the attacks of September 11, 2001, on American soil, NATO rightly invoked article 5, which forced all the nations to join forces to help the Americans eradicate this terrible evil.

In the beginning, we agreed. We told ourselves that the UN had held discussions and agreed that the United States had a legitimate defence and that they could counterattack. There was a period of about one month when George W. Bush asked Afghanistan to hand over al-Qaeda leaders or else the Americans would launch a military attack. One or two months after the September 11, 2001, attacks, the United States intervened in Afghanistan. The war was not a difficult one. It was not very long. But the United States and Canada felt that we needed more than a whirlwind war to get the job done. In fact the war was far from being over; it was just getting started. In the end, it was more of an insurrection than an actual war.

There is nothing very complicated about an insurrection. People who think the Taliban is cowardly because it does not engage in full-frontal attacks on NATO tanks have a misguided interpretation or view of what fighting is. The Taliban can certainly not compete with conventional arms like NATO's tanks, bazookas and firearms. So

they resort to an insurgency where anyone can attack NATO forces. For example, a 15-year-old child may approach a soldier and blow himself up. Tensions are high, and no one knows where the next strike will come from.

So the Bloc Québécois became disillusioned. We supported this measure in the beginning, but when Parliament was asked to extend the mission until 2009, we added some conditions. The government did not agree to those conditions and the mission was extended until 2009.

So the mission continued. As 2009 approached, the Conservative government began suggesting that the mission should be continued until 2011. We were somewhat disappointed, because in the end, the Liberal Party—which had been saying for a year that it did not want to extend the mission, that Canada had done enough and that the mission should end in 2009—decided to get into bed with the Conservatives and to extend the mission again, this time until 2011.

We objected for the same reasons as the first time. There was no exit strategy, or any fundamental strategy as to where we were headed with Afghanistan. What benchmarks would be used to measure the success of the mission? All they were offering was a day-to-day approach. Just find the Taliban and kill as many of them as possible. Then we would see.

• (1730)

The longer this insurrection went on, the less sure we were of the results. That is why, in late 2008, we decided that the mission should not be extended until 2011. We did not agree with extending it until 2009, and we agreed even less with extending it until 2011. Unfortunately, the Liberal Party agreed with the Conservative Party, which is why we are still in Afghanistan today.

I would also remind the House that the title of the American mission in Afghanistan was “Enduring Freedom”. The Americans were the first to go in. When they decided to send some of their troops to Iraq, they asked for NATO support. NATO became involved and in 2005 it began playing a systematic role in Afghanistan. Initial efforts were directed at trying to stabilize the capital, Kabul. They then continued counter-clockwise, in other words, they began in the north, and then headed west, south, and then east. That is where the problems really began.

I should point out that some 40 nations are involved in Afghanistan, each with its own chain of command. On top of that, there is some confusion about the chain of command. The Americans have always said that they would command their own troops. For example, take what is going on in eastern Afghanistan, where the Americans said that they would take charge of the fight against terrorism, which is happening in the eastern part of the country. So there was a NATO chain of command and an American one. That caused huge problems. Not to mention that the 40 nations all had their own exemptions because their legislative bodies said that their troops' participation in Afghanistan was contingent on certain conditions, such as not leaving camp after 8 p.m., or rules of engagement that varied from country to country. In the end, the situation got so complicated that Afghanistan is now in a state of chaos and confusion.

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These are serious problems. I have often attended NATO meetings, where I have suggested that troops be rotated through Afghanistan. I mentioned the four points of the compass earlier. It is much less dangerous in northern Afghanistan right now than in the south. Why are Canadians always the ones based in the south? Why does NATO not have some kind of rotation scheme? Those based in the south are sure to suffer losses, and it will cost more. So there should be a rotation to ensure that the bulk of the burden is not always borne by the same countries. But that idea has always been rejected out of hand. I am sure that the Prime Minister has asked for this too, but has also been turned down.

Speaking of the cost of the mission, the Parliamentary Budget Office estimates that by the end of 2011, the mission will have cost \$16 billion. That is more than \$1 billion a year. I can tell the people who ask me how much the conflict in Afghanistan is costing Canada that it costs between \$3 million and \$4 million a day. Why does it cost so much? Because we are still not sharing the cost with NATO. That is another major problem. Each nation is responsible for its own troops there. It costs much less to have troops in the north than in the south.

• (1735)

It is going to cost us a lot. However, the greater cost is in the loss of human life. So far we have lost 131 soldiers. I think this is a very dear price to pay. Just go to the funeral of one of these soldiers to understand the human cost. It is not just the soldier that is lost. His comrades dissolve in tears at the sight of the coffin followed by the family members choked by emotion. It is almost unbearable to be in those churches during a military funeral. That is the toll we must pay and I do not think we can keep it up much longer and not just because of our lost soldiers and the expense, but because we are far from certain that we will succeed in Afghanistan for the reasons I have just mentioned.

There are all manner of aggravating circumstances with respect to Afghanistan. I will start with the first, which involves the Canadian Parliament. We have a problem in the Canadian Parliament. We had to fight tooth and nail to be briefed on what was happening in Afghanistan. I remember that the minister at the time told us he could not brief us because we could not be told in advance where they would be the next week. That would be giving away their position to the enemy. That is not what we wanted. We wanted to know what had happened in the previous two weeks. Was progress being made in Afghanistan?

We were given all kinds of briefings like the following: we were shown a C-17 aircraft arriving in Kabul, we were shown its cargo which consisted of crates, and we were told what a beautiful aircraft it is. That is not a briefing. Similarly, we were shown a bridge and told that it had taken one month to erect and that it connected the two shores. That is not what we wanted to know.

Have Canadian MPs, elected by the citizens to be their representatives, been kept informed? I say the answer to that question is no. We have not been given the facts and we are still not getting them. We ask for all kinds of additional information and the people in Canadian intelligence, a division of national defence, give us the nonsense I just mentioned. We are not told if we are making progress. We are not told if victory is close at hand. We are not told if

people are happy in Afghanistan. Has the quality of life improved for the Afghan people? The answer is no. It is not the Canadian government telling us this. MPs are forced to obtain information from all kinds of other sources. We are forced to consult others to ensure that we get the straight goods.

I have to constantly tell the defence committee that we are members of a Parliament that makes decisions about the mission, that decides how much it will cost, and that must bear the burden of the loss of soldiers.

First of all, not only should we be consulted but we should be kept well informed. And yet, that is not happening. I call that an aggravating factor.

There are other aggravating factors. Pakistan is an aggravating factor. Even recently, the American army fought in the east against people who came from Pakistan. When we receive delegates from Pakistan, members of Parliament from Pakistan, I always tell them that it is true that their government seems to be taking the situation seriously. I remember that Musharraf told us that he had lost some 800 soldiers in one year. His problem is not necessarily his political will to put soldiers on the front lines, it is also his problem with the ISI, Inter-Services Intelligence, the Pakistani intelligence service, which gives arms to the Taliban and helps them to such an extent that the Pakistani delegation told us the other day that the ISI is a government within the government. There are certain problems, and Pakistan is certainly an aggravating factor. I am not saying that the Pakistanis are not making any effort, but there is a segment within Pakistan that is not helping the cause of the alliance troops, because everyone knows that the attacks are coming from Pakistan. When things get too hot, the attackers retreat to Pakistan, so the Americans have started attacking certain places in Pakistan using drones, because the Pakistani government does not seem to be addressing the problem in that country.

• (1740)

We may not solve the problem militarily—I will talk about this later—but it is significant that the Americans are intervening directly in Pakistan and are not even telling the Pakistanis what they are doing.

Poppy cultivation is another aggravating factor. How can we prevail in a conflict when we take away people's means of survival? There have been discussions at NATO. My colleague spoke earlier about the importance of infrastructure and the importance of growing different crops. Poppy growing must be replaced with something else. But it takes more than infrastructure and different crops. It also takes a market.

A few years ago, I witnessed discussions where Afghanistan was guaranteed a share of the European Union market. It is all well and good to substitute another crop for poppies, but if farmers produce cucumbers, tomatoes or melons, the domestic market in Afghanistan will not be enough. The European Union, the United States and Canada should perhaps make an effort to welcome Afghan products. If we want to substitute something else for poppy cultivation, infrastructure will not be enough. There will have to be markets.

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But we must realize that the poppy trade is currently feeding the insurgency in Afghanistan. There is a problem, and we must address it. These are aggravating factors in the current crisis. So are civilian deaths. How can we win?

I hear my colleagues saying that we must win over the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. But does it help us when we kill civilians? Afghans have lost friends and parents in other conflicts. I am willing to believe that the allied forces now are not occupation forces. The Russians were occupation forces because they truly wanted to take over the country. The allied forces are not occupation forces, but when we needlessly drop bombs, when the lives of young men, young women and children are lost, that does nothing to help us earn the trust of the Afghan people.

In their own surveys, Afghans are saying that security has deteriorated since 2001. That shows that it was better under the Taliban than the current regime. That is a very aggravating factor. The government is corrupt. There is disappointment after disappointment. An election was just held, and its legality and legitimacy are being called into question.

The other day, at the Standing Committee on National Defence, I talked about Mr. Karzai's fellow candidate, one of the bloodiest warlords who ever lived in Afghanistan. Western democracies close their eyes and allow such things. This cannot be tolerated very long.

Afghans understand that there is a major problem when President Karzai brings one of the worst warlords in the history of Afghanistan into his fold. There have been some ballot boxes in which the number of ballots was some four or five times the number of names on the list of voters. There were some problems. Some people added ballots to the ballot boxes.

So this is an extremely difficult situation and we are again stuck between a rock and a hard place. We supervised the vote at arm's length, but would it be possible to hold another one if necessary? There are all kinds of aggravating factors. The government is corrupt. What has happened to the billions of dollars the international community has given to help the people?

I recall hearing that a ton of stone to build a road might cost \$8. Yet when people went to buy it from the warlords, they demanded \$80 for a ton of stone to build a road. Clearly, there is a problem there.

We have to review the situation and take a more diplomatic approach. Afghanistan's neighbours need to get involved. We are all affected by what is going on in Afghanistan. We have to talk to Iran, China, Russia and the countries bordering Afghanistan, who are in the thick of the events, because they can have an influence.

It would probably be a good idea to have an international conference in order to refocus. We have to continue providing reconstruction assistance and protecting what has been rebuilt and we have to enhance the diplomatic side of things. Everyone knows that this conflict will not be won by adding more soldiers. The Russians once had 150,000 soldiers there. Now there is talk of a build-up to 120,000 soldiers. The Russians did not resolve the situation in Afghanistan and they left disappointed and defeated.

It was important to the Bloc Québécois to take part in the debate today. The Bloc will continue to keep a critical eye on this mission and will continue to support the soldiers who are under orders and doing excellent work in Afghanistan.

• (1745)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member covered the subject rather well in his speech.

It is really hard to have confidence in the government when the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs basically said that there is no war going on over there. Clearly, he is a bit confused. Maybe he should let the troops in on that piece of information from the government.

Canadians deserve to be consulted on this whole question. From listening to the media reports lately I think that the fix may be in on this and the government, supported by the Liberals, may move at some point to extend the mission. Canadians should be consulted on this subject either through a referendum or an election before Canada signs on for a never ending commitment.

I liked the member's statement about the rotation of troops within Afghanistan. It seems to me that we are in the worst position within the country and we should move our troops around.

I did have some things to say about the poppy trade, because it seems to me the member asked for a market for the poppies. I have read articles about the fact that Africa could use the drugs as painkillers to help millions of people who are without painkillers. There is a market for the poppy crop in Africa.

I would ask if the member would like to elaborate on any of these points.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments.

I would like to clarify one thing. Earlier, I spoke about the poppy crop. I am familiar with the position of certain NGOs that would like to see it used for therapeutic purposes. I agree with that, but we cannot buy the entire supply. The heroin produced in Afghanistan represents 90% of the international illegal trade. Even if it were to be used for therapeutic purposes, there would be too much. We have to replace poppy crops, keeping only part for therapeutic purposes. If they decide to grow other crops, as we have in our own country, they will need a market. My colleague spoke of infrastructure and of changing the crops.

Europe has talked about reserving part of their market to help Afghans sell their goods. Perhaps the U.S. and Canada could do the same thing. But we have to do something about the poppy trade in Afghanistan because it is fuelling the insurgency.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc is the defence critic for his party and has studied the issue of Canada's role in Afghanistan over the years. I would like his comment on what seems to be emerging in the debate in the United States, which of course is important to all of us because it will affect what we do, I would think, in terms of the present and post-2011.

There is the McChrystal view and the Biden view. The McChrystal view is a troop surge and the idea of clear, hold and develop. The Biden view is to take a step back and not do the troop surge, but treat this more like a different mission, doing the special ops and rooting out al Qaeda, and focusing on that.

I would like to get the hon. member's feedback on that. Does he think that one is better than the other? How might this affect Canada in the future?

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I came to the same conclusion as the member for Ottawa Centre.

Just the other day, I heard Barack Obama say that he would be very skeptical if any of his generals asked for more soldiers. I think that the American administration understands that we will not put an end to this conflict by sending more soldiers and bulking up military contingents. We have to find another way. Everyone is looking for solutions.

The other day, I noticed that Canada has adopted an interesting approach. It was decided that when troops go to a village, they will not rush in and immediately rush out again, making way for the Taliban to retake the village a couple of days later. Instead, they will stay and show people that they can help with reconstruction and protect them.

Earlier, someone was talking about General Vance's temper tantrum. The other day, a vehicle was blown up and the general told the people of the village that they had to take responsibility for their own security too. That is the kind of approach we need to take now. We have to go to these villages, support them, help them and protect them until finally, the Afghan people realize that it all serves a purpose. We cannot rush in, carry out an aggressive military operation, chase all of the Taliban out of town, and then take off, because a day or two later, the Taliban will be back. We have to come up with original solutions.

• (1755)

[English]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate on the motion to concur in the report from the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs on Canada in Afghanistan, a report that was originally tabled in the last Parliament but because it was still valid, was reported to the current session as well. I am glad that we have this opportunity to speak about what is happening in Afghanistan and what the future holds for Canada's efforts in that part of the world.

As a member of the NDP, I still believe that our mission in Afghanistan is the wrong mission for Canada. I have believed that consistently in my time here in the House of Commons and before. If

I could do so, I would bring our troops home now because I think that the role they are playing departs from the role Canadians believe our armed forces should be playing around the world.

Our role in this combat mission is the wrong mission for this country. It is a departure from the values of peacekeeping, of separating combatants, of putting ourselves between those who are solving disputes through violence. I believe Canadians firmly believe that is the role Canada should be pursuing in the world. Our ongoing combat mission in Afghanistan is something that has not upheld those kinds of values in which Canadians firmly believe.

I also believe that this is a war that cannot be won. We have heard many others who are far more skilled in military operations than I make that same statement. It is not a statement that comes from someone who is unaware of the situation or the difficulties of engaging in war. Many people now firmly believe that that is the case.

I also believe that pursuing a combat role and a war in Afghanistan was never a way of ensuring security for Afghanistan, ensuring security for the people of Afghanistan, for making sure that human rights were upheld in that country and for ensuring women's rights. We have often heard that this was a war that had establishing women's rights as one of its goals. I do not think that any of those things can be established by military means. It takes a lot more and a lot of other kinds of efforts to make all of those important things possible.

We have seen a turn in the opinion about the war, even from people who initially supported it, even from those who have made it their career and their business to understand how wars are fought and won. This is a war that cannot be won.

We are there and I doubt that is going to change before the date of February 2011, which was set in this House a number of years ago, but if there is an opportunity to discuss bringing the troops home as another possibility, I will be there to discuss that possibility.

What do we do in the meantime? The report is very clear. It mentions in at least three of its recommendations the need for a new focus on diplomatic efforts.

Recommendation three talks about the need to set the conditions within Afghanistan for the possibilities of peace and reconciliation, of how the folks within the communities in Afghanistan need to work together to find that place where another possibility can be explored. That is a very key recommendation of this report.

Recommendation four talks about the role of the United Nations. Clearly the United Nations needs to be a key player in whatever the future of Afghanistan is. That was a very significant recommendation from the committee as well.

Recommendation five talks about the importance of regional diplomacy and the importance to have other countries of the region, the neighbours of Afghanistan, directly involved in finding a solution to this situation. We have heard that talked about this afternoon already.

Routine Proceedings

New Democrats have long advocated for a diplomatic effort, have long advocated that Canada should be making more efforts on diplomacy. The leader of the New Democratic Party, the member for Toronto—Danforth, was very clear that Canada needed to be pursuing every diplomatic means possible and needed to be talking with all of those who could bring about a different kind of solution than a military one in Afghanistan.

• (1800)

There was some derision for that, but it is interesting now to see that many of allies, that many military experts are also saying we need this kind of diplomatic effort, that it is not an option but a necessity to bring this situation to a conclusion.

I am proud of my leader for having been there earlier on and clearly in favour of Canada taking a role in that area.

We know the region is one that lacks a certain security. The insurgency in southern Afghanistan, which is now spreading to the north, also affects the security of the countries surrounding Afghanistan. Those countries have a direct interest in seeing a diplomatic resolution to what is happening in Afghanistan. They also need to be involved in pursuing that resolution. Canada should be talking with them to encourage their participation in finding that diplomatic solution. Countries like Russia, China, Turkmenistan, Iran and Pakistan all have a very clear interest in what is happening in Afghanistan and their security is all very much bound up in that.

Others have said that this diplomatic effort is absolutely crucial. The United Nations special envoy to Afghanistan has called for a political surge, which is his phrase, to match the kind of military surge about which we have often heard. We need that kind of political surge to ensure a satisfactory solution to this conflict can be reached. That is important to realize and the UN can play a very important role in that.

We also know that involving those other countries will lead to a sharing of the burden of responsibility for what is happening there. Canada has had a very large share of that burden and our men and women in the armed forces have disproportionately, in many ways, shouldered the burden of our involvement there, of the activities and of the war in Afghanistan. It would be good to involve the other countries of the region in sharing that burden.

Also Canadians have been involved in the region in negotiating earlier agreements. They are experts in understanding that part of the world, in particular Afghanistan. In particular, Mokhtar Lamani has been very involved over many years, working in Afghanistan and with the people of Afghanistan and in the region. He certainly should be involved in any future efforts to find a peaceful or a diplomatic solution to what is happening. He worked together with his colleague, Lakhdar Brahimi, the former Algerian foreign minister, on many of these issues. They did a report in 1988 and they were also involved with the Bonn conference report in 2001.

It is interesting to look back at those reports which came out of both Mr. Brahimi's and Mr. Lamani's original report. They also came out of the Bonn conference. The issues that were delineated are still with us today in Afghanistan. In 2001 they noted that the Taliban was training foreign fighters and it was a very destabilizing kind of effect. The drug issue in Afghanistan was still very destabilizing and

the narco economy was a very serious problem for any effort in that region. There were very serious human rights problems as well.

Sadly, none of that has changed today. None of the efforts that have been expended in Afghanistan so far have been successful in addressing any of the concerns identified before the conflict began. Mr. Brahimi said that the Bonn conference process needed the participation of those in Afghanistan who were willing to talk, who were willing to be part of a diplomatic solution, which could include elements of the Taliban who were willing to participate in that kind of process.

Therefore, we saw in other instances where we needed that kind of broad diplomatic effort, a diplomatic effort that did not only include NATO countries and the UN, but included regional partners and the people of Afghanistan as well as the political groups there. Surely it is only common sense to believe that this is the way to a solution to this conflict.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development has made it very clear that it is a very necessary piece of what needs happen and what needs to be on Canada's agenda as we move forward and that there is much more we could do as a country is that regard.

• (1805)

We know we have excellent diplomats who are very capable. We have experts in the region who are from Canada. There are ways for us to take advantage and play a very key role in a diplomatic solution, not just in our current military role in Afghanistan.

There are very serious issues related to the ongoing conflict there, serious issues that point to a lack of progress, which would cause many of us to question what has been happening there, what our role is and what success we can point to, if any, in that region.

I think many of us were disappointed in the outcome of the recent elections in Afghanistan. The ghost polls, the electoral fraud that seems to have been documented so far, and more reports will likely be coming out about that, is a huge disappointment. It must be a huge disappointment to the people of Afghanistan, who have been told time and time again that their future lies in the establishment of a true democracy in Afghanistan. They must be incredibly disappointed that their ability to have a say about how their country proceeds into the future seems to have been manipulated, that this does not seem to be working as it should and that their say in choosing their leadership has been altered in some way. That is a very serious problem and it is very disappointing. It again points to the question of what has been accomplished in Afghanistan.

There are very serious concerns, as well, about rampant corruption within Afghanistan and within its government. There is no doubt that much of this may be linked to the narco economy and the drug trade, which is a very serious ongoing problem. Other solutions to this have been proposed but they have never been taken up seriously by who those do that kind of work to establish a cleaner regime in Afghanistan. There are other suggestions and proposals out there that would try to deal with the narco economy in Afghanistan, yet very little progress has been made in those areas.

That is a very significant concern about our ongoing participation in this war in Afghanistan and one that does need our attention.

Routine Proceedings

In recent days my colleague, the member for St. John's East, and in previous months and years the former member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, raised very serious concerns about the operations of the Afghan police and armed forces and about the detention centres and prisons in Afghanistan and what exactly happened in those organizations and institutions.

We have heard the very disconcerting stories about the sexual abuse of boys by members of the Afghan police and the Afghan armed forces, serious charges that are a huge concern to us all.

We have also heard the concerns regarding torture against detainees in those prisons in Afghanistan. In fact, in the past this is one issue that I have raised in our debate on Afghanistan, the Canadian policy of turning those who are captured in the course of Canadian military operations in Afghanistan over to the Afghan authorities, to Afghan prisons, where we know torture has been practised and is practised.

I have often said it is an inappropriate policy of Canada to turn over detainees to Afghan authorities after they have been captured in a Canadian military operation. I still believe it is a dereliction of our responsibility to the people we capture in the course of war. These ongoing allegations about torture in the Afghan prison system concern me greatly.

Some of these complaints have gone before the Canadian Military Police Complaints Commission. Yet in recent days we have also become concerned as to whether that body will have the ability to fully report on these very serious concerns. My colleague from St. John's East again raised that in question period today, to try to get the government to commit to the ongoing mandate for those who are currently working at the Military Police Complaints Commission on this report. This is a very serious report. It needs to be completed and they need to have the resources to fully finish that work before there is a change in leadership. I would heartily support the concerns and the suggestions made by the member for St. John's East in that regard.

• (1810)

We need to be fully clear about what our role has been with regard to these very serious allegations. If Canadians did not take responsibility for information they knew about the abuse of boys by the Afghan police or Afghan armed forces, we need to know that. We need to know what is happening in Afghan prisons. I hope a way can be found to ensure that important work is not interrupted or delayed.

Shortly after I was elected as a member of Parliament, I raised a concern during a take note debate on Afghanistan. I remember asking the minister and colleagues how Canada was planning to deliver development aid to Afghanistan and noted the fact that the aid was being delivered by the Canadian military. I had very serious questions then and I continue to have very serious questions about trying to deliver development aid by the military. It is utterly ineffective, it is the wrong way to go and it is a complete departure from how Canada has delivered military aid in the past.

We know that when a combatant military force is also responsible for delivering development aid, especially in an area where conflict is still possible and still regular, it sets those development projects up

as targets of the opponents of our military forces. It is not an effective way to ensure that the development aid, if it is building a school or some other community facility, is not targeted by the enemies of our armed forces due to our combat role in the region. It is not a good way of delivering that aid.

In fact, if we look at the statistics, it seems our ability to deliver that aid has been extremely limited. It is my understanding that we have committed to building 50 schools in the Kandahar region for the period we are in Afghanistan. However, at this point only five of those schools have been completed. It is not a very good record given that there is only a limited time left in the mandate of the armed forces there. It is not looking promising that the commitment, that delivery of very important aid to the people of Afghanistan will be met. We have been unable to deliver on those schools as a key piece of that commitment.

A lot of question are being raised about the cost of the military mission in the war in Afghanistan, the cost in human terms, the number of Canadian men and women in the armed forces, the diplomat who have died in service in Afghanistan. We know their families, friends and communities mourn and grieve their losses, we all do. There has been a huge human cost.

We also know there has been a huge human cost on the part of the Afghan people. We do not often hear about the human cost to Afghan civilians. In fact, sometimes that information is kept from us. I applied to have those statistics a number of years ago. I was told that it could not be released. There is a very limited response in that way and it would be good to know what the true human cost of this conflict is. There is also the huge military spending involved in this mission in Afghanistan.

There is no doubt that significant taxpayer dollars are going to fight this ongoing war in Afghanistan. Given the many questions about it, one wonders about that huge financial commitment. We want to ensure that when we ask men and women of the Canadian armed forces to undertake this kind of work, they are well equipped to do that. There is no excuse to send them to battle without giving them the appropriate resources. However, we need to be very clear about the cost.

• (1815)

The Speaker: I am afraid it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

CLIMATE CHANGE

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by a good number of residents from my riding of Yukon calling on the government to take action to address the serious threats posed to Canadians by climate change.

Routine Proceedings

They note that climate change poses threats to economic well-being, public health, natural resources and the environment. They believe Canada needs to assume its responsibility, so Parliament should continue to support former Bill C-30.

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table a petition in the House of Commons on behalf of a large number of people who are concerned about gasoline prices and the fact that the government is doing nothing to help ordinary working families who are getting hosed at the pumps.

In fact, the petitioners are keenly aware that the government is making things worse rather than better. By offering the Liberal government in Ontario \$4.3 billion to implement the harmonized sales tax, the federal Conservative government has just added another 8% tax to a commodity that many of the petitioners need every single day to get to and from work, to look for new jobs, or to keep a doctor's appointment.

The petitioners no longer have faith that the government will protect their interests as consumers. They do believe, however, that my private member's bill, formerly Bill C-442, now Bill C-286, which calls for the creation of an oil and gas ombudsman, will provide strong, effective consumer protection to make sure no big business could swindle, cheat or rip off hard-working Canadians.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Parliament of Canada to give speedy passage to Bill C-442 to help consumers fight the gas price squeeze.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table yet another petition today signed by hundreds of people from all over Quebec urging Parliament to immediately pass Bill C-378 to allow hard-working families to access their maternity, parental, sickness and compassionate care benefits without worrying that if they lose their jobs in the meantime they will lose their EI.

The petitioners note that one barrier preventing workers from accessing EI is the anti-stacking provisions found within the Employment Insurance Act. These discriminatory provisions prevent new mothers in particular who have secured the full amount of "special" benefit entitlements from accessing regular benefits if they lose their jobs during or shortly after these specially sanctioned leaves.

The petitioners are keenly aware that in the current economic downturn, layoff announcements are coming daily, and they want to ensure that these discriminatory provisions of the EI Act are eliminated.

I am pleased to say that my Bill C-378 would indeed address those concerns. I very much appreciate the support of the petitioners on this very important issue for thousands of working families.

PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of people mostly from Prince Edward Island.

They note that Canada is a country which respects rights, including the right to life, and that since 1969, for 40 years, Canada has been a country which allows abortion, and since 1988, in fact, we have had no law on abortion whatsoever.

The petitioners call on Parliament to pass a law which would ensure the protection of human life from the time of conception until the time of natural death.

CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present in the House today petitions, not only from people in my constituency but from Alberta, Ontario, clearly all across the country.

They are calling upon this House to promote the values they cherish, which are Canadian values in support of pre-born life.

They are particularly calling upon the Government of Canada to stop the funding of planned parenthood by CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency, believing that CIDA should be concentrating on dealing with fighting poverty instead of concentrating on destroying human life.

• (1820)

WORKERS' RIGHTS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition in the House signed by dozens of residents of Vancouver Island in British Columbia, from Sooke and Victoria in the south to Courtenay and Comox in the north.

All of these petitioners call on the Government of Canada to support my Motion No. M-384 which would rescind the provisions of Bill C-10 that violate workers' rights to collective bargaining, including arbitral awards and equal pay for work of equal value.

There is no doubt the provisions of Bill C-10 have a negative impact on our hard-working civil servants. These are people who devote their time to making the governmental machinery work, even when the government makes bad decisions. Our civil servants are there to work on behalf of all Canadians.

These petitioners, many of whom work for the government and many of whom have families who are associated with the government, are calling on the government to rescind those provisions of Bill C-10 that attack those principles of equal pay for work of equal value and the principles of collective bargaining in the federal civil service.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today to present petitions on two separate subjects.

The first petition is signed by 229 petitioners, many of whom are from my riding of Wild Rose.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to support Bill C-391, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry). In so doing, they call on all parties to do the right thing in support of law-abiding farmers, ranchers and hunters, and finally abolish the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of presenting two separate petitions signed by people from all across Canada calling for greater freedom in the use of natural health products.

WORKERS' RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce a petition calling for a stop to wage rollbacks and a restoration of pay equity to public service workers.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to support Motion No. 384 and rescind the provisions of Bill C-10 that violate workers' rights to collective bargaining, including arbitrary awards and equal pay for work of equal value.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 171 could be made an order for return, the return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 171—**Mr. David Christopherson:**

What is the total amount of government funding, since fiscal year 2004-2005 up to and including the current fiscal year, allocated within the constituency of Hamilton Centre, listing each department or agency, initiative, and amount?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions on the order paper be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

HUNGER STRIKE BY SECURITY CERTIFICATE DETAINEE

The Speaker: The Chair has received a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas. I would be pleased to hear his arguments in that connection at this moment.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am requesting an emergency debate under the terms of Standing Order 52(2) on the extremely serious situation at the Kingston Immigration Holding Centre where security certificate detainee Mohammad Mahjoub is on the 126th day of a hunger strike. Hunger strikes of

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this duration are extremely dangerous with the ever-present possibility of permanent health consequences and death.

Mr. Mahjoub has been detained since 2000 never having been charged, tried or convicted of a crime. That indefinite detention without charge or conviction can happen here in Canada is of profound concern especially since it happens under the terms of legislation intended as an expedited deportation measure.

Mr. Mahjoub is the only person in detention in Canada who does not have access to an independent ombudsperson to review complaints about the conditions of his imprisonment. The Correctional Investigator Canada provides this important function for inmates of all other federal institutions. This is the key issue of Mr. Mahjoub's hunger strike.

The possible if not imminent death of a man in a Canadian detention centre, a man who has been held for almost nine years without charge or conviction, is an emergency that demands the attention of the House. Parliamentarians must be heard on a situation that challenges fairness, that subverts due process and that belies confidence in our justice system.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas for his remarks in connection with this matter. I agree with him that the issue is an important one, but I am not sure that it meets the exigencies of the Standing Order as being a serious emergency.

I recognize that the hunger strike has gone on for some time as indicated by the hon. member, but I am not sure that it constitutes an emergency within the exigencies of the Standing Order. Accordingly I am going to decline his request for an emergency debate at this time.

● (1825)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

As all hon. members will know, Treasury Board guidelines are very explicit with regard to guiding members as well as ministers in their activities and in terms of the criteria with regard to their communications to Canadians, and they are very broad. I am going to be circulating for members' interests the relevant Treasury Board guidelines.

What I would like to do at this point is seek the unanimous consent of the House to table a letter from the Minister of Natural Resources which was broadcast widely throughout Canada and which I believe would strain Treasury Board guidelines.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Mississauga South have the unanimous consent of the House to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

*Adjournment Proceedings***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to talk against this bill that would give a message to Colombians that Canada supports a government that violates human rights. Of course, we all know that Canada would never support a country that violates human rights.

The Prime Minister launched his free trade talks with Colombia in 2007, around the same time that U.S. President George W. Bush was pushing a trade pact through Congress, where Uribe's government was vilified by the Democratic majority. The government-proposed trade pact is another sign that Conservative foreign policies simply shadow those of U.S. Republicans in an attempt to bolster our like-minded leader in Latin America.

Fearful of implicitly endorsing Uribe's government, Norway has put a hold on free trade talks with Colombia, and Britain has stopped providing training and support to the government's security forces. I would like to quote José Oney Valencia Llanos from Colombia. He said:

You know that here in Colombia, there are many human-rights violations. Business people, through multinational and transnational corporations, have violated human rights and attacked workers, directly and indirectly.

He goes on to say:

We don't have the right to free association, or political rights, or the right to unionize...The government sees that we want to get together so that we can demand our rights, and they call us terrorists. Those of us that have had charges pressed against us, we're accused of having links with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, even though we have never had links with—and at no time did we have meetings with—illegal armed groups.

This brings me to a company that we have in my riding. It is a company from Brazil. Brazil is not a third-world country, but I want to give an example of a company that is acting like a third-world company. This company purchased a company in my riding called Inco a few years ago. It was able to purchase this company through an agreement with the government of the day. It was an agreement that we cannot even see today. We do not know what is in this agreement.

I will give an example of what this company is doing. Right now, there are negotiations going on in my riding with Vale. Over the years, we have had a lot of negotiations because Inco has been in existence for 100 years. This company is not negotiating. It is not negotiating because it wants to bring us back 30 years to the times of third-world countries. It wants to take away our pensions, which are hard earned by the former employees of Inco.

It wants to take away what is called a nickel bonus. Miners earn a nickel bonus when the company is profitable. If the company makes

money, the workers make money. There is nothing wrong with that. It says that it wants to make these changes to be more profitable. I think that it is profitable enough as it is.

This company was also negotiating in bad faith when it was negotiating. Last week, it fired three strikers. It fired these three strikers and then it did something that has never been done in negotiations in Nickel Belt before. With its third world attitude, the company sent out a press release announcing to the media that these three workers had been fired—

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The time provided for government orders has expired.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[Translation]

SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your French. It is getting better by the week. I know that you are working hard at it.

[English]

On April 29, I asked questions of the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development about the enabling accessibility fund. This was a \$45 million, three year commitment to expand opportunities for people with disabilities. The fund was to support community based projects across Canada that improve accessibility, reduce barriers and enable Canadians, regardless of physical ability, to participate in and contribute to their community and the economy.

The approved projects were to have strong ties to their communities and to support their communities. A bit of investigation by the Liberal critic for human resources and skills development, who represents the riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour in Nova Scotia, revealed that the overwhelming majority of the funds went to Conservative ridings.

I think most Canadians would be astonished to learn that the overwhelming majority of disabled Canadians appear to live only in Conservative ridings. This appears to be a pattern with the Conservative government. It sees contribution programs, which are there to help all Canadians or certain segments of the Canadian population, in this case the disabled, as reward programs for members of that government, members of the Conservative Party.

Adjournment Proceedings

In fact, when we looked into it we noted that overall a total of 61% of the approved projects were in Conservative ridings and only 10% of the total number of projects went to Quebec overall. Four projects were approved in the riding of the government House leader, four projects were approved in the riding of the Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification) and three projects were approved in the riding of the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development herself. There were \$15 million of the \$39 million, which were approved, that went to the riding of the Minister of Finance.

I would like the government to explain how it is that the approvals of applications appeared to have been overwhelmingly slanted to Conservative ridings. It appears to be, as I said, an overall trend of the Conservative government to be using and spending public money as if it is a rebate rewards program for the ridings that have elected Conservative MPs.

When the Liberal critic for infrastructure looked into what happened with the infrastructure projects, it found that the overwhelming majority went to Conservative ridings, not opposition ridings, notwithstanding that money was supposed to go to ridings that have clear needs in terms of infrastructure.

When one looks at a whole series of contribution programs, it appears the Conservative government thinks that public money is a rebate rewards program for those ridings that are held by Conservatives. It is shameful.

•(1835)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would urge the member to look at the big picture, all that has been happening and what our government has been doing.

Our Conservative government is proud to support Canadians of all abilities. We have introduced several initiatives to support Canadians with disabilities, including the enabling accessibility fund. Our government is very proud of this program. We have provided \$45 million to support community based projects that improve accessibility, reduce barriers and enable Canadians with disabilities to participate in and contribute to their community and the economy, a very worthwhile goal. Under the program, a portion of the funding went toward projects that make buildings and vehicles more accessible, for example, through the construction of ramps or renovations and upgrading of washrooms.

Funding was also provided for the creation of comprehensive abilities centres that will provide a range of services for Canadians of all abilities.

Every project that received funding had to meet clear eligibility criteria and applications were based on merit. Funding was spread out across the country. The projects will make a significant difference in the lives of Canadians with disabilities. The Liberals may have difficulty understanding that, but what can one expect? That member and her Liberal Party voted against the creation of the enabling accessibility fund. The Liberals voted against \$45 million for Canadians with disabilities. Now the hon. member has the audacity to make comments about a program that she did not even want in the first place.

The enabling accessibility fund has invested in many important and worthwhile projects. For example, the Iona Presbyterian Church in Dartmouth received funding. This is located in the riding of the Liberal critic and member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. In Toronto, JobStart, a not for profit organization that provides employment services, received funding to make its building more accessible. It is located in Etobicoke—Lakeshore, the riding held by the Liberal leader. Is the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine saying that she does not think these projects are worthwhile? The Liberals voted against funding for both of those projects and now the hon. member is complaining about where the funding went.

The enabling accessibility fund is only one of several examples of investments our Conservative government is making to support Canadians with disabilities. One needs to look at the big picture. For example, our government introduced the historic registered disability savings plan so that parents and others can help their children and relatives to ensure financial security into the future, a program that was well received, a remarkable plan that is certainly heralded and accepted. That member and the Liberals voted against that as well.

Our government's support does not end there. Canada's economic action plan included \$75 million for the construction of social housing for Canadians with disabilities. We have signed labour market agreements for persons with disabilities to ensure they have access to training and skills upgrading and can fully participate in our economy.

We have invested \$20 million to make federally owned buildings more accessible. We have provided additional funding through the working income tax benefit specifically for Canadians with disabilities. Those are a number in a range of projects and one needs to look at the whole picture.

Our Conservative government is very proud of the enabling accessibility fund. These investments are making a positive difference in the lives of countless Canadians. Unlike the Liberals, who have repeatedly voted against funding for Canadians with disabilities, our government is standing up and is proud to support Canadians of all abilities.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, what stands out very clearly is that the parliamentary secretary, on behalf of his government, did not deny that over 61% of the money in the enabling accessibility fund went to Conservative ridings. He did not come back with any statistics to show that 61% of disabled Canadians live in those Conservative ridings. He did not at all counter that. That is looking at the whole picture. That is looking at whether or not the projects went to those people and communities that need it or whether the first criteria was whether or not it was a Conservative riding.

Second, when one looks at the action plan, there again the government has overwhelmingly approved projects in Conservative ridings. The statistics have been made public. The government has not been able to counter those statistics so it makes personal attacks.

Adjournment Proceedings

● (1840)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The record is very clear and we are very proud of the support we have provided for Canadians with disabilities. The enabling accessibility fund is just one example of this support.

As I mentioned, there are several others and they must be taken in context. Across the ridings, coast to coast to coast, from the registered disability savings plan, to the investment in social housing, to providing funding for training and skills upgrading for Canadians with disabilities, our Conservative government's record speaks for itself.

Where was the Liberal Party over the many years when these types of projects should have gone forward? We know what an important contribution we have made to Canadians with disabilities and what contribution they have made to our great country. That is why we are focused on encouraging their maximum participation in our communities and economy. Our record is clear.

The member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine is commenting on the enabling accessibility fund but she and her party voted against it. It is a matter of record that she and her Liberal Party have repeatedly voted against funding for Canadians with disabilities. Their actions speak louder than words. We have put in place a number of programs that will stand the test of time.

PRODUCT SAFETY

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address this issue tonight.

On May 8, I asked a question about sunscreens that use harsh chemicals such as oxybenzone and Benzophenone-3, which dermatologists and researchers say can cause severe skin reactions in adults and children. This actually happened to two of my constituents who filed a complaint with me in this regard.

I asked the Minister of Health to assure Canadians that their sunscreen will protect them from the sun and that it is safe to use. The minister's answer was that the government was promoting the health and safety of Canadians through the chemicals management plan, that it would be monitoring the chemicals on a regular basis and that it does act appropriately when complaints occur. However, that was the end of his answer. It did not really give my constituents the satisfaction that they sought.

I would like to follow up on that by asking the minister whether the government issues warnings or cautions, medical or otherwise, and, if it does not, why it does not. I also would like to know whether any tests have been done on this particular type of sunscreen or a variety of sunscreens that have these particular chemicals in them, and more I might add.

I also would like to ask if there have been any other complaints about this particular brand or any other brand containing these chemicals and whether there are any safe alternatives. In reading the literature out there, I understand there are some safe alternatives but, once again, companies have products to sell and I do not know whether there is proof of what they are saying.

I would like to know if there are any other complaints and whether there have been any settlements made.

In doing some of our research on this matter, my office looked up data that indicated that despite increased education in this particular area, the Skin Cancer Foundation said that more than 600,000 new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed each year and that the figure was rising. Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States and is responsible for 8,500 deaths annually.

The member will be aware that one of the members of this House died of skin cancer a number of years ago and that one member, who just recently retired from this House, was diagnosed with skin cancer.

This is a very big area that we should be looking at here because all of us, at some point, are exposing ourselves to the sunscreens. I could read a list of the types of chemicals that are involved, in addition to the ones I have listed. I would just like a deeper response than what I got that day to my question as to how on top of this issue the government is, where it is now and where it is planning to be on this in a year or two.

● (1845)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope to give the hon. member a deeper response this evening. I wish to assure the House that the health and safety of Canadians is paramount to this government.

It has long been known that increased exposure to sunlight during the summer can cause a myriad of health problems and that added protection from UV rays by using sunscreen products has been strongly recommended.

Health Canada regulates the safety, effectiveness and quality of sunscreens in Canada. Sunscreen products are classified as drugs and must meet the requirements set out in Canada's Food and Drugs Act before they can be imported, advertised or sold in this country. Sunscreens may contain one or several UVB filters and are often enriched with UVA filters. In Canada sunscreens are approved by Health Canada and must meet the criteria identified in the department's sunburn protectants monograph.

Therefore, to answer one of the questions the member asked tonight, this monograph outlines both acceptable sunscreen ingredients and their concentrations as well as the required labelling such as directions for use, acceptable claims, cautions and warnings.

There are currently over 500 different sunscreen products authorized for sale from different manufacturers in Canada. Medicinal ingredients in sunscreen products are recognized to absorb ultraviolet A or UVA and/or ultraviolet B or UVB rays.

For drug products, including sunscreens, manufacturers must present Health Canada with evidence to support the safety, efficacy and quality of the products before they can be authorized for sale. This information is then conveyed to consumers through product labels.

Additionally, the department routinely performs assessments of drug products after they are approved for sale to look at any adverse events that may occur. It should be noted that to date there is no clear evidence linking the presence of the medicinal ingredients in authorized sunscreen products to the occurrence of skin irritation or cancer.

Health Canada takes adverse events reports very seriously. We strongly urge Canadians to report these unfortunate events with full details to Health Canada so that the issues can be properly investigated.

Exposure to UV light is the main cause of skin cancer. It can also cause tanning, sunburn, premature skin aging, eye damage, and a decrease in the immune system response. Health Canada continues to advise Canadians of the importance of using sunscreen products along with other sun avoidance methods to help reduce the risk associated with UV exposure.

It is paramount that Canadians use a common sense approach and a balanced approach to sun exposure.

This evening I was at the Health Charities Coalition of Canada speaking to the president of the MS Society. We found out, recently, with research, that vitamin D is very important and perhaps preventative for MS.

Therefore, the member brings up a very important question. He brings up a question that affects each and everyone of us as Canadians, but there is still a lot to be learned.

I would encourage him to encourage his constituents to follow up with any allergic reactions and let Health Canada know. There are reporting mechanisms for that and Health Canada is always looking to ensure that the products on the market are first of all safe and effective, and are what they claim to be because the health and safety of Canadians is our utmost priority.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, that is really part of the problem. People buy the sunscreens and they do not read the information about them. As a matter of fact, most people cannot pronounce the chemicals that are in the sunscreens in the first place.

Therefore, I would suggest that the government, rather than spending a million dollars on its advocacy advertising campaign to get re-elected, it should take some of that money out and perhaps do an advertising campaign on the health risks associated with sunscreens.

For example, there is some suggestion that there are harmful chemicals lurking in sunscreens that are doing more harm than good. In fact, some international studies have found that the greatest rise in melanoma occurred in countries where chemical sunscreens were heavily promoted.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would be willing to provide for the member some of the additional chemicals that are of concern and perhaps he could look into them further.

The environmental working group, in a June 2007 study, said that 785 sunscreens were analyzed and 84% of them provided inadequate protection from the sun's harmful rays or contained ingredients with safety concerns.

I have more information for the member if he would like to talk to me about it.

• (1850)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, if the member has the information, I would like to take a look at it. Again, it does have to be a balanced approach. Sunscreen is something that we put on our kids. I know I do with my own kids and maybe we are getting a false sense of security that we are able to stay out in the sun a little longer. So, these are things we all have to look at.

However, we all know that for good health we also need to have sun exposure. I have heard different recommendations for that. So, we really do have to base it on the science. Again, as I said this evening, in talking to the different charities out there, the Canadian cancer associations talk about the risk, but then the MS people also talk about the importance of getting vitamin D.

So, to repeat for the member, Health Canada does regulate the safety, effectiveness and quality of sunscreens in Canada. In addition, the degree of protection against chemicals is improved by Canada's chemical management plan, an initiative that further supports the health and safety of Canadians. Sunscreen products are classified as drugs and must meet the requirements set out in Canada's Food and Drugs Act before they can be imported, advertised or sold in this country. They may contain several UVB or—

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:51 p.m.)

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