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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 4, 2000

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 4, 2000

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to five petitions.

* * *

[*English*]

STATISTICS ACT

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-468, an act to amend the Statistics Act (ethnicity question).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise on behalf of the constituents of Calgary East to introduce my private member's bill in the House today. The purpose of the bill is to ensure that no question will be asked about a person's ethnicity in the population census.

Ours is a great country that respects equal rights and equal opportunities for all Canadians. Thus program initiatives must be available to all with no discrimination. One common thread that holds us all together is that we are all Canadians.

I hope my colleagues will recognize the intent of the bill and will support it because we are and will remain always Canadians.

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

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 21st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of the Standing Committee on Industry presented to the House on March 22 be concurred in.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move:

That the following member be added to the list of associate members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs: Dave Chatters.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

LABELLING OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure this morning of tabling two petitions.

The first contains 25 names and calls upon the federal government to pass legislation on the labelling of genetically modified products.

CANADA POST CORPORATION ACT

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a second petition here from 32 people calling upon the government to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act so as to repeal

Routine Proceedings

subsection 13(5), which bars collective bargaining for piece rate workers who deliver mail.

• (1010)

[English]

MAMMOGRAPHY

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I am honoured to present a petition signed by hundreds of residents of the Windsor and Tecumseh area who urge the government to establish an independent governing body to enforce mandatory mammography quality control standards in Canada.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House to present a petition on behalf of about 125 people in my riding.

The petitioners ask that the federal government recognize that marriage in this country is indeed the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others. They are concerned that the government has failed to define this in legislation that would withstand a court challenge. They ask that the government take action to make sure this is put into law.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I have the privilege to present to the House four petitions from concerned constituents in my riding of Cambridge.

The petitioners pray and request that the Parliament of Canada act to amend the criminal code to extend the same protection to unborn human beings that is currently enjoyed by born human beings.

BILL C-23

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by 178 individuals and highlights the concern of my constituents that there is legislation that would extend benefits based on a person's private sexual activity while excluding other types of dependent relationships. The petitioners ask parliament to withdraw Bill C-23 and affirm through legislation that marriage is and will remain what it has always been, the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

MAMMOGRAPHY

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recognizing that one in nine Canadian women will develop breast cancer and that early detection is a vital weapon in the battle against this disease, 120 petitioners ask parliament to enact legislation to establish an independent governing body to develop, implement

and enforce uniform and mandatory mammography quality assurance and quality control standards in Canada.

CANADA POST

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the final petition contains 30 signatures from concerned citizens in my riding of Cambridge.

The petitioners draw to the attention of parliament that rural route mail couriers have not been allowed to bargain collectively to improve their wages and working conditions. Since workers who deliver mail in cities have collective bargaining rights, the petitioners request that parliament repeal section 13(5) of the Canada Post Corporation Act to permit rural mail couriers to bargain collectively like urban mail workers.

NATIONAL UNITY

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from citizens across Canada, but most notably from the province of Quebec.

The petition calls for the Prime Minister and the Parliament of Canada to declare that Canada is indivisible and that this state is presently alterable only by all citizens of Canada and their government. Mr. Speaker, I concur.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton East knows that his agreement or otherwise with the petition is not relevant for the purpose of presentation of petitions and he ought not do such a thing in the course of his presentation.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr. Steve Mahoney (Mississauga West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I am pleased to present two petitions. Both are the same. One has 715 signatures and the other has 220 signatures.

The petitioners, many of whom are from my riding and elsewhere, call upon parliament to establish a multi-year budgetary strategy to eliminate child poverty by the end of the year 2000.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition from my constituents in Calgary—Nose Hill.

These constituents are concerned about the non-action on the resolution of the House of Commons of November 24, 1989 that child poverty in Canada be ended by the year 2000.

• (1015)

The petitioners point out that the number of poor children in Canada since that resolution has actually increased by 60%. They call upon parliament to use the federal budget to introduce a multi-year plan to improve the well-being of Canada's children.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—DEPARTMENTAL AUDIT REPORTS

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance) moved:

That an Order of the House do issue for all departmental audit reports to be tabled within 15 days of their completion and permanently referred to the appropriate standing committees, that audit reports since January 1, 1999, be tabled within 15 days after the adoption of this motion, and that all audit reports requested under the Access to Information Act be tabled forthwith.

She said: Mr. Speaker, today is the day that the Canadian Alliance Party is able to set the agenda for debate in the House. The topic for debate, the issue which we wish to have debated today, is the issue of unlawful and unreasonable delays in providing to members of parliament documents under access to information.

This may at first glance seem like a rather administrative, routine matter to be debated in the House of Commons, but in fact the issue goes to the very root of democracy. Democracy means rule by the people, but clearly the people cannot govern in any effective or meaningful sense if they do not know what is happening, if they do not know what is going on, if they do not know what government is doing with their money and with their affairs.

In recent days we have come up against a refusal or delay or neglect of the government to follow legislative guidelines, that is the law with respect to the provision of information requested on behalf of the people of Canada.

This is an extremely serious matter. I urge all members of the House to take it seriously. If government is able to hide and cover the actions it is taking then clearly the transparency, openness and accountability which are necessary in a true democracy are being undermined and even destroyed. Therefore we have brought forward the motion today for debate. I will read it for the House and for Canadians:

Supply

That an Order of the House do issue for all departmental audit reports to be tabled within 15 days of their completion and permanently referred to the appropriate standing committees, that audit reports since January 1, 1999, be tabled within 15 days after the adoption of this motion, and that all audit reports requested under the Access to Information Act be tabled forthwith.

What is so alarming about the motion is that it should not have been necessary. Under the law, under the government's own guidelines and indeed pursuant to its own promises to Canadians, the motion should never have had to be brought before the House.

It is a treasury board guideline that all departmental audit reports are public as soon as they are completed. We should not be having to ask that those reports be tabled. They should automatically be made public, but the guidelines of the government are being ignored and flouted by the government itself. It is a shameful situation.

We have asked that when these reports, these audits come forward, they be immediately referred to the appropriate standing committee of the House. Instead they are being hidden and kept under wraps. We have had a very difficult time receiving them. Even audits that have been produced years ago have not been forthcoming to committees of the House.

• (1020)

We are also asking that all audit reports since January 1, 1999, be tabled within 15 days. Again we should not have to ask that. This is a clear guideline already of government which it is not following. We are also asking that all the audit reports we have requested under access to information be tabled immediately.

Why are we asking for that? It is because a number of audits the official opposition and other opposition parties have requested have not been provided as the law requires. The law requires that access to information requests be responded to within 30 days. Contrary to the law, the government has now delayed some requests for audit reports for over 45 days.

I am a member of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources Development. The committee asked for two audits which were completed in 1991 and 1994 for the Department of Human Resources Development. It was fully three weeks before a committee of the House was provided by that government department with the documents requested, documents which were done years ago. There is absolutely no excuse for this lack of openness and responsiveness to clear direction and requests from members of the House.

The department kept saying it had to translate them. In an officially bilingual country it is (a) beyond belief that those important documents had not already been provided in both official languages and (b) unbelievable that they could not have been translated very quickly with the first class translation services available in the House of Commons. I have seen the government

Supply

translate reams of material virtually overnight when it is motivated, but all of a sudden when it does not want documents to be provided to members of parliament all these procedural obstacles magically appear.

It is completely unacceptable. I hope that every member of the House, whether on the opposition side or the government side, will be outraged by this abrogation of their clear privileges and of the clear duty owed to Canadians for openness, transparency and timeliness in the provision of information.

We are all aware that the government's refusal and delay in providing even the most basic information requested is due to the fact that it has been caught in the most flagrant and outrageous abuse and misuse of public money in the human resources department. There is troubling evidence and increasing evidence that misuse and abuse is happening in other departments as well. I would like to advise the House that I am splitting my time with the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

The government has gone into an alarming bunker mode. That alarm was brought forcibly to the committee one week ago by the information commissioner, an independent individual appointed to be a watchdog over government to ensure that it carries out its responsibility to Canadians to be open and timely in the provision of information to which Canadians are entitled.

• (1025)

The information commissioner tabled with the committee what I believe is an unprecedented document, a memo from the Treasury Board of Canada which essentially said two things. One was to make sure it knew about any access requests brought forward. Big brother is watching. Instead of information just going out, now the highest reaches of the government are making sure they are told everything that is being requested. The memo also asked for the audit reports so that it could look them over and decide how to deal with them.

We have some very troubling developments in the way the government is operating. We see a lack of openness and transparency that Canadians have a right to demand and expect from their government. We also see the tendency of the government to flout the rules, regulations, safeguards and even the laws put into place to ensure openness in government.

This will be our concern for debate today. We urge all members of the House to support our motion to put an end to what we see as a very difficult and unacceptable situation for the House and for Canadians.

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with some interest to the member opposite and was quite dismayed that she would use words such as flout the law and like skirting around the issues.

She has tried to grandstand on the precise issue of HRDC for way too long and to carve out her so-called 15 minutes of fame. It

will not work. Canadians see through that kind of shenanigans by whatever that party is now calling itself, be it Reform or CCRAP, or Alliance of whatever nature it tries to be. She has never once apologized to the House and to Canadians for the outrageous statements she has made vis-à-vis the HRDC department.

Here and now in this great house of democracy, the Parliament of Canada, I ask the member whether she has the internal fortitude to stand on her feet in the House and apologize for the outrageous statements she has made against people who are disabled and have received HRDC grants, students who have received HRDC, and people in need across this great country of ours. Will she stand on her feet today to apologize and say full well that it was not, as she likes to say, a boondoggle but rather money well spent?

Instead of going after us on the government side for investments well made in terms of jobs and other things, will she state finally and categorically that she apologizes for the outrageous statements she has made repeatedly?

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, it is outrageous that a member of parliament, an elected representative of the people of Canada, would ask for an apology from someone who is doing a job on behalf of the Canadian people.

I hope the member's constituents were listening to him just now, demanding an apology for someone holding his government to account and trying to stop it from stonewalling and hiding information to which the people of Canada are entitled by law.

I notice the member is not dismayed that his own government is flouting the law of the land because the law of the land under the Access to Information Act says that documents requested must be provided within 30 days. Access requests are now routinely delayed far past the 30 day limit. Some of them, without any notice or request, have already been delayed for 45 days.

• (1030)

We have also received letters saying that we will not receive the information that we requested which, by law, we must receive within 30 days. That is not being done. In fact, we have been notified that we will not receive it for 60 or 90 days. In other words, we will not receive information to which Canadians are entitled until after the House recesses for the summer in which case the government will be off the hook.

I wonder if the member is dismayed by this clear breaking of the law by the government and the disrespect for Canadians that entails.

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join in this most important debate. The

motion before us should not be necessary. Unfortunately, the Liberal government has taken upon itself to eliminate or reduce the ability of any of the opposition parties to effectively hold the government accountable for the public good.

Since 1993 the government has used one form or another of time allocation over 60 times in the House of Commons. That does not include the many times that committees have used similar tactics to limit or pre-ordain the witness list and the amount of time the committee will spend on a given topic or to select an issue and where or if the committee will travel.

In addition to the time allocations the government has imposed on all opposition parties in the House, I believe that it has made every attempt to thwart true democracy. When the government attempts to hide the information that should by law be readily available to all members of the public, including the opposition parties, then we have a travesty of democracy. It is for this reason that the Canadian Alliance has brought forth this motion today. It is appalling that the official opposition must be forced to bring this motion forward. Let us look at the government record. Unfortunately it is not a very pretty sight.

This past January the Minister of Human Resources Development held a hastily prepared news conference to break the bad news that an internal audit did not meet the standards that are expected by Treasury Board guidelines and more important, the standards of the general public. Although the minister has unsuccessfully attempted to overshadow the real reason that she suddenly came clean on this issue, the truth is easy to see for all who want to see it.

She did not release the audit simply because she wanted to act in a transparent and clear manner. She did not release the audit because the audit had just been completed and an update to the general public was therefore appropriate. She did not release the audit because her colleagues in other ministries were conducting the affairs of government in an accountable manner. That would be too straightforward for the government and it does not like to do things in a straightforward manner.

No, the minister released the damning audit for one simple reason. The official opposition had filed an access to information request for it. The official opposition had asked for it and both the minister and her officials knew that the report must have the government's spin prior to its falling into the hands of the opposition. The audit paints the Ministry of Human Resources Development in a terrible light. Full disclosure is required; in fact, it is absolutely necessary.

Within days of the access to information request being filed, the minister found herself in front of the cameras and media and the firestorm had begun. The minister has felt the heat of the opposition in the House of Commons and the heat of the press throughout

Supply

the country. Even the spin doctors cannot control this one. The government has been caught in its own web of arrogance and will ultimately fail because of it. Of that I am certain. We only wait for the day when it occurs.

We all know the access to information guidelines. For the benefit of those who do not, let me summarize the overall concept.

The government maintains a vast database of information on everything that it does. The access to information regulations state that the majority of this information is to be available to the public.

• (1035)

I recognize the benefits of the Internet in this part of the equation. Many documents, including the words that we speak today, will be on the Internet by tomorrow, available to virtually anyone who has access to a computer.

The guidelines also state that the citizens of Canada have access to these documents. By filling out a simple request form and submitting it along with a \$5 administration fee, they can ask for almost anything that the government has on record. The guidelines are also very clear in the length of time that the department has in order to complete the access request. All requests, by law, must be completed within 30 days.

Let us look at the reality of the situation. Does the government meet its own guidelines? Unfortunately the government does not even come close. While many requests are submitted, the results are often extremely slow in returning. For example, the official opposition currently has 29 access to information requests that one government department, Human Resources Development Canada, is now late in responding to. That should not come as a great surprise. However, some responses are as much as 90 days overdue.

Some will ask is this is really important; is the opposition just being picky with its criticism? The answers to these questions may be found in a quote from the information commissioner when he appeared before the standing committee on HRDC on March 28, 2000. He stated, "The right of access is one of the cornerstones of our democratic process and one of the best tools available to ensure responsible government". The information commissioner, the person who oversees the access to information process for the federal Government of Canada, regards the right of access as one of the cornerstones of our democratic process and one of the best tools available to ensure responsible government.

A cornerstone of our democratic process, that is what the government is sadly lacking. Simply put, the party opposite lacks the integrity of a democratic government. Its arrogance and lack of accountability have placed true democracy on the endangered species list.

Supply

This is not just some pie in the sky theory that my colleagues and I are addressing. Listen to what Treasury Board stated in its letter of decision dated May 26, 1994. The access to information policy is: "To simplify the process for acquiring copies of reports, and to deliver on the government's commitment for more openness, the policy requires that departments make the final version of review reports, including internal audit and evaluation reports, accessible to the public", and this is the really good part, "without requiring a formal access request".

HRDC and Treasury Board are breaching their own policies by withholding this information until an access request is final. This is not acceptable. Furthermore, it is not right. Public access and disclosure is being grossly mismanaged. Now, as a result of the negative report that has slammed HRDC, both Treasury Board and the Privy Council Office require that they be told what audits have been requested, what bad news is within them and what the official spin will be prior to their release.

Listen again to what the information commissioner stated on March 28, 2000 when he appeared before the standing committee on human resources development. He said "The problem, however, arises when the communication concerns of the government are allowed to take precedence over the public's right to timely access to information". I hope that the members of the government are listening today to what that means and what it says.

I respect any member of the House when we have philosophical differences of opinion. When we are collectively trying to solve a problem, I may not agree with their proposed solution. But it is a very sad day indeed when members of the public and the opposition parties are thwarted in their ability to have full disclosure to the government's activities. With the loss of access to information is the loss of trust, the loss of public accountability and the loss of true democracy.

• (1040)

I fully support this motion and ask for the support of the members of the House of Commons.

In conclusion, I move:

That the motion be amended by replacing the number "15" with the number "30".

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. For clarity's sake, did you read the motion to say the numbers 15 or the number? I heard only number and it is plural.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe it is only one number but I will check the wording on the motion. There is only one number in the motion. The number is 15 and it is being replaced I understand with the number 30.

The question is on the amendment. The hon. member for Waterloo-Wellington.

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with some interest to the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. I was astounded to hear him try to take credit for somehow flushing out the government in this all-important area when in fact it was the minister herself who brought forward the audit results.

I find it somewhat disconcerting that the members opposite, the Reformers, CCRAP party, alliance, or whatever they are these days would try to take credit. They should apologize.

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It was only a day or two ago that the Speaker ruled specifically for the second time that the proper name of our party would be used. It is the Canadian Alliance. I urge you to not allow other people to distort that.

The Deputy Speaker: I had pointed out the name Canadian Alliance to the hon. member for Waterloo—Wellington. I hope he will use it since that is the name of the official opposition.

Mr. Lynn Myers: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be told about the real name by the hon. member for Elk Island who not so recently called me a liar in the House. It was so recorded in *Hansard*.

The Deputy Speaker: I do not think we had better go there. It would be better if we stayed with questions and comments on the speech of the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Mr. Lynn Myers: Mr. Speaker, I was thinking about the grandstanding by the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill. I read a comment from her constituent, a Calgary psychologist, Dr. Allan Mandel, about her allegations with regard to the HRDC money which she raised this morning. He said, "In my case, I can certainly say that this is absolutely not true", and that he in fact had not donated any money especially to the Liberal Party. He said, "To me, this is a program to stimulate employment and to stimulate getting young workers into the workforce. I think it is great".

Gina Cameron, program co-ordinator for the Beddington Heights Community Association in the member's own riding had this to say about her MP attacking these all-important programs: "To say that they are a waste of money, she has not been in these doors, she has no concept of what goes on, so it is sort of probably an empty statement"—coming from the member for Calgary—Nose Hill—"I could not run an efficient, well-run program without it. I really could not".

I would say to her she should get into her constituency and try to see the good work that is done.

Supply

• (1045)

Mr. Leon E. Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The last presentation was made by the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. Any member who would like to make a comment or ask a question should be referring to the presentation made by him, not by the former speaker. If the member wants to make political cheap shots at least they should be directed at what the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan said.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Waterloo—Wellington can ask a question of the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. It is supposed to deal with his speech.

It may be a question that arose out of the other speech and there may be some connection so the Chair has been patient, but I agree with the hon. member that these are questions and comments on the speech of the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan and not on the speech of the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill which is now finished. I know the hon. member for Waterloo—Wellington will want to pose his question quickly.

Mr. Lynn Myers: Mr. Speaker, I am getting to the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan but I needed to build my case a bit. I was interested in the first ballot that went out from the United Alternative.

We are speaking now of audits, transparency and accountability. It printed 6,000 additional ballots and when it came down to the vote all of a sudden, according to one of its executive council members quoted in the *Edmonton Sun*, it ended up destroying the ballots. This is a party that is trying to lecture us about accountability and about transparency. It really is outrageous.

Mr. Reed Elley: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I feel very slighted by the member. I took time to make some very valid points and now he is going into the past history of the Canadian Alliance and the Reform Party. He is not talking at all about what I had to say. This again is an example of how democracy is thwarted in parliament.

The Deputy Speaker: I think the hon. member for Waterloo—Wellington will want to come to the point very quickly with a question that is relevant to the speech of the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Mr. Lynn Myers: I will, Mr. Speaker. Your judgment, as always, is dead on. When the member for Medicine Hat called the programs wasteful, stupid, and garbage, and when the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands called them a manure pile, I wondered if the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan agreed with that. I wonder if he agreed that loans to the—

The Deputy Speaker: I think to give him a reasonable amount of time to reply we will go to the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Mr. Reed Elley: Mr. Speaker, I am glad we have you up there guarding the interest of democracy. Again I am astounded at the member who uses a smokescreen to deflect any kind of comments or any kind of good judgment we in the official opposition might bring to the motion by raising these kinds of issues.

We want to talk today about our concern about the lack of democracy in the House. In the opinion of many Canadians, and certainly those of us in the official opposition, the House does not act upon democratic principles.

The matter we are bringing to the House this morning is simply a case in point. We as the official opposition and all Canadians across the country have a right to know what the government is doing. We have filed access to information requests time after time and we do not get the answers. That is the problem, and it would be nice if the hon. members across the way would address the problem and not deal in smokescreens.

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to split my time today with the hon. member for Mississauga West. I wanted to pick up a bit on what I was talking about previously, simply that some members opposite have called the programs of HRDC, among other things, a manure pile, stupid, garbage, and such.

Those members opposite do not understand how important money to the disabled, to students, to the elderly and to community groups across our great country really is. They should take a lesson appropriate to knowing our country and determining that great things are done as a result of the money that flows through grants and contributions. I remind them that with their holier than thou attitude it seems it is very easy for them to dish it out, but it sure seems not so easy for them to take it. Given their new alliance with their right wing friends perhaps they should try to develop thicker skin. I think it would be more appropriate for the House.

• (1050)

We on the government side have processes and procedures in place whereby we fully understand internal audits and how best to proceed. We deal with access in audit reports in a timely fashion. I can say firsthand, as a former vice-chair of the public accounts committee and working with the Auditor General of Canada who is by the way, I need not remind members, an officer of the House, that we have dealt and do deal effectively with audits in a timely fashion.

The motion being presented today is not only flawed, not only silly, but is unnecessary, redundant and otherwise unheard of and quite out of character. In addition to creating additional paperwork, something members opposite seem to claim that they want to reduce, it would actually add to the number of days they would have to wait until they got access to this information.

Supply

Let us think about that for a minute. We are talking about members of a party that want to have things done quickly and efficiently. They take the moral high ground and say that they made it all happen, that they put the minister of HRDC under a microscope and therefore must take credit for doing all these things. The very motion they are proposing today would add time to the release of audits. It would add time by approximately 15 days. That simply is ridiculous and not worthy even of those people opposite.

By the way, why should Canadians have to request audits anyway when we under government rules have audits released in a timely fashion in any event? The smokescreen members opposite are trying to portray is quite ridiculous. To have to request under access to information audits that we would in the normal course of events make public in any event is quite frivolous and, in fairness, vexatious.

I would like to remind the House of something that happened not so very long ago. I was interested in reading in *The Hill Times* that it was one of the Reform members own researchers, I believe the name was Laurie Throness, who actually was on record as saying that the human resources department was one of the best departments in the Government of Canada when it came to responding to access to information requests.

I take full congratulations on behalf of the government from that wonderful researcher who seems to know what he or she is talking about. It is appropriate to duly note that. It was interesting to see and I think the researchers who are saying that should tell their political masters how important the Government of Canada is in this very important area.

It is somewhat encouraging to have a silver lining in the cloud today. We share the view about the importance of internal audits. The Government of Canada and we on this side of the House have always done that. Audits are a critical tool for managers within the public service and an independent and objective means for parliamentarians to hold governments accountable. We have had that process for many years and I think it has worked effectively.

When I see the motion before us today I know it is yet again that party opposite, the Alliance or whatever it calls itself, trying to grandstand and to score cheap political points where none can be scored. After all, it has to do what it thinks is best for a party that is sinking fast.

Clearly the evidence shows that the government is committed to an effective and independent internal audit function. We are taking the necessary steps in keeping with what we have always done to ensure that the internal audit function is spread throughout government in a meaningful, transparent and accountable fashion.

• (1055)

In 1997, not long before the audit at HRDC, an independent review panel of recognized leaders in the management and ac-

counting professions wrote a report on the modernization of comptrollership in the Government of Canada.

It was a very important document. The report made a number of observations about the role and practice of internal audit in the Government of Canada. As a result, the Treasury Board Secretariat, to its credit, understood the requirements, recommendations and objectives of that report. It indicated and undertook a comprehensive examination of the internal audit function.

The objective of that government-wide study was to set internal audit practices and policies standards geared to the management environment of today. The study was largely conducted in the summer of 1999 and the draft report was completed in January 2000.

I do not want to take a lot of the time of the House to go into the details of the study, but suffice it to say that over the last decade, especially and perhaps even beyond, the whole area of internal audit has evolved considerably. That is important to note. Not only do auditors audit under financial statement requirements and the rules of financial management. They also get into the whole area of management control and the framework of management control.

I need not remind you, Mr. Speaker, and members of the House that it is now an extension of what auditors do not only in the Government of Canada but across Canada in other areas as well. That is important. We need to make sure we have the kinds of checks and balances in place to ensure that the proper internal audits are conducted in a meaningful way which helps and assists not only governments but Canadians wherever they live in Canada.

In the audit that came down there were a number of recommendations. The first priority would be the development of a new treasury board policy on internal audit to set the stage for further development of the function. That is important because it sets the stage, the foundation, where we now act in an appropriate fashion.

The second priority would be the development of a new set of professional standards to support the expanded role of an internal audit. Again it recognizes that there is an important role in this area to play, and I believe rightfully so. I think Canadians expect that. Certainly we on this side of the House, unlike those people opposite, understand fully the importance of those kinds of things and do it effectively in the interest of all Canadians.

Finally, the third of these cornerstones is that once they are in place the Treasury Board Secretariat must then work with the internal audit community to address human resource issues. These include determining the required core competencies, recruitment, professional development and succession planning. There are many more but I do not have time to go into them. I would like to do so for the record but I cannot.

Supply

These then underscore the commitment of the Government of Canada to move in this all important area in a meaningful fashion that underscores our party's commitment, the government's commitment under the leadership of the Prime Minister, to ensure that we do the kinds of audits necessary.

I need not remind the House as the Prime Minister did not so long ago that years ago the auditor general would report once a year. It was under our government that was changed to four times a year. Why did we do that? It was because we wanted to enable that the books of Canada and all audits were made in a timely fashion, were done so effectively and efficiently, and were done so knowing that Canadians expect transparency and accountability.

By way of conclusion I want to say that the motion as presented is frivolous. It is vexatious. It is annoying. It is not in the best interest of Canadians and what they should do. It should be voted down because it is simply not something that needs to see the light of day.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I listened pretty well to every word the hon. member said. Just in passing, it is ironic that he would take a swipe at us and our researchers when he does not even have the name of the researcher right. He cannot seem to get much right today.

• (1100)

At any rate, I would like to ask him a couple of questions. The member said that the motion was vexatious, redundant and all of those things. I agree with that. If this government and if those departments were doing what they were supposed to do, as required by law, then we would have never even thought of this motion today. We put it forward because it is a response to the actual facts.

The other thing that is so very important is, what is the government trying to hide? Why does it not release this information in a timely fashion? It must be because it is not proud of what is in it. Otherwise it would be having press conferences and blowing it up to all proportions. The fact is, it is not only not proud of what is in it, it is ashamed of what is in it. That is why it tries to suppress the information as long as possible and that is why this motion is very much in place today. We are simply asking the government to behave in the fashion prescribed by law and it is not doing so.

I would like the member to retract his statement that the motion is redundant. It is in fact very much in place and it needs to have the total support of the whole House to assure Canadians that there is accountability, openness and transparency in the way their money is being spent in this place, which is totally lacking.

Mr. Lynn Myers: Mr. Speaker, I need not be lectured by the member opposite when it comes to accountability and openness when his own party had to print 6,000 additional ballots when it

came to a vote and then, before the real scoop got out, had to destroy those ballots. Talk about duplicitous. Talk about hypocrisy in the extreme. It really is too much to take, especially from the member opposite.

He should be congratulating the Government of Canada. He should be congratulating all of us in terms of the openness and accountability that we, on this side of the House, portray on a day to day basis, year to year—decade to decade for that matter. We have implemented the kinds of checks and balances in our system which enable us to conduct internal audits and release them in a timely fashion.

Instead of bringing forward this frivolous kind of nonsense that only those people opposite seem capable of doing, he should be celebrating the Government of Canada and congratulating us for the kind of good work we do, not only on behalf of the people in this House, but on behalf of Canadians wherever they live in this great country.

The member for Medicine Hat has repeatedly referred to the grants and contributions portrayed by the HRDC minister as, I believe his words were, stupid and garbage. He should instead take a lesson from his constituents and understand that those are in fact good investments made in the regions of Canada which assist Canadians wherever they are. Instead of bad-mouthing people, constituents in the ridings and people across Canada, he should be celebrating and congratulating the Government of Canada, as should all those people opposite, whatever they term themselves as these days. The member should be celebrating and saying what a wonderful thing that we on the government side are doing.

In direct response to the member for Elk Island, I would simply say that he should go back and do his homework. As a former teacher he should know that we cannot do the kinds of things that members opposite are doing, state the kinds of things they state, without doing their homework. He should do that. If he did, he would begin to understand a little more about what it means to govern this great country of ours.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with much of what the hon. member said. He suggested that the audit process is a vital tool for management to bring forward, with different eyes, through the auditor general, efficiency audits to identify some of the inefficiencies within the departments.

Recently the auditor general appeared before the agriculture committee with three organizations, three departments of government. The auditor general told the committee that it was necessary that committees be there to get the commitments from the departments in order that the departments follow what the auditor general puts in his reports.

Supply

• (1105)

Why does the hon. member have difficulty having those audits tabled within 30 days of their presentation to the departments?

Mr. Lynn Myers: Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that we on the government side have made a very consistent effort to ensure that this very, very important audit information is released in a timely fashion, and we have done so in a manner consistent with normal auditing practices and in a way which underscores the government's commitment to accountability, to transparency and all of the things that Canadians, wherever they live in this great country of ours, determine to be important.

I am convinced, as are most Canadians, that we continue to do the right thing in this very important area and to do so consistent with the values of Canadians. I think it is important that we continue to do so and that we do so in an efficient, effective, transparent and accountable way.

Mr. Steve Mahoney (Mississauga West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to change the tone of the debate a bit and the direction, because I think there is something fundamental in the nature of an opposition party which puts forward on its opposition day a motion which suggests that the government is being dishonest and that funds are not going to the right people in the communities.

I can appreciate the fact that opposition members might disagree with government programs. They might disagree with the direction we take. They might disagree with where the money goes in terms of helping certain people in the community. If I were on that side and they were on this side, I might have some questions about what was happening. That is a scary scenario, I admit, but it is obviously the role of the opposition to question and to hold government to account. I have no problem with that.

What bothers me about this almost incessant attempt to get at the HRDC grants and other government grants that are community based and go to help people in the community is that while they may succeed in the public's mind in marking up, if you will, the government, they do serious damage to the community groups and the people who need the help. Members opposite know full well that the audit procedure has improved dramatically since this government came to office. However, I do not want to stand here and spend my time simply defending the government. I want to talk about some of the programs.

We know that HRDC, for example, helps to fund the Ontario March of Dimes. What is the role of the Ontario March of Dimes? It is to help adults with disabilities integrate into the community. If that program is in jeopardy because the opposition is in hysterics about questions to do with audits and things that were actually

instituted by the minister and the government, then I would suggest to members opposite that they do a disservice to that organization.

I received a frantic phone call two Fridays ago in my office on Parliament Hill from the chief administrator of the Canadian Mental Health Association. He told me that people in the area HRDC office were so frightened and afraid to move that they would not release the money so that he could pay the staff. The Canadian Mental Health Association could in fact be put in jeopardy.

We corrected the problem. We contacted the office and the money flowed in time for people to be paid and for that organization, which does tremendous work in all of our communities across Canada, to live up to its mandate. But why should it be put in jeopardy so that opposition politicians can simply mark up a minister or mark up the government, or score what some might call cheap political points?

Last Thursday evening in Mississauga I was pleased to be part of an event put on by Community Living Mississauga. Many members of the House were part of it, even some members of the opposition. A roast is held every year by members of Community Living. I think they have been doing it for 22 years. This year, as one of the roasters said, they scraped the bottom of the barrel and I was the one they were roasting.

• (1110)

I was delighted to be put in that position, mainly because I knew at the end of the night that the outcome would be a successful fundraising event for Community Living. Including an auction item, we raised close to \$70,000 in one evening for Community Living Mississauga.

The event is vitally important because of the young people it supports, young people with mental handicaps who need help. Are these people funded directly by HRDC? No, they are not. They are funded by the social services programs at the provincial level, which are in turn partially funded by the CHST from the federal government. This is not about claiming credit and saying that we are a great government because we are giving all of this money to those groups; this is about the bottom line and the impact when the rubber hits the road in helping these young Canadians and in helping organizations deliver services to them.

A young man was born 19 years ago by the name of Tyler Williamson. Tyler was born to Laurie and Jane Williamson. He was autistic. Many people may have seen the movie *Rain Man*, in which Dustin Hoffman portrayed an autistic young man.

Many people would recognize the incredible talents of Mr. Hoffman in portraying that autistic young man. Tyler had those same types of gifts; not exactly the same in terms of mathematical skills perhaps, but he was a very special individual. He passed away a month ago.

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Tyler fought a four-year battle with leukemia, but what he achieved in his short 19 years, by working with the organizations at Community Living, and what his mom and dad achieved, was truly miraculous. His sister, Taylor, actually donated bone marrow to him as he went through this very debilitating time.

This was a young man who, if he had not had Community Living, sure, he would have had the support of his mother and dad, his sister, and the support of his aunts and uncles and many friends. Tyler was known as the guy in charge of the keys around his dad's car dealership, Laurie Williamson Pontiac Buick in Erin Mills, Mississauga. He would take care of the keys. Everybody would run to Tyler to get the keys for the car, the back shed or whatever was needed.

He was an active young man in the community, but I would venture to say, and I am absolutely sure that Laurie, Jane and Taylor would say, that without the support of Community Living their lives would have been much more difficult. While it was a difficult time for them, and a tragic time for all to lose Tyler, there was at least some recognition that he fought a tremendous battle, not only against cancer and autism, but against attitudes in the community.

One of the important goals of Community Living is:

We believe that the whole community is enriched when people who have a handicap have opportunities to live alongside their non-handicapped neighbours.

That is so incredibly important, because the community is actually enriched as a result of young people like Tyler Williamson being able to participate in community events. The real tragedy, scandal and frightening aspect is the entire acrimonious debate surrounding the issue of precious taxpayer money. It should be on what is even more precious, the Tyler Williamson and Community Living and all the young people who benefit from it.

• (1115)

At the roast I was delighted to see a video with the member for Wild Rose in it showing less partisanship, having some fun. There was a purpose to the video and he understood that.

While I can disagree strongly, passionately, almost physically in some instances with the philosophies, comments and issues that are raised by the former Reform Party, I cannot believe that individually they are so inhuman as to want to jeopardize the good programs that are put in place by the men and women who work at places like HRDC or who work at social services departments in our provincial governments, funded in part by the federal tax grants that are passed on through the CHST. The mitigating damage as this flows downstream is potentially catastrophic.

I wish members opposite could come up with a motion with some teeth to it. The big issue today is health care. We should be

debating that issue. Have we put enough money into health care? Are we simply writing a blank cheque to the provinces so they can reduce taxes while cutting health care? These are important issues that need to be debated here, not an issue relating to an administrative matter such as when an audit gets reported.

I ask members to think of the Tyler Williamsons of Community Living and what this money has done to help Canadians with and without disabilities right across the country.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the member made the point that access to information threatens the programs he described. I would like to know how openness and transparency threatens the programs he described and the moneys that government is spending. How in the wide world can accountability of government spending threaten these programs?

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I have no idea what the member is talking about.

The government is open. Access to information is clearly available. The Internet can be used. There is no problem getting information. The government increased the number of times that the auditor general performs audits from once a year to four times a year.

That party's own member is chair of the public accounts committee on which I also sit. The auditor general brings forth extremely detailed audits on various departments that he determines he wants to audit. It is not the government and not the opposition, but the auditor general who determines which audits to bring forward.

The chair does a good job on the committee; I have no problem with him. But I am constantly amazed at the lack of research and lack of in-depth questions by members of the opposition in asking the auditor about his audits. In fact, the record would show that as a member of that committee, I ask more difficult questions in relation to government programs than they do.

If the opposition members want to get information out to their constituents, let them do their homework. Let them dig into the auditor general's reports. There is more information in them than they could possibly begin to disseminate. They could at least start by recognizing that the programs exist.

The government is open and accessible and information is clearly available to Canadians.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there is a contradiction here. The member says that ATI requests, all the things we are doing, are somehow threatening these programs. Yet he turns around and says that everything is open. Either it is or it is not.

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The fact of the matter is that treasury board gave instructions that these documents, including internal audits, should be made public without being asked for. The fact is that is not being done.

• (1120)

Second, he keeps pointing out that these are such wonderful programs. That is a debate for another day. It could well be. I agree that some of these programs are worthwhile but the political slush fund programs are not. They will come to light if there is openness and transparency. However, that is not there.

I ask the member to tell the House that he will support the motion of the day which says that there is going to be openness and accountability as already required by law. He claims it is being done but it is not. Therefore, I expect him to vote in favour of the motion today in order to make sure that what is the law will be done.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Mr. Speaker, the very point the member makes in referring to political slush funds makes my point. By taking grants that are used to support organizations in our community, whether it is the March of Dimes, Community Living or whatever, and effectively throwing everything into a big pot and calling it a political slush fund, denigrates the use of those funds.

When Canadians read the front page of the *National Post* they get excited because they somehow think the government has misplaced a billion dollars. We know that is not true, yet opposition members stand in this place every day and consistently say it even though it is not true. What they are doing is damaging the good work that is being done by all of these organizations because people get frightened. They are afraid that some reporter is going to show up. They are frightened to write a cheque even though it is a properly approved, sanctioned and processed grant that should go to those people.

In closing, if I may, Mr. Speaker, I referred to raising money for Community Living on the Thursday night. There was also a scholarship fund established, led by Jim Murray of J.J. Barnicke in the amount of \$5,000 in the name of Tyler Williamson to help young people with disabilities. This is the community helping out in addition to government grants. Anyone who wants to contribute to that can contact Community Living.

[Translation]

Mr. Benoit Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not return the serve by the hon. member for Mississauga West, who informs us that it is absolutely incorrect and totally ridiculous to say that there is a \$1 billion hole in the HRDC grants.

I could agree with him to a point that he is not completely wrong on this. We do know, however, that the amount that has been lost, wasted or misspent lies between the Prime Minister's \$252.11 figure and the \$1 billion mentioned at one point in the media.

Is it \$1 million, \$2 million or \$50 million? This is the figure the motion is intended to find out. We know it is perhaps not \$1 billion; however, as the Prime Minister has already stated, we know it was \$252.11—but he was slightly wrong in his figures—and this is what today's motion is intended to clarify.

In passing, it should be noted that the member never answered the question on whether he supported the motion or not. The question was relatively clear, there was no need for 50% of the votes plus one, just his opinion, but we will know it in due course.

I will now come back to the motion put forward by the Canadian Alliance member for Calgary—Nose Hill. For the benefit of the parliamentarians who often talk of nothing and everything and who will see that we support the motion of the Canadian Alliance—they will think it has to do with Quebec's separation—I will read you the motion. Our friends opposite often have very delicate and sensitive hearing. This is why I am going to repeat this motion slowly but surely so they may understand what we are talking about today. The motion reads:

That an Order of the House do issue for all departmental audit reports to be tabled within 15 days of their completion and permanently referred to the appropriate standing committees—

• (1125)

What does that mean? The motion is asking for three things. Under the Treasury Board standards, every federal department must complete an internal audit report, as did the Department of Human Resources Development.

The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill is asking that these internal audit reports be automatically referred to the appropriate standing committees. This means that the report from the Department of Finance would go to the Standing Committee on Finance, the report from Fisheries and Oceans would go to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, and so on.

It should not be necessary for an opposition member to make a request under the Access to Information Act to have such reports released. It should be formal, normal procedure.

If I have time, I will explain later on that this is not just a wish expressed by the opposition, but rather a standard set by the Treasury Board and also a wish expressed by the auditor general.

The second thing motion is asking for is that all internal audit reports since January 1, 1999, be tabled within 15 days after the adoption of the motion. If passed, the motion would ensure that in

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the future all internal audit reports would be referred to the appropriate committees. This requirement would also apply to internal audit reports completed since January 1999.

Third, the motion calls for all access to information requests for internal audit reports previous to January 1999 to also be made public.

As everyone knows, this motion follows on the heels of the huge HRDC scandal, which raises many questions about how departments operate, and about their transparency as well.

I will list a series of responsibilities that must be recognized within departments. First, public officials are accountable. Ministerial responsibility ought to be restored. There is also the need for the government to be transparent, which is emphasized in this motion.

Members of the public have a right to know what is going on in the public service and particularly where their money is being spent. Too often, we hear the argument “HRDC’s program and grants are a good thing because some non-profit agency in our riding received assistance, which was helpful”.

We do not have a problem with that. If \$60 of every \$100 does go into grants, we have no problem with that, as all the opposition parties have said. What we want, however, is for \$100 of every \$100 to be well spent and not \$60 to help the less fortunate members of society and \$40 to reward Liberals. This is clear to everyone. People want to know where their money is going.

Members are elected to represent their constituents and not just to pat the government on the back, as the member for Waterloo—Wellington does all too often, without looking any deeper. For some members, everything is just fine, and they do not look any deeper.

Opposition members, however, are public watchdogs who must keep an eye on the money spent, wasted or badly invested by the Treasury. Officials who are not elected, such as Deputy Minister Mel Cappe at the time, must also be held accountable because they are spending taxpayers’ money.

This should not all fall to MPs. There are also the unelected, such as the Clerk of the Privy Council, Mel Cappe, who was Deputy Minister of Human Resources Development, negotiator for the transfer of training programs from Ottawa to Quebec, and also Deputy Minister of the Environment. If I remember correctly, I had the privilege of travelling across Canada with him on the Environmental Protection Act.

Perhaps we also need to look at what went on at Environment during his reign. This deputy minister has a long history in the

federal government and we believe that unelected officials must also be answerable to the Canadian taxpayers for their actions.

This is important. I have listened to the speeches of the previous two speakers with their references to accountability, and I believe they have left out a few things, either by accident or by design.

• (1130)

First of all, it is important to look at how the government is obliged to be accountable. This has nothing to do with it being a good government, with their being nice guys, with their Liberal values properly. There are obligations, laws, regulations. I shall try to be very brief, because one could easily take 30 minutes on accountability alone, or even give a post-graduate course in public administration on it, but I am going to touch on it very briefly.

First we have the budget presented by the Minister of Finance. At the start of the fiscal year, the Minister of Finance presents his budget, which reveals how much money, by department, the minister and the officials may spend. Also, if we look carefully at the budget, we can often tell which programs will have money invested in them.

However, on the subject of the budget, we wonder how the Minister of Finance can announce his budget for this year, next year, the other year and so on, over five years. The U.S.S.R. used to present five year budgets, and we know what happened there recently.

What can we say about the Minister of Finance, who brings down a budget that provides for tax cuts, among other things, and who the next day says “Perhaps this will happen faster than what I forecast in the budget yesterday or the day before”. Did he present a responsible budget or not? The Minister of Finance presents a budget containing figures for the coming year. Then, something the public knows less about are the estimates, what we call the little blue books, which come out each year for each of the programs and provide more precisely how the funds in the budget will be spent.

There is also—the member for Mississauga mentioned it earlier—the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, which examines the audits and recommendations of the auditor general. I sit on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and it is true unfortunately that a number of members arrive at the committee less well prepared than they should be and that the committee should be as unpartisan as possible.

Each year, before appearing before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the auditor general reports to the House. He can now, under legislation, table four reports a year. The fact that he can table four reports a year has advantages and disadvantages.

When the auditor general tabled only one report a year, the report was expected and followed up and his recommendations got fairly

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considerable media attention. The disadvantage of having an annual report was that if a serious flaw in the administration of public funds were discovered early in the audit, the auditor general often had to wait eight, nine or ten months before tabling his report and reporting the flaw to the public.

So, it is a real advantage for the auditor general to be able to table four reports every year. However, because the auditor general now tables a report every three months, there is somewhat less public interest and media attention. Heaven knows that what the auditor general's reports say on the sound management of taxpayers' money in Canada and Quebec is extremely important.

When the auditor general tables his chapter by chapter report, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts reviews each chapter with designated officials. The departments must also—and this is a rather strict accountability requirement—table annual reports. Each department must table an annual report in which it explains how it intends to spend the money allocated to it by the Department of Finance.

In order to examine the departments' annual reports, to review their expenditures, parliamentarians have the right, under the Access to Information Act, to ask for documents that are not of a public nature, and they can request specific information on the management of accounts by departments.

The auditor general can also reply to written questions received from parliamentarians. My colleague, the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques asked a very specific question to the auditor general concerning the Department of Human Resources Development and the auditor general will reply, not in his next report but in a written answer, as to whether he will pursue the matter and investigate that department.

• (1135)

There is also the Financial Administration Act, with which all departments must comply. We obtain a great deal of information, it is true—I have just mentioned several types of information that the government and the departments are obliged, by regulation, to release to parliamentarians—but this information system must also be improved, as the President of the Treasury Board pointed out in her report.

Members, whatever their party—Bloc Québécois or Canadian Alliance—too often face large hurdles when requesting more critical information, information more specific to the management of public accounts.

It is important to remind members of the public that, when the auditor general tables his report, he is making observations. The auditor general cannot force the government to take specific action. There is nothing binding about his observations: they are only

recommendations. So the auditor general recommends to the government that it take specific action to correct a particular situation.

In general, the recommendations made by the auditor general, who is non-partisan, are implemented by the government. But, as the auditor general pointed out in his last appearance before the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, in the ten years he has been making recommendations about the disbursement of grants and contributions by Human Resources Development Canada, these recommendations have not been implemented.

We can therefore see that some departments take the auditor general's recommendations into consideration and institute specific corrective action. But there are two departments which have long been corrupt and in which a miracle will be needed to put things right and they are Human Resources Development Canada and National Defence.

These will be two of the last departments that I hope and believe the auditor general will examine before he concludes his excellent work, because he is leaving us in one or two years to take up very important duties within an international organization. Perhaps he will be followed by the Minister of Finance, who knows?

In the United States, for instance, when the auditor general, or the person who has the same duties there, submits a report, the government and the various departments are required to be accountable to the public; accountability is an obligation. It can be seen that his role is far more restricted.

Here in Canada, what has happened in the past 20 years or so to modify the auditor general's role is that he has been instructed that, instead of tabling one big document once a year, he should divide it in four and report four times a year. Then they said to themselves that everything is fine, that they did not have to do anything else for another 20 years. As the auditor general was doing a good job, everything was just great. In our opinion, the auditor general ought to have closer control over government administration.

When the present auditor general, Mr. Desautels, leaves, the Liberals will be the ones to appoint his replacement for the next seven years. I am certain, I am convinced, that the Liberals are going to appoint an auditor general on his abilities, not his political allegiance. He may be in place for the next Liberal mandate, but he certainly will be there for the next government.

This auditor general needs to be recognized as impartial and non-partisan. When he makes recommendations, all parliamentarians and taxpayers must assign to them the importance they deserve.

As far as ministerial responsibility is concerned, there is a flaw as far as accountability is concerned. Only the minister currently in

charge of a department are be answerable for the actions of that department. In that context, we saw how the current Minister for International Trade washed his hands of any responsibility and even refused to answer, this after having said in his adopted city of Paris “Yes, I will answer the questions that will be asked of me on this issue”. But the Minister for International Trade has said nothing.

The current Minister of Human Resources Development said “I do not have to answer, because this did not take place under my administration”. When things start to heat up in a department, they change ministers, thus avoiding having to answer questions.

• (1140)

What happened at Human Resources Development? An internal audit report was tabled, as is required. They did not do so because they are nice people or because they wanted to see how things were going in their department. Internal audit reports are important documents and they are compulsory.

The minister had known about the internal audit report for a long time, but the information was only disclosed on February 21. Was there a cover up attempt? We have our opinion on this, but let us say that I am merely raising the question. As we know, asking the question often brings the response. Did they hope these data would not become public in the House of Commons? What data are contained in the internal audit report? It is this report that is the model for the other reports we want tabled in this House.

Seven categories of programs were analyzed in the report. The programs analyzed totalled grants and contributions of around \$1 billion a year for three years. There is therefore \$3 billion in programs that were analyzed.

The internal audit report prepared by officials within the Department of Human Resources Development revealed significant problems in program management. Grants were awarded when no application had been made.

I asked people in my riding “Is it easy to obtain a grant from the federal government before you apply?”. They replied “It is so hard to get one when you have applied that if you get \$252.11”, as the Prime Minister pointed out, “and you spend \$250, they want the \$2.11 back and they are after you until you have paid back the \$2.11”. Management at HRDC is so efficient with quotas that they can even cut benefits to the unemployed.

At section 6.5.1 of a Treasury Board internal document on internal auditing, the President of the Treasury Board asks the government and says that departments should expect these internal reports will be made public, not only under the Access to Information Act, but by the intrinsic desire of the various departments to

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make them public, as the motion by our colleague from the Canadian Alliance requests.

She asks to have these reports be released to parliamentarians and the Canadian public so that we may know where the money goes and ensure that the money duly earned by Canadian taxpayers which is paid in taxes to the federal government is wisely invested.

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member for Repentigny has given us an overview of spending and of the money that makes its way into the Minister of Finance’s coffers.

He mentioned the scandal at Human Resources Development Canada, with its new minister who is unfortunately not very up on matters or familiar with all the issues, because it was her predecessor who was responsible. But since he is afraid to answer, it is left to the minister or her parliamentary secretary to field questions.

I congratulate the member on giving the background and telling us about the one to three billion dollars that were probably misspent. I would also like to know what the member for Repentigny thinks about the advertising inserts the federal government sprang for in all Ontario’s daily newspapers in an attempt to pin the blame directly on Ontario’s premier, Mike Harris.

This advertising appeared in both languages and I cite the part in black “Last year, the Government of Canada’s share of Ontario’s health care spending was 55%”.

• (1145)

These are only numbers of course and sometimes a malicious spin is put on them. What premiers and provincial finance ministers want is for payments to be restored to 1994 levels.

They are not asking for an increase. They know that budgets have been slashed. Jean Charest, when he was here, said that, if Canada’s health care system was in disarray, the Prime Minister, and he pointed at him, was responsible. He pointed at the Prime Minister, the member for Saint-Maurice, as he said this.

Today, the federal government has paid for advertising in all of Ontario’s daily newspapers. This will cost goodness only knows how much, probably the better part of \$1 million. Instead of putting this money into health care, it is going after Mike Harris, probably to damage his credibility with Ontario voters.

I would like to know what the member for Repentigny thinks about this.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Frontenac—Mégantic for his question. The government shows partisan leanings too often, with examples such as this.

Last week, however, there was a federal-provincial meeting of ministers of health, focusing on Canadians’ urgent priorities in

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connection with the health system. A consensus was reached—and this is often what people hear, or want to hear from the government, as my colleague from Frontenac—Mégantic has said—on the restoration of transfer payments for health care.

The federal Minister of Health said “It is not my responsibility any more. It is up to the premiers”. The Prime Minister said “A meeting is scheduled in August or September, and I will discuss it with my provincial counterparts at that time”.

We can see the contempt with which the government treats matters that are under provincial jurisdiction, according to the Constitution, in this instance health. When we call for the restoration of transfer payments, they come at us with all kinds of figures.

I do not want to say that the government is robbing people, for that would be unparliamentary language. I will, however, give an example from outside parliament. I put it this way to the people in my riding “It is sort of like someone stealing \$100 from me, then coming back in a week or two to tell me he would give me back \$20”. As if I were supposed to be grateful that he stole just \$80. That is more or less what the government is saying to us “Come on now, I borrowed money from you without your permission, but you need to thank me because I am giving one-quarter of it back, or one-third, or some other amount”.

What we are asking is to have back, not the interest on the money borrowed without our permission, but the money itself.

In conclusion, to complement the motion by the Canadian Alliance member, section 6.5 of the Treasury Board manual, which I was not able to read earlier, provides, and I quote:

In accordance with the principles of the Access to Information Act, government information should be available to the public. Departments should develop cost-effective means—

I do not know what cost-effective means in this context.

—to ensure that review reports are accessible to the public without requiring a formal request under the Access to Information Act.

This is a request by Treasury Board to make public internal audit reports “without requiring a formal request under the Access to Information Act”.

The government is being asked to do as the President of the Treasury Board asks, apply the policies of this government and the wishes of this government.

As members will see, consistent as they are, the Liberals will not apply their policy, they will not support their request and will not apply the standards set by the Treasury Board. It is a bit of a paradox.

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the opposition day motion by the former Reform Party, as I understand it, calls for an audit of all government programs to be tabled in a more prompt fashion and for better and easier access to information.

Our caucus does not disagree with either of those points. They are both valid points. However, after reading the motion this morning at our caucus meeting my first reaction was that it was a waste of a good opposition day. What a terrible thing to squander an opportunity to hold the government accountable on so many pressing issues. What a shame that party is so devoid of ideas that it has to nitpick about relatively insignificant things when there are so many pressing issues that we could be talking about in the House of Commons today.

After reading the motion I felt that it was very poorly crafted. I could hardly understand what it meant, and once I did understand, I thought it was a shame. We could have used this time today. It must be one of the luxuries of being the official opposition in that it has more opportunities for these opposition day motions. We do not treat our opposition days lightly. If my party had been given the opportunity to choose the topic of debate for a whole day in this hallowed Chamber, I would like to think that we would have found something of more significance.

We could talk for a day about a national housing strategy and about being the only developed nation in the world that has no national housing strategy. We could talk about a commitment to full employment and about putting the whole country back to work. Would that not be a theme worth dedicating one day of debate to?

There are so many issues. We could talk about saving our national health care system. Why are we not talking about that in this golden opportunity we have to choose the topic of debate? We could talk about cleaning up the environment. How often do we hear that debated in the House of Commons while we, as Canadians, are busy poisoning our own nest to the point where we will not be able to live here anymore if we do not do something about it? That is not being debated in the House of Commons today.

Frankly, we are talking about nitpicking. We are talking about little incidental administrative details. Is that the worst thing that party can think of to accuse the ruling party of, that they are poor administrators? How cruel. What a condemning comment. What a waste of an opportunity and it saddens me.

I will speak to the motion because, as I said, we do not disagree with the idea of more accountability and transparency, although those words are getting to be such a cliché that I am not sure they

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have any meaning anymore. They are the two most overused words in the House of Commons.

We agree with the whole concept of increased accountability on spending on government programs. We do agree with the former Reform Party. What does one become when one is no longer a reformer? If one is no longer interested in that anymore, one must be a conformer. The opposite of a reformist is a conformist. Maybe that is what we should be calling them now.

We do come from diametrically opposed positions. Our party and that party may agree on this one issue of increased access to information, et cetera, but it is very transparent. The one thing that is truly transparent is what motivated the Reform Party to debate this motion today. It is not even a call for greater accountability. It is that it disagrees with government spending on social programs.

What it boils down to and the reason the Reform Party keeps hammering mercilessly away at government spending is that it disagrees with public investment in a human resources strategy at any level. It disagrees with public spending whether it is for human resources, income maintenance or access to services for the disabled. Any public spending is bad. All things private are good. If one tears down the former Reformers' political ideology, that is about as basic as it can be put. Public bad; private good. No more public spending is really what their message is.

We disagree wholeheartedly because our party believes that government not only has a role in public spending for social services but it has an obligation. One of the finest things we do as government is that we do our best to distribute the wealth to care for those who need it most in our communities.

• (1155)

The one thing that is very obvious and transparent about the former Reform Party is that if it ever did have the authority, heaven forbid—

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think it is really a very simple thing to get the name of the party right. The Speaker ruled somewhat over a week ago and ruled again when the name was being misused. The name of the party is Canadian Alliance and it is not asking a great deal to have the member just follow that Speaker's ruling.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I am sure the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre is duly admonished.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to co-operate. I will call the party by its proper name.

One thing I would ask the movers of the motion today to take into consideration is that one of the reasons we are having a difficult time administering complicated government programs

might be the fact that the ruling party, the government, has been cutting, hacking and slashing jobs in the public sector to such a degree that it is perhaps getting more difficult to actually do the necessary follow up on these programs. Under the questions and comments portion of my speech, perhaps we could talk about that somewhat. How can we possibly take 50,000 jobs out of the public sector, increase the workload and still expect the same access to services?

The public sector has been cut, reduced and slashed to the point where even right-wing analysts are looking at the public service and wondering if they have gone too far; if they will have to do a massive hiring to try to plug some of the massive holes that were left.

Every time the government cuts the public sector it seems to cut the people who are most valuable, the people in the middle band of experience, the people who have been there for 20 years and maybe would take an early option, an opportunity to retire earlier. We cannot replace those people overnight. It is not like flicking a light switch on and off. Once we cut those 50,000 jobs we cannot just say tomorrow that we went too far and we should get them back. They are not coming back. They have already slipped away and the damage has already been done. We are fond of saying that some cuts do not heal. The cuts to the public sector will not heal easily and certainly not overnight.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver East.

One of the real motivations that the official opposition had in putting this motion forward was to draw criticism again to public spending programs like the transitional jobs fund. This is a sensitive point for myself as well coming from the riding of Winnipeg Centre. We were horrified to learn, even though we are the third poorest riding in the country, with unemployment levels of 13% and 14%, the third lowest per capita income per family and the highest incidence of poverty, that we did not qualify for any of the transitional jobs fund money. We were just as horrified as anybody else that the Minister of HRDC's riding qualified with an unemployment rate of about 7% and my riding, with an unemployment rate of almost 14%, did not qualify. The public certainly needed to know that something untoward was going on with that one particular program.

When the government was pressed on the issue more and more facts started to surface, things that people cannot be comfortable with. All Canadians were shocked as the truth started to surface. The House leader for the government side had his binder ready and any time a member from one of the ridings stood up to question this, it would be thrown back to the member "You probably qualify for all kinds of other grants. You might not get any transitional jobs fund grants but you do get other kinds of HRDC spending". We do and we appreciate that.

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In the process of this debate, we learned that my riding gets more HRDC funding than any other riding in the country. I am quite proud of that. It means that the people in my riding have been aggressively trying to get some federal spending going on in the inner city of Winnipeg. As transfer payments are cut or reduced year after year, we needed to get that flow of dollars coming to us in some way or another. Thankfully, the people in my riding have been creative enough, quite often with the help of our office, to avail themselves of the various programs that can help the situation in my riding.

We have watched the federal transfer payments dwindle. In the short time that I have paying attention to politics, we have seen the established program funding system chucked out the window and in its place we saw the Canada health and social transfer.

• (1200)

This is something that the National Council on Welfare called the most disastrous social policy initiative this country has ever seen. It could see the writing on the wall that when the Canada health and social transfer came in there was going to be trouble. Really what the federal government was trying to do was distance itself from any obligation to social spending across the country and to offload that burden on to the provinces.

First the government provided block funding for health, post secondary education and social services, then it started dwindling it away. From \$19 billion worth of CHST, with the bat of an eye it went to \$11.5 billion per year for all the provinces. Now the government is slowly inching it back up a billion at a time. I think it is back up to \$14.5 billion in total spending.

We are supposed to toot the government's horn and cheer that it is going to put some of the money back which has been cut so drastically from that side of social spending, but really it is still four or five billion dollars short from when the CHST was initiated in 1996.

So it is a bit of a smoke and mirrors game and it leaves us no choice but to aggressively go after any kind of program spending that we possibly can in the riding of Winnipeg Centre.

To sum up my brief remarks today, I am disappointed that the Reform Party, or the former Reform Party, could not have been more creative in choosing a topic for debate today. It certainly must be completely devoid of ideas if the worst thing it can accuse the government of is being poor bookkeepers. There are plenty of other travesties that the government is guilty of which we would love to point out had we the opportunity to choose the subject of debate today.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today after my colleague from Winnipeg Centre, a former member of the CCF, to speak in support of the motion that is before us.

I want to begin my remarks by saying that I just came from the human resources development committee where we had the President of the Treasury Board appearing before the committee. It is quite an interesting debate that is taking place to really examine the relationship of a department like HRDC with the treasury board and to try to figure out what rules are in place to ensure that there is financial accountability for the expenditure of public funds.

Just a couple of weeks ago we had the auditor general before that committee. He said:

I cannot help but express frustration with the way the government manages grants and contributions in general. Our audit work in various departments back to 1977 has identified persistent shortcomings, from problems with compliance with program authorities to weaknesses in program design, instances of poor controls, and insufficient measurements and reporting of performance. We continue to find many of the same kinds of problems each time we audit grant and contribution programs. The recent internal audit at HRDC again pointed to the same types of problems.

I think that is a real condemnation of the way the government has managed grants and contributions and the expenditure of public funds. Although this motion before us today is fairly narrow in scope, I think it does afford us the opportunity to examine in a public realm, and to bring to public light, the inner workings of government.

As my colleague from Winnipeg Centre said earlier, obviously the issue that we are grappling with is not just an issue of financial administration and financial management. It is also an issue of political management of grants and contributions in HRDC.

From the very beginning of this scandal, the members of the New Democratic Party have been very clear in calling for a full disclosure of information. In fact, the motion before us today is within that realm of trying to ensure that there are procedures in place to make sure that audits are tabled in a timely manner and that access to information is provided in a timely manner.

• (1205)

Looking back over the debate that has unfolded in the last more than two months, it is amazing that in the beginning weeks members of the opposition had a hell of a time even getting information about moneys that were spent in the transitional jobs funds, the Canada jobs funds and other human resource development programs. Member after member got up in question period and in committees, and in the media through access to information, tried to pull that information out from the government in order to get a sense of what the picture was really about.

I remember the government House leader, with his huge binder, slipping the pages to the Prime Minister so that information could be doled out little bit by little bit, as it suited the government. I thought to myself, what a travesty of the way to do public business.

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The issue of public disclosure, of transparency in government workings, of financial administration as an important part of a democratic institution, parliament, is of great concern to Canadians. Maybe a couple of years ago somebody would have looked at a motion like this and asked why we would want to debate it. But I think this motion and what is underneath it, the substance of what lies beneath it in terms of the very political management of these huge funds, is something that more and more Canadians are very concerned about.

I also want to say that the NDP from the very beginning has not only called for disclosure and a full audit by the auditor general, it has also made it very clear that from its point of view it supports public expenditure of funds on job development and job creation programs. It thinks that it is a wise and credible way in which to expend public money but the problem is it must be done in a way where the rules are clear, consistent and where there is transparency so that Canadians can be assured, no matter what region or city they are in, that the rules operating in their region are the same as the rules in another region, with the understanding of course that there are differences across the country.

One of the things that has really concerned me, representing a riding that has high unemployment and very high poverty levels, is that Vancouver East, my riding, did not qualify for transitional jobs funds apparently until we found out that these pockets of unemployment existed.

It has really been a very disturbing exercise to unravel and to deconstruct what has happened with the grants and contributions program and to learn that not only were audits and recommendations from the auditor general's office ignored for more than 20 years, but that the rules that have been put in place seem to be made up as the government goes along. They seem to be made up in a way that is convenient to suit the political fashion of the day, to dole out some money here or there and, interestingly enough, to very profitable large businesses.

Job development and job creation should be community based. We have the reality that of the 100 most profitable businesses in Canada, 49 of them received some kind of grant or contribution from the federal government. I think most Canadians would kind of scratch their head and ask, what is the priority there? I could think of many other instances where those funds could be better expended to create long term sustainable jobs in a local community.

The other matter that I want to mention briefly is, as we have now sort of uncovered what is going on in HRDC and recognize the magnitude of the problem and the scandal that has unfolded, what has not come out very strongly is the fact that the decisions by the Liberal government to cut back the civil service has really had an impact as well.

• (1210)

Just a couple of days ago I had a visit from the Financial Administration Offices Association that worked for the federal

government. It pointed out some quite alarming facts. These are folks who provide financial administration. They are the folks who within the system should be in a place to figure out when things are going wrong and to provide the necessary financial controls. What I found out from the association is that it has suffered major cutbacks of about one-third which has seriously impaired its ability to work effectively within various departments to make sure that the necessary financial controls are in place. That is just one small instance of how this picture has gone so terribly wrong.

I want to say in closing that the NDP supports the opposition motion that is before us today, but clearly we do not believe that it goes far enough. This is just the tip of the iceberg. We want to see timely audits that are made public. We want to make sure that MPs and parties are not running around in circles trying to get access to information. We do not want to see 10,000 pages of material dumped on members that it is very difficult to make any kind of sense of. This is about democratic disclosure. It is about ensuring that there is transparency in government operations.

More than that, it is also about political accountability of the minister and of the government to ensure that these public funds are expended in a way that is fair, open and consistent. The evidence shows us that this clearly has not been the case.

We will support the motion and we will also continue to bring forward other issues and questions about the management of funds in HRDC.

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Brandon—Souris.

It is with pleasure today that I speak on this votable supply motion which will effectively encourage and instil a greater sense of accountability in this place. I think it is extremely important that we should expect from governments at least the same level of accountability, and I would suggest an even greater level of financial accountability that we expect from private corporations. Private corporations and publicly traded corporations require through the auditing process a greater level of accountability in terms of their bookkeeping and the auditing of their statements than in fact this government seems to deem appropriate.

There has been a secular decline in the role of the private member since the late 1960s. Commensurate with that there has been an increased amount of power in the cabinet and ultimately in the PMO. As such, there has been a reduction in the level of parliamentary scrutiny over spending and again starting in the late 1960s.

I would argue it would benefit all members of the House and all Canadians, regardless of political affiliation, if we were to restore greater levels of parliamentary accountability over spending.

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There was a time when the estimates for departments were debated here in the House of Commons, scrutinized by committee of the whole. I would propose, as we did in the PC party's prebudget position last year, that we should restore a system which would provide the ability for parliament to actually scrutinize the estimates of a certain number of departments each year in the House of Commons without a time limit. This would ensure that first, the minister has to be very aware of what is going on within his or her department, but also that Canadians who are paying among the highest taxes, business and personal taxes, in the industrialized world, will be ensured that their money—again, it is their money, it is not the government's money—is being invested or spent in ways that are consistent with the goals and the aims of Canadian taxpayers.

• (1215)

Whether one agrees or disagrees with the nature of some of the government spending is immaterial in some ways. What is most important, and what the motion speaks to, is that whatever government spending occurs the government is held accountable through an audit process that is open, transparent and clear to Canadians on an ongoing basis to show that the government is maintaining taxpayer money in a way that is appropriate.

The PC Party is supporting the motion. The accountability issue is critical. We should not have to go through what we went through in recent weeks with the HRDC debacle in trying as members of parliament to get information that should have been available openly, transparently and instantly, and then having the dissemination of an immense amount of information in one day, to the extent that it almost became impossible to absorb and deal with it in an effective way. This kind of information should be available on an ongoing basis and all Canadians would benefit from it.

The motion addresses some of the issues from the perspective of parliamentary involvement in this very important area of spending, but we would like to see parliament move further in this direction. We would like to see the restoration of the right to debate the estimates in the House of Commons and in committee of the whole, which would provide greater levels of scrutiny over the spending of taxpayer money. This would also increase the role of the private member whether that member was sitting on the backbenches of the Liberal government or on the opposition benches. It would benefit all of us.

In these times of hyper competitiveness on the global stage when taxes are comparatively higher in Canada than they are for our trading partners, we must recognize it becomes doubly important that taxpayer money be spent in such a way that Canadians are aware of where the money is being spent. The government should take very seriously its fiduciary role in maintaining the proper levels of financial procedural control over these investments.

The motion goes in the right direction, but we should also reconsider the involvement of government departments. Prior to the HRDC scandal I was not aware of the degree to which the government was clearly involved in projects that it should not have been involved in. I was naive enough to believe that a lot of the pork barrelling and use of taxpayer money to buy support in an election had subsided. I thought we were in a new age and that all parties in the House recognized the importance of creating sound economic policies and environments to create economic growth.

Direct government involvement in investing in some of these businesses may have been considered less important or less effective than it would have been at one point. I saw some of the most egregious examples of government spending with HRDC. I think \$500,000 were given to Wal-Mart to build a store that it would have built anyway. I forget the exact sum but I believe \$300,000 were given to a company to move 30 kilometres from one member's riding to a minister's riding.

Some of these examples smack of the type of old style politics of which Canadians have been skeptical. They have lost faith in governments and institutions. Any structure we could put in place to ensure greater levels of procedural accountability and audit accountability would be very positive.

We in the PC Party are supporting the motion. We hope it is just one of a number of steps that we can take to create in a multi-partisan or non-partisan way greater levels of accountability and scrutiny over taxpayer money in parliament.

• (1220)

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this supply day motion from the party formerly known as Reform. In fact the motion should have been put forward. I heard a previous speaker from the New Democratic Party suggest that it was unnecessary to bring the issue before the House and that there were other priorities and other issues that we could be talking about which certainly had a greater resonance now with Canadians.

I disagree to a certain extent because this issue certainly does resonate with Canadians. It speaks to the specific management capabilities of the government of the country to control and put into place the necessary services required by Canadians. There has to be some control over that either in the House with parliamentarians or with administrators at the top of departments.

I am a fan of internal efficiency audits. If I can go back a bit into a previous lifetime when I was involved in municipal politics, my administrator of the day and I set up a complete process by which we would identify specific departments within that municipal entity and then put into place internal efficiency audits.

Why we did that was not to witch hunt. We did not suggest that we or outside auditors could do the job any better. We looked at the operations with different eyes, especially operations that have been in place for a long time. Whether it be municipal governments, provincial governments or the federal government, there is a tendency, if the bureaucracy has been in place for a while, to do the job by taking the path of least resistance.

The path of least resistance may not necessarily be the best way to attain the necessary efficiencies within the department. Bringing in outside eyes allows someone else to see how better the operation could run. It is not a witch hunt. It is simply a matter of listing the way the job is completed now, the numbers of steps that have to be taken for necessary approval processes and perhaps identifying ways of doing the job better.

That is what happens in the federal government with the auditor general's department. I am a fan of the auditor general. Mr. Desautels does his job extremely well. Members of his staff are extremely competent. When they go into a department they do not go in for a witch hunt. They go in simply to look at the operations and say what could be done better or what could be done in a different fashion.

A lot of what has been said today in the House has a tendency to focus on HRDC because it has been the audit that has been put forward with the most regularity over the last two months and has identified certain deficiencies within the particular department.

HRDC is just one of the departments within the federal bureaucracy. Let me give a little example. The auditor general, Mr. Desautels, appeared before the agriculture committee last week. Four specific departments of agriculture were there. Mr. Desautels and his staff went through the audit with us as members of that committee and highlighted some of the areas where we could improve upon the service delivery of those departments, whether it be on cost recovery, which we have talked about in the House at great length in terms of agriculture, or whether it be an accounting process which in fact would bring forward some deficiencies within the department.

When the committee questioned the departments it was given some commitments from those departmental heads, which I expected to have regardless. We had an audit. We showed them the deficiencies. They were responsible to put into place in their departments changes within their operations to try to comply with those recommendations. They told us as committee members, as parliamentarians, that they would comply with those recommendations.

• (1225)

I asked the auditor general a question and he said that he was very glad to hear that the departments would comply with those

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recommendations. I was a bit shocked because I assumed it was automatic that the departments would follow the auditor general's recommendations and make the necessary changes, but that is not the way the system works. There has to be a watchdog. There has to be a backstop. The parliamentarians in committee are the watchdog and the backstop.

I was pleased to be able to say to the departmental heads that we would follow up on it on a regular basis over the next 12 months and that we would insist their operations become more efficient. The auditor general certainly thanked us for the job we performed in the whole process.

The motion today speaks specifically to that requirement of parliamentarians. It simply says that when we have an internal efficiency audit we must make sure the audit is tabled with the committee within 30 days of its being presented to the department.

I cannot for the life of me understand why any member of the sitting government would not agree with that. It is their job as well as our job to make sure that internal audits which give efficiency reports are seen and are acted upon. To hide them or not to react to them is a dereliction of duty. It is an abdication of duty. It is necessary that those reports be tabled, so why would the government not agree on its own behalf to ensure proper timeline and the process?

When we did internal audits at the municipal level we made them available to the department to put forward its comments on the recommendations. We then took the audits, the recommendations from the auditor and the reports from the departmental heads on the way they would comply with the recommendations, to council and ultimately to the public. Those were done in a necessary process. The public demands and the public deserves to know exactly how services are being delivered and that the money is being expended in an efficient manner. That is all the motion speaks to.

All the motion says is that when we do an internal audit, which we want to have, with which we agree and which we say Mr. Desautels has the mandate, the right and the requirement to put forward to the public, we should ask him to bring it forward to the departments. That is fair ball. It should be taken to HRDC, to agriculture, to finance, to the treasury board, to defence or to any department he wants to, so that the departments can look at the recommendations, put their comments forward and in 30 days report the audit back to committee. Where better can we deal with an audit than publicly at a committee table? There is absolutely no reason the government should oppose that type of resolution.

My hon. colleague from Kings—Hants spoke eloquently with respect to the private-public requirements and to the fact that as a federal government we were the watchdogs of the public purse.

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That is the absolute essence of what the audit speaks to, the watchdog of the public purse.

If the government is not prepared to bring forward audits in a timely fashion then it is saying that we as parliamentarians should not be the watchdog of the public purse. That is wrong, absolutely wrong. I would ask hon. members to support the resolution as in fact our party will support it.

Let us talk just briefly about access to information.

• (1230)

Access to information has been a very important tool for us and members of other parties. We require access to information because the departments have not been forthcoming when we have asked for information with respect to audits and other information. I would prefer not to have to file another access to information request in my life in parliament. Then I could honestly say to my constituents and other constituents in this great country that there is openness and transparency.

Earlier it was said that access and transparency are probably the two most overworked words in parliament and I agree. We should be working toward correcting the inefficiencies and making sure it is open and accessible.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the two members of the party who spoke touched on it briefly. Perhaps they would explicitly comment on the response of the government today that this is a vexatious waste of time and that the motion we have brought forward is unnecessary. That totally ignores the fact, and I stress the word fact, that access to information requests are long overdue and are past the 30 day limit as required by law. Yet the Liberal government members are denying this.

I would like to have the member comment on the Liberal government's ineptness. I do not want to use that word but it is really mismanaging the financial affairs of the country. It is in continual denial.

Mr. Rick Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, the member for Elk Island is absolutely correct. I would like to indicate to the member for Elk Island that the members who spoke are from the Progressive Conservative Party rather than that other party, but we support the motion before us today.

I agree. To simply refer to this as vexatious speaks to the attitude of the government when it says because we question the ability for other members, opposition members as well as backbench members, to get information on a particular department that we are interfering with the operations of the government. That is not correct. We must make the government and bureaucrats accountable for public dollars that are spent.

To be perfectly honest, I am surprised that the Liberals will not stand up and support this. It is just good management. It is good management tactics that are done in any private or public corporation. Why the government would hide audits, hide access to those audits or not allow those audits to be available to members of parliament really disturbs me. It is saying that it will reward inefficient management, it will not question it and it will continue in the same fashion it has been doing over the last seven years.

The member for Elk Island is absolutely correct. The terms that have been used by the government should not be used with respect to this particular motion.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is again my honour to stand in the House to speak to a very good motion. The motion before us is an interesting one. It puts the government of the day into the dilemma of either voting for the motion which makes good sense, or voting against it which means that it wants to continue its policy of cover-up and not dealing honestly and openly with all of the facts on many financial issues that have come forward from time to time.

One of the best ways of providing accountability in government is to have openness. When some access to information requests that I put in were returned to me, we were dismayed that there was so much whiteout. In fact there were pages and pages of blank paper. The code on the blank paper was that it was personal and therefore could not be disclosed.

• (1235)

My contention was then, is now and shall continue to be that the instant it is public money, it should become public information. In other words when I as a member of parliament spend my office budget, I believe that office budget should be accessible to the public. The people of my riding should know how their member of parliament managed the money that was entrusted to him for managing his office.

The minister of a department must account properly not only for his or her own expenditures with respect to the manner in which the minister handles the ministry but also the expenditures within the ministry.

Mr. Speaker, I just noticed that my colleague has arrived so I now want to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Prince Albert. I did not want to advise you until he was physically here because I could easily speak for 20 minutes on this issue.

Many years ago when my wife and I were first married we moved to a little town in Alberta called Duchess. It had a population of some 200 people. It was a really good town and had a lot of fine people. One of my friends from the big city asked how I could stand to live in that little town with everyone knowing what I was doing. I shrugged my shoulders and said "I do not plan on

doing anything bad so it does not matter. Let them know what I am doing”.

In that small town I was the whole math department in the high school; I was the department head and the total staff. I did that job for three years in that delightful community. We have many fond memories. We are looking forward to going to a reunion of the class I had way back in the early sixties. It is hard to imagine that those youngsters are now in their forties and fifties. I will be really interested in picking up on that and seeing how they are.

I was accountable. When I walked down the street everybody knew the math teacher was walking from his home to the school. It was such a small town that I lived on the east edge of town and the school was on the outskirts of the west end and it took me five minutes to walk there. It was a wonderful time. It underlined my basic philosophy which I have learned from home which is that one deals openly and honestly with people.

I find it distressing that we have this motion today. First of all, as one of the Liberal members said, it should be redundant. He said it is redundant. I would change the wording simply to say that this motion should be redundant. We should not have to use a day of debate in the House of Commons to debate a motion which says that the government should obey the law.

We do not do that in any other case. We do not say to citizens that today we are going to have a debate and we want people to obey the law about murdering others, or on another day we are going to debate that people should obey the law and not steal from others. We do not revisit old bills, motions and government decisions in this way for other things.

There has been a blatant breach of treasury board guidelines and of decisions which are properly made and should be enforced. Here we are as the official opposition debating whether or not the government should actually obey the law, whether it should obey the rules. My very strong contention is that it should.

Some time ago treasury board put out a directive saying these internal documents which are basically report cards on the operation of the departments should be made public. It should not be necessary to file access to information requests in order to access them.

• (1240)

It is quite ironic that the government will make that decision. It will have a big fanfare when announcing that decision and will say to the people of Canada “Look how wonderful and accountable we are. Here we are offering information”. That is wonderful. It makes a great press release. It makes a great press conference. But what happens when it comes time to release the document? It is not released. The government just does not do it, hence the motion today. Why does the government not insist that the departments follow treasury board guidelines? One of them is being breached.

Supply

To make matters worse, when some member of the public, or in our case a member of the official opposition, files an access to information request to get the information that should be public anyway, we are stonewalled. We hit a wall. We know one thing that happens is as soon as such a request goes in, there is a heads up to the minister. We know that. The very first response is “Get the ministerial staff informed. The minister may have to answer questions because the official opposition or some other member of the opposition is raising a question so we had better make sure that we have our spin doctors out”.

It is absolutely ludicrous that the government is much more interested in putting a spin on the facts than simply revealing and dealing with the facts. It is a contradiction of the whole concept of accountability. It basically says that the government wants the people to believe what they hope would be true instead of the government saying it would like the people to know what is true. There is a vast difference in those two concepts. The government often says, “We are so open, look at this directive”. As I said, it looks good on the surface but it would look so much better if it were actually practised.

To paraphrase the HRDC minister, on numerous occasions she has said “We are so wonderful, we released this request for access to information on the HRDC internal audit before it was requested”. To be very blunt, that was not true. We got a copy of a memo that had been doctored. We cannot prove that it was but the suspicions are surely there because the document speaks of the date of reference and says “We received your request on” and I think it was January 23 or January 22, but the date of the memo is January 21. It was the day before. They forgot to change the date on top when they issued the public document.

That, to me, is evidence of a cover-up. What they are saying is “Let us quickly produce a document that proves our case”. Using a word processor they changed one date but forgot to change the date at the top. As a result they were speaking of the next day in the past tense. One has to be psychic to do that or guilty of forging a document. It is part of the cover-up.

The government wants people to believe that it is honest, open and accountable and all that. We want it to be and that is what today’s motion is all about.

Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would the member who just spoke agree that treasury board has in place a directive that all audits once completed are released immediately? Also treasury board went even further and said it would review all the internal audit procedures and report to the House by June 2000 to make the policy even more effective and enforceable.

Surely the member will agree that the very clear intention of the government is to make internal audits available as soon as they are

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completed. Members opposite do not have to wait even for 15 days or go to the Access to Information Act.

• (1245)

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, the member has asked if I would not agree that the government has this in place. The answer is, yes, to the best of my knowledge it does.

The distressing part is that it has had it in place for some four or five years. Treasury board policies announced in a May 25, 1994 letter of decision read in part:

To simplify the process for acquiring copies of reports, and to deliver on the government's commitment for more openness, the policy requires that departments make the final version of review reports, including internal audit and evaluation reports. . . accessible to the public, without requiring a formal access request.

That is right from the letter of decision dated May 26, 1994. It has been in place for six years and the government is not doing it.

The member asked if I would not agree that the government has it as part of its policy. Yes, I agree that it is part of its policy. The motion today is that the government do it. That is it, do it. Do it, do not just say it.

Mr. Derrek Konrad (Prince Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for sharing his time. It should be noted that all speakers from the Alliance party will be sharing their time from now on.

It was interesting to hear my colleague talk about being accountable. He lived in a small town that took five minutes to walk across. I lived in a town so small that if I looked out one window of the house I was on the east side of town and if I looked out the other window I was on the west side of town. People were really accountable there.

We are in the opening days of the 21st century. This is a century which has been characterized as the information age, yet we are in the House talking about how to get information out of the government.

People would think that rather than being in the information age we were in the days prior to the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg, for all the response we see to access to information requests and audits which are meant to be released as a matter of policy.

To quote from the 1998-99 annual report of the information commissioner:

As early as 1986, the Justice Committee reviewed the operation of the access law and unanimously recommended wholesale changes to strengthen it and keep it current with technological changes. No government since has had the motivation to implement the

suggested changes and address, through law, the persistence of a culture of secrecy in the federal bureaucracy.

That was written in 1986 and quoted by the information commissioner in the 1998-99 report.

Nothing has changed. The official opposition currently has 29 requests for information filed with human resources development which are overdue. Of those 29 HRD requests, 8 are for departmental audits, which are supposed to be public information.

As I said earlier, this is the new millennium, the information age. The government's response times are prehistoric. They are stone age. There is no information forthcoming from the government.

Quoting from the same report of the information commissioner, this statement is still relevant today: "Frustration over weaknesses in the law has recently spilled over to members of parliament from all stripes in the House of Commons".

That is why we are here today having this debate in the House. No one, not members of political parties, nor people in the news media, nor private citizens, nor researchers should have to request departmental audits under the Access to Information Act, and yet we find that it has become necessary to make such requests.

Even more unconscionable is the fact that the department is defying treasury board directives which require compliance within 30 days of acknowledging the request.

We only have to read the treasury board's words in a letter of decision dated May 26, 1999, which has been referred to before. Let us put it on the record again, so that anyone interested knows what was said:

To simplify the process for acquiring copies of reports, and to deliver on the government's commitment for more openness, the policy requires that departments make the final version of review reports, including internal audit and evaluation reports. . . accessible to the public, without requiring a formal access request.

• (1250)

Those are fine words, but actions speak louder than words, as the hon. member for Elk Island stated. If the government had lived up to its stated ideals, this supply day motion aimed at ordering the government to open up its information processes would not be necessary.

The public is probably at home asking themselves why there is a log-jam in responding to requests for information from the government. They are asking, are there legitimate reasons of national security? Or, are there problems with protecting vulnerable persons from exposure? Only if we subscribe to the view that it is in the

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national interest to protect ministers from public scrutiny, or if there are questions about the management of taxpayer dollars that might embarrass the government. All of the legitimate issues could be dealt with in an expeditious manner.

On March 20 the information commissioner testified before the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development. In his testimony he stated the reasons for this huge backlog at HRDC. I quote from his testimony:

With respect to the audit reports, there has been a slowdown, but the slowdown is government-wide, and the reason for that is that as a result of the HRDC experience, . . . all audits now go through an additional process by Treasury Board and the Privy Council. What has happened is that Treasury Board and the Privy Council Office want to know what audits have been requested, whether they contain bad news, and what the official media line will be.

This is a regressive attitude for the government to take. It is not in the people's interest to have government manage bad news to avoid accounting for it. Ottawa is spin city for this Liberal administration when it comes to the release of information vital to holding it responsible for its actions. The current attitude has always been a major concern of the information commissioner.

In his recent testimony the information commissioner added "The communication concerns of the government are allowed to take precedence over the public's right to timely access to information".

Despite ongoing concerns by the commissioner, it appears that HRDC had a fair track record when it came to the release of public information until recently. Now it is because of HRDC's intransigence that we are debating the issue.

Someone from another planet may not know why this is so, but in case there are other aliens who are listening, other than federal Liberals who have not figured it out, it can be summed up in three words: billion dollar boondoggle. That is the reason. That is a lot of taxpayer money and it is in question. Every time another audit or response to an ATI request is released there is more bad news for the government.

Being true to their roots, the Liberals are engaging in spin sessions to manage the message, when what they should be doing is reviewing the need for the programs and how to properly manage and account for them.

Information is crucial to accountability. If this government wanted to be truly accountable it would welcome scrutiny to improve its stewardship of the public credit card. And it is a credit card, because we do not have any money in the bank.

The information commissioner has rightly stated that the right of access is one of the cornerstones of our democratic process and one of the best tools available to ensure responsible government.

If the Liberals agree with that statement—and I bet they do privately, never mind what they do publicly—they should cast their ballot in favour of the supply day motion proposed by the Canadian Alliance in the name of the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

It should be stated again that this is no trivial matter which is under consideration today. We could consider the list of outstanding audits and ATIs filed by the official opposition to get an idea of it. Human resources development is late in replying to five departmental audits which should be public information according to treasury board guidelines. All five are 45 days overdue.

There are outstanding ATI requests with agriculture and agri-food, and Canada Customs and Revenue, which asked for a 30 day extension on March 9, I suppose for the purpose of figuring out how to respond to the bad news included within the response.

• (1255)

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation requested an undefined extension due to third party consultations. We do not need much imagination to figure out who the third party was. Citizenship and immigration asked for a 90 day extension. Then there is fisheries and oceans. Some audits received 30 day extensions requested for others. Then there is the National Capital Commission.

When the members opposite talk about open and accountable government, they certainly are not looking at the facts, they are looking at the spin. That is not acceptable.

I am not sure which report of the auditor general it was in, but there was an interesting quote. I cannot remember how it went, but it concerned a Tammany Hall organizer from the United States, and we all know what that is about. He said something like "If you don't have to speak, grunt. If you don't have to grunt, nod. If you don't have to nod, wink". I am not saying that is an exact quote, but that is the exact meaning. That has been the attitude of the government when it comes to releasing information. A wink and a nod is all we get, along with a few promises and the questions "Why don't you believe us? Why don't you like us?" The answer is obvious.

Mr. Lou Sekora (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mississauga South.

I am pleased to address the House today on this opposition motion. I begin by expressing my disappointment that members of the opposition do not understand and appreciate what the Government of Canada is doing for all Canadians. Maybe they do not want to understand for political reasons.

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I doubt that all members have taken the time to read the document tabled in the House last Thursday by the President of the Treasury Board, along with 84 reports on plans and priorities for all federal departments and agencies. It is even more unlikely that they have taken the time to reflect on the actions and accomplishments of the government.

I do not intend to speak today about the excellent 2000-01 budget of the Minister of Finance; however, there are a few things I must mention. A few years ago, when the government gained power, there was a \$43 billion deficit. The debt load was at an all-time high of some \$490 billion. We also took over at a time when unemployment was very high, around 11.8%. It is now at a 30 year low of around 6.5%.

A lot of money in this budget was directed to the RCMP, which very badly needs it across Canada. It is a good budget. I talked to Deputy Commissioner Watt who said that the budget was great and much appreciated.

The number one issue was medical. Health and welfare needed more money. We gave \$2.5 billion in the budget. Our health minister has met with all health ministers from across Canada to talk about more money and the need to modernize the system.

With respect to the health system, in my community, in British Columbia, there are hospitals every four or five miles which have a lot of modern, sophisticated equipment. I suggest that some of the equipment which is only being used four or five hours a day, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., could be used 16 hours a day, until midnight, for people who get off work in the evening. They would be able to get their medical attention, their scan or whatever, at that time. There has been a lot of progress since we took over as far as the government is concerned.

• (1300)

I know the Minister of Health wants to do the right thing with the provinces and give them more money for health. But we must work together. There was a very good comment by the health minister of British Columbia, Michael Farnworth. He mentioned the fact that it is going to take time and that it cannot be done in a day. He said that we must work together. I think that is a very fair comment. If everybody put their political stripes aside as far as the provinces are concerned and work with the health minister, I am sure we could accomplish a lot. I am sure there would be more money in the budget.

I want to bring to the House's attention a document from my colleague, the President of the Treasury Board, entitled "Results for Canadians: A Management Framework for the Government of Canada". This document sets out a program of change providing long term direction for enhancing management of the government's affairs.

Since 1997 the government has been working hard to build a higher quality of life for all Canadians. We must constantly work toward improving our policies, programs and the framework governing the government's activities.

We have a solid foundation on which to build our efforts to modernize management within government. This foundation will also help all departments to focus on citizens, to draw upon values, to build on results and to spend responsibly.

Canadians know and appreciate that their government is operating from sound values, is results oriented and that it is continuing its sound approach to spending. There is a philosophy that goes along with the management framework for the Government of Canada. It is an operating philosophy that requires effort and control but a control that is achieved through instruments that encourage initiative and creativity by the departments.

Few people are aware that the Treasury Board Secretariat has been working with the departments and agencies since last summer to complete its review of the policy on transfer payments and to strengthen the internal audit function.

The purpose of an internal audit function is, among other things, to help identify shortcomings, to learn from those shortcomings and to make the necessary changes. One of the priorities of the Government of Canada is to regularly review its spending to ensure the responsible use of taxpayer's money in terms of results and values. One thing is certain with this framework and this philosophy. Canadians can continue to enjoy one of the best standards of living in the world.

The government has introduced the millennium fund. I can tell the House that in my community many applications have been filed and fulfilled. Those applications are very helpful to our community in building our communities, by bringing people together and by employing people.

Heritage Square submitted an application under the millennium fund for \$84,000. It is outside my riding, however, I was mayor there for many years. The Reform member whose riding this is in refused to endorse the application so I endorsed it.

There was another application submitted for \$348,000. This was also in a Reform riding. I approved it and they received the grant. This project looks after 1,800 kids. It is in a great area in Mallardville where all the residents get together with people from other communities. This facility looks after the community. When I was the mayor we spent \$5 million in enlarging it and even now it is much too small. Every room is filled and they are looking for more space. These are things that are happening. These are things that our government is doing. I am sorry I referred to the party across from us as Reform because it has been changed to Alliance. They had a CCRAP Party and a few other things, so really we cannot tell what it really is.

Supply

• (1305)

Our public works minister put a vote to the House related to all municipalities getting grants in lieu of taxes for government buildings. Guess what? The Reform Party voted against it. It voted against the municipalities receiving grants for the communities. I am just wondering what side of the fence Reformers are really on. Do they support the municipalities that they represent? Do they really support the ridings that they represent, or do they really represent themselves and nobody else?

I have been a politician for going on 28 years. I was in municipal politics for 25 years. I am appalled at some of the comments that I have heard. When I came to Ottawa, some of the things I saw were frightening. I wish that every mayor and every council member in Canada would tune in and listen to the dismal performance of the Reform Party as far as the—

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Speaker of the House ruled just a little over a week ago that the name of our party is now Canadian Alliance. When people were misusing it, that ruling was reaffirmed and requested. Here we have a member who somehow does not have the ability to even learn two words. I would like to have him repeat three times after me: Canadian Alliance, Canadian Alliance, Canadian Alliance.

The Deputy Speaker: All hon. members try to get it right and I know the hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam will make every effort to get the name of the Canadian Alliance Party correct.

Mr. Lou Sekora: Mr. Speaker, it looks at this particular time that its name is being challenged in court. I do not know what its name will be when it goes to the Supreme Court of Canada. The leader of the Reform Party lived at Stornoway for many years. He said he would never live there and that he would open up a bingo hall in there. It was to become a bingo hall. I wonder how many times a week the party plays bingo in there. Another time—

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This individual is now so far away from the motion of the day that there is no question he is irrelevant, so please call him on it.

The Deputy Speaker: I can see that when we get into debates on party names we do tend to get away from the motion. The hon. member I know will address his remarks to the motion.

Mr. Lou Sekora: Mr. Speaker, certainly in my community there have been a lot of HRDC grants. I can assure the House that they are well accepted and well represented in my riding. There are wheelchair cases, handicapped people and kids who need parks in my community. There are many, many things that can be done in

my community. I think it is a great place to spend our money and a great accomplishment for our communities.

The Canadian Alliance Party members do not realize that. They do not believe in it. They do not believe in taking HRDC money, outside of a few of them maybe who write letters, like I have on my file, stating how good it is for their ridings once they get the money. But I do not believe they endorse it, outside of a latecomer's letter that will arrive about six months later stating how good it is for communities after they wake up and spend some time in their ridings.

Those are things that I stand for and this is what our government stands for. I hope that there will never come a day when we will lose that identity to be part of all governments across Canada, provincial, municipal and otherwise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I took some notes in preparing questions for my Liberal colleague from British Columbia. He said from the outset that he was disappointed to see that opposition parties did not understand all the things that this good Liberal government is doing for his fellow citizens.

• (1310)

This government created a big mess in health care services across the country. This government made it harder to qualify for employment insurance, with the result that barely 58% of contributors to the employment insurance fund can qualify, and most do not even have access to social assistance.

This same government created a scandal the likes of which we have never seen under the Progressive Conservative Party, a scandal that could total anywhere from one to three billion dollars.

The member said that his government was spending in a reasonable manner. Is it reasonable to spend in the Prime Minister's riding to help the Placeteco plant, when HRDC paid out \$1.2 million, of which more than \$1 million was transferred directly from HDRC to the National Bank to repay a loan, or else the company would have gone bankrupt? As for the other \$200,000, we do not even know where it went, to whom it was paid.

Is this the member's idea of spending in a reasonable manner? I challenge the Liberal member to give me three examples where, in the past seven years, his government acted reasonably. Let him quickly give me three examples.

[*English*]

Mr. Lou Sekora: Mr. Speaker, the one thing that we have been very responsible for is health care, not like the Bloc across the way.

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It was with great dissatisfaction that I found out that Quebec did not spend the money which was given to it by the federal government on health care. If the money has not gone to health care, a report card must be given to the federal government explaining where every dollar went. Quebec has some \$8 billion from years ago that it did not spend on health. If it has a problem with health care maybe it should dig into that money. It is there for health care. British Columbia has \$471 million, Alberta has millions of dollars, and I can go on.

I would like to ask the Bloc members why they are not here singing "O Canada" with us every Wednesday? How come it does not feel a part of Canada although it is? Is there something wrong with being a part of Canada?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I hope that you understood the question I put to the member. I asked him to give me three examples, not to sing the national anthem. I made no mention of the parties of Mike Harris or Lucien Bouchard. I want him to give us three examples.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe that what we have here is an argument, not a point of order. The hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam.

[*English*]

Mr. Lou Sekora: Mr. Speaker, the clarity bill was one and certainly health care was another. I could go on for three-quarters of hour.

I came here two years ago. Every Wednesday all members of the House get together and sing "O Canada". We put our political stripes aside and everything else. Does the Bloc join us? No. It does not want to be part of Canada. I wonder when that is going to cease and it becomes a party that helps the government? It seems to resent us calling it to come aboard. It wants to stay away from here, especially when the national anthem is sung. They have some other kind of song to sing and nobody wants to listen.

The fact is all the money across in the provinces is for health care.

• (1315)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the House's indulgence, I want to congratulate the member for Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière on the success of his private member's motion on shipbuilding. I know he has been working very hard on that and it is always good to see a private member have success in this place. It makes us all feel some measure of achievement.

I also seek the indulgence of the House to welcome, on behalf of the House, the Forum for Young Canadians who are here again this

week. As members know, these are high school students from right across our country who have come to observe parliament. Today I have two guests in the lobby, Derek Snyder from your riding of Kingston, Mr. Speaker, and John Bowden from my riding of Mississauga, who are here to observe the process. I know they will have a good time learning about our government.

Today is a supply day, which means that an opposition party, in this case, the Canadian Alliance, has the opportunity to table in the House a motion for debate by the House.

I must admit that when I saw the motion I had some difficulty with the flow of it and understanding it. For the edification of those who may not have seen the motion, I will take the opportunity to put the motion forward again. It says:

That an Order of the House do issue for all departmental audit reports to be tabled within 15 days of their completion and permanently referred to the appropriate standing committees, that audit reports since January 1, 1999, be tabled within 15 days after the adoption of this motion, and that all audit reports requested under the Access to Information Act be tabled forthwith.

It is a complex motion. There are some elements in it that deal with audit reports, on which I will make some comments. I will also comment on the part about referring information or additional responsibilities to committees. The last thing I hope to comment on are some of the rules in the Access to Information Act.

As an overriding statement, all members will fully appreciate that on behalf of the people of Canada, the Parliament of Canada and the government departments of Canada work to the very best of their ability to ensure that the best interests of Canadians are represented and protected.

It is so very important that we work every day on the integrity and credibility of this institution. The motion raises an important issue. I am not sure whether the motion hits the target squarely but I think the motion is important in terms of its subject matter. It is important for us to reassure Canadians that there are rules and policies in place that give us and Canadians the tools to ensure that credibility, integrity and the best interests of Canadians is kept in mind in this place.

The motion generally calls for audits to be referred to standing committees for review. I want to advise the House that internal audits are released by departments to the public domain immediately upon their completion. This has been the policy of the Treasury Board since 1995. This is not a reaction. This has been our policy since 1995. With regard to accessibility to that information, to internal audits, it is a very important part of the policy. The policy states:

Departments should make these review reports, or summaries of them, accessible to the public in both official languages by making use of electronic public networks, timely press releases to inform the public of the results, or by placing them in departmental libraries.

In other words, the policy does in fact direct itself specifically to the concerns raised in the motion, and it has been in place since 1995.

The policy also states that “Completed internal audits are available for review by every interested Canadian immediately”. Therefore, there is no need for some formal process to make that happen because it is already happening.

It continues to say:

Further, there is no need to make access to information requests for completed internal audits.

The motion calls for that and yet it is already in place.

The issue of access to information requests does come up with regard to other internal audits that may not have been completed or other reports that have been prepared by a department but not released. These audits or other internal departmental material may be subject to access to information requests. Indeed, that is in place and it is done.

• (1320)

Canadians should be very assured that mechanisms are now in place to safeguard the interests of Canadians. The principles that guide us, in terms of right of access, are: first, that government information should be available to the public; second, that necessary exemptions to the right of access should be limited and specific; and, third, that decisions on the disclosure of government information should be reviewed independently of government. That is directly contrary to a part of the motion which asks committees to look at this.

Knowing the mover of this motion, the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill, HRDC has been of particular interest to her. I do not know whether there was information that prompted her to take some interest in this department through access to information or whether it was an audit report that was the subject of the information.

When the HRDC officials appeared at a press conference shortly after this issue broached the House, the officials described a process whereby HRDC personnel visited over 400 locations where applicants had received funds from HRDC programs and projects. They described those visits as look-see visits. They looked at a file or something else and they had what was described as a bingo chart on which they ticked off what they saw and what they did not see. As a result of that, some 37 files showed deficiencies. In a nutshell, that is what happened.

All of a sudden it comes out that there is this damning audit report which indicates that money has been misappropriated, misused or mismanaged by applicants or someone else. In the first instance, this motion is talking about audits. I would suggest to the House that what kicked off this whole HRDC question had nothing

Supply

to do with an audit. It concerned information that was assembled by HRDC personnel through visits but which did not constitute an audit.

As a chartered accountant, I have been involved in the public auditing process. I was also in charge of an internal audit department during my corporate life. I know what is involved in planning, preparing and executing an internal audit. What was done by HRDC with regard to those 37 files was not an audit or an internal audit by any definition. I would challenge any member to find anybody in the industry to suggest otherwise.

The proof was in the pudding when the auditors were subsequently sent out to these 37 locations to follow up on the points raised by the visits from those HRDC personnel. In all the cases—and I believe 34 of the cases are now complete—every single item raised as being a deficiency in the file was cleared because they asked the questions or looked for the documents. If an audit had been done, those questions would have been asked, the search would have been conducted and they would have been cleared even before the original visit was completed.

Admittedly, the issue here is the credibility and the accountability of the government and parliament to the people. I believe that the provisions and the tools are in place for this to happen. I also believe it would be inappropriate to suggest that we need to have more of the operating information from departments come through the House and go to our committees. Our committees are not trained to do this and they would be obligated to actually review them and to do reports. Committees already have the opportunity. They are the masters of their own agenda. They can call for this information if they want to look at it. They can make the decision themselves whether or not it is important to review. I do not believe that all reports should have reviews. I believe that only those reports that merit review by a committee should be reviewed. That is contrary to what is prescribed in this motion. As a consequence, I will not be supporting the motion.

• (1325)

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would have loved to have got my debating claws on the previous member who spoke, but I guess that opportunity slipped me by.

I listened intently to the speech of the member who just spoke. I was absolutely amazed to hear him declare that he was voting against the motion. I had read the motion he would have seen that is almost exactly what are presently Treasury Board guidelines. Treasury Board said that these internal audits and other internal reports were to be released within 30 days. The motion, if it were amended, would say that we should release them within 30 days.

How can the hon. member possibly stand in this place and say that he will vote against the motion that we are putting forward that

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will simply underline the importance of doing what the Treasury Board guidelines say? He is saying “No. I’m going to vote against it. I don’t agree with that”.

What does he propose in its place? Does he propose to hide them forever? We have all these audit reports, which are long overdue, and they are not available. We are not getting them through access to information. Does he want to continue to hide it? If he votes against this motion does he have an alternate proposal?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, as I outlined in my speech, the rules of Treasury Board are already in place. They require that internal audits are released by departments into the public domain immediately upon their completion. That cannot be clearer.

The member asked directly why I would not be voting for the motion. I will repeat directly why I will not be voting for the motion. First, it is very poorly worded and, in particular, it requires that all these audits from all departments at all times, everything that has ever been done, somehow be magically referred permanently to committees which would be responsible for reviewing them. It would simply tie parliament up totally and not put the priorities of the nation ahead of ordinary day to day work.

The motion is flawed not only in its language but also in its intent.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have to take some umbrage with the latter comment by the hon. member opposite, who I have the greatest respect for and who I think has the highest degree of integrity.

However, we have found, throughout this entire affair that has been going on now for some months, that there have been incredible efforts undertaken by his government to not only deny that the problem existed but to then point an accusatory finger across the way at the opposition.

It would be ludicrous for me to suggest that there was not a political element to all this. However, when it comes down to the facts of the case that are before the Canadian public, we have the auditor general himself saying that 85% of the programs were flawed in one form or another. We know that when we talk about flaws we are discussing things like companies getting more money than they applied for, companies applying for money under numbered companies and then did not set up the company in the way that they were supposed to or create the jobs that they were supposed to. Therefore, there is a very serious undertone to the motion that is before the House.

The hon. member should not simply shrug his shoulders and say that there is a process in place that is doing this work. He should admit that the problem is there. This motion is worded in such a

way as to perhaps give Canadians some confidence that this problem will be dealt with in a very open and transparent way, which is again just a word when it comes to this government and is not in fact the practice.

I think Canadians would like to see—and it applies to opposition members as well—the government stand before the Canadian public and say that it was wrong, that it made a mistake and that maybe, based on the information it had at the time, it did something that it would have done differently in retrospect. Canadians have now come to expect that from the government.

Will the member please elucidate to us why it is that the government is not prepared to admit that the problem is there and that it will do something in a substantive way to give Canadians confidence in the future about this?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his kind comments and his words of encouragement.

• (1330)

First of all, the member will readily admit that when the HRDC issue came up, whether it was \$3 billion or \$1 billion or whether it was mismanaged by the government or the applicants, a lot of politics was being played. That is unfortunate because it is at the expense of the interests of Canadians.

Canadians have a right to know the facts. The facts are that of the original 37 files in the HRDC matter which is what the member is referring to, 34 have been completed. It was found that none of the deficiencies in the files were valid and all of the items were cleared.

The motion calls for all audit reports to go to committee. I will not be supporting this. I am sure the member would not support it on that basis. Certainly the House has the right to send audits to committee, but all audits would just grind parliament to a halt.

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to the comments made by the Liberal member. I am a little concerned because I get the impression members such as the member for Mississauga South do not realize the concern that Canadians have.

Canadians have watched over a period of time what they consider to be democracy and accountability in government diminishing. We have seen how a government has taken authority away from this place, the Parliament of Canada, and has placed it in the courts of the land and in the orders in council, the executive branch of government. We have seen how the executive branch of government, which is really a handful of individuals hand picked by the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister himself, is running the country. This motion has brought to our attention the fact that not

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only is it running the country, making the decisions and ignoring parliament, but it is also refusing to share information which is legally available to Canadians.

I think there was some misinformation about the motion. I am going to read it just so Canadians know exactly what the motion is about:

That an Order of the House do issue for all departmental audit reports to be tabled within 15 days of their completion and permanently referred to the appropriate standing committees, that audit reports since January 1, 1999, be tabled within 15 days after the adoption of this motion, and that all audit reports requested under the Access to Information Act be tabled forthwith.

All the motion is trying to do is to make information that is to be public made public through the committee process.

The hon. member for Mississauga South was quite right. This motion really should not be needed because treasury board has policies under which it is to operate. I will read from a memo from André Robert, the acting director of internal audit division of Treasury Board Secretariat. His memo is quite specific as to what the requirements under ATIP, access to information, are:

With regard to the issue of accessibility under ATIP as raised in the first paragraph of page two of my February 14 memo, I would like to clarify that once such reports are completed, they are public documents. This means that when completed, they should be accessible to the public without requiring a formal request under ATIP.

The memo is very clear. And, Mr. Speaker, I am sharing my time.

Requests for "draft material" of any kind should be dealt with through the normal ATIP process. Your departmental ATIP co-ordinator is familiar with these matters and requests received for draft reports should be referred to your departmental ATIP co-ordinator for appropriate action.

As a final point, I would ask that you please disregard my previous request to fax a copy—

It is very clear from this memo that the policy is in place. The problem and the reason this motion is before the House is that the government is completely ignoring the policy that is on the government books.

• (1335)

That policy is prohibiting Canadians from accessing information they are entitled to. It is their money that is being used. This policy has been in place for a period of time and everybody on the government side is aware of it, yet we have access requests for audits that we know are completed which are 45 days overdue.

Mr. Dennis J. Mills: You do not need access. We gave you the file.

Ms. Val Meredith: Precisely. A member on the opposite side says we do not need access. Then why are the audits not available to us if we do not need access to information? The truth of the

matter is that the government is withholding this information. Why?

The member for Mississauga South claims that the government was ensuring its credibility, its integrity and its accountability. He did not use the word transparency because he could not. If this is true, then why do we have to go through the access to information process to get audits that are supposed to be available without an access request?

It is because the government is hiding information and one has to ask why. It is to control the timing of the release of the information. The government wants to withhold this information until the summer recess when we are not sitting here and cannot draw the public's attention to the mismanagement of government departments. Or perhaps it is withholding this information until after the next federal election so the Liberal members do not have to hold themselves accountable to the electorate during that election. The government is controlling the timing by refusing to release these audit documents.

Most important is that the government is breaking its own policies. It is breaking the policies and the established process of releasing government audits. It is the government that is to rule under the law but it seems to have no hesitation to break it whenever it is appropriate to do so.

The member for Mississauga South commented that it was information that came up, that perhaps it was not an audit at all that raised this concern in the Department of Human Resources Development. He also said that it was one audit.

It is not one audit. Canadians are smart enough to know that it is not one audit we are talking about. It is a number of audits, and it is a number of audits that we cannot get our hands on. And it is not just one department. A number of departments other than human resources development hand out grants and subsidies to individuals and corporations in this country. It is their audits as well.

Our job in opposition is to hold the government accountable for spending the good hardearned tax dollars of the Canadian public. The government does not seem to be responsible or really care whether it is held accountable or whether the integrity of government is protected.

We in opposition feel that it is important for the government to share information. Government departments should be available to the public for scrutiny. It is very important that a government that places so much control and power with the executive branch show itself to be transparent so the Canadian public can have some degree of confidence that the government is doing what is in the best interests of the Canadian population.

Everything we have seen in the past three months in the House would indicate a number of things, that the government is contemptuous of the Canadian taxpayer, the government has no

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intention of being transparent and its integrity is in question. The government has to decide whether it is going to continue down the path of withholding and controlling information or whether it is going to offer to the Canadian public information so it can be held to account for how it spends the tax dollars that are provided to it to provide programming for Canadians.

I ask the government members if they intend to uphold the laws of the land or if they feel they are above the laws of the land.

• (1340)

Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Broadview—Greenwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the member from British Columbia that all of us on this side of the House and in government understand it is the opposition's duty and responsibility to hold us accountable. Many of us have been in opposition and we know what that role is. We do not challenge that role.

We also would say that we do not know of a business or a government in Canada, even this government, that has not made mistakes. There will always be mistakes. That is the way life is. We are not proud of mistakes, but we will admit there are some mistakes.

It is absolutely shameful that the members of the Canadian Alliance try to create the illusion that somehow \$1 billion sort of vanished when—

Mr. Leon E. Benoit: No, the government is mismanaging \$13 billion.

Mr. Dennis J. Mills: Mr. Speaker, now the members opposite want to create the illusion it was \$3 billion that just vanished.

Mr. Leon E. Benoit: No, it was \$13 billion.

Mr. Dennis J. Mills: Mr. Speaker, most Canadians realize that every one of those Canadian taxpayers' dollars went for projects in every single riding across Canada for people in our communities who tend to be most in need.

I say with respect to the member, we have to be transparent. We put 10,000 pages of documents out there and I cannot believe that members opposite have read all of those documents.

The point I want to make is that whether we are on the government side or the opposition side, we are all here to look out for those people in the country who are most in need. The people who are most in need tend to be those clients of HRDC. I respectfully ask the member, why would she cast aspersions on 99.9% of those dollars that go to good causes for children at risk, for seniors, for people with disabilities? Why would the member or her party do that when essentially her argument is with those few files where there have been honest, human mistakes?

Ms. Val Meredith: Mr. Speaker, I thought I made it quite clear that HRDC is only one department and that the problems do not sit just with one department.

When we talk about \$1 billion, one audit of \$1 billion worth of projects showed very high instances of non-compliance, of poor management.

When the hon. member talks about those most in need benefiting from this government largesse, we know that is absolutely misrepresenting the facts. The Liberals cannot tell me that the government in helping Amtrak, the U.S. passenger rail service, is helping those most in need, that Bombardier, a very large international corporation which has 32 plants around the world is in dire need, that they are those most in need.

The government member is misrepresenting to Canadians where all the money is going. It is not just HRDC. It is EDC, it is DIAND, it is industry, it is HRDC. The taxpayers' money goes to many different areas in government spending.

All we ask in the motion is that the internal audits done on how the government is spending taxpayers' money be made public and available to the opposition and to Joe Blow citizen so that we can hold the government accountable and be able to decide whether the government is spending our money wisely.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a brief question, because I know that there is not much time left.

In the first part of her speech explaining the reasons for the motion, the member said that more transparency was necessary. She had harsh words for the way the federal government now operates.

I agree with her, in that the Prime Minister of Canada is not elected by the voters of Canada. Yet the Prime Minister appoints judges and senators. Through his executive power, the Prime Minister has almost complete authority.

Could the member tell whether she and her party agree that reform is in order on this point?

[*English*]

Ms. Val Meredith: Mr. Speaker, this party agrees with the need for some reformation, some changes in how parliament operates and in how the patronage system needs to be corrected.

The concern is not just about the appointments. The concern is about how the government is bringing legislation to the House that removes power from the House and places it with the executive branch of government. That has to stop.

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Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the people of Surrey Central to support my colleagues in the official opposition on our supply day motion which reads as follows:

That an Order of the House do issue for all departmental audit reports to be tabled within 15 days of their completion and permanently referred to the appropriate standing committees, that audit reports since January 1, 1999, be tabled within 15 days after the adoption of this motion, and that all audit reports requested under the Access to Information Act be tabled forthwith.

We are recommending these actions because we are finding that the government is being less than forthcoming with respect to reporting and providing information to Canadians on how our tax dollars are spent.

The motion we are debating today simply asks this weak Liberal government to reaffirm its own regulations. The wording of the motion is the same as the regulations of the treasury board and the privy council office. That means if anyone is opposing the motion, he or she is opposing the government's own regulations.

A very serious and disturbing point has recently come to light in terms of how the government is governing our nation. All Canadians respect the fact that certain information is not made public in order to protect our national security. That is okay. Other information may be kept secret in order to ensure fairness in competition in certain cases, but for the most part we expect our federal government to come up with the facts and figures on the nation's finances in detail and without hesitation.

We only expect to be stonewalled if there is something to hide. We are proud of and trust our public service employees. If there is something to hide it is the political managers that want to hide something. Who are those managers? It is the Liberals who are hiding something. They have found out that it is too difficult to hide a \$1 billion boondoggle.

The official opposition has received no reply to formal requests for audit reports from the following government departments and agencies. I will list some of them. The official opposition put forward many ATI requests to the Department of Human Resources Development, and HRDC is late in replying. It does not want to reply. Five of these requests are for departmental audits that should be public information according to treasury board guidelines and are now 45 days overdue.

● (1350)

Canada Customs and Revenue requested a 30 day extension on March 9. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation requested an undefined extension due to third party consultations. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration requested a 90 day extension

on March 9. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans provided some audits and asked for a 30 day extension for others. Similarly the National Capital Commission, the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food and so on are on the list.

I want to speak about the treasury board guidelines. Treasury board policies were announced in a May 26, 1994, letter of decision which stated in part:

To simplify the process for acquiring copies of reports, and to deliver on the government's commitment for more openness, the policy requires that departments make the final version of review reports, including the internal audits and evaluation reports, accessible to the public, without requiring a formal access request—

The treasury board is now breaking its own policy by withholding such information even when a formal request is filed. HRDC had a good record of responding to ATI requests on time until the billion dollar boondoggle came along. As a result of the HRDC experience, the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Privy Council Office now insist on being told what audits have been requested, whether they contain bad news, and what the official political media line will be before the audits are released.

In testimony before the HRD committee last week the information commissioner attributed the backlog of information requests in the department largely to new treasury board and privy council rules. Let me give some quotes from the information commissioner to the HRD committee on March 28 of this year. The information commissioner said:

The right to access is one of the cornerstones of our democratic process and one of the best tools available to ensure responsible government.

He further stated:

With respect to the audit reports, there has been a slowdown, but the slowdown is government-wide, and the reason for that is that as a result of the HRDC experience, . . . all audits requested now go through an additional process by Treasury Board and the Privy Council. What has happened is that the Treasury Board and the Privy Council Office want to know what audits have been requested, whether they contain bad news, and what the official media line will be. . . The problem, however, arises when the communication concerns of the Government are allowed to take precedence over the public's right to timely access to information.

The information commission said as well that it was clear from what had been said by the access to information commissioners in the various departments that they could not meet the 30 day stipulation because of the new process that had been put in place by the Liberals. He also said that information delayed was information denied.

The government should have no problem supporting a motion that would entrench its own policies with regard to the release of audit reports to the public on an order of the House. That way the House would have some recourse if the government failed to live up to its recent self-stated commitment to openness.

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We have clearly witnessed in the government time and again a lack of openness and a lack of transparency. We have seen in the government time and again a lack of respect for democracy. It has limited debate many times. It has used time allocation many times. It has beaten the record of Brian Mulroney.

Similarly we have seen changes to the Canada Elections Act before the House which favour the governing party, in this case the Liberal Party. It is so undemocratic that it is almost anti-democratic.

• (1355)

The government denies information. It hides facts. It exaggerates its own achievements. It does not answer questions in question period, as we will see in five minutes. It misrepresents the opposition parties time and again in the House. It has not kept its promises to the Canadian public.

We know about the GST and national day care programs. The government time and again has exhibited a cover-up mentality. Despite its own mistakes it continues to ignore, ridicule the opposition and defend itself and its ministers, but it will not apologize or confess that it was wrong. It will not correct mistakes and rectify the problems.

We are witnessing the lack of political will by the government to fix the system. We are witnessing arrogance by the government. It has lame excuses, delays and denials. It abuses its power time and again in the House. It promised to introduce visibility legislation and it has not done that. I will introduce a private member's bill.

We see the role of committees. All parties tend to be partisan. The committees can be more productive and can analyze the audits we are talking about. They can analyze other issues and make recommendations to the government.

The public's only access to audits occurs when they are leaked to the media. I remember that CIDA released a very important audit just before the Christmas holidays. This attitude is continuing. All members in the House should support the motion.

The Speaker: We have five minutes left for questions and comments but rather than do that now I propose we wait until after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

BORALEX SENNETERRE

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 3, 2000, with the Mayor of Senneterre and

numerous representatives of the municipality, government, industry and local dignitaries in attendance, Boralex Senneterre held a sod-turning ceremony to inaugurate the construction of its future 32-megawatt thermal power plant at Senneterre, in the Abitibi region. It will be fuelled by residue from the forestry industry.

This project represents an investment in excess of \$50 million, and is the highest capacity installation Boralex has built in Quebec to date.

According to Boralex President and CEO Jacques Gauthier, "This project fits solidly within our objective to make Boralex a producer focusing on renewable energy and green energy, an area in which we have already developed leading-edge expertise and have already earned our laurels. We are particularly proud that this project will be located in a dynamic community and will enable us to contribute to putting to good use a large proportion of the forestry residue from the Senneterre region, to produce energy".

* * *

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, today the agriculture minister appeared before the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. I was hoping to get some answers as to why the government was not getting the \$1.7 billion it promised into the hands of struggling Canadian farmers. Unfortunately the only response I got from the minister was more Liberal rhetoric.

Farmers in my riding say AIDA is inefficient, rigid and filled with complicated forms and bureaucratic red tape. Frustrated farmers may not even apply for assistance this year as it appears hopeless.

AIDA must be overhauled. The whole program must be reviewed and revamped to help farmers. Taxes on fuel and other inputs could be reduced immediately. The Liberals have already broken their promise to get the money out in time to help farmers. Will they make a commitment to get the remaining \$1.2 billion out in the next couple of weeks so farmers have the resources to put in their crops?

Farmers send a lot of money to Ottawa hidden right in their input costs. Why not refund it now?

* * *

[Translation]

MURDER OF HAITIAN JOURNALIST

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday morning we learned the sad news of the murder of Jean Dominique, a Haitian broadcast executive and close friend of

President René Préval. He was killed in Port-au-Prince while on his way to work.

Mr. Dominique was one of his country's most respected commentators. He had been forced into exile on several occasions as a result of his fight against dictatorship.

I would remind hon. members that the atmosphere in Haiti at the present time is a very tense one, and President Préval is hesitant to hold a general election.

This death brings to mind what a difficult job journalists have in a number of places on this planet. In some cases, they are truly living on the edge.

Fortunately, Canada has a spotless reputation as far as freedom of the press and freedom of speech are concerned. Regardless of the country in which such a terrible event takes place, it is always a terrible shock for us to hear such news, as it runs counter to all charters of rights and freedoms.

* * *

• (1400)

[English]

TERRY FOX

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the magnificent legacy of Terry Fox continues to grow year by year, country by country. A Terry Fox run is now being held in more than 50 countries worldwide.

On the eve of our Prime Minister's visit to the Middle East, it is heartwarming to observe the growing ties between Canada and the nations of the region. On the streets of Beirut, Lebanon, and Damascus, Syria, and throughout the Middle East, thousands of people have gathered each year for many years to walk, run, and roller blade in support of cancer research in memory of Terry Fox.

May the legacy of Terry Fox continue to serve as an ambassador for the spirit of Canada all over the world and may relations between Canada and the Middle East continue to flourish.

* * *

PRIME MINISTER DAVID ODDSSON

Mr. John Harvard (Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome Prime Minister David Oddsson of Iceland to our country. Prime Minister Oddsson is the longest serving prime minister among western countries today. He is an accomplished statesman, political leader and author.

Mr. Oddsson's four day visit will commemorate Iceland's unique historical ties to Canada. These ties stretch back 1,000 years to the birth of Snorri, the first white child born in North America at

L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland, 500 years before Columbus and Cabot.

These ties also include the founding of New Iceland in 1875 on the location of present day Gimli, Manitoba, and other settlements throughout Manitoba's Interlake region.

Today, there are thousands of Canadians of Icelandic descent spread across our country. I am proud to be one of them. My father came from there when he was 13 years of age.

On behalf of all members of this House, I welcome Prime Minister Oddsson to Canada.

* * *

THE SENATE

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, loyal Liberals are waiting by their phones as the Prime Minister mulls over his choices for the seven vacant Senate seats. The Alberta vacancy, however, is sending shudders through the Prime Minister's office.

Albertans elected Bert Brown as their choice for senator in October 1998 and now they expect the Prime Minister to appoint him to the Senate.

The problem is the Prime Minister would rather bypass their wishes in favour of a patronage appointee. What a change from those long forgotten days when he was opposition leader. Back then he said "The Liberal government in two years will make the Senate elected. As Prime Minister, I can make that happen".

A year later, he said "To meet the hopes and dreams of those who live in the west and the Atlantic, a reformed Senate is essential. It must be a Senate that is elected, effective and equitable".

Will this be just another in the long list of broken Liberal promises? The Prime Minister has a choice. Will he choose democracy over patronage?

* * *

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, six years ago, Sue Rodriguez died after a long and courageous struggle with ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease.

Sue also fought another valiant battle before parliament and into the Supreme Court of Canada for a change to the criminal code provisions on physician assisted dying for terminally ill persons.

Even with the best of palliative care, too many Canadians are forced to suffer pain, anguish, indignity or pharmaceutical oblivion in their final days. Doctors must reject the eloquent plea of people like Terry Graham of Brampton or of Dr. Cohn Woolf of Toronto to allow them to die with dignity at the time they choose. Some, like

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Halifax orchestra conductor, Georg Tintner, jump from their balcony in despair.

I call today on the Liberal government to show compassion and humanity and listen to the eloquent call of Terry Graham, dying of mitochondrial myopathy, who recently said, "I'm just waiting to die. I'd just as soon shoot myself. It's quicker."

I urge our government: Listen to the voices of three quarters of Canadians, amend this cruel and inhumane law now.

* * *

VAISAKHI

Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this month the Sikh community in Canada and around the world are celebrating Vaisakhi, the 301st birthday of the Sikh nation, Khalsa.

Canada's Sikh community and myself are deeply grateful to the Prime Minister for his continued involvement at Vaisakhi celebrations on Parliament Hill every year for the last seven years.

I am sure all members will join me in congratulating Canadian Sikhs on the birth of the Sikh nation, and in recognition of their tremendous contributions in all spheres of Canadian society, like B.C.'s premier and minister of fisheries.

Finally, I thank all members of the cabinet and my fellow members for their continued support and involvement with me since 1993.

* * *

● (1405)

HUTCHISON CREEK FISH HATCHERY

Mr. Lou Sekora (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday I went to the Hutchison Creek Fish Hatchery in Port Moody with students from the Heritage Mountain Elementary School. The students had a hands-on educational experience.

Larry Cardus operates an eight year old hatchery that is monitored by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. He has let over one million fish go in the 18 years of his involvement in fish enhancement. He is also a great firefighter in my riding.

* * *

FIRST NATIONS ACCOUNTABILITY COALITION

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, last year the United Nations stated that the quality of life for Canadians living on reserves is a national shame. For non-aboriginal Canadians the quality of life ranking continues to be

number one, while aboriginal Canadians tolerate a quality of life ranked 35th, below that experienced in Mexico and Thailand.

I would like to salute Leona Freed and her colleagues with the First Nations Accountability Coalition. In one year this group has brought aboriginal accountability to the forefront and has worked tirelessly to correct this inequity.

Leona held meetings for grassroots people last summer. The purpose was to hear concerns about living conditions on and off reserve. The grievances were many and were extensively documented. Many had proof of mismanagement of tax dollars, illegal and corrupt activities and electoral irregularities, just to name a few.

I encourage all members, regardless of political stripe, to obtain and study a copy of this report. In the words of Leona "unless the grassroots natives' concerns are addressed and thoroughly investigated, a new relationship with band members cannot exist and self-government will not succeed".

Leona, I salute you.

* * *

[Translation]

GLOBE AND MAIL

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Jeffrey Simpson, a so-called worthy and honest journalist, today used the pages of the *Globe and Mail* to deliver a vitriolic attack on the members of the Bloc Quebecois and on all Quebecers who even dare to consider voting for our party.

He said, and I quote "The Bloc Quebecois caucus is mostly made up of second-raters and shouters—not caring or knowing anything about the rest of Canada—. In this, too, they are a fine reflection of their electors".

Rarely have we seen such contempt for Quebecers and their legitimate political aspirations spread across the editorial page of a respectable Canadian newspaper. This intolerant attitude verges on hatred and racism. This is an embarrassment to the *Globe and Mail* and to Canada as a whole.

Off come the masks. The constitutional general store is closed. The Montreal love-in has been forgotten. Now is the hour of Bill C-20, night sticks and "shut up and stay quiet".

Quebec is of nobler spirit. When the day comes and it becomes sovereign, it will reach out to Canada.

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CANADIAN ARMED FORCES ASSOCIATION

Mr. Robert Bertrand (Pontiac—Gatineau—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 1, the Canadian armed forces association launched its first Internet site.

The site contains a host of information on military and civilian aviation with many links to museums, squadrons and organizations in the world of aerospace.

The launch date of April 1 was no chance matter. This date marks not only the 75th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Air Force but the 50th anniversary of civil aviation as well.

The world of communications has never been such a vital element in the context of openness to the world and exchanges of information between people and organizations from all corners of the planet.

Congratulations to the Canadian armed forces association on its initiative. I invite everyone to visit this site full of interesting discoveries and surprises.

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GASOLINE PRICING

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government derives huge revenues from the sale of gasoline in Canada.

It rakes in over \$6.3 billion annually just from excise taxes and the GST. If the \$2 billion from taxing oil companies is added in, the government has over \$8 billion from which to draw in tackling the hike in gasoline prices.

The recent increase in the price of gasoline continues to benefit the federal government by bringing in additional revenues.

As he often tries to do on many other occasions, the Minister of Finance is trying to duck the issue, and is shirking his responsibilities to taxpayers. He must take action immediately to improve the situation for taxpayers, and not try to shift the blame to the provinces.

Since we know that federal surpluses are much higher than the Minister of Finance forecast, the Bloc Quebecois thinks that he has sufficient leeway to do something about this problem immediately.

Canadian and Quebec taxpayers are not stupid; they know where the money is and who is in a position to take immediate action: Ottawa.

* * *

• (1410)

[English]

C.H. TUNG

Ms. Sophia Leung (Vancouver Kingsway, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Canada-Hong Kong Parliamentary Friendship Group, it is my pleasure to welcome Mr. C.H. Tung, Chief Executive of Hong Kong, to Canada and to our beautiful capital of Ottawa.

S. O. 31

The relationship between Canada and Hong Kong will only strengthen as Canada continues to expand and develop new partnerships through trade, education and through sharing of our cultural traditions.

I hope Mr. Tung has a wonderful time and will take back a good relationship.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance says he has more money for health care if the provinces agree to the federal government's plan for health care reform. While the government plays carrots and sticks with the provinces over health care funding, people are dying while awaiting operations, emergency rooms resemble war zones and patients are sleeping on stretchers in hospital corridors.

Canadians want us to fix the system that is already broken before we embark on any new schemes. That fix urgently requires putting back the \$4.5 billion a year that the Liberals have already taken out of the system.

If the government is serious about building the health care of tomorrow, it must first help save the system that we have today.

* * *

ORGANIZATION OF WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 8 the Ontario Chapter of Women in International Trade was launched. Canada joined a worldwide network that aims to significantly increase international trade opportunities for Canadian businesswomen.

The Organization of Women in International Trade is comprised of over 5,000 members in countries around the world. With women-owned businesses significantly under-represented in the global trade arena, this organization seeks to change the situation by providing global business contacts, networking and educational opportunities.

The activities of the Ontario chapter are presently focused on electronic commerce. Women can now level the playing field by accessing the Internet and making contact, marketing or selling their products and services worldwide. With this technology, some of the barriers women often face, such as the inability to travel extensively due to family commitments or fears for their security, now disappear.

Women in International Trade of Ontario hopes to play a valuable role in assisting women exporters reach aggressive growth targets through skill enhancement seminars, networking opportuni-

Oral Questions

ties, and by providing practical tips, resources and global contacts to foster Internet marketing.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to challenge the Liberal government over its lack of foresight and inability to seek out solutions for the number one problem facing Canadians today, health care.

Funding is an integral part of the solution but the federal government now only provides 11% of public health care funding in Canada. Yet this government seems unwilling to work with the provinces in an effort to find solutions to health care problems it has caused.

As all of the provincial health care ministers showed last week, there is an overwhelming need for the federal government to get on board and join in the search for real solutions. The time for empty talk is over. The time for action is now.

As I have done previously, I challenge this government to co-operatively research and seek solutions to the health care problems facing Canadians today. Bring the provinces on board for this major task.

This afternoon the Standing Committee on Health will discuss future business and I urge all members of the committee to adopt my motion to study the state of health care in Canada.

Canadians expect solutions. The Canadian Alliance is actively working to find these national solutions.

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VIA RAIL

Mr. Dennis Gruending (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Biggar, Saskatchewan, in my riding, is a railroad town but you would never know it by the way it is treated by VIA Rail. The train arrives in the middle of the night and if you want to catch it, you have to stand shivering under a light pole.

The station that was built by VIA in the 1970s has been closed. I have had letters from CN pensioners, from the Biggar New Horizons project and from the Catholic Women's League asking that VIA Rail open the station so that people can wait for the train in comfort.

The transport minister said yesterday we are getting more money into the rail system and a new day is dawning for passenger rail in Canada. The people in Biggar, Saskatchewan, just want to have their station re-opened so they can wait for the train in comfort and safety.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Miss Deborah Grey (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, political accountability on our aboriginal reserves across Canada is a disaster.

• (1415)

The chief of the Eskasoni reserve in Cape Breton took honorariums and bonuses totalling more than \$300,000 last year alone, and yet his fellow band members are plagued by a 50% unemployment rate and dire poverty.

Why will this minister not stand to protect the band members?

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality of government to government relationships means that we have to honour the abilities of the first nations people to make their own decisions.

The reality is that the first nations people will decide what will be the wages of their elected officials. At election time they will make that decision. When they make the decision they will choose the best person on the ballot.

Miss Deborah Grey (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, if that is the case, I wonder why there is even a position for the minister of Indian affairs, if he is not going to give any guidance to these people who have such desperate situations on reserve.

Taxpayers have a right to know that their money is being put to good use, and so do the aboriginal grassroots band members.

Asked to comment recently on the \$130,000 tax free salary of the chief of the Acadia reserve, the minister stood and said "I have no reason to dispute it".

Why is rampant poverty and dire straits not reason enough to dispute greed at the top?

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make this very clear to the member, because she may not understand what government to government relationships mean. When talking about government relationships, we allow governments which are duly elected by their memberships to make the decisions as to what salaries their elected officials will make. It is not up to the Government of Canada or this minister to make that decision for them.

Miss Deborah Grey (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the minister talks about government to

government relationships. Surely there is some responsibility for government to taxpayers, the people who are footing the bill. The amount of \$640,000 went to the Acadia reserve chief and councilors, over three times what it had been just two years before.

Over that same two year period social services to the people and the children on that reserve were reduced by more than \$200,000. So much for helping the poor.

If the minister is in this position to actually help people, I would like him to realize that these are tragic stories. Why is he ignoring them?

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have stood and said in the House a number of times in the last number of months, to make it very clear, we are the most audited department in the government.

One of the things we do is ask the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants to audit first nations. Those audits include information which any first nation can get. All they have to do is ask the department for the information and it will be supplied.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have read some of these audit reports and they are a disgrace.

A crisis exists in Canada. The First Nations National Accountability Coalition presented its report, pleading for an end to the government's refusal to address the critical needs of ordinary people living on reserve. The coalition reports waste, corruption and dictatorship rule.

Will the minister and his government do the right thing and respond immediately to the recommendations of the accountability coalition, or will billions continue to be wasted on boondoggles—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we are dealing with government to government relationships, we allow first nations people to make their own decisions.

A number of years ago white governments made the decisions for first nations. That is not the policy of this government. The policy of this government is to let first nations make their own decisions. Those decisions will be made much better at the community level than they will be made by me as the minister or by that party across the way.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is too bad it is not government to people. That is what it ought to be.

The minister continues to hear the outcry of aboriginal people living on reserve. Grassroots aboriginal people have been begging the minister to stop the gross corruption and waste on reserve.

Oral Questions

Others in Canada can access an ombudsman. Aboriginal people on reserve cannot. Will the minister respond to this request? Will the minister give aboriginal people on reserve the same rights and privileges that the rest of us have, and give them access to an ombudsman?

• (1420)

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me first say to the member that if he is making accusations of corruption in communities about individuals and elected officials, I would ask him to make those accusation in writing, give them to the solicitor general and we will look at them.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. If the hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development needs more time, he may continue.

Hon. Robert D. Nault: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the issue of an ombudsman, it is a very interesting concept which the government is prepared to look at. However, we need to do what the hon. member who spoke yesterday suggested, that is, consult people before we make decisions related to a number of issues.

This is the same issue. We do not make decisions on behalf of first nations without holding consultations. We are in the process of consulting with the leadership of first nations. Once we have made the decision as to whether or not they think it is a good thing, we will undertake to do that.

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[Translation]

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, disturbing facts regarding Placeteco keep accumulating: non compliance with Treasury Board rules, jobs not created, agreement not respected, clauses deliberately ignored, triple role played by Mr. Champagne as the department's trustee, Mr. Gauthier's lawyer and creditor in the bankruptcy, misappropriation of the grant, which was used to repay a loan to the National Bank, creditors cheated.

What more does the minister need to request a police investigation?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the House well knows that this question has been asked a number of times. It has also been answered a number of times, and the answer remains the same.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we never got an answer. Some people, including the minister, avoided the issue.

In the issue of the transfer of a grant from Rosemont to the riding of the Prime Minister, Saint-Maurice, there was a lot less to justify a police investigation. Still, after an administrative inquiry, the accounting firm decided to ask for a police investigation.

Why is there no investigation in the case of Placeteco, where the facts are much more serious, even though they were reprehensible in the other case? Is it because several of the people who would come under investigation are very close friends of the Prime Minister?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's assertion is absolutely false. As I have said on a number of occasions, we have had an administrative review of this file at the highest level in the department, and there is no overpayment that has been established.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources Development has told us that she has all the invoices justifying the grant to Placeteco.

However, a document from officials informs us that Placeteco no longer considers itself under any obligation to provide an accounting, since it has gone bankrupt, which would indicate to us that not all the information has been provided.

Given this contradiction between the two versions, should the minister not table the vouchers in this House to eliminate any ambiguity?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have provided a considerable amount of information to the House on all the files related to grants and contributions. If the hon. member wants more detailed information in this regard, there are appropriate avenues that can be followed.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since, in her responses to our questions, the minister voluntarily mixes the files of Techni-Paint and Placeteco and since she also refuses to table the invoices she says she has in hand, could we not conclude that the invoices she has in hand are not those of Placeteco but those of Techni-Paint?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again I can confirm that we have reviewed this file in detail at the highest level in the department and there was no establishment of an overpayment.

Again, I want to point out that there are approximately 78 people working on this undertaking who would not be working if we had taken the approach of that side of the House.

* * *

• (1425)

HEALTH

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the story of another victim of Alberta's private health care is being widely reported. The patient was told she needed an MRI scan. She called the clinic, only to find out that the waiting list for a publicly funded MRI was nine months, but that she could be seen the very next day if she could pay the \$600 fee.

When will the Minister of Health stand and say that this is wrong, that this is shameful, and when will the federal government finally take action to stop it?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member that this is the first government since the enactment of the Canada Health Act to stop payment to a province. In fact it was Alberta, which conducted practices inconsistent with the act.

In relation to MRIs, I can tell the member that we are fully aware of concerns. We are investigating them. In fact I took the matter up with the Alberta health minister when I met him last Friday in Markham.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a leaked report on Alberta health care shows once again that privatization does not work. Instead of innovation and improvement, it leads to queue jumping and it leads to a two tier system.

When the evidence is so overwhelming, and the minister knows it, why will he not speak up? Is not the real reason that the government refuses to stand up to Alberta's privatization plans that the Prime Minister actually supports the increased privatization of our health care system?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is nonsense. More than that, it is offensive nonsense. The Prime Minister is a man whose public career stands in testimony to his deep commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act. It was under his leadership that this government acted to stop payment when Alberta conducted practices which were inconsistent with the act.

As to Bill 11, we have made it clear that at the appropriate time we will play our role to ensure that it is fully and entirely in keeping with the Canada Health Act.

* * *

SHIPBUILDING

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport knows better than most that there are shipyards sitting idle in this country from coast to coast. Yet when the people of Newfoundland needed an additional ferry, his personal appointee at Marine Atlantic bought a ferry built abroad.

The Minister of Industry has long told the House, day after day, that this government does indeed have a national shipbuilding policy that is competitive. If we have a policy that works, how on earth can this government justify buying a ferry that is anything but made in Canada, but made in Europe?

Hon. David M. Collette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely astounded that the hon. member would come forward with this question, given the fact that there are members on her side from Newfoundland—only one left now—who have come to me over the last year and said “Get more capacity for the ferry from Marine Atlantic”. Now she is saying that because we will deliver on our promises that is somehow bad.

How does she explain that to Tories in Newfoundland?

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have a follow-up question for the Minister of Transport.

The people of Newfoundland were waiting for that greatly needed additional ferry to service the North Sydney to Port-aux-Basques run, but before they could get it the Minister of Transport appointed a new chair of Marine Atlantic who changed the required specifications, we are told, at the very end of the bidding process.

Now that the ferry is apparently purchased, how can the minister defend the process to purchase a vessel that is in need of a full year of repair work before it will be ready for use?

Hon. David M. Collette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the important issue here is, will there be additional capacity on the gulf run this summer? There will be additional capacity.

The new chair of Marine Atlantic, who is a captain from St. John's, an eminent seafarer, somebody who knows the marine industry, is an individual who has gone out and got the best deal for the Government of Canada. It does not come cheap. We are spending over \$70 million for the service between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. I think that is very responsible.

Oral Questions

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the government spends billions of dollars on aboriginal specific programming that it claims will better the lives of Canada's aboriginal people, but too much of that money is getting into the hands of those who do not really deserve it.

On the Samson Cree reserve the band deficit is \$50 million. The unemployment rate is 85%, and yet, according to the 1997-98 audit, the chief and council have been paid \$1.9 million, tax free, in salaries and benefit.

Why is it that grassroots aboriginals get so little and band councils get so much?

• (1430)

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, band councils are elected representatives of their communities.

If the member has the gall to do it, he should take these questions up with the band council in Samson. If he does that he will find that the first nation people there who elected those officials have a lot of respect and trust in their abilities to manage their affairs.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I expect we would find no such thing.

According to statistics, one-third of aboriginals on reserve live in overcrowded conditions, 50% of aboriginal children live in poverty and the infant mortality rate is twice as high for aboriginal children as for other children.

When Health Canada recently conducted an audit of eight British Columbia bands, it found that every single one of the chiefs and councils had misspent health care funds, often using money, which should have been used to help children or spent on health care, to go on junkets to Hawaii.

Why has the minister failed to protect the interests of disadvantaged grassroots aboriginals by ensuring that money earmarked for health care actually gets to those who deserve it?

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting to hear this from a party that has opposed every single piece of legislation brought to the House that would improve the abilities of first nation people to govern themselves.

Let me use one example. The Nisga'a agreement is a modern treaty, a modern self-government agreement that will give the first nation people the opportunity to be successful, and this party now tells me that it has concerns about first nation people. I think that is hypocritical.

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order, please. I would ask all hon. members to please stay away from the words hypocrite or hypocritical.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals were elected in 1993, the federal government paid 29% of the costs of Quebec's health care system. Seven years later, it pays only 13.5%.

How can the Minister of Health say that the problem facing the provinces is not one of health care funding, when his government has dropped its contribution from 29% to 13.5% in seven years?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member must know that our transfer payments are now more than 33 cents on every dollar, or \$31 billion over the next year, which is a new high. Equalization payments will hit a new high next year as well. As for the specific question, what I can do is cite Quebec's Minister of Finance, Bernard Landry.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when a minister cites Bernard Landry in the House, would he have the courage to say that Quebec's Minister of Finance clearly said that the main reason for the difficulties the provinces are facing in their health care systems is the federal government's cuts to transfer payments?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will say it again: \$31 billion, a new high.

This year, as last year, we also transferred money. It is in a bank in Toronto, and Quebec's finance minister can go and get it.

* * *

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on this issue of native accountability, the minister is standing up for the chiefs and we are standing up for the grassroots natives.

Let us go to the Stoney Band in Alberta. Here the band councillors receive \$1.4 million in salaries. They have a \$5.6 million deficit and just 90% unemployment.

Why does the minister give so much to the chiefs and so little to the grassroots natives?

• (1435)

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are negotiating some 80 self-government agreements right now. When I bring them to the

House, I look forward to this party supporting the self-government agreements of first nation people.

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the one thing we will need in those agreements is accountability. The minister is standing up for no accountability for the grassroots. It is pretty straightforward. The minister believes that the chiefs should get a lot and the grassroots should get little. My question is: Why?

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not support the Leader of the Opposition nor the previous leader of the opposition. He was elected to represent his people, and I respect that, as I respect the chiefs who were elected by their people.

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[*Translation*]

FISHERIES

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his speech of March 24, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans seemed confident that agreements would be reached with both the first nations people and the traditional fishers. The industry has concerns, however, and wants to see more concrete agreements.

Can the minister confirm that one of the hypotheses envisaged by the federal government at the negotiating table is the transfer of part of the Quebec crab quota to the first nations fishers of the Maritimes?

[*English*]

Hon. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report to the House that as of today we have six signed agreements with first nations bands. I hope in the coming days that I will be able to announce more agreements. We have learned that one of the ways to resolve this issue is by bringing the communities together to talk and to have dialogue.

Even though we hear the members opposite talk about helping the members of the first nation band, the way to do it is to sign agreements on fishing so first nations can truly earn an income and be able to take advantage of the economic opportunities available.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I get the impression that the minister is a little mixed up. I will therefore ask my question again.

In fisheries, there is a very delicate balance. Can the minister confirm that one of the hypotheses envisaged by the federal government at the negotiating table is the transfer of part of the Quebec crab quota to the first nations fishers of the Maritimes?

Oral Questions

An hon. member: That is the question.

Mr. Yvan Bernier: That is unfair. An attempt is being made to imbalance the quotas of the various provinces. This is what prompts the AQIP, the Association québécoise de l'industrie de la Pêche, to believe there are going to be interprovincial transfers. What is his answer to that?

[English]

Hon. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should stand up and congratulate the government. We have committed \$160 million to a voluntary retirement program. The hon. member should know that we are spending the money to buy existing licences on a voluntary program to provide access to the aboriginal community. We have brought the commercial fisherman and the aboriginal community together to find community solutions to build communities across the country. We are doing it in Atlantic Canada. This is good news for Canada and it is good news—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary East.

* * *

EXPORT DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the EDC continues to shovel billions of taxpayer money out the door to fund ecologically disastrous projects like the Three Gorges dam in China and the Urra hydro project in Columbia.

I ask the minister in what way does financing ecologically disastrous projects overseas benefit the Canadian taxpayer?

• (1440)

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite interesting to see that the now deceased reform party is taking an interest in the environment. It has voted against every single piece of legislation the government has tabled to protect the environment.

This being said, the EDC has its own environmental framework which comes from its own policies to ensure that environmental factors are taken into account before any financial support is approved for all projects.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, since the financing of the EDC is not available to the public we cannot clarify that fact, but the beneficiaries of many of these EDC loans are donors to the Liberal Party.

Canadians are horrified to learn that EDC is financing some of the most damaging environmental projects in the world.

I ask the minister again: Why are Canadian taxpayers forced to fund the world's worst ecological nightmares?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the whole matter of the environment is a very important file.

As I said earlier, we have had the Gowling report and a report from the standing committee of the House of Commons. Both reports have dealt with the environmental aspect. The government is now studying how it will respond to those reports. We will provide our response before May 15 acknowledging the legislative review of which EDC will soon be the object.

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[Translation]

PARENTAL LEAVE

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the matter of parental leave, senior officials of the Department of Human Resources Development confirmed yesterday that negotiations with Quebec would not resume until Quebec sends Ottawa the terms of the program it has in mind.

How can the minister claim to refuse to discuss with Quebec until it submits its plan, when this is a matter under Quebec's jurisdiction and, in any case, she has her hands full with the scandals and investigations in her own department?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question gives me a chance to remind the House that it was in the Speech from the Throne that this government indicated it would double parental benefits. Only four months later in the budget, we have made that a reality. Between now and the end of the year parental benefits for Canadians will double. The opportunities to make them more accessible and flexible will be there.

The job that I have is to ensure that this undertaking is done well for all Canadians, including those in Quebec.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Walt Lastewka (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister for International Trade.

I raised the issue of trade inequities in international wine markets on previous occasions. In 1996 Canada imported more than \$330 million worth of wine from the European Union while Canadian exports to the EU were limited to only \$1 million. In 1999 the gap grew.

Why is there this huge imbalance? When will the minister correct the problem?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that Canada will

Oral Questions

continue to seek improved access for our wines, including the Ontario ice wine which is having major difficulty in Europe. We are working hard on that file.

We have discussed a limited aegis on bilateral wine and spirit issues with the EU, including market access, protection for geographic indications and mutual recognition of winemaking practices. We had an exchange of views between Canadian and EU officials at the end of March. Significant differences remain but we will make further progress.

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EXPORT DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, maybe they can exchange papers after question period instead and pay attention to the environment.

The government can study environmental investments all it wants but Canadian taxpayers are still on the hook for the following environmental disasters: the Three Gorges dam in China, \$130 million; mine poisoning in Papua New Guinea, \$88 million; and, a gold mine cyanide spill in Kyrgyzstan, \$30 million.

How can the minister defend blowing hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars on these disasters?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague in the House for taking an interest in the wine exports of the country that will do a lot better job. I do not think the opposition member should question his own questions.

• (1445)

As for the EDC, this is a very important subject on environment. It has its environmental framework with its own policies and EDC does go through these factors for every project that it approves.

There will be a legislative review. We will discuss these elements further as our government—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it seems like whining is all we are getting from that side of the House. We are starting to see that environmental boondoggles are the real return on investments to Canadians, from the so-called team Canada trade missions that the government has sponsored. There was \$1.5 billion for a Chinese nuclear reactor; another \$245 million for a gold mine in Guyana, and another cyanide spill; a pulp and paper mill in Indonesia; chronic air and water pollution.

How can the minister justify spending billions of dollars on these environmental boondoggles?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have explained a number of times that the EDC has a mandate to help Canadian exporters gain access to a number of markets. It works out of two accounts. I have explained that in the House time and again. There is the corporate account and the Canada account.

The auditor general has gone through its work and it is quite appropriate the way it works. It is applying public criteria that are well known with its environmental framework. We will have the opportunity of discussing that further at the legislative review of the EDC.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, 300 people gathered on the Acadian peninsula to ask the federal and provincial governments to assume their responsibility in the matter of the black hole created by the changes to unemployment insurance in 1996 by this government.

Yesterday, the Premier of New Brunswick told a group of 200 people that New Brunswick was not responsible for the black hole.

What is the Minister of Human Resources Development going to do to resolve the problem of the black hole once and for all?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very sensitive to the plight of seasonal workers. Let us face it, the best insurance for them is job creation, economic development and skills training.

That is why in 1997 we conferred \$240 million to the province of New Brunswick to use in assisting seasonal workers and others in the province to get the employment they need. I am glad to say that I have had the chance to visit the Acadian peninsula and have received a report jointly done with the men and women who live in that area and my department. We will be looking at that report to see if there is more we can do.

* * *

ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Dennis Gruending (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has failed to renegotiate a longstanding agreement with the province of Ontario to clean up the polluted waters of the Great Lakes. There are 8.5 million Canadians who live in the Great Lakes basin and another 4.5 million who live along the St. Lawrence River. Their health and safety is at stake.

Oral Questions

This agreement was important and it was working. Will the environment minister tell us why the agreement was allowed to expire?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can inform the hon. member that I wrote sometime ago to the Ontario minister for the environment proposing that the agreement be continued and re-established for another period of years. The Ontario government has not yet substantively replied to us. This does not mean that we are not continuing with negotiations. We would like to continue so we can sign an agreement as soon as possible.

I can assure the member that in the meantime we will make sure that everything possible is done to maintain the quality of the environment of the Great Lakes and to make sure that there is no harm to the environment by reason of the lack of an agreement.

* * *

SHIPBUILDING

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport just stood up and said he got the best deal he could on a ferry for the run from North Sydney to Port aux Basques, Newfoundland. He got the best deal and it only cost \$70 million. Our information is other vessels were offered for \$30 million to \$40 million.

Would the minister stand up and say exactly how much was paid for the ferry and how much it is going to cost to bring it up to standard?

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a certain amount of money has been allocated by the government for the new ferry. That money will be spent to get the best ferry possible and negotiations on this particular ferry have concluded.

We on this side of the House believe we have to be responsible in paying out a certain amount of money. On the other hand we also feel an obligation to all those passengers between the mainland and Newfoundland who demand a good quality of service.

• (1450)

It is obvious from the hon. member's question that the Tories are not interested in quality service on the gulf.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, all I asked was how much he paid. I would like to ask the minister again. How much did Marine Atlantic pay for the ferry, how much is it going to cost to upgrade it and how long is it going to take?

Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, a certain amount of money in excess of \$70 million was allocated to this particular project. It will provide

for first class ferry service which will provide the capacity on the gulf for this year and years to come.

This is going to be a great boon especially to the tourism industry in Newfoundland and Labrador that has really expanded in recent years.

I think this government has discharged its obligations to the people of Newfoundland and we have done it in a very good and satisfactory way.

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HIGHWAY 407

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

With respect to the Ontario government's proposed highway 407 extension project which has led to some public outcry, can the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans as the responsible authority tell the House today whether he will call for a full federal environmental assessment and public review panel to examine this proposed extension?

Hon. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first let me congratulate the hon. member for Davenport for his excellent work on the environment. It is something on which he has worked very hard and to which he is committed.

With regard to the report on the environmental assessment of the highway 407 project, it has just undergone a public review and comment period which concluded on March 24. The report will now be completed and a decision will be made in the near future regarding the next steps in the environmental assessment process.

I can assure the hon. member that I am reviewing this file right now. I hope to visit the areas that are affected personally and have a decision very soon.

* * *

EXPORT DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Minister for International Trade keeps justifying the billion dollars plus EDC loan to Amtrak by claiming that these loans are creating jobs in Canada. We know however that most of the jobs were created in the United States with the Amtrak loan.

I ask the minister precisely how many new jobs were created in Canada with the EDC billion dollar loan to Amtrak.

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will have to explain to the now deceased Reform Party how the new economy functions.

Oral Questions

The EDC loan to Amtrak has been granted against purchasing some groundwork equipment made in La Pocatière, Canada. They are initially made there. They are initially built there. They might be finished closer to the destination but that is exactly how the new economy works. They are doing their job just fine.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence.

The Minister of National Defence established a task force to look at the location and the costs inherent in setting up a new military training program focussing on leadership, training that would be offered to the officers in the Canadian army.

Could the minister confirm whether the only site being proposed is still the military college in Saint-Jean, Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are still considering the enhanced leadership program. It is a program that we want to put into effect as quickly as possible. It is one of many recommendations to help with the improvement of officership development in the Canadian forces.

We are still looking at the location. We are looking very carefully at the location the hon. member has mentioned in Saint Jean and I hope we have an answer very soon on that.

* * *

COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry. On Friday Bell Canada announced that it would increase the basic residential rate for rural telephone service by up to 600% more than the planned increase for city phones.

● (1455)

Does the minister support having a two tier price structure for basic phone rates in Canada? Does he think it is fair that rural Canadians in places like Plevna and Gogama pay more than Ottawa residents for basic telephone service?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important question with respect to the accessibility of basic services to residents wherever they are in regions which in some cases are rural or remote.

It is a matter, as the member knows, which has been discussed and considered by the CRTC in recent decisions. Some of those

decisions are currently under appeal to the governor in council, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment on them until those appeals have been dealt with. The member should know that it is part of the government's policy to ensure that Canada is the most connected nation in the world. That includes not only basic telephone service but basic Internet service for all—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

* * *

MINISTER OF NATIONAL REVENUE

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, in September 1999 the Minister of National Revenue chartered a plane from Gaspé to Montreal for himself and his assistant at a cost to Canadian taxpayers of \$4,280. Flights between Gaspé and Montreal run three times a day and cost about \$470 per flight.

Why did the minister take a chartered plane at 10 times the cost of a commercial flight when there are three flights a day? Why does the minister's champagne tastes cost Canadian—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Revenue.

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member actually said that it was the Minister of National Revenue but at the same time I am the secretary of state responsible for Canadian economic development in the province of Quebec.

Based on my duties I have to go to the province of Quebec very often. I go across the province often. As well, very often I have to charter planes, depending on the agenda and depending as well on the commercial flights. I may have to charter planes on a regular basis. It is as simple as that.

* * *

[Translation]

BIOCHEM PHARMA INC.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Industry announced a repayable investment of \$80 million in Laval-based BioChem Pharma Inc. for a major R and D project.

Could the minister tell us what the project involves and how an area such as the riding of Laval West will benefit?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member should be very proud of this company in her area. It is truly a world leader in the biopharmaceutical industry.

The money invested in BioChem Pharma could lead to the development of three new vaccines which could be very important

in the health sector, which could make Canada a world leader in the biotechnology industry and which could enable Canada to build the capacity to produce domestic vaccines. This is very important for us in this sector.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Indian affairs minister claims he has no responsibility for money he shovels out the door to native self-governments. It is kind of like the HRD minister.

He claims his government respects the autonomy of native governments, but his government never hesitates to hammer provincial governments on issues like health care. Sometimes it even withholds funding like it did with Alberta.

Why will the government withhold funding from provincial governments but blindly funds native governments that siphon off millions of dollars for themselves while impoverishing the people they purport to serve?

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member has information that suggests some wrongdoing, I would think that he would bring it forward to the House, as he would have an obligation to do that.

On the issue of audits, if the audit is not complied with, in fact we do, as the Minister of Health has done on occasion, hold funds back until the audit is given to us in the form that it is supposed to be as it relates to our requirements.

* * *

• (1500)

[Translation]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Ms. Hélène Alarie (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, the Mexican senate unanimously adopted a bill that will make it obligatory to label genetically modified foods.

The U.S. senate is now studying a bill that will make it obligatory to label genetically modified foods in the United States.

My question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. Does the minister realize that, at the rate things are going, Canada may be the last country in which genetically modified foods are not labeled and that its products will be banned in export markets?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have reminded the hon. member in the House

Points of Order

before that there is a process in place with the Canadian General Standards Board and many organizations, including the federal government, consumer organizations, producers and provincial governments, working to set the criteria for a labelling process in Canada.

Before it can be available in any country, whether it is Canada or elsewhere, it has to be meaningful, credible and enforceable.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of two visitors today: the Honourable Steven Kakfwi, Government Leader of the Northwest Territories, and the Honourable Erik Robinson, Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs of the Government of Manitoba.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-206

Mr. John Bryden (Wentworth—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to your ruling on a point of privilege raised by the then Reform Party, I have again obtained the hundred plus seconders for my Bill C-206.

However, between the time you made your ruling on February 8, in which you said that Bill C-206 should be dropped from near the top to the bottom of the order of precedence while you awaited the advice of the Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs, and now after the committee has debated, after it has reported and after you have made the final ruling that I should again get the seconders to my bill, and my getting those seconders, there has been a draw.

• (1505)

Consequently I find Bill C-206 to be not at the bottom of the order of precedence as it existed when the member for Athabasca's point of privilege was first raised but now in 28th place behind all those bills and motions from the most recent draw.

On March 29, Mr. Speaker, you spoke of fairness to myself and all those who prepared items by the hundred signature rule. The essence of the member for Athabasca's point of privilege was whether Bill C-206 could still command the requisite more than 100 seconders, given that he wished to withdraw his signature. I have demonstrated that it can and does, despite a very narrow timeframe in which to make such a demonstration.

I therefore question the appropriateness of dropping Bill C-206 to the bottom of a second round of order of precedence when all seem to agree that I have not acted improperly and my Bill C-206

Supply

continues to have the confidence of more than 100 members of the House.

Because of teething problems associated with the new procedure, Bill C-206's scheduled appearance before this House has already been delayed two months. Is it fair, not just to me but to its 100-plus seconders, that it be delayed a further two months? I would ask that it be restored to where it would have been prior to the last draw, immediately behind Motion No. 128, the motion of the member for Langley—Abbotsford.

The Speaker: The hon. member is correct. We always seek fairness. However, I thought about the ruling before I made it and notwithstanding the fact that it did take a little more time I am sure the hon. member's bill will eventually get to the top and he will have his chance and his day in the House to debate the bill. My ruling stands.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—DEPARTMENTAL AUDIT REPORTS

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): When debate was interrupted it is my understanding the hon. member for Surrey Central had about five minutes remaining on questions and comments.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I feel very badly that my colleague's speech was interrupted by question period. He made a very fine presentation and put his finger on the problem when he said that the government feared accountability.

There is a real dilemma. It appears, at least from speakers on the government side so far, that the government will actually vote against the motion. I would like my colleague to comment on that because the motion is pretty well what is in place now by treasury board. If the government votes against it, it will basically say that the treasury board guidelines are not good enough. There is a huge contradiction. I would appreciate my colleague's comments on the Liberal contradictory statements.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Elk Island for asking this wonderful question. It is shameful that the weak Liberal government is opposing the motion. I doubt

that it will support the motion during the vote, but it still has some time to think about it.

To answer the question as to why the motion was put, it was because government members are hiding their incompetence. They are hiding their mismanagement. They are hiding their wastage and patronage and all those things. The government is hiding its arrogance. The government is becoming more and more arrogant day by day. It has more lame excuses and more delays in providing information. It denies the right to information. We see gross abuse of power by the government, and it will continue.

• (1510)

We are witnessing a continuous lack of willpower to fix what is wrong with the government. It lacks the political will to fix what is wrong with the system.

We are witnessing a lack of openness and transparency on the part of the government. We are witnessing day and night from the government a lack of respect for democracy. It has limited debate by moving time allocation on all debates in the House. Even on the elections legislation that was before the House, the government tried to deny amendments that would have made the system more transparent, open and democratic. It is so undemocratic that it is almost anti-democratic.

We have also seen that the government is not keeping its promises. It forgot what Canadians called on it to do. It forgot its promises to Canadians about what it would do. Who does not remember the GST promise it made? Who does not remember the national day care program it promised to bring forward? Who does not remember that it said it would bring forward whistle-blower legislation? So far we have not seen anything from the government which would enhance democracy in this place.

We are witnessing a cover-up mentality. Despite the mistakes by government ministers, the Prime Minister will stand to defend his record and try to support his ministers who have made serious mistakes such as the billion dollar boondoggle and the solicitor general's actions in the House during the APEC incident.

The government has a cover-up mentality. The basic reason government members are speaking against the motion is to hide their weaknesses and arrogance. We expect the government to come forward with openness, with true democratic principles being applied in the House. Unless we see them, I am sure that what I have said is why they are opposing the motion.

When the Canadian Alliance forms the government there will be transparency, openness and democracy in this place. Canadians will heave a sigh of relief when the Canadian Alliance forms the next government in the House.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

Supply

I am pleased to take part in this debate on the opposition motion. If I may, I will begin with a brief review of the proposals making up this motion.

It calls for all audits carried out within the government to be tabled within 15 days of their completion. All audits carried out within the government are made available to the public when they are completed. Even when they are only at the draft stage, they can be obtained via access to information.

The motion calls for all audits to be referred to a standing committee. Any standing committee—indeed any committee of the House, as hon. members know—is able to examine whatever audit report it wishes, once it is completed.

The motion calls for all audit reports requested under the Access to Information Act to be tabled within 15 days. All access to information requests are processed. There have, certainly, been some delays recently due to the very heavy volume, but all requests are being processed and responses will be forthcoming as soon as possible.

For example, last year the Department of Human Resources Development had an excellent record for responses provided within the deadline to access to information requests. This year, however, the department is having to respond to four times as many requests.

• (1515)

I would like to point out that the information commissioner, John Reid, pointed out recently before the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and I quote:

Not many people have the skills sought for this sort of work you could find on the street. It is therefore exceedingly difficult to find outside contractors to help you deal with this huge workload.

The law requires, for example, that we respect the personal nature of certain information. We must therefore see whether the documents sought contain personal information and check a number of other points before we can make them available to those requesting them.

I cannot believe that the members of the opposition are asking us to break the law. We will certainly comply with it and therefore protect personal information.

My remarks may be summarized briefly: the motion by the official opposition serves no purpose. What it seeks is already available. I believe that, by presenting the motion we are debating today, the official opposition is showing that it has not grasped one of the vital changes that have taken place in recent years in the way government is managed, in fact all major organizations are managed.

As the hon. members no doubt recall, in June 1997, the Prime Minister designated the Treasury Board as the management board of Cabinet. This was recognition that, in an institution of such magnitude as the Government of Canada, an inflexible style of management cannot be effective. The old style of management based on orders and control simply does not suit today's realities.

There are a number of reasons for this change in the concept of management, both in government and outside public administration. In the private sector, business and other bodies, for example, long ago dropped the style of management based on orders and control, which reeked of authoritarianism.

Increasingly, decisions are made locally. Local managers have increasing responsibilities. This is the key to greater efficiency and the delivery of better services in less time to all clienteles, including the Canadians they serve.

[English]

Governments must also adopt more modern management practices, because our field of operations has changed over the years. Not only have we introduced new and creative policy and program directions to better, more efficiently and more effectively meet the needs of Canadians, we are also delivering our services in different ways; in partnership with other levels of government, for example, and in partnership with the private sector and other organizations. These changes have greatly increased the complexity of administration and accountability for program delivery.

In spite of this new complexity in program delivery, the government is committed to both modern management practices and good service to Canadians. That means that departments and agencies must focus on achieving results in a way that ensures clear accountability, proper stewardship of public funds and transparent reporting on what has been achieved. That requires effective control, but through instruments that encourage initiative and creativity.

On the one hand, we must be flexible enough on the delegation of decision making authority and on administrative rules to support initiative and common sense. On the other hand, we must be sufficiently rigorous on standards and control systems to ensure clear accountability.

Modern comptrollership means integrating financial and non-financial performance information, implementing sound risk management, ensuring appropriate control systems and updating related management policies.

• (1520)

This government is committed to ensuring that public funds are managed in an ethical, fair and responsible manner. This means operating transparently. It also means focusing on the needs of Canadians as citizens, clients and taxpayers. It means taking action when problems arise.

Supply

I want to make it clear, in regard to the motion today, that the Treasury Board Secretariat is addressing the task of strengthening internal audits.

As I am sure everyone will agree, the existence of a strong internal audit function is vitally important to sound management and modern comptrollership. As part of its ongoing efforts to modernize management and comptrollership practices across government, the Treasury Board Secretariat began a study of the internal audit function last summer.

This study was completed in January. It recommended that changes to the internal audit policy are required to reflect its role in modern management.

In addition, the study recommended that each department establish an internal audit committee, if it has not already done so, to ensure that audit plans address relevant management issues and that there is appropriate follow up action taken to address and approve recommendations.

These recommendations are substantial and the Treasury Board Secretariat is now preparing, in partnership with the internal audit community across government, a plan to improve our professional capacity in this area to ensure we have the right people in place with the right skills.

We are also studying ways to improve our ability to actively monitor the effectiveness of control systems across government.

Last week I tabled a document which describes the various efforts that are taking place to modernize government management practices, entitled "Results for Canadians: A Management Framework for the Government of Canada". This document sets out in a very clear way the management commitments that the Government of Canada is making to Canadians. It also provides a clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of departments and agencies and of the treasury board and its secretariat in helping the government to meet these commitments.

Work on the document began last fall and the final product is the result of a great deal of collaboration across government.

Some have suggested that we in government should not delegate authority at all. Some believe that we should return to strict command and control regimes. I do not believe that the command and control approach would serve the public interest.

The motion before us today would take us backward, not forward. Canadians do not need more red tape. That is clear. Nor do they need simplistic suggestions which ignore the complexity of government in the 21st century.

Canadians want the government to continue to modernize its thinking and methods, while keeping sight of the fundamental reality that tax dollars need to be managed responsibly and wisely.

One of the central themes in "Results for Canadians" is that we must continue to implement modern management practices. This involves delegating decision making authority to the right level to achieve the results, but in a way that ensures clear accountability, due diligence and proper control of public funds.

This framework emphasizes the need for clear standards, sound risk management and early attention to control deficiencies. It also makes clear what is needed in terms of active monitoring to ensure effective control.

● (1525)

As this framework is implemented across government it will greatly strengthen resource management, reduce the likelihood of serious control failures in the future and provide Canadians with a more modern, more efficient and more effective public service. That is what I believe Canadians want, expect and deserve, and that is what the government will deliver to Canadians.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the minister attempts to paint herself and the government as prudent financial managers when in fact the very opposite is true. She is asking Canadians to trust the government to fix the problem that it has purposely created. She is asking a lot.

I would assert that she is doing a disservice when she implies that members of the official opposition, the members of the Canadian Alliance, do not understand the act. We understand the act and we understand exactly what the minister is doing. She is stonewalling, putting up excuses and not getting to the bottom of the issue.

She knows that her own directives say to release these internal audits. She knows there are some sitting on the shelf right now. Yet she and her department refuse to release them. Why is that?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I would invite members to address each other through the Chair.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Mr. Speaker, the opposition member certainly does not have the right information. I cannot believe that he would make such a statement in the House.

It is very clear that, under Treasury Board policy, internal audits from all departments, once completed, are in the public domain.

What does this mean? It means that there is not even a need to apply under the Access to Information Act because the document is already public. It means fewer procedures are required in order to have access to the information. It means that any internal audit from any department may be made public immediately. What is this, if not transparency? It is extremely transparent.

Supply

All these reports can be made public immediately. There is no need for a motion in the House demanding that we make them public and refer them to parliamentary committees.

What is more, all parliamentary committees have the power of initiative. They may ask to examine any completed audit report.

[*English*]

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I must say that this is a bit of *déjà vu*. I heard all of this when the minister appeared before the HRDC committee this morning.

I ask the minister how in the world she could ever feel that it would be a step backward to provide documents which are supposed to be in the public domain anyway? All opposition members are doing today is putting forward a motion that basically reiterates what the law states already, saying to the minister and to the government that they are not upholding the law.

Why would the minister find this motion offensive when it is simply reiterating exactly what the government is supposed to be doing? Is it because the government is not following the law?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Mr. Speaker, I am merely saying that the motion is unnecessary. That is what I am saying.

The motion is unnecessary because all internal audit documents from all departments are already in the public domain and it is not even necessary to make an application under the Access to Information Act.

The member is mistaken with his talk of complying or not complying with the act. It is not a question of complying with the act or not. It is a question of complying with Treasury Board policies, which say that once internal audit reports are completed they must immediately be made public. So the motion before us today is unnecessary.

• (1530)

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Lowther (Calgary Centre, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister is missing the point here. She talks about modern management practices. Modern management practices require some accountability.

The simple intent of this motion today is to make reports that are, as she professes, public documents to be made available to people within a 15 day window of being completed. If we are to have modern management practices that call for accountability, this motion is in keeping with her own department's guidelines which she gave us and which she wants us to support.

How can this motion move us away from what we want? In fact, it moves us closer toward the accountability that she says she wants by making these documents available to people within a reasonable window of time.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Mr. Speaker, one would think the official opposition had just suddenly discovered, in the year 2000, what an internal audit report is. This is not a new Treasury Board policy. It has been around since 1994.

Has any member of the official opposition on a parliamentary committee ever asked to look at the internal audit report of a department? I have never known of a single one. All of a sudden this year, the year 2000, because the Minister of Human Resources Development herself has decided to officially make public an internal audit report, they are discovering that there is such a thing in administration.

There has always been. We have a very clear policy that these are public documents. I am therefore saying again that today's motion is pointless. If the members of the opposition who sit on various committees want to look at these reports tomorrow, they are welcome to do so. They can do so at any time. They have the power of initiative in each of the committees.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, listening to the minister, she gives the impression to me and to Canadians in general that there is a process that is currently being followed by the government that in fact if there is an auditor's report then the government will table that report within a very short period of time.

I asked for a Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food audit. The deputy minister at the beginning of March said I would have access to that audit, but I am still waiting for it. I find that the best way to access the audits of the government is through access to information.

Is the impression to be that, in fact, all audits are automatically given to the opposition and to the House?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Mr. Speaker, I am referring to a completed internal audit report, not a draft report. We make the distinction here.

As soon as this report is completed, it is in the public domain. It must therefore be made accessible to all members of the public, and all parliamentarians, on request, without having to use the Access to Information Act. This is a far more open approach than to require people to take the access to information route.

Supply

That is why I say that today's motion is pointless, in that these documents are already in the public domain and can be requested by any parliamentary committee.

[*English*]

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to follow up with another question because the minister has been asked this several times but has not answered.

She knows that opposition parties have filed access to information requests for internal audits because they have not been released, even though treasury board guidelines say they should be released, and then directives have been sent after that within her own department saying to release these internal audits because they are supposed to be public. They are supposed to be public, but they are not. In other words, treasury board is hiding these audits, not releasing them or not putting them out in a timely fashion. That is why this motion is before the House today.

I will ask the minister once again. Why is it that her department is not releasing these audits in a timely fashion when there are already access requests which she says do not even need to be applied? She is right on that, but we are bringing this to her attention and the government's attention so they will do something about this problem and fix it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Mr. Speaker, it seems fairly obvious to me that the hon. member does not understand the difference in public administration between the responsibility of the departments and that of the Secretariat of the Treasury Board.

• (1535)

Responsibility for making an internal audit public rests with the department itself and not with the Secretariat of the Treasury Board. Each department is responsible for its own management and must follow the policies of Treasury Board. Each department must therefore make public an internal audit report at the request of an individual. This is how the system works and it is Treasury Board policy. We will actively monitor this policy.

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Lowther (Calgary Centre, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, after that interchange, it may be a good time to step back a bit and review the rules, the goal line and what we are trying to accomplish.

Some time ago there were some laudable goals put in place by treasury board and the government. These goals and guidelines were designed to establish a simple and open process for people to get access to public information. That public information included audit reports. A few years back the treasury board, for which the

minister who just spoke is responsible, said that it required departments to make the final version of review reports, including internal audits and evaluation reports, accessible to the public without requiring formal access requests. I heard the minister say that. It is a great idea, it is a laudable goal and we applaud that open approach to public information.

Recently, the same concept was reiterated by the information commissioner. He said that he regards the right of access as one of the cornerstones of the democratic process and one of the best tools available to ensure responsible government. The problem today, and why this motion is on the floor, is that something has changed in recent times. Although those are the goal lines and although that is what we are trying to achieve, something is off the rails. That is why we brought this motion forward.

Currently, there are audits done which are public reports. To get access to these public reports, we have made formal requests. It is clear that we do not have to make a formal request, but to make it official we have made them formal. We are now waiting to get access to these audit reports.

I should mention, Mr. Speaker, that I am sharing my time with the member for Dewdney—Alouette.

In the past when we made these requests for information, the response was generally not too bad. In recent times something has changed. In fact, there are reports, which are public information and paid for by public money, that we have made formal requests for and 45 days later we are still waiting for them. I do not think it is any coincidence that five of these audit reports are directly related to Human Resources Development, the area where the billion dollar boondoggle was exposed by a previous audit report. There are five more reports that we are waiting for. It has been 45 days plus and there is no sign of those reports.

It does not stop at HRDC. This delay tactic seems to be spreading. It is not only HRDC. Now we have requests for public reports, paid for by public money, from a number of other departments and agencies in the government that we are still waiting for: Agriculture and Agri-Food; Canadian Customs and Revenue, the new Revenue Canada; Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation; the Department of Citizenship and Immigration; the Department of Fisheries and Oceans; the National Capital Commission; and the list goes on. This delay approach is spreading to other departments. That is the reason for our motion today. It is the government's own guidelines and own rules and we as the official opposition have to bring a motion forward to get it to respect its own rules because we see a trend of delay in getting access to public information in these audit reports.

• (1540)

When did all this start? I do not think it takes a genius to figure out that when the report for human resources development came

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out, when we got access to it and the minister for that department was aware that this was going to be exposed, that is when it all started.

The government now has put in it appears a new vetting process of any new audit. This vetting process requires that audits, before they are released to the public as a public document of reports and audits, be now cycled through the treasury board and the Privy Council Office. They want to know what has been requested, what is being asked for and what this public report says. Then they develop a media spin to make sure that when the report is released they have all the answers ready and they can package this in a way that can do damage control, which is basically what it comes down to.

The problem is that this is causing increasing delays. That begs another question. How big are the problems? If the HRDC audit which has exposed a billion dollar boondoggle is an example, I am wondering if perhaps we have just seen the tip of the iceberg with that particular boondoggle.

Why are so many audits being held back for so long? It is taking 45 days for the government to figure out how it is going to spin some of these audits in the public arena. It is more than 45 days. We have been waiting 45 days. How much damage control does it take to release a public document which reports on the working of the government? Apparently it is taking more and more.

In light of that, let us reflect again on the statements of the information commissioner. He said, "The right of access is one of the cornerstones of our democratic process, one of the best tools available to ensure responsible government". I like another quote from the information minister. He said, "Information delayed is information denied". That is effectively what has been happening with these damage control tactics of the Liberal government on reports that expose things like the billion dollar boondoggle which we suspect, and could make a pretty good case for, is probably the tip of the iceberg based on these many audits that we are waiting for.

What did we find in the HRDC audit when it came out? What is being hidden here? Let us look at the HRDC audit for a moment. This audit of a billion dollars a year in grants and contributions handed out by HRDC revealed some interesting things which have concerned Canadians across the country: 15% did not have an application on file; 25% of these grants that were handed out did not have a description of the activities to be supported; 87% showed no evidence of supervision.

To quote from one of the specific examples, McGill University submitted a \$60,000 proposal. It received \$160,000, but when it was audited it should have only been \$30,000. If that is the tip of the iceberg, we can see why the official opposition is asking that these public reports not be hidden from the public so that appropriate action can be taken and these out of control programs can be dealt with in the light of the scrutiny of the public.

• (1545)

The minister who spoke before me talked about modern management practices and that being why these delays were put in place. I submit to her that modern management practices are open, accountable and responsive to the problems and do not use delay tactics to cover up problems and spin-doctoring to misrepresent facts to the people.

In light of that, if the minister really wants to modernize the approaches taken by the Liberal government she would support the motion because it is modernization and enforcement of their own guidelines.

It should be easy for government members across the way to support the motion on information being given to the public in a timely manner from an open and accountable government. That is what the motion is all about. We look forward to them supporting it.

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the end of the debate of the hon. member and it occurred to me to call to the attention of the House, by way of commentary, that this morning we listened to the President of the Treasury Board inform us of the many initiatives her department has embarked on to further strengthen management control within government.

An outline of those initiatives would include assisting Human Resources Development Canada, which is proper; strengthening the management of grants and contributions; strengthening the internal audit system; and active monitoring. Last Thursday the minister tabled "Results for Canadians: A Management Framework for the Government of Canada". It is a very important document which describes the various efforts that are taking place to modernize government management practices.

The member spoke about tabling all the audit reports. While it is one thing to ask for them to be tabled, it is another thing to study the reports. Since "Results for Canadians: A Management Framework for the Government of Canada" was tabled on Thursday, has the member had an opportunity to read the report?

Mr. Eric Lowther: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and I am glad to hear the report was tabled. I hope that the five others from HRDC for which we have been waiting for 45 days will soon be tabled and that the public reports of the seven other departments in government for which we have asked will soon be tabled. Those are the ones for which we have made specific requests to be tabled and we are still waiting.

The member opposite does not seem to understand what the HRDC fiasco has exposed. When grants and contributions are given out to certain entities in certain riding and members of parliament have a hand in it, there is a concern that there is a

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perception of conflict of interest, that those grants can be used to advance certain political agendas.

Whether or not that is the case, the appearance of the conflict of interest potential is there. That is exactly why there must be openness in government. As the commissioner said, the openness and availability of public reports must be there so that we can protect everyone in the House against the accusations of conflict of interest through having access to the audit reports on various departments of government.

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that the member was alluding only to perception and not to reality. We must underscore what he said, but it is not responsible to keep repeating the perception with the hope or at least the unwitting result of creating a reality out of a perception. I am sure the member did not mean that. I am glad to note that he indicated that it was a perception. Of course the corollary is that it is not a real fiasco.

• (1550)

Mr. Eric Lowther: Mr. Speaker, regarding perception and reality, when the perception is continually laid before the Canadian public that grants and contributions are going to the ridings of certain members and that they have had a hand in it or some involvement in it, the problem is that unless there is openness on audit reports, unless there is openness to requests for information, which is the treasury board minister's guideline, there is concern. They will never get away from that perception unless they allow openness in the public reports generated by the government.

If they are really concerned about the perception, they should deal with it by endorsing the motion the opposition has brought forward today and by saying that they will let us have access to public reports paid for by public money for which we have been waiting for more than 45 days.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, government members opposite talk about perceptions and realities. Let us take a look at them. Of course they would like the perception of all Canadians to be that they are prudent financial managers and taking care of taxpayer dollars.

The reality is the very opposite. This has been exposed to the light of day through the HRDC fiasco. It is unbelievable and it cannot be hidden. That is reality. That is the reality government members are running from. They would like to create a smokescreen, a diversion, and make up a bunch of excuses about what they are doing, as though they really are prudent financial managers.

Let us take a look at some of the information that has somehow slipped through the minister's fingers, because we know she likes to hang on to it very tightly. Here is some that has slipped through the net. I will read from a letter from the minister of human resources when she wrote:

It greatly concerns me that Treasury Board regulations were not complied with in relation to issuing advances to sponsors and carrying over between fiscal years. This is an unacceptable practice that is completely avoidable. Every officer responsible for managing this fund should be cognizant of the regulations under which they work.

These are the minister's comments to people within her department. She acknowledges that treasury board guidelines are being broken. This is the minister and the government that put these guidelines in place. They are the ones who need to be held accountable and responsible for what it is they have done. We are bringing the motion forward in the House today to hold the government accountable.

The President of the Treasury Board said earlier in the House that the motion brought forward by the Canadian Alliance did not mean much, that it was meaningless. I would argue exactly the opposite. The President of the Treasury Board knows that the treasury board has been issued with directives to release the internal audits for which we are asking, and it has not done so.

Members of the official opposition, members of the Canadian Alliance, even filed access requests for some of the information which should be made public. It should already be out there in the open, and it has not been released.

We are bringing forward the motion today because of the smokescreen mentality of the government. It does not want the information to flow which should be in the public domain because it would expose the government further to what it really is, an irresponsible manager of the public purse. It has demonstrated that through its actions throughout the HRDC fiasco.

We see it spreading to other departments now. The government would like for Canadians to believe that it is a good manager when the opposite is true. It cannot hide from that reality. That is a reality and the government is in the midst of it. Canadians are not happy about it at all.

I would like to read a little more from some of the information we have from within the human resources department, some questions and some draft talking points given to employees which indicate in many ways that HRDC was not complying with the rules.

• (1555)

Here is a question within an internal document:

We were told to be flexible and responsive and not to lapse funds. Now we are being told we have to obey the Financial Administration Act and Treasury Board guidelines. Why doesn't management make up its mind?

That is a fairly indicting comment from within the department itself about its own guidelines. It has to issue questions and answers to its own employees about why management does not

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make up its mind, be flexible or obey the rules. That is unbelievable.

That is the kind of information that is being exposed in the light of day when we get it. This information is not forthcoming from the current government because it has to run and hide and get into damage control mode any time information is released. It is accountable for Canadian taxpayer dollars and it is blowing it in a big way. The document goes on to say in answer to the first question posed:

—the minister and the Deputy Minister have instructed us to follow the rules starting immediately.

What does that imply? It implies that the rules were not followed previous to this directive. It is unbelievable that employees had to be reminded to follow the rules. Another question was:

So what are the new rules? We have to know before we can talk to partners/sponsors.

The answer was:

The rules are not new. They are just being enforced.

They were not enforced before. That is the implication of that comment. Again I would state that this is glaring evidence of the problems the government is running from with the whole fiasco and why the President of Treasury Board and the government are not releasing information as quickly as they need to do. They are over the time limit in releasing information and as a result information is not coming forward. That is simply wrong.

This document from the human resources department goes on further with another question:

Do we really have to start these measures of enforcing the rules before this year's fiscal year-end?

The answer was:

We must obey the Financial Administration Act and the Treasury Board guidelines. This is not an option.

It is as though it were some new piece of information that they should be obeying the regulations and following the rules and guidelines, thereby implying that the guidelines were not being followed previously. That is why there are major problems and that is why we are bringing the motion forward today.

Canadians need to know this. They need to sift through the information screen being placed in their way by the government and take a look at the reasons behind it. The Liberals will stand to say one thing but they will do a very different thing with their actions.

I suggest that Canadians judge the government on its actions. What are its actions? Its actions have shown very clearly that it is a very poor manager of the hard earned tax dollars of Canadians. Money has gone out through some of the HRDC programs without

individuals even applying for funding. Yet they receive funding and very few checks and balances have been placed on that funding.

That is not government money. The Liberals seem to think somehow that it is government money. They are taxpayer dollars, hard earned dollars that people go to work every day to earn, to make a living. The government, which imposes the highest tax rate possible on Canadians, then squanders away much of this money in an unaccountable fashion.

I do not think people have a problem if dollars are being managed wisely. Canadians are generous people, but they sure have a problem when they see their money wasted and they see their money blown on programs that do not even have accountability measures built in.

That is unacceptable and that is why we are bringing the motion forward. That is why we are holding the President of Treasury Board, the Minister of Human Resources Development, the Prime Minister and the entire group over there accountable for releasing information. They need to do that and they have failed to do so.

It is almost like the Wizard of Oz. When we pull back the curtain and see a little man sitting behind it we wonder how we were bamboozled by this individual. It is amazing. I ask Canadians to pull back the screen and examine in the light of day the actions of the government and exactly what it has done with Canadians' hard earned tax dollars. They will be appalled. The government should be and needs to be held accountable.

● (1600)

We are waiting in its stead to fill the void that is being created by a government that has simply lost touch with Canadians and with its responsibility to manage taxpayer dollars. That is why we brought this motion forward.

We implore all members of the House to support this motion, which will hold the government accountable, so that we get the information that should be public but is not being released, to examine the actions of the government and to make the government accountable.

Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Broadview—Greenwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing to see the happy faces of my friends in the Canadian Alliance today. I have listened to many of the remarks by the opposition today and I do agree on the issue of holding us accountable. Many of us have been in opposition and we know it is the opposition's job to hold us accountable. We do not have a problem with that.

We would also like to remind members opposite that when they asked for all the records relating to the human resources development grants that happened across the country, we produced them.

Business of the House

The thing that troubles me about this exercise that the opposition is on right now is that it goes against the very essence of what this Chamber is supposed to be doing. What do I mean by that? I mean that we were elected to come to this Chamber, which I sometimes call the nation's boardroom, to speak for those in our communities, those in our country who need the most help.

Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from the beautiful county of Dundas.

We are not here to speak for the advantaged, although we do not ignore the advantaged, but we are here to speak for those who need the most help. In the last few years I think most Canadians would agree that we have gone through a very difficult and stressful time because of a tough economy. In a tough economy there are a lot more people who need help.

In my mind, what the opposition members have done over the last few months has been to put a spike in the heart of the essence of why we are all supposed to be here. They have taken the human resources development file, HRDC, and have tried to cast aspersions on thousands and thousands of projects in every riding across Canada, projects that have helped young people get into the workplace, projects for seniors, projects for the disabled and projects for farmers. The list goes on of thousands and thousands of projects right across Canada. They have tried to create a perception that this entire fund was mismanaged. They tried to create a perception that somehow \$1 billion—one member today even went as high as \$3 billion—just vanished, that it went out the back door. I think Canadians are beginning to realize that in all but a few examples, 99.9% of that money went to important community-building projects in every riding right across Canada.

● (1605)

Members in the House will cite examples where maybe the accounting procedures or the accountability of a particular project should have been better. I have no problem when the opposition stands up and tries to ask us about a specific project. Ultimately, we, as the government, have to take responsibility for all the officials. The notion of blaming the officials, in my mind, is awful. It is terrible to strike out at people who cannot defend themselves. It is our duty as elected members to say that the buck stops with us. We have to speak up and defend the officials. If they have made a mistake we have to take responsibility. However, we do not, for the sake of 40 or 50 examples out of over 35,000 projects, have to cast aspersions on the whole human resources development file. I, for the life of me, cannot figure it out.

Does this mean that the opposition wants to do away with HRDC projects? Is that what this line of attack means? Does the opposition want to cast aspersions on the \$1 billion that went to all the projects? I see one of the members shaking his head no. If they do

not want to cancel the HRDC file, then why are they trying to stain the whole envelope because of a few files that they want to challenge? That is where I take exception to the opposition's line of attack and line of accountability.

The opposition members have taken 40 or 50 files out of 35,000 and have tried to cast aspersions on \$1 billion and sometimes even as high as \$3 billion. I think Canadians see through that. If this had been a more straightforward accountability, they probably would have had better luck with the public. However, because they tried to take a few examples and say that the whole waterfront was money out the back door, I will bet my seat in the next election that all of those HRDC projects in my community, which I am proud of and which I stand by, will help get me re-elected.

The member across the way talks about this as being pork-barrelling. That casts aspersions on the public service. I am not sure if opposition members realize that public servants, officials and bureaucrats—and I think it is important for the public to know this—are bound by the Financial Administration Act of Canada. Unless a project meets the criteria, there is absolutely no way a contract will be processed because these public servants risk their own integrity and their own future in the public service.

I want to touch on one other area that is separate and apart from the human resources development file. It has to do with the Export Development Corporation. When the opposition members saw that the HRDC campaign to discredit all those good projects in every riding across Canada was beginning to falter, they began turning their sights on the Export Development Corporation. Boy, did they ever make a mistake there. This is an agency of the Government of Canada that has a reputation for being one of the most entrepreneurial units in the Government of Canada. Its economic track record shows us that. It has a responsibility to assist Canadian manufacturers of products to do business in every part of the world. To try to discredit EDC is really a shame.

● (1610)

In summary, I have no problems in being accountable to the opposition, but I wish it would deal with the specific facts and not cast aspersions on all departments and all the good work that tens of thousands of public servants do across Canada on behalf of millions of deserving Canadians.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Bob Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to give the House my assurance that discussions have taken place between all the parties and pursuant to Standing Order 45(7) I believe you would find consent for the following motion. I move:

That at the conclusion of today's debate on the Canadian Alliance's opposition motion, all questions necessary to dispose of the said motion be deemed put, a recorded division requested and deferred to the conclusion of today's debate on Bill C-222.

That at 5.15 p.m. today, the House shall resume debate on Bill C-222 as listed on today's order paper for Private Members' Business.

That at the conclusion of the debate on Bill C-222 all questions necessary to dispose of this item be deemed put, a recorded division requested and the bells to call in the members shall ring for not more than 15 minutes.

That the order for the taking of the recorded divisions later this day be as follows: all questions necessary to dispose of today's opposition motion; the motion of the Minister of Industry with respect to Bill C-6; second reading of Bill C-238; and all questions necessary to dispose of the motion concerning Bill C-222.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—DEPARTMENTAL AUDIT REPORTS

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, taking a look at the defence offered by my colleague on the Liberal side, he has used two modes of defence in his debate. One is the minimize defence, which is that this has not been very much of a problem at all. So the first tactic in his argument is to say that this is not really a big problem and that we should not worry about it. Mismanagement of a billion dollars is okay.

I would also say to my colleague that there is between \$13 billion and \$17 billion offered up in grants and contributions—

Mr. Dennis J. Mills: We have him up to 13.

Mr. Grant McNally: The hon. member will not listen. I am saying to him, and I will say it slowly and clearly so he can hear me, that \$13 billion to \$17 billion is spent in government departments in grants and contributions. I am only stating the facts. I do not think he would disagree with that. What we are asking is that if there is mismanagement in this billion dollars with HRD, is there a possibility that there could be some mismanagement in other

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departments with government funds? I would say, yes, there is a possibility of that.

The hon. member's second defence is the casting aspersions defence. He said it about nine different times. This is an attempt by the member to say that those who would ask questions might somehow be casting aspersions on individuals.

What we are doing is holding the government accountable and we are holding the minister accountable for her responsibility. Individuals within the different departments, the departmental officials which he noted, are between a rock and a hard place many times because they have to comply with those rules and regulations that are ever changing from directives of the minister.

• (1615)

After using his aspersions defence and his minimize defence, how can the member possibly defend this kind of spending of taxpayers' dollars as though it were nothing major and was just a minor thing happening—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): That is the question. The hon. member for Broadview—Greenwood.

Mr. Dennis J. Mills: Mr. Speaker, maybe we will get unanimous consent to extend this.

First, I would not want anyone in Canada to think that I was trying to minimize any mistake. By the way, I said earlier today in the debate that there is not a businessman or woman in Canada, there is not a government agency whether municipal, provincial or federal, there is not a perfect agency anywhere in the country or for that matter anywhere in the world. The notion that we think somehow that everything we do is perfect, forget it.

Canadians know that we make mistakes. What we are defending here is we do not think it is proper that in the opposition's process of making us accountable for certain files that were maybe not up to snuff, it has also cast aspersions on the whole Government of Canada process and 99.99% of the work that is proper. That is my point.

Mr. Grant McNally: Mr. Speaker, again we have seen the minimize defence.

I appreciate the fact that my colleague has admitted that the Liberals have made mistakes. Unfortunately the Minister of Human Resources Development has not done that. Had she done that right off the bat, then this would have subsided and would not have been the huge problem it has become for the government.

Would the hon. member talk to the minister and ask her to make the same kinds of comments he has just made in this place?

Mr. Dennis J. Mills: Mr. Speaker, this is really amazing. In my mind the minister has been doing a magnificent job. The minister's

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role is to defend not the 25 or 30 files where we are being held accountable, it is her responsibility to defend the integrity of all those projects in every riding in Canada that have been serving millions of Canadians. That is her responsibility.

Mr. John Bryden (Wentworth—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is late in the afternoon and there have been hours and hours of rhetoric. I think it is high time for a reality check. I do not include the hon. member for Broadview—Greenwood in the rhetoric. I was referring to the rhetoric coming from the other side. I must correct myself on that.

Mr. Grant McNally: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would offer that if this is a reality check, that is just unbelievable. The reality is that the government is trying to create a perception that is not so.

Mr. John Bryden: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member opposite would just wait for about two minutes, we will give him his little reality check.

The gist of the opposition argument is while acknowledging that treasury board practice and policy is to release audits as soon as possible, it is suggesting that the government is somehow dragging its heels because it cannot get the audits it requests under the Access to Information Act in a timely fashion.

The reality check is that I am going to read from the Access to Information Act. Section 21(1)(a) says:

The head of a government institution may refuse to disclose any record requested under this act that contains advice or recommendations developed by or for a government institution or a minister of the crown.

In other words, since 1994 it has been this government's policy to release the very information that the Access to Information Act entitles it to refuse.

• (1620)

Read the section again, I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker. You will see it very clearly states that the minister does not have to refuse to release that information and yet we have a government that, starting in 1994, almost as soon as we came to power, opened up that kind of information.

Mr. Speaker, when you resort to the Access to Information Act to try to get this type of information and the government is withholding it, if you will forgive me, Mr. Speaker, the suggestion is false. I believe that is in order, Mr. Speaker, the suggestion is false.

In fact, all that is happening is that of course the government when it is doing an audit wants to give time for its officials to examine the results of the audit. That is what timely release is all about. You have to give the government time to consider the results and then release it to the public.

The member's colleagues suggest that all these internal audits should be released to standing committees. This government, which is very sincere in its desire to bring the best level of management possible, does internal audits all the time, not just financial audits but performance audits. If all of those audits went out to a standing committee, the standing committee would be absolutely smothered.

The real answer is to put this kind of information on the Internet. Put it on the Internet where everyone can see it, Mr. Speaker, and then you will have the type of management control by the people of Canada that is the target of this government and I think is very, very poorly understood by the members opposite.

Indeed, if they really and truly wanted to ensure that it was government legislative policy and it was the law that the government had to release these audits, then all the members opposite would have to do is to support a certain private member's bill that is around. Bill C-206 offers them the opportunity to make amendments to the very clause I cited. This particular private member's bill, Bill C-206, uses that clause and adds the words that public opinion polls are to be disclosed automatically. You could easily add the words that government audits should be disclosed automatically to that clause, but no, that is too simple.

To think that the Reform Party, or the Canadian Alliance as it is now known, would actually take advantage of a legislative initiative of a private member in order to bring more openness to government is just too much to ask. The party opposite has made it very clear that it does not support reform to the Access to Information Act. It does not support it at all. It will be very amusing as time goes on to see it vote against a bill that calls for openness in government. But we will see.

However, I am glad of the opportunity to speak on this particular issue because if they were really interested in bringing more transparency to areas that really matter to Canadians, then they should be looking at this whole question of making the audits of non-profit organizations, charities and crown corporations available to the public. This is a huge area of secrecy. We have a President of the Treasury Board who has established a policy despite the restrictions of the Access to Information Act, a policy that does call for audits to be open and yet we have all these other bodies that spend billions and billions of taxpayers' dollars, who, when they are audited, can keep those audits secret.

I would suggest again that there is an incredible opportunity for the opposition members if they really want these audits made public, and I think the majority of Canadians would say that is correct, they should be supporting a certain private member's bill, Bill C-206. If it passes and goes through, it would overtake the Income Tax Act and its restrictions on the disclosure of the audits of charities and non-profit organizations and would make these available to the public.

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I ask you, Mr. Speaker, what is wrong with the opposition? What is wrong with the opposition that it cannot get on board with legislation that is supported by 70 backbenchers on this side alone and dozens of backbenchers or members of the opposition on the other side? For some reason I cannot understand, the Reform Party has abandoned the issue entirely and so has the Bloc Quebecois. They do not care about openness and I know why.

It is because a government that is closed is a good target. A government that is open, as we have seen from the minister of the treasury board as she explains that these audits are available now, you can get them now. Well, Mr. Speaker, that does not give much opportunity to the members of the opposition. And so they come up with a motion, Mr. Speaker, that I can even barely understand. Mr. Speaker, I am in despair with them. I just do not know what I can do with them.

• (1625)

What they do not seem to understand is that our time in this House is precious. They should get behind legislation, either government legislation or private members' legislation, that is good for Canadians, instead of putting trivial motions on the floor that we have to vote against because the motion goes nowhere and suggests by implication that the government is not doing its job when in fact it is doing more than its job.

This is a government that stands for transparency. We are moving in the right direction. I do wish the opposition would get on board.

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member opposite for his impassioned plea for the opening up of the Access to Information Act and to become more transparent than is currently the case. I could not agree more.

I also agree with his advocacy that charitable organizations open their books to the public insofar as it is desirable to do so. I do not disagree with that at all.

I think the hon. member actually is in agreement with everything we stand for over here. The interesting thing which I cannot figure out is why in the world he moved from one bill to another bill and somehow thinks that the second bill is better than the first. He has not explained that to me at all. I do not think he has explained it to anyone. I think that is why he is in trouble right now, because he has failed to explain exactly what it is that he wants.

He wants more access to information and that is correct. So do I, as does this whole side of the House, whether it is the Canadian Alliance or others. And I would like to educate the hon. member opposite that there is a Canadian Alliance and there is no Reform Party in Canada. Would he please remember that is the case.

I ask the hon. member, exactly what does he understand an audit to be?

Mr. John Bryden: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. I have difficulty grasping this new name, but I believe it is in order if I still call it the former Reform Party. I do not think there is any rule in the House that requires me to call it the perfidious alliance or whatever it is.

Apart from that, there are two types of audits. There is a financial audit and there is a performance audit. Actually since this government came to power in 1993, the civil service has been moving more and more toward performance audits.

There is no question that there has been a very serious problem in governments before and we are moving in the right direction. The problem has been that the money has been spent and there has not been a decent tracking of whether that money has been spent wisely and well.

I think what we are talking about here in reforming accounting practices and reforming the Access to Information Act is keeping track of the money and making sure that money is spent well.

It is really transparency that you must have before you have accountability, and I do believe, not just the political government but our bureaucracy is headed in that direction as fast as it can go.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, to the member who just spoke, I find it interesting that there is a party now in the House that would like to distance itself so quickly from its previous name that members are standing constantly and saying there is another name and they must distance ourselves immediately from that party formerly known as the Reform Party. It is very interesting that they not only distance themselves from their name, but from their leader, their party and their principles.

The issue of the day obviously is audits. The hon. member said that performance audits are a very integral part of management as we know it today in our society. It is true by the way. I am very familiar with performance and proficiency audits.

The member also said that in previous governments it was seen that those departments were not acting in a proper manner. Certainly the performance audits being brought in now are the ones now functioning in a proper fashion.

Can the member then answer please why it is that some of those performance audits I have been asking for from other departments are not forthcoming from his government? They are not forthcoming and access to information seems to be the only way to get those particular audits. Is there some reason why this member feels that transparency was only good in this government and not in previous governments? Why can I not get my audits?

Supply

• (1630)

Mr. John Bryden: Mr. Speaker, I think part of the problem is the Access to Information Act itself which was passed in 1983. It has not been upgraded or overhauled since that time.

We have to get at that legislation and make it so that it is very clear the type of information that the bureaucrats should release automatically. In other words, if he wants to perform his audit, I would say to him that it should not be a matter of an access to information request. It should be so defined as being the type of information that should be automatically released, and I think better out through the Internet.

I think we are headed in the right direction. I served a little while on the government operations committee in 1995. I was very surprised to see how behind the times a lot of this performance management, or lack of it, was. I think we are headed in the right direction, but it is really up to us, the politicians, to lead.

I really deplore it when I see members of the opposition, and not the member who just spoke, because I know he is very interested in reforming the Access to Information Act, but I really deplore it when other members of the opposition do not support what Canadians think is the right thing to do, for minor political gain, for their party, Reform, former Reform. I am not sure what it is, but whatever it is allied to, I am sorry, I have just forgotten.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, Transfers to Provinces; the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas, Criminal Code; the hon. member for Brandon—Souris, Agriculture.

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise you that I am sharing my time with the member for Kelowna.

When we listen to some of the members opposite, we would think that there is not even a problem. But things are so bad that we had to bring forth this motion today on behalf of all the opposition parties.

I will be revealing something a little bit later on in my speech that will probably be like a bombshell thrown into this place. But first of all I want to describe my personal experience.

When I first came to parliament back in 1993, I thought that if we spoke the truth and if we put forth arguments that were reasonable and analysed the information available, it would affect

the decisions made in this place. What a surprise I received when I got here. Government members really do not listen. They invoke closure on controversial legislation that we oppose, but most serious of all, we cannot analyse the information because it is not available in a timely fashion. The government delays its release.

For example, I have made about 80 access to information requests. Hon. members will wonder why I even have to apply for the information. They would think that it would be shared freely. In fact, the government boasts that it is doing a good job managing our money and running effective programs. We would think that it would be anxious to share that information with us and the public. But there really is a problem with open and transparent government. That is the reason we brought forth this motion.

The government, as the President of Treasury Board has said, talks about the complexities of government and the need to modernize. Canadians expect a government in modern times with the technology available to have information readily available. In fact, it appears as if the government is using the modern means available to it to hide the information.

Some of the examples of government hiding information are almost unbelievable. The information which should be made available in 30 days sometimes has taken almost a year. Hon. members have heard that right, almost a year. In fact, after the government was stonewalling some of my requests, I had to complain to the information commissioner. It took almost one year to find out how much money was being wasted by the RCMP on the gun registry. Probably the information was embarrassing, but it is not being released as it should be.

There are other problems. A billion dollar boondoggle is unfolding with regard to the gun registry.

• (1635)

Over \$300 million has already been wasted on laying a piece of paper beside every gun in Canada rather than improving public safety by putting more police on the street, and the government does not want the public to know about it. That is probably why I am having difficulty having my access to information requests complied with.

What are some of the other problems? I revealed on approximately March 9 that the justice minister blocked 172 pages of the Canadian Firearms Centre budget documents. The excuse was cabinet secrecy. I did not know about that until I started trying to find out how much the government was spending. It has come up with a new excuse, cabinet secrecy.

The minister's departmental officials are even refusing to provide the proposed budget allocation for this coming year, saying that they do not need to release that information. The government

has also used cabinet secrecy to withhold from the public a 115-page report on the negative impact of the Firearms Act on the economy. It has done the study but it will not release the results of the study and the cost of its legislation for businesses, how it will destroy thousands of jobs and all the money that will be wasted.

It gets even worse than that. I discovered through access to information that not only does the government hide information from members of parliament so we cannot hold it accountable and tell Canadians what a mess it is making, it even hides it from the courts.

That is the bombshell I will tell members about. Here is what I found out.

I will give a preamble. An eight page document was released to me entitled "Cost Presentations Options" was dated February 5, 1998. Here is what option C, the incremental approach, says when it comes to releasing the costs, "If pressed, confirm actual spending of the past three years on C-68. Provide arguments why we can't produce a definite cost forecast". In other words, the government already planned strategy as to why it would not release the information as to how it would explain it does not want to release the information.

Under timing considerations it proposed releasing the cost of the gun registry at the same time that the government went public with the federal budget. The reason was that "A lot of numbers are mentioned during that period," referring to the budget, "and we benefit from the sheer volume of numbers being released (i.e. unlikely to attract a lot of attention)".

The hon. member said that if the government does things in a certain way, put it on the Internet and so on, that will help. We have clear evidence here that it will release so much stuff, so many numbers will be put out, that it will be mind boggling and the public will not know. This is clear evidence that it is like a culture of deceit over there.

Here is the bombshell. This is what the minister's bureaucrats admitted in a document I received through access to information.

During the Alberta reference court proceedings, we argued that we were not in a position to reveal costs. Announcing the costs before a decision may add a bad 'obiter' in their decision.

Documents provided to me in response to previous access to information requests proved the justice department had been keeping an annual summary of the gun registry costs since 1995 and even though those detailed financial documents were available, they were telling the Alberta Court of Appeal that they could not reveal them. They would not even tell the courts and one has to ask why.

Deceiving the public is bad enough, but deliberately deceiving the Alberta Court of Appeal must surely have some consequences.

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Why should Canadians care about whether we have open and accountable government? Does this debate even matter today?

Let me say this. This strikes to the very heart of democracy. There must be a free exchange of information. Without information as to how the government operates, we cannot hold the government accountable. Democracy just cannot work. Second, it is the money of the Canadian people that is being spent. They should know where that money is. We are talking big bucks. When almost half of some people's income is going to government, that is a lot of money.

• (1640)

Third, if the money is being used to buy votes, that thwarts democracy and it should not be happening. How can proper decisions be made if we do not have all the information available? That really thwarts democracy. If it is being misused, that is also of great concern.

Why does someone who has been drinking refuse a breathalyser test after being stopped by a police officer on a public highway? Why do they say "No, I do not want to take the breathalyser"? If a person refused a breathalyser, they can be assumed to be guilty. Is that why the government refuses to be open and accountable and release the information?

The fourth point I want to make as to why Canadians should care about what is going on here is the big issue of trust. Trust does not just reflect on the government. It reflects on all of us in this place. People do not trust the government because of the fact that they discover huge boondoggles long after they have been out of this place.

Maybe there is another bombshell I can drop right here. I made a request on the cost of the gun registry and Canadians may find this unbelievable. I cannot use a prop in the House but I received a budget document on the cost of the gun registry. Everything was itemized except the column where the numbers should have been. It was completely blocked out. Is that access to information? That is what I am concerned about. That has to stop. We need to have that information because without it I cannot do my job and that should be a concern to all Canadians.

Mr. John Bryden (Wentworth—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, did I really hear right? I do believe the member opposite said that the government is deceiving the people by giving them too much information, too many numbers. That is exactly what he said. I must say he really underestimates the Canadian public because there are lots of people who have computers. He may not know about computers but there are lots of people with computers who can crunch numbers and check the government's numbers if we can only get them out to them.

I listened to the member carefully when he talked about blank spaces in the documents he was getting via access to information.

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This is not a problem that exists with government, it is a problem that exists with legislation that needs to be reformed. If he wants that information, then he should get on board with the rest of the backbench MPs and change the Access to Information Act into an open government act so we can get that information. He should get on board rather than sitting here whining in the House and blaming the government when in fact it is his Reform Party's lack of initiative, lack of getting behind the private members who are trying to change the way government operates, trying to make government open. I do not know why he simply stands here and complains when he could get on board with the rest of the MPs on both sides of the House and make a difference.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, the member has asked two good questions.

With regard to the first question about the public and all the information, what I was trying to explain to the member is that the government has a deliberate strategy to put so much information into a certain place and to put in so many numbers that it is confusing. The government has a deliberate strategy to confuse. That is the point I was trying to make.

In the access to information request that I put forward, I read that part of the government's strategy is to try to deceive people by putting information in and taking information out. When questions are asked, the government indicates that it is explained. The government puts out information that needs to be cross-referenced and wiggles out of almost any accountability. That is the problem.

As far as what the member was saying in regard to access to information, that is exactly what we are trying to do here today. We agree that needs to be fixed. We do not have a problem with that, but it is the government that has to fix it.

The member knows that a private member's bill is open to a free vote and we have no problem with having a free vote on that kind of thing.

• (1645)

However, without our raising the issue, I do not think the member opposite would get much support. In fact I think he only has 70 members supporting it so far. Perhaps we have to start putting public pressure on the government to open up the information act and make sure that it is available to everyone. That is our point and that is why the debate today is so important.

Mr. John Bryden: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his reasoned reply. We have over 70 backbenchers on the Liberal side who are supporting it and about 40 members or so on the opposition side. Therefore, the will is here.

I have to stress that I am a legislator too. It is not just the government that passes laws or creates laws, it is we backbenchers.

In fact we are the very bread and butter of the laws. It is right and proper for a bill of this type, of this nature, of this importance to come from the backbench. There is nothing wrong with that. Why should we always rely on the government to have the initiative? Why can we not band together and do good things around this place?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, give me a break. I cannot believe it. We are all here to try to improve the lot of Canadians and to pass good laws. For this member to give the impression that it is only the government that cares about it is demeaning to what we are trying to do on this side of the House. I really resent that.

I want to make the point that it is an advantage not just to backbench MPs on the government side, but to all MPs in the House that we have a free flow of information. With a free flow of information and openness in government all Canadians would benefit. That is the bottom line. The only way democracy can function is if we have a free flow of information. If something is hidden we cannot make good decisions. That is what this discussion is all about. The government hides information so that we cannot hold it accountable, and it is the people of Canada who in the end suffer. That is my main point. Let us not lose sight of that.

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is really a very interesting debate that is taking place this afternoon. I would like to commend my hon. colleague from Yorkton—Melville for the very explicit and detailed analysis that he has done and also the very specific examples that he used to illustrate and support his particular arguments. I appreciate that very much.

I would like to focus our attention a little more concisely, because information is such a big word. In fact it has come to the point today where to simply use the word information is almost ambiguous. We have to ask ourselves what kind of information it is that we want.

We are talking about audits. Audits have been divided by various groups into different kinds. There are internal audits, external audits, financial audits, performance audits and a variety of audits. What we are talking about, at least in part, has to do with financial audits. In fact I wish to speak about financial audits primarily.

These audits have to do with examining in an official capacity the financial statements and the financial records and accounts that are kept by government, that are kept by business and that are kept by individuals. The audit is a reflection, an accurate statement, an official statement of the expenditures that have been taking place in a particular government department. That is what we are talking about this afternoon.

The audit is the official examination of whether there is an accurate statement of the revenues that have been received and an

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accurate accounting and record of the expenditures that have taken place. However, the audit also follows the trail of the money: Where did it come from? Where is it going? What was the process used in spending the money? Was it spent according to the plan that was originally established? That has to do with the budget.

The audit compares where the money was supposed to come from, where the budget suggested that the revenues be collected, and where the money was supposed to be spent, and we have the official record of the estimates.

Invariably, every year there is a statement that is brought forward called the supplementary estimates. These are estimates that are added to the original budget. They change certain lines and they add certain amounts of money to certain lines so that the intentions of the original budget document can be met.

- (1650)

The budget is the guiding document. It is the policy document. In fact the budget is a piece of legislation. It has the force of law, it is the law and it must be observed. The audit is a very clear comparison of what the budget said should happen and what actually happened. It has to do with projects, with programs and with the intentions of government as to where our money should be spent.

There are two words that refer to the audit. One has to do with accountability, that is, to hold the government to account as to whether the money was spent the way it was supposed to have been, and also to give an account. To whom should that account be given? That account shall be given to the people whose money was spent. The money the government has is not its own. Whatever money the government has is money that has been collected from the taxpayers, either directly or indirectly. It is money that is held in trust. The whole concept of holding to account has to do with giving an account of how the money that was collected was spent. The government said it needed the money for these projects and programs. Did the government deliver the projects and programs? That is the first level of accountability.

The second level of accountability is, did the government spend as much as it said it would spend, less or more? If less was spent, why were the costs of the project underestimated? If more was spent, why? Was it inefficiency or were there other reasons? The government had better explain why it did not hit the mark set in the budget.

The budget also establishes responsibility. It says who shall get the money: the Minister of Human Resources Development, the Minister of National Revenue, the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Natural Resources, the Minister of Industry, and so on. The budget clearly identifies who shall get the money and on which projects and programs it shall be spent. If the minister does not do that, he or she should be held to account. The responsibility is his or hers and no one else's.

The point has been made that the servants of government, the public employees, are doing an excellent job of managing public money. They had better, because it is the minister who holds them to account. If the minister does not hold them to account, then the minister is the one whom the audit should reveal and say "Mr. Minister, you are the one who had this account. This is your responsibility. Make sure that it is done according to the regulations and policies that have been set up to do the job". That becomes the issue.

The budget clearly identifies not only what money should be spent, how much should be spent, where it should be spent, but who is to be held to account, who is responsible for the expenditure of that money.

Then we have to look at the honesty, the integrity, the openness and the freedom of the people to do what the government said they should do, in trust for the people, in the name of the people. When the Minister of National Defence spends money, he spends it in the name of the people. The people trust that minister to spend the money in such a way that their security and the security of the nation will be looked after. If it is not, then the minister is held to account, and the Prime Minister is held to account for all of the ministers in his cabinet.

What is meant by honesty? It means that the government and the minister have to be able to say "This is the financial statement. These are the revenues that we received. This is how they were spent. This is an honest statement of what happened". There are not two sets of books. There is one set of books. That is honesty.

Then there is integrity. Integrity is very interesting because the minister recognizes that it is his or her responsibility and that he or she is accountable. The responsibility cannot be pushed off by saying "I have delegated this to my deputy. Therefore, I am not responsible, it is the deputy's responsibility". If the minister is a person of integrity the response would be "I am responsible".

What about openness? "Sure, here are the books. Here is where I spent the money. Have a look and see whether it is not so". They do not bother to white out columns so as not to show certain numbers. Why would they not want to let out this information? It is a cover-up of some kind. It is either the cover-up of a number on a sheet of paper or it is the cover-up of a decision that is represented by that number. In any event, any kind of whiteout, any kind of resistance to give information is a lack of openness. This is all part of responsibility. This is all part of integrity and honesty.

- (1655)

There is also something else, and that has to do with freedom. When it comes to the business of people giving to the government their money, which the government is to spend on their behalf, in trust, to do the kinds of things that the government said it would do in its budget, the people have the right to know. They should have

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the freedom to ask the minister and to ask the Prime Minister if the government spent their money the way it said it would. That openness has to be guaranteed.

It is not just openness for the sake of openness; it is openness in a timely fashion. If a department's books are opened five years later, it might be useful, but there would be a totally different set of circumstances. There has probably been an election and there may be a different government in power. Timeliness is absolutely critical.

We need to be very, very careful when we talk about these audits, that they are timely, that they are open, that they can hold people to account and determine clearly where the responsibility lies.

If that is the case, then we need to examine why it is that a corporation like the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation can request an extension because it needs to consult a third party. Whose money is this? Who made the decision? The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation made the decision. It had the money. It kept the books, but it now needs to consult a third party to see whether in fact it is an accurate statement. What is going on? Why does it have to consult a third party? The corporation is responsible. The minister is responsible. He should be open and he should be able to account.

The debate is very significant. It is very necessary and it is in the interests of the people who are listening. I am here to hold the government to account. The government should not be afraid. If it is making good decisions, the people will say "Yes, the government has managed my money well".

Mr. John Bryden (Wentworth—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I followed the member's speech with great attention, but I found myself losing the thread slightly in the sense that he seemed to be speaking about financial audits and which numbers count.

He will realize, of course, that anyone who has anything to do with reading the annual reports of any type of company, incorporated or otherwise, will know that often these financial audits tell us very little, other than the fact that money came in, money went out and there was no criminality or fraud involved.

It seems to me, when we look at HRDC, that what we are talking about and what we want from government are the results of performance audits. The whole kerfuffle about HRDC is not about the actual moneys spent; it is whether or not the moneys were spent effectively and properly, whether the proper records were kept and whether there was proper management of the moneys. It seems to me we are talking about two things.

When he is talking about numbers, is he not really criticizing public accounts record keeping, criticizing the estimates and the way the government keeps the estimates? If he is, I would agree

with him that work has to be done there. However, I am not sure that this motion is really focused in quite the right direction if it is the numbers which concern him.

Mr. Werner Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for giving me the opportunity with that question to expand further on this issue.

Yes, it is an expansion of the motion to a degree, but it is a very necessary expansion. The audits themselves reveal the processes to be used to follow the money to determine if it was spent where it was supposed to have been spent. That is a financial audit. We could call it a performance audit, if we wished. It is a very fine distinction and one which the people really do not care about.

What the people want to know is if their money went where it was supposed to go and was it used for that which it was originally intended.

One thing they do not want that money to be used for is to buy votes. That was never the intention when the people of Canada gave the money to the government and said "I will pay my taxes. I want you to look after those who are poor, who cannot look after themselves", as in the case of HRDC. That is what they want. By the same token, they do not want that money to be used to buy votes to give particular advantage to particular people because they live in a particular way and have given money back to a political party. That they do not want. The audit will reveal that kind of thing if it is a proper audit and if it is open and timely. That is exactly what we want.

• (1700)

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question for the hon. member. He knows that I have a lot of respect for him.

I am surprised that there is this assumption that voters can be so easily bought. I have never yet met a voter who could be bought. Maybe I have not asked the right questions.

Voters in Canada are well informed. They are thoughtful and intelligent. I understand the political point the member is making, but are voters in Kelowna really that stupid that they can be persuaded to vote a particular way because somebody brings a government cheque to them? I would be surprised if his voters are really that dumb.

Mr. Werner Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, the best response is that is why they never voted in a Liberal.

I have too much respect for the minister to not recognize the seriousness behind the question. I want to recognize that the voters by and large are very intelligent. After all, that is what makes democracy work. I also know that we are sometimes very subtly

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influenced by getting certain kinds of money for certain advantages. We are kind of selfish people. Most of the people around here have a bit of a selfish interest.

We do have this kind of thing. We do have a penchant toward doing that. We want to avoid that. We do not want the appearance of public funds being used to influence a voter to cast his or her ballot in a particular direction. That is the issue. I do not think the voter would do so deliberately. To suggest that they are not influenced is not the way it really exists out there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): So the hon. member is aware, the debate will terminate at 5.15 p.m. The hon. member has about 12 minutes.

Mr. John O'Reilly (Haliburton—Victoria—Brock, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, being a former hockey player I was used to ragging the puck whenever I was able to get it.

Haliburton—Victoria—Brock had a large number of grants in the riding, in fact, the most in southern Ontario, next to Toronto. With over 200 programs, it was a great concern to me when the leader of the opposition started yelling the new word “boondoggle”. I was very concerned because this was a word I had never heard before and was one I was not sure if I was part of.

I asked the local press to audit some of the programs in my riding. The first one it audited was the Lindsay Boys and Girls Club because it was the largest recipient. It has a number of programs that cater to youth in the riding, that cater to boys and girls programs and provides a large variety of very worthwhile programs. It was one that I thought the municipality and the county could not afford. Therefore, we were very appreciative that these grants came into the ridings.

The audit on the Lindsay Boys and Girls Club looked at the applications made, the method of what checks and balances had to take place in order for them to receive and keep the grant and how the money was actually spent. I felt that that program withstood the scrutiny of the boondoggle by the opposition party formerly known as the Reform. As in the largest majority of the grants, I felt there were no problems.

• (1705)

We wanted to make sure that the minister was well aware of the good publicity received in our riding because we honestly took a look at just exactly what the opposition was talking about. Therefore, in doing our own audits and publishing the names of every organization that received grants, whether it was a local pizza parlour that was hiring youth for the summer so that they could have their first job, so that they could afford to go to university, so

that they could pay their tuition, I felt that all of these programs stood on their own merits.

As we looked at each one of them and as we looked at the ones proposed again this year, we wanted HRDC to know that we are quite pleased with the amount of grants, the number of grants, and the proportion of them. Of course we would like more money. Who would not? But we want them to know that these grants mean something to ridings.

In Haliburton we do not have to go very far to find a population with a high unemployment rate, with a seasonal work problem. We have as many problems in trying to address that as the east coast and, to some extent, the great north.

HRDC has already provided the results of an internal audit in the grants and contributions program and we have done our own audit in our riding. This total audit identifies some shortcomings in the management of the department's grants and contributions program. I think that is normal.

If we take my riding with over 200 grants, we cannot look at that and say that there would not be someone who did not dot an *i* or cross a *t* or send back the wrong form. That is only human nature, but in fact the internal audits are made to identify things that need fixing. That is why organizational reviews and audits are basically tools used by modern managers to make sure the right structures are in place and the right resources are available.

We are in a changing world. We are in a world where certain pockets need more help than others. We have to admit that not everyone is caught up in the metropolitan Toronto boom. Not everyone is caught up in the high tech industries. In my mind, Ontario is not Toronto. That is maybe what happens with the party formerly known as Reform. It has kind of looked at Toronto as if it were Ontario. It really is not.

If we look at the riding of Haliburton—Victoria—Brock, there are 46 municipalities, 24 Santa Claus parades and 18 cenotaph services. We never have a time where we are not busy. In fact, last weekend I had the pleasure of accompanying the minister of agriculture for Canada as he toured one of the newest operations, one of the great new dairy operations.

If we go to that area we will find 450 active dairy farms. Let us think about that, 450 active dairy farms in my riding alone. The member for Wentworth—Burlington is waiting to heckle me because he does not have dairy farms. Does he have dairy farms?

Mr. John Bryden: I do so.

Mr. John O'Reilly: Okay, he has good dairy farms, but when we look at that as a part of Ontario, not many people from Nova Scotia would think that Ontario has one of the largest fishing industries in Canada. The internal waterway is a great resource.

Supply

We have to think beyond the megacity of Toronto and the problems it has, and go out into the ridings and areas which represent mainstream Ontario and some of the recreational facilities.

It is important to note that the minister of HRDC voluntarily made the report public. She did so as soon as the department managers came together with an acceptable plan to meet the identified deficiencies. These are not things which were brought out by the party formerly known as Reform. They were brought out by good control within the department's own management system.

Regarding controlling payments, no payments are made without written confirmation that the criteria are met. I know that to be a fact in looking at my riding and correcting past problems. Some of these agencies are made up of volunteers or made up of people who are not paid to be auditors, who are not paid to be managers, so they do the best they can. There were 37 projects flagged in the internal audit report and all other active files are being reviewed. I think that is a compliment.

• (1710)

The HRDC people are key to fixing these problems. It is not something that will happen through access to information. I firmly believe we are the most open in the world on that. The professional and dedicated people of the government who work on HRDC are the ones who will certainly bring this program into line, if in fact it needs to be brought into line, or whether it is not just the new word "boondoggle" that the Leader of the Opposition had a tough time even pronouncing, let alone spelling.

When HRDC is ensuring accountability, it has established a performance tracking unit to monitor the corrective actions and to provide regular reports. I think that is what is going on in each individual member's riding in HRDC offices right across this country, access to the best advice available. HRDC is in fact in regular contact with the office of the auditor general and several major accounting firms, so it is following up on all the things that need to be followed up on and it has made a commitment to openly report and to report objectively on the progress.

What it boils down to is the six point action plan is certainly seeing its way through the system and producing the results that we thought it would produce, that is that there are very few programs with which we have any trouble, other than in the eyes of the party formerly known as the Reform Party.

As members of parliament, it is important that we let our officials get on with implementing the plan. Many thousands of Canadians depend on these programs. If I go back to the Boys and Girls Club of Lindsay, I do not know how anyone in fairness could stand up and openly contest the good work that it does. I had no

trouble throughout all these discussions, always leaning back and looking at exactly what was going on in my own riding and how that was helping the community. It certainly was helping the community.

We have heard from Canadians all across the country. I have heard from Canadians in my riding who are in support of making sure that we look after people who need to be looked after, that we look after people who are less fortunate than ourselves, that we look after the needy regions of the country. They are not just on the east coast or in the north. They are all over this great country of ours. There are pockets that have great need.

I want to speak a little bit about the tens of thousands of Canadians who depend on the support from HRDC. Whether it is helping people become more literate or whether it is helping people make their way in a world that is certainly difficult for people with disabilities, I think that those types of programs are in need of our support.

I recognize, as the member for Wentworth—Burlington has pointed out so many times, there are some 73,000 registered charities in Canada, all of which write members of parliament every day and all of which lobby the government to try to get more money. Some of them are very worthwhile and some of them we have our questions about. Some certainly should be looked at more closely. I think that is an area that the parties in opposition could look at more closely and maybe find some result or find out exactly what is going on there.

Madam Speaker, I know my time is coming to an end because you are waving your finger. I want to wrap up by saying that I do think that the auditor general believes the minister and her officials are following the right course to improve the administration of the department grants and contributions program with the six point plan. I would encourage them to get on with it and they will find, as I have, that the plan is working and that the problems exist only in the minds of the opposition.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Thibeault): It being 5.15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion of the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill relating to the business of supply are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until later this day, at the expiry of the time provided for Private Members' Business.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to order made earlier today, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

FIRST NATIONS OMBUDSMAN ACT

The House resumed from February 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-222, an act to establish the office of First Nations Ombudsman to investigate complaints relating to administrative and communication problems between members of First Nations communities and their First Nation and between First Nations, allegations of improper financial administration and allegations of electoral irregularities, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I rise today in full support of the bill by the hon. member for Wild Rose, Bill C-222. We are into the final hour of debate. We have heard a fair bit about the bill and I have listened to what members on the other side have had to say.

I am here tonight to tell those members that I have been to many of these meetings. I have listened to the aboriginal people who have showed up at these meetings. I have listened to their concerns. Some of the stories I have heard would bring tears to your eyes, Madam Speaker.

I had a speech for tonight. Instead, I will read into the record a letter calling for financial accountability. It states:

We have been working for 5 years trying to get accountability, democracy and equality to our First Nations communities. We worked for three years under the name Dakota Action Group and for two years under First Nations National Accountability Coalition of Manitoba. To date, we have gone national and are in the process of registering our organization under First Nations National Accountability Coalition. We have organizations in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick. We get calls from all parts of Canada with regards to mismanagement of band funds, corruption, nepotism, no services, no equality and dictatorship rule in the First Nations communities.

We have approximately 200 reserves that have joined our accountability coalitions and there are about 213 that have been in contact with our organization or affiliates. These band members want their rights restored under the Canadian constitution, the charter of rights and freedoms, the Human Rights Act and the Indian Act.

As aboriginal people and as Canadian citizens, we have been stripped of all rights by our very own aboriginal leaders as well as the department of Indian affairs.

The Corbiere consultation process is proof of that. The supreme court ruled in favour of the Batchewana off reserve band members to vote in band elections, but they could not do the consultation process nor could they get the funding for it. The government gave the defendants—the Indian affairs and the chiefs and councils—

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funding to do the consultation process. We believe the government is letting the fox get security for the hen house.

Our organizations, which deal directly with the “grassroots people” across Canada, were not informed of the Corbiere consultation process or of the funding for it. Again, the grassroots people have been neglected and forgotten. The aboriginal people have no rights. The majority are ruled “dictatorship style” on the reserves. There is no economic development in the First Nations communities. Most reserves have no money and huge deficits with no future in sight for band members. This is one reason the suicide rate has sky-rocketed and has reached epidemic proportions on the reserves.

The way the chiefs and the council operate their systematic government is demoralizing, demeaning and discriminatory. There are very few band meetings, if any at all. Few band members are privileged to be employed. The grassroots people are not informed of any developments on how their funds are spent. They can only observe the chiefs and council and their relatives drive new vehicles, get new houses or extensions on homes and the chiefs' and council's children sent to private schools. Nepotism is widespread. The band members are not educated and they are kept that way. The chiefs and councillors are not available to be accountable or to provide information because they are on exotic vacations/trips and they are paid twice for per diems, travel and honorariums.

Their cellphones are unlisted while grassroots people are forced to live in third world conditions. Many cannot access money for housing, medical, education, transportation, including all other programs such as native alcohol and drug programs. Any activity or requests for accountability results in all services being discontinued. The aboriginal leaders do not consult with the band members. They do whatever they want. They spend band funds any way they want with little or no sensitivity to the needs of their people. The grassroots people pay dearly and heavily for the extravagant squandering of band funds (tax dollars) by the chiefs and council. This is condoned by the department of Indian affairs.

If the non-native people ran their businesses the way the majority of the chiefs and councillors operate the band offices, they would be in jail. This is proof of the double standard that exists in a democratic country such as Canada. To go to Indian affairs or the RCMP is futile. Numerous packages have been given to both departments about fraud, corruption, embezzlement, etc. A blind eye is turned. RCMP liaise with Indian affairs and so it appears that Indian affairs investigated themselves and controls the RCMP. This leads us to believe that the chiefs and councillors are above the law. Their criminal activities are untouchable. The band members have nowhere to turn for help.

We knew the band members needed to have a native ombudsman, so we did a proposal and gave it to (the member for Wild Rose) to take to the House of Commons on behalf of the grassroots people. Without one, there will be more Waterhen, Gustufson and Oka crises. Situations have deteriorated so badly that people are threatening to take arms up against their chiefs and council and to give up their lives for change.

We have a crisis in our First Nation communities and it is crucial that a native ombudsman be enacted into legislation. Fortunately for the grassroots people from coast to coast, there is an organization like the First Nations Accountability Coalition where people can vent their frustrations, hopelessness and receive a glimmer of hope that there might be a solution which is the native ombudsman who will be there on behalf of the grassroots people.

We appeal to all members of parliament to support this native ombudsman Bill C-222. If the government is sincere to remain in good standing in their special relationship with Canada's First Nations people, and if they truly want accountability, democracy and equality in Canada, as well as lighten the tax burden, then they will support Bill C-222. We see this as a major milestone in building on a new relationship with the grassroots people of Canada and we are PEOPLE too!

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• (1720)

This letter was written by Leona Freed who has worked very hard to bring some of these concerns to the attention of the government and to the attention of members of parliament.

I would like to quote from another article called Chief "Injustices." It will give members something to think about. It says "if you dare criticize the abusers, you are ostracized. If you dare speak out in favour of support groups who are off reserve for urban aboriginals, if you speak out against the aboriginals, you stand the chance that aboriginal goon squads will come after you".

This is not uncommon. It goes on and on.

We went to meeting after meeting. I attended a meeting in Alberta with the hon. member for Wild Rose. The native people came up to us and told us they were threatened. They were at the meeting even though they had been threatened not to talk to members of parliament and not to raise those concerns. Is this any way to live in this country when a person cannot take their concerns to their member of parliament, let alone the RCMP, without threats being made against their family? This is what is going on.

It is not just the communities that are saying this. I will now quote some examples given by a judge. The most high profile example of aboriginal corruption is on the oil rich Stoney Reserve, 60 kilometres west of Calgary, where an independent audit in financial mismanagement resulted in 43 complaints being turned over to the RCMP.

• (1725)

In a precedent setting decision in 1997, Alberta Judge John Reilly demanded a provincial inquiry into how such a wealthy band could have such poverty and social ills, linking the Stoney government to a banana republic.

In September 1999, after investigating the suicide of a Stoney teenager, Judge Reilly produced a damning report that laid the blame for the boy's death squarely at the feet of the corrupt native leadership and the misguided federal bureaucrats.

Let us take a look at the Gitksan authority of B.C. which was caught in 1998 investing federal health care funds in the Alberta stock exchange. No charges were laid but the band lost over \$50,000.

The examples go on and on but does the government listen? Does the government listen to the grassroots people? No, it listens to the people it wants to, the Phil Fontaines who get all the money and speak for the white people and not for the grassroots native people.

Mr. John O'Reilly (Haliburton—Victoria—Brock, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Haliburton—Victoria—Brock is a riding in cen-

tral Ontario that enjoys some prosperity and good relations with some aboriginal groups and some that are even better.

It is a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill C-222. I believe the hon. member's motion has been inspired by a sincere desire to improve living conditions in aboriginal communities and to promote greater accountability for the management of funds or to encourage the development of aboriginal self-government.

Regrettably, his rhetoric today and in the past, and his party's well-known and oft-stated position with respect to aboriginal issues, leads me to a different conclusion.

The party, formerly known as the Reform Party, opposes aboriginal self-government. It would prefer to return to the good old days when a paternalistic Ottawa managed the affairs of first nations. It does not believe that aboriginal people can be trusted to manage their own concerns, make their own decisions or determine their own destiny. When there are different reports about poverty on reserves or financial difficulties in some aboriginal communities, it seizes upon that as proof that aboriginal people cannot be trusted and should not be encouraged to manage their own affairs.

We take a different view. This government believes that first nations can be trusted, that they are responsible and that they deserve to run their own lives. Our preference is for partnerships not paternalism and for co-operation not control.

Let me remind the House how we came to where we are today, how the issue of financial management has evolved over the years and why it is so important to demonstrate our continuing confidence in first nations as they make their way through this period of transition to self-government.

Until the late 1950s, the federal government delivered most programs and services directly to first nations. By the late 1970s first nations were administering some programs in accordance with terms and conditions set out by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

In the 1980s the process of devolution began to pick up steam and new funding arrangements were developed. First nations were administering more programs, but still under the mandate of the Indian Act. Today 83% of our department's budget for programs is transferred directly to first nations and a further 11% to provinces for service delivery.

More importantly, in the 1990s, as we moved toward self-government, more and more first nations are assuming jurisdiction and greater responsibility for these programs. That means more and more they are planning and managing services based on the needs of their community. These new arrangements emphasize the relationship between chiefs, councils and their members.

This means that our primary role is no longer to deliver services to first nations but to design and manage financing arrangements that will allow first nations to deliver their own programs and be accountable for those programs for their memberships.

As we transfer more responsibility to the first nations, we are also working toward strengthening and building the skills and professional capacity within first nations that are needed to support these programs.

As funding arrangements have changed, so too has the issue of accountability. In the old days, when the federal government provided most of the programs and services directly, the lines of accountability were clear.

• (1730)

The departments involved, through their ministers, were responsible to parliament. Over time, as responsibilities devolved to first nations, efforts were made to promote local accountability; that is to say, first nations are becoming accountable to their constituents for the expenditures of funds and for the quality of programs and services they deliver.

In these times of limited resources, Canadians are insisting, quite rightly, that we manage tax dollars prudently. This is true of aboriginal and non-aboriginal governments alike. The same principles of accountability which apply to non-aboriginal governments also apply to first nations, principles like transparency, disclosure and redress. This means, for example, that first nations must disclose to their membership not only annual audits, but information such as the salaries of chiefs and councils, travel expenses and so on.

The federal government has worked with aboriginal governments to put in place financial standards that are comparable to other governments exercising similar responsibilities. The emphasis is now on making the information within first nations financial statements relevant and comprehensible to community members. Similarly, the accounting industry is starting to consider the needs of first nations when developing accounting standards.

Recently, as some first nations have assumed greater responsibilities and acquired significant assets, through land claims settlements for example, they have recognized the need for more sophisticated accounting systems. What we have seen is that first nations have gained the right to manage their affairs. They are moving to strengthen accountability and management practices.

Much of the progress in this area has not received the attention or publicity it deserves. Too often it is only the first nations communities that run into real financial problems that make it on to the news or into the papers. In fact, last year only 2% of first nations had their agreements placed under third party management.

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The simple fact is that most reserves are managing their finances properly. I believe this record reflects both the determination of first nations to manage their affairs responsibly and the creation of proper checks and balances.

When problems do arise, the department may intervene in a number of ways, depending on the problem. For example, we may simply make sure that the first nation is aware that there is a problem, encourage it to find solutions and offer advice. In other cases we will consult with the band more actively or hire a co-manager to address the difficulty. Only in a very few cases, the 2% I mentioned earlier, is it necessary to bring in a third party to stabilize the situation until a solution can be found. Some intervention does happen, but our favoured approach—and I am sure the House will agree it is a good one—is not intervention, but prevention.

The brief chronology I have sketched today shows the evolution of our relationship with first nations as a government. It highlights the increasing responsibility and accountability that has been assumed by first nations in recent years as they move toward exercising their inherent right to self-government. However, we must keep in mind that this is a story that is still being written. Yes, there have been growing pains along the way as we make the fundamental transitions in our relationship, but if we think that people are not exercising their judgment well, is the answer to take away their ability to choose or to inform their judgment?

The party formerly known as the Reform Party would have us take away the rights of first nations to choose, to grow and, yes, occasionally to make mistakes. Our government would rather work with first nations—

Mr. Myron Thompson: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member knows well that the purpose of this bill is to attempt to provide an ombudsman for aboriginal grassroots people. Would he stick to the topic, please?

Mr. John O'Reilly: Madam Speaker, I am glad that I have struck a chord with the party formerly known as the Reform Party.

Our government wants to work with first nations, not to put them down, not to demean them, not to make them crawl into line somewhere in the former Reform Party's policies. First nations must have self-reliance. They cannot have a continued state of dependency. We would rather work with first nations as partners, not dictate to them like parents. In short, we would rather build for the future than return to the past.

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Harvey (Chicoutimi, PC): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Wild Rose for bringing

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forward Bill C-222. The purpose of this bill is to create the position of a First Nations Ombudsman to investigate complaints relating to administrative, financial or electoral problems between members of first nations communities.

My colleague from South Shore—who has been working very hard on this—and my colleague from Madawaska—Restigouche have already spoken in favour of this bill. They have said that the Progressive Conservative Party supported it because it was important for all levels of government and private enterprise, including the first nations in this instance, to be accountable.

We have all read the newspaper reports about poor administration among Canada's first nations. This problem has drawn media attention in the maritime provinces, Nova Scotia in particular. Members of two Nova Scotia bands have accused their governing councils of mismanaging the funds received from the federal government for the welfare of the entire band membership. In some cases, the question is not whether the band has administered the funds correctly, but whether it can justify their use.

More serious still, an internal audit at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has revealed that the department does not know which bands have filed complete, detailed statutory financial statements, because of poor co-ordination between the regions.

The department has no mechanisms by which it can verify the administration of these various sectors. Audit has revealed that monitoring of compliance was inconsistent and that, as a result, the Crown was at risk of additional responsibility if monitoring by INAC staff was insufficient or inconsistent.

According to the evaluation, there were four other factors with potential negative effects on compliance with the terms of the agreements. In certain cases, indicators of measurable performance were not clearly defined in the funding agreements, resulting in imprecise reports by recipients and imprecise monitoring; post-audit follow up on qualified opinions and reports of non-compliance was not uniform; payment authorizations were not always supported by satisfactory compliance reports; regional quality control assessments of the compliance monitoring process were limited.

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development gives first nations close to \$4.6 billion so that they can provide their members with social programs and services. Unfortunately, this money does not always reach those for whom it is intended.

However, it is obvious that not all first nations are badly run. On the contrary, many aboriginals are very well served by their chief and their council. It also happens that some bands have trouble managing their money properly because of a lack of training or for a number of other reasons.

Some first nations are progressive and have created programs designed to help their members achieve social and economic stability, and they are to be congratulated. However, even in their case, a ombudsman could provide an important service. People need an office to which they can turn for information or with which they can lodge a formal complaint and be sure it will be investigated impartially and independently. The establishment of the office of ombudsman does not mean that there are major management problems to be resolved, although one of the ombudsman's duties would be to look into these problems to make sure that the money is getting to the right destination.

This bill is nothing new. Many provincial governments, businesses and public organizations have created the position of ombudsman to improve client relations.

• (1740)

These offices provide people with a means of raising issues that they feel have not been appropriately resolved through other channels.

I think that the creation of the office of first nations ombudsman would be an effective and useful means of responding to the concerns of aboriginals, whether they have to do with electoral irregularities, or financial or administrative problems.

Aboriginals complain that there is no one to whom they can turn to challenge the way their chief or band council is doing things. The position of independent ombudsman would be one possible solution, since the incumbent would be able to get to the bottom of complaints lodged with his office.

In addition, it would allow aboriginals to pursue their grievances when they felt they had not been listened to by their chief or their band council, or when they did not want to discuss them openly.

Under this bill, any first nation member could use this service. Some aboriginals have expressed their support for the creation of the office of first nations ombudsman. They recognize the role that an ombudsman would play as an intermediary between aboriginals and their chief or band council. It would be a means of encouraging aboriginals to suggest ways of improving their relations with their chief without fear of reprisals.

This bill sets out how the office of ombudsman would operate. For instance, it stipulates that the ombudsman would be appointed by the governor in council on the recommendation of the minister for a term of five years. The first nations would take part in the appointment process by making representations to the committee reporting to the minister.

I will not go into the details of how the office of ombudsman would operate. I see advantages to creating such an office, but I am not sure that it is a good thing to have the governor in council make

the appointment. I think this should be reviewed, so that members of the first nations have a greater say.

It is only on the condition of being consulted and involved in the entire process that they will have confidence in the position of ombudsman. It is clear that the first thing to be considered is their opinion and their suggestions in the process of establishing this position.

The bill recognizes that aboriginal peoples must also look to themselves and their organizations and their elected bodies to protect their rights and access to service. Instead of complaining to the Minister of Indian Affairs, they will be able to turn to an independent ombudsman.

On condition that they are part of it, this process may help the first nations assume responsibility and accountability for their actions. As I mentioned earlier, I think this is a very valid bill. Misunderstanding and discord may often be resolved when a mechanism is in place for such purpose, and the position of ombudsman may be such a solution.

Improved services to band members, increased transparency and accountability are three objectives the office of the ombudsman can help achieve.

The federal government could draw a lesson from all of this. Too many departments are totally indifferent to these vital objectives all responsible governments must set for themselves. In recent months, it has become clear to taxpayers that there is a shortage of transparency and accountability in the Department of Human Resources Development and in other departments, and others to come.

More recently, similar problems have surfaced in the Department of Indian Affairs. If the position of ombudsman can contribute to transparency, efficiency and accountability, our party supports its creation.

[English]

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, do I have a minute or so to make my presentation?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The debate will continue until 6 p.m., at which time we will have a 15 minute bell and then we will vote.

Mr. Leon E. Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I understood the debate would be over at 5.45 p.m. I really appreciate having this chance to speak.

• (1745)

Bill C-222 was presented to the House by the member for Wild Rose. If this bill passes, it will put in place the position of ombudsman for aboriginal people to go to if they are having

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difficulties dealing with their leadership or a band dealing with another or situations like that. The member is to be commended for bringing this piece of legislation forward.

This was one of the recommendations of the Lakeland aboriginal task force which I set up in my constituency in 1997 shortly after the election. After the election, the new part of my constituency took in eight Indian reserves and four Metis settlements for a total aboriginal population of about 30,000 people. I immediately started getting phone calls from people who had real concerns about issues like housing, alcohol and drug abuse on their reserve and the lack of accountability as they saw it on the part of chiefs and councils on their reserves. It was not just one or two isolated calls.

As a result, I set up a task force made up of four aboriginal people and myself. Over the next several months we met with people in a three step process. First, we met confidentially, one on one. Second, we sent out questionnaires and had several returned. Third, we had three public meetings in the constituency. Some very interesting things came out of this process.

I will refer particularly to the recommendation which deals directly with what we are talking about. That is recommendation number four under the category of democratic accountability. It says that "the government must establish an arm's length body, an ombudsman or agency to hear and act on the confidential concerns of aboriginal Canadians". This proposal came from people who made presentations to us throughout this process. It was a recommendation that was almost unanimously supported by the hundreds of people who took part in this process.

The suggestion came up because there were many people who felt alienated from their band or settlement leadership, as well as from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Some speakers at this meetings said they did not feel comfortable in approaching Indian Affairs and Northern Development because they had seen people who had felt negative repercussions when they did so in the past. Even when they approached Indian affairs in confidence, often the exact message that they took to it got back to the chief and council. They did not feel they could trust Indian affairs to keep their confidential issues confidential. That is why they felt they needed an ombudsman.

In many cases, they felt the problem was with the leadership of the chiefs and councils. That is not the situation in every case, nor would I ever say that is the case. However, it is a very common problem and we cannot ignore that.

The Liberal member who spoke previously said that it was very unusual to have problems of the lack of accountability on reserves. He either does not understand the reality or he is trying to minimize the problem. It is a very common problem across the country. It is not only the eight reserves in my constituency.

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This is what was said in one presentation:

"A lot of people in my community have been discriminated against (by chief and council)," said one participant. "Where do you go in your community for help? Higher government just refers it down to the local elected officials. We need something for grassroots people who can't speak out right now, because they know there is a price to be paid. An advocate, or an arm's-length agency. A hearer of all injustices within the aboriginal community."

• (1750)

That is what this person said when presenting to the aboriginal task force.

They did acknowledge that the logistics of setting up the ombudsman position might be quite difficult, but it is something they felt was worth the effort. That was a point which was made very clear.

They suggested that the ombudsman should be in place for a time period very similar to what this private member's bill suggests. That is part of the reason I suggest this is a good bill.

The minister of Indian affairs on several occasions has said in the House that he really cannot deal with issues when they arise on reserves. He cannot deal with problems on reserves because that is the responsibility of the leadership on the reserves.

It is an interesting point because the first thing is that the minister of Indian affairs absolutely has responsibility for what happens on reserves. It is clear in Canadian law. He is abdicating his responsibility.

Second, how is it that the chiefs and council members are going to deal with problems brought to them when the problem in many cases is themselves? It is the chief and council. That is where so many members who presented before the task force made the point as strongly as they possibly could.

"It seems like a hopeless situation", they said. "We can see a situation where our council, including the chief, is mispending money. We know this is happening and we have nowhere to go. We see situations where we know elections have been unfair and we can point to particular problems in the election process, but we feel we have nowhere to go."

This is the type of feeling which came up again and again. I believe this ombudsman position will help deal with part of that problem.

I congratulate the member for Wild Rose for bringing this forth. I know that he brought this bill forth because he heard from grassroots aboriginal people right across the country, including the members in the gallery. He heard from them that the situation is desperate, that they do need someone to go to, that they cannot always go to leadership because in many cases the leadership is the problem.

What does the minister of Indian affairs suggest when we bring these problems to him? He says, "Well, you know, you have to leave it up to the band because we have self-government". He talks as if the bands in this country are a separate level of government, that they are somehow an equal government, to be treated equally with the federal government. That is the way he talks.

When we raise these issues, he says that he has no way he can deal with the problem. He says that the answer to the problem is self-government and more responsibility to chiefs and councils. I believe that that is the case. That is part of the answer, more ability on the part of leadership to deal with the problem, but in terms of fiscal accountability, electoral accountability and fair elections on reserves, we can only go to a system where there is more self-government where these issues are dealt with. They have not been dealt with.

It is interesting what people at one of the public meetings said on exactly this issue. One member speaking at one of the public meetings, and this was covered on television, said, "Ron Irwin has sent a memo out to reserves saying that no one would be forced to take self-government until everyone was ready. We had a referendum and said no. Now Jane Stewart, we are feeling, is being pushed into it."

At a public meeting of about 70 people in St. Paul, Alberta, I asked this question. I asked, "How many of you think that we should be moving to a system of self-government now?". One hand out of the 70 went up.

I asked the question another way: "How many of you feel we should not be going to self-government until the problems of accountability are dealt with?" All the hands went up except one.

Self-government is not the answer until accountability is put in place. This ombudsman will help deal with the situation of a lack of accountability. I applaud the member and I will support this bill. I hope everyone in the House will support this bill.

• (1755)

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that this is a very personal issue to me. My wife and I visited the home of an aboriginal family. We were confronted by six women. One of the women there was just completely shaken with the fact that the chief and council had removed her family from her. She had no place to go. The host who convened this meeting had helped her get her family back by going to the provincial authorities. By doing so, this woman now has her family back. She was really shaken with the concept of self-government because with self-government, where would she go?

That is not the end of the story. The end of this particular story is that the host of this meeting and her family were then told that they must leave the reserve because the people on the reserve, the chief and council, said that they had a requirement for housing, notwithstanding the fact that there are 11 vacant houses on that reserve.

She was not only required to leave, but she was literally frozen out of her house last winter when the chief and council saw to it that the power and water were turned off at her home.

The issue of the ombudsman is a real issue. It is a gut level issue that I have seen and I have experienced. This is something that absolutely must happen if the government is set on the idea of going ahead with self-government. Along with self-government there must be the position of ombudsman.

Mr. David Iftody: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I understand and I have agreement with the members from the opposition, and I am sure that the House would agree, that the mover of the bill, the member for Wild Rose, be given the last few minutes remaining to speak and summarize on the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Do we have the unanimous consent of the House that the hon. member for Wild Rose will have until 6 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all the members in the House of Commons who participated in the debate. I appreciate their opinions. Although we may not agree with some of them, we certainly do appreciate hon. members having a say.

I would like to especially express my appreciation to the thousands, and I mean thousands, of grassroots natives across this country who have taken the time to support the bill and have input with Leona Freed to put together a final 200 page report that we have released today which is available to all members of the House of Commons. I encourage each and every one of them to get a copy of that.

I am making a last plea on behalf of the aboriginal grassroots people, many of whom are with us today in the gallery. I am pleased to have them here. We are looking for support on the bill.

I would like to remind all members that this is a very serious consideration. There is not one member, you, Mr. Speaker, myself, every member in the House of Commons, any citizen in Canada who does not have access to an ombudsman to help deal with

Supply

grievances in their lives. The only people that does not apply to are natives who live on a reserve. Is it not about time that these people who live on the reserves have the same equality that each and every one of us in the House and across this land enjoy?

These kinds of inequalities must not exist. If hon. members vote no, they are saying no to equality and they should remember that. Hon. members do not want equality on the reserves if they vote no. I encourage hon. members to support these people and I encourage them to remember that the basis of all of this is a plea for accountability. A no vote means no to accountability. I will remember how hon. members vote.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Pursuant to the order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion are deemed put, and a recorded division deemed requested.

Call in the members.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1815)

[*English*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—DEPARTMENTAL AUDIT REPORTS

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made earlier this day, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment relating to the business of supply. The question is on the amendment.

• (1825)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 1259*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Alarie
Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)
Bailey

Ablonczy
Asselin
Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bellehumeur

Supply

Benoit	Bergeron	Harb	Harvard
Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok)	Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok)	Hubbard	Ifody
Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Bigras	Jennings	Jordan
Blaikie	Borotsik	Karetak-Lindell	Keys
Breitkreuz (Yellowhead)	Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville)	Knutson	Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Brien	Cadman	Lastewka	Kraft Sloan
Cardin	Casey	Lee	Lavigne
Casson	Chatters	Limoges	Leung
Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic)	Crête	Longfield	Lincoln
Dalphond-Guiral	Davies	Mahoney	MacAulay
de Savoye	Debien	Maloney	Malhi
Desjarlais	Desrochers	Marleau	Manley
Doyle	Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière)	Matthews	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Duceppe	Dumas	McGuire	McCormick
Earle	Elley	McLellan (Edmonton West)	McKay (Scarborough East)
Epp	Forseth	McWhinney	McTeague
Gagnon	Gauthier	Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)	Mifflin
Girard-Bujold	Godin (Acadie—Bathurst)	Mitchell	Minna
Godin (Châteauguay)	Goldring	Myers	Murray
Grewal	Grey (Edmonton North)	Normand	Nault
Gruending	Guay	O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	O'Brien (Labrador)
Guimond	Hardy	Paradis	O'Reilly
Harvey	Herron	Patry	Parrish
Hill (Macleod)	Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	Peterson	Peric
Hilstrom	Hoepfner	Phinney	Pettigrew
Jaffer	Johnston	Pillitteri	Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Jones	Keddy (South Shore)	Proud	Pratt
Konrad	Lalonde	Provenzano	Proulx
Laurin	Lebel	Reed	Kedman
Lill	Loubier	Robillard	Richardson
Lowther	MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)	Saada	Rock
Mark	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Sekora	Scott (Fredericton)
McDonough	McNally	Speller	Shepherd
Ménard	Mercier	St-Julien	St. Denis
Meredith	Mills (Red Deer)	Stewart (Brant)	Steckle
Muise	Nystrom	Szabo	Stewart (Northumberland)
Obhrai	Penson	Thibeault	Telegdi
Perron	Picard (Drummond)	Ur	Torsney
Plamondon	Price	Vanclief	Valeri
Proctor	Reynolds	Wappel	Volpe
Ritz	Robinson	Wilfert	Whelan
Rocheleau	Sauvageau		Wood—142
Schmidt	Solomon		
St-Hilaire	St-Jacques		
Stinson	Stoffer		
Strahl	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)		
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean)		
Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis)	Turp		
Vautour	Wasylcyia-Leis		
Wayne	Williams—107		

PAIRED MEMBERS

Chan Nunziata

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

The next question is on the main motion.

Mr. Bob Kilger: Mr. Speaker, I believe that you would find consent to apply the results of the vote just taken on the amendment to the main motion.

The Speaker: Is there agreement to proceed in such a fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

(Division No. 1260)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Alarie
Alblonczy
Asselin

NAYS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Anderson	Assad
Assadourian	Augustine
Baker	Bakopanos
Beaumier	Béclair
Bélangier	Bellemare
Bennett	Bertrand
Bevilacqua	Blondin-Andrew
Bonin	Bonwick
Boudria	Bradshaw
Brown	Bryden
Bulte	Byrne
Caccia	Calder
Caplan	Catterall
Cauchon	Chamberlain
Charbonneau	Chrétien (Saint-Maurice)
Clouthier	Coderre
Collenette	Comuzzi
Copps	Cotler
Cullen	DeVillers
Dhaliwal	Dion
Discepolo	Dromisky
Drouin	Duhamel
Easter	Eggleton
Finlay	Folco
Fontana	Fry
Gagliano	Galloway
Godfrey	Goodale
Graham	Gray (Windsor West)

Government Orders

Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)	Bachand (Saint-Jean)	Easter	Eggleton
Bailey	Bellehumeur	Finlay	Folco
Benoit	Bergeron	Fontana	Fry
Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok)	Bergeron	Gagliano	Galloway
Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Bigras	Godfrey	Goodale
Blaikie	Borotsik	Graham	Gray (Windsor West)
Breitkreuz (Yellowhead)	Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville)	Harb	Harvard
Brien	Cadman	Hubbard	Iftody
Cardin	Casey	Jennings	Jordan
Casson	Chatters	Karetak-Lindell	Keys
Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic)	Crête	Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh)	Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Dalphond-Guiral	Davies	Knutson	Kraft Sloan
de Savoye	Debien	Lastewka	Lavigne
Desjarlais	Desrochers	Lee	Leung
Doyle	Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière)	Limoges	Lincoln
Duceppe	Dumas	Longfield	MacAulay
Earle	Elley	Mahoney	Malhi
Epp	Forseth	Maloney	Manley
Gagnon	Gauthier	Marleau	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Girard-Bujold	Godin (Acadie—Bathurst)	Mathews	McCormick
Godin (Châteauguay)	Golding	McGuire	McKay (Scarborough East)
Grewal	Grey (Edmonton North)	McLellan (Edmonton West)	McTeague
Gruending	Guay	McWhinney	Mifflin
Guimond	Hardy	Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)	Minna
Harvey	Herron	Mitchell	Murray
Hill (Macleod)	Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	Myers	Nault
Hilstrom	Hoepfner	Normand	O'Brien (Labrador)
Jaffer	Johnston	O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	O'Reilly
Jones	Keddy (South Shore)	Pagtakhan	Paradis
Konrad	Lalonde	Parrish	Patry
Laurin	Lebel	Peric	Peterson
Lill	Loubier	Pettigrew	Phinney
Lowther	MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)	Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)	Pillitteri
Mark	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Pratt	Proud
McDonough	McNally	Proulx	Provenzano
Ménard	Mercier	Redman	Reed
Meredith	Mills (Red Deer)	Richardson	Robillard
Muise	Nystrom	Rock	Sada
Obhrai	Penson	Scott (Fredericton)	Sekora
Perron	Picard (Drummond)	Shepherd	Speller
Plamondon	Price	St. Denis	St-Julien
Proctor	Reynolds	Steckle	Stewart (Brant)
Ritz	Robinson	Stewart (Northumberland)	Szabo
Rocheleau	Sauvageau	Telegdi	Thibeault
Schmidt	Solomon	Torsney	Ur
St-Hilaire	St-Jacques	Valeri	Vanclief
Stinson	Stoffer	Volpe	Wappel
Strahl	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Whelan	Wilfert
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean)	Wood—143	
Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis)	Turp		
Vautour	Wasylcyia-Leis		
Wayne	Williams—107		

PAIRED MEMBERS

Chan

Nunziata

NAYS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Anderson	Assad
Assadourian	Augustine
Baker	Bakopanos
Beaumier	Bélair
Bélangier	Bellemare
Bennett	Bertrand
Bevilacqua	Blondin-Andrew
Bonin	Bonwick
Boudria	Bradshaw
Brown	Bryden
Bulte	Byrne
Caccia	Calder
Caplan	Catterall
Cauchon	Chamberlain
Charbonneau	Chrétien (Saint-Maurice)
Clouthier	Coderre
Collette	Comuzzi
Copps	Cotler
Cullen	DeVillers
Dhaliwal	Dion
Discepola	Dromisky
Drouin	Duhamel

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan: Mr. Speaker, I regret that I was tied up with a constituent. I would like on this motion to vote with the government, of course.

The Speaker: Your vote will be recorded.

* * *

PERSONAL INFORMATION PROTECTION AND ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS ACT

The House resumed from March 30 consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-6, an act to support and promote electronic commerce by protecting personal information that is collected, used or disclosed in certain circumstances, by providing for the use of electronic means to communicate or record information or transactions and by amend-

Government Orders

ing the Canada Evidence Act, the Statutory Instruments Act and the Statute Revision Act.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, March 30, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion relating to the Senate amendments to Bill C-6.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bob Kilger: Mr. Speaker, with the exception of the hon. member for Broadview—Greenwood, I believe you will find that there is unanimous consent for the members voting on the previous motion to be recorded as having voted on the motion now before the House, with the Liberal members voting yes.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Is there agreement to proceed in such a fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, Canadian Alliance members present this evening will be voting in favour of the motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, the members of the Bloc Québécois are strongly opposed to this motion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the members of the NDP vote yes to this motion.

Mr. André Harvey: Mr. Speaker, Progressive Conservative members vote in favour of this motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, the Portage—Lisgar constituents vote yes to this motion.

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

(*Division No. 1261*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Adams	Alcock
Anderson	Assad
Assadourian	Augustine
Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)	Bailey
Baker	Bakopanos
Beaumier	Bélair
Bélangier	Bellemare
Bennett	Benoit
Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Bertrand
Bevilacqua	Blaikie
Blondin-Andrew	Bonin
Bonwick	Borotsik
Boudria	Bradshaw
Breitkreuz (Yellowhead)	Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville)
Brown	Bryden

Bulte	Byrne
Caccia	Cadman
Calder	Caplan
Casey	Casson
Catterall	Cauchon
Chamberlain	Charbonneau
Chatters	Chrétien (Saint-Maurice)
Clouthier	Coderre
Collenette	Comuzzi
Copps	Cotler
Cullen	Davies
Desjarlais	DeVillers
Dhaliwal	Dion
Discepola	Doyle
Dromisky	Drouin
Duhamel	Earle
Easter	Eggleton
Elley	Epp
Finlay	Folco
Fontana	Forseth
Fry	Gagliano
Galloway	Godfrey
Godin (Acadie—Bathurst)	Goldring
Goodale	Graham
Gray (Windsor West)	Grewal
Grey (Edmonton North)	Gruending
Harb	Hardy
Harvard	Harvey
Herron	Hill (Macleod)
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	Hilstrom
Hoepfner	Hubbard
Iftody	Jaffer
Jennings	Johnston
Jones	Jordan
Karetak-Lindell	Keddy (South Shore)
Keyes	Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh)
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)	Knutson
Konrad	Kraft Sloan
Lastewka	Lavigne
Lee	Leung
Lill	Limoges
Lincoln	Longfield
Lowther	MacAulay
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)	Mahoney
Malhi	Maloney
Manley	Mark
Marleau	Martin (LaSalle—Énard)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Matthews
McCormick	McDonough
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough East)
McLellan (Edmonton West)	McNally
McTeague	McWhinney
Meredith	Mifflin
Mills (Red Deer)	Minna
Mitchell	Muise
Murray	Myers
Nault	Normand
Nystrom	O'Brien (Labrador)
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	O'Reilly
Obhrai	Pagtakhan
Paradis	Parrish
Patry	Penson
Peric	Peterson
Pettigrew	Phinney
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)	Pillitteri
Pratt	Price
Proctor	Proud
Proulx	Provenzano
Redman	Reed
Reynolds	Richardson
Ritz	Robillard
Robinson	Rock
Saada	Schmidt
Scott (Fredericton)	Sekora
Shepherd	Solomon
Speller	St. Denis
St-Jacques	St-Julien
Steckle	Stewart (Brant)
Stewart (Northumberland)	Stinson
Stoffer	Strahl
Szabo	Telegdi
Thibeault	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Torsney

Private Members' Business

Ur
Vanclief
Volpe
Wasylcia-Leis
Whelan
Williams

Valeri
Vautour
Wappel
Wayne
Wilfert
Wood—210

NAYS

Members

Alarie
Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bergeron
Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok
Brien
Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic)
Dalphond-Guiral
Debien
Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière)
Dumas
Gauthier
Godin (Châteauguay)
Guimond
Laurin
Loubier
Mercier
Picard (Drummond)
Rocheleau
St-Hilaire
Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis)

Asselin
Bellehumeur
Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—
Bigras
Cardin
Crête
de Savoye
Desrochers
Duceppe
Gagnon
Girard-Bujold
Guay
Lalonde
Lebel
Ménard
Perron
Plamondon
Sauvageau
Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean)
Turp—39

PAIRED MEMBERS

Chan

Nunziata

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Amendments read the second time and concurred in)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

CANADA POST CORPORATION ACT

The House resumed from March 31 consideration of the motion that Bill C-238, an act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (mail contractors), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Pursuant to order made Friday, March 31, 2000, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-238 under Private Members' Business.

[English]

I would remind hon. members that the division will be taken row by row, starting with the sponsor.

• (1840)

Before the Clerk announced the results of the vote:

Mr. Paul Bonwick: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I was not sure, as the clerk was counting the votes, whether he recognized my vote in support of this motion. I would ask that the record be checked.

• (1845)

Mr. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether you counted me in favour or not, but I am in favour.

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

(Division No. 1262)

YEAS

Members

Alarie
Assad
Asselin
Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bélanger
Bennett
Bernier (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok)
Bigras
Bonwick
Caccia
Calder
Casey
Charbonneau
Crête
Davies
Debien
Desrochers
Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière)
Dumas
Easter
Folco
Galloway
Girard-Bujold
Godin (Acadie—Bathurst)
Gruending
Guimond
Herron
Hubbard
Jordan
Keddy (South Shore)
Lalonde
Lebel
Lill
Loubier
Malhi
Marceau
Matthews
McGuire
Ménard
Muisse
O'Brien (Labrador)
Perron
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Proctor
Redman
Robinson
Sauvageau
Solomon
St-Julien
Stoffer
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis)

Alcock
Assadourian
Augustine
Bélair
Bellehumeur
Bergeron
Blaikie
Brien
Cadman
Cardin
Chamberlain
Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic)
Dalphond-Guiral
de Savoye
Desjarlais
Doyle
Duceppe
Earle
Finlay
Gagnon
Gauthier
Godfrey
Godin (Châteauguay)
Guay
Hardy
Hoepfner
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Kraft Sloan
Laurin
Leung
Lincoln
Mahoney
Maloney
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
McDonough
McTeague
Mercier
Nystrom
Peric
Picard (Drummond)
Plamondon
Proud
Reynolds
Rocheleau
Scott (Fredericton)
St-Hilaire
Steckle
Szabo
Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean)
Turp

Private Members' Business

Ur
Volpe
Wasylcia-Leis
Wilfert—110

Vautour
Wappel
Wayne

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Bailey
Bakopanos
Bellemare
Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Bevilacqua
Bonin
Boudria
Breitkreuz (Yellowhead)
Brown
Bulte
Casson
Cauchon
Clouthier
Comuzzi
Cullen
Dion
Dromisky
Eggleton
Epp
Forseth
Gagliano
Goodale
Gray (Windsor West)
Grey (Edmonton North)
Harvey
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Jaffer
Jones
Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh)
Knutson
Lastewka
Lee
Longfield
MacAulay
Mark
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McLellan (Edmonton West)
Meredith
Minna
Myers
Normand
Obhrai
Parrish
Penson
Pettigrew
Pillitteri
Price
Richardson
Robillard
Saada
Sekora
St. Denis
Stewart (Brant)
Thibeault
Valeri
Williams

Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)
Baker
Beaumier
Benoit
Bertrand
Blondin-Andrew
Borotsik
Bradshaw
Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville)
Bryden
Caplan
Catterall
Chatters
Collenette
Copps
DeVillers
Discepola
Duhamel
Elley
Fontana
Fry
Goldring
Graham
Grewal
Harb
Hill (Macleod)
Hilstrom
Johnston
Keyes
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Konrad
Lavigne
Limoges
Lowther
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
Marleau
McKay (Scarborough East)
McNally
Mills (Red Deer)
Murray
Nault
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
Paradis
Patry
Peterson
Phinney
Pratt
Reed
Ritz
Rock
Schmidt
Shepherd
St-Jacques
Strahl
Torsney
Vanclief
Wood—114

PAIRED MEMBERS

Chan

Nunziata

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I declare the motion lost.

FIRST NATIONS OMBUDSMAN ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-222, an act to establish the office of First Nations Ombudsman to investigate complaints relating to administrative and communications problems between members of First Nations communities and their First Nation and between First Nations, allegations of improper financial administration and allegations of electoral irregularities, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-222 under Private Members' Business.

● (1855)

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

(Division No. 1263)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)
Benoit
Borotsik
Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville)
Casey
Chatters
Elley
Forseth
Grewal
Harvey
Hill (Macleod)
Hilstrom
Jaffer
Jones
Konrad
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
McNally
Mills (Red Deer)
Obhrai
Price
Ritz
Shepherd
Steckle
Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Ur
Wappel
Williams—57

Ablonczy
Bailey
Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Breitkreuz (Yellowhead)
Cadman
Casson
Doyle
Epp
Goldring
Grey (Edmonton North)
Herron
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Hoepfner
Johnston
Keddy (South Shore)
Lowther
Mark
Meredith
Muisse
Penson
Reynolds
Schmidt
St-Jacques
Stinson
Szabo
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Vautour
Wayne

NAYS

Members

Adams
Alcock
Assadourian

Alarie
Assad
Asselin

Augustine
Baker
Beaumier
Bélanger
Bellemare
Bergeron
Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok
Bevilacqua
Blaikie
Bonin
Brien
Bryden
Byrne
Calder
Cardin
Cauchon
Charbonneau
Clouthier
Comuzzi
Cotler
Cullen
Davies
Debien
Desrochers
Dion
Dromisky
Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière)
Dumas
Easter
Finlay
Fontana
Gagliano
Gauthier
Godfrey
Godin (Châteauguay)
Graham
Guay
Harb
Harvard
Iftody
Jordan
Keys
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Kraft Sloan
Lastewka
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PAIRED MEMBERS

Chan

Nunziata

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I declare the motion lost.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

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

TRANSFERS TO PROVINCES

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on December 14, 1999, I asked a question about transfers to the provinces. My question read as follows:

Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, December 8, the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick unanimously passed a motion calling for re-establishment of social transfers to the 1994-95 level.

Is the Minister of Finance prepared to listen to his Liberal cousins in New Brunswick and to restore transfer payments to their 1994-95 level in order to ensure that the people of New Brunswick may benefit from better social programs?

The Minister of Finance responded as follows:

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member must realize that, including the tax points, or in other words all transfers together, we are already where we were five years ago.

The reason I referred to “his Liberal cousins in New Brunswick” was because a motion in the New Brunswick legislative assembly was passed unanimously.

● (1900)

The Liberal Party of New Brunswick was even in agreement with the Progressive Conservative Party in saying that the transfers to the province of New Brunswick were—and we know this, for it is the same everywhere in the country—not as high as those received in 1994-95, because of the cuts.

As we know, according to the figures available, the federal government is paying only 15% of health costs. Up until 1969, the federal government paid 50%, as compared to a mere 15% today.

I hear our Liberal friends across the floor saying “No, no, not true”. If it is not true, the Liberals of New Brunswick are telling

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untruths, because the provincial Liberals of New Brunswick voted along with the Progressive Conservatives members in order to tell their cousins in the federal government “We want the same transfers as in 1994-95”. So which ones are telling the truth? The provincial Liberals or their federal Liberal cousins? This is a question that must be raised.

The one thing we do know is that, in the health field, people are suffering. Hospitals have been closed and patients are being forced to go to the United States for treatment. This we know, and we know what suffering it is causing. Every day, the Minister of Health gets up in the House to tell us “New methods have to be found”. Might this new method be to go the American way? That is the question that must be asked. Answers must be found and they must be found fast, because we are paying the Americans millions and millions of dollars to look after Canadians.

As we know, this is going on in every province. People are forced to go to the United States for treatment. I is sad to say but, here in Canada, animals are treated better than people in the health system. A dog or a cat would not be allowed to be mistreated the way the sick are in the health care system of this, of which we are supposed to be so proud.

This country should be able to look after our health care programs so that the provinces are not paying up to 85% of costs. I am talking about costs, not just the tax points the Liberals keep coming back to, but real day-to-day costs. The government should look at the bill and pay half.

Tomorrow, I am sure that we could have better health care in Canada, and our friends and families would not have to go to the United States for treatment.

[*English*]

Mr. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak for the New Brunswick provincial Liberal Party, but perhaps the day they voted there was a full moon because it is a well-known fact that the federal contributions are more like 32% or 33% and that the federal contributions were never 50%.

[*Translation*]

The federal government restored social transfers to their 1994-95 level.

[*English*]

Total CHST cash and tax transfers will reach an all-time high of close to \$31 billion in 2000 and 2001, and it will continue to grow. This is up \$900 million from the previous peak in 1995-96 and up \$1.8 billion since the government took office in 1993-94.

[*Translation*]

Thanks to the solid performance of the Canadian economy, the other major transfer payments to the provinces also increased substantially. Equalization payments to the less prosperous provinces are up \$500 million this year from the forecasts in the 1999 budget.

[*English*]

Total transfers will reach an estimated \$39.4 billion this year and will continue to grow over the next four years. The increase in total transfers means that provincial governments can strengthen social programs that are important to Canadians.

What does it mean for New Brunswick? In 2000 and 2001, transfers to New Brunswick will exceed \$1.7 billion, will account for about 37% of New Brunswick's estimated revenues and they are expected to total about \$2,348 per person, about 78% above the national average.

[*Translation*]

Over the next five years, New Brunswick will receive over \$9 billion in transfers.

• (1905)

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on December 13 last year I rose in the House to ask a question of the Minister of Justice. My question related to a young law student at the University of New Brunswick, Robbie Peterson.

Robbie Peterson was brutally attacked in the early hours of the morning the previous month on a downtown street at a major intersection. He was attacked for one reason—because he was gay. Similar gay bashings occur across this land.

I called on the Minister of Justice to recognize that this is a serious problem and specifically to bring forward an amendment to the Criminal Code of Canada to outlaw hate propaganda which promotes violence and hatred based on sexual orientation.

The Minister of Justice recently tabled an omnibus bill in the House amending a number of statutes, including the criminal code, but unfortunately she did not include that important amendment to expand the sections of the criminal code on hate propaganda to include sexual orientation.

Under the current provisions of the criminal code, those who incite hatred against any identifiable group where such incitement is likely to lead to a breach of the peace can be subject to criminal sanction. Identifiable groups include those distinguished by colour, race, religion or ethnic origin.

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That law has not changed since it was brought into force in 1966 and the silence of the code on this important issue sends a very destructive message. I believe that the silence of the code is unconstitutional.

Section 15 of the charter requires that the equal benefit of the law, including the criminal code provisions on hate propaganda, be extended to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons.

What does it mean for the criminal code to be silent on this important issue? It means, for example, when a hater like the Reverend Fred Phelps wants to come to Canada to burn the Canadian flag and to promote hatred and violence directed at gay and lesbian people, the police in Ottawa cannot stop that man from crossing our border. In fact, it was Sergeant Callaghan of the Ottawa Police Force who said and I quote "If this was done against a Catholic or a Jew or a black person, charges could be laid. If we had that legislation, we would not have to put up with this nonsense on Monday. We could have told him 'If you show up and you start spreading this hate, we will arrest you'."

I plead with the government to give our law enforcement officers in Canada the power to take that important action. It is important because if we say it is all right to promote violence and hatred based on sexual orientation, that is a licence to the thugs in our country. It is a license to the thugs who get involved in gay bashing. It also sends out a negative message in terms of self-esteem for young gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

I want to note that a gifted artist in Peterborough, Spencer Harrison, has pointed out that under the current provisions of the criminal code and the denial of equality, this leads to hatred and to violence. He has put together a project called The Queer Project that documents the impact of this hatred.

I call on the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice to do the right thing, to join with provincial and territorial attorneys general to listen to the premier of Ontario, the Leader of the New Democratic Party in Ontario, Howard Hampton, to amend the criminal code provisions on hate propaganda to include sexual orientation.

Mr. John Maloney (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government takes the issue of hate crimes and hate propaganda very seriously and has been working actively to address this issue. There are a number of measures already in place at the federal and provincial levels to ensure that Canadians are protected from discrimination and crimes based on hate.

In 1995 the government enacted legislation in the form of Bill C-41 on sentencing reform which made it clear that hate motivation is an aggravating circumstance to be factored in at the time of sentencing. Paragraph 718.2(a)(i) of the criminal code provides that evidence that an offence was motivated by hate, bias or

prejudice based on race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or any other similar ground shall be considered an aggravating factor in the sentencing of an offender.

In other words, if there is evidence that an assault, damage to property, threatening, harassment or any other criminal offence was motivated by hate, bias or prejudice, it is an aggravating factor for the purposes of sentencing and it should result in a more severe sanction. In addition, in 1996 the government brought forward legislation, Bill S-5, which resulted in amendments to the Canadian Human Rights Act and added sexual orientation as a prohibited grounds of discrimination.

• (1910)

My hon. colleague will also be happy to know that as part of our ongoing discussions at the federal-provincial—territorial level, the minister and her colleagues have been discussing Canada's hate crime laws and recommendations to improve them. Given the nature of the criminal law in this country with federal responsibility for the enactment of the law and provincial responsibility for the administration of the criminal justice system, there is a collaborative process in the development and implementation of criminal law.

Federal-provincial-territorial ministers responsible for justice have approved for consideration, subject to an in-depth charter review, a number of recommendations which would further ensure that hate crimes are dealt with firmly. Many have suggested an expansion of the criminal code definition of identifiable group used for purposes of the hate propaganda offence provisions to include sexual orientation.

It is important to remember, however, that changes to the criminal code are only a part of a much broader strategy which must be taken to combat hate motivated activities in this country. This approach recognizes the importance of public awareness and education on the values of tolerance and respect which are fundamental to Canadian human rights and Canadian citizenship.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, on March 17 I posed two questions to the minister of agriculture and I am very pleased to see the parliamentary secretary to the minister in the House tonight.

As usual, the two questions I posed were very valid questions. They were very succinct questions. They were very simple questions. I expected an answer from the minister of agriculture but as usual, there was a lot of doublespeak, there was a lot of beating around the bush and in fact no answers to those very simple questions.

The first question was rather interesting because at that time there were a number of supporters who were in town supporting

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this particular party. A number of people in that particular group of people wanted to reinstate what was known as the GRIP program, the gross revenue insurance program. Lo and behold, when they went to this huge gathering, all of the people in that gathering supported the fact that the government should reinstate the GRIP program.

For your information, Mr. Speaker, the GRIP program was a farm support program put into place prior to 1993 when this government took power and when it got into power in 1995 it in its short term mind decided to get rid of the GRIP program for in fact short term gain but for long term pain.

Here we have a wonderful group of individuals who support the government saying unanimously, "Bring us back the GRIP program". So I asked the minister a very simple question: "Will you support that particular comment and resolution and will you in fact bring back the GRIP program". There was no answer.

From there I then went on to very simply say that if the minister does not want to support the GRIP, then let's identify and let's analyze the program that was put in its place and that is the AIDA program. We recognize by the vote itself that AIDA was not being supported by the people who it was meant for, the farmers of western Canada. So we looked at whether there were some advantages to this AIDA program over the GRIP and we looked at the administration costs.

Lo and behold, the administration costs of the AIDA program to deliver some \$500 million in 1998 came to a grand total of \$35 million, about seven times what the administration costs were to administer not only GRIP but the NISA. NISA and GRIP were less than 2% of all of the program dollars delivered under those programs.

We now have here a program that the government's own supporters say is not good, that it is costing huge dollars that could be going to agriculture and to the farmers themselves and now going to bureaucrats to administer the program, so we ask ourselves, why would the minister of agriculture not want to answer those two simple questions. Why not reinstitute GRIP, a program that is being accepted by all those who wish to have it back, and in fact the government could save money by putting the GRIP program back and not having to spend those exorbitant sums on bureaucrats in the department to administer and deliver the AIDA program.

I would like the parliamentary secretary if he can to perhaps just stick to the subject, not talk about previous deficits, not talk about previous policies or previous parties and governments, just stick to the questions and the issues that are before him today.

Why not reinstate GRIP and please talk to the administration costs of that program.

Mr. Joe McGuire (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Brandon—Souris for his St. Patrick's Day question and for his interest in our policy convention.

• (1915)

He did not want me to mention the platform of his party in the previous election so I will not belabour him in that regard, but I am glad he is watching what we are doing in our policy conventions. I hope his party adopts some of our programs.

The Government of Canada is willing to consider various options for farm safety nets. The national safety nets advisory committee has been asked to look at a variety of proposals submitted to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food over the past few months.

A few of these proposals share some similarities to the former GRIP program. All of these proposals will be reviewed by the committee and will be measured against criteria the committee has established for an income disaster program. The criteria it has established is split between essential and preferred criteria.

The first element is that any new disaster program be whole farm, that is, applicable to all farm production. As well, the committee is looking for proposals which will complement current safety net programs. As safety net programs are cost shared with provincial governments, any new programs must also meet their key principle, which is that safety net programs are equitable, fair and generally available, and that these programs do not put producers at risk for trade actions or countervail threats. All of the programs which have been submitted, including those based on the former GRIP program, will be measured against this criteria.

The national safety nets advisory committee will prepare a report for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food after it has met with the organizations or individuals who submitted each proposal.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7.16 p.m.)

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