



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 136 • NUMBER 104 • 2nd SESSION • 36th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 31, 2000

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

All parliamentary publications are available on the
“Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire” at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 31, 2000

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. member for Saint John.

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

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

THE LATE DAVIE FULTON

Mr. Ted McWhinney (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Davie Fulton, who died on May 22, was elected to parliament as a member for Kamloops in 1945, while still an officer in the Italian campaign in World War II. He served in the Diefenbaker government as an imaginative and reform-minded minister of justice. He was joint author, with U.S. Attorney General Rogers, of the Fulton-Rogers Agreement, restricting the extraterritorial application of U.S. anti-trust law against Canadian companies without prior consultation with the Canadian government. He also developed a plan for an all-Canadian amending machinery for the Canadian constitution, which later provided a scientific-legal base for the Trudeau Constitution Act of 1982, chapter V.

Mr. Fulton's post-parliamentary career involved further public service as a justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia and as a respected juriconsult on major Canadian constitutional issues.

* * *

TERRORISM

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a country of immigrants, enriched by diversity, a peace-loving nation willing to help out our neighbours and celebrate our freedoms. Canadians oppose any form of terrorism anywhere. They are particularly opposed to terrorists using Canada to finance their killings.

The Tamil tigers raised \$22 million in Canada last year alone. The Minister of Finance and the Minister for International Cooperation made a mistake. They attended an event sponsored by an internationally known front for the tigers.

The Tamil New Year should be celebrated as much as any other cultural holiday around the globe. However, celebrating it with an organization that finances terrorism is wrong.

Instead of apologizing, the ministers attack, calling us racist and anti-Canadian.

It is not anti-Canadian to condemn terrorism, nor is it racist to identify terrorist organizations from a particular country. What is anti-Canadian is ministers of the crown who refuse to admit their mistakes and attack those who defend and demand accountability. Canada is still, after all, a democracy.

* * *

NATIONAL CANCER SURVIVOR'S DAY

Mr. Gary Pillitteri (Niagara Falls, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Sunday, June 4, 2000 marks the 13th anniversary of National Cancer Survivor's Day. This event honours survivors who are living with and beyond cancer. It also recognizes the important role played by family, friends and community in the lives of cancer survivors, as well as that of the many health care professionals and researchers who devote their lives to making life more comfortable for those faced with the disease.

Approximately one in three Canadians will be diagnosed with cancer during his or her lifetime. However, thanks to the improved detection, more available information and enhanced methods of treatment, over half of all people diagnosed with cancer today go on to achieve a full recovery.

Recently one of my staffers was diagnosed with cancer. I admire her courage and her determination and would like take this opportunity to tell her that we are all rooting for her.

Today, with the Canadian Cancer Society, I salute and celebrate the survivors.

* * *

WORLD NO-TOBACCO DAY

Ms. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World No-Tobacco Day.

S. O. 31

World No-Tobacco Day is a global event created by the World Health Organization to raise the awareness about the use of tobacco and its devastating effects on human lives. Tobacco use leads to breast and lung cancer, heart disease, disability, death and high health care costs. This year over 4 million people, more than 45,000 of whom will be Canadians, will die as a result of tobacco use. By the year 2030, they tell us, the annual global death toll from tobacco use is expected to reach 10 million.

• (1405)

Educating the public about the dangers of tobacco use is a responsibility governments must share. I am pleased that the federal government is taking steps in this direction by proposing tobacco products information regulations.

On this World No-Tobacco Day, I join with the Canadian Society for International Health and health—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale.

* * *

CANADA AT THE MILLENNIUM

Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, May 25, I had the honour to launch the online version of a new book on behalf of the Minister of Industry.

Canada at the Millennium tells the stories of 50 ethnocultural groups that have journeyed to Canada throughout the 20th century.

The project is the result of a unique partnership between the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, Heirloom Publishing and Canada's Digital Collections Program of Industry Canada.

I trust that my colleagues will join me in commending the young website builders who produced the on-line version of *Canada at the Millennium*.

* * *

TERRORISM

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians we are known for our willingness to welcome immigrants and refugees with a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

If we have a failing though it would be our tendency to assume that every new entrant will leave behind any long held prejudices and deeply held feelings related to conflicts in their previous homelands.

In fact, as the experience with the Babar Khalsa charity in B.C. taught us, criminals and undesirables do infiltrate our society from overseas and use our willingness to embrace other cultures as a way to raise money for wars and terrorist activities abroad.

It took years to get the Babar Khalsa deregistered as a charity, even though CSIS had identified the group as raising money in Canada for terrorism, because those who spoke out about the problem were unfairly labelled by political opponents as intolerant and racist.

Let us not make the same mistake again. Let us begin listening to authoritative warnings about terrorist fundraising activities in Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

MONTREAL'S IRISH COMMUNITY

Mr. Raymond Lavigne (Verdun—Saint-Henri, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the most Irish riding in all of Canada is surely my beautiful riding of Verdun—Saint-Henri, for it includes four Irish parishes: St. Gabriels, Holy Cross, St. Willibrood and St. Thomas More.

We also have the United Irish Society, which is responsible for the traditional Saint Patrick's parade, which has been held longer, without any interruption, than any other such parade in the world. This year marked its 176th anniversary.

I wish to salute the members of the United Irish Society and the queen and princesses of the Montreal Saint Patrick's parade, and the St. Thomas More parishioners accompanying them.

I welcome them to the Parliament of Canada and ask them to keep up their excellent work on behalf of Montreal's Irish community.

* * *

WORLD NO-TOBACCO DAY

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for the past 12 years, May 31 is World No-Tobacco Day, a date set by the World Health Organization to invite us to encourage those around us to stop smoking, at least for one day, or even to give it up permanently.

It is also an opportunity to encourage all authorities responsible for health to continue their research on the harmful effects of smoking, to disseminate information on the subject, and to engage in concrete actions against smoking.

The proportion of health problems affecting the world's population that is related to smoking is not to be underestimated. According to World Health Organization estimates, there are approximately 4 million tobacco-related deaths every year and, if the trend continues, within 30 years smoking will become the top cause of illness in the world. One in eight deaths could be linked to smoking.

Given the immediate and long term harmful effects of tobacco on health, it is essential for there to be clear and firm support to any

antismoking measures and to co-ordinate worldwide efforts in this connection, in order to enhance the effectiveness of our response to the public health hazard tobacco represents.

* * *

GASOLINE PRICING

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the cost of gasoline has jumped by 10 cents. A litre of regular gas is selling for the unheard of price of 84.9 cents in Montreal.

Up to yesterday, retailers had been selling regular gas almost at the floor price established by the Quebec energy board, that is, by the government of Lucien Bouchard.

• (1410)

No retailer wants to sell below floor price, which is dictated by the Government of Quebec and which is the wholesale price plus transportation costs and taxes. Some would have broken the rule. In Montreal, profits usually range between six and seven cents a litre.

Why is the government of Lucien Bouchard maintaining this floor price, when consumers are on the floor.

* * *

[English]

TERRORISM

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, remember when the Prime Minister said that lowering taxes was the not the Canadian way, and if people did not like it they should move out of the country?

Now we have the finance minister saying that any criticism of his support for what CSIS claims is a front for a well known terrorist group is also not the Canadian way.

What would Joe Canadian say in response? I think it would go something like this. I am a Canadian and it is about time the federal government started to treat my tax dollars as funds held in trust, not a personal slush fund for a political party. I believe that a dollar held in the hands of a family or business person is far better than sending it in to the finance minister.

Speaking of the finance minister, I also reject the idea that criticizing supporters of the Tamil tigers who go to public schools dressed in army fatigues and packing replica assault weapons is somehow not the Canadian way.

While Canadians believe in noble ideas like the equality of all people, respect for diversity and freedom to express oneself, it is about time we gave up on the politically correct notion that

S. O. 31

criticizing a terrorist group is somehow equal to criticizing someone's culture. It is not unCanadian to be against terrorism.

[Translation]

Some hon. members Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. If hon. members have comments, I invite them to make them outside the House, because we would like to hear the members' statements.

* * *

[English]

THE MIDDLE EAST

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in honour of peace and the recent pullout of Israel from Lebanon.

I want to ask His Excellency, Dr. Assem Jaber, Ambassador of Lebanon to Canada, to convey our best wishes and congratulations to Lebanon. This is a momentous occasion since it brings an optimistic close to decades of frustration and confrontation.

The pullout of Israel from Lebanon provides a momentum for peace in the Middle East. Now the people of Lebanon can turn, and should turn, their attention to improving their quality of life.

Our world can no longer afford the cost of war when for the price of one bullet we can feed a child.

* * *

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Ms. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been eight years since the tragic explosion that took the lives of 26 miners in the Westray Mine. It has been three years since Justice Richard gave his report on the disaster. He called for changes to the criminal code to hold corporations and managers accountable for putting workers in undue danger.

The House has passed a motion calling on the government to act on Justice Richard's recommendations. Last Monday the justice minister tried to pass the buck to the justice committee by telling the House that the committee was looking at the issue. What the minister said was wrong.

Corporate responsibility is not on the justice committee's agenda. It has never been on the justice committee's agenda. It is time for the Liberal government to stop avoiding the issue of workplace safety.

Every year over 600 Canadians are killed on the job and over a million injured. It is time for the government to hold bosses who do not care about safety on the job accountable.

The NDP leader has tabled a bill to act on Justice Richard's recommendations and hold corporations and managers account-

Oral Questions

able. I have seconded that bill. We call on the Liberal government, and all members of the House to help us make workplaces safer for all Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

THE LATE MAURICE RICHARD

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today in Montreal, final tributes were paid to Maurice Richard at the funeral for this man, sportsman, hero and legend.

The sportsman had long retired, but his exploits remained engraved on our memories and passed on from one generation to the next.

The exploits of the hero, not only in sports but expressed in daily life through his qualities of determination, passion and courage, excited crowds and inspired determination and passion in a people. The hero has gone.

The man has left us. And now we pay a final great and sober tribute to his image. The sportsman and the hero depart with the man. But, Maurice Richard today is more with us than ever.

The man made way for the legend. May this legend be handed on from one generation to the next and continue to inspire a desire for excellence and determination in the people.

Farewell Maurice Richard the man. Long live Maurice Richard the legend.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

FISHERIES

Mr. Mark Muise (West Nova, PC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the last day of another successful fishing season in my riding. As our fishermen prepare to put away their gear for another season they can only wonder what lies ahead for their future fishery.

Our fishermen are deeply concerned about their industry because, despite the many promises made by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to resolve the crisis, he has done nothing except increase tension between native and non-native fishermen.

We hear about the millions of dollars being spent to purchase licences and equipment for aboriginals, but what we do not hear from the minister is how he plans to address the serious problem of the summer food fishery. This summer fishery threatens the livelihoods of all fishermen and if the minister does not soon take this threat seriously he will be risking the long term survival of an industry that spans generations.

I want to congratulate our fishermen for another successful season and thank them for their commitment to peacefully resolving the crisis in the Atlantic fishery.

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we continue in this House to hear constant attacks from the alliance party about the Minister of Human Resources Development and her department concerning the privacy files. I would like to read a direct quote from the privacy commissioner, Bruce Phillips. On May 30 he said:

I am not just satisfied with the minister's decision; I am delighted by it. I say this on behalf of Minister Stewart. In so doing, I realize that I may be treading into places I ought not to go, but it has been my experience from past dealings with this particular minister on privacy issues that when she has been fully informed and on top of the case, she has responded very quickly. The protocol they presented to me last week for discussions could not have been much improved upon if I had written it myself.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Miss Deborah Grey (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that was a good attempt at defence, but I think Canadians would be a little surprised today to find out that there is another HRDC website out there with a whole lot of personal information on a whole lot of people who are appealing their EI applications. I would like to ask the minister today, how much is too much information on the worldwide web?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on our website are copies of Umpire—the umpires are federal court judges—concerning federal court and supreme court decisions of employment insurance appeal cases. These are electronic copies of the paper decisions that have been available to the public for almost 60 years.

Having said that, I have asked my officials to look at this format and to make sure that the information is being presented in an acceptable fashion.

Miss Deborah Grey (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, again it is a good try, but there is some very personal information on these files, which maybe is not necessary. How about information about Canadians' drug problems? Or, someone with a particular religious belief and how it affects their work. Or, whether or not some of these people have disabled children. The list goes on and on.

How much information is just a little too much?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, we are making information public that is already public. I would note that the website has been endorsed by the federal court of appeal as a source for jurisprudence on the Internet. This was under decision A-401-99.

I want to point out that I have asked my officials to review the format to make sure it is appropriate.

Miss Deborah Grey (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the minister's views on privacy are interesting because, as a member of parliament, HRDC officials will not lift a finger for any of my constituents until I have them sign a letter of consent that I will be assisting them. Yet, if they happen to enter the appeal process, some of the most personal details of their lives are made available from Toronto to Timbuktu.

How much confidentiality do Canadians have a right to when they enter into the EI appeal process?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the hon. member would know that it is the practice of courts and almost all administrative tribunals in this country to publish their decisions. Let me indicate to the hon. member some of the administrative tribunals, such as the one under discussion, which are presently publishing their decisions: the Quebec Human Rights Tribunal, the Canadian Industrial Relations Tribunal, the Public Service Staff Relations Board, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

Let me reassure the hon. member that our system is based upon—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

• (1420)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the justice minister's attempt to get the HRDC minister off the hook, but I read from the Employment Insurance Act, section 127, which states: "The following information shall be made available only to the Commission and the employees of the Department", and that is, "any information obtained by the Commission or the Department from any persons under this Act".

The whole section is titled "Confidential information", yet we find out, to the shock of Canadians, that all of this is being published for the view of anyone at the click of a mouse on the web.

How on earth can the minister justify this breach of confidentiality?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister

responsible for HRDC has pointed out, these decisions have been available for a very long time in hard copy.

These decisions, as is the case with many, many others, be they administrative tribunals or court decisions, are available on the web.

There is absolutely nothing improper in relation to that. In fact, the supreme court and other courts in this country have said that openness and transparency are fundamental elements of the integrity of our justice system.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the HRDC minister owes Canadians an explanation about why she has made them vulnerable by putting personal details of their lives on the web, including their address, work situation, living arrangements and family circumstances. This information is published on the web. It is not kept in a file somewhere; it is out on the worldwide web.

Why were Canadians not told that their dealings with HRDC would be published on the web?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again I want to remind the hon. member that these are copies of paper decisions made by the courts.

I have also said and I will repeat that I have asked my officials to look at this format to ensure that it is an appropriate use of the Internet.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA INFORMATION OFFICE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services said that all CIO contracts for the Quebec tour by federal ministers had been put out to tender, as though the guidelines were always closely observed by the CIO.

Will the minister therefore explain to us why 21% of the \$22.5 million in contracts awarded by the CIO between April 1997 and December 1999 went out without any tenders?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House that for the past two years any contract over \$25,000 has been competitive.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was talking about calls for tender—these are not necessarily competitive because there are a number of bizarre criteria in what they call the competition.

Could the government therefore explain to us how it is possible under the contracting-out guidelines to award \$258,000 in various contracts to Stratégies et Communication, and to Groupe Cible,

Oral Questions

without any calls for tender? Is it because these two outfits are directed by a former Liberal candidate or for reasons of state? What is the competitive criterion in this case?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I repeat, contracts, specifically those for the tour mentioned by the member, were put out to tender.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it seems that Treasury Board rules regarding the awarding of contracts are flawed in several ways.

How can the President of the Treasury Board justify the fact that her department's rules regarding the awarding of contracts are so permissive?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a policy for awarding government contracts that must be complied with by all the departments of this government, and the Canada Information Office does comply with that policy.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is very good.

In that case, how does the Minister of Public Works explain that, in January 1998, the firm of Tremblay-Guitett was awarded a \$105,000 contract without any call for tenders, to provide advice in the area of communications? Does this example not squarely contradict the minister's statement that the Canada Information Office complies with the contract awarding rules?

• (1425)

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, immediately upon being appointed minister responsible for Quebec, I gave very clear directives to the CIO to the effect that it had to comply with Treasury Board policies. Any contract of more than \$25,000 must be awarded through a competitive bidding process, through a call for tenders, and this is what the CIO did.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Right Hon. Prime Minister, who was a colleague of Monique Bégin when she brought in the Canada Health Act in 1984.

The former minister of health has now called on the Liberal government to bring in amendments to federal legislation governing health care in this country to stop the privatization of medicare.

If the Prime Minister is not willing to listen to the NDP, would he be willing to listen to his former colleague and do what we have been asking for a long time, bring in legislation to stop privatization?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Madam Bégin did not suggest amending, she suggested new legislation, parallel legislation.

In fact, I met with her the other morning and we had an interesting discussion. She is a person whose views I very much respect. I reminded her that we are in the process of working with provincial partners to renew medicare to find an answer to make sure the principles of the Canada Health Act are respected as we go forward with a sustainable health care system.

We welcome good ideas from any source, and I will work with my provincial partners to make certain that we do what is right to keep public medicare safe in Canada.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not care what it is called, whether it is called parallel or new or amendments. The fact is that the former minister of health has called for changes to the legislation governing medicare in this country, which is exactly what we have called for, changes that would stop privatization.

Why is the minister waiting? Is he waiting for the federal election? Is he waiting to put a package in place as part of the strategy for the Liberals? Medicare needs to be saved now, not at the convenience of the Liberal Party. Let us have some action now, as the former minister of health has asked for.

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we did not wait to have a health budget in February 1999. We did not wait to increase by 25% the transfers to provinces for health over the last four years. We did not wait to invite health ministers from across the country to join me at the table to talk about concrete action to save medicare.

The government has no lessons to learn from the NDP on health. The NDP has come into the House with no constructive ideas on how to change medicare. We will see to it that public medicare is safeguarded in this country.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday morning the sensitive investigation task force reported on four areas of horrible conduct on the part of the Canadian forces.

The Minister of National Defence told reporters that he felt strongly that action had to be taken.

Will the Minister of National Defence inform the House what action he has personally taken on this file since this information was brought to his attention?

Oral Questions

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the report from the investigators is most disturbing. The actions which they have outlined are disgraceful. They will not be tolerated within the Canadian forces.

I discussed this matter yesterday with the chief of defence staff as to the action that is to be taken. We are both reviewing the report at this point in time. Within a few days we will announce an action plan that will be quick, fair and decisive.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, we all feel the way the minister feels about this situation. This type of conduct is unacceptable in Canada and is scandalous in the Canadian forces.

We have soldiers who have confessed to putting poison in their superior's coffee. We have evidence that medical documents have been taken from files and we have serious breakdowns in the chain of command.

It has been seven years since this information was brought to the attention of the government. Why will the minister not cut the red tape and immediately call for a public inquiry?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will take the necessary action to deal with all of those issues that the hon. member has raised and we will do it quickly.

I want to emphasize also that what these people have done and what has happened does not reflect upon what the vast majority of the fine dedicated men and women in our Canadian forces are doing, which is honouring this country in their service.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, when we asked the HRD minister for information about some of the million dollar grants that went to people in her riding, she claimed that all that information was private. Yet if an average Canadian appeals his or her employment insurance claim, all those dealings are published on the worldwide web, including intimate details of his or her personal life.

• (1430)

Why the double standard between million dollar grant recipients in the minister's riding and people who are trying to claim EI?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. member that the website has been endorsed by the federal court of appeal. I remind him that the privacy commissioner has applauded us for our response to his report tabled less than two weeks ago.

I ask him what the privacy policy of that party would be. Would he agree with his colleague, the member for Yorkton—Melville,

who thinks that even those who are found not guilty or have their charges dropped should have their DNA recorded on file because in his view police only arrest people for good reasons? Would that be part of that party's policy?

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that answer is a good reason why the member is so discredited. The minister—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please choose your words very judiciously.

Mr. Monte Solberg: Mr. Speaker, I asked a very specific question. All kinds of grants have gone to the minister's riding. When we asked questions about them she said the information was private. Now we find that there is a website that reveals intimate details of the lives of people who appeal for EI. Why the double standard?

Why is it that the information is not revealed about people who ask for and get million dollar grants but on the other hand, regular folks are having their names and details of their personal lives spread all over the worldwide web?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about double standards. He rises in the House and challenges us on issues of privacy. Again, I point out the privacy commissioner supports what we were doing.

I wonder if he would agree with the reform-a-tories in the province of Ontario that giving over 600 private companies access to the database in the Ministry of Transport and selling that private information is the right thing to do.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA INFORMATION BUREAU

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, defeated Liberal candidate Serge Paquette, and former assistant to a Liberal MP Richard Bélisle, are the directors of Stratégie et Communication, the recipient of half a million dollars to organize seven months of tours by federal ministers around Quebec.

Can the Minister of Public Works tell us whether we are to understand from this that the Liberal government finds the ministers' own communications services so incompetent that they have to award a half-million dollar contract to friends instead?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all I will say again, the contracts are competitive.

Second, as far as the Quebec ministerial tour is concerned, several ministers are involved. A number of different matters are involved as well, because the purpose in going there is to inform

Oral Questions

Canadians. We meet with municipal representatives, Chamber of Commerce people, and community groups. We want to ensure that there is proper follow-up.

Therefore, the services of these people are retained through a competitive contract in order to ensure that co-ordination is properly carried out.

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during that same period, the firm of Tremblay-Guittet, with a connection to the Minister of Public Works, received one-quarter of a million dollars for ministerial speech writing.

Are the Liberal ministers so hopeless that it takes half a million to tell them how to tour, and another quarter million to tell them what to say when they do?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can see that the ministerial tour is starting to have a good effect on the Bloc Québécois member. As I have explained, on various dates, several ministers—

Some hon. members Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Public Works.

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, the main purpose of the ministerial tour of Quebec is to inform Quebecers about Government of Canada programs and about what the Government of Canada is doing.

• (1435)

At the same time, we are a government with an attentive ear. We are there to listen and to ensure that the programs of the Government of Canada meet the needs of the population.

Therefore, we do so in a co-ordinated manner, and will continue to do so.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, why does the Minister of Human Resources Development think the world should know that Neil G. has “certain religious commitments that interfere with certain shifts after 6 p.m.?”

The Speaker: I guess the question is in order. I am not sure what the question was, but I see the minister on her feet. The hon. Minister of Justice.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister of HRDC has already pointed out, since the 1940s umpires who are judges of the federal court trial division have been called upon to settle UI and EI litigation matters dealing with claimants who may

be eligible for benefits. Umpire hearings are generally held in courts and they are open to the public. In fact, the decisions of these umpires are available. Because of the use of technology, they are now not only available in hard copy but they are also available on the net.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yes indeed, and what a web they have woven.

Canadians might be forgiven for asking the question why the Human Resources Development Canada website points out that Mark M. “developed a substance abuse problem”. Did anyone at HRDC ask Mark if he wanted that information published?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Justice has pointed out, these are the decisions of justices.

Again let us look at the record of that party over there. I am just reminded of the 1997 dissenting report to the report on privacy issues wherein that party said that the government side was being narrow and heavy-handed by suggesting expanding the role and responsibilities of the privacy commissioner. Which way do they want it?

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA INFORMATION OFFICE

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is too much.

Not only is half a million dollars being spent to tell ministers how to conduct a tour, and a quarter of a million to tell them what to say, but another \$1,208,000 is being spent to have a specialized firm read the newspapers in order to see whether the ministers have done their job well.

Does the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, who is the chief organizer of the Liberal Party of Quebec, not find it scandalous that almost \$2 million in taxpayers' money has been wasted for the sole purpose of parading federal ministers around Quebec?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I understand the Bloc Québécois questions correctly this afternoon, when the Government of Quebec communicates, it is information, but when the Government of Canada communicates, it is propaganda.

I think that enough is enough. I think that they should ask their head office how much it is spending to promote sovereignty. I think that from where we stand the Government of Canada is entitled to promote the Canadian federation.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Promotion of the government's activities, Mr. Speaker.

The minister can say and do what he likes, but can he deny that the CIO, for which he is responsible, is nothing more than a propaganda tool that makes it possible for Liberals to use public money not just for partisan politics in Quebec, but also to reward friends of the party?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I repeat, when Quebec communicates, it is information, but when Ottawa communicates, it is propaganda.

They are free to tell Quebecers that the Government of Canada is not working, in order to advance their cause. And we should sit still and not tell Quebecers what the Canadian government is doing for people living in Quebec?

We will continue to do so in a very organized manner, so that we can provide accurate information, not Bloc Quebecois propaganda.

* * *

• (1440)

[English]

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance said that although he had Irish blood running in his veins that did not mean he was a member of the IRA, but if the finance minister started attending IRA cultural events, you can bet we would have some pretty tough questions for him.

The fact is CSIS, the U.S. state department and security analysts in Australia and Scotland all say that the FACT is a fundraising front for the Tamil Tigers.

How can the minister continue to defend his attendance at a FACT event in the light of that evidence?

The Speaker: I do not know how that fits in with the administrative responsibility of the government or the minister. I ruled this type of question out of order yesterday. The minister stood to answer it. I see another minister is standing to answer. This question is out of order but if she would like to respond, the hon. minister.

Hon. Maria Minna (Minister for International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes, I do want to answer because neither I nor the Minister of Finance attended a Tamil Tiger event. We attended a cultural event of the Tamil community of Toronto.

I lived for decades under the accusation that the Italian Canadian community was Mafiosi and part of the Mafia. I will not tar the whole of the Tamil community in the same manner.

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, during the 35th parliament, this government was told

repeatedly by CSIS and by the Reform Party that the Babar Khalsa Sikh charity in B.C. was raising money—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. We will hear the question from the hon. member.

Mr. Ted White: Mr. Speaker, during the 35th parliament, this government was warned repeatedly by CSIS and what was formerly the Reform Party that the Babar Khalsa Sikh charity in B.C. was raising money for terrorist activities overseas. It took years to get the Babar Khalsa charitable status cancelled. Now it looks like the finance minister is repeating history, this time in connection with the Tamil Tigers.

If the FACT has done nothing wrong, will the Minister of Finance please stand now and say that he supports an inquiry into the activities of that group in Canada?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Tamil Canadians are making a contribution to this country in virtually every segment of our society. We will build Canada only by embracing new communities, not by shunning them. Until the Reform Party understands that, all the name changes in the world will not help them.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIVACY

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the privacy commissioner, Bruce Phillips, said yesterday that nothing prevents the Minister of Revenue from releasing personal information to anyone, as he did with Human Resources Development Canada and that it is a myth to believe that information given to Revenue Canada is totally private.

Will the Minister of Justice finally realize this and get it across to her colleagues in the government that the only way to resolve the problem is quite simply to review the Privacy Act?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency is being questioned, so I would like to respond.

I have already explained it a number of times in the House. A keystone of the Income Tax Act is confidentiality, which is highly protected.

Within the department, when information is shared with other departments, other agencies, I am told, it is done very strictly according to the law. It is also shared when the person involved gives his or her consent.

Oral Questions

I would also point out that, when people fail to honour a commitment, namely the law, penalties are provided under the Income Tax Act.

* * *

• (1445)

[English]

COMMUNITY FUTURES DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mr. John Harvard (Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Secretary of State for Western Diversification. He took in last weekend's meetings in Quebec of the Community Futures Development Corporation. Would he care to share with the House some of the results of those meetings?

Hon. Ronald J. Duhamel (Secretary of State (Western Economic Diversification)(Francophonie), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over 500 men and women, mostly volunteers from 250-plus community futures development corporations and 130 of whom were from western Canada, met in Quebec.

These men and women identify local needs, prioritize them and then find solutions to community and economic development. They met to see how they could do that even better. They did it with the help of the Government of Canada, and they do it in western Canada with the help of western economic diversification. Two years from now they will do it again.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the tragedy in Walkerton, Ontario, caused by a contaminated water supply has devastated that community and touched all Canadians.

In 1995 Health Canada identified 171 aboriginal reserve communities in Canada where water systems were defective and, to quote from its own report "have the potential to affect the health and safety of the community if the problems are not resolved".

Could the health minister verify that these defective water systems have been fixed and that the health and safety of these aboriginal residents on reserve communities are not at risk?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. Health Canada has been vigilant over the years to make sure that aboriginal communities across the country have access to safe and pure drinking water.

Some years ago we did a survey across the country to make sure we understood the nature of the challenge. Since that time Health

Canada has been working closely with aboriginal communities themselves and with other partners to make sure that the aboriginal population in their own communities have access to safe drinking water. That effort continues. We have challenges still, but we are addressing the issue with the communities themselves.

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the residents of these communities do not want pablum. They want answers. We have seen what can happen when a contaminated water supply in one community is allowed to go forward.

Could the minister stand in his place and say that after five years they have managed to correct the problems in these 171 communities where the health and safety of those residents are at risk?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member invites me to repeat my response. My response was to exactly what he asked.

My response is that Health Canada takes very seriously the need to have safe drinking water in all aboriginal communities. We have identified the challenges and we are working toward addressing those challenges with the communities themselves.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Dennis Gruending (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the environment commissioner told us yesterday that 20 million Canadians are being exposed to deadly smog and that 5,000 of us are dying from it every year.

Ten years ago governments signed agreements to do something about it but the plan was never implemented, says the commissioner. Today we are told by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation that Ontario is the third worst polluter in North America.

The minister recently announced measures to deal with smog producing emissions but they are voluntary. What assurance can he give that his latest plan will not go the way of the first with announcements and targets but no implementation?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there was a different government in place in 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993, for those four years, which I think is comforting to him.

A process was put in place with respect to improving the quality of gasoline, reducing the sulphur in gasoline, reducing the sulphur in diesel, improving the quality of the vehicles, and extending the requirements of passenger vehicles to SUVs, trucks and vans, thus doubling the number of vehicles covered. There were changes with respect to benzene for the Canada-wide standards and ozone work with the United States on the ozone annex—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar.

Mr. Dennis Gruending (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. minister's efforts and I appreciate his response, but he did not quite answer my question.

I want to know, when he rose to announce the regulations he is putting in place, why he made them voluntary rather than mandatory to help us deal quickly with this death dealing smog.

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, actually the hon. member is somewhat mistaken. The provisions I talked about are by and large mandatory provisions with respect to automobiles and with respect to Imperial Oil. He may have heard of the discussions between Imperial Oil and myself a few weeks ago. These are mandatory requirements, regulations.

• (1450)

There are some areas of federal-provincial jurisdictional overlaps where co-operation is needed. There we may have to get the support of the provinces. I sincerely hope the hon. member will help me get the support of the three NDP provinces in the country so that we can have the highest standards possible of air quality throughout Canada.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, with the scrapping of the department's big brother computer access files, the minister of HRDC supposedly guaranteed Canadians that their privacy would be protected. Fat chance.

The dismissive attitude of the minister is incredible. How could the minister first defend, then dismantle, then delude Canadians into thinking that big brother exists no more?

Anyone including employers, co-workers or business competitors with Internet access can retrieve sensitive personal information on Canadians citizens. How could she let that happen?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians would benefit from the way in which the privacy commissioner described our approach yesterday in the Senate when he said:

It contains the ingredients for the proper management of data. . .so that people know what is going on. It has put in place a proper process for conducting research projects by which, first, you define the project and identify the information necessary for its completion, and then you go out and get the information. Second, it

subjects all those research projects to a proper process of review by qualified experts, and it involves the Office of the Privacy Commissioner—

He thinks it will work. Why doesn't the hon. member?

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not think it will work. In her usual dismissive fashion the minister is trying to minimize this problem by refusing to take responsibility for her leaky, freaky department.

Good government should be protecting the privacy of Canadian citizens. Anyone with Internet should not be able to gain access to the most personal of information about other Canadians or themselves. Canadians have lost confidence in this minister.

In light of yet another embarrassing incident in her department, will the minister try to restore the faith of Canadians in their own privacy protection and do the right thing? Will she take their files off the Internet and herself out of cabinet?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member of all people in the House should know the importance of openness and transparency in our judicial system.

If in fact the hon. member is referring to the reports of umpires who are federal court judges, these are quasi-judicial proceedings. The decisions have been available in hard copy for years and they are now simply available through the Internet.

* * *

HIV/AIDS

Mrs. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister for International Cooperation. The world has been fighting HIV and AIDS for more than a decade, yet the disease remains a growing threat with about 16,000 new infections every day, the majority being in developing countries.

Tomorrow the minister opens an international HIV/AIDS conference in Toronto. Could the minister tell the House what she hopes to accomplish at this conference?

Hon. Maria Minna (Minister for International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow we, along with the partners that CIDA works with all over the world, will begin to look at the best practices on the ground that we use.

We will try to approach the problem in a more collective way and in a more aggressive way. As well we will look at new therapies such as mother to child transmission, one of the major problems; access to medication, another major problem; and how we begin to address the millions of orphans who are being left behind by this horrible pandemic.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I will go back to the Minister of Health to try to get a concrete answer. It was just reported a few days ago that members of the Norway House reserve are having to resort to bottled water to protect their health and safety.

Two years ago I asked the minister about the Gull Bay reserve where \$4 million had been spent on that reserve and yet it still had contaminated water.

Of the 171 deficiencies in Health Canada's own report, could the minister tell us how many or can he tell us of even one that has been fixed as a result of that study?

• (1455)

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already assured the member and the House that the safety and purity of the water supply in aboriginal communities continue to be a priority for Health Canada.

We will continue to work with those communities and with the officials at Health Canada across the country to make sure that those communities have access to the safe drinking water they need.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA INFORMATION BUREAU

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, here is a list of contracts: Groupe Cible, \$27,100; Média Q, \$37,500; Ekos Research, \$53,500; Muséobus, \$27,700; Densan Consultant, \$60,000; Compex, \$27,500. These six contracts, which have a total value of \$233,385 and which are all in excess of \$25,000, were awarded without any bidding process by the Canada Information Office, since the minister took over responsibility for the CIO.

How can the minister tell the House without blushing that, since he has taken over responsibility for the CIO, all the contracts have been awarded through a competitive bidding process?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will say it again: I am told that all contracts in excess of \$25,000 are awarded through a competitive bidding process and I stand by that statement.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Gordon Earle (Halifax West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence. The minister

indicated to the House that the file on the maritime helicopter project is moving. The file seems to be in such constant motion that I am afraid it will never come to rest for a decision.

Could the hon. minister tell the House where the mobile file is at the moment and when exactly he will announce a contract for replacement of the aging and oftentimes malfunctioning Sea Kings?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have indicated on many occasions that the file is moving and that there are ongoing preparations for the replacement of the Sea Kings.

I indicated in fact when the Sea Kings needed to be replaced. I indicated that we were putting money into upgrading them to extend them over the next five years while we go through the process of getting the helicopters manufactured and put in place. That is how long it takes for the process. We will continue to move that file because it is our number one procurement priority.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, while we know the Minister of Justice cannot comment on the specifics of the extradition case involving Karlheinz Schreiber or the million dollar slander case that has been launched by him against her government, could she assure the House none of the irregularities that existed in the first instance, which forced the government to settle out of court in an embarrassing way, exist this time around?

Does she honestly feel that the actions of her department are in full compliance with Canadian and international law?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, this matter is before the courts at this time. Therefore it is inappropriate for me to make any comment in relation to it.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Sophia Leung (Vancouver Kingsway, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Last week in Vancouver I attended a rally with over 1,000 native Fijians to call attention to the recent coup in Fiji.

Can the minister tell the House how Canada will help restore democracy in Fiji and ensure that any future attempts against democratic rule in that country will be condemned by Canada?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her concern and remind the House that we have already issued a very strong condemnation of the illegal takeover and a call for restoration.

Next Monday there will be a meeting of the Commonwealth ministerial action group, at which time Canada will propose the suspension of Fiji from the Commonwealth unless there is substantial improvement and make it very clear that we will only accept that restoration based upon a democratically elected government under a constitution which recognizes no racial or ethnic discrimination.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we will try one more time. Two years ago in the House I asked the minister if he could guarantee that the water supply for the Gull Bay First Nation would be corrected after an expenditure of \$4 million. The minister said he would look into it and would get back to us.

• (1500)

We are two years down the road. If he cannot answer the questions about any of the other 171 reserve communities where they have deficient water systems, can he tell us if this one has been fixed? Has his commitment been lived up to? Are the residents of this community able to have purified drinking water at this time?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I spoke of our commitment to make sure that safe drinking water is available. Had the member given me advance notice of his question about this specific community, I would have been pleased to get up to date information about it.

Let me tell the member, as I have already, that for Health Canada safe drinking water in aboriginal communities is a matter of real importance. We will continue to work with our partners and with those communities to make sure that is available.

* * *

*[Translation]***VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION**

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont, BQ): Mr. Speaker, eight years after presenting a petition signed by 1.3 million people asking the government to legislate to reduce violence on television, Virginie Larivière was back in Ottawa yesterday to support Bill C-470 on the reduction of violence in television broadcasts.

What is the Minister of Canadian Heritage waiting for to support this bill endorsed by the Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec, the Canadian Teachers' Federation and over 80 parliamentarians?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

* * *

*[English]***CANADA PENSION PLAN**

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Canadians are increasingly uneasy and uncomfortable with the fact that big tobacco and corporations blind to human rights, such as Talisman, are profiting from their pensions funds. I am sure the minister might share some of that discomfort himself.

In May of last year the minister said that he would take the whole issue of ethical screening of the CPP investments to the provincial finance ministers.

It is now one year later. What progress can he report? Has he convinced them that ethical screening is an important part of the pension fund of the Canadian people?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the matter is still under discussion by officials at both the Canadian government level and at the provincial government level.

There has been no conclusion to those discussions, but I can assure the hon. member that we take the matter quite seriously.

* * *

ATLANTIC SUGAR REFINERY

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, Atlantic Canada is about to lose its only sugar refining business with the closure of Atlantic Sugar Refinery in Saint John at the end of June. This will cost the region the loss of over 300 jobs and they will never be replaced.

Will the minister tell us what steps he is going to take to correct this injustice that has been brought about with the agreement he has entered into with the U.S.A. with regard to sugar.

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member should be standing and thanking the government for the percentage of sugar going into the United States that has been, can I say, captured by Canada.

By far, the majority of the sugar going into the United States, according to international agreements, comes from Canada. We have that agreement with them.

*Routine Proceedings***PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

The Speaker: I would like to draw members' attention to the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Jane Groenewegen, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Social Services, and Minister responsible for the Status of Women, from the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1505)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the standing orders, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 90 petitions.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATURAL RESOURCES AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Government Operations.

In accordance with its order of reference of Monday, May 8, 2000, the committee has considered Bill C-11, an act to authorize the divestiture of the assets of, and to dissolve, the Cape Breton Development Corporation, to amend the Cape Breton Development Corporation Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, and has agreed to report it without amendment.

[*English*]

FINANCE

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan—King—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Finance regarding its order of reference of Friday, May 12, 2000 in relation to Bill S-3, an act to implement an agreement conventions and protocols between Canada, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Algeria, Bulgaria, Portugal, Uzbekistan, Jordan, Japan and Luxembourg for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income.

The committee has considered Bill S-3 and reports the bill without amendment.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding the Order of Reference from the House of Thursday, March 16, 2000, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be granted an extension for its report on the confidentiality of the work of the Legislative Counsel from June 1, 2000 to June 15, 2000.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

• (1510)

PETITIONS

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to present petition No. 362 prepared by some 85 or 90 petitioners in Toronto and in various parts of the country who call upon parliament to freeze the budget of the Department of National Defence pending a public review of military spending priorities and public hearings on the role of the Canadian armed forces.

MARRIAGE

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present this afternoon from a number of constituents in West Vancouver and British Columbia with regard to making sure that parliament affirms the opposite sex definition of marriage.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have separate petitions here with over 2,400 names, which adds to the list of well over half a million people who have already sent in petitions.

The petitioners are concerned about the legal possession of child pornography in British Columbia and want parliament to take swift action.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of rural route mail carriers, who often earn less than minimum wage, I am pleased to table a petition containing approximately 150 signatures.

This petition asks that rural route mail carriers be given the same treatment as people already covered by the Canada Post Corporation Act, for the riding of Laurentides.

[English]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from a number of people from Newfoundland. I have not had a chance to count the number but it looks like there could be 1,000 or 1,500 names. The prayer of the petitioners is as follows "The undersigned residents of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I think the hon. member knows it is not in order to read a petition. He will want to summarize it for the House in compliance with the rules.

Mr. Norman Doyle: Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, Newfoundland has had its local CBC cut back a great deal. The petitioners request that parliament intervene to protect the rights of the citizens in the province. The daily CBC program *Here and Now* is essential to the culture of this very large and sparsely populated region.

The petitioners feel *Here and Now* is the last vestige of the once creative and leading CBC program producing region in news, current affairs, documentaries, entertainment and variety programs. *Here and Now* is their daily communication within the province and within the country.

The petitioners pray that parliament will take the appropriate action to ensure that the CBC board of directors adhere to the mandate set out by parliament and maintain at least its current level of support. I note that members opposite do not support that apparently.

ERITREA

Mr. Dennis Gruending (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by about 125 people in and around Saskatoon, many of them of Eritrean descent. As members might expect, they are extremely distraught about the border war between their country and Ethiopia. They tell us that about one million innocent civilians have been victimized.

They ask this House, among other things, to support and promote the peace package proposed by the Organization for African Unity

and they ask our government to respond to the urgent appeal of the United Nations to provide more humanitarian assistance to people displaced by the war in Eritrea, which would be over and above what we have already provided which they do not find adequate.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by people who call on parliament to ask the government to remove the landing fees imposed on refugees and immigrants coming to Canada.

CANADA POST

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of petitions to present this afternoon.

The first petition is signed by constituents from Prince George and by citizens from Nelson, B.C. calling upon the House of Commons to repeal section 13(5) of the Canada Post Corporation Act which discriminates against rural route mail couriers.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from constituents of the Prince George—Peace River riding. It calls upon the House of Commons to oppose same sex marriages and to enshrine in legislation the unique institution of marriage.

[Translation]

OIL PRODUCT PRICING

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition signed by 223 inhabitants of the riding of Jonquière, who are calling on parliament to take all necessary steps to identify and recommend, as quickly as possible, concrete means for dealing with the excessive price hikes for oil and oil products, to permanently regularize pricing, and to take action to develop alternative forms of energy at affordable prices.

● (1515)

[English]

FAMILY FARMS

Ms. Susan Whelan (Essex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the constituents of Essex, I have the honour to present a petition pursuant to Standing Order 36.

The petition concerns the insufficient support given to family farms and requests the enactment of a five year farm act to ensure financial stabilization.

TAXATION

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour today to present a petition on

Routine Proceedings

behalf of my constituents of Battlefords—Lloydminster regarding the tax situation in Canada.

The petitioners ask the federal government to take a look at the examples set by Alberta and Ontario and the great economies that are booming in those provinces. They say if the federal government followed their lead, the whole country would be better off. It is a very timely petition since we will be back on the budget this afternoon.

[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICING

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of submitting a petition signed by 6,247 inhabitants of the riding of Lotbinière, who are calling on the Parliament of Canada to take all necessary steps to identify and recommend, as quickly as possible, concrete means for dealing with the excessive price hikes for petroleum products, and to permanently regularize pricing, particularly now, just before the tourist season, when oil companies are getting ready once again to exploit consumers in Quebec.

[English]

RURAL MAIL COURIERS

Mr. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I want to present two petitions on behalf of Prince Edward Islanders who live along rural mail routes and who support their rural mail route couriers.

Rural mail route couriers earn less than minimum wage and are not allowed to bargain collectively to improve their wages because section 13(5) of the Canada Post Corporation Act prohibits rural couriers from having collective bargaining rights. Therefore the petitioners call upon parliament to repeal section 36(5) of the Canada Post Corporation Act.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Eric Lowther (Calgary Centre, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it has been a year and a half since the law against child pornography has been struck down. These petitions I am submitting today add to the hundreds of thousands of signatures from coast to coast calling for action. They ask that parliament take every measure to ensure that child pornography remains a serious offence and that federal police forces be directed to give priority to enforcing this law for the protection of our children.

[Translation]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition organized by rural route mail carriers who are calling upon Parliament to repeal section 13(5) of the Canada Post Corporation Act, because it deprives them of their collective bargaining rights and allows Canada Post to keep their wages and working conditions at an unfair level.

[English]

THE DEBT

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan—King—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions.

The first one deals with the government's efforts to reduce the national debt. Canadians would like the government to continue its efforts to reduce the national debt.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan—King—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition deals with the reduction of employment insurance premiums. The petitioners call upon parliament to continue to reduce employment insurance premiums.

TAXATION

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan—King—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the final petition calls upon parliament to build on previous actions to assist families through the Canada child tax benefit.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Wanuskewin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition similar to that of my colleague.

The petitioners ask that parliament invoke section 33 of the charter of rights and freedoms, the notwithstanding clause, to override the B.C. court of appeal decision. They ask that the section of the criminal code making child pornography possession illegal in British Columbia and across the country be reinstated. They reinforce and reaffirm their objection to the B.C. court of appeal decision.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Wanuskewin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I wish to present has some 225 signatures. The petitioners pray that parliament withdraw Bill C-23 and affirm the opposite sex definition of marriage in legislation and ensure that marriage is thereby recognized as a unique institution.

CONSCIENCE RIGHTS

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Wanuskewin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the final petition.

The petitioners lament the violation of the rights of freedom of religion and conscience in our country when health care workers in their training institutions have had those rights stripped away when hospitals have forced nurses to assist in abortion procedures against deeply held religious and moral convictions. They ask that parliament enact legislation against such violations of conscience rights by administrators in medical facilities and educational institutions across the country.

• (1520)

[Translation]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Ms. Hélène Alarie (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition from the people of my riding.

The petition is signed by 969 people who are calling for Parliament to promptly enact legislation on the mandatory labeling of foods that are wholly or partially genetically modified.

[English]

ABORTION STATISTICS

Mr. John O'Reilly (Haliburton—Victoria—Brock, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present a petition from beautiful Brock township calling on parliament to act immediately to request the provision of Canada's annual abortion statistics.

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have in hand a petition from people throughout my constituency that points out that Canadians are overtaxed.

The petitioners demand that the Department of Human Resources Development account for the gross mismanagement of \$3.2 billion annually. They call upon parliament for the immediate resignation of the Minister of Human Resources Development and that the auditor general conduct a full and independent inquiry into HRDC's management and accounting practices.

CRTC

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the honour to present three petitions signed by a number of my constituents.

The first petition calls on parliament to review the mandate of the CRTC and to allow for the licensing of religious broadcasters.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the other two petitions are signed by hundreds of Canadians mostly in my riding but also in other ridings.

The petitioners urge parliament to fulfil the promise of the 1989 resolution of the House of Commons to end child poverty as soon as possible.

[Translation]

PETROLEUM PRODUCT PRICING

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table in this House a petition bearing 3,436 signatures and relating to excessive petroleum prices.

Routine Proceedings

The people in my area are well aware that the main reason for such prices is collusion between the refineries. They are asking the government to take concrete actions to regularize petroleum prices.

[English]

DANGEROUS OFFENDERS

Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise pursuant to Standing Order 36 to present a petition on behalf of thousands of petitioners from the Kamloops area. They point out that they have concerns regarding the provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada which make it too easy for a person who has been convicted of a serious crime, such as murder, sexual assault or manslaughter, involving a term of imprisonment greater than five years, to obtain a release from custody pending the hearing of their appeal.

The petitioners ask the Government of Canada to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to prevent persons convicted of serious crimes from being released from custody pending the hearing of their appeal except in very exceptional circumstances.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in another unrelated petition, the petitioners are distraught about the fact that gasoline prices have risen to 75.9 cents in Toronto and over 80 cents a litre in Quebec. There are extremely high costs right across the country.

The petitioners ask the federal government to take some action through some form of regulation so that consumers are not gouged at the pumps time and time again.

* * *

[Translation]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[English]

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

Government Orders

Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. P-13 in the name of the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan is acceptable to the government and the documents are tabled immediately.

Motion No. P-13

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of all documents, notes, minutes of meetings, briefings, e-mails, memos and reports concerning the independent multi-year financial audit and program review ordered by Health Canada concerning the allegations of improper use of government funding by the Board of Directors of Pedahbun Lodge and the Board's response to these allegations.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. P-13 in the name of the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan be deemed to have been adopted?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to be so kind as to call Motion No. P-29 in the name of the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

Motion No. P-29

That a humble address be presented to Her Excellency praying that she will cause to be laid before the House copies of all private sector reports that pertain to Canada agri-infrastructure program, CAIP, projects, and any and all correspondence between the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food pertaining to CAIP expenditures and ministerial talking points issued by the above ministers or government members on their behalf that pertain to CAIP.

• (1525)

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I am informed as follows. In regard to the Canada agri-infrastructure program, CAIP, no correspondence between the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister of Transport exists, nor have any ministerial talking points been issued by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Minister of Transport or by government members on their behalf.

There are private sector reports that pertain to CAIP but they are of a voluminous character and would require an inordinate cost and length of time to prepare. However, the hon. member is welcome to visit the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration office in Regina where all of the reports can be gathered from Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta for his perusal.

I would therefore ask the hon. member to withdraw his motion.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, it seems a little onerous that the government can fund projects like this and then send us down the road to Regina to look at the results. I guess I would have to take

that with a grain of salt, but I withdraw my motion. Or, do I understand that since the government will not table my motion, I could ask that it be transferred for debate?

The Deputy Speaker: Is that the member's wish?

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed that we transfer it for debate?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I ask that other Notices of Motion for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed that the remaining Notices of Motion for the Production of Papers stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.) moved that Bill C-12, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code (Part II) in respect of occupational health and safety, to make technical amendments to the Canada Labour Code (Part I) and to make consequential amendments to other acts, be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it feels very good to rise today to begin third reading of Bill C-12. It feels good because we are coming to the end of a long journey. I want to express my gratitude to my friends on all sides of the House for their hard work on Bill C-12 and for the quick manner in which they handled the bill.

All members recognized that we are not dealing with just another labour bill but we are in fact talking about people's health and safety on the job. Their input was serious, their questions thoughtful, their concerns valid and their suggestions helpful. Further, I want to thank previous ministers who supported the review of part II.

I also want to acknowledge with gratitude the effort of the labour and management people who were charged with extremely demanding and complex tasks, first, to review the existing legislation and identify the issues that needed to be addressed and second, to come to a consensus on possible reform to part II.

They did their jobs exceptionally well and were able to devise consensus based proposals. That could not have been easy. Again I want to thank them for their perseverance, their seriousness of purpose and their openness to alternative approaches. They demonstrated as I have said numerous times that this country is blessed with durable and effective labour relations institutions and organizations and with professional, dedicated and prudent labour relations practitioners.

We have learned over the years that progress in occupational safety and health comes only when we, the government, employers and labour, work together. We have also learned that working together, teamwork, co-operation and partnership building are not just warm and fuzzy concepts but absolutely essential ingredients for effective action. We need each other's experience, resources and wisdom if significant declines in work related accidents, injuries and diseases are to be achieved.

[Translation]

Over the past couple of decades, many profound changes have occurred in the workplace, in the workforce and in the economy. The fundamental objective of our reforms is to ensure that the primary federal labour law responds to those changes.

• (1530)

Bill C-12 represents the second phase of our three-phase initiative to modernize the Canada Labour Code. Amendments to part I of the code, which deals with the conduct of industrial relations, received Royal Assent last year.

Part III of the code—dealing with labour standards—is being reviewed now. I hope to be able to bring forward amendments early next year.

Ever since 1985, when the last significant amendments to part II were passed by the House, there have been important changes in the way we organize and do our work. Some were welcome changes and some were very worrisome. The law cannot ignore those new realities. I know we made a good start with our amendments to part I.

I feel very positive about the bill before us today to amend part II, and the review of part III is proceeding well. It seems to me that the updating of the Canada Labour Code is a fitting way for legislators to launch the second century of the federal labour program.

[English]

Part II of the code is based on basic principles. One is that employees have certain rights when it comes to their health and safety. They have the right to know about workplace hazards, the right to participate in health and safety matters and the right to refuse dangerous work. In recognizing these rights, part II also

Government Orders

takes care not to unduly infringe on the employer's right to manage the workplace.

A second principle is that the government must empower employees and employers to assume responsibility for the regulation of their workplaces. Employees and employers ought to be equipped with the means to identify and deal with health and safety issues in their own backyard, so to speak. Of course, this is not to say that the government has no responsibility for the health and safety of employees, or that there is no room for direct government intervention, but the obligation for achieving a safe workplace rests with both the employer and the employee. Those people ought to have the authority and the primary responsibility to address those issues because they are the ones who will feel the consequences of inaction on health and safety issues.

Bill C-12 not only adheres to but also gives further expressions to these fundamental principles. How it does so will become evident as I review its main features.

[Translation]

The bill brings in several important changes to part II, but there are four that I think are especially noteworthy.

First, the legislation provides for an innovative, new internal complaint resolution process, by which the parties themselves, not a government officer, will solve their workplace health and safety problems.

Under this new process, if an employee has a complaint, the employee and the supervisor are required to try to resolve the matter between them as soon as possible. If they cannot do so, they can refer the problem to the workplace health and safety committee or, in the case of smaller organizations, to the health and safety representative, and the matter will then be jointly investigated.

If the parties cannot come to an agreement, or if the employer does not accept the results of the investigation or fails to act on the matter, then and only then will a government official intervene. When appropriate, he or she may intervene simply by requesting that the parties try again to resolve the issue themselves.

Of course, the health and safety officer retains the authority to act decisively if a danger exists or if the parties cannot come to an agreement. But I think we can all see the wisdom in giving the parties every opportunity to settle their problems themselves.

• (1535)

[English]

Secondly, the bill also strengthens the local workplace health and safety committees in a number of ways. For instance, they will be able to do workplace inspections and to participate in the implementation of changes that might affect health and safety, including changes that pertain to work processes and procedures.

Government Orders

Where there is no corporate health and safety policy committee, they will be involved in the development of occupational health and safety policy. If this is not local empowerment, I do not know what is.

A third important feature of this bill is the requirement to establish a joint health and safety policy committee at the corporate level in enterprises with 300 or more employees. These committees will meet at least quarterly to address issues that have company-wide application. They will participate in the development of health and safety policies for the organizations. They will deal quickly with matters referred to them by the workplace committees. They will participate in studies, inspections and investigations pertaining to occupational health and safety and they will assist in planning changes to enhance workplace health and safety. They will also be able to request from the employer any information necessary to identify actual or potential workplace hazards, and they will have full access to all of the government and employer reports, studies and tests related to the health and safety of employees.

The range of issues that the policy committees can deal with is very wide and includes prevention and awareness raising activities. By requiring these committees we will ensure that health and safety issues receive the attention they deserve from the people who have the authority to make things happen. The committees will see to it that health and safety priorities make it to the corporate agenda.

Their existence will also be tremendously reassuring to employees who, for whatever reason, feel that the safety of the workplace is of little concern to the higher ups. For the local health and safety committees, the new policy committees are likely to be a motivating factor because they will see that senior people in the organization take occupational safety and health just as seriously as they do.

[*Translation*]

A fourth change to the bill is consistent with the Government of Canada's plans to encourage family-friendly workplaces.

This change expands the employee's right to refuse dangerous work, by giving to a female employee who believes that her job conditions pose a danger to her, the fetus or the baby she is nursing the right to leave the workplace until she has had a reasonable opportunity to obtain a medical certificate.

While she is seeking this certificate, her employer will have the right to assign the woman to other duties or require her to remain at work in a safe location, and she will still be entitled to the normal pay and benefits attached to her job.

If her physician determines that there is no danger to her, the fetus or child, the woman's right to cease her work will no longer be in force. If the physician confirms the risk, she will be able to turn to the protection of part III of the code.

Those are the major reforms that Bill C-12 makes to part II of the Canada Labour Code. I believe they are sound, progressive and meaningful, and that they will be effective and help to restore the downward trend in workplace casualties in the federal jurisdiction.

Before I conclude, I would like to draw the members' attention to some of the other important changes that this bill will make to part II.

First, the right to refuse will be clarified in a couple of ways. All employees who have been prevented from working because a colleague has exercised a refusal will be paid until the end of the shift.

The employee exercising the right of refusal will be paid until the matter has been resolved. In addition, to ensure that the right to refuse is not used frivolously, the employer will be able to discipline an employee if he can demonstrate that the right to refuse was abused.

● (1540)

Over the last several years, we have become aware of the importance of ergonomics to the prevention of a wide range of physical ailments. Those of you who have spent time in front of a computer monitor will know what I mean here. We have, therefore, inserted a provision in the bill that will allow us to address ergonomic standards.

Finally, in response to the growing problem of workplace rage, we have included a clause that requires employers to take the necessary steps to prevent and protect against violence in the workplace.

[*English*]

This bill will inject new energy into our efforts to reduce workplace casualties. It provides important new mechanisms to address health and safety issues. It reaffirms the faith of the federal government in the capacity of labour and management to solve the health and safety problems that they encounter in their own workplace.

Occupational health and safety is a very important matter. The extent to which we succeed in protecting our employees from hazards and diseases is a measure of our social progress, our civility and our sense of what is important.

History seems to show that progressive workplace health and safety policy is also good economic policy. Let history show that, as this country soared to new economic heights, its record in reducing workplace casualties was second to none.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to address Bill C-12 finally at third reading, a bill which may have become known as the Friday file because of its habit of coming up on Fridays every time it came

before the House. I would like to thank my colleagues who stood in for me from time to time to make sure that someone from our party addressed the bill.

We are at third reading of Bill C-12, which will amend part II of the Canada Labour Code. It deals specifically with workplace health and safety for employees and businesses which fall under federal jurisdiction.

Workers, managers and even federal bureaucrats I am sure will all breathe a sigh of relief when Bill C-12 receives third reading and goes to the other place. Bill C-12 is an example of a consensus agreement that has been some 10 years in the making. I do not know why it should necessarily have taken 10 years. I am sure that the process could have been hastened a lot. I would admonish the government for taking so terribly long to get this done. We have heard about the possibility of amendments to part II of the labour code for some time, and finally we see that it has come to fruition.

I do not think that labour legislation should ever be changed on a whim. I am pleased that the government, when it decided to change it, went to the stakeholders, who realized that since these amendments were needed to reflect a changing workplace they should all work together to develop a viable solution.

I was also a bit disappointed that the government refused to negotiate on the labour-management consensus that called for a two tier appeal process. The appeal process in the bill does not meet their needs. This came through loud and clear during committee hearings.

In the current statute, decisions made by the regional safety officer can be appealed to the Canada Industrial Relations Board. Under the streamlined provisions set out in this bill, the mandate of the appeals officer has been strengthened. Any decision rendered by the appeals officer will now be final, and the only recourse is to take the issue to the Federal Court of Canada.

The Canadian Alliance supports the removal of unnecessary red tape, but in this case a two tier appeal process could save the parties the hassle and expense of bringing a disputed directive to the Federal Court of Canada.

• (1545)

When the minister's officials appeared before the committee studying Bill C-12, they indicated that over the last 10 years about 1,800 directives had been issued by their officers. Of those there were only 179 appeals, or about 10%. Fifteen of them were appealed to the federal court and only two were because the appeals officer's ruling was overturned by CIRB. In light of the small number of appeals, the burden on the CIRB certainly would not be an onerous one. Yet the government chose to deny the stakeholders a second level of appeal.

If only 10% of the directives are ever appealed to the federal court, the inclusion of a two tier appeal process could cut the

Government Orders

number of appeals to the federal court considerably. It may not be as lucrative for the lawyers, but it could save labour and management considerable time and expense.

The successful tripartite consultative process that spawned this legislation will hopefully bring about regulations that are equally acceptable to all parties. Indeed, when we were researching the bill and when we talked to stakeholders, we found very little resistance to what was in the bill from anyone.

Consultation with stakeholders does not just mean that the government gives a few representatives a chance to present their concerns and then unilaterally imposes the Liberal will. Unfortunately this is what happened in the case of the trucking industry. The government decided that this safety apparatus was essential and would be implemented according to its timetable without concern or regard for the impact on truck owners, drivers or operators.

All too often government consultation is just as one-sided as that. For instance, when the minister decided to implement the fair wage schedules it made little difference that the schedules were not necessary and had not been activated in years. Apparently it also made little difference that the consultation process was flawed. The fact that the surveys were botched did not seem to matter much to the minister either. In the end, it is the Canadian taxpayer who will pay the higher cost for contracts carried out at federal sites.

The success of the consultative process employed in developing Bill C-12 should be extended to all legislative and regulatory areas under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Labour. Bill C-12 is now on its way to the other place. The focus now turns to the much anticipated overhaul of part III of the labour code. The minister mentioned that in her speech. We could only hope that the minister and her officials will endeavour to reach the same kind of consensus obtained with the health and safety amendments.

Part III of the code may perhaps have the greatest impact on everyday lives of workers in the federally regulated sector. Amendments to this part of the code should stand as a model for the provinces to emulate. They should not be rushed into the House as a pre-election ploy as we saw with the health and safety amendments back in 1997. The government tabled those changes in April 1997 just days before the election was called. I cannot understand why it would take more than two years before Bill C-12 was introduced again.

I hope the minister will learn from Bill C-12 that she can bring in whatever it is on part III of the code and that we can discuss it and repair it where it needs to be.

Thanks to the groundwork laid by the tripartite group Bill C-12 was reasonable. It met with little opposition from any party in the House. We in the Canadian Alliance willingly co-operated at all stages of the debate. I ask the minister to ensure that it be proclaimed without further delay.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, some speeches are uniquely important and meaningful. The speech I am making today in this House is in fact one such important speech.

• (1550)

Unfortunately, and clearly, the federal government does not see it that way. For the Minister of Labour and the government opposite, Bill C-12 is just one bill among many, period.

We will remember that Bill C-12 is the in-depth reform of part II of the Canada Labour Code and, more particularly, as it concerns occupational health and safety.

Members will no doubt recall that at first reading the Bloc Québécois supported Bill C-12, since it is the practice of the Bloc Québécois, in its great wisdom, to give the government the benefit of the doubt when it introduces bills that are constructive in spirit and intent. I nevertheless added, however, that it was vital the federal government be open-minded so that certain amendments to Bill C-12 to be proposed by the Bloc Québécois could be made. Absolutely nothing happened. Utter nothingness.

The Bloc Québécois introduced very reasonable amendments that substantially improved the bill. These changes took nothing away from the substance of Bill C-12, on the contrary.

The Bloc Québécois introduced amendments so that the process for hiring health and safety officers and filling many other positions could be neutral under the Public Service Employment Act.

In addition, we also presented amendments to enable pregnant and nursing women to take preventive withdrawal worthy of such a name. We introduced many other amendments as well. But, as I said earlier, the minister sat idly and remained unmoved by our amendments. Yet, our goal was only to make Bill C-12 better suited to the new realities of the workplaces governed by the Canada Labour Code. But, as is its habit, the government turned a deaf ear. It just wanted to go it alone through the legislative process. This is what happened.

So, for all these reasons, the Bloc Québécois will, at third reading, have no choice but to oppose Bill C-12. I will get back to these reasons and provide more in depth explanations later on in my speech. But first, I would like to paint a picture of the situation regarding occupational health and safety for workers subject to part II of the Canada Labour Code.

I will begin this gloomy account by quoting from the brief submitted by the Canadian Labour Congress, the CLC, to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Government Operations, when it reviewed Bill C-12. Here is what it says on page 5 of the French version:

Canada is the only jurisdiction where the rate of injury has in fact increased during most of the last decade.

The ratio of federal inspectors to the number of workers being inspected is among the worst in Canada.

The federal government waited over 15 years before reforming part II of the Canada Labour Code. Meanwhile, however, every year in Canada some 800,000 people experience a work-related accident or illness. Of that number, more than 750 die, which represents an average of three deaths per day.

In 1997, an average of one in sixteen employees was hurt on the job, the equivalent of one every 9.1 seconds of working hours. One in thirty-one was injured seriously enough to be off work at least one day, which means that there is one accident with lost time every eighteen seconds in the workplace.

In 1996, 38 deaths from occupational illness or accident were reported in industries under federal jurisdiction. The figure was the same in 1995. One death from an on-the-job accident occurs every seven days on average, or approximately one worker in 20,000.

The rate of accidents resulting in disability rose from 15 per million hours worked in 1995 to 15.24 in 1996. The 1996 level was not as high as the 15.44 recorded in 1994, and is markedly lower than the 1993 level of 16.99.

• (1555)

The economic cost of these accidents is very high. Compensation payments to victims or their families total some \$5 billion per year.

If we add on the indirect costs of accidents, the figure doubles to close to \$10 billion. We are very much aware that these figures do not take into account the incalculable pain and suffering experienced by victims and their families.

In the light of these statistics, it is high time the Minister of Labour did something. I do not know how the present government feels to have so many deaths on its conscience. It would appear that this reality does not overly disturb the Minister of Labour.

In fact, since the beginning of the legislative process for Bill C-12, the minister has shown very little interest in the reform of Part II of the Canada Labour Code. We know that the minister, for personal reasons, was unable to appear before the committee to explain her bill. We understand that perfectly.

However, what explanation is there for the fact that the minister did not take advantage of report stage in the House to come and explain her bill in order to make up for her absence before the parliamentary committee? Instead, it was her parliamentary secretary, who is in the House now, who spoke at report stage.

To top it all, and this really shows how interested the Minister of Labour and the government are in this whole reform of Part II of

the Canada Labour Code, the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles had to make a point of calling the Minister of Labour to order here in the House because she was not listening and was showing no interest at all in the remarks of my colleague, who was in the process of offering some very enlightening explanations about Bill C-12, specifically with respect to pregnant and nursing women and the bill's serious deficiencies in that regard.

With this federal government, one more bad move will not make any difference. Taking Bill C-12 as an example, I am going to show just how illogical the federal government is.

During one of the committee's meetings on Bill C-12, the Bloc Québécois presented an amendment to improve the definition of the word "danger". We took absolutely nothing away from the definition. On the contrary, we improved it and made it more precise by setting out in it that the sources of danger should not affect pregnant or nursing women.

To our great surprise, the Bloc Québécois amendment was passed at the stage of clause by clause examination in committee. The Liberal member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik even supported the Bloc Québécois amendment with great pride.

However, imagine my surprise at learning that the minister also introduced an amendment at report stage thereby destroying the Bloc Québécois amendment in order to reinstate the original definition of "danger" in Bill C-12. Does that make sense to you?

One day the Liberals say yes and a few days later, on the same issue, they say no.

In response to a question by my colleague, the member for Longueuil, the Minister of Labour said—and note the insipid, meaningless and uninterested explanation the Minister of Labour gave to my colleague—and I quote:

The Bloc Québécois amendment concerning the definition of "danger" is addressed by part III of the Labour Code, and this will be discussed by employees and employers.

First, how can the minister claim that the definition of "danger" is covered in part III of the Canada Labour Code, when she said later on in her answer that employees and employers will discuss it? That is in the future. Are we going to have to wait another 15 years to discuss it, as was the case with the reform of part II?

This response proves just how little the Minister of Labour knows her Canada Labour Code, since part III contains absolutely no reference to danger for pregnant and nursing women.

• (1600)

The minister is totally disinterested and uninformed about the reform of part II of the Canada Labour Code, and of the Canada

Government Orders

Labour Code as a whole. I would advise the minister to do her homework as quickly as possible, because she is misleading the House, and this is totally unacceptable.

The Bloc Québécois also proposed amendments to clause 132 so that pregnant or nursing women would be eligible for a true preventative withdrawal. Again, the minister misled the House in a reply to my colleague, the hon. member for Longueuil. The minister said, and I quote:

—this is available to pregnant and nursing women under section 132 of the Canada Labour Code (Part II). It was negotiated for seven years with employees and employers.

One thing is clear and the minister knows it full well: there is a consensus on clause 132 of Bill C-12, which deals with pregnant and nursing employees, but that consensus is clearly to the effect that clause 132 is largely inadequate, and I will demonstrate it.

During the hearings of the committee, various interest groups invited not only by the Bloc Québécois but also by the government came to express their views. Here is what these groups had to say about clause 132 of Bill C-12, entitled "Pregnant and Nursing Employees".

In its brief, the CAW, one of the major unions representing workers at the federal level, described clause 132 as "not going far enough, however, and lacking clarity".

According to the Public Service Alliance of Canada's brief, the amendments to clause 132 "do not go far enough to provide the necessary health and safety protection for these workers".

The CSN, which represents more than 235,000 workers in Quebec, said the following about clause 132 "This text is incongruous and renders the entire provision meaningless". Further on in its brief it adds "This text does not create a right but rather a problem for pregnant workers".

The Association des médecins du réseau public en santé au travail du Québec submitted a brief over the signatures of 13 occupational health and safety specialist physicians in which the following comment was made about preventive withdrawal under the federal legislation "In our opinion, clause 132 of Bill C-12 is much too timid and will not protect the workers who need protection most".

Katherine Lippel, a law professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal, and one of the leading Canadian specialists in preventive withdrawal from the workplace, commented "Bill C-12 as it now stands does not provide for protective reassignment that includes the right to benefits when reassignment is not available. In failing to do so, it proposes a right that is really an empty shell".

Government Orders

This same consensus was present at a symposium on the health of women in the workplace held from March 26 to 28, 1998 at the Université du Québec à Montréal. Health Canada was one of the sponsors of that event, which was attended by experts and organizations from Quebec and from Canada. The following is a partial list.

For Quebec: Gisèle Bourret, head of the women's affairs service of the CEQ; Maria DeKoninck, professor, department of social and preventive medicine, Laval University; Jocelyne Everell, union adviser with the health-safety-environment service at the CSN; Carole Gingras, director of women's affairs at the FTQ; Danielle Hébert, co-ordinator of women's affairs service at the CSN; Nicole Lepage, occupational health and safety adviser at the CEQ; Katherine Lippel, professor of legal sciences at UQAM; Donna Mergler, professor of biological sciences at the University of Montreal; Jean-Pierre Néron, union adviser, occupational health and safety, at the FTQ.

• (1605)

For Canada: Kathleen Connors, president, National Federation of Nurses' Unions; Diane Ponée, director, policy and planning analysis, Women's Health Bureau, Health Canada; Michelle Simms, policy and program advisor, Women's Bureau, Strategy and Coordination Unit, Human Resources Development Canada, and Cathy Walker, national health and safety director, CAW.

For British Columbia: Ellen Balka, associate professor, department of communications, Simon Fraser University; Mieke Koe-horn, researcher, department of health care and epidemiology of the University of British Columbia.

Equally credible experts and organizations came from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Newfoundland and even Sweden.

At the conclusion of the conference, the participants agreed on a plan of action entitled "Improving the Health of Women in the Workplace". Everyone supported this action plan and reached the same conclusion. It warrants attention. I quote the document:

Legislation in all jurisdictions, federal and provincial, should provide for the protective reassignment of pregnant or nursing women, if their working conditions are hazardous to their health or that of their fetus or nursing infant.

Such programs should draw on Quebec legislation, which provides for reassignment to a job presenting no hazard. . . They should include, when worker reassignment is not possible, the right to compensation equivalent to that related to incapacity as the result of an accident on the job.

Once again, Quebec is at the forefront in social policy. Unfortunately, this cannot be said of the Minister of Labour and her government. However, with Bill C-12, the minister could show her open-mindedness and her concern for the health of women and

more particularly those who are pregnant or nursing. But this is not the case.

The Bloc Québécois is asking the minister to follow the example of the Health Canada officials and the various women and agencies present at this conference and to allow pregnant or nursing women covered by the Canada Labour Code the same benefits as pregnant women covered by Quebec's occupational health and safety legislation.

This request comes not just from the Bloc Québécois, but from the vast majority of occupational health and safety agencies and experts in Quebec and in Canada. The consensus is there: now the minister must take action.

We can safely say that the real consensus around clause 132 has to do with the fact that it falls short, requiring the minister and her senior officials to go back to the drawing board.

Through its proposed amendment to clause 132, the Bloc Québécois seeks to end this two-tier regime, which leaves women in Quebec who work under federal legislation less well protected than those who work under Quebec's legislation.

Women working under Quebec's legislation who withdraw for preventive reasons are paid during the first week by their employer, and thereafter by the CSST at 90% of their net salary. All workers are thus not treated equally in Quebec. This is a good example of the problems encountered by Quebec when it tries to establish a comprehensive occupational or family strategy, or when it tries to reconcile occupational and family considerations.

How can the Minister of Labour say that pregnant or nursing women have the right to preventive withdrawal with financial compensation? This is just smoke and mirrors.

Clause 132 of Bill C-12 gives a woman the right to refuse to work if she believes that this may constitute a risk for herself or the unborn child. She will continue to be paid and to retain all benefits until such time as she obtains a medical opinion as to whether or not there is a risk.

As soon as this is obtained, she can no longer make use of clause 132(1). That is it. From that point on, the expectant mother has two unacceptable choices: shorten her maternity leave, or work in conditions that are a danger to her health or her baby's health.

Finally, the only real financial compensation to which pregnant or nursing workers are entitled under federal legislation is the maternity leave given under employment insurance. Comparing this to the CSST program, this is a pittance.

• (1610)

This employment insurance program discriminates against pregnant women as far as maternity leave is concerned. Employment

Government Orders

insurance provides protection for maternity leave but access to the program is tied to hours worked. The requirement is a minimum of 600 hours worked over the past year; as well, the amount will be between 55% and 50% of her earnings, as opposed to Quebec's 90%.

As well, it must be kept in mind that, if a pregnant woman has to take several weeks of maternity leave prior to delivery because her workplace is dangerous for her and her fetus, those weeks will be deducted after the birth, which means that the new mother will not only have to face a substantial loss of income, but she will also have a shorter time to be at home with her beloved new-born.

When the Minister of Labour states in this House that clause 132 of Bill C-12 provides withdrawal from the work place for preventive purposes with financial compensation equal to that available in Quebec, this is quite simply misleading the House. Nothing more.

I am not the only one who thinks so. All unions and all experts who appeared before the committee said the same: the preventive withdrawal allowed at the federal level is far from sufficient.

It is impossible to understand the position of this government on the treatment of pregnant and nursing women when we realize that 800,000 people annually are injured or become sick in the exercise of their duties. Of this number, over 750 die as a result, a figure that represents an average of three deaths a day.

Why then make a point of swelling the statistics? According to Statistics Canada, in 1993, women represented 43% of paid employees, compared to 35% in 1971. From this fact alone, the number of women who are victims of accidents on the job has also increased.

At the moment, pregnant women tend to stay at work longer before they give birth, because their financial situation is more often than not precarious. In addition, they return to work earlier after the birth of their child.

Another consequence of this new reality is that women today tend to have fewer children and at an older age. The government is well aware of this fact. So why is it insisting on pushing future mothers governed by the Canada Labour Code into totally unacceptable misery?

When will this government assume its responsibilities and do what the interest groups have been asking, namely, provide pregnant and nursing women covered by the Canada Labour Code working in Quebec with the possibility of protective reassignment as Quebec has?

The Bloc Quebecois was not yet even in the House of Commons when our leader, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, tabled, on June 1, 1993, an amendment to Bill C-101 introduced by the Progressive Conservative government then in power. This bill was also a reform of the Canada Labour Code. The purpose of the

amendment was to ensure that federally employed pregnant or nursing workers would have the right to preventive withdrawal under the legislation of the province in which they work. This is exactly what the Bloc Quebecois is seeking in this amendment in the year 2000.

Through the irony of fate, or power, the Liberal Party of Canada, which was then in opposition, supported the amendment brought forward by the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, the future leader of the Bloc Quebecois. When I say that this government is basically dishonest, and I would even say acting in bad faith, here is the proof today.

Now that the Liberal Party is in power and the idea of actually giving pregnant or nursing employees the right to preventive withdrawal—a right they have in Quebec—does not come from within the Liberal Party, the federal Liberals have voted against. This is unjustified and unjustifiable.

The Bloc Quebecois amendment is a completely reasonable motion, which imposes nothing, because it is clearly stated in our amendment that there should—this is an obligation—be negotiations between the federal and provincial governments.

• (1615)

All that the Bloc Quebecois wanted was for pregnant or nursing employees governed by the Canada Labour Code to be able with complete dignity and safety, not just physical but financial, to experience one of the most extraordinary events imaginable, that being pregnancy and the birth of a new being. Unfortunately, for the federal government, pregnancy is something that is completely trivialized, not to say neglected.

This bad faith and lack of conscience is all the more evident because what the Bloc Quebecois is asking for in its amendment to clause 132 is nothing extraordinary or unusual, nor any special privilege for pregnant workers. No, what the Bloc Quebecois is calling for is fairness and equity.

I would, moreover, like to remind hon. members that, between 1981 and 1988, employers under federal jurisdiction were paying the portion that corresponded to the CSST preventive withdrawal allowance, since the courts had not yet reached a decision on the constitutionality of that program. Some women who came under federal jurisdiction even received CSST benefits for preventive withdrawal. The system does work. It has proven itself several times in the past.

Another proof that there can indeed be agreements between the federal and the provincial levels as far as financial compensation is concerned: in Quebec, people employed by the federal government who have an occupational illness or injury are referred to the CSST for compensation purposes. I would invite the Minister of Labour and all of the hon. members across the way to look at section 4 of Quebec's government employees compensation legislation.

Government Orders

In Bill C-12, clause 140(2) reads as follows:

140.(2) The Minister may, with the approval of the Governor in Council, enter into an agreement with any province or any provincial body specifying the terms and conditions under which a person employed by that province or provincial body may act as a health and safety officer—

I could cite a lot of other examples where agreements have been signed between the federal government and the government of a province on a given provision of law. Well, then, with the government talking about its flexible federalism, why is there no flexibility on the preventive withdrawal of pregnant or nursing workers under federal jurisdiction? What is the federal government afraid of?

There is a consensus among interest groups clearly advocating substantial improvement in federal preventive withdrawal conditions. As I have just shown, the system works. The Bloc Québécois amendment now permits the federal government and the provinces to negotiate in good faith an administrative and financial agreement giving female workers under federal jurisdiction recourse to the legislation on preventive withdrawal of the province they work in.

All of the elements are in place to permit Quebec women working for in federal jurisdiction to be on the same footing as their colleagues covered by Quebec legislation on occupational health and safety. The federal government no longer has an excuse. So why this inaction on the part of the Minister of Labour and the federal government?

This government's attitude is not only shameful, it may turn out to be criminal, since this government is threatening the life of certain women and their unborn children. And this is unacceptable. Count on me and the Bloc Québécois to remind the people of Quebec and my riding of the Laurentides of this.

The Bloc Québécois has now been fighting seven years on behalf of pregnant and nursing women. This issue is important to us. I can assure you that the Bloc Québécois will continue determinedly to fight for just and equality. Women of Quebec and Canada, the Bloc Québécois is behind you.

The fight continues, and I invite you to join us in getting this Liberal government and its Minister of Labour to understand that pregnant and nursing women under federal jurisdiction are also entitled to work in an environment free of all danger. This is a matter of humanity, health, respect, fairness and justice.

• (1620)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to enter this final stage of debate on Bill C-12, a bill that we have all watched with great interest. There has been great interest from labour, management and government in a truly tripartite way

to deal with the issues of the bill and to move it forward within this session. I am very appreciative of that and of having the opportunity to debate the bill today, prior to the House adjourning for the summer.

All Canadians agree that no one should be injured, butchered, maimed or killed in a workplace on behalf of some arbitrary production schedule. It would be crazy to indicate otherwise. Canadians are justifiably shocked and horrified when they hear of people being injured, butchered, killed or poisoned on the job. They feel very passionately about this subject.

We all agree that Canadians get up in the morning and go to work to earn a living, not to be killed. "It is your life and you should not leave work without it" is the motto we use in the labour movement. Yet, given that commonly shared sensibility, in Canada three people per day are killed at work. Almost 1,000 people per year die an avoidable and needless death in the workplace. Beyond that, every year over one million people suffer some form of lost time due to accident injuries which prevent them from doing their job.

Aside from all the moral and ethical reasons for cleaning up the workplace and putting an end to this carnage, there is an economic side to it. There is a very practical side to why Canadian industry, Canadians in general and the Government of Canada should be very concerned about lost time due to accidents and injuries, and that is productivity.

If Canada is so concerned about being competitive internationally and keeping the levels of productivity high, surely we would want to address the issue of lost time due to injuries and accidents in the workplace. We are seeing a shared interest in addressing that concern.

By way of illustration, in my province of Manitoba we lose approximately 50,000 person days per year due to strikes and lockouts, due to labour unrest. During that same period of time we lose 550,000 person days per year due to injuries incurred from accidents on the job. If we are serious about productivity and lost time as an issue, surely we are better to address that concern and clean up the workplace when, clearly, ten times as many days are lost due to injuries than to any kind of labour unrest.

Bill C-12, as has been pointed out by other speakers today, was the result of many years of broad consultation by business, labour and government. The lamentable thing about us dealing with it today is that it should have been dealt with years ago. The tripartite working group that arrived at the recommendations to amend part II of the Canada Labour Code prepared its consensus document years ago and was just waiting for the government to move it forward.

All of these issues were dealt with at the committee, and I believe there was a lot of goodwill at that committee. I know

Government Orders

people who sat on that committee for many years. People were very generous in their co-operative approach. Like any negotiations and bargaining sessions, people arrived with firm opinions on each side, but they tempered their demands with reason and, over a period of time, over an exhaustive series of meetings and a huge contribution made by all who took part, they honed down those positions to round out the package which we now see before us.

They were negotiations in the truest sense of the word. I think that serves as a model for creating legislation like this. This kind of legislation should be non-partisan. It should be dealt with in a way that is non-confrontational. What could be more important and what could be more realistic than the safety of Canadian workers in the workplace?

This process certainly should be commented upon and should be applauded. This is how this type of legislation should be crafted in the future. It should stand as a model.

• (1625)

Bill C-12 has many good qualities. I sit as a member of the executive council of the Canadian Labour Congress. All of the affiliate members of the Canadian Labour Congress have had a great deal of input and opportunity to review these amendments. They feel that for the membership they represent this bill has a great deal of merit and it will make Canadian workplaces safer.

Some of the qualities have been pointed out by other speakers. I do not think it is necessary for me to itemize on a clause by clause basis what we like about the bill, but I will say briefly that the bill really emphasizes three things about workers in the Canadian workplace.

First, it emphasizes, establishes and augments a worker's right to know about hazards in the workplace. That is key and fundamental. Workers have a right to know what they are dealing with, what products they are dealing with, and any inherent dangers they may be faced with.

Beyond that, because of the increasingly complex workplaces we are representing, sometimes the compounding of materials influences the different properties they are dealing with. For instance, a person may be working with chemical *A* which is completely benign and chemical *B* which is completely benign, but when the two of them are mixed together in the kidneys they blow up into chemical *C*, making for a very sick person.

Workers have a right to know and that is why, under this legislation, there is a system called WHMIS, the workplace hazardous material information system. Any worker has the right to ask for and be given the exact composition of the materials they are dealing with and any inherent problems that may arise.

The second thing which Bill C-12 will establish in part II of the Canada Labour Code is the right to take part in correcting those

hazards. In other words, the right to sit on workplace safety and health committees. It is mandated by the Canada Labour Code that these committees will be formed and that they will be charged with a mandate. Their powers and their authority have been augmented by Bill C-12, which is a very positive step.

The third fundamental employee right that is recognized and institutionalized in part II of the Canada Labour Code is the right to refuse. A person has the right to know what the hazards are, the right to participate in correcting those hazards, and the right to refuse unsafe work. It is one of the most basic, fundamental rights and freedoms that we have to withhold services if we feel strongly enough that something will pose a danger to ourselves and our fellow workers.

Bill C-12 strengthens and emphasizes the worker's right to refuse and the protections for both the employer and the employee.

We sought amendments to Bill C-12. The spirit of co-operation extended beyond the tripartite working group to those of us who came later as critics in this field. We agreed that we would not introduce any amendments which went beyond the tripartite agreement and consensus building process. The only amendments we sought were where we thought the language was unclear or ambiguous, or if in our opinion the article did not accurately reflect the consensus position of the committee, and there were some cases like that, or if the article was brand new and we felt it was arbitrarily put in place by government without ever going by the tripartite process.

We found it necessary to ask for amendments in two or three areas, and I am pleased to report today that we got co-operation from the committee to amend Bill C-12 in three important areas.

We eliminated the definition of health altogether. We felt it was better off to rely on standard definitions of health found elsewhere than it was to have what we thought was poor language in the definition of health within the bill.

We managed to delete a clause which dealt with mandatory medical examinations and testing. We felt this was an infringement of basic human rights and workers' rights, that they do not have to participate in those things unless they are voluntary.

We succeeded in clarifying when an employee would be disciplined for making a right to refuse unsafe work action when it was not warranted. In other words, if it can be demonstrated that the employee acted in a malicious or vexatious way and was pulling a right to refuse, or misusing his or her right to refuse, then we agree that some discipline would be warranted. However, we want it clarified that the burden of proof and the onus has to be on the employer to demonstrate that the employee willingly and willfully abused his or her right and that there was malice and mischief associated with it.

Government Orders

• (1630)

All three of those amendments add to the quality of Bill C-12. We have probably saved ourselves a fortune in arbitrations and court challenges based on the language of those three amendments that we made. All of them would have been challenged extensively had they gone through unamended.

Again, it is an example of how the system works. If we bring things to the attention of people who genuinely care about a bill, they will respond in a reasonable way. We are very pleased that the committee co-operated with us.

Some things still need to be done. Unfortunately we are very critical that we were unable to amend the appeal process. The joint labour-management working tripartite committee all agreed that there should be a two stage appeal process and an arm's length process to distance it from the bureaucracy and the department. We did not achieve that. What went forward in Bill C-12 is an appeal process which we believe is flawed and we hope there will be an opportunity to revisit this process in the very near future.

We hope that Bill C-12 will be passed so that its many good qualities will be implemented, but we look forward to and serve notice that we will be seeking to improve the appeal process at the earliest opportunity.

Another poignant issue comes to mind when we are dealing with the issue of workplace safety and health. It may be beyond the scope of Bill C-12, but our legal opinions have it that it could have been addressed within the purview of Bill C-12; that is, the recommendations of the Westray inquiry as they apply to introducing the concept of corporate accountability.

In other words, if there is gross negligence in a workplace to the point where it kills Canadian workers, if corporate greed leads to corporate murder, then there should be corporate accountability. This was the recommendation of Justice Peter Richard of the Westray inquiry in November 1997. This ruling is almost three years old and we have been calling upon the government to take action to implement the recommendations of the Westray inquiry along those lines.

I should point out that in the next two weeks every member of parliament will be visited by members of the United Steelworkers of America who are on the Hill, to their credit, to represent the families of the 26 Westray miners who met their death at the Westray disaster. They, too, are here to appeal to parliament to do this one thing. Our goal and objective is not to put executives into prison. It is to make them take note that for any enterprise over which they have direction and control, they have an obligation and responsibility to do at least the minimum required by law to ensure that their enterprise is clean, safe, healthy and does not pose a threat to Canadian workers.

We were joined at our press conference with the steelworkers on Monday by Robert Ellis, a businessman from Burlington, Ontario, whose son, 18-year old David Ellis, was killed on his second day at work in a bread mixing machine at a small privately owned bakery. It was a high school job and he would have gone to university the following fall. He was pulled into the mixing machine and killed in a tragic accident.

We believe in that case, where such gross negligence killed a Canadian worker, that it was corporate manslaughter, and we are not afraid to call it that.

I have another example in my own riding where a chop shop or scrap metal yard often hires young summer students. One summer student was hired, given an acetylene torch and told to cut some 45 gallon drums in half. You and I know, Mr. Speaker, if a 45 gallon drum has any fumes left in it then it is not an oil drum anymore, it is a bomb. This kid was killed also on the second or third day on the job. These things do happen in the workplace. I am not raising them to be romantic or to make the argument with any kind of cheap points. I am just saying that three times a day these things happen in Canadian workplaces and sometimes there is negligence that warrants criminal charges, not just charges under the Canada Labour Code but charges under the Criminal Code of Canada.

• (1635)

The analogy we often use is that if we drink a bottle of whisky and jump behind the wheel of our car and kill somebody, we are not just charged under the Motor Vehicle Act, we do not just pay a fine and lose our licence under the Motor Vehicle Act, we will be charged under the Criminal Code of Canada for gross criminal negligence. The same, we argue, should apply in the case of the workplace.

All Canadians were horrified when 26 miners died at the Westray disaster, but I think most of us were even more horrified to learn that under the current criminal code the crown prosecutors in Nova Scotia had no choice but to stay the charges. They could not make the charges stick because under the current criminal code it does not contemplate the idea of corporate manslaughter or corporate killing, and this needs to be done.

Motion No. 79 put forward by the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough clearly articulated this in a very brief and straight to the point manner. His motion called for the House of Commons to implement the recommendations of the Westray inquiry as put forward by Justice Peter Richard. The motion passed in the House by a vote of 216 to 15, all party support. Everyone, except for 15 individuals, agreed that was exactly what the House of Commons should do.

That motion was agreed to months ago and now the Minister of Justice tells us that it is before the justice committee. Between members, myself and the fence post, it is not before the justice committee. I have talked to all members on the justice committee

who I could track down and the motion has never been mentioned at the justice committee. It is not on the agenda and there is no plan to put it on the agenda as far as anybody can ascertain.

The United Steelworkers of America are on the Hill today and will be on the Hill for the rest of this week and all of next week. They will be visiting every member of parliament urging us to show the collective will to implement or introduce these changes during this session of the House so that they can bring some closure to that tragedy. Hopefully we can motivate boards of directors and heads of corporations to take more of an interest in workplace safety and health of any enterprise under which they have direction and control to at least go through the basic motions of providing a clean, healthy and safe work environment for the workers they represent.

All Canadians deserve the protective umbrella of workplace safety and health legislation. Parliament Hill has the only group of workers who are specifically denied by legislation the right of access to any workplace safety and health legislation. These workers are covered by the Parliamentary Employment Staff Relations Act. The Mulroney government allowed these employees the right to collective bargaining during their tenure but failed to proclaim part III of the Parliamentary Employment Staff Relations Act. Part I received proclamation, which gave employees industrial bargaining rights. Part II received proclamation. Part III, the chapter dealing with workplace safety and health, was never proclaimed. These employees now have no workplace safety and health protection whatsoever.

I wrote the Minister of Labour asking her to bring to cabinet the idea of giving part III of the Parliamentary Employment Staff Relations Act royal proclamation or recommending it, completing it and making it law. This would provide parliamentary employees, the ones we deal with everyday, the guys who drive the little green buses, access to workplace safety and health legislation as well.

I think it is important for us to do that and I think most members, if they were made aware of the situation, would also agree that it is important. I am only talking about 500 or so individuals but it is 500 people who have been specifically denied any kind of workplace safety and health committee, any avenues of recourse if they are injured on the job, et cetera.

Bill C-12 is a worthwhile piece of legislation. Every industrial sector in the federal jurisdiction welcomes it. We want speedy passage of it, but all of the best legislation in the world is completely useless without enforcement, enforcement, enforcement. It is like real estate: location, location, location. It has to be enforced.

The fact is that workplace inspections are way down. The number of workplace inspectors in the field are way down and therefore prosecutions are down. All of that has been allowed to slide a great deal. We would call for the government to not only

Government Orders

pass Bill C-12 but to show a real commitment in the enforcement of Bill C-12 when it enters into the federal sector.

• (1640)

[*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 Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, The Environment; the hon. member for Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, Employment Insurance.

[*English*]

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre mentioned that there should be a two stage bill process. Could the member be a little more specific and describe what the first and second stages of the bill process should be?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, the tripartite joint labour-management-government working group recommended that there be a two tier system and that the system should be as follows: the first stage of appeal would be to the RSO, the regional safety officer. In other words, the RSO would make a directive to an employer or an employee. Either of those could then appeal and ask them to review the direction that was given.

If the directive still stands, then the next stage of appeal would be to the CIRB, the Canada Industrial Relations Board, where a three part panel would then review the matter, and hopefully that panel would have expertise in workplace safety and health.

Currently in Bill C-12 that whole process has been tossed to the side. It put in place an appeals officer who works for the department and is in fact an employee of the department. What we really have, in a way, is the fox watching the hen house, because we are filing our appeal in a single stage to the same people who issued the directive that we are appealing with no further outside arm's length appeal option.

Everybody involved, from the FEDCO federal employers, to the Canadian Labour Congress and all the unions affiliated, agree that they want an arm's length appeal heard by a third party like the CIRB not by an appeals officer who actually works for the department.

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my good friend and colleague from Saint John.

It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the PC Party, to say a few words on Bill C-12, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code.

I have to confess that I have very little new to say about this bill given the fact that this will be the third time, I believe, I have

Government Orders

spoken on it. We are generally in support of the bill because the goal of the legislation, as we are all very much aware, is to promote safety consciousness in the workplace and the boardroom, and to establish the rights and responsibilities of workers and management with regard to real and potential hazards in the workplace.

I do not know what could be more important for workers today than for those of us who come to parliament to bring in good, sound laws and regulations for the workers. A few minutes ago my colleague mentioned a few accidents that happened in the workplace. I know he has quite a great deal of experience in the construction industry.

I remember, having worked in that industry for a number of years, the kinds of hazards that workers generally are exposed to today.

• (1645)

It is very important for us to be cognizant of those facts and to make sure that the laws we bring in address the very important area of safety for people who work not only in the business or office environment but in the construction environment as well.

All in all I think the bill is a very good one. One sign of that is that we only had two amendments to vote on yesterday at report stage. Motion No. 1 was put forward by the minister to provide clearer definitions of health and the real and potential dangers to health, which my party supported.

The other amendment was from the Bloc Québécois to allow a pregnant or nursing mother to avail herself of the provincial health and safety legislation where the legislation is better or more comprehensive. That amendment did not pass. Quite a number of concerns were voiced about it, but I will not go into them at this point.

Key to the bill is an expanded role for health and safety committees in the workplace, which envisions identifying and dealing with potential hazards and related refusals to work quickly and efficiently in the workplace.

The bill seeks a better balance among the roles of government, employers and employees in dealing with workplace problems and more emphasis on establishing rules and procedures to deal with such matters at the local level.

When a bill like this one is vetted through a number of bodies there is more likelihood that the bill will be acceptable to a broad range of people. The bill came about as a result of consultations among government, business and labour in an effort to modernize our health and safety legislation, which incidentally has not undergone an overhaul since 1985. In general the bill has significant support among the groups of people involved. As I mentioned before we support it as well.

The last time the bill came before the House I pointed out a few of our concerns. I know the minister will not be speaking again on the bill. I think there is a part III of the code to come. When the minister comes to the House with part III perhaps she could address some of the concerns we have put on record for her.

One of our concerns is the whole area of ergonomics. It is a bit vague in detail, as we said before. To the layperson ergonomics is a strange and very sophisticated sounding word. As I understand it, it is the art or science of designing or changing the workplace to minimize the risk of injury to an employee in the course of his or her normal duties.

I would assume it is based on the old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It is an area we are hearing quite a great bit about today. It is an area in which the minister probably should have been more detailed. Perhaps the government intends to bring in regulations or guidelines on ergonomics, but the press kit we received on Bill C-12 is essentially silent on the issue.

Another area of workplace safety not covered in the bill is the notion of the psychological protection of the worker in the workplace: the right to work in an environment free of harassment or various types of discrimination. Such matters can cause a great deal of grief in the workplace just as easily as physical injury or the threat of physical injury. While there are protections against a worker being unfairly disciplined for reporting a potential workplace hazard, there appears to be no provision in the bill to provide for a safe psychological work environment.

• (1650)

I will not continue too long as the member for Saint John has some concerns with regard to appointments to various boards which the bill addresses. I commend and compliment the minister for bringing in the bill. It is a good one. I compliment her as well on the fact that labour, environment and management have been consulted widely in this regard.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member from St. John's, Newfoundland, for the opportunity to speak to the bill. I also compliment my colleague in the NDP from Winnipeg on his comments.

In today's society not too many people speak out for the men and women who work with their hands. I can relate to that. A number of workers come to see me back home. They are under tremendous stress in the workplace today because of the cutbacks that are taking place. Some of them have to work longer hours because of the cutbacks. They are having most difficult times and it is difficult for their families as well.

I know the Westray mine was referred to. That issue has tugged at the hearts of just about all of us. The wives of those miners have been to see me a number of times. Had there been proper legislation in place, possibly what happened in the Westray mine

could have been prevented, and those men would still be with their families and their children.

My colleague spoke about ergonomics. He was absolutely correct. It sounds great when subsection 125(1) states that an employer shall:

—ensure that the machinery, equipment and tools used by the employees in the course of their employment meet prescribed health, safety and ergonomic standards—

It is a bit vague on detail, as was said by my colleague, and we have to look at it. We support the bill, but as my colleague from St. John's, Newfoundland, stated, there is a need to elaborate on different areas of it.

I could talk about stress and what has happened to some workers. I know of a gentleman with a wife and four children who was hurt at work. He is not an old man. He is in his late thirties. His wife brought him into my office because of what had happened to him. He was working on a piece of equipment way up in the air that broke off. He went flying through the air. He was in a wheelchair and all his body shook. His little children were crying about their dad. He could not work any more with his hands. Could he walk to work? Could he do anything? I was happy to have helped him to obtain a disability pension. He is a man in his thirties who was injured because the equipment he was working on to do his job was not safe.

I am concerned that a complaint made under this provision cannot be referred to arbitration or adjudication. Subsection 141(1) states that the minister can appoint an appeals officer to adjudicate a decision made through a local health and safety process. To some extent this is a political appointment. We have no guarantees that all ministers will be as circumspect as our current minister.

• (1655)

Subsection 146(3) says that the appeal officer's decision is final and cannot be reviewed by the court. I have big problems with any bill that consistently denies a citizen full access to due process.

Perhaps the minister could take a second look at it. We need that. The government should take a second look at it because it takes away the democratic process in Canada when people do not have the right to go to the court. The court is there for all Canadians. There is no process that should remove their right to go there for a final decision.

Subsection 135(1) indicates that a workplace with 20 or more employees must have a workplace health and safety committee. That is good. Yet subsection 135(2) exempts ship from being required to have such a committee. Be there 20 sailors or 200 sailors, it does not apply to ships. We have ferries. We have other

Government Orders

ships out there. We have our coast guard. We should make sure that it applies to all of them.

Subsection 137(1) calls for the establishment of a coal mining safety commission. This commission is to be appointed by the minister. If the safety of coal miners deserves special attention, I am not sure ministerial appointments is the way to go, especially when their remuneration and expenses are to be set by cabinet.

We should take the politics out of health and safety and do what is right by putting the people in place who have the knowledge and the experience to do the job and do it right. That is what we should do for people. That is why people put us in the House of Commons. They want us to do what is right for all people. I would like to see that kind of respect for our men and women who have to work their hands.

They can make complaints to the board, which I assume means the Canadian Industrial Relations Board or the Public Service Staff Relations Board. I also assume that these boards are filled by order in council and as such are once again political appointments of the government in power. I hope the minister can provide us with the listing of the individuals involved so that we can judge for ourselves if they are appointed on the basis of merit or, heaven forbid, only on the basis of political affiliation.

As I stated before, we should do what is right. It does not matter which party is in power. It does not matter where we sit in the House of Commons. We should put in place the people who can do the job, the people who have the ability and knowledge to do it. We are talking about the lives of people who work in environments where there must be safety in order to protect them.

I thank the House for having the opportunity to say a few words with regard to our concerns. We will support the bill. It is on record how we feel about the bill and the changes we feel very strongly about that should be in place in order to make the bill the one and only bill that will protect men and women in the workplace.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Call in the members.

• (1700)

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The vote is deferred until the end of Government Orders today.

* * *

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2000

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-32, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in parliament on February 28, 2000, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): First we will do the ruling on the groupings.

There are two motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-32, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in parliament on February 28, 2000.

[*Translation*]

Motions Nos. 1 and 2 will be grouped together for debate but will be voted on separately.

[*English*]

I shall now propose Motions Nos. 1 and 2 to the House.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-32 be amended by deleting Clause 35.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-32 be amended by deleting Clause 36.

Mr. Bob Kilger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions between all the parties concerning the order

in which the recorded divisions will be taken today at the end of Government Orders. I believe you will find consent to begin with the recorded division requested on third reading of Bill C-12 followed by the recorded divisions on Motion No. 30.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Is it the pleasure of the House to proceed in the fashion as presented by the chief government whip?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Monte Solberg: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to Motions Nos. 1 and 2 which would effectively delete clauses 35 and 36 in Bill C-32.

The Canadian Alliance is bringing these two motions forward because we are concerned that in approving this, we would simply be handing the government and the people at Revenue Canada another weapon to go out and wring ever more tax dollars out of taxpayers' pockets.

The government is not very efficient at many things. One thing it is exceedingly efficient at and becoming more efficient at every day is using the hammer of Revenue Canada to go out and collect money from people's pockets. These two clauses grant the Minister of National Revenue the power to obtain judicial authorization to assess and collect GST and HST deemed remittable. We argue that it already has sufficient tools to do this.

• (1705)

I know the government will say that it needs symmetry between what there is now in the Income Tax Act and the Excise Tax Act. We agree, but it should be the other way. We think we should be reducing the tools the government has to intrude on people's lives.

I can barely think of a time when there was not someone in my office complaining about unfair treatment from people in the GST department or at Revenue Canada.

Certainly starting in 1995, the year we saw the government bring in an important budget, one of the things it did was to hire more auditors. It hired tons of auditors. I cannot prove this, but anecdotally I think we all know it is so, that starting at that point Revenue Canada and the GST folks got a lot more aggressive. Those auditors are trying to justify their existence.

I cannot count the complaints that have come into my office where people have said that they went to the GST people to ask for a ruling on such and such and they were given a ruling. They submitted their papers. They did it the way they were told to. All of a sudden they found out that they did it wrong. They did it the way the GST people said to do it, but they did it wrong. Someone else at the other end interpreted the whole thing completely differently.

Government Orders

Then all of a sudden the GST auditors would descend like locusts, go through the people's books and tie up their businesses sometimes for days on end. In the meantime, people were struggling to keep their businesses afloat. They found that in some cases their accounts had been frozen. All kinds of things occurred that made it impossible for them to do business.

The very last thing we should be doing in this place is to hand more ammunition to the people at Revenue Canada and the people in the GST department. That is the last thing we need to do. That is effectively what these two clauses in Bill C-32 do. We do not want that anymore. We do not want to see that happen.

We do not have a problem in Canada with people paying their fair share of taxes. We have a problem with the government wringing too much money out of people's pockets. We have an Income Tax Act which is 2,000 pages thick and extraordinarily complex GST legislation and all the amendments and circulars that flow from it. With all of that there are a lot of grey areas. People inevitably end up in those grey areas, sometimes unavoidably. When the government produces legislation as complex as this, it ends up causing situations the consequences of which it cannot see.

People who are trying to earn a living fill out all the GST forms they have to fill out every month, and lo and behold, inevitably some of them wander into those grey areas. What happens when that occurs? The GST people come down not only like a swarm of locusts, but with a hammer. Very often people are in a position where they feel they are on the right side of the issue and that the law is with them. Their accountants will tell them that they are on the right side and according to their understanding these people are within the spirit of the law. But they end up fighting the folks at GST and guess who can outlast whom in a situation like that.

Someone who owns a cornerstore or whatever may have a few thousand dollars to fight a legal battle. But on the other side is the Government of Canada with its battalions of lawyers and experts of all kinds and all the resources the government has including deep, deep pockets with all kinds of money. The government basically freezes people out or makes it impossible for them to proceed. As a result, although these people are very often on the right side of the issue, they cave in. They have to cave in because they cannot afford to wage the battle. The government knows this, so it always comes out on top.

• (1710)

It means more revenue for the government, more revenue coming in all the time. We see it when we look at the GST revenues. They have gone through the roof since 1993. They have gone absolutely through the roof.

The government will say it is economic growth. I will concede that some of it is economic growth, but I think my friends across the way have to concede that some of it, a not insubstantial chunk of it, is due to this new unrealistically tough attitude at the GST

office. They are crawling all over businesses trying to wring every cent out of hardworking business people across the country.

I do not think the members across the way in an honest moment will deny that they have had probably dozens of cases each in their offices where people have said, "Here is my correspondence. Here is what was sent to me saying I could do it this way or that way", and then they got pounded. Someone on the other end did not have the same message.

I do not know how many times people have said to me that they phoned the GST office and got an interpretation of what they were supposed to do from someone who very often does not have a last name; it is Mary or Bill or whomever. Getting the last name from someone on the other end of a government telephone line is like pulling hen's teeth; it is virtually impossible. Then finally at the day of reckoning when they try to explain to the GST people why their paperwork is not done right, they say that Bill or Mary told them to do it. The GST office asks for the person's last name and they say, "Well, I do not know. They would not give me their last name". If I had a dollar for every time I have heard that story, I would be a wealthy, wealthy man.

My point is that it is crazy to arm the government, which already has all those tools, with even more tools to wring more money out of people's pockets.

I want symmetry too. I want symmetry between the Income Tax Act and what we are seeing in the GST, but I want it in a different way. I want fewer powers for Revenue Canada. I do not want it to have the ability to turn people's homes upside down like it currently does.

There are many examples. Probably one of the most egregious ones is in my part of the world, in southern Alberta. A woman finally took her own life because of the harassment from the tax people. This is quite a famous story now, unfortunately. It is part of a trend.

Let us not empower the people in the government to go even further than they already go. Life is miserable enough for a lot of people because of the intrusive behaviour of people who collect taxes. We do not need to give them more tools. They already have all of the resources on their side.

I am proud to say that in the Canadian Alliance my colleagues have moved things like the taxpayers protection act, which would give real rights to people who are facing this sort of outrageous behaviour from the people at Revenue Canada. It would reverse the onus so that Revenue Canada would have to prove that it was in the wrong, instead of putting this chill over things by threatening all kinds of legal action and threatening to drag it through the courts.

People on this side of the aisle, members of the Canadian Alliance, understand the sort of difficulties business people have to go through when they deal with the folks at Revenue Canada, the GST office, the income tax folks, or whomever.

Government Orders

I urge my colleagues across the way to support the motions to get rid of clauses 35 and 36. If they do, they will be sending a powerful and a very good message to taxpayers across Canada.

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Reform Party for his intervention into—

Mr. Monte Solberg: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think my friend will remember that Mr. Speaker has already commented that the reform party no longer exists in this place and there is another party here now called the Canadian Alliance. I just thought I would point that out for my friend.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I am sure everyone here feels much better now.

• (1715)

Mr. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, it was an honest mistake. Sometimes I forget, and I think the majority of Canadians tend to forget, that this is a different political entity. I guess my confusion comes from the fact that reform is still in the name. I do not understand why there is a difficulty in referring to the Reform Party. It is the same as calling the Progressive Conservative Party the Conservative Party, periodically, or the Tory Party. It was an honest mistake, Mr. Speaker, and I assume that Canadians will make that honest mistake in the next election, as well, in forgetting that the Canadian Alliance is nothing more than a corporate re-imagining or a revamping of the Reform Party.

Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure today that I rise to support my hon. colleague's motions to remove clauses 35 and 36 from Bill C-32, the budget implementation act. I share with my colleague his concern that the revenue agency already has more than ample power to enforce tax policies in Canada, and that in fact it has too much power.

I have not had one constituent come to me seeking help to strengthen the abilities of Revenue Canada in collecting money from Canadians. I have, however, had numerous constituents come to me citing egregious examples of abusive practices being performed by Revenue Canada. People, particularly those in small businesses, are being clamped down on by Revenue Canada at a time when it is difficult, with our level of taxation and regulatory burden, to have a successful small business to begin with. To have as one of their greatest enemies the federal government, through the revenue agency, which is on the attack and out to destroy them if unwittingly they fall into one of those grey areas because of the complexities of our tax codes, is clearly unfair and not consistent with the government's efforts to supposedly create an environment within which business can grow and prosper in Canada. The best way to have a small business in Canada is to start a big one and wait.

I have seen numerous examples of the abuse of small business people over GST issues in my riding. The heavy handedness of

Revenue Canada, now the new Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, is consistently unfair and has created a situation of fear across Canada in the small business community and with ordinary Canadians who live in fear of that call or that letter from Revenue Canada.

A few years ago there was a study which evaluated the psychological impact of a number of events in people's lives. The fact is that people receiving a letter telling them they are being audited by either the IRS in the U.S. or by Revenue Canada has the same psychological impact as the death of a close relative.

I am sure that none of us would want to see the death of a close relative, but compared to a full audit by Revenue Canada there are probably some relatives we would trade in quite easily. All kidding aside, this is a very serious issue and I intend to support the motions of my hon. colleague, my unreformed colleague, in this regard.

The tax tinkering that I see in the budgets coming from this government, whether it is on the enforcement side or in terms of general tax policy, is clearly unacceptable. Other countries are using tax policy as a vehicle to create greater levels of economic growth and opportunity for their citizenry. Here we are in Canada with this government continuing its pathetic, anemic tax tinkering which will not really do anything that will have a major impact on the future of Canada.

The government boasts of progress in the recent budget and of steps in the right direction because of the fact that there was some level of tax reduction. These are baby steps. Baby steps in the right direction do not help Canadians if other countries are taking gigantic leaps. The finance minister is bragging of these small steps in the right direction, but a tortoise on the autobahn that is moving in the right direction is still roadkill, because the cars are moving faster. We as a country cannot afford to be that tortoise moving in the right direction on the autobahn. We have to be moving ahead of the pack and we have to provide our citizens and our businesses with the tools to not just compete globally, but to succeed globally. That means not just tax tinkering, but significant levels of tax reform. I do not mean reform in a party sense; I mean tax reform in a more generic sense. I would not want to be accused of tomfoolery in the House of Commons.

• (1720)

The issue of tax reform is extraordinarily important. I am sure my hon. friend would agree with me that we need a greater level of tax reform in the upcoming years. One of the most important areas of tax reform would be the elimination of the personal capital gains tax in Canada, which represents one of the single largest impediments to growth in the new economy of any of our taxes.

I see my colleague in the New Democratic Party shaking his head because he believes that the capital gains tax reduction would be a tax cut for the rich. He could not be more wrong. Over half of

Government Orders

personal capital gains taxes in Canada are paid by people who are making less than \$50,000 per year.

In terms of the new economy, there is no form of taxation that is any more deleterious in terms of its impact on the new economy than the capital gains tax.

We are, through our capital gains tax disadvantages, driving entrepreneurs, driving venture capitalists, driving the innovators whom we need to strengthen the new economy out of Canada. There is a consensus on this issue. The Senate banking committee and the House of Commons industry committee have spoken of the significant need for a reduction in capital gains taxes. We have seen a movement in the right direction, but our capital gains tax is still 13% higher than that of the United States. A 13% disadvantage is a signal to our innovators in Canada that we do not want their innovation. These people could build a stronger country. They could build stronger businesses. I want those businesses. I want that country to be Canada. I do not want it necessarily to be the U.S. We are driving people out of Canada.

The capital gains tax issue is particularly important based on the degree to which the new economy uses stock options to compensate employees. In the new economy the beneficiaries of stock options will not just be the fat cats on Bay Street, but the ordinary people: the receptionists, the innovators, the software engineers and the assembly people. All employees will benefit from these types of initiatives. We would be far better served as Canadians if the government and parliament were to focus on these types of issues as opposed to trying to strength Revenue Canada's ability to pillage and burn the private fiefdoms of Canadians. We should be trying to reduce the tax burden and impediments that the government places on Canadian entrepreneurs by changing our tax system and by reducing not just the tax impediments, but also the regulatory impediments.

When the government hears the need for tax reform, I suggest that its emphasis is on the wrong syllable. The government thinks that tax reform means strengthening Revenue Canada so it can collect more taxes. We in the Progressive Conservative Party suggest that tax reform means reducing and simplifying the Canadian tax system such that more Canadians succeed and ultimately do not have to pay as much tax when they choose to build their futures here in Canada.

Mr. Monte Solberg: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is wonderful to have the support of the pathetic Conservatives. However, I want the House to know that it is a disappointment that it is always a day late and a dollar short.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The hon. member for Medicine Hat is good with the puns, but usually in debate, not on a point of order. We cannot let that slip through.

Mr. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am quite amazed at the alliance

member for Medicine Hat who introduced two motions which will effectively delay the enactment of Bill C-32, a bill that will deliver \$2.5 billion in increased payments under the CHST to the provinces and territories for their health care systems and post-secondary education. It will ensure that students receiving assistance under the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act will have a seamless transition in the fall and that their student loans will be protected. I am amazed they would introduce these spurious motions to delay the implementation of this bill, which Canadians want. Canadians have responded very favourably to budget 2000.

• (1725)

We can stand in the House to debate tax cuts and the pace at which we are making tax cuts. Of course, the alliance would like a flat tax, a tax which would move the tax burden from higher income Canadians to middle income Canadians. We could debate that and unveil the fact that the tax is not progressive and that it would hurt middle income Canadians. We could also demonstrate quite clearly that the tax would not be more simple. It would not be a simpler tax. Many Canadians think that a flat tax would be a simpler tax, but it would not be. When we put questions to members opposite as to whether there would be exemptions for health care, medical expenses over a certain amount, child care expenses, et cetera, they say yes to all of that. Yes, we would have a flat tax of 17%, but Canadians would still have to fill in the same forms. And, by the way, if those deductions were allowed, it would not be affordable in any case.

The hon. member for Medicine Hat talked about poor citizens being trampled upon by Revenue Canada, or the new revenue agency. I would point out that these measures are meant to allow the revenue agency to take action after having been to a court. A judge has to determine whether there is enough evidence presented by the revenue agency to allow it to collect the taxes. It is not the revenue agency acting on its own volition; it is getting a court order to do that. It is done only in exceptional cases, those very rare cases. Most taxpayers are honest, taxpaying citizens. To stand in the House and try to protect those people who are evading taxes is increasing the tax burden on all Canadians.

We have cases where people are collecting the GST and, because there is a delay in the remittance period, they are taking advantage of that. They have no intention of remitting the GST. What does that mean? That means that every one of us pays more tax.

The fact that this member and the member from the Progressive Conservative Party would stand and try to protect tax evaders I find scandalous. They know full well that people have the protection of the courts.

I would like to talk to the specifics of these particular measures. The hon. member opposite said that he understands these measures bring GST and HST collection into line with the Income Tax Act, but he says we should be moving the other way. We should be moving the measures under the GST and the HST the other way. In

Government Orders

other words, we should be removing these provisions from the Income Tax Act.

Most Canadians do not try to evade taxes. They expect to pay their fair share of taxes. If taxes are not being remitted, I think that Canadians look upon the government to collect those taxes. The motions proposed by the hon. member for Medicine Hat do not take into account the fact that the government has that right.

The GST and the HST are collected by businesses and are held in trust on behalf of the people who paid that tax in good faith in the expectation that it will be remitted to the government. There are cases in which these taxes are not remitted. These people have no intention of remitting that money, and the hands of the revenue agency are tied under the current provisions.

The provisions under this bill would allow the revenue agency to go to a judge, demonstrate that there is a good case and collect the taxes that are owing on behalf of all Canadians.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The parliamentary secretary will have five minutes when the bill next comes before the House.

* * *

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-12, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code (Part II) in respect of occupational health and safety, to make technical amendments to the Canada Labour Code (Part I) and to make consequential amendments to other acts, be read the third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): It being 5.30 p.m., the House will proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-12.

Call in the members.

• (1755)

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

(Division No. 1332)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Adams
Assad
Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)
Baker
Barnes
Bélanger
Bennett

Ablonczy
Anderson
Augustine
Bailey
Bakopoulos
Bélair
Bellemare
Benoit

Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Bevilacqua
Blondin-Andrew
Borotsik
Bradshaw
Brown
Caccia
Calder
Carroll
Catterall
Charbonneau
Clouthier
Copp
Cullen
DeVillers
Discepola
Doyle
Duhamel
Earle
Eggleton
Finlay
Fontana
Fry
Galloway
Godfrey
Goodale
Gray (Windsor West)
Gruending
Harb
Hearn
Hill (Macleod)
Hilstrom
Ianno
Jackson
Jennings
Jones
Karetak-Lindell
Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh)
Knutson
Kraft Sloan
Lastewka
Lee
Lill
Longfield
Lunn
Mahoney
Maloney
Manley
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
McCormick
McWhinney
Mifflin
Minna
Muisse
Nault
Nystrom
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
Obhrai
Pankiw
Patry
Peric
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pratt
Provenzano
Reed
Richardson
Ritz
Saada
Scott (Fredericton)
Solberg
St. Denis
St-Julien
Stewart (Brant)
Strahl
Telegdi
Torsney
Valeri
Vellacott
Wappel
Wayne
White (North Vancouver)

Bertrand
Blaikie
Bonin
Boudria
Brison
Bulte
Cadman
Caplan
Casson
Cauchon
Chatters
Comuzzi
Cotler
Desjarlais
Dion
Dockrill
Dromisky
Duncan
Easter
Epp
Folco
Forseth
Gagliano
Gilmour
Godin (Acadie—Bathurst)
Graham
Grey (Edmonton North)
Guarnieri
Harvard
Herron
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Hubbard
Ifody
Jaffer
Johnston
Jordan
Keyes
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Konrad
Laliberte
Lavigne
Leung
Lincoln
Lowther
MacAulay
Malhi
Mancini
Marleau
Martin (LaSalle—Énard)
Matthews
McGuire
Meredith
Mills (Red Deer)
Mitchell
Myers
Normand
O'Brien (Labrador)
O'Reilly
Pagtakhan
Paradis
Penson
Peterson
Pillitteri
Proctor
Redman
Reynolds
Riis
Rock
Schmidt
Sgro
Speller
St-Jacques
Steckle
Stewart (Northumberland)
Szabo
Thibeault
Ur
Vanclief
Volpe
Wasylcia-Leis
Whelan
Wilfert—180

Private Members' Business

NAYS

Members

Alarie	Asselin
Bergeron	Bigras
Brien	Canuel
Cardin	Crête
de Savoye	Debien
Desrochers	Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière)
Duceppe	Gagnon
Gauthier	Girard-Bujold
Godin (Châteauguay)	Guay
Lalonde	Lebel
Marchand	Ménard
Mercier	Perron
Picard (Drummond)	Plamondon
Sauvageau	St-Hilaire
Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean)	Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis)
Turp	Venne—32

PAIRED MEMBERS

Copps	Nunziata
-------	----------

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The House resumed from May 19 consideration of the motion and the amendment.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday 29, 2000, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment to Motion No. 30 under Private Members' Business. We will now vote on the amendment to the motion.

- (1810)

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

(Division No. 1333)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Anderson	Assad
Augustine	Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)
Bailey	Baker
Bakopanos	Barnes
Bélair	Bélangier
Bellemare	Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Bertrand	Bevilacqua
Bigras	Blaikie
Blondin-Andrew	Bonin
Borotsik	Boudria
Bradshaw	Brisson
Brown	Bryden
Bulte	Caccia
Cadman	Calder
Caplan	Carroll
Casson	Catterall
Cauchon	Charbonneau
Chatters	Clouthier
Comuzzi	Copps
Dion	Dockrill

Doyle
Duhamel
Earle
Eggleton
Folco
Forseith
Gagliano
Godfrey
Goodale
Gray (Windsor West)
Gruending
Harb
Hearn
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Ianno
Jackson
Jennings
Jordan
Keys
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Konrad
Laliberte
Lavigne
Leung
Lincoln
Lunn
Mahoney
Maloney
Manley
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Matthews
McWhinney
Meredith
Mitchell
Myers
Nystrom
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
Obhrai
Pankiw
Peterson
Plamondon
Proctor
Redman
Richardson
Ritz
Saada
Solberg
St. Denis
St-Julien
Stewart (Northumberland)
Szabo
Torsney
Valeri
Vellacott
Wasylcyia-Leis
Whelan
Wilfert—155

Dromisky
Duncan
Easter
Epp
Fontana
Fry
Gilmour
Godin (Acadie—Bathurst)
Graham
Grey (Edmonton North)
Guarnieri
Harvard
Herron
Hilstrom
Ifody
Jaffer
Jones
Karetak-Lindell
Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh)
Knudson
Kraft Sloan
Lastewka
Lee
Lill
Lowther
MacAulay
Malhi
Mancini
Marleau
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McGuire
Ménard
Minna
Muise
Nault
O'Brien (Labrador)
O'Reilly
Pagtakhan
Paradis
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pratt
Provenzano
Reynolds
Riis
Rock
Schmidt
Speller
St-Jacques
Steckle
Strahl
Telegdi
Ur
Vanclief
Volpe
Wayne
White (North Vancouver)

NAYS

Members

Benoit
Brien
Debien
Duceppe
Gauthier
Godin (Châteauguay)
Hill (Macleod)
Lalonde
Mills (Red Deer)
Picard (Drummond)
Turp

PAIRED MEMBERS

Copps	Nunziata
-------	----------

Private Members' Business

The Speaker: I declare the amendment carried.

The next question is on the main motion, as amended. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion, as amended?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion, as amended, agreed to)

THE ROYAL ASSENT

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Government House
Ottawa

May 31, 2000

Mr. Speaker:

I have the honour to inform you that the Honourable John Major, Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Canada, in his capacity as Deputy Governor General, will proceed to the Senate chamber today, the 31st day of May, 2000 at 6.15 p.m., for the purpose of giving royal assent to certain bills.

Yours sincerely,

Anthony P. Smyth
Deputy Secretary
Policy, Program and Protocol

* * *

[*Translation*]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing the House that the Senate has passed certain bills, to which the concurrence of this House is desired.

• (1815)

[*English*]

It being 6.15 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should take immediate steps to implement a labelling process that will make consumers aware of all genetically modified produce and components in processed foods.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to present a motion to the House on a matter of great significance, a public policy area that has serious ramifications for all society.

I do not have to tell any member of the House how seriously Canadians regard the issue of food safety and genetically modified produce. The matter weighs heavily upon the minds of Canadians and has certainly become a matter of intense debate, discussion and organizing right across the country.

The hour allocated for debate on this motion will hardly permit an indepth review of this issue. However, I am grateful that we have this hour because it will give us an opportunity to air some issues that are of grave concern to Canadians.

I am mindful of the fact that this is not the only opportunity we have had to debate this issue. As a result of work by other opposition members in the House, we have had recent opportunities to debate this very important issue.

A few weeks ago, on May 2 in the House, an entire day was devoted to discussing genetically modified foods and the need for a labelling process.

[*Translation*]

At this point, I would like to sincerely thank the hon. member for Louis-Hébert, who worked on this issue for over a year. She moved an opposition motion in the House on May 2. She also moved a motion under Private Members' Business. I want to apologize for my French, but I want to speak it for a moment to recognize the work of the Bloc Québécois member.

The fact that there are two motions on the same issue at the same time before the House clearly indicates the importance of this issue for all members of parliament and for Canadians across the country.

[*English*]

What is so apparent from the proceedings in the House is that the initiative to have this critical matter of food safety and genetically modified produce discussed publicly and openly has come from the opposition parties in the House. It has come from individual, non-Liberal members. This is truly an effort on our part as well as on the part of members of the Bloc to fulfill an obligation that we hold as elected representatives to ensure open, democratic debate, public consultation and open, transparent government on something as important and fundamental as food safety.

This is really an attempt—and I know it is grating some of the Liberal members present today but it has to be said—to fill a

vacuum left by the Liberal government, which has a well established pattern of secretive, less than democratic decision making around this important issue and on many of the important issues facing health protection and health safety systems in the country today.

• (1820)

The work of private members is very important in that regard. At least we can provide a venue for public debate on this important issue. At least we can be a conduit for the concerns our constituents are bringing to our attention, not having been able to penetrate the walls of the Liberal government.

It is important for us to have this time and opportunity, and hopefully out of it will come some pressure on the Liberal government to rethink its current position of inaction and passive response to something as important as food safety, particularly when it comes to genetically modified produce.

The work of a private member is no substitute for government action. The government has initiated no parliamentary debate, no public consultations and no democratic process for resolving a controversial and far-reaching public policy. There has been no leadership at the community level where, as members of the House know, the voices of Canadians have been heard loud and clear.

All of us have received hundreds of calls and letters on this issue. We have all presented a number of petitions to the House. We all know the number of times this issue has been raised either in Oral Question Period or in debate. Yet, there has been no proactive movement on the part of the government to address this issue.

Time and time again it was suggested in the health committee that this should be a topic of research and study. The matter of a joint study between the agriculture committee and the health committee was never even brought to the health committee. Motions and recommendations that individuals brought to the health committee to have this item placed on our agenda were dismissed, disregarded and ignored.

Anyone who has seen the recent coverage on the developments at the health committee will probably have a good understanding of why this has happened. On every major issue facing Canadians today when it comes to health care, our health committee has had its hands tied. Our committee has become almost dysfunctional because of our inability to crack through the wall of control that the Liberal government has placed around our committee.

We as a committee have not been requested or challenged to investigate the crisis in our public health care system. We have not been given the opportunity to discuss the crisis in our health protection system. All the while, developments are taking place, decisions are being made behind the scenes and policies are being initiated without any kind of parliamentary scrutiny, public

consultation or sensitivity to the impact those policies will have on Canadians' health and safety.

There is no question, I believe, on the part of everyone in the House that the issue of genetically modified foods is a high priority for Canadians. I do not think there is any doubt about where that concern comes from.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. When we resume the hon. member will have six minutes remaining for her remarks.

THE ROYAL ASSENT

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

A message was delivered by the Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Deputy to the Governor General desires the immediate attendance of this honourable House in the chamber of the honourable the Senate.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker with the House went up to the Senate chamber.

• (1835)

[*English*]

And being returned:

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that when the House went up to the Senate chamber the Deputy Governor General was pleased to give, in Her Majesty's name, the royal assent to the following bills:

Bill C-10, an act to amend the Municipal Grants Act—Chapter No. 8.

Bill C-2, an act respecting the election of members to the House of Commons, repealing other Acts relating to elections and making consequential amendments to other Acts—Chapter No. 9.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the concern of Canadians when it comes to genetically modified foods is legitimate and must be taken seriously.

Private Members' Business

There has been a flood of genetically engineered products on the market in the last number of years. Some 30 to 40 products are now available on the grocery shelf. Some 60% of processed foods contain genetically modified foods. Large numbers of acreage are taken up with genetically modified crops.

This is a very significant development in the history of this country and it certainly causes Canadians legitimate concern. This has all happened without much knowledge on the part of Canadians. These decisions were made by governments some years back. There was no public consultation process. There is no policy framework in place to deal with the long term effects of this kind of development in our society today.

We are told time and time again not to worry. We are told that genetically modified foods are substantially equivalent to non-genetically modified foods. We are told there is no need to worry. Don't worry, be happy as my colleague for Palliser has said. That is the message from the government. We are here today to try to change that.

It is not good enough to tell Canadians not to worry and that the government will take care of their interests. Canadians have been faced with too many examples in the past where governments have taken shortcuts and Canadians have paid the price.

If we have learned anything from the Walkerton water tragedy, it should be that there can be no shortcuts when it comes to the safety of the food we eat, the water we drink, the blood transfusions we may require, or the drugs that are necessary for our medical conditions. To do anything less is to put people at the whim of the marketplace without any guarantee of safety. As someone once said to me, it is playing Russian roulette with the lives of Canadians.

We in the NDP are saying the precautionary principle should be that products should only go on the market when they have been proven to be safe. That is what should guide us through all of the developments in biotechnology. We are saying that if the science is unavailable or has not been completed, then surely we should not allow things on the market unless we know they are safe.

It is time for the government to hear the message. It has a responsibility to prove safety and ensure that the companies prove safety as opposed to the individual Canadian consumer proving harm. What creates the possibility of serious problems and disastrous consequences is when precautionary steps have not been taken. That is what we are asking to be done when it comes to genetically engineered food.

I cannot stand here and say that genetically engineered food is unsafe. However, I can say with absolute certainty and authority based on everything I have read that no one can say that there will never be any deleterious effects from genetically engineered food.

• (1840)

We cannot say at this point that there will be no long term effects on human health, on soil conditions or on the state of our environment. We do not have the ability to say that because we do not have the science. In fact, we have all kinds of science which suggests otherwise.

All kinds of studies say there could be lethal effects from genetically modified seeds on insects such as the monarch butterfly. We know that Roundup resistant crops may result in increased residue to the consumer, possibly causing non-Hodgkins lymphoma. We know that genetically modified seeds could render antibiotics useless. We know from news as recently as today that genes used to modify crops can jump the species barrier and cause bacteria to mutate. We know from the recent example of the company Advanta based in Winnipeg that problems occur when seeds spread from one crop to another. That is causing all kinds of ramifications in the European market. It is having a major impact on farmers in this country today.

We are here today to say that when we do not know all the answers and we do not have the science then we have to do something. We have to take steps. There are some things we can do. One is suggested in the motion today. It has been suggested as well by the member for Louis-Hébert that we could at least begin with a labelling process. We could at least guarantee that consumers have the knowledge they need to decide whether or not to consume genetically engineered food.

In the best of all worlds if we had taken all the precautionary steps, had the science in place and made sure that we knew what we were dealing with, maybe that would not have been necessary. At least at this point in time when the horse is out of the barn, we should be doing that which consumers are expecting us to do and that which is absolutely essential given the changing nature of the field. We should give consumers the information they need to make a decision, give them the right to know and the right to make an informed choice.

That is certainly something that is elemental. It is basic and something the government should be doing immediately. It should not set up one more biotechnology committee, not create an illusion of consulting while it spends \$25 million on fancy booklets trying to tell Canadians that everything is safe and fine.

Canadians want open consultation. They want to be involved in the decision making process. All of parliament wants to be part of this process because what is fundamentally at stake here is human health, environmental health and the future of our society.

Without exaggerating the point, let us simply say that in the absence of sufficient knowledge to answer all of those questions, let us not take any chances. Let us put human health first. Let us put public safety ahead of the needs of the industry. Let us ensure that with every step forward we provide consumers with the right to know and with the information they need in order to make

informed decisions. Let us also ensure that from this day forward all of our decisions are based on independent scientific expertise.

Mr. Joe McGuire (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to address the motion by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. The motion calls for the compulsory labelling of genetically modified food.

At the outset I want to make one thing very clear. When it comes to biotechnology issues, including genetically modified foods, the Government of Canada's number one priority is to act as a responsible steward for the health and safety of Canadians and the environment. I would like to quote from a recent speech by the premier of Saskatchewan, the Hon. Roy Romanow:

Food created from genetically altered crops grown on the Canadian prairies didn't originate from some madman's spiderwebbed laboratory; it passed through one of the best government regulatory systems in the world. The products that make it through the Canadian biotechnology regulatory system have met demanding protocols that require conclusive research into the products' impact on human health and the environment. Almost universally, peer review of research data by scientists with extensive knowledge in the biotechnology field has supported the safety of products before they are allowed into the marketplace.

The Province of Saskatchewan has long been a supporter of carefully regulated biotechnology.

• (1845)

The previous premier of Saskatchewan, the hon. Allan Blakeney, was responsible for beginning the biotechnology centre at the University of Saskatchewan. Maybe the province of Manitoba should catch up with the province of Saskatchewan when it comes to its support for biotechnology research in food.

Let me emphasize that the Government of Canada's commitment is always to safety first: safety for the protection of Canadians, safety for animals and safety of our environment. That is what Canadians expect of their government. It is a mission that the government takes very seriously.

I remind the House that the government undertakes very strict scientific evaluations of all food products including those derived from biotechnology. Before any new agricultural biotech product can be produced and marketed in Canada, it is subjected to comprehensive safety assessments to ensure that humans, animals and the environment will not be adversely affected by it.

Health Canada maintains responsibility for establishing policies and standards related to the safety of food sold in Canada. This department sets the data requirements for the safety assessments of all foods and undertakes comprehensive pre-market reviews of all foods.

In terms of labelling, Health Canada sets the specifics for labelling of all foods. Current labelling regulations in Canada require that all food products, including those developed through

Private Members' Business

biotechnology, be labelled when the potential human health or safety issue has been identified or if foods have been changed in composition or nutrition. Therefore Health Canada determines if and when labelling is required based on scientific food safety evaluations.

The role of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, CFIA, is to carry out inspection and enforcement activities relative to the food safety standards set by Health Canada.

The government recognizes that Canadians want to be heard on the issue of labelling. We are actively engaged and consulting with Canadians to explore how labelling can best serve the public. There is need for informed discussion on the issue of labelling genetically modified products.

The government is responding to the public's interest in the area and has carefully encouraged the establishment of a Canadian standard for the labelling of foods derived through biotechnology. The Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors has been working with the Canadian General Standards Board to develop this labelling standard.

A committee composed of representatives and individuals from a broad range of Canadian interests has been established. This committee has already met for three intensive working sessions since its inception in November of last year. A number of working groups have been established to examine various components of the standard. These groups are focusing on the scope of foods to be covered under the standard, label statements and mechanisms to verify the truthfulness of these statements. A completed standard is expected within the next six to twelve months.

Canada is fully immersed in developing its own national standard in full consultation with the shareholders and in a way that is open and transparent to all Canadians. Because of the leadership of the government, we are the first country in the world to actively engage such a broad range of stakeholders in this issue. Earlier this month the U.S. food and drug administration announced similar plans to prepare labelling guidelines that will ensure that labelling is truthful and informative.

The development of a comprehensive Canadian standard for the labelling of foods derived from biotechnology allows consumers, health care professionals, other levels of government, processors, distributors and producers to work together in establishing a single national standard. I believe the government has done the right thing by taking this approach. As consumers, we have the right to clear, concise and understandable information that allows us to make knowledgeable choices about the foods we eat.

Moreover, Canada is assuming a leadership role in the search for international standards that would govern how and when genetically modified foods are labelled. In fact, Canada's food regulatory

Private Members' Business

system is held in such high esteem internationally that the Codex Alimentarius committee on food labelling asked us to chair the working committee to revise the proposed draft of the Codex standard for the labelling of food biotechnology products.

I also remind the House that last year the ministers of health, the environment, and agriculture and agri-food asked the Royal Society of Canada to appoint an expert panel on the future of food biotechnology. This past February the Royal Society named its expert panel, which consists of scientists who have widely recognized expertise in specific areas of knowledge. This panel is carefully balanced with respect to the various points of view on biotechnology issues.

• (1850)

This proactive, forward thinking body will advise Health Canada, the CFIA and Environment Canada on the science capacity that the federal government will need to maintain and enhance the safety of new foods being derived through biotechnology in the 21st century.

Once again we can see that the Government of Canada is committed to maintaining the highest scientific standards. We strive to ensure that scientific advice is broadly based and that Canada's regulatory assessments keep pace with the latest scientific innovations and discoveries. This type of proactive thinking underlies our efforts to make sound policy decisions that will continue to protect Canadian consumers.

The government also recognizes there are a number of challenges and opportunities associated with biotechnology that require detailed consideration and public discussion. Food biotechnology presents Canadians with unprecedented challenges but also unprecedented opportunities.

The recently formed Canadian Biotechnology Advisory Committee, CBAC, will bring stakeholders and interested parties together to advise the government, to raise public awareness, and to engage Canadians in an open and transparent dialogue on biotechnology issues.

CBAC will deal with tasks such as the issues surrounding regulation and stewardship of emerging applications of biotechnology, with public education about biotechnology, and with the social, economic, environmental, legal and ethical issues relating to food biotechnology. CBAC will monitor scientific developments that underpin new developments in the field of biotechnology and the application of those new developments.

Another important initiative is that of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. This committee raised labelling as a key issue in the 1998 report entitled "Capturing the Advantage: Agriculture Biotechnology in the New Millennium". This report recommended that parliament consult with stakeholders to review labelling policy.

I recommend that report to the hon. member. She thinks that opposition members are the ones who are filling the void. She is missing the two years of activities of this government, in conjunction with six other departments besides the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, to put together the Canadian biotechnology strategy. I recommend that she pick up that strategy and read it. The present standing committee has already begun a series of hearings on the labelling of genetically modified foods.

I remind the House that during the debate on the same issue earlier this month my hon. colleagues from the Canadian Alliance called for a joint study by the health and agriculture committees of the issue of labelling. Such a review would add considerable information and raise the level of dialogue on the issue.

The House owes it to the people who are working so hard to study the issue of food biotechnology to wait until we hear what they have to say. The message we are sending to Canadians is this: our priority is health, safety and the environment. We have incorporated these values into a regulatory system and will continue to ensure that we have a regulatory system in place that is rigorous, thorough and scientific.

The Government of Canada considers the issue of labelling of genetically modified foods to be very important. We want to hear what Canadians have to say. We want to hear what the experts have to say. We remain committed to the exchange of ideas on the issues surrounding biotechnology.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, certainly it is a pleasure to speak to this private member's bill. I congratulate the member for bringing it to the House. We get very frustrated, as she pointed out, in the health committee where we really cannot deal with any of the issues with which Canadians want to deal. We are forced instead to toe the line and simply go along with one little aspect of the health issue.

This is an issue for Canadians. It is one that they care about. It is one on which they want information. The government would be wise to learn that if information is provided an awful lot of the hearsay and scary stuff will be eliminated.

The age that we came from was much simpler when it came to biology. I cannot help but think back to my days in biology classes at the University of Saskatchewan when our professors would talk about what the future might be when it came to genetics, eugenics and all those sorts of issues. I cannot help but remember back to their talking about issues like Dolly and that sort of science ultimately being applied much further.

• (1855)

The problem with the failure of the government to provide information is that it is left open to emotion. It is left open to using

Private Members' Business

non-scientific information that can frighten people including farmers, consumers and those who care about their health and the health of their families. It can scare them in terms of the new technology which they do not understand. By having that information in place and talking about it in detail we prevent the scary stuff from entering into the discussion.

I have seen what can happen when we deal with non-science, when we deal with what people think might happen. I encourage the government and the House to force the issue of GMOs in the whole area of biotechnology. We should force it to be transparent. We should involve the participation of as many groups including citizen groups as we can. We should go an extra distance with the consultation process and base all our decisions on scientific evidence, not hearsay evidence and the fear some might have.

The safety assessment of biotechnology is critical. We must look at it in our foods. We must ask what it does. We must know that using this technology is for the benefit of humanity, as opposed to a danger to humanity. We should not jump into what we will do. Information is key. The information available to our citizens is what we should be concerned about in the House.

We in the Canadian Alliance have developed a position which we have discussed at some length with our agriculture critic, our health critic, and our membership in general. We came up with a position I certainly want to read into the record. It is much more reasonable than what we have heard from the government side.

The alliance supports using scientific information to determine if an agricultural or food biotechnology product meets Canadian health and safety requirements. If it does, the acceptability of the product in the marketplace should be determined by consumer choice and not by political interference. The alliance supports increased consumer awareness and choice in the voluntary labelling of these products. The alliance also supports labelling of foods that are not genetically modified. This should be on a voluntary consumer driven basis, which would go a long way toward solving some of the problems of today.

While we come out somewhat in between where the hon. member stands in terms of genetically modified foods and where the government is at, the ends we would go to would be much the same and would accomplish the same for Canadians. That is what should be important when it comes to an issue like this one.

There are reasons to label everything. We can look at them, but we must ask some questions. Why would we do that? The obvious answer is for people with allergies and different genetic make-ups. There could be a peanut in something that they would not expect it to be in. That is an obvious reason. That is science and a reason for labelling. People are developing increased resistances and increased allergies. All kinds of medical issues should be dealt with, which we need a lot more information on.

We could simply respond to our trading partners. I particularly point to the European Union. In many respects, from the little bit I know about what the European Union has done, it seems that it has been stamped into opposing genetically modified foods without the science that is there. We could point fingers at why that happened but we can understand the politics involved. Some of it would be justified and some would not. We should have learned from that however that we had better not get in that same category of being stamped into labelling or not labelling just based on scientific fearmongering.

• (1900)

The obvious disadvantages we have think about when we talk about labelling, and the one that would be most significant to me, would be the cost to our agricultural community which is already under severe strain.

Over the past week I was in my riding talking to farmers at farmers' markets and at town hall meetings. One morning I met with a group of farmers and they told me that they were growing canola that was roundup resistant and that they were worried about what would happen if we started to overregulate. They said that it would hurt an industry that is already hurting. We must consider that and look at the consumers and the food manufacturers. We must tell the farmers that we will not get on the bandwagon of anti-GMO just because someone else is pushing us. We must make sure that we consider the farmers and all the others who are affected.

How would we enforce the labelling of genetically modified foods? I read an article once that said "If a chicken eats genetically modified grain does that mean you are going to label the chicken as being genetically modified?" My biology says that we have been eating chromosomes and genes for an awfully long time and that I will not become what I eat in terms of genetics. I am not likely to have canola growing out of my ears or a cob of corn under my neck or whatever. That is not science. It will not what happen.

I cannot help but think of some of the bills we have passed in this House. I cannot for the life of me imagine how we will enforce Bill C-23, which might be the most recent example. We will have sex police checking out couples. We will spend \$4.5 million on health police to make sure Alberta follows the law. If someone in Alberta is extra billed or jumps the queue it will be on the front page of every newspaper in that province. We do not need police to do that. We also have the gun police for Bill C-68. I guess we will now have GMO police checking out what chickens are eating. I am not sure where all this stops.

The main point, as my time is running short, is that we should base things on science. We should have voluntary labelling based on consumer demand and we should let the consumers decide. We should base everything we do on science. We should also ensure that consumers are informed. The government must take a lead role in making sure that this information gets out to all Canadians who are concerned about this issue.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Alarie (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would need an hour to refute some of the things that were said by members who spoke before me; yet I only have ten minutes, but I will surely have other opportunities to do so. First and foremost, I want to express my support to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre and to thank her for tabling Motion No. 252, asking the government to take immediate steps to implement a labelling process that will make us consumers aware of what foods are genetically modified.

Far from being an attack on biotechnologies, the hon. member's motion is a serious initiative asking that light be shed on the scientific process used to approve these foods and to evaluate their potential long term effects on health, on the environment and now on culture, agriculture and international trade.

• (1905)

What is great is that the more we look at this issue, the more components we must take a stand on as members of parliament.

I want to tell the House that we are not scaremongers, that we are definitely not sheep, and that we do not belong to any sect. Let us be very clear. The fact that we want to inform our fellow citizens and to get to the bottom of things does not put us in any of these categories, on the contrary. We are members of parliament with a responsibility for what goes on in society, and it so happens that GMOs are a new and growing phenomenon.

I would like to say, particularly, in response to my honourable colleague from Egmont, that we read everything that has been written, everything that has been said, everything we can get our hands on about the subject. What was done two years ago in committees, what was produced by the government two years ago, we also read. I should point out, however, that this is a constantly evolving field and so a person has to be constantly updating. What was being said two or three years ago is very quickly out of date, I believe.

There is one other thing I would like to add. There is talk of labelling. and there is an adjective I really feel must be added to that, mandatory. I will explain why. In the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food, we received some people responsible for voluntary labelling. We came to realize immediately that this was a problem: no two organizations share the same definition of what a GMO is.

It is clearly evident from our readings, whether from the USA or Japan—in translation obviously—or from Europe, that there is near-complete agreement on reference to GMOs as relating to the mechanisms of recombinant DNA, and procedures for detecting

genes that have been created in a laboratory in order to confer new characteristics to organisms to which they are transferred.

Now another totally different subject is cropping up very regularly: mutagenesis, which is something completely different. It is a totally different process, one which refers to chemical or physical actions on genes which result in certain progress changes in the organism.

Now they are trying to lump these two together. The resulting whole is something that no one can grasp. The result: confusion in both scientific and consumer communities. All this confusion gives us more time to do nothing.

Speaking of doing nothing, I listened very politely to the government member. Ways must also be found to centralize action and information. I did a small calculation and came up with eight ministers responsible for this issue. I often say that having one minister and one agency to deal with is already a lot; but if this is multiplied by eight, action is sure to grind to a halt.

So we are thus being given more time, and on this issue, more time is not what we want. What we want is to inform consumers, the public, as quickly as possible and to reassure ourselves about the effects of genetically modified organisms, especially on health and on the environment.

I can hear certain members asking whether I know of anyone who has died from eating GMOs. I find talk like that so simplistic that I have a tendency to become annoyed, although I am usually even-tempered.

I will tell members why I get annoyed: I get annoyed because we must not minimize this issue. We must be wise enough to tackle it head on and examine it thoroughly. All sorts of things can happen: there are environmental diseases, which we are hearing about with increasing frequency, allergies, resistance to antibiotics. Perhaps there is no connection with GMOs, but what we do know is that, right now, nobody is studying this or has proven otherwise.

• (1910)

It is very simple. We always met with representatives of Health Canada in the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. They told us they were there merely to obtain budgets to start assessments on humans, in other words on us, the consumers.

The thought is that there must be medium and long term evaluations, but the budgets are just starting to come through. When the government talks of budgets, believe me, that does not mean that the studies are begun.

Why not take the precaution of taking time to do these analyses before getting into an evolution that cannot be reversed, because it moves ahead too rapidly? The hope is that the consumer will be well informed. As we begin a new century, one so anxiously

awaited, we ought to have labelling that is readily understood, quick to be inaugurated, and mandatory. We have seen that making it voluntary opened up all manner of opportunities for getting around it and for not holding this debate.

This is part of what we are calling for, and we will continue the debate in all possible forums until we have that certainty.

It is a year now—this almost feels like an anniversary to me—since I started the tour, petitions on GMOs and the demands for mandatory labelling. I also called for the public to be informed and trained, not to send out a little propaganda pamphlet to people's homes telling them to wash their hands before they eat, on the right hand page, while on the page opposite treating GMOs as if there were nothing to worry about, no questions to be asked.

Consumers have questions. Without wishing to contradict the member who spoke before me, we know that consumers have questions. There have been surveys for years. The results are always the same. We all want the same thing—information—and information means mandatory labelling of transgenic foods.

There is so much going on right now. Last week, I was listening to a greenhouse grower who produces tomatoes. He tried to label his tomatoes as not containing GMOs. Major food stores, which I will not name but which can be found throughout the region, would not let him label his tomatoes “not transgenic” because apparently if the other tomatoes were not labelled, it might have given the impression that they were transgenic.

Farmers do not have much leeway, but consumers do not have any at all. That is why I am supporting my colleague's motion and why we are pushing for results on this issue, because we want everything to be analysed: the effects on health, as well as the effects on ethics and on the economy, social and environmental effects and, of course and above all, for me, the effects on agriculture because that is my particular concern. I will be following this issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, first let me thank hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre for bringing forward once again the issue of genetically modified foods and that of mandatory labelling. I appreciate that her motion does not speak to mandatory labelling. It simply speaks to implementing a labelling process that will make consumers aware of all genetically modified produce and components in processed foods. I do understand the motion that is before us.

I also want to thank the hon. member for Louis-Hébert, in particular, who sits with me on the agricultural committee. In my estimation, she is probably one of the most knowledgeable individuals in the House when it comes to debating, talking about and certainly understanding the ramifications of genetically modified

Private Members' Business

organisms. I do thank her for educating me on a number of occasions at the agricultural committee.

● (1915)

As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre will recognize, the members speaking to this motion are the ones who have the most to gain or the most to understand with respect to agriculture.

Two or three members of the agriculture committee are here. The member for Palliser is here as well as is the parliamentary secretary, who is not only on the agriculture committee but also represents the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

There is a member here who sits on the health committee who has brought forward the motion with respect to genetically modified produce. I do feel some compassion for the member for Winnipeg North Centre and the fact that she could not get her committee to debate this very important issue.

As a matter of fact, at one point in time we had hoped we could get the health committee and the agriculture committee together in a joint committee to debate this very complex and important subject on which Canadians are asking for a resolution.

I cannot speak to the hon. member's inability with her own committee, but I will give her some assurance right now that the agriculture committee takes this situation extremely seriously. The committee is now dealing with this very issue.

I will not be supporting the member's motion as it stands. It is not that I do not agree with a lot of what the hon. member has said, but simply because I do not understand this very complex situation well enough to be able to say that mandatory labelling or labelling of any sort will be the best resolution for this issue.

Let me talk about biotechnology. First of all I will not take a long time, even though I know the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food would like to stay and listen to me for as long as possible because he learns an awful lot. I know that the Speaker would love to stay here a little longer and learn a little bit about genetically modified organisms, but I will very briefly and succinctly try to explain the Progressive Conservative Party's position on this.

We in the Progressive Conservative Party accept biotechnology and genetically modified organisms as being a very major opportunity for Canadian agriculture. We have always supported biotechnology and genetically modified organisms and believe that agriculture and Canadians as consumers are the beneficiaries of strong, very good science, and we will continue to do so.

The parliamentary secretary referred to comments by Mr. Romanow in Saskatchewan. Right now Saskatchewan has one of the

Private Members' Business

world's most renowned biotechnology centres. That is very positive. Canadians are on the leading edge of biotechnology. This is very good for consumers because consumers, and producers to a degree, can take advantage of the changes in biotechnology.

We would like to make sure that Canadians can protect their position in world markets right now with biotechnology. We believe that the consumers must have the proper knowledge and information available to them.

I am saying to the member for Winnipeg North Centre that yes, I agree that the government, we as the opposition and we as a parliament must be able to give consumers what it is that they want, unlike some other parties in this House that will remain unnamed who wish to turn a blind eye, stick their heads in the sand and simply say, "Never mind what the consumers want. We will simply say it is safe as predicted by science and continue to go on with biotechnology". That will not happen.

In the real world consumers are demanding more information and knowledge when it comes to biotechnology and that is a very good thing. We have to make sure we listen to all the stakeholders, to all those organizations and groups that are demanding that knowledge and information. We must make sure we put forward that information in a logical and knowledgeable way.

Let us not have fearmongering, as some may wish to suggest. Let us make sure we do it logically.

• (1920)

I would like to thank the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre for bringing this motion forward. My party and I will support her in certain movements toward information based genetically modified organisms with information given to consumers as they demand it. It may or may not be mandatory labelling, but it will be—

Ms. Paddy Torsney: A Manitoba solution.

Mr. Rick Borotsik: A Manitoba solution? Quite possibly, but it will be based on what consumers require from the government and parliament.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. I should advise the House that if the hon. member speaks now, she will close the debate. She has five minutes for reply.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have a few more minutes to speak on this important issue. Before doing so, I would like to thank members of all parties in the House for participating in this debate and ensuring that we had a very comprehensive discussion in the brief amount of time allocated for a very important topic.

In response to some of the comments, I wish to say four things. First, this debate is about ensuring that the concerns of consumers as well as farmers are addressed. There is no doubt that the uncertainty in this field is wreaking havoc not only in terms of individuals' concerns about their own health and well-being but also the grief and anxiety caused to farmers everywhere in the country.

It is absolutely apparent to me and I am sure to the hon. member for Brandon—Souris and others, that farmers and consumers, Canadians everywhere, want from the government a clear public policy, an open consultation process, a tough regulatory regime and decisions based on scientific evidence and independent research. That is absolutely clear. That is not happening today.

The Liberal spokesperson suggested that there was a wide open consultation process involving Canadians. That is not the case. There has been little opportunity for individual Canadians, citizens groups and farmers organizations to participate in an open discussion about where we go in the future with respect to biotechnology.

When it comes to the government statement around in-depth research and scientific investigation of this matter, I want to tell the hon. member that he is not portraying the situation as it actually is. There is now very little capacity in government in terms of in-depth research to determine the long term impacts of genetically modified food on health, soil and the environment.

As one example, I want to mention to the hon. member that his own Minister of Health promised back in 1997 to reopen a lab in the health protection branch to study genetically modified foods. Three years after that, the lab is still not open.

I also want to mention to him that I actually tried to inquire of the government how much money is spent on research in terms of genetically modified foods and how much of that \$65 million it keeps touting as being assigned to food safety has been spent on genetically modified foods. What did I learn in a recent response to my question? There is currently one ongoing research project on a topic related to genetically modified foods with a planned expenditure in 1999-2000 of \$166,389. There is no secret around the fact that the government has neither the capacity nor the will to do the ongoing research that is required.

Finally I want to say that no one in the debate has ever questioned the fact that there are benefits in terms of biotechnology. We are bringing to this discussion the issue of human safety and the right for consumers to know. What we are proposing today is very clearly a process that will allow individuals to know what they are eating and to make decisions based on the knowledge they are able to acquire.

We would like to go beyond that. Hopefully there will be time for another debate in the future to get the government to be more proactive and not to be bound so much by the needs of industry. It

should not restrict its actions to blue ribbon committees which are very closely tied to the industry and not linked to consumer groups. We would like it to broaden the approach, be proactive on this issue, involve citizens and create exactly what I think every member of the House wants, which is a regulatory and policy framework that takes into account the impact on human health and the environment, and that it be done on the basis of ethical determinations that are agreed to by all Canadians. I do not think that is unreasonable.

• (1925)

As a final comment, I want to put on the record some thoughts from the New Democratic Party in terms of where we would like to see the government go with respect to biotechnology.

We have said that biotechnology as applied to food production is poised to expand significantly in the next millennium. That is no surprise to anyone. That is why we are having this debate today.

We have said that agricultural biotechnology contains both the promise of increasing production and adding value to agriculture, but also poses potential risks to production patterns, food safety and the environment.

We have said, and it is intrinsic to this whole debate, that preserving the health and safety of Canadians should be given the highest priority in evaluating and regulating new technologies in food production. This safety should be determined through science based decision making and independent sources of information.

We bring to this debate the sense from Canadians that they have grave concerns over the safety of genetically modified foods but lack the means to identify those products and make an informed choice about their purchase and consumption.

Those are the concerns that we bring to this Chamber and hope they form the basis for government action.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired. Since the motion was not selected as a votable item, the item is dropped from the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

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

Adjournment Debate

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Dennis Gruending (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak this evening about the importation of toxic waste into Canada.

The House may recall that Canadians were stunned about a month ago when they learned that 90 tonnes of toxic waste from an American military base in Japan was bound for Canada. In fact, this shipment of PCBs was on a boat bound for Vancouver. From there, this waste was to be shipped across the country to northern Ontario where it was going to be concentrated and then shipped back across the country to Alberta to be burned. It is really quite remarkable that this material was going to be shipped back and forth across the country and it was not even produced in Canada.

Canadians were shocked to learn that their health was going to be put at risk to take care of someone else's toxic waste, in addition to the fact that tonnes of toxic waste of our own, PCBs for example, sit untreated at thousands of storage sites.

It is quite clear that Canadians do not want their country turned into someone else's toxic waste dump. Yet, we are importing this waste more quickly than we can take care of of the waste we produce ourselves. We should not be importing toxic waste.

The Americans have refused to import PCBs from other countries and I believe Canadians should be worthy of the same protection. The government is not taking the necessary measures to ensure that the importation of toxic wastes into Canada, whether it be PCBs or others, is legal.

There has been a new development on this front. Yesterday a report was released by the commissioner for the Environment and Sustainable Development. He had some startling things to say. I will quote briefly from the report. It says:

There is still a problem in detecting hazardous waste illegally entering or leaving Canada. The extent of possible damage to human health and the environment is unknown. As well, Canada does not know whether it is fulfilling its international obligations to prevent the illegal traffic of hazardous waste at the border. Enforcement continues to be a problem.

The environment commissioner is telling us that we do not know what is coming across our border. We are not looking for it, not finding it and not enforcing it. This is not the first time the commissioner has talked about this. A report in 1997 came to the same conclusions. Two years later he is looking at what improvements have been made. He has a report card and there are only a couple of check marks and many xs. He has failed the government on this one. He is saying that we do not know what is going on and we have to know.

Adjournment Debate

Three years after the auditor general told the government it was not protecting Canadians from illegal shipments of toxic waste, he is telling us that we are still not doing so.

• (1930)

We have signed the Basel Convention, but we still refuse to get serious about ending the global trade in toxic waste. This government refuses to sign a sidebar to that agreement which would put an end to the deadly practice.

What has happened to date on the whole subject of toxic waste is really quite startling, it is quite frightening and it is just not good enough. The kind of crisis management we have seen on this issue is no substitute for good regulation and good administration. Canadians are not getting that today.

The report from the independent Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development proves that. It is not simply things that the opposition parties are saying. The government's own watchdog is blowing the whistle.

I could go into more detail about the government's sorry record on the environment, but I do not have the time to do that. This is simply one more case where Canadians are being let down when it comes to environmental and health protection.

Ms. Paddy Torsney (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that the shipment of waste containing PCBs from U.S. military bases was not in fact off-loaded in Vancouver, but went on its way back to Japan.

We are pleased that the U.S. government has taken responsibility to dispose of this cargo outside Canada. Throughout we have maintained and continue to maintain that the cargo and its disposal are the responsibility of the U.S. department of defence and Trans-Cycle Industries. As a result of this incident we have asked the U.S. department of defence to inform us in advance of any shipments of PCB contaminated waste intended for Canada, no matter what the PCB concentration.

We would ensure that our obligations under the Basel Convention and all federal and provincial regulations were complied with before any decision on allowing such a shipment would be rendered. Under our regulations Canada ensures that hazardous waste imports and exports are handled in a manner that protects the environment and human health.

The new CEPA provides enhanced authority to control imports and exports of hazardous waste. We will continue to introduce new regulations to implement specific criteria to assess the environmental soundness of proposed imports and will refuse any import if these criteria are not met. The criteria will be developed in

co-operation with the provinces and other stakeholders and will take into account the guidelines developed under the Basel Convention and the controls applied by the U.S.

We will continue to honour all of our international obligations and will take steps to continuously improve the standards for hazardous waste, whether these wastes are domestic or international in origin.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to the issue of employment insurance.

In March the Minister of Human Resources Development tabled a report which showed that only 30% of unemployed women qualify for EI benefits. At the same time the Prime Minister and the Liberal caucus from the Atlantic provinces called for changes to the unemployment insurance system so as to ensure more seats for this federal Liberal government in Atlantic Canada.

It is rather clear that the government recognized there were problems with the EI system.

The government recently made changes to EI in order to reduce unemployment rates in the country. The problem is that it did nothing to actually reduce the number of unemployed in Canada. The government is simply playing a shell game with Canadians. It is easy to fool people with numbers.

In order to address the growing unemployment rate in Canada the government redrew the boundaries for EI economic regions. In Nova Scotia, for example, there are currently five regions and soon there will only be three. With the old boundary system, Cape Breton Island was in its own region with Guysborough County. Now Cape Breton has been lumped in with an even larger part of the region, all the way to Halifax County. This new boundary reduces the unemployment rate for Cape Bretoners and, in doing so, reduces the benefits which Cape Bretoners can receive. This was just another devastating blow from the government.

We all know that the numbers used for the unemployment rate do not reflect the reality of unemployment across the country. I know for a fact that on Cape Breton Island the unemployment rate is incredibly high. In some areas it is as high as 50%.

It is a real shame that this could happen only a few short weeks after the House adopted a motion introduced by my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst and seconded by myself which called on the House to restore EI benefits to seasonal workers. The motion set out to urge the House to undo the damage that was done back in 1996. Now what do we get? Even more damage.

Adjournment Debate

• (1935)

The federal Liberal government has destroyed the fish. It is presently in the midst of destroying the coal industry. This is all due to the mismanagement of our resources by the Liberal government. What do Cape Bretoners get in return? Less access to EI than they had before.

The devastation is even worse for women. As I said earlier, only 30% of unemployed women qualify for EI benefits. If we turn the numbers around it means that 70% of unemployed women do not qualify for EI benefits.

How is this possible? The finance minister is praising the so-called wonderful surplus budget. He also tells us how great the economy is. If the economy is so great, why is there still so much economic devastation? Why do women have to pay such a high cost?

The government has acknowledged that the EI system does not treat women fairly. Why can the government not address the issue by taking a step forward rather than taking two steps back? Why will the government not do something for Canadian women? It knows its own programs have shown discrimination as they relate to Canadian women, so my question is very simple. Why is the Liberal government refusing to do something about it?

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to respond to the charges laid by the member opposite, particularly the ones about the federal government destroying the fish in the fishery and destroying the coal industry. Even if the

federal government had the power to do such things, there is absolutely no logical reason why any government would set about to accomplish it.

The employment insurance reform she refers to cannot be looked at in isolation from what is happening in the economy and the labour market. The decline she referred to in regular claims by women reflects improvements in the labour market rather than changes to the rules. In fact, the unemployment rate for adult women is now at 5.8%, its lowest level since 1975. Perhaps that is one reason why the number of claims has lowered. Women have enjoyed the best job growth in a decade at 3.2% per year. Furthermore, strong employment growth means fewer claims and longer periods of employment for women.

EI also has features that are important to women such as the small weeks adjustment projects which provide workers in high unemployment regions such as Cape Breton with higher benefits. Women qualified for 61% of the claims under these projects. Also the family supplement for low income Canadians with children has been increased to nearly \$150 million. Six out of ten recipients of that program are women.

The government is working to ensure that all Canadians have access to jobs and to employment insurance when it is needed.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7.38 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, May 31, 2000

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Late Davie Fulton		Mr. Sauvageau	7278
Mr. McWhinney	7273	Ms. Robillard	7278
Terrorism		Mr. Sauvageau	7278
Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	7273	Mr. Gagliano	7278
National Cancer Survivor's Day		Health	
Mr. Pillitteri	7273	Mr. Blaikie	7278
World No-Tobacco Day		Mr. Rock	7278
Ms. Augustine	7273	Mr. Blaikie	7278
Canada at the Millennium		Mr. Rock	7278
Mr. Malhi	7274	Canadian Forces	
Terrorism		Mrs. Wayne	7278
Mr. White (North Vancouver)	7274	Mr. Eggleton	7279
Montreal's Irish Community		Mrs. Wayne	7279
Mr. Lavigne	7274	Mr. Eggleton	7279
World No-Tobacco Day		Human Resources Development	
Mr. Ménard	7274	Mr. Solberg	7279
Gasoline Pricing		Mrs. Stewart (Brant)	7279
Mr. St-Julien	7275	Mr. Solberg	7279
Terrorism		Mr. Solberg	7279
Mr. Strahl	7275	Mrs. Stewart (Brant)	7279
The Middle East		Canada Information Bureau	
Mr. Harb	7275	Mr. Lebel	7279
Workplace Safety		Mr. Gagliano	7279
Ms. Desjarlais	7275	Mr. Lebel	7280
The Late Maurice Richard		Mr. Gagliano	7280
Mrs. Guay	7276	Human Resources Development	
Fisheries		Mr. Penson	7280
Mr. Muise	7276	Ms. McLellan	7280
Human Resources Development		Mr. Penson	7280
Ms. Sgro	7276	Mrs. Stewart (Brant)	7280
		Canada Information Office	
		Mr. Bergeron	7280
		Mr. Gagliano	7280
		Mr. Bergeron	7280
		Mr. Gagliano	7281
		Cultural Heritage	
		Mr. White (North Vancouver)	7281
		Ms. Minna	7281
		Mr. White (North Vancouver)	7281
		Mr. White (North Vancouver)	7281
		Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	7281
		Privacy	
		Mrs. Venne	7281
		Mr. Cauchon	7281
		Community Futures Development Corporation	
		Mr. Harvard	7282
		Mr. Duhamel	7282
		Health	
		Mr. Scott (Skeena)	7282
		Mr. Rock	7282
		Mr. Scott (Skeena)	7282
		Mr. Rock	7282
		The Environment	
		Mr. Gruending	7282

Mr. Anderson	7282
Mr. Gruending	7283
Mr. Anderson	7283
Human Resources Development	
Mr. MacKay	7283
Mrs. Stewart (Brant)	7283
Mr. MacKay	7283
Ms. McLellan	7283
HIV/AIDS	
Mrs. Redman	7283
Ms. Minna	7283
Health	
Mr. Scott (Skeena)	7284
Mr. Rock	7284
Canada Information Bureau	
Mr. Gauthier	7284
Mr. Gagliano	7284
National Defence	
Mr. Earle	7284
Mr. Eggleton	7284
Justice	
Mr. MacKay	7284
Ms. McLellan	7284
Foreign Affairs	
Ms. Leung	7284
Mr. Axworthy	7285
Health	
Mr. Scott (Skeena)	7285
Mr. Rock	7285
Violence on Television	
Mr. Bigras	7285
Ms. Copps	7285
Canada Pension Plan	
Mr. Nystrom	7285
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	7285
Atlantic Sugar Refinery	
Mrs. Wayne	7285
Mr. Vanclief	7285
Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	7286

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Government Response to Petitions	
Mr. Lee	7286
Committees of the House	
Natural Resources and Government Operations	
Mr. Volpe	7286
Finance	
Mr. Bevilacqua	7286
Procedure and House Affairs	
Mr. Lee	7286
Motion	7286
(Motion agreed to)	7286
Petitions	
National Defence	
Mr. Caccia	7286

Marriage	
Mr. Reynolds	7286
Child Pornography	
Mr. Reynolds	7286
Canada Post Corporation	
Mrs. Guay	7287
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation	
Mr. Doyle	7287
Eritrea	
Mr. Gruending	7287
Immigration	
Mr. Harb	7287
Canada Post	
Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	7287
Marriage	
Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	7287
Oil Product Pricing	
Ms. Girard-Bujold	7287
Family Farms	
Ms. Whelan	7287
Taxation	
Mr. Ritz	7287
Gasoline Pricing	
Mr. Desrochers	7288
Rural Mail Couriers	
Mr. McGuire	7288
Child Pornography	
Mr. Lowther	7288
Canada Post Corporation	
Mr. Marchand	7288
The Debt	
Mr. Bevilacqua	7288
Employment Insurance	
Mr. Bevilacqua	7288
Taxation	
Mr. Bevilacqua	7288
Child Pornography	
Mr. Vellacott	7288
Marriage	
Mr. Vellacott	7288
Conscience Rights	
Mr. Vellacott	7288
Genetically Modified Organisms	
Ms. Alarie	7289
Abortion Statistics	
Mr. O'Reilly	7289
Human Resources Development	
Mr. Abbott	7289
CRTC	
Mr. O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	7289
Child Poverty	
Mr. O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	7289
Petroleum Product Pricing	
Mr. Cardin	7289
Dangerous Offenders	
Mr. Riis	7289
Gasoline Prices	
Mr. Riis	7289
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lee	7289

Motions for Papers	
Mr. Lee	7289
Transferred for debate	7290

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canada Labour Code	
Bill C-12. Third reading	7290
Mrs. Bradshaw	7290
Mr. Johnston	7292
Mrs. Guay	7294
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	7298
Mr. Perić	7301
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	7301
Mr. Doyle	7301
Mrs. Wayne	7302
Division on motion deferred	7304

Budget Implementation Act, 2000	
Bill C-32. Report stage	7304

Speaker's Ruling	
The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland)	7304

Motions in amendment	
Mr. Solberg	7304
Motions Nos. 1 and 2	7304
Mr. Kilger	7304
Mr. Solberg	7304
Mr. Brison	7306
Mr. Solberg	7306
Mr. Brison	7306
Mr. Solberg	7307
Mr. Cullen	7307

Canada Labour Code	
Bill C-12. Third reading	7308
Motion agreed to	7309
(Bill read the third time and passed)	7309

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

International Organizations	
Motion	7309

Amendment agreed to	7310
(Motion, as amended, agreed to)	7310

THE ROYAL ASSENT

The Deputy Speaker	7310
--------------------------	------

Message from the senate	
The Deputy Speaker	7310

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Genetically Modified Foods	
Ms. Wasylcyia-Leis	7310
Motion	7310

THE ROYAL ASSENT

The Deputy Speaker	7311
--------------------------	------

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Genetically Modified Foods	
Motion	7311
Ms. Wasylcyia-Leis	7311
Mr. McGuire	7313
Mr. Mills (Red Deer)	7314
Ms. Alarie	7316
Mr. Borotsik	7317
Ms. Torsney	7318
Mr. Borotsik	7318
Ms. Wasylcyia-Leis	7318

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

The Environment	
Mr. Gruending	7319
Ms. Torsney	7320

Employment Insurance	
Mrs. Dockrill	7320
Ms. Brown	7321

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation/Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

03159442

Ottawa

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:

Canadian Government Publishing,
45 Sacré-Coeur Boulevard,
Hull, Québec, Canada, K1A 0S9

En cas de non-livraison,

retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à:

Les Éditions du gouvernement du Canada,
45 boulevard Sacré-Coeur,
Hull, Québec, Canada, K1A 0S9

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le réseau électronique «Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire» à l'adresse suivante :
<http://wwwparl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Additional copies may be obtained from Canadian Government Publishing, Ottawa, Canada K1A 0S9

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les Éditions du gouvernement du Canada, Ottawa, Canada K1A 0S9

On peut obtenir la version française de cette publication en écrivant à : Les Éditions du gouvernement du Canada, Ottawa, Canada K1A 0S9