



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 6, 2001

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 6, 2001

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

INTEREST ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-223, an act to amend the Interest Act (interest payable on repayment of a mortgage loan before maturity).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill would ensure that everyone has a chance to repay a mortgage before the mortgage expires or before the maturity of that mortgage without an interest penalty, thereby putting into law what is only fair practice in financial institutions.

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

* * *

FAMILY FARM COST OF PRODUCTION PROTECTION ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-224, an act to provide cost of production protection for the family farm.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill would provide a guarantee that the farmers receive a price that reflects the cost of production for their products. It is similar in many ways to what the European countries, or indeed the United States, have for many of their products.

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

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INCOME TAX ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-225, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of expense of tools provided as a requirement of employment).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill would amend the Income Tax Act. It would provide for the very fair provision that mechanics should be able to deduct the cost of their tools when they have to purchase these tools for work purposes. Again, it is a bill that is based on equity for all Canadians.

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

* * *

BANK ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-226, an act to amend the Bank Act (bank mergers).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue. The bill would amend the Bank Act with regard to mergers among our big banks. It would allow mergers to take place on two conditions. The first would be that if one bank were to become insolvent then, of course, a merger could take place. The other condition would be that a merger applicant would be successful only if the application passes in the House of Commons by virtue of a resolution of the House of Commons, whereby we collectively make the decision, not the Minister of Finance.

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

* * *

PENSION OMBUDSMAN ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-227, an act to establish the office of Pension Ombudsman to investigate administrative difficulties encountered by persons in their dealings with government in respect of benefits under the Canada Pension Plan or the Old Age Security Act or tax liability on such benefits and to review the policies and practices applied in the administration and adjudication of such benefits and liabilities.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill has the purpose of creating the office of a pension ombudsman to deal with all the problems that people have with the Canada pension plan, the old age security act and pensions of that sort under federal jurisdiction. The powers of

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the office of an ombudsman would be in terms of the traditional powers those offices hold.

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

* * *

• (1010)

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-228, an act to amend the Canada Pension Plan (early pension entitlement for police officers and firefighters).

He said: Mr. Speaker, members are quite familiar with this bill. It would provide for the early retirement of firefighters and police officers because of the hazardous occupations in which they are involved.

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

* * *

FIRST NATIONS VETERANS COMPENSATION ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-229, an act to provide compensation to First Nations veterans on a comparable basis to that given to other war veterans.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill would attempt to right an historical wrong in the country. It would provide first nations veterans who fought in the first world war, the second world war and the Korean war, or their families, with four things: first, an apology; second, adequate compensation; third, a scholarship in their honour; and, fourth, a war memorial that is dedicated to their fighting for the country over the course of three different wars. I am sure all members of the House would support this bill.

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

* * *

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BANK OF CANADA ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-230, an act to amend the Business Development Bank of Canada Act and the Canada Student Loans Act to provide for a student loan system that is more supportive of students.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill would provide changes in legislation to make sure that students have a more reasonable interest rate for student loans and a more reasonable repayment rate that favours students rather than private financial institutions.

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

CREDIT OMBUDSMAN ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-231, an act to establish the office of Credit Ombudsman to be an advocate for the interests of consumers and small business in credit matters and to investigate and report on the provision by financial institutions of consumer and small business credit by community and by industry in order to ensure equity in the distribution of credit resources.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill would establish the office of a credit ombudsman to look at the problems that consumers and small businesses have with credit and to advocate on their behalf. The office would have the traditional powers of the office of an ombudsman.

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

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CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION ACT

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-232, an act respecting conscientious objection to the use of taxes for military purposes.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill would permit individuals who object on conscientious grounds to paying taxes that might be used for military purposes to direct that an amount equivalent to a prescribed percentage of the income tax they pay in a year be diverted to a special account established by this enactment. This account would direct funds toward peaceful purposes such as peace education, war relief, humanitarian and environmental projects.

The fund would be established in consultation with groups including: The Canadian Yearly Meeting—Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, the Canadian Conference of Mennonites; Conscience Canada Inc.; Mennonite Central Committee of Canada; and Nos impôts pour la paix.

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

* * *

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-233, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (withdrawal of applications for full parole by offenders serving two or more years).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Lethbridge for seconding this bill that would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

The present act not only permits offenders to make application for parole but allows them to withdraw their application at any time with little, if any, repercussion.

My amendments attempt to protect the taxpayer and the victims. Unless there are reasonable and valid grounds for withdrawal by the offender, the reapplication would be delayed for two years.

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

* * *

● (1015)

SUPREME COURT ACT

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-234, an act to amend the Supreme Court Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill would require the Supreme Court of Canada to hear from and consider the intentions of parliament when it considers charter challenges. Moreover, it would also require that in the event of a less than unanimous decision on a charter challenge, the supreme court's decision would not be considered binding other than to the case being heard at the time.

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

* * *

YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-235, an act to amend the Young Offenders Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Lethbridge for seconding this bill which would amend the Young Offenders Act to make the offence set out in section 7.2 a hybrid offence.

The bill was originally introduced in the last parliament as Bill C-260. The Minister of Justice recognized the value of the legislation as she incorporated it in its entirety in the failed Bill C-3 in the last parliament.

I am endeavouring again to introduce this amendment to the Young Offenders Act that is in currently in force since we have no new legislation yet approved.

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

* * *

HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS ACT

Mr. John McKay (Scarborough East, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-236, an act to amend the Hazardous Products Act (fire-safe cigarettes).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Sydney—Victoria for seconding the motion. The bill would force cigarette companies

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to make fire safe cigarettes. If we could save a dozen lives a year, we would do so. If we could save 100 injuries a year, we would do so. If we could save millions of dollars in property damage, we would do so.

Cigarette companies have known how to make fire-safe cigarettes for years but have failed to do so. The proposed bill would remedy that situation. I hope to solicit the support of all members.

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

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DIVORCE ACT

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-237, an act to amend the Divorce Act (joint custody).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill is to ensure that the courts grant custody of a child to both parents unless there exists evidence that to do so would not be in the best interests of the child. Automatic joint custody could reduce the number of parents forced to go to court to gain access to their kids, increase the likelihood of support payment compliance and reduce the likelihood of one parent denying the right of the other to see the children.

The report of the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access recommended two years ago that joint parenting be included in new legislation but the justice minister has yet to do so.

Children have waited long enough.

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

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CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-238, an act to amend the Criminal Code (conditional sentencing).

He said: Mr. Speaker, conditional sentencing was introduced in the 35th parliament as Bill C-41. Since that time, tens of thousands of conditional sentences have been handed down. Most of these sentences are for petty crimes. However, many have been handed down for crimes as serious as sexual assault, manslaughter, drunk driving and drug trafficking.

In 1997 the British Columbia Court of Appeal stated in a decision regarding conditional sentencing that "if parliament had intended to exclude certain offences from consideration, it should have done so in clear language".

The Address

My bill does precisely that. It lists the offences to be excluded from any possibility of receiving a conditional sentence.

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

* * *

• (1020)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-239, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Young Offenders Act (capital punishment).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I believe Canada should hold a binding referendum on capital punishment so that all the Canadian people, and not political parties, can decide whether or not it should be reinstated. An Alliance government has pledged to do this, however the Liberals do not believe in allowing Canadians to exercise this power.

Today I am reintroducing the bill to reinstate the death penalty for adults convicted of first degree murder. In addition, the bill also imposes a range of stiffer penalties for youths convicted of murder.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-240, an act to amend the Criminal Code (prohibiting certain offenders from changing their name).

He said: Mr. Speaker, once again I am introducing legislation in the House of Commons which would, if adopted, prevent serious offenders from changing their names while incarcerated. It must be a right of Canadians to know who is residing in and around their homes if one of these persons is a convicted killer or serious sex offender.

Currently incarcerated inmates are able to apply for and receive changes of names, changes of drivers' licences and other documents. When on parole or released, they can slip into any neighbourhood while an innocent, unsuspecting public believes all is well. I am personally aware of serious sex offenders who have changed their names and even admitted they were a danger to the public when they were released.

We cannot wait for offenders who have hidden their identity to reoffend and then say we have made mistakes. We have an obligation to protect the public.

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

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from February 2 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session and of the amendment.

Mr. Reg Alcock (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my remarks, I would like to note that I am splitting my time with the member from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik.

I also wish to mark the passing of a colleague of ours, a former member of the House, Mr. David Iftody, who died suddenly last night. He will be missed.

As this is the first time I have had an opportunity to speak in the House since the election, I will begin by thanking my constituents who have demonstrated their faith in me for the third time. I am honoured by their support and I pledge, as I have always done, my efforts to serve them to the best of my ability.

I also want to thank my wife and family. I am blessed with three wonderful children and a wife who takes on a lot of extra responsibilities so that I may be here. She gives up a lot and I really appreciate her efforts.

I also want to thank my many friends and volunteers who worked so hard for my re-election and worked with me throughout the intervening years to serve the people of Winnipeg South.

Finally, I want to thank my staff who I believe are among the best in Canada and who work very hard for very poor pay, very limited remuneration and do an excellent job.

I want to welcome the new members. I also want to welcome you, Mr. Speaker, as Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees of the Whole. We have a new Clerk but I think we have the same table officers returning.

The Address

I also want to thank all of the people around the Hill who work unseen by us to make our lives so much easier, whether it is the drivers, the security guards who are always so friendly and helpful, the people who clean our offices, the *Hansard* staff and an enormous number of people who toil day in and day out so that we may do the work that we are here to do. They do not often get the recognition they deserve.

Since I have very limited time, I want to simply highlight a few things. I was very disappointed in the way this campaign evolved in the last election.

● (1025)

I hold the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party responsible for starting it. We all launched into what was a very bitter and personal campaign. As a result, I think the Canadian people lost an opportunity through that process to hear us debate some of the things we debate all the time around here. They lost an opportunity to hear some discussion of ideas to improve the country. We lost a lot in that.

There were a few things our party put forward that were exceptional. As a person who represents a suburban riding in the south end of Winnipeg and a university, there were a couple of things that went entirely unnoticed in the Speech from the Throne that are enormously exciting and important for our country.

We made a commitment, and it was repeated by the Prime Minister, to make Canada among the top five countries in the world in investments in R and D by the year 2010. That is a staggeringly important announcement, not just for the research community but for our entire quality of life. The government made that commitment and I am enormously proud of it.

We also made a commitment to bring broadband access to all homes by 2004. I am sure a lot of people do not know what that means. It is an enormously important commitment, one that says we will all have high speed broadband, wideband access to our homes.

Everyone talks about getting television on their computers. That is a very small part of what it means. It means having the power to drive the kind of interfaces needed in order to have user friendly access so we can take advantage of the services which can be made available with the new information and technologies. It means we can literally talk to our television sets and order whatever we want by voice. It means my mother and grandmother can interact with the technology. It is shatteringly important and I am surprised we made it. It will take a lot of effort to get there.

I represent the University of Manitoba, one of the best universities in the world and certainly an important resource in my community. There are commitments around research and development, broadband access and registered learning accounts.

We talked about this as being the knowledge economy and the need for lifelong learning. The government has now put its resources behind that. We are giving people an opportunity to retrain, build their skills and invest in their own futures. It is an incredibly important initiative and one that I am sorry was not debated more wholesomely during the election.

I will focus on one set of issues because I have such limited time. Each time I run for election I come back here and set my own agenda in addition to the ones that I have committed to with my constituents during the campaign. We have some local infrastructure, an underpass and urban transit that we are going to work on. I see that reflected in the Speech from the Throne.

My big passion is the whole business of what is euphemistically called e-government, the adaptation by government of the information and communications technologies that have become so pervasive in the private sector. Either Gates or Michael Dell said that the Internet changes everything. We are just beginning to realize how true that is and what a profound change is going on.

If we look back at what has happened in the private sector with large corporations and all the talk about downsizing, rightsizing, flattening, speeding up and the customer is king, all the stuff that has taken place in the last decade and a half, there have been enormous and profound changes in the way businesses do business. The world has speeded up. Bill Gates calls this decade the decade of velocity. The skill necessary now is how to deal in a world that is moving faster and faster. Government will have to get there and learn how to live in that world.

Whether we want to or not, we are going to evolve from a structure of government that is hierarchical and based on traditional methods of accountability and department structure into a more network form of government. We are interacting on a very immediate basis with the levels of government and citizens in ways that are just unprecedented. We have to get our heads around that and start thinking about what this means for our role.

If we change the structure and operations of government we cannot help but affect the accountability mechanisms, the governance. We cannot change the way in which information flows in a government and not affect the way that decisions are made.

● (1030)

I do not have a particular passion for parliamentary reform. It is not the thing that drives me. However I see some portions of parliamentary reform as being critically important to advance the rate at which we adapt new technologies and the way in which our government will change.

It is important that Canada lead that change. We go back and forth in that leadership position around the world, but other

The Address

governments in the industrialized world such as Japan and Australia are making some important strides right now.

I want to sound a note of caution. There is a commitment in the Speech from the Throne to bring forward a review and a redrafting of the existing privacy legislation. This will be a critically important debate, one to which we need to pay a lot of attention and one that I am concerned about.

Privacy is a right. It is not just a right in the charter but it is a right that the supreme court has read into the charter. It is a right that we all exercise. I am a little tired of people talking about customers, that we will move to a customer style of government. This is nonsense.

It has been tried around the world. It has failed all over the place because it fails to recognize the fact that I may be a customer of government in a few transactions but I am a citizen of Canada all the time and as a citizen I have rights. The government is accountable to me as a citizen. One of the ways I exercise that right is in the way it respects me and the way it treats the information that it has about me.

At the same time there are huge values to be gained as a citizen by allowing the government to accumulate information to better serve me and to better understand how government functions and how society functions.

At the heart of that is privacy legislation. Currently it is being worked on by a committee of bureaucrats. I am sure they are bright and beautiful people. However this is a bill that must be crafted on the floor of the Chamber by all of us. This is a bill that concerns the rights of all of us. It is something that we must be very involved in. We cannot let it go through the House simply because it has received the stamp of approval of the executive.

In conclusion, I wish all members well. I think it will be an extremely interesting few years in which we can make some major improvements.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague's speech very carefully. I certainly agreed with him when he talked about how unfortunate it was that the election campaign was very vicious and dirty. Probably members from all parties would agree with that. I noted that he singled out one or two people as deserving some criticism in that regard.

I remind the hon. member with all due respect that his leader, the Prime Minister of Canada, who at the start of the election campaign referred to my party, the Canadian Alliance, as the forces of darkness. That kicked off the campaign and started us down the road of everybody tearing at each other.

All Canadians were absolutely embarrassed for the Prime Minister in the dying days of the campaign when he was in Atlantic

Canada. He referred to the fact that he liked to do politics in the east because he did not understand westerners. I think he said they were different. Then he said that he was kidding and then that he was actually serious.

Did the hon. member make a note of that fact? Has he had a chance to talk to his leader to find out whether the Prime Minister was kidding or was he serious in the way he feels about westerners?

Mr. Reg Alcock: Mr. Speaker, I will resist the urge to play with this response. I have never been embarrassed by the Prime Minister, and I am a westerner. The things that I talked about in my speech, which I think are so important to the future of this country, are there because of the Prime Minister's willingness to listen and work on these issues.

• (1035)

I did single out one party. It is possible for us to constantly spend our time in this Chamber looking at that little phrase that each one of us will misspeak at some time or another and pounce on it saying that this is what we mean. The reason I singled out the leader of the Conservative Party was that was the first set of deliberate insults and deliberate fabrications that were put on public record in the first set of ads. I think that is different from debate where we get into pulling out those little twists.

I recently wrote a paper on communication. It is very difficult for us, as politicians, to communicate because we are so used to listening to a person on the other side just long enough to find that phrase that we can flip back at them in order to discredit what they are saying. We do not listen to what they are talking about and that soon becomes the way we function. We never really hear what we are saying.

I dismiss that part of the debate. However, I do think there were some deliberate acts that did not serve all of us very well. There has been a concern about the drop in voter turnout, but I think that has less to do with disinterest on the part of Canadians and more to do with disgust in this last process.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to the speech by my colleague, particularly the matter of electronic government. We do have at our disposal an extraordinary new tool in the new technologies and the Internet, but this is a tool that can have both positive and negative effects.

We see what I would term the pre-generation of what the federal government is doing with these tools, for example the HRDC scandal and the cross-referencing with Revenue Canada of data on unemployed travellers, without any prior authorization.

I know the hon. member was on a fact-finding tour across Canada on this and there will be a Canada-wide conference. I

The Address

would like to know from the hon. member if our duty as parliamentarians is to act as true watchdogs in order to ensure that these tools do not merely become tools of the high bureaucracy in order to control the system, and to ensure that democracy gains from them, rather than losing?

[*English*]

Mr. Reg Alcock: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his interest and his assistance to us in meetings with the Quebec government on this very important issue.

Value will come from the ability to accumulate data. What HRD did is something that we would like to see happen again. We want to put proper safeguards and controls in place so that people understand what is happening and have the right to interact. However the member is absolutely right to identify it as an important issue. It is critical that all members of the House get involved in this debate in the next couple of years. If they want to learn about it, they can attend a conference at the end of March.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, allow me to congratulate you on your appointment. I would also like to congratulate you and your family, especially your son Chad Kilger, who plays for the Montreal Canadians and was yesterday selected his club's player of the month for the province of Quebec and Canada,

I would like to thank those who re-elected me this past November 27. We had a good campaign. The riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik is, I would remind hon. members, the biggest riding in all of Canada. It extends over more than 800,000 square kilometres and has a population of 100,000.

I dedicated this election to my wife, Diane St-Julien, who has been following me and helping me through the last three mandates and who will continue to do so in this one. I also thank my daughter, Sonya-Kim St-Julien, who, for the last four elections, has been giving me advice on communications.

I wish to thank the voters of the large riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik for giving me a fourth majority, in all of the riding's 68 polls. My hometown is the municipality of Val-d'Or, but I also represent a community located in Nunavik, 2,000 kilometres north of it, called Salluit.

I thank the Inuit from Nunavik, the Cree from James Bay, the Algonquin, the Algonquin communities and the other residents of my riding for this great victory, and particularly thanks to our leader, the Prime Minister of Canada and Liberal member for Saint-Maurice.

• (1040)

In the throne speech, we were told that a better future awaits us. We must put forward a project that will not leave anyone behind.

Above all, we must set priorities and draft a specific plan. This is what was done in the red book during the last election campaign.

We realize that, during an election campaign, we must face a number of political parties. A 30 day election campaign is fair ball. There are pros and cons. Some people have claimed that my election on June 2, 1997, was a historical aberration. This is not so: it was my mother's birthday on that day.

The member who claimed that there was a historical aberration the day of my election has seen that we have fixed that aberration, as I was re-elected on November 27. All of that to say that the member who made the statement in my riding was wrong again.

In any case, what are we concerned about today? The specific plan of the Liberal government, with our Prime Minister at its head and the new options available to us, be they innovation, learning skills, connecting Canadians or trade and investment.

The Liberal government is providing prospects for children, families, health and quality care, a healthy environment, strong and safe communities, a dynamic Canadian culture and most importantly new windows of opportunity for us internationally.

In a large riding such as Abitibi, we are concerned with the price of metals in the mining sector. We have gold, copper, palladium and vanadium. There has been a price war for the past three years. The price of gold was always pegged at under \$300 and rose above it only once. Cambior, a company recognized worldwide, got it because gold was sold on option.

The throne speech calls for building our health care system. Last September, in an effort to modernize our system, the Liberal government gave the provinces an extra \$21.2 billion over five years. At issue is better meeting the needs of Canadians. This is a priority, which received much attention during the election, and today we hear mention of it again.

What is important? Not treating people in hospital as clients. Those sick in hospital must be treated as human beings. Together with the provinces, we must find solutions. That is what is important.

In addition, we must give thought to creating a registered individual learning account for employees, help Canadians establish a training plan and find the necessary funding. For those aged 45 to 50 who have lost their job, new ways must be found to enable them to return to the labour market.

What is important in recent years is that our government, with its expertise, has run this country with all members of the House and has paid down the debt, given fair tax breaks, and invested in health, in research and innovation, in families and children and in the protection of the environment.

The Address

On the topic of research and innovation, we know that in a remote area such as Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, considerable money is needed to help universities and cegeps. The rector of the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, in Rouyn-Noranda, has submitted projects involving primarily forestry in the Amos region. For Val-d'Or, the focus was on underground communications and multimedia, and for Rouyn-Noranda, on various other areas.

The important thing is that we need this money to boost research, particularly in a riding where natural resources are so important, whether in mining or forestry. We have trouble getting secondary and tertiary manufacturing going.

Be that as it may, in the coming months and years we will improve prospects for people in our region. The government will work closely with the private sector to offer broadband high speed access to citizens, businesses, educational institutions and all communities, particularly in a region such as ours, which takes in northern Quebec, Nunavik and James Bay.

The government plans to introduce communications. Recently, we have seen Bell Canada double its telecommunication rates in Nunavik. Why? The company told the Inuit and those working in this sector that, now that too many people were using the Internet, it would double their rates in order to lower rates for Internet users.

● (1045)

That is a good one on Bell Canada. It is doing a great deal of harm in Nunavik, and the people do not find it amusing, since they are the ones having to pay.

It is also important for new approaches to be found. I strongly believe that the government, via the minister responsible for the economic development of Quebec or via Industry Canada, is going to put new methods into place to help northern Quebec, James Bay and Nunavik.

What is important in our area is health, quality health care in particular. We know that we need to work hard in conjunction with the governments, the government of Quebec in particular, to find physicians. We also need to improve the situation of hospitals and to add to the numbers of nurses in a region as large as ours.

We must speak of Nunavik, because it must be kept in mind that the Inuit pay taxes just like southerners do. Recently I spoke with the President of Makivik corporation, Mr. Pita Aatami. He said that new ways must be found to help the hospitals administered by Kativik corporation, by the Nunavik health board, and improvements must be made in order to attract nurses.

What is important is to work very hard in this House in order to be accountable to the taxpayers, to the people in that great riding, to

Quebec and to Canada. We must plan in order to reduce taxes, move toward a new economy and strengthen our communities.

[English]

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is interested in the country's current equalization formula because he is from Quebec and Quebec is a recipient of equalization payments. The current equalization formula keeps a province from drowning but falls far short in that it never gives a province the wherewithal to swim on its own.

As a member from Quebec, a province that receives equalization payments, how would he feel about a change in the current equalization formula to recognize that some provinces need a leg up to develop their natural resources?

[Translation]

Mr. Guy St-Julien: Mr. Speaker, this is an excellent question. In Quebec, we have equalization payments and tax points. Also, we must file two tax returns, a provincial one and a federal one. Transfers will always be an issue. Let us not forget that under the equalization program there are rich provinces and poor provinces.

For a number of years, even Quebec had a deficit in the employment insurance sector of some three or four billion dollars. Who helped us? It was the other provinces. There is always room for improvement of the equalization program, but always in co-operation with the current government of Quebec.

We know the Quebec Liberal Party, through the Hon. Jean Charest, made proposals regarding equalization and the handing over of tax points to the province. We are waiting to see what will come out of these proposals.

Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member if he is aware of the impact on his riding of the changes to the employment insurance program. I am convinced that he is pleased to see that the government has already introduced the new employment insurance bill. I would like to know the impact of these changes on his riding.

Mr. Guy St-Julien: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member. Employment insurance is indeed an important issue in my region. Seasonal workers in a large ridings such as ours are like those from the Atlantic region, whether they work in mining or several other industries.

Bill C-2 has been introduced. There is always room for improvement.

● (1050)

We know that the standards come from a committee of the commission, which comprises management and unionized employees.

What is important? Finding the right solutions. Requests come into my office either from Laurier Gilbert, from Val d'Or, or the Regroupement des chômeurs et chômeuses, wanting to appear before the standing committee.

It is also important to look at both sides of the coin. A few years ago there were people using unemployment insurance in the last four months of the year, because during the year they had earned their full salary on Saturdays and Sundays earning double time and double time and a half. When they saw they were going to pay too much income tax, they went on unemployment. It was very easy to do so back then.

There are employers back home who say to me "With the new reform, we get more". Back home, Bélanger Électrique said "I am happy with this, because the electricians come to us. Before we never saw them in construction". The same is true for PLC in Senneterre, which does not have mechanics any more. The mechanics went off for three months. We knew it, it was not a secret, some of them went off hunting and fishing and so on over the holidays.

The system has to be improved and together, before the standing committee, we will find solutions. Together with the government in office is the way to improve things for people. In any case, what counts is keeping permanent jobs.

[*English*]

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I know the House will join with me in offering congratulations to you on your position. We all know that the House is in very good hands. I will be splitting my time with the member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

I want to take this opportunity to offer my sincere thanks to the people of the riding of Medicine Hat who once again elected me to be their representative in Ottawa. It is really a great honour. I also want to say a special thanks to my family: to my wife Deb and my boys, Matthew and Michael, without whose indulgence it would be impossible to do this job.

I am the foreign affairs critic for the Canadian Alliance. My job is to scrutinize the government's foreign policy and to offer suggestions on how it might be strengthened.

Today I have just 10 minutes to speak, so an entire survey of the government's foreign policy is not possible. I will focus therefore on what I believe to be the most important aspect of our foreign policy, the complex relationship between Canada and the United States.

The Address

Specifically I wish to offer ways to strengthen that relationship. First must come a change in attitude. We need to remind ourselves that every single Canadian benefits from our relationship with the United States, and not just a little.

Over 40% of Canada's annual wealth is generated by trade, and 80% of that trade is with the United States, a \$10 trillion economy. In other words, trade with the U.S. accounts for about a third of all the wealth generated in our country every year.

One could imagine the unemployment and cuts to government services if that wonderful relationship suddenly ended. A strong relationship with the United States is very much in Canada's economic interests.

Some people are anxious knowing that President Bush will make his first foreign trip to Mexico instead of to Canada. They are worried that Mexico will soon eclipse Canada as America's biggest trading partner.

I am not troubled per se by Mexico building a stronger relationship with the United States. More U.S. trade with Mexico does not necessarily mean less U.S. trade with Canada.

The relationship between Mexico and the United States is probably underdeveloped and, in my opinion, very much to the detriment of the Mexican people. I hope both sides of that relationship prosper because the wealthier they become the greater the opportunities for Canada.

What troubles me even more is the cavalier and even hostile attitude some of the Liberals betray toward the long, deep friendship between Canada and the United States.

More trade between the United States and Mexico is not a threat to Canada's interests. Undermining, snubbing or picking fights with the U.S. is a threat to our interests. Nothing can be gained but much can be lost when prominent members of the government go out of their way to tweak the noses of the Americans.

Examples abound. Consider Raymond Chrétien, former Canadian ambassador to the U.S., and his embarrassing statements last spring. The ambassador said publicly that the Liberal government favoured candidate Gore over candidate Bush in the U.S. presidential election.

Imagine the outcry if that had happened the other way around, if an American official had consciously interfered in a Canadian election. Thank goodness the Americans mostly ignored the government's disregard of the tradition of non-interference in domestic politics.

The Address

• (1055)

A second example occurred in 1999. A suspected Algerian terrorist making his way from Canada into the United States was picked up with bomb making equipment in the trunk of his car.

CSIS, our intelligence agency, reports that it is monitoring 50 terrorist organizations that currently operate in Canada. The Liberal government still largely ignores these U.S. concerns, to the point where Liberal cabinet ministers, such as the finance minister, have defended attending a fundraising dinner in Toronto for a group that CSIS and the U.S. state department have identified as a front for a terrorist organization.

A third example occurred just recently. Our current foreign affairs minister, regarding the U.S. proposal for a missile shield, made the amazing announcement that if President Bush satisfies the concerns of the Russians and the Chinese then Canada will be satisfied as well.

When did we decide that Canada's foreign policy would be driven by the wants of the Russians and the Chinese? I think that is absolutely ludicrous.

Perhaps the minister needs to be reminded that we are an ally of the United States, not Russia and China. Perhaps he should recall that Canada and the U.S. are committed to mutual defence through NATO and NORAD. Perhaps he needs to recall that the likely scenario would be a missile coming from across the Pacific toward North America with the idea being that the U.S. missile shield would be in place to shoot it down before it reached North America, something that is definitely in the interest of Canada.

To be sure, questions remain about the effectiveness of that shield, but it is irresponsible for the minister to dismiss it out of hand while casting his lot with the Russians and Chinese.

In reviewing the recent record, President Bush might be forgiven for wondering whether Canada is still the trusted ally that it once was.

We must do more than quit annoying the Americans and undermining our relationship. We must put greater effort and resources into building and improving that relationship. Why should we do that? We should do it because it is in the interests of Canada. Even a small percentage of increases in exports to the United States would result in thousands of new Canadian jobs.

However, the Prime Minister and the Department of Foreign Affairs would much rather talk about their elaborate efforts to promote trade with China and Cuba. This is a little more than ironic because Canada's exports to China have gone down by about \$800 million since the first trade Canada mission a few years ago.

Meanwhile, our yearly trade with Cuba is \$500 million dollars. We do more trade with the United States in half a day than we do with Cuba in the entire year. The United States, moreover, is not a notorious human rights abuser like both China and Cuba.

We need to do much better. First, we should start by forging much stronger relationships with the Bush administration, congress and senators. We also need a new initiative to get to know governors and legislators because they are often the first to raise issues which can sometimes become full blown trade disputes.

Second, we need to rebuild our military to more properly fulfil our NATO and NORAD commitments. A strong and independent foreign policy requires a strong military behind it.

Third, we need to crack down on terrorist organizations operating within Canada, not just for our own safety, which is reason enough, but also so the Americans will ease up on the restrictions at the Canada-U.S. border that impede trade and hurts the prosperity of Canadians.

We need to show respect for American concerns if we want them to respect ours. Nobody doubts that Canada should practice an independent foreign policy but not one driven by knee-jerk anti-Americanism.

The guiding principle of foreign policy should be the deliberate, methodical pursuit of outcomes that are directly beneficial to Canada. In other words, sometimes we will agree with the Americans because it is in our economic or security interests to do so. Other times we will disagree, as we have on softwood lumber or Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, again because it is in our interest to do so.

It is an approach that we have used in the past to build our reputations as respected, fair and independent players on the world stage.

• (1100)

In conclusion, I urge the government to pay closer attention to the critically important relationship with America. In war and in peace we have worked together to our mutual benefit. A new administration in Washington means a new chance to build on that relationship, but it requires a new Canadian attitude free of the defensiveness that the current Liberal government has so frequently displayed. What we need is a tough minded, determined and respectful approach driven by the interests of the Canadian people.

Mr. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the remarks of the member for Medicine Hat with interest. I have two questions for him.

First, he said that the Alliance Party has a different view from that of the government about the softwood lumber dispute. I am wondering what its position might be.

Five years ago the forest industry pleaded and begged the government for the quota system to manage trade so that they could get five years of trade peace. In hindsight perhaps it has not worked, but it was on the basis of the industry's recommendation that the government proceeded to manage trade. Now there is talk

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about free trade in lumber. What is the Alliance's position on softwood lumber?

Second, the member referred to the social dinner with the Tamil community in Toronto, a cultural dinner. I think it was \$25 a head, hardly a big fundraiser. I was there with two ministers. He talks about the Tamil community and sponsoring tourist activities in Sri Lanka. What about other communities that are illegally sending money back to their home countries to help causes? Why is he singling out the Tamil community? Has he some information that the government does not have?

Mr. Monte Solberg: Mr. Speaker, let me answer those questions in reverse order. I simply point to the CSIS website, Canada's own intelligence agency, which raises the red flag about the particular group that sponsored the dinner the finance minister and the member attended.

This is not information that we exclusively have. If he would consult his own government then he would find out that there are concerns about this group. It is not the Tamil community in general; it is this group. I want to make that very clear.

I do not think it is correct for the member across the way to misrepresent our position. He has asked for our position on the issue of softwood lumber. Our position is that we would like to have free trade with the United States in softwood lumber.

The real question is what is the government's position. We have the industry minister saying "I think the renewal of the existing agreement is something that will be part of the mix when we sit down at the table". He says that we should renew the softwood lumber deal, even though the industry does not want it. The industry is opposed to it but the industry minister wants to do it.

Meanwhile, the international trade minister says something different again. Perhaps the member's question should go to his own ministers. Then he could find out the government's position from them.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member for Medicine Hat that we need a stronger military in terms of Sea King replacements, money and compensation benefits for the valiant men and women in our armed forces.

The feeling that I am getting on this side of the fence is that a while ago they argued to put Canadian flags on their desks and now it sounds as if they want to put U.S. flags on their desks. It is obvious by his comments that Alliance members will support the nuclear missile defence shield which leads us all down the path to nuclear madness.

It is also quite obvious by his comments that the Americans plan to open up the Alaskan oil reserves in Alaska and on the east coast. President Bush also indicated a year ago that he would lift the moratorium on the Georges Bank on which Canada has placed a 12 year moratorium.

Would the member support the lifting of the Alaskan oil reserve, which has a great effect on our aboriginal people, on the porcupine caribou herd and on our fishing communities, if the moratorium is lifted off the Georges Bank?

Mr. Monte Solberg: Mr. Speaker, the position of the Canadian Alliance with respect to all these issues is that we will do what is in Canada's interest. Because I have not attacked the United States, my friend has suggested that means we would put American flags on our desks. It is quite the contrary. We want to do what is in the best interest of Canada.

Sometimes that means agreeing with the Americans. Sometimes it means taking the opposite position, such as we are doing on softwood lumber. I think that is entirely appropriate.

• (1105)

In answer to the question, when the issues become completely clear, the issues of missile defence, of opening up the refuge in Alaska and other such issues, the Canadian Alliance will take a position that favours the interests of Canadians. However, it will not be the knee-jerk anti-Americanism which unfortunately characterizes so much of the rhetoric of the NDP.

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this is my first time to speak during the new session. I congratulate you on occupying the chair and express my confidence in you.

I have thanked my constituents. It is a rare that they would ask me to thank some other people, some of whom are in the House. The hon. member from Winnipeg has already spoken. I always enjoy what he has to say. He referred to the campaign as being more than just a bit dirty, but the dirt and the innuendoes actually helped me.

When I started my campaign my crew knew that I had about 41% of the vote. Then the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration made a speech which reached my constituency. It was in the *Ottawa Citizen* and stated that I above everyone was anti-immigration. Those words riled my constituents and I jumped about 5% in the polls because they knew it was absolutely untrue.

Then one night on television a former premier of the province of Ontario said that the Alliance in the west could put up a donkey and get it elected. I know he was talking about me and I will say why: I am the one with the biggest ears over here. Immediately I went up another 5%.

Then we had an incident in which a reporter said, and he wishes he had not said it, that the Ontario vote was a sophisticated vote. It is, as are the votes in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and British Columbia, but the tone in which he said that put me up 10%.

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By this time my crew estimated that I had 61% of the vote. The surge in popularity came more from comments that were meant to degrade me and my efforts in my constituency. Finally, and this is a little humorous, one of the other candidates accused me of stealing his platform and that put me over the top.

In a sense I say to people who tried to use a smear campaign that it blocked hundreds of Canadians from going to the polls in the last election. If it continues we will have fewer Canadians exercising their right to vote.

My colleague from Medicine Hat referred to security. I wish to talk briefly about security at home. He referred to security on the international level. I know what it is like to look into the eyes of a child who lives with insecurity. I know what it is like to look at elderly people who live with insecurity. I certainly know from the past four years what insecurity means to my constituents.

I am very proud to be the Department of Veterans Affairs critic. I say to the government and to this side of the House as well that if those in veterans affairs knew that the veterans affairs committee was not an independent committee, I think they would feel insulted. They would say they have enough on their plates, enough matters to be discussed, that they should be a separate committee.

I will ask a question this morning in the House. The very people providing the security and the freedom we enjoy are now some of the most forgotten people in Canada, and that ought not to be. Many veterans out there have not received medals for the various campaigns they have been in. They have been asking for them for years. Widows of veterans have been cut off from some of the vet programs. That ought not to be. Where is their security?

• (1110)

To top it all off, a young fellow in the army reserve came to me. He volunteered to go overseas to Bosnia and was ordered to get his passport. When the passport came, unbelievably he had to pay for it. A man who is volunteering his time to serve with the Canadian forces had to pay for his passport. I hope he receives remuneration, but the last I heard he had not.

Let me ask one more question. I believe that a promise made is a debt unpaid. It is clearly recorded that the government still owes merchant navy vets some \$70 million. I believe that should be paid and it should be paid now. There was no mention of it in the throne speech, but I believe it should be paid.

Another forgotten group is grassroots aboriginals. For years they have been crying out for help, telling us of the fraud, the theft, the corruption and the mismanagement. These accusations reach my office and I am sure they reach the offices of members opposite. These accusations come from rank and file aboriginals. They are not invented on this side of the House. They have been crying out for years. I can understand their feeling of insecurity.

The throne speech indicated that billions will be allotted to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. I ask the government, and particularly cabinet, to listen to the rank and file. Aboriginals should be included so that they have a degree of security on their own land. They do not now. People in Regina are on a hunger strike in the hope that the government will say that enough is enough and bring about security.

Security means fundamental changes. We must respond to the auditor general. We talk about the inherent right of self-government, treaty entitlements and land claims which will bring security to all. However all of the claims mean absolutely nothing unless we change our approach to accountability for the common people, the grassroots people.

I want to spend my last two minutes talking about the terrible insecurity that exists within my constituency and across the farms of western Canada. Towns and villages are disappearing. On the main street of my town four businesses have closed. They will never reopen.

We are watching a whole generation, fourth and fifth generation Canadians, completely deserting our province because the government bungles more money than ever got into the hands of the farmers of western Canada. It has thrown away more money than will ever go to make agriculture a sustainable industry in western Canada. We need to provide them with some measure of security.

In closing, since 1993 the government has deliberately used alienation to divide Canada and to give it the largest block of voting. It believes in going ahead and alienating and it can always be government. That is a national philosophy of which it should be ashamed.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Gilbert Normand (Secretary of State (Science, Research and Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating you on your appointment and by thanking all the people of the big, beautiful riding of Bellechasse—Etchemins—Montmagny—L'Islet for returning me to the House. I also wish to thank the Prime Minister for his vote of confidence by appointing me to the position of Secretary of State for Science, Research and Development. This morning I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington.

As hon. members will no doubt realize, my remarks on the Speech from the Throne will provide an explanation and support of the Canadian government's programs to advance science and research in this country.

In recent years, the Canadian government has made huge efforts to develop this sector of activity and to make it possible to enhance

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the quality of life and standard of living of all of our citizens. Research councils, which we call funding bodies, have been put in place, such as the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, created in 1978 out of the National Research Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, which has its roots in the Canada Council. More recently, we established the Canada Foundation for Innovation in 1998, Genome Canada in 1999 and the university chairs in 2000. In the year 2000, we also gave strong support to environmental research.

The government's intention in focusing so much effort on R and D is aimed at national and international objectives, along with what I would term security and ethical ones.

Foremost among the mandates is to keep our research scientists in Canada and not to see them leaving for other countries. As well, we want to attract foreign researchers of international repute.

Canada has set itself the policy goal of moving from 15th ranking internationally in R and D to 5th within 10 years. That is why there is a clear indication in the Speech from the Throne and in the Prime Minister's speech that the emphasis will be on innovation, research and development, and we shall be doubling the budgets devoted to this over the next ten years.

Our universities need substantial support. The Canadian Foundation for Innovation has made new funding available and this has led to agreements with the provinces and private sector for additional and increasingly innovative research in our universities. However more work remains to be done, particularly with respect to support for indirect costs.

I must also tell the House that Quebec's universities are going to need some very tangible support, particularly with the about face by Quebec's Minister of Education this week.

With respect to research being carried out in our hospitals with funding from both by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation and our granting councils, many of our hospitals have actually acquired international reputations in research. Some of this research has resulted in the development of drugs now recognized throughout the world.

There are various approaches to research in Canada. The government has its own in-house research centres, such as those in the Departments of Agriculture, Natural Resources, the Environment, and Fisheries and Oceans. All these research centres are now in the process of restructuring so as to meet the needs of industry in the various sectors concerned. The primary purpose of this research, as I mentioned, is to give citizens access to quality products, new

drugs and new technologies, whether in transportation, environmental monitoring, agriculture or food.

• (1120)

This research is vital to our economic and social development. It is also designed to maintain Canada's credibility in the international scientific community.

We are working closely with a number of countries. In his economic statement last October, the Minister of Finance announced an additional \$100 million for the Canadian Foundation for Innovation for collaborative international research projects. The Canada Foundation for Innovation, which was given that mandate, wants to establish three or four major research centres in our country, where researchers from abroad can work in co-operation with our own scientists.

The foundation also wants to set up a program to allow Canadian researchers to work abroad with researchers from other countries.

The important thing regarding our investments is that they are profitable in the sense that we have partners who come to work with us. Genome Canada, among others, was set up barely a year ago with a budget of \$160 million and has already collected \$240 million from the provinces, not counting the money that will come from the private sector for genetic research.

These initiatives, which we want to further develop and even double in the coming years, are not only useful but indispensable to our country's development and, as I said earlier, to improving the quality of life of our fellow citizens.

Various types of research are conducted in co-operation. For instance, for the space agency, France, Canada and the United States are co-operating regarding telescopes set up in Hawaii. This is currently giving an incredible boost to astronomical research.

Beyond the money aspect, the Canadian government will also have to concentrate on issues of safety and ethics. As people know, a lot of discussions are going on, primarily on biotechnological research. There is the whole issue of research on human embryos, on human cloning, organ culture and genetic properties. All of this must be debated and mechanisms must be put in place to do so.

Personally, I am currently working on creating what I call—but which will probably not be its final name—a national academy of sciences. Canada is the only country of the G8 without such a body, which would be independent and could provide expert opinions, which would be available to the population at large.

We are currently working to set up federal-provincial discussions on science, research and development. In the coming month, the first federal-provincial science ministers meeting will very likely be held.

The Address

At the moment, Canada's scientific influence abroad is growing with our researchers. Discussions with the Minister for International Trade are increasing. I myself, as the Secretary of State for Science, Research and Development, have already had three meetings with the Carnegie group, which brings together the ministers of science of all the G-8 countries. The next meeting of this type will be held in Quebec, most likely in Montmagny itself.

The efforts that went into the throne speech for science, research and development are not only justified but indispensable. I want to congratulate my colleagues on their support and I thank them for seeing the importance of developing this sector of activity.

[English]

Mr. Roy Bailey: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During my speech I inadvertently used the wrong figure when I was pleading for the government to return the money owing to the merchant marines. I should have said \$10 million. I think I said \$70 million.

* * *

• (1125)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Jacques Saada (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice, statements pursuant to Standing Order 31 may be made this day from 1:55 p.m. to 2:15 p.m. and, after 2:10 p.m. a Minister of the Crown may be permitted to make a statement pursuant to the said standing order.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General of Canada in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, and of the amendment.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address the House today, following the speech by the member for Bellechasse—Étchemins—Montmagny—L'Islet. I have two questions for him.

The first concerns research and development. I agree that some of the Canadian Foundation for Innovation projects have produced some interesting results. For example, I know that the Centre spécialisé de technologie physique du Québec, in La Pocatière, received funding.

I would like the hon. member to tell me whether his vision encompasses a sufficient share of R and D investment both for Quebec and for areas outside the major centres, be they in Quebec or elsewhere.

As we know, the trend in this field is to create centres in order to create synergy, but often there is a natural attraction toward the major centres. There has been a tradition of research in certain areas for years. For instance, the centre in La Pocatière benefited from the support of an experimental farm for some years. Unfortunately, it was closed in 1994 as a result of cuts. Since then, however, new areas of activity have been developed in fields related to technology, mass transit and all manner of other areas.

Does the hon. member think Quebec is getting its fair share? What about the regions? When I see the number of federal research centres that are located in the Ottawa region compared to Quebec, I feel there is a very considerable disproportion.

My second question deals with an issue which must be of concern to the hon. member. During the election campaign, it was said that there would be other changes to employment insurance in addition to those contained in the former Bill C-44. Now Bill C-2 has just been introduced and it is Bill C-44 all over again.

During the campaign, the Prime Minister stated that certain problems, certain major shortcomings in the plan needed to be corrected. The Secretary of State for Amateur Sport and the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, who is also the minister responsible for Quebec, suggested that other improvements needed to be made. I know as well that the hon. member for Bellechasse—Étchemins—Montmagny—L'Islet, with whom I participated in a debate on this issue during the campaign, has indicated a desire for such openness.

Can he explain to us why the government has not immediately brought in other modifications? Does he believe it is possible for additional improvements to indeed be added through the work of the committee, and for the terrible clause trying to legalize the misappropriation of the employment insurance fund surplus to be eliminated?

Hon. Gilbert Normand: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for his very pertinent questions. As for his first question concerning the Canada Foundation for Innovation, this is a first because the foundation is investing not only in universities, but also in colleges. In fact, the Collège La Pocatière, located in the hon. member's riding, benefited from such subsidies, as did Cégep Lévis—Lauzon and several other cégeps in various regions.

I must also point out that one of our priorities is to demonstrate that research can be conducted in rural areas when the so-called critical mass is not indispensable to such research.

I can give the hon. member several examples of what has been done in recent months. There has been, among other initiatives, the marine science park in Rimouski, the de-icing operations in Chicoutimi, some composite materials in Sherbrooke and, just recently, the establishment of the aluminum research centre in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region.

This area is indeed a government priority. I could add that in Rouyn—Noranda there is a research program on pain and various other initiatives. So, this is indeed a government priority.

• (1130)

In my opinion, Quebec is getting its fair share and even more than its fair share. In recent years it has received over 30% of all the subsidies given across the country.

One must not only look at the research centres located in Ottawa to determine what is being done across the country, and particularly in Quebec, regarding research and sport subsidies.

When the granting councils and the foundation select projects, that process is conducted by experts and is not dependent on any geographical consideration. It is innovation that counts. Quebec is very innovative, and it gets its fair share.

As for employment insurance, the bill was tabled in its original form, as we said it would. It was referred to a parliamentary committee. It would have been ill-advised on the government's part not to leave it to members of parliament to propose amendments, and I am convinced that the hon. member opposite will propose amendments.

[*English*]

Mrs. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph—Wellington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate you. You look great in the chair.

I am pleased to rise today to take part in the debate on the Speech from the Throne. I thank the people of Guelph—Wellington for re-electing me for a third term as their member of parliament. It is an honour and a privilege to stand here as their representative. I promise to do all that I can to ensure that their voices are heard in the Chamber and across the land.

The Speech from the Throne sets the course for the future. It outlines the government's vision for Canada. It explains how we will create opportunity for all Canadians in the 21st century. By working together to implement this moderate and balanced plan, all Canadians, men, women and children, will have the opportunity to be the best that they can be in the best country in the world.

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Personally I am proud of our achievements as a government over the past seven or eight years, and this plan builds on those accomplishments. We will continue to table balanced budgets, to pay down the debt, to cut taxes fairly, to invest in health care and social programs, to encourage research and innovation, to protect our environment and to help Canadian families.

The Speech from the Throne will have a very real impact in my riding of Guelph—Wellington. In order for Canada to continue to be a world leader in terms of innovation and entrepreneurship, we have to create opportunities for bright minds to learn and share their knowledge.

Some of the nation's brightest minds study and teach at the University of Guelph. The university and our community will benefit from the federal government's commitment to work with other public and private partners and to encourage research and development.

We will at least double the current federal investment in R and D by 2010. We will strengthen the research capacity of our universities, government laboratories and institutions. We will accelerate our ability to commercialize research discoveries. Many of these are made at the University of Guelph.

For example, the Yukon Gold potato was developed by Dr. Gary Johnston, an employee of Agriculture Canada, doing research at the University of Guelph. We will also support more collaborative international research at the frontiers of knowledge.

The University of Guelph, which is well known for its roots in the farming community in Guelph—Wellington as a whole, and Canadians from coast to coast will all benefit from the federal government's commitment to helping our agriculture sector move beyond crisis management. Together we will work toward more genuine diversification and value added growth, new investments, better land use and high standards of environment stewardship.

I am pleased to see the commitment to our farmers and their families. Our agricultural community helped to make Canada what it is today, and we must give it the tools it needs to continue to grow and prosper. Mr. Speaker, as our whip you talked a lot about having a tool box with tools in it so that people could achieve their full potential.

While the well-being of our agricultural community is a concern in Guelph—Wellington, so too is the state of our health care system. In the Speech from the Throne our government reaffirms our commitment to upholding the Canada Health Act. We will work with the provinces to ensure that all governments continue to fulfil their commitment to the principle of medicare. We will work to help Canadians maintain a healthy lifestyle by encouraging physical fitness, combating substance abuse and tobacco consumption, and promoting mental health.

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• (1135)

In order for Canadians to have confidence in our health care system they need to understand how it is run. To this end we will create a citizen's council on health care quality to provide perspective on relevant and meaningful measures of how our health care is performing.

We will also encourage active minds by creating registered individual learning accounts to make it easier for Canadians to plan for and to finance their education. We will improve loans for part time students and provide support for young people who have difficulty staying in school or getting their first job.

As the former chair of the Guelph—Wellington County Literacy Council, I am pleased to announce that the federal government will invite the provinces, territories and other parties to launch a national initiative to increase adult literacy.

In the new knowledge economy it is no longer enough to be literate. Canadians must also be computer literate to succeed. The path to national prosperity and personal opportunity travels the Internet. The federal government is committed to building a fast lane for Canada on the information highway by giving Canadians the skills and opportunities they need to become the most Internet savvy people in the world so that we can compete to win.

We will make the Government of Canada the most connected government in the world to its citizens. We will help entire communities go on line and create the framework needed to make Canada a world leader in e-commerce. Getting Canadians on line will not only help connect us to the world but also to each other. We can learn so much about each other if children in Whitehorse can chat on line with students in Gander, Drumheller, Guelph or Halton.

Canada cannot succeed in the knowledge economy unless we prepare our children for success. To this end we will build on our efforts to eliminate child poverty. We will develop new measures to help single parents overcome poverty and to create a better future for their families. We will work with the provinces to modernize laws for child support, custody and access, and to ensure they work in the best interests of the children in cases of family breakdown.

Guelph—Wellington has always been especially concerned with helping our children and with ensuring that they inherit a clean, safe country. We all need clean air to breathe, clean water to drink and natural spaces to enjoy.

The Speech from the Throne commits the federal government to implementing the smog emissions reduction agreement signed with the United States to reduce vehicle emissions by 90%. We will do our part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

We will develop stronger national guidelines for water quality and fund improvements to municipal water and waste systems. We will invest in the creation of new national parks and make our existing parks ecologically healthy. We will strengthen laws to safeguard Canadians from toxic substances.

To ensure our communities are safe we will continue to implement a balanced approach to crime, focusing on prevention and on punishment. We will take aggressive steps to combat organized crime. We will reintroduce legislation dealing with young offenders.

On a final note of good news for Guelph—Wellington, the Speech from the Throne includes a commitment to helping our municipal and provincial partners improve public transit infrastructure. We will stimulate the creation of more affordable rental housing, for which there is a very real and urgent need in my riding and in many other ridings across Canada. My colleague from Halton and I were just speaking of the homeless issue and the things that we need to do and have done as a government to help in that area.

The issues are wide and broad and the needs are great, but the government has worked hard to have a balanced platform. We will continue on that path to do the right thing for all Canadians.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments of the member opposite. There were a couple of points I would like her to address that she did not mention.

• (1140)

She mentioned that one issue addressed in the throne speech was the commitment by the government to bring the agricultural community further than crisis management. I would like to suggest to her that the program to get money out to the farmers with low incomes in disaster situations has not worked. Only 50% of the money has been disbursed. Does she have any comments on what the government will do to get that money out faster?

Spring seeding is coming. Many people in my riding and across Canada from coast to coast are having trouble in the agricultural sector to meet their needs. I wonder if the comments in the throne speech, which say that tools will be given to get our agricultural community past this crisis and into other areas, mean that the government will try to help farmers to get off the land instead of help them to stay there. If that is the approach the government is taking it is on the wrong track.

We need to do something immediately to get these funds off cabinet table and on to the kitchen tables across Canada. Would the member comment on what she will do about that?

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A joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons met to deal with the parenting issue when families break up. This has been on the table now for about two years. The justice minister said she would not look at it for another two years.

This issue needs to be addressed. Many Canadians are coming to my office asking questions on it. They must be coming to the member's office as well. Would she comment on the government's slow approach in dealing with it?

Mrs. Brenda Chamberlain: Mr. Speaker, let me assure my colleague that the government believes in the family farm. There is no question we are committed to it. We also believe as a government in a safe, affordable food supply.

When we look across the world we see people in food lines. They line up for hours for a quart of milk or a loaf of bread. As much as 85% or 90% of their money goes toward that food supply and they are still hungry. We have none of this in Canada. This has been because the government has been committed to the family farm. This has been because we believe that we need to have safe, affordable food for all.

I will not stand before the House today and say there are no problems in agriculture. There are many problems. Since the government was first elected in 1993 it has increased the safety net by 85%. That is an important point, but there is no doubt there continue to be problems in the trade area.

Last night the Prime Minister talked to the new president of the United States about this issue, which tells me that we are continuing to work on it. Perhaps my colleague would like to infer that by the wave of a magic wand everything will be okay. That is not possible. We have to continually work at problems in balance, and that is what we intend to do.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for the hon. member. For her to stand in the House of Commons and say that the Liberal Party cares about the family farmer is simply not on. It is simply ridiculous.

The facts are that 22,000 farm families left the farm last year in western Canada alone. Those are the facts. They are undeniable. When we speak to the children on the prairies about whether they are interested in the farming community, they say they want nothing to do with farms. Who does she think will be the farmers that will feed Canadians in the future?

Mrs. Brenda Chamberlain: Mr. Speaker, the government has continually been focused on a direction to help farmers. All things are not perfect. I will not stand here and say to my colleague that they are.

In January I met with about 50 commodity groups. All things are not bleak in all areas. We have some areas of farming that are experiencing very tough times right now. The government is committed to the family farm and a safe, affordable food supply.

• (1145)

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to respond to the throne speech. I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Calgary East.

I thank all the residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands for doing me the great honour of re-electing me to the House of Commons to represent them. I also thank my wife and my family, who have stood beside me for the last three and a half years and who are so important to me in doing this job.

I am the international trade critic for the Canadian Alliance, while my colleague from Lethbridge deals with the agricultural issues in international trade. It is difficult to get into all of the issues, but there are some that are very important and I will focus on those.

I was encouraged to hear in the throne speech that the government will work toward creating a free trade area of the Americas. Canada can be number one of the Americas if we put our minds to it, if we work together, and if we put policies forward to ensure that we have free trade.

Parliament has been sitting for only a little over a week since the last election, but I have to admit that I find some of the comments coming from the government and its cabinet ministers quite alarming. I will focus on those.

Two issues are very important to Canada on the international trade front. One is the softwood lumber agreement with our friends to the south, the Americans, which expires next month and which is very important. At present, Canada has \$1.2 billion in trade every day with the Americans. Over \$10 billion a year is traded in softwood lumber. The industry is very important to Canada's economy. There are thousands of jobs at stake.

Yesterday as we were trying to put forward our concern about being in sync and having a unified position, in response to a question the Deputy Prime Minister maintained that "there is no threat or action on countervail against Canada on this matter". That is the whole issue.

This issue has been before the U.S. senate, while in January Ottawa launched a challenge to a U.S. law which states that countervail duties are non-refundable even if the Americans lose a WTO challenge on countervail action. That law is seen as an incentive for the U.S. government to impose countervail duties even when an action is not likely to be upheld by the WTO. Our

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own people in the international trade department, our own trade officials, conceded that they expect the United States to immediately begin action to impose duties on Canadian lumber once the deal expires on April 1. This issue puts thousands of jobs at stake right across Canada. I ask the government to look at this.

To his credit, the international trade minister seems to be saying the right things. He is saying that he wants to let the agreement expire, which is the position of the Canadian Alliance. The member for Vancouver Island North has done a lot of work on this file and he has advocated this for the last year. Do we need to let this expire? Do we want to get to free market trading with the United States on softwood lumber? Canada has to aggressively go after this.

We want to let this agreement expire, but the Minister of Industry has come out with a position in which he says "I think the renewal of the existing agreement is something that will be part of the mix when we sit down at the table". Canadians do not want that. Industry does not want that. The international trade minister does not want that.

Yesterday the Deputy Prime Minister waded into this debate by saying there was no threat of countervail duties. That is exactly the threat we could face from the U.S. Canada has to take a very strong position.

• (1150)

Hopefully members of cabinet will sit down and decide that there is only one position, not three, and that they can speak with a unified voice on this matter. I do find it alarming that the Deputy Prime Minister said yesterday there is no threat. In fact, right out of the U.S. senate, this is exactly what they are threatening to do. At the confirmation hearings of Robert Zoellick, the U.S. trade representative, the Americans said that this is the most important issue between our two countries and that they want him to make it his first priority after his confirmation. Again I ask the government to look at this.

There is another issue we need to bring up as we go to a free trade agreement with the Americas, if that is our goal. We are now engaged in a dispute with Brazil over Embraer. Canada has gone to the World Trade Organization. Last year it won that case. In December the World Trade Organization gave Canada the option of imposing sanctions against Brazil as the only way to fight this measure, but to date Canada has done absolutely nothing.

Again I am concerned, in that we want to enter into free trade agreements with the Americas, which I absolutely 100% endorse, but even in the dispute we have now with Brazil, Canada is not acting with the tools available under the rules of the World Trade Organization. We have been one of the principle proponents of these tools and have advocated for them, yet we have not been using them. I find that alarming.

As we go toward free trade agreements, Canada enjoys a very strong trading relationship with the United States, \$1.2 billion in trade every day. The U.S. is our most important trading partner. Over 80% of Canada's trade is with the United States. There is no question, I would argue, that we have been considered one of the favourites of the United States and vice versa. We have done a lot of trade with them. That is about to change. There is the new administration in Mexico under Vicente Fox and the new administration under President Bush, and President Bush has made it very clear that he is looking to expand trade throughout the Americas.

International trade amounts to 40% of the wealth created in Canada. It is so critical to our economy and, if we are not completely on the ball, we could be left behind in this evolving free trade area. Brazil will play a role. We know Mexico will be at the table in a major way and will become a very powerful trading partner in the Americas. It is important for Canada to get a very strong trade policy and aggressively pursue it, not just with the United States but with Mexico and the states throughout Central and South America.

With regard to the actions we have seen from the government in the last week, I am not sure if the government members are really sitting down and getting their position right or if they are all jockeying to see who can get out of cabinet first to get in front of the cameras. It is alarming when one says one thing and one says another. The headlines in every major paper across the country last week said that the Minister of Industry and the Minister for International Trade are fighting over who gets control of this file. Quite frankly, Canadians really do not care who is in charge of the file; they just want to make sure that someone is and that Canada has a unified voice.

My colleagues and I, throughout this parliament, will look at all government policies and put forward constructive options that we believe will advance Canada's position in the international trade market. I believe Canada can be number one if we have the courage to stand up to all these other nations, to make sure that Canada is on the forefront of these free trade agreements and to actively pursue them.

• (1155)

Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate and was interested in the hon. member's comment about the importance of trade and relations between our country and the United States. I agree that they are very important. Clearly the United States is our most important trading partner as well as our close friend and neighbour.

On the issue of softwood lumber, what can the hon. member tell me about his party's position on the situation in Atlantic Canada, where the majority of forest products come from private woodlots?

In fact, the Atlantic region has been exempted by the U.S. The U.S. senators, congressmen and trade representative all recognize

that in Atlantic Canada there is no question of any subsidy, even from their perspective. They do not have the view that the lumber coming from Atlantic Canada is subsidized lumber. They do not feel that there should be any quotas, export taxes or anything else on that lumber.

There are thousands of jobs in Atlantic Canada dependent on the lumber industry. I wonder what his party would propose to ensure that the interests of Atlantic Canada are protected.

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Speaker, I first want to emphasize that we do not come here to represent the views of Atlantic Canada or British Columbia or Ontario. We come here to represent and look after the interests of all Canadians, from coast to coast. The Canadian Alliance, and again I give credit to the member for Vancouver Island North, has advocated the position the government has now taken, that is, the Alliance wants to see a free market without any countervailing duties or quotas, a free market in lumber for everyone in Canada, for British Columbians, for Nova Scotians, for everyone from the Atlantic regions, for everyone across Canada. We believe that is very important.

I would agree that there are no subsidies for the lumber industry in Atlantic Canada, just like there are none in British Columbia. Of course some of our opponents in the U.S., our competition, would argue that there are, but this issue has been to the World Trade Organization and Canada won. The WTO ruled that the British Columbia forest industry is not subsidized. There are different practices.

I will argue as aggressively for the people of Atlantic Canada as I will for the people of British Columbia, and for everyone else in between, that Canada pursue this very aggressively. We should let the softwood lumber agreement expire, which I believe is the position of at least the international trade minister, and we should ensure that the lumber industry right across Canada has unfettered access to all U.S. markets.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I ask the member to elaborate a bit more on the agricultural situation. As we know, the grain and oilseed sector in this country is hurting very badly because of low commodity prices. Some believe that those low commodity prices are due to European and U.S. subsidies for farmers. Certainly in Europe something like 56% or 58% of their agricultural dollar is created through subsidies. In the United States, it is about 38%, while in Canada it is somewhere around 9 or 10 cents.

I feel the government has not been aggressive enough as a country at the trade table. I ask the member to elaborate on some of the things that we as a country can do to help lever some of these subsidies down in order to create a better atmosphere for our agricultural community.

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from Lethbridge for his question, and as he will be responsible for the

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agricultural sector of international trade, I look forward to working together with him to provide solutions for the government over the next three or four years.

It is clear that the United States subsidizes its farmers four times more than Canada does. Canada has to start taking a very strong, aggressive position in the negotiations with the Americans. Collectively we have to go after the Europeans on their subsidies. If we are going to have a free market, we believe that Canada and Canadian farmers can compete if they are competing on a level playing field. However, now they are up against a huge wall. The subsidies in Europe and the United States are so excessive compared to those of Canada that competing is almost impossible. The government has offered some relief, but the money has been left on the cabinet table and has never reached the kitchen table.

• (1200)

In summary, it is time for the Canadian government to aggressively pursue the Americans to abandon these policies and get on board and collectively go after the Europeans.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, before I start, I would like to join my colleagues in congratulating you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker. I look forward to working with you.

It is an honour for me to rise this afternoon in reply to the Speech from the Throne. Earlier last year, following World Trade Organization negotiations in Seattle which I attended as a member of the Canadian delegation, I hosted a public meeting in my riding to discuss among other things world trade and globalization.

Like many Canadians, constituents of mine who attended this meeting did not know a great deal about the WTO or NAFTA. What they did know was that Canada has prospered from its involvement in international trade. Globalization and Canada's involvement in the global economy were not viewed as inherently threatening but simply a natural progression brought about by freer markets and advancements in communications.

Certainly there were questions about what globalization meant for Canada's sovereignty or our ability to make policy decisions in the public interest.

A common theme of this meeting was that globalization should bring prosperity to all countries and people of the world. We know globalization has led many developing countries to increased prosperity and wealth. However, for many others globalization poses a challenge. The question for Canadians is how best all countries can grasp opportunities offered by globalization.

I strongly believe that freer trade and expanding local economies are the best engines for development and prosperity. The best hope for developing countries has always been to find ways of tapping into the vast resources of private capital. We must stop thinking of government as the permanent engine driving overseas assistance

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and instead view the government as a facilitating partner. Canadians should be encouraged to contribute directly to NGOs involved in foreign assistance. Governments can then match contributions given by the private sector.

An excellent working example of this system in practice is the Canadian Food Grains Bank. The Canadian Food Grains Bank accepts donations of grains to send overseas for people in need. The Canadian International Development Agency, CIDA, matches the donations received by the CFGB on a four to one basis. The government money is used to either purchase additional grains in Canada or to purchase grains closer to the area in need. Through the Canadian Food Grains Bank and its partners, 98% of the food donated to the organization makes it to the people who desperately need it. That is a true Canadian success story.

Naturally, Canada must also continue to provide assistance for emergency relief efforts. The minister responsible for CIDA was quick to respond to devastating earthquakes in El Salvador and India with \$1 million and \$5 million respectively. I applaud the government for its prompt response to this crisis.

Although the November 27 federal election was dominated by domestic issues like taxes and health care, Canadians have come to expect that their country provides assistance to countries and people less fortunate. Having said that, Canadians expect a certain level of performance, results and accountability for tax dollars budgeted for foreign aid.

The auditor general in his 1993, 1996, 1998 and 2000 reports was critical of CIDA's mismanagement and institutional culture characterized by confusion and lack of focus. It seems that over the years change has not come easily to CIDA. The Canadian Alliance believes that CIDA is simply not capable as presently structured of fulfilling its mandate effectively or efficiently.

I mentioned earlier in my speech it is freer trade and expanding local economies that are the best engines for development and prosperity. Globalization continues to be the engine bringing countries together. Globalization has helped to promote sustainable development and prosperity around the world. Globalization represents opportunities and challenges for all countries in the world, including Canada.

• (1205)

Canada entered the new century with some significant economic strengths. However, it also has some troubling weakness. The country's strength includes a labour force that is among the most highly educated in the world and a well developed infrastructure that includes advanced information and communications technology, both necessary requirements in a knowledge based economy. However, we have some glaring weaknesses including the relatively low rates of research and development, a capital investment rate

that is far below the level of the United States, a high personal and corporate taxation and our relative slowness, again compared to the United States, in adapting advanced technologies and in seizing the new economic opportunities.

The federal government announced a program in the throne speech to double the investment in research and development by 2010. This is a step in the right direction. However, the government missed a critical opportunity in the throne speech to introduce real tax relief and encourage our best and brightest to remain in Canada. Again the government has ignored the reality of the brain drain. It is a fact that every year more and more of our best and brightest are attracted to the high earnings, lower taxes and better job opportunities offered in the United States.

As we look to the future, the United States is poised to introduce substantial tax reductions and to pay down the debt within the next 10 years. Our finance minister has introduced tax cuts which are marginal at best and has an unambitious target of paying down Canada's debt. Canada cannot hope to remain competitive with the United States if our fiscal structure is so terribly out of line with the others. The government needs to make fiscal competitiveness with the United States a current priority. This means real tax relief and a dedicated paydown schedule. None of these important steps were mentioned in the Liberal throne speech.

Critics of globalization fear that economic integration is leading to a loss of Canadian sovereignty. As policymakers we must adhere to our obligations under NAFTA and WTO which attempt to prevent policy actions that might create an unlevel playing field. Similarly, Canada's policymakers must give careful attention to how their actions will impact the country's ability to attract investment and highly skilled workers. There are concerns about foreign ownership.

Our undervalued Canadian dollar has given Canadian exporters an advantage in exporting their products and services to the United States. However, it has made Canadian companies a bargain for American investors. Former Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed has expressed concern about Canada's sovereignty since the signing of NAFTA.

In conclusion, I would say that globalization is extremely important. With the summit of free trade of the Americas coming pretty soon, even the president of the United States is very keen to promote free trade, the issues and challenges of globalization must advance.

The Leader of the Official Opposition has asked me to chair an advisory committee to address globalization and Canada's competitiveness. I will talk with NGOs and Canada's business leaders to develop a sound plan for Canada to deal with some of the questions surrounding globalization. I look forward to hearing from anyone who has something to add.

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Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I want to indicate that I will be sharing my time with the member for Tobique—Mactaquac.

It is a privilege and pleasure this morning to speak for the first time in the 37th Parliament of Canada, my first time since being returned for the third time. I want to pay tribute to some of those people who have made it possible for me to come back. First, I want to personally thank my wife and my family for their continued support and indulgence of my time to others. Being a member of parliament, as all of us in the House know, requires giving up a lot of our personal time. I enjoy it and my family has agreed to allow me to do that.

• (1210)

I also want to express my appreciation to the people of Huron—Bruce for their support over the past number of elections. Traditionally, my riding was a Conservative riding. The people who normally supported that party chose to support me because of my representation. I count it a humbling experience to come back, and from time to time I ask them to recommit to that support they first gave to me in 1993.

This morning I want to commit my time to speaking on the issue of agriculture. My riding of Huron—Bruce is primarily an agricultural riding. It is an area which is now traditionally called the western coast of Ontario. It is an area where we primarily make our living from the land. However, we also have a number of other industries.

Probably the most notable industry in our riding is Sifto Salt. It represents the largest salt mine in the world. When people travel the highways of Ontario or in other parts of Canada and the United States, they will likely be saved the embarrassment of finding themselves in a ditch because the salt on those roads probably came from Goderich, Ontario. It is one of the things that we would like to forget for a while since we have had a long period of winter, but spring is not that far around the corner. That brings me to the concerns that I have regarding agriculture today.

It is imperative to remember that we all look upon our farmers as the suppliers of our food source. We rely on them to provide us with our daily food. In the short time that has been allocated to me this morning, I want to give the members some illustrations of where agriculture is today.

Agriculture is at a crossroads in Canada. It is not because we have been unable to produce the food. We have been able to safely produce food in adequate numbers and quantities for Canadians. However, we have been unable to receive adequate returns in the marketplace to make it profitable for farmers to remain on their lands.

I come from a family of seven generations of agrolgists, people who have made their living from the land. The generation of people

which follow me are not farmers today and will not be farmers. They are making their life vocation in other sectors. That is disconcerting in itself.

Perhaps I can help members better understand where agriculture is today. In my riding of Huron—Bruce, we produce more agricultural products in terms of dollar value than any other riding in Canada east of Winnipeg. We have the largest grain inland elevators in Canada in a little village called Hensall. Every time I turn around or every time I go down a road I pass some of those farmers who have given us the food that we put on our tables. I have a strong tradition in agriculture.

I remember citing in the House of Commons in the 36th parliament the importance of agriculture. Then I saw storm clouds on the horizon. Today the storm clouds have developed into a major storm. These people are seeking refuge and help. They are calling upon government to intervene in the short term.

In the Speech from the Throne the Governor General said “The government will help Canada’s agricultural sector move beyond crisis management”. Indeed, the government recognizes that there is crisis in agriculture.

We need to move now. We are 90 days away from seeding in Ontario. While I support agriculture in all corners of the country, my focus is largely on Ontario because that is where my expertise is. When I speak of what is good for Ontario, it also has to be good for other parts of the country. Every province needs to share in the wealth that we generate. That is what Canada is all about.

• (1215)

A farmer came to my office last Friday morning with a balance sheet of his returns from last year. He had his own bookkeeper do the accounting and then sent it to the auditor for a final accounting so it would be accurate.

This farmer is well known in my community. He remains nameless in the House. However he has allowed me to bring his numbers to the House to give some credence to the arguments we are putting forward.

On a 600 acre operation, which is not a large one, he paid himself \$110 per acre for the land he owns. He included repairs and had very little depreciation because most of his equipment had been depreciated to a point where there was nothing left. At the end of the day he was \$90 per acre short on income and expenses.

This guy would be considered a model farmer in his community. He had a \$55,000 loss on 600 acres. Last year he purchased nitrogen fertilizer at \$150 per tonne. He has two prices: one a month ago at \$350 per tonne for this coming spring and another which is effective now. Unless he purchases it now, it will go to \$450 per tonne. This is a 140% increase from two years ago.

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For diesel fuel and other fuel sources, because he has a drying operation as well, we are talking about enormous increases in the 90 to 100% range. However his prices were basically put into effect in the 1930s. There is not an industry in Canada that can sustain such losses over that many years. I think food is much more important than we sometimes give it credit for. The issue of food goes much beyond the farm gate. It is an issue of sovereignty.

Do we want continued sovereignty over our food supply? Do we want our rural communities, which share the wealth when farmers prosper, to continue to exist? Do we want churches and schools to disappear from the rural landscape in Ontario and throughout the rest of Canada?

We have choices to make. This is a serious issue. I do not often come to the House with an issue that is so profoundly difficult to talk about. Because I know it so well, it is important that today and in the short term we find a vehicle to deliver cash to farmers which they can take to the bank. If we do not, we will not have farmers in the future.

We did what was right for Bombardier. Farmers will not argue that we did what was right. It is important that we now do the right thing for agriculture. Some 640,000 people in Ontario are directly or indirectly related to this industry and 24,000 people are involved in the aerospace industry.

Let us do the right thing. Let us deliver the money to our farmers before seeding time so that we can enjoy the food we put on our plates every day.

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am impressed with the hon. member opposite. He ought to be commended for the beautiful, wonderful and insightful remarks he just made. I congratulate him on his re-election to the House of Commons.

The member brings forward a balanced position and puts it together nicely. In light of his impassioned speech and his obvious understanding of the problem, why has his government not given to farmers the money it promised them, let alone a new program to help them with other problems?

• (1220)

The government has not even done what it said it would do. Why can the hon. member opposite, a member of the government, not get the Prime Minister to do what he said he would do?

Mr. Paul Steckle: Mr. Speaker, I am indebted to the hon. member, who is a good friend of mine, for asking that question. It is not that we have not delivered to farmers. It is a case of mixed messages being sent to our farmers. Right now farmers are more interested in money than in another message.

When we began this process some two and a half years ago, we were looking at a request of \$600 million. We came in at \$900 million and raised that to \$1.1 billion. We have committed to three years at \$1.1 billion and are now asking for another \$900 million of federal money.

The member is speaking about the 20% that has not been delivered on the AIDA program, and he is absolutely correct. If we have not delivered that money we ought to be delivering it. It is not because I have not put forward the argument to deliver that money. I will continue to do that, but there are mitigating circumstances which have for one reason or another not allowed it to happen.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member for Guelph—Wellington who seemed to think there was no farm crisis. Then I heard my good friend, also with a farm background, mention that there was a farm crisis. It is refreshing to have someone on the backbenches with an incredible amount of backbone to tell it exactly like it is. I do not think a member on this side of the House could have said it as eloquently and as passionately as he did.

The hon. member understands that farmers in Ontario and western Canada are going through exactly what fishermen in the coastal communities of Atlantic Canada went through and exactly what the fishing communities of western Canada went through. Conservative and Liberal policies have put the main producers of the food on our tables in a state of continual crisis.

I consider the hon. member to be a great friend and a great member of the fishing community. Will he take his comments directly to the agriculture minister and the industry minister, because they are the ones who need to hear them?

Mr. Paul Steckle: Mr. Speaker, I have come to enjoy working with the hon. member from Nova Scotia on the fishery committee. Not only will I take the message to the ministers to whom he referred, but I have already done so.

Tomorrow I will deliver to anyone in the House who wishes one a copy of the farmer's financial statement I spoke of earlier. All the member needs to do is ask and he will have delivered to him a copy of that statement. The message must get out and we must do it as quickly as we can. We have no time to lose. I would be more than delighted to provide you with that document.

The Deputy Speaker: As a reminder as we begin the 37th parliament, please do not forget your Speaker. Rather than addressing one another directly, it is more useful to speak through the Chair.

Mr. Andy Savoy (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with an overwhelming sense of pride and respect that I rise today in the House to respond to the throne speech.

The Address

I begin by thanking the constituents of Tobique—Mactaquac for giving me the awesome responsibility and privilege of representing their views and concerns in parliament. During the election campaign I promised my constituents I would listen to their concerns and speak to those issues on their behalf when in Ottawa. I intend to fulfil that promise to the best of my ability.

This obligation derives not only from the sense of responsibility that comes with being a member of parliament but in some measure from the fact that the Speaker of the House has a sister residing in my riding, who I am sure will receive regular reports on my performance in Ottawa.

I congratulate the Speaker of the House on his most recent election victory. To be selected by your peers and assume the highest authority in the House of Commons is the greatest mark of respect your fellow members can show you.

Third, I congratulate all members of parliament on their recent election victories. To be elected by the people of Canada to represent their views and concerns is both a formidable task and a tremendous opportunity. This symbiotic relationship carries a huge responsibility, one that I am prepared to accept while in public office.

• (1225)

Lastly and most importantly, I thank my friends and family for their unwavering support and inspiration. I especially want to extend personal thanks to my wife and my mother. I thank my mother for teaching me to aim high and my wife for keeping me on track and helping me achieve my goals.

[*Translation*]

I also want to thank Gilles Bernier, the former member for Tobique—Mactaquac, for his good work these past years, on behalf of the people of our riding.

[*English*]

Situated in western New Brunswick, my riding is known for the picturesque beauty of the Nashwaak, Tobique and Saint John River valleys, a beauty my ancestors no doubt dwelt upon when they first settled in the Saint John River Valley over 200 hundred years ago.

The region of the upper Tobique River in the north end of the riding has excellent fishing and hunting. Both my grandfather and great-grandfather worked there as guides and lumberjacks. As guides they respected nature. While probably not schooled in the concepts of wildlife conservation, they understood its implications. They knew that if everyone fished or hunted to excess there would be no fish and game for their children or their children's children.

I am proud to say, as my forefathers did, that the government understands the concept of resource management. It has explicitly committed itself to the protection of species at risk, to marine conservation and to the conservation of our natural spaces.

My forefathers fished and hunted alongside the aboriginal people of the area, and each depended on the other in times of need. The Tobique first nations are a proud people. I am optimistic about the future of the government's relations with all first nations people.

In aboriginal communities we are promoting programs to reduce the incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome in newborns and preventable diseases like tuberculosis and diabetes. The aboriginal head start program will be significantly expanded to better prepare aboriginal children for the rigours of the educational system and to help those with special needs.

The people of Tobique first nations will see the benefits of an increased focus on entrepreneurial and business expertise that will ultimately promote economic development and industrial growth in their community.

Just as some of my forefathers chose to be hunters and lumberjacks, others chose to be farmers. The upper Saint John River Valley is home to some of the highest quality seed and table potatoes in the world. The area is responsible for 95% of New Brunswick's potato production and most of it is grown on traditional family farms. A superior product does not compensate for low market prices or offset unfair subsidization by other national governments, which has been an ongoing problem for Canadian producers.

I am encouraged to see a renewed federal commitment to move away from farm crisis management toward long term agricultural sustainability, value added agricultural growth, improved land usage and increased investment in research.

Carleton county in the centre of my riding has the third fastest growing economy in Canada, fuelled by food processing, lumber operations and metal working. As a professional engineer with extensive experience in local economic development, I know firsthand the commercial importance of research and development. Companies must either innovate or over time they stagnate.

The government has made innovation a top priority. For engineers, scientists and business people across Canada this is music to their ears. The government will double spending on R and D by 2010. It will accelerate the commercialization process for new products. It will support collaborative research with international partners. It will strengthen the research capacity of Canadian universities and government laboratories.

The Address

I applaud the government's goal and encourage it as an attainable one. The goal is to become one of the top five countries in the world for research and development by 2010.

[*Translation*]

Today, I have spoken of my own experiences and those of my forefathers, but I would now like to talk about our collective future, that of Canada's youth, of our children, of my children.

My wife and I have a 19 month old daughter and are expecting a second child in June. I am proud to say that our country is built on liberal values, which accord the family its due increasingly.

• (1230)

I know that my children will benefit from the major spending that goes into social programs. For example, by allocating an additional \$2.2 billion to the early childhood development program, the federal government has reiterated its support for targeted social spending.

It is doubling the length of parental leave and maternity benefits while continuing to increase child tax benefits.

Today's children will grow up in a climate in which learning and education, the foundations of a better future, have become a national priority for all Canadians.

In the context of the millennium scholarship fund, scholarships will be accorded over the next ten years to over 100,000 disadvantaged students. In addition, the educational tax credit has been increased and tax cuts worth nearly \$1 billion are planned one million students over the next four years.

Finally, the registered individual learning accounts will help Canadians of all ages find the money they need for their ongoing training.

[*English*]

Promoting opportunities and social benefits for families is as extremely important as protecting our families and children. The tragedy at Walkerton last summer saw the deaths of innocent Canadians, both adult and children. In response to the incident I organized a drinking water conference in Fredericton, New Brunswick, which saw over 300 people from across Canada attend workshops and learn how to assess, remedy and ultimately protect themselves and others from contaminated water sources.

The government has shown a commitment to safe drinking water for all people in Canada by focusing on stronger national guidelines for water quality, by strengthening the role of the national water research institute, by funding improvements to municipal water and waste water systems, and by investing in research and development on better land use practices.

Our government has shown vision. Our government has shown innovation. Our government has shown compassion for families, children and aboriginal peoples. Our government has shown leadership. I look forward to governing this great nation with my colleagues from all political parties. The elected in each riding reflect the truly great citizens of a great country.

I congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, and all members in advance for what will prove to be an exciting, productive and rewarding 37th parliament.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the new member for Tobique—Mactaquac and I wish him good luck on the upcoming birth of his next child.

Having listened to the member, one would think there are no problems in the country. One would not think that record numbers of students are leaving their post-secondary graduate studies with record levels of debt. One would not think that a tremendous amount of fishermen are still making under \$10,000 a year. One would not think that 22,000 families left the family farm last year.

The throne speech concentrated heavily on the so-called new economy and completely neglected what was called the old economy of fishing, mining, forestry and agriculture. Would the member comment on what he plans to do for Canada's largest employers in the so-called old economy?

Mr. Andy Savoy: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore for my first question, the encouragement and the welcome to the House of Commons.

The future lies in the concept of value added in each of these resource areas. We must look at agriculture and the fisheries not only as a traditional resource but as a base product. We must look at value adding to the resource by processing fisheries products further down the line. Similarly in agriculture.

In my riding I have one of the experts in value adding in McCain Foods, the largest frozen fry producer in the world. People have taken value added to the extreme. McCain Foods produces not only french fries. It produces juices, pizzas and a variety of value added products. I believe the future lies in value added.

• (1235)

Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I join in congratulating the hon. member and welcoming him to the House. We benefit in this place by having people from all walks of life and different backgrounds. In the case of the hon. member, we have the advantage of having a professional engineer who has significant experience in the field of environmentally sustainable development.

The Address

I am sure the member is aware of the government's plans in relation to the treatment of waste water and water. How does he feel about the government's infrastructure plans in this area?

Mr. Andy Savoy: Mr. Speaker, with regard to water and waste water infrastructure, the government has taken an initiative by investing over \$2 billion. Specifically in my riding with 14 small municipalities many have had boil orders in the past.

The infrastructure program extends not only to the water system itself but extends to the waste water system. Water contamination is frequently the result of improper waste water management. The government has made enormous progress as far as investing \$2.2 billion in water and waste water management.

The government has also looked at strengthening the National Water Research Institute. It has looked at developing stronger national guidelines for water quality. It is doing research and development in better land use practices, which means the protection of our surface water and our ground water sources. Some of it is common sense. In layperson terms, one does not put a chemical plant within 100 feet of a municipal well head or municipal lagoon. That is an example of better land use practice. More research and development are being done into land use practices.

I look forward to working with the New Brunswick Environment Industry Association to organize our second annual drinking water conference entitled "Your Drinking Water: Ensuring Its Safety". This conference will further educate people from across Canada on the perils and the contaminants potentially in our water source and how to assess and remedy them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like you to note that I will be splitting my time with the new Bloc Quebecois member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Although I have already asked some questions and made some comments, this is the first opportunity I have had since being elected to actually rise and respond to the throne speech.

I would like to begin by thanking a few people. I am sure that the House will understand. My first thanks go to my wife Nathalie and my children Roxane and Vincent who, although still young—eight and eleven years old—have a very good, not to say an excellent, understanding of the demands made on a member for parliament. I also wish to thank my family, the organizers and voters of the riding of Berthier—Montcalm, who have put their trust in me since 1993.

This is the third election for a party, the Bloc Quebecois, which was not supposed to be around for more than three elections in a row. In the riding of Berthier—Montcalm, my percentage of the

vote went up starting in 1993. I therefore think that there is room for the Bloc Quebecois and that it is using its position properly to defend Quebec's interests.

This brings me directly to the throne speech. What are we to conclude from this particular throne speech? The tradition after a general election was to have a speech that would give parliamentarians some direction, that spoke about the government's vision. Things had to change. There were new bills on the table.

Unfortunately, I must agree with many other experts and journalists. In a nutshell, all the time put into the throne speech was pointless and very expensive. As we have seen, it was even a very imperialist exercise, with the Governor General, the Queen's representative. There is nothing, or nothing new anyway, in the throne speech. It shows a complete lack of imagination on the part of this government, which is simply maintaining the course it embarked on after the 1997 election.

• (1240)

It seems to me that this was an opportunity to follow up on certain comments and wishes expressed by the public for changes.

But no. We can see for instance that, by wholly reproducing what was already in its red book—not to fault that, but it was unnecessary to have a general election and a throne speech—the government decided to continue its usual incursion into areas of provincial jurisdiction.

The reaction may be that the Bloc Quebecois is always saying that, but it is the very source of this country's problem.

I would remind hon. members that Quebec did not sign the constitution. No Quebec premier signed it, whether Parti Quebecois or Liberal. None has signed the constitution. Yet here again we find a government preparing to invest—because it has the cash—in areas of provincial jurisdiction. Just think of parental leave and education. Is there any area, under the Canadian constitution, which falls more clearly under provincial jurisdiction than education?

In the throne speech we can see that the federal government's investment is under the pretext that there is a problem. Yes, there is a problem, and not just in Quebec. The problem has been caused by the federal government with its cuts to transfer payments.

This is why we are asking the federal government, which is accumulating billions of dollars, to transfer the money it took to the provinces, which are closer to the people and provide services directly to constituents so they may invest wherever there is a need, including among others in education. It is, however, not up to the federal government to invest directly in education.

The Address

This is the basis of a number of misunderstandings. Let the government honour the Canadian constitution, which it boasts is good. Let it honour it. In doing so, they will end up with a lot fewer overlaps.

The same is true in education and health care, where the government will create a supervisory superstructure. As if the provinces could not manage their hospitals and the health care system.

The problem, I repeat, was created by the federal government when it cut the transfer payments and money, which was in fact intended for these public services.

There is the matter of potable water. It is true that this has been a problem in certain municipalities in Canada and Quebec. However, water quality and availability are provincial matters as well. Will the federal government start investing in that area as well? That does not line up very well.

I understand that the government opposite is very arrogant. I understand that it is quietly pursuing the same approach since 1997. Perhaps it should realize it is off track. The Bloc Québécois will be there to remind it. We will be there to get the most for Quebec, to remind the federal government that it is off the beam in the case of many bills and we will try to influence it, as we have done in the past. Through it all, we will continue to do our job and we will respect provincial jurisdiction.

To be honest, there was at least one positive thing in the throne speech, and I can hardly wait to have it in my hands. This is the anti-gang legislation.

The House will recall that when the Bloc Québécois spoke about the problem of biker gangs in Quebec and in Canada, the government members opposite practically laughed in our faces. They said there was no problem, that the Criminal Code was fine the way it was and that additional legislation was not necessary. All the Liberals in the House heard the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice tell us this.

However, in the wake of the election campaign, people realized that Canada did not in fact have the tools to effectively combat organize crime.

We read in the throne speech that the federal government is preparing to introduce anti-gang amendments.

• (1245)

It has understood, and this is why the Bloc Québécois is important. Without us, the government would have done nothing because it did not understand the problem. We got the message across. We are going to continue to speak out because there are other messages that must get across to the government, including the one having to do with the Young Offenders Act.

I would have thought that after an election campaign the government members opposite, especially those from Quebec,

would have understood that Quebecers do not want the Minister of Justice and the federal government meddling with the Young Offenders Act. This legislation has demonstrated its worth in Quebec, where the crime and recidivism rates are the lowest in Canada.

We are succeeding where other provinces are not. Why? Because we apply the Young Offenders Act while some provinces do not. They do not have the necessary infrastructures to deal with young people who have a problem with crime.

What will the minister do? Will she listen to Quebec? Will she follow Quebec's example, since our approach is successful? Have the Quebec Liberal members of parliament managed to convince the minister? They have not.

Following the throne speech, the minister introduced a bill repealing the Young Offenders Act. She used the lowest common denominator, that is those provinces that had the lowest success rate with young offenders.

Now, the government is saying "Quebec will have to apply the same provisions as western Canada". This says a lot about the value of the motion passed by the government to recognize Quebec as a distinct society.

As for the Liberal members from Quebec, I would be ashamed to belong to this government given the way it is dealing with the Young Offenders Act. They have failed in their responsibility to get the message across to the Minister of Justice.

As for us, we will continue, along with the national assembly, the coalition and the Quebec consensus, to oppose the government regarding such an important bill for the future of our young people and having to do with the Young Offenders Act.

I see that my time is up, so I am leaving the floor to my colleague.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I want to say that I was very honoured to be elected on November 27 by the people of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel to represent them in the House.

I would like to thank my constituents, my wife Francine, my daughter Joëlle, my son Mario junior, all my political organizers as well as my predecessor in the House, Maurice Dumas, who has retired after seven productive years here.

I entered into the election campaign when Mr Dumas' departure was announced, on the day the election was called. For me it was of course quite a jump. At this time last year, I was president of the Union des municipalités du Québec. It was a big challenge for me, particularly when I heard that I was running in a constituency targeted by the Liberal machine in Quebec.

The Address

I am even more thankful to the people of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel when I remember that, during the campaign, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the Minister of Public Works and even the Minister of Finance came to help my opponent in his attempt to defeat me. The people of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel were not fooled.

My riding spans more than 6,000 square kilometres between the greater Montreal and the metropolitan Outaouais. The federal system had a harsh impact on this area over the last 30 years.

The riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel is located between two major populated areas, but there still is no highway linking these two important areas within the same province. It is the only place in Canada where such a situation exists.

Moreover, the riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel includes an international airport, Mirabel airport, where no development plan has yet been prepared.

• (1250)

We are also hit hard by an annual unemployment rate that hovers around 10% annually, at 8% in the summer and about 14% in the winter. Members will understand that this riding's economy relies on forestry, agriculture, tourism and, of course, these past years on industry.

Of course, members will also understand that in tourism, agriculture and forestry employment is seasonal, not workers. Consequently, this 10% rate of unemployment is compounded by a 10% rate of people who are able to work yet are receiving income security benefits from the Quebec government.

Thus, as we speak, 20% of the workers in the riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel are not working. This is a situation that has no justification whatsoever, and we have been waiting and still are waiting for changes to the Employment Insurance Act.

Obviously, the strategies outlined by the federal government in the last Speech from the Throne had nothing to impress the citizens of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

The only thing proposed regarding employment insurance is that workers be given back 8% of annual surpluses taken from the federal government's budgets. The government wants to dip into the pockets of the workers in Quebec and Canada to the tune of \$32 billion.

During the last election, at the peak of the campaign, the Prime Minister of Canada openly recognized that he had made a mistake with the Employment Insurance Act. The leader of the Bloc Québécois wrote a letter to the leaders of all the political parties in the House asking that the House be recalled on compassionate grounds before the holiday season, to give some hope to the

workers of Canada and Quebec who had been penalized by the Employment Insurance Act.

The leader of the Liberal Party was the only one to refuse to have the House recalled on humanitarian grounds before the holiday season, which is absolutely inconceivable and unworthy of a political party.

In the last Speech from the Throne, intrusion into areas such as health and education is still to be found everywhere. The Liberal Party has no intention of putting an end to the war against the provinces, which has been going on for too long. This government has decided once more to intrude into provincial jurisdiction, namely health, education and the legislation on young offenders. My colleague mentioned this earlier; the federal government is still waging war against the provinces. This is obviously a bad thing for economic activity in the country.

Naturally, the whole story of the November 2000 election campaign has been the most shameful in modern Canada, to paraphrase the Prime Minister's words. It was the most shameful, because it was the election of one man, as in *Un Homme et son péché*. It was a case of power-hungry people who tried to catch the other political parties off guard. This is the only reason we had an election in November 2000. There was no other justification for it.

The last election, which had the lowest participation rate in the history of modern Canada, was the most shameful election of modern times in our country.

On behalf of the citizens of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, I predict that if the next five years, which have been launched by this Speech from the Throne, are similar to the last 30 years, Quebec will no longer be represented in this House when the next election rolls around.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with a great deal of interest to the remarks of my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Let me remind the House that the member for that riding has developed a great deal of expertise in municipal politics and has decided to use his experience for the benefit of Quebec and of the Bloc Québécois. I am very pleased that electors in that riding have put their trust in him.

• (1255)

What struck me in his remarks was the similarities between his riding and mine. One example is the importance of forestry, an industry that has a direct impact on seasonal workers. He gave a very concrete example. In his riding the unemployment rate varies between 8% in summer and 14% in winter.

The Address

Could the hon. member tell the House whether it would be interesting if we could make sure that, when the lumber agreement expires on March 31, 2001, we could go back to free trade in the lumber industry, like producers in Quebec and Canada would like?

For forestry workers, the best way to get a fair return on their contribution to the elimination of the deficit is not only tax cuts, but also an employment insurance system that would provide them with sufficient income when they are out of work.

When the earnings of workers are not very high, it is frequently the supplement coming from the employment insurance plan that helps make ends meet and financially sustains their family.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

As he knows, the forest industry has demanded that free trade apply unconditionally to everything it has developed during the last few years. It is important to understand the problems facing the forestry workers and the owners of the logging companies throughout Quebec. Forestry is a huge asset for Quebec, and going back to the free trade agreement would obviously help this industry to prosper.

In answer to my colleague's second question, major improvements are expected to be made to the employment insurance system, because it is the jobs in the forest industry, not the workers, that are seasonal.

We can expect the grace periods to be abolished, the workers to be able to hang on to the \$32 billion in the EI fund and the national program to be based on the needs of the workers in every industry, including the forest industry.

Mr. André Harvey (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Hillsborough.

First of all I want to thank my fellow citizens in the riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord who were inspired enough to elect me for another mandate, so that I could strive to serve them efficiently. They can be assured that I will do everything I possibly can to show them that they did the right thing in supporting me.

As you can see on my jacket, my first priority is still the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area. Before making my comments on the Speech from the Throne, I want to say that I listened to what some of my colleagues in the Bloc and in other parties had to say. They are always talking about the Canada-Quebec dynamics, Canada versus the provinces.

Recently I was reading the book written by Mr. John Ralston Saul where he was wondering if the problem of Canada is not

related to the fact that the wealth is not shared equally within the provinces.

In our regional university, an economist, not from London but from the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, who proved, supported by figures, that our region was highly disadvantaged by Quebec government that was extremely centralizing.

I thought that I should make an analysis to see where the problem lies as far as the sharing of wealth is concerned. I have the figures here. The federal government is sharing the wealth with every province, a given amount per capita. The unemployment rate and the wealth index are also thrown into the equation.

There are two major programs. There is equalization, a lump sum payment that provinces can do what they want with, and there is the Canada health and social transfer, for health and social programs.

• (1300)

The problem in Quebec is that our regions are in a very precarious situation. We are looking at ways to keep our young people in our regions and we are seeking the best method to stop the migration of our young people. Yesterday, I asked the member for Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière if he could tell me about the measures needed to stop the migration of these young people and to offer them interesting jobs.

Unfortunately, I sometimes am under the impression that the members of the Bloc want all Canadians to be on EI. I do not think this is the thing to do. The bill was introduced. It will then be referred to a parliamentary committee. Some interesting amendments will be made. Significant changes have already been made. I am confident that in the end the EI bill will please everyone.

I wondered how I could continue to help my region. I thought we should analyze the areas where the government wanted to invest. Health care is a major issue, especially in the regions where the average age is increasing because of the incredible migration of young people. Consequently, we must invest in this area.

Everyone is aware of what happened in our regional hospitals. The doctors and the nurses were pushed into early retirement with huge cash outs. Friends and colleagues of mine told me this "How can someone stay on with an offer like that?"

Finally, we are in an extremely difficult situation. With regard to the health care budget, it is all fine and well to transfer \$21.5 billion to the provinces. However, this is a provincial jurisdiction and a Quebec jurisdiction, and I for one want to make sure that our regions are in a position to provide health care.

In my area, and this is a proven fact for the past 10 to 15 years, we need about \$75 million more each year. The Canada social

transfer and equalization payments will go from \$11.5 billion or \$12 billion in 1994-95 to more than \$14 billion in 2004. There is certainly a management problem. The provincial government does not pay attention to the regions. The current Quebec government is a centralizing government which arbitrarily is using equalization payments to build a \$900 million hospital in Montreal while letting the hospital in Chicoutimi die.

As an hon. member from the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, I think that when the amount of transfer funds are negotiated, it is important to ask our government to make sure that regions are well represented and have what they need to fulfil their role, particularly in health care.

I also noticed that the throne speech insisted on the importance of skills. The federal government talked about literacy and the need to reach agreement with the provinces. One third of the Canadian population has a literacy problem. That has a tremendous cost for business.

The government insists a lot on research and development. During the last parliament, I was in the opposition and I worked on a very major project for my region, a major aluminum plant. We actually produce 50% of all the aluminum in this country.

Nothing has been done yet in terms of processing. We lost 8,000 jobs in the aluminum industry. With the help of my colleagues with whom I now sit, particularly the Minister of National Revenue, we will be building next spring a national research centre for the processing of aluminum that will allow us to create good jobs for our young people. The issue of aluminum is of critical importance to me.

There is also the forest issue. Natural resource areas such as ours are there strictly to be developed. No one is helping us with our development. The first aluminum processing plant partly financed by the Quebec government via the SGF was built in the Montreal area. We lost 8,000 jobs in our community, even if we were named the aluminum valley last year. It must not become a valley of tears.

There is another issue mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. It is the issue of infrastructures. A region cannot develop itself without a highway infrastructure (The Europeans, the Americans understood that). This is a major element.

● (1305)

For several years, the federal government has formed partnerships with the private sector. I hope the Quebec government will take advantage of these programs in order to help our region to be connected to the North American continent and to the beautiful greater Quebec City area by a highway between Quebec City and Chicoutimi. This does not involve billions of dollars, but it is important. Land communications are the precursors to development, they do not follow it.

The Address

We have all the industrial development support programs, through Economic Development Canada, as well as research programs which I hope will be increasingly set up in the regions. The guidelines the government wants to set for itself are promising for the future.

There is the whole aspect of poverty. I would need more time to speak about it, but I will come back to it. I think that one day the federal and provincial governments will have to look carefully at a method to combat poverty effectively.

The government has created good programs, such as the child tax benefit, worth over \$9 billion. There is the early childhood support program worth over \$2 billion. There is the whole business of more progressive taxation over the next five years. One hundred billion dollars less in income tax to pay will benefit everyone.

Poverty is a difficult issue to define. The European economic community and a number of other countries are currently looking into the following possibility. Rather than increasing the number of programs, consolidating federal and provincial assistance programs or within a federation such as that of Europe, to fight poverty effectively with a single program, there could be guaranteed minimum income. It would be easier to manage and easier for recipients to identify.

I am certain that, in addition to the program's being more effective, everyone would be content to know that, as Canadians over 18 years of age, they have something to get them started in life. I hope that one day a future agenda will include the important item of giving thorough consideration to the battle against poverty.

In 1967 the American government pointed out that this was probably an approach worth considering. Unfortunately, there was no follow-up. The Macdonald commission examined this aspect. It considered it a positive avenue. One day we will come back to this. Poverty is an important issue.

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am stunned by the speech of the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

Since the hon. member changed sides in the House of Commons, his views have also changed drastically. Part of his speech dealt with health and was to the effect that the reason there are problems in Quebec is because the Quebec government is too centralizing. This takes the cake.

Moreover, Toronto MPs applauded him. He delivered a speech that got applause from Ontario MPs. Mr. Speaker, I hope your constituents are listening, because I am going to remind the hon. member of some of the statements he made here barely a year ago.

“What was scrapped in Canada was not the GST, but the health care system, particularly in Quebec. . . Yes, people are tired of the constitutional debate, but they certainly need a break from the provocation carried on for the past 30 years by the leaders of the Liberal Party of Canada”.

The Address

That comment was made on November 29, 1999. On March 20, 2000, the hon. member said:

“How does one go about getting rid of a Prime Minister who, not just in the case of Human Resources Development Canada, but in the case of the budget, is determined to interfere in all sectors of provincial jurisdiction?”

Here is one last quote:

“The federal government grabs all the money and then haggles with the provinces on education, health services and the infrastructure programs”.

• (1310)

There has to be some logic in comments. One cannot speak from both sides of his mouth in the House, make completely contradictory statements and, above all, blame a government for something that does not come under its jurisdiction. It is the federal government that is to blame, not the provincial government.

Mr. André Harvey: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have made speeches and the Bloc members should quote them all. I will continue to stand up for my region. Since I made my speeches, tax cuts in the order of \$100 billion have been announced.

About the Quebec government, a study by Dr. Moussaly revealed that Quebec is siphoning \$300 million in my region. All the multinationals, all the tax measures which favour the Quebec government, all that never comes back to our region but goes to the greater Montreal region.

If the hon. member wants to talk about the last election, I can tell him that I defended my fellow citizens of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord against the whole PQ government. Still, we succeeded in defeating them because it is important to have people in this House to fight for research, for the park highway, so that the regions are taken into account by the Canadian government as much as possible, whenever possible.

On October 20 of last year, we received \$52 million to create a research centre for aluminium manufacturing. This is a good thing and we did not wait for the Quebec government because it would have taken another five years to reach an agreement.

[English]

Mr. Lynn Myers (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the eloquent speech of the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

It is interesting to hear the Bloc people talk about Toronto and other things. They conveniently forget that Mr. Bouchard squirreled away close to \$1 billion of health money in a Toronto bank, money that was earmarked for Quebecers.

I want to ask that great Quebecer and great Canadian, the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, if he would explain to us the

kind of good work the federal government is doing with respect to eradicating poverty, not only in Quebec but across Canada. I would like to hear his views because I know he is a very eloquent and passionate Quebecer and Canadian.

[Translation]

Mr. André Harvey: Mr. Speaker, I am first and foremost a regionalist and I find myself somewhat in agreement with *La Presse*'s Lysiane Gagnon, who says that Bloc Quebecois members are on a picnic here in the House.

In the wake of an election, Bloc Quebecois members are pretending to defend Quebec's interests. Let us begin by defending the interests of our region, which needs help badly. The Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region generates an extra \$300 million annually for Quebec, because of the multinationals that exploit us but do not leave us with any jobs to show for it.

As long as we had jobs from exploiting our resources, we kept quiet. But now natural resources are being exploited in a big way and jobs are disappearing. Quebec is therefore benefiting. We have the figures to prove it. I invite Bloc Quebecois members to read the latest study by Dr. Moussaly and they will see what is going on.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. André Harvey: It is not the federal government which is to blame, but the Government of Quebec, a government which is extremely—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but his time is up.

[English]

Mr. Shawn Murphy (Hillsborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like others who came before me, I also want to congratulate you on your new position as acting speaker. I wish you all the best in your new position.

• (1315)

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the voters of Hillsborough for their confidence in my candidacy. It is an honour and a privilege to serve in the House of Commons. I am grateful to have been given this opportunity. My pledge to each of them is simple: to work hard, to represent the district to the best of my ability and to be guided by the values of the people of Hillsborough.

Mr. Speaker, I must tell you that I am enjoying the view from this side of the House. When I left my previous place of employment, my associates gave me a present. They gave me a set of binoculars. They told me that where I was going in the House I

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would not be able to see either you or the chair without these binoculars. I am pleased to report that my view from this chair is excellent.

At this point in time I want to pay tribute to my predecessor in Hillsborough, Mr. George Proud. Mr. Proud served the constituents of Hillsborough with dedication and distinction during the last three parliaments of the House. George Proud was a hard worker, was committed to the people of Hillsborough and always maintained a very close contact with the common person.

The riding of Hillsborough is comprised of the city of Charlottetown and a portion of the town of Stratford. Charlottetown is a very historic location, especially as it relates to this country and this very institution. It was there in 1864 that delegates from Upper and Lower Canada and from the colonies of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island met for the purpose of exploring the possibility of forming a union which eventually led to this federation.

As members of parliament, it would assist us to reflect on the challenges and obstacles that faced those delegates who met in Charlottetown in September 1864. The obstacles were immense: cultural differences, historical differences, language differences, differences in trading patterns and religious differences.

Those delegates faced what in today's parlance would be considered insurmountable obstacles. However, they had one overarching objective: to form a country, a country that would be greater than the sum of its parts. That was exactly what they did, and that is why we are here today.

As I indicated previously, the view from this seat is excellent. It is through this vantage point that I can report to the people of Canada that the government is doing a good job, not only here in the House of Commons but also in administering the affairs of the nation. By following sound economic principles and implementing a balanced approach, an annual deficit of \$42.1 billion has now been eliminated and replaced by a surplus of \$12.4 billion.

The balanced approach includes paying down the debt and cutting taxes fairly. It includes investing in health care, research and innovation. It includes investing in families and children. It includes protecting the environment. This balanced approach is the reason why the Canadian people gave the government a third mandate.

The theme throughout the Speech from the Throne that impresses me the most, as a first time member of the House, is that of inclusion. Any time a country, such as Canada, experiences economic growth both social and economic inequities arise. This occurred during the industrial revolution and, to a lesser extent, has occurred in western economies that have experienced economic growth mainly brought about by the increased use of technology.

• (1320)

Economic and social inequities, if allowed to persist, are counterproductive to further economic growth and will eventually lead to social unrest. We cannot separate social and economic priorities.

The Speech from the Throne establishes an agenda that will widen the social and economic circle of the country. It includes programs to improve the lives of the poor, especially poor families with children, our aboriginal communities, the disabled, people who have a lack of skills or training and people who are illiterate.

One of the greatest challenges facing the government is the issue of child poverty. In the throne speech, the government has announced initiatives which, taken with commitments already announced, will provide children with a good foundation so that every child has a good start in life.

Some of the commitments already announced by the government include: spending \$2.2 billion over the next five years for early childhood education; the doubling of maternity and parental benefits available under the employment insurance legislation; the doubling of the child tax credit; and the lowering of income taxes for lower and middle income families.

I was pleased to see in the throne speech that the government will continue to expand on these initiatives. It has committed to implement new measures to help single parents overcome poverty and become more self-sufficient. It has committed to work with the provinces to modernize the laws relating to child support, access and custody. It has committed to take steps to enable parents to provide care for gravely ill children. Perhaps most important, it has committed to provide further income tax relief directed primarily at lower and middle income Canadians.

Another challenge facing the administration is the conditions found in our aboriginal communities. Too many aboriginal Canadians continue to live in poverty, without adequate housing, health, education or job opportunities. I am pleased to see in the throne speech that the government has made it a priority to ensure that the basic needs of aboriginals for jobs, health care, education, housing and infrastructure are met.

The government has taken a number of initiatives, including commitments for aboriginal post-secondary education and the creation of the aboriginal heads start program. There are a number of initiatives outlined in the throne speech that take these commitments a step further. A lot remains to be done but I believe the agenda is the correct one.

A third group that the throne speech reaches out to is those Canadians who do not have the necessary skills or training to

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compete in today's marketplace. The throne speech calls for a renewed effort in building a skilled workforce and the establishment of a national literacy initiative.

As a member of the House, I am pleased that our government has come forward with this agenda. The focus has shifted from economic survival to economic and social renewal.

• (1325)

Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his excellent maiden speech. It is a pleasure to have the hon. member from Atlantic Canada and the great province of Prince Edward Island here in the House.

I enjoyed the member's speech. He covered a wide range of important topics on the government's agenda and on the past performance of the government. He touched on important problems and issues that are of concern across the country. They are certainly of concern in his riding as they are in mine.

Would the member like to comment on one part of the government's plans, the area of innovation? Would he tell us what he thinks will be the impact of those important efforts in Atlantic Canada?

Mr. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I am very excited about the steps the government has taken with regard to innovation.

I was especially pleased last June in Halifax when the Prime Minister announced the Atlantic investment partnership. It called for approximately \$300 million to be spent in Atlantic Canada on innovative projects, mainly geared toward our university research institutions. I believe that is the right path. It will develop our innovative infrastructure in Atlantic Canada and we will see results in the years to come.

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I too want to congratulate the hon. member for his maiden speech. I remember the first speech I gave in the House of Commons. It is a very nerve-racking experience and can be very disconcerting. The member did an admirable job and I commend him. The only trouble is he is on the wrong side of the House.

Mr. Alex Shepherd: He is on your side.

Mr. Werner Schmidt: He is on my side but he is with the government over there.

I was rather impressed with the way the member dissected the Speech from the Throne. I think he did a pretty fair job of it. However, this morning a private member's bill was introduced that deals with the custody of children when parents divorce. The Speech from the Throne did not really deal with that issue. I know

the member cares about that issue because the people in Prince Edward Island are very concerned with families.

Would the hon. member tell us what his position would be in terms of joint custody for children?

Mr. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, first, I am on the same side of the House as the learned member. However, my goal in the House is to get to the other side of the House. If there is anyone over there, especially on the front benches, who wants to trade with me, I am willing to talk with them.

With regard to the custody of children in cases of divorced or separated families, the only principle, and by far the most important and significant principle, that has to be taken into account in any legislation that comes before us and is passed by the House, is that the best interests of the child be taken into account. All other interests are secondary.

Mr. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of France): Mr. Speaker, I also congratulate the member for Hillsborough. I know he comes from a very distinguished career on Prince Edward Island, including being on the board of the CDIC, and many other areas.

I was curious about his comments with regard to the linkage between social and economic policy. He also cited a few examples. Could develop that theme a little further, particularly in the areas of early childhood development, health care, drug abuse and other aspects.

Mr. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue. When we look at the history of nations, any time there are disparities or there is economic growth, economic and social inequities develop.

• (1330)

Canada has been sheltered somewhat from that because of the social legislation we have. It is important to bear this in mind. There are inequities in the wage levels in Canada, and that is why, in this 37th parliament, we have to bear in mind the family, children and the disabled. We have to widen the circle, not only the economic circle but the social circle.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak in support of the Liberal Party of Canada and its initiatives and plans for Canada on issues that are exceptionally important.

The Liberals have been in power since 1993. At the time we came to power, the economic state of the nation was, to put it mildly, a mess. There was a deficit of over \$42 billion and there were huge debts. There was a lack of confidence in the economy as well as a lack of confidence in the institutions themselves, whether

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it was parliament or the government itself. As well, there was a high unemployment rate in excess of 10%. Inflation was at an all time high. Bankruptcies were in the hundreds of thousands in almost every single sector of the economy. The international community's confidence in our economy was on shaky ground to a large extent. The picture was not very pretty.

The people of Canada gave us the opportunity and the mandate to govern. This government, in a three step approach, has taken a number of initiatives which I will put in a global setting.

The first step the Prime Minister and his government took was to restore confidence in the institution. To that extent, the government undertook one of the most dynamic and pragmatic analysis ever of almost every single program at the national level. In essence, the objective of that analysis was to find out in terms of plans or programs what should be in the federal domain and what should be in the provincial domain. A number of good things came out of that objective.

Also, the Government of Canada decided to let go in excess of 42,000 public servants, which caused a lot of harm in this community and this region. However, the government did that because it felt that it first had to clean its own house and set its own affairs in order.

Second, the government brought back confidence on the economic front. To that extent, the government had an exceptionally aggressive strategy to encourage trade and to look at every single segment of the Canadian economy, the manufacturing sector as well as the service sectors and others, in order to figure out the things that were necessary to put in place in order to support those sectors.

The government thus adopted a policy of low interest rates, without dictating to the Bank of Canada what should and should not be done. The government also embarked on a major infrastructure program, which created hundreds of thousands of jobs across the country. This program was exceptionally popular. The federal government provided one-third of the funding, the province put in a third and the municipalities put in a third. The program generated an economic stimulus across Canada. It created jobs and helped municipalities undertake projects they would not otherwise have undertaken.

• (1335)

The third thing for the government to do is to start investing in the future, based on the results of the first and second steps undertaken by the government. We have moved from a situation of having a \$42 billion deficit and a huge debt to a situation where, for the first time in a long time, we have a surplus. When the government started to generate the surplus we were able, for the first time in a long time, to start, at the turn of this century, to pay down the national debt. Our house is in order, public trust in the national institutions has increased and is in place and the economy is moving forward. Now that the Liberal Party has been elected for

the third time, it is time for investment. That brings me to the third point, which to a large extent is the Speech from the Throne, which the House of Commons is now debating.

It makes me very proud, first as a Canadian and second as a member of the Liberal Party of Canada, to see such a wonderful initiative put forward by the Prime Minister and his team. It makes me proud to be a Canadian and proud to be a member of this House. When I heard the Speech from the Throne I felt good and I thought, wow, it is really wonderful to be a member of this nation, this party and this parliament.

We will bring about very positive and managed change for Canadians over the next few years. We will see investments accelerating in areas that are exceptionally important and close to the heart of every Canadian. One case in point is the investment in education and training, in lifelong learning. The ability of a citizen to go back to school with government support, regardless of his or her age, is a wonderful thing.

Not too long ago the government initiated a \$400 maximum investment per child for each \$2,000 a parent invested in an RESP. That was a wonderful initiative, which will go a long way. With a situation like the one we have in Canada, where close to 25% of people have difficulty reading an application form or properly reading, writing or performing a very simple mathematical skill, it is high time for government at the federal, provincial and municipal levels to take initiatives to bring about positive change in the lives of our people. In 1986 a business study showed that the cost of illiteracy to the economy was in excess of \$10 billion annually. That is the direct cost, but the indirect cost of illiteracy to the nation is huge, in the tens of billions. To that extent, it is exceptionally important for the Government of Canada to embark on a program such as this one.

I bring up this point in order to say that it is only one good initiative the government has undertaken. There are a number of other initiatives on which I am sure my colleagues will elaborate in their own speeches. I was delighted, however, to see the Government of Canada embarking on this magnificent initiative. I know my constituents in Ottawa Centre will be thrilled to know that not only will they now be able to save for their children's education and have the government provide them with incentives and support, they can also do it for themselves.

Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his speech today. He is of course the member for Ottawa Centre and Ottawa has experienced tremendous economic activity in the last few years. I wonder if he would like to comment on and suggest how other areas of the country might try

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to emulate the success that Ottawa has had, particularly in the Kanata area with the high tech sector, and whether he would comment on what the innovation plans of the government would do to assist in that regard.

• (1340)

Mr. Mac Harb: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely true that this region has done miraculous things, one of which was dealing with the huge cuts to the public service. In excess of 40,000 people found themselves without jobs. On top of that, the economic situation overall was not that great.

In a matter of three to five years, things turned around in this region in an incredible way. This region is now not only the leading economic engine in this province and in this country, but will fairly soon lead any other city in North America and perhaps in the world in terms of economic activity.

I am proud and honoured to be a professional engineer by education and also a resident of this city that is so dynamic. I am so proud to be a representative of the riding of Ottawa Centre.

Ms. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your guidance and your help this morning. As well, I acknowledge and thank my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, who I will be splitting my time with today.

At this moment it is important that I express my sincere gratitude to the constituents of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, as they are the people who are responsible for me being in this wonderful House of Commons. My job as a member of parliament for my riding is that of a servant. I am very proud and humbled that they have chosen me to represent them. The people of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar put their faith in me and the Canadian Alliance Party that I represent. I know they want to see things done differently. I know they want their voices heard. I will do my very best to make sure that happens.

The constituency of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar is a beautiful part of Canada, a large rural riding with an urban component. Agriculture is of vital importance to the people of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, not only in the rural communities but also in the city of Saskatoon, where the spinoffs from the industry are prominent. It is very unfortunate that there was only a passing mention of Canada's agriculture industry in the throne speech. I find it hard to believe that an industry so important to our nation was not given more emphasis.

In the throne speech, the government says it will "help Canada's agricultural sector move beyond crisis management, leading to more genuine diversification and value-added growth, new investments and high standards of environmental stewardship and food

safety". I do not believe there are many members in the House that know more about agricultural diversification, value added growth and new investment in agriculture than I do. Perhaps that is why I find the Liberal government's flippant use of the words ringing hollow and so without meaning and true intent.

Under the Liberal government, the farming industry has been left in dire straits. Continuing international farm subsidies, thin trade negotiations, low commodity prices, government indecision, bureaucratic red tape and the gross inefficiency of farm income assistance programs have driven farm families across the country to desperation.

With all due respect, we have diversified. There is not one farm family I know of that has not moved from traditional grains to trying oilseeds and pulse crops. Some have developed community based investment options to diversify into seed production, seed cleaning or larger livestock operations. Farmers are turning grain land to grass and raising traditional livestock. Some are taking on huge debts to convert traditional livestock operations to specialty livestock. Others are experimenting with herbs, spices, vegetables and an assortment of other products that boggle the mind, anything to try to make ends meet and to diversify as their governments keep telling them they must.

There is not one farmer I know of who relishes the fact that he and his wife must work off the farm to keep the farm running. There is not one farmer I know of who likes going to farm rallies or who likes lobbying the government for help.

• (1345)

There is not one farmer I know of who watches sons or daughters leave the farm and is not literally heartbroken, just as my husband and I were when both our sons, their wives and our beautiful granddaughters left our farm and our small community for jobs in Regina and Edmonton because they could not make a living.

The government's loose use of catchphrases like diversification and value added is very convenient for its speech writers and bureaucrats, who cannot in a million years understand the situation on Canadian farms right now.

That is precisely why it is so disappointing, discouraging and infuriating for farm families to repeatedly be told by government that this is what they must do to survive in agriculture today. Yes, the agricultural industry is changing quickly, as is any other industry affected by our fast paced, technology reliant global economy, but do not tell us what we already know. Help us adapt, help us get there and help us continue to be the best food producers in the world.

In order for farmers to move past crisis management, the government must seriously and immediately deal with internation-

al agricultural subsidies. It has been all talk and no action from the Liberal government. While Canada has reduced agricultural subsidies, the American and European governments continue to subsidize their farmers at high levels. It is a simple case of competition, and we cannot compete.

International subsidies are crippling the agricultural industry in the country, and while the Liberal government took a tough stance to protect Quebec airplane manufacturer Bombardier from international subsidies, its stance to protect Canadian farmers against U.S. and European countries has been positively limp and lethargic.

I would like to believe that the weak mention of agriculture in the Speech from the Throne was an oversight by the Liberal government. It is a very sad situation if that is the case. However, it may very well be the start of a tough love demonstration promoted by the Prime Minister for western provinces. If that is the case, it is a demonstration that affects agricultural producers from our nation's eastern shores to the coast of British Columbia. It is an insult to the industry that built this country and that has fed our people, an industry that has fed the world and that needs our support.

I am committed to working on behalf of the agricultural community in my constituency and on behalf of all Canadian farmers. Before my term is up, I intend to make sure that each and every member of the House understands the importance of agriculture to the economic and social fabric of our country. The members of the House will be diversified right up to there.

If there has been one thing that has become clear to me since my decision to seek a position as a member of parliament, it is how important family is. There is nothing more precious to me than my own family. Since the election it has become increasingly obvious that my work on behalf of families in my constituency will be some of the most important work I do.

In my first few weeks on the job, I was approached by people with a variety of concerns: a woman in a situation of domestic violence who was dealing with the justice system; a couple who were not getting any answers from the AIDA program; and an elderly man who could no longer look after his ailing elderly wife in their home. There were others. The one thing all these people had in common was family, family members who were there trying to help them and support them through their problems.

What is so discouraging about the direction of the Liberal government over the last decade, and which continues to appear in the direction of this throne speech, is that it continues to put politics ahead of family. Families are forgotten. It does not matter what one considers: health care, where families cope with long surgical waiting lists; a mom who is a nurse and who is hardly home because of the tremendous numbers of shifts she works; financial issues, as families struggle to pay skyrocketing fuel bills; justice; child poverty; and agriculture.

Canadian families need our attention, especially the members of our family who have helped build this country. I especially look

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forward to spending time with and working for the senior citizens of my riding. They are special people who have contributed so much to building our communities, our province and our nation. They are our roots.

● (1350)

I want to recognize and pay special tribute to my mom, Irene Winacott, and to my mother-in-law and father-in-law, Roberta and Roland Skelton, for their love and their support. They are incredible people. The challenges they have faced in their lifetime were great and many, but they are wonderful examples of strength, grace and love.

I also want to thank my husband Noel for his patience, his whole-hearted support and his hard work, not only through the nomination process, the election campaign and consequently this new commitment, but for the last 36 years. I want to thank my children, my daughter Terri and sons Ted and Mark and their spouses, for being great cheerleaders, listeners and advisers. I want to thank my five beautiful granddaughters, Wendi, Tenille, Victoria, Shelby and Shae, for keeping me young.

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for her first speech in the House of Commons. Beyond what she said, I also want to compliment her on the tone of what she said, because she is speaking as a true representative of her community. I hear an urgency in her voice in regard to what she is talking about, which is the plight of her community, especially of the farmers.

I have been around the House for long enough to know, and I have come to understand that when it comes to big government programs, the Liberals cannot manage. Yesterday we had the minister answering some questions in the House of Commons about farm aid. Basically he was saying that his hands are tied and that he is doing the best he can in spite of a bad situation. However, he did not offer any solutions or any hope of relief for desperate farmers.

Last week we had tractors on the Hill. That was a sign of desperation. We have an AIDA program and the government says that is its answer, but I want to ask my colleague this: what is the practical situation in the kitchens of some of these farmhouses across her riding? Of those who are expecting AIDA to help them, what is their situation?

Ms. Carol Skelton: Mr. Speaker, there is desperation at our kitchen tables in Saskatchewan. People need their money. We have people waiting who filed their AIDA forms last September. They have been told by the AIDA office that their forms will not be looked at—for the first time—until March. These people need their AIDA payments at this moment. We would like the Liberal government to make sure that this is done as soon as possible.

S. O. 31

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the hon. member on her maiden speech.

As we look at agriculture and listen to her comments, we see that things are changing rapidly in agriculture. This year alone, some of the input costs have gone through the roof, such as fuel, energy and fertilizer costs. The costs for all of these things are going up and will further adversely affect farm operations.

Could the hon. member, as an active farmer, relate to the House and to Canadians some of the difficulties she and her farm family are facing due to this increase in expenses?

Ms. Carol Skelton: Mr. Speaker, we all know about the soaring price of natural gas. This immediately increases the cost of fertilizer. Any farmer who wants to get fertilizer is finding it very hard to obtain. We have fuel dealers who are on the verge of bankruptcy because their bills from last year have not been paid.

Farm families need immediate assistance. Unless assistance is given immediately, we will not have a crop put in this spring.

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the member from Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, and I wish to ask her if she has the same theme in her part of the province: we lost a large number of students this year and that has effectively closed some of our schools. The number of young people leaving the rural areas is so large that in many areas the traditional curling teams and hockey teams are done for, probably forever. Is that true in the hon. member's community?

• (1355)

Ms. Carol Skelton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises an important issue. In rural Saskatchewan we have lost basically a whole generation of farm families. They have all moved away, either to the city or to another province, because there are no jobs available for them in the rural communities. We find that they are having trouble getting into technical schools to further their education because the seats are already spoken for. We are losing that whole generation of agricultural people in Saskatchewan.

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[*Translation*]

AUDITOR GENERAL

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons, Volume III, dated December 2000.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(e) this document is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

CHARLIE GRANT

Mr. Joe Comuzzi (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I bring to your attention today the story of a great Canadian, a fine citizen of Thunder Bay and a very good friend.

Charlie Grant was born in Winnipeg in 1918. His first job was selling newspapers to help support his family. He married his childhood sweetheart, Dorothy, in 1943. They have 5 children and 12 grandchildren whom they love very deeply.

Charlie worked for the CPR and was transferred to Thunder Bay, thank goodness, in 1949. Every award that can be bestowed upon Charlie Grant by the city of Thunder Bay has been bestowed upon him. He was a builder of his church and was involved in little league baseball, the minor league hockey, Boy Scouts, Red Cross, United Way and so on. He was a teacher at Confederation College. When he retired he went into business for himself and now owns several travel agencies throughout Ontario. In his spare time he is up at 6 o'clock in the morning and finds his way home some time around 10 o'clock in the evening.

The real tribute to him is that like you, Mr. Speaker, in his spare time he reads *Hansard*. His motto in life is never retire. He is a wonderful person. I wish him luck.

* * *

FOOD FREEDOM DAY

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, today is Food Freedom Day, which means that it takes only 37 days for Canadians to earn enough money to pay for their food supply for an entire year. I salute the farmers who provide Canada with the safest, highest quality and most affordable food supply in the world.

However I must raise an important point: the increasing gap between what consumers pay and the money that actually reaches the farmer's pocket. Do we realize that by January 9 we have paid the farmer for a year's worth of food? Nine cents is all that a farmer receives from a \$1.50 loaf of bread.

The agriculture industry is the third largest employer in Canada. When it is hurting, all of Canada is hurting. It saddens me to say

that the only place there will be starvation this year is down on the family farm.

Farmers have built this country. Canada must not turn her back on them in their time of need. The government needs to recognize these facts and be willing to take some action.

* * *

FOOD FREEDOM DAY

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, happy Food Freedom Day. It is like Tax Freedom Day except that it pertains to food. It is true that if we put 100% of our income toward our basic food requirements, today is the day that we would have our bill paid in full.

Oh happy day, unless one is a farmer. The portion of this bill that is paid to the farmers was paid way back on January 9. It is sad, is it not, that it takes us 37 days to pay our entire food bill and only 9 days to pay our farmers?

In last week's throne speech the Governor General stated that the government would help Canada's agriculture sector move beyond crisis management. I applaud her for that. I also applaud the Prime Minister for promising that the matter of high U.S. agricultural subsidies would be the first order of business when he meets with the U.S. president this month.

In the meantime our farmers need support that they can take to the bank. I am calling upon every member to support our primary producers with a lobby for cash. Let us make Food Freedom Day a celebration for everyone.

* * *

DAVID IFTODY

Mr. Bob Speller (Haldimand—Norfolk—Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with shock and sadness that I stand today to extend my sympathy to his family and loved ones on the sudden death yesterday of our former colleague, David Iftody.

David was a good friend to many of us. As a former roommate of his, I knew how dedicated he was to his constituents, his province and his country.

● (1400)

He chaired and was an active member of the rural caucus and we fought many agricultural battles together. David was outspoken on behalf of the people of Provencher and we could always count on David to be in our corner when we needed support on rural issues.

David was a hard worker and a good parliamentarian and will be remembered for his positive outlook on life and his cheery smile to match.

On behalf of all his colleagues, I extend our sincere condolences to his family. David's voice and presence will be sorely missed in Manitoba and in the House.

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FOOD FREEDOM DAY

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is Food Freedom Day in Canada, as the annual food bill for consumers is paid in full. As of today Canadians have earned enough money to pay for their entire year's food supply, food which is the safest and most affordable in the world. It takes just 37 days for us to pay for our groceries. That is just 10% of our personal disposable income. In France, it is 13%, in Germany 15% and in Mexico 33%.

Our farmers are the most efficient and productive in the world, but while those who eat food celebrate today it is astonishing to note the date on which farmers get paid for all this food. It is January 9. It takes only nine days to pay farmers for a year's worth of food. Statistics Canada figures show that a waiter or waitress will make more on tips for serving the food than the farmer does for producing it in the first place.

* * *

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, today the auditor general released his report on the state of affairs in our public service. He warns of a crisis in the ability of the government to deliver essential services to Canadians.

He blasted the inability of the Public Service Commission to compete with the private sector in the hiring of the very best personnel. Seventy per cent of senior executives are expected to retire by the year 2008 and there is no plan to replace them.

I quote the auditor general, who states "The short term hiring practice shows a lack of long range planning with little regard for long range needs. There is no analysis of labour markets to assess trends".

The best and brightest are being courted and recruited by the private sector while the government pays no attention to filling their ranks. I call on the government to follow the advice of the auditor general to end quota hiring practices and start attracting the best recruits before this crisis cripples the ability of the government to competently deliver even basic government services to all Canadians.

* * *

BILL CORCORAN

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Oak Ridges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I pay tribute to Bill Corcoran, who passed away on February 3 following a courageous battle with cancer.

Many of the people in Richmond Hill remember Bill from his long years of service to the town of Richmond Hill as town councillor and hydro commissioner. He also served his country by

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serving overseas with the Queen's Own Rifles and the Cameron Highlanders.

Corky, as he was affectionately known, was a generous, kind hearted man with a wonderful sense of humour who stood by his word. Although I did not have the pleasure of working with Bill on council, I did have many opportunities during his tenure as hydro commissioner to discuss with him many issues of mutual concern to the community.

In particular, we will remember his great sense of duty, his warmth and his propensity for telling jokes. His dedication to public service and his concern for his fellow citizens were hall-marks of his political career.

I express my condolences to his wife, Eleanor and to his children, grandchildren and many friends. We will miss him.

* * *

[Translation]

SOIRÉE DES MASQUES

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, over the years, the Soirée des Masques has become a special occasion for focussing the spotlight on Quebec theatrical genius.

The seventh edition, held this past Sunday night at the Monument-National, demonstrated this once again. The evening, with actress Pierrette Robitaille as the mistress of ceremonies and orchestrated by Fernand Rainville to the texts of Pierre-Yves Lemieux, was a theatrical event in itself. The atmosphere was thick with emotion.

Quebec is fortunate indeed to have such talented artists, creative people, performers and production teams.

Bravo to the award winners and to all the nominees. Bravo and thanks also to all those numerous actors and actresses who were not nominated this time. Thank you, all the creative people who provide us with such thrills every time the curtain goes up. Thanks to, all members of the theatrical world.

* * *

[English]

TOQUE TUESDAY

Mr. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, homelessness is one of the greatest social problems of our time. Sadly we are accustomed to people sleeping in shelters and on the street. Even worse, there are far more who are invisible to us: people who live in appalling substandard housing.

While the reasons for homelessness are many, solutions to the problem are in short supply. Raising the Roof is a national charity dedicated to finding long term solutions to homelessness. It is

asking that we warm our hearts and indeed our heads this winter. Today is Toque Tuesday. Thousands of Canadians across the country are donning toques to draw attention to homelessness.

• (1405)

While I understand that props are not allowed and neither are funny costumes, I hope in this case you will forgive me for donning my toque.

The Speaker: I am sure we all admire the toque but some of us may have missed that.

* * *

CANADIAN FOODGRAINS BANK

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today and voice my support for a true Canadian success story, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

The foodgrains bank core program involves the provision of food to vulnerable people and households throughout the world. Started by prairie farmers, this program is expanding rapidly in Ontario and interest is mounting in the maritimes.

The Canadian Alliance caucus supports the work done by countless volunteers and private sector contributors involved with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, who donate their time, resources and services to help feed the world's hungry.

Canadians should look to the foodgrains bank as an example of how the private sector can lead and how the government can play a crucial supporting role in humanitarian assistance.

The foodgrains bank's three year funding agreement with CIDA expires on March 31. We urge the government to renew the agreement and continue this very successful program.

* * *

DAVID IFTODY

Mr. Tony Ianno (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise with great sadness today to pay tribute to a former seatmate, colleague and good friend, David Iftody, on his sudden passing.

I pay tribute to the dedication and devotion with which he served in the House, working tirelessly for the people of Provencher and championing many of their causes from the rural base he was so proud to represent. He was not afraid to stand up for what he believed in, at times when it might have been easier to go with the flow.

He fulfilled his role as a parliamentarian on issues that were dear to his heart. His position as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and his work on behalf of small business allowed him to display in the House his sharp wit.

His love of the outdoors and his support for the rural way of life were always evident. One could feel the pride he felt in his grandparents' struggle to establish roots in their chosen country. The opportunity to return to his grandparents' homeland, Romania, as a member of parliament, along with the Prime Minister of Canada, was an historical and emotional moment for David.

There is so much more I could say about this great friend, but I will end by expressing, along with my friends in the House, my heartfelt sympathies and condolences to his family at this very difficult time.

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FOOD FREEDOM DAY

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is Food Freedom Day. Canadians have now earned enough money to pay for groceries for an entire year. It takes Canadians 37 days to pay for food for one year, but it takes only 9 days, to January 9, to pay the farmer for producing that food.

Farmers receive a small share of the Canadian food dollar. From a loaf of bread that sells for \$1.50, the farmer receives only 9 cents. From a food basket of \$10.50, including chicken, bread, vegetables and milk, the farmer receives only 73 cents. The farmers, not the large corporations, deserve a greater share of the food dollar.

Finally, because of the crisis in agriculture now, the federal government needs to put an immediate cash injection in the hands of farmers and come up with a long term farm program based on the cost of production.

* * *

[Translation]

CHINA

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, as a democratic citizen concerned with the respect for human rights and as the Bloc Québécois spokesperson for the Asia-Pacific, I took part in a press conference organized by the Canada-Tibet Committee in order to support a demand that the Prime Minister of Canada bring to one negotiating table representatives of the Dalai Lama and of the Chinese government.

The Canadian government is well known for its fondness for appearing in the eyes of the international community as a broker of peace and an untiring defender of human rights. In that context, our current special relationship with China offers us a unique opportunity to put our principles into concrete actions.

Tributes

• (1410)

The Bloc Québécois does not want to see human rights sacrificed to the economic benefits of the Prime Minister's visit to China. The Tibetans have the right to retain their culture, a culture that is unique to them.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's equalization system is a cornerstone of our social policy. In fact it is the only constitutionally enshrined spending program.

The stated goal of equalization was to provide approximately equal levels of taxation and services across the country, regardless of province. Yet today the provinces that have the greatest need for economic growth are also suffering under the highest levels of taxation. As such, clearly Canada's equalization system is broken.

The premier of Nova Scotia, John Hamm, is in Ottawa today, leading a crusade to fix Canada's equalization system, starting with eliminating the clawback of offshore revenues which denies provinces like Nova Scotia and Newfoundland the opportunity to use offshore revenues to lower taxes, to lower debt and to create greater levels of economic growth for their people.

I urge all members of the House, regardless of province or party, to support John Hamm, premier of Nova Scotia, in this legendary crusade on behalf of all Canadians.

* * *

DAVID IFTODY

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in tribute to a young man whose life ended at all too young an age. I had the privilege of working with David Iftody for more than seven years. He was a faithful and dedicated member of the House.

[Translation]

David served his fellow citizens with enthusiasm and passion, and his extraordinary efforts in issues related to Indian and Northern Affairs testify to this.

[English]

David had strong opinions. He knew where his constituents stood on issues and he relayed their views with zeal. I saw how much the people of Provencher appreciated that when I visited his riding in 1997 in Lac du Bonnet, and most recently during the campaign, at a high school in Oakbank.

Oral Questions

I was disappointed when I learned that he would not be joining us in this parliament and today I am greatly saddened by his passing. Thank you, David. You will be missed by all of us.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to express my condolences at the sudden death of Mr. David Iftody. I first met Mr. Iftody a number of years ago at the University of Manitoba where he was my student. He was a bright and enthusiastic student. It was not surprising to me that he decided to pursue a career in the public service.

As an energetic and hard working member of parliament, he served the people of Provencher for seven years, representing their concerns in Ottawa and working in good faith to improve the lives of all Canadians.

He will be sadly missed by his former constituents, his family and friends, and by his colleagues in the House of Commons.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with consternation and sadness that we learned yesterday of the passing, at age 44, of our former colleague, David Iftody, who, when parliament was dissolved on October 22, was the member for Provencher, in Manitoba.

Mr. Iftody was first elected to the House of Commons in 1993 and re-elected in 1997. He was the chairman of the rural caucus of the Liberal Party, a member of the Standing Committee on Industry and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Born on June 15, 1956, in Winnipeg, Mr. Iftody studied at the University of Manitoba where he received a B.A. in social services and a masters degree in public administration. We will remember our colleague as a strong person dedicated to social justice, to which he devoted several years of his life.

I join all my colleagues in presenting to his family and friends our most sincere condolences.

• (1415)

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my NDP colleagues and as a member of parliament from Manitoba, I too join in expressing the shock and the sadness we all felt yesterday as word began to proceed with respect to David's sudden death.

I join with others here in paying tribute to the work that he did in this place; to his commitment to his constituency, the area around Lac du Bonnet and throughout the whole area of Provencher; his

commitment to his constituents; and the way in which he struggled from time to time, I think he would want it said, with what he thought his constituents wanted, what he thought his party wanted, and what he thought his church wanted.

In a time when we are talking a lot these days about free votes, he might want it noted that sometimes, to the Prime Minister's distress, he was one of the original free voters around here. We honour that memory of him as well.

We join with others in expressing condolences to his family and friends.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we lost one of our former members at the too young age of 44. David Iftody's untimely death was a shock to all of us in the House who knew him. He will be greatly missed by members of the House and the people of Manitoba.

David Iftody will be remembered best for his dedication and commitment to his constituents, whether it was helping out the people of Provencher during the 1997 Red River Valley flood or voting his constituency's wishes against his own government on gun control legislation. Members from all parties can respect that kind of commitment.

David was first elected to the House in 1993 and re-elected in 1997. He served his constituents and his party as parliamentary secretary of Indian affairs and as chairman of the Liberal rural caucus. David understood rural Canada. He fought and worked for the rural way of life in Manitoba.

I extend my condolences on behalf of the PC Party to the surviving members of the Iftody family. On behalf of Manitoba I thank David for his years of public service.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: I invite hon. members to rise for a minute of silence for our former colleague, David Iftody.

[*Editor's Note: The House stood in silence.*]

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*English*]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general's latest report was tabled just minutes ago in the House. Sir, if you are looking for a good sleep tonight, I would not suggest that you read this book before retiring, retiring for the evening that is.

It says that Canadians are justifiably upset about scandals, about mismanagement and about waste. The auditor general states that things are getting worse and that he shares the frustrations of Canadians.

So do we. This is wasted and lost money that could have gone to health care. It could have gone to helping students with high debt loads. It could have gone to community agencies. It is lost forever.

The Prime Minister promised year after year that he would clean up his act. He has not. This is a mess. Why is it that way and why does he not care?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have an auditor general who reports four times a year. Previously the auditor general reported once a year.

He is there to find out where we have problems in the administration. We receive the report. We study it very seriously and we implement the recommendations that he makes. It is a very good process. It is public and it is done to make sure that taxpayer dollars are well spent.

• (1420)

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that just does not reflect reality. I am quoting the auditor general. He says that the problems are by no means exclusive to one program or to one department. He goes on to say:

It is discouraging to witness new incidents of waste and mismanagement crop up hydra-like after older ones have been discovered—

New and ongoing mismanagement. In the red books that we hear about from time to time there is a promise that the Prime Minister will hold ministers responsible for waste and mismanagement. Which ministers is he holding responsible?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they are all responsible for their departments and they are very diligent.

I would like to inform the Leader of the Opposition that when we came to office in 1993 the federal government was spending something like \$121 billion on programs every year. Since that time we have reduced the level of spending on programs by 20%. After seven years we are not back to the \$121 billion.

This is great testimony that the government is taking public spending extremely seriously. Whenever there is an error we correct it as quickly as possible.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that math is very scary. The Prime Minister says he has reduced spending 20% but the problems have increased. So with less money he is creating more problems.

The auditor general has some simple advice for the government: “Don’t waste public money. Do nothing illegal. Act impartially,

honestly and fairly”. The auditor general goes on to say that while these principles may seem self-evident, most of us would agree: “don’t waste public money. Do nothing illegal. Act honestly”. Yet he goes on to say they are self-evident and not clear enough to have prevented breaches.

Would the minister responsible for HRDC tell us if she thinks these are fairly clear principles? If so, why does she not follow them?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very tempted to go through the list of all the things that were given to his riding when he was a member of the assembly in Alberta. Money was given to hair salons, Dairy Queens, limousine services, and even to a tuxedo rental company.

* * *

GOVERNMENT GRANTS

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general says that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. It is difficult for the Chair to hear the questions and the answers, and I have to ensure they are in order.

Miss Deborah Grey: Mr. Speaker, these kinds of answers have nothing to do with the real problem. The auditor general says that new incidents keep cropping up. I asked the industry minister about one yesterday. He did not even know of this latest one.

He knows that Mr. Lemire and Mr. Pepin have been charged with fraud and theft in their handling of government grants in the Prime Minister’s riding. They are also involved in a questionable Shawinigan scheme that allowed them to qualify for \$600,000 more by using previous federal grants for seed money.

Something is wrong with that. The Prime Minister’s chief of staff was warned in writing, yet the deal slithered through anyway. Has the industry minister contacted the RCMP about this? Yes or no.

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on any matter that the RCMP should be involved in, the RCMP will have its own volition to take whatever action it deems appropriate.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, surely the industry minister, if he has a handle on his department, would of his own volition have some problems with some of the things that have gone on for years, not only in this department but in many departments across the way, evidently with full sanction from the Prime Minister.

Oral Questions

The fact that the industry minister has announced that he is trying to demand money back from Lemire and Pepin proves that there was impropriety with taxpayer dollars. That is why we sent these documents to the RCMP last December 8 as soon as this was revealed.

Why did the government make \$600,000 available without ensuring that absolutely all criteria were met?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite keeps mixing up a variety of different files. It appears to me her only purpose seems to be to want to try to malign the reputation of people without proper examination of the facts.

The reality is that there was an overpayment which has been dealt with. Funds are now in the process of being returned by the agreement of all sides.

With respect to the RCMP, if the member has any evidence whatsoever that she thinks warrants an RCMP investigation, she should pass it on to the RCMP. If she is interested in justice, she should allow it to do its job before she attempts to carry on as she has, smearing on the floor of the House the reputations of many people. It is—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Roberval.

* * *

• (1425)

[Translation]

CINAR

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the resolution of a tax dispute, Revenue Canada has two ways of negotiating an agreement with a delinquent company. The first is through voluntary disclosure, where the error is admitted before it is discovered. The second is through a decision based on the discretionary authority of the Minister of National Revenue.

My question is addressed to the Minister of National Revenue. I am not asking for the confidential details of the agreement between Revenue Canada and CINAR, but can the minister confirm to the House that this agreement was indeed based on a ministerial decision taken by virtue of his discretionary authority?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have said this several times in the House.

First, it is obvious that the Income Tax Act prevents the Minister of National Revenue from commenting on any individual file.

Second, there are many more ways of resolving files than those mentioned by the opposition member.

Third, the Minister of National Revenue must not get involved in any of the investigations being conducted by the department.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary for the Minister of National Revenue.

Since there are so many ways for the Department of National Revenue to arrive at a resolution, I ask him, without wishing to know the details of the agreement with CINAR, what method he and his department decided on to reach an amicable agreement with this corporation?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will once again repeat what I said.

As the Minister of National Revenue, I cannot comment on any individual case involving the department. I think most Canadians appreciate this fundamental principle of confidentiality underlying the Income Tax Act. I think everyone here supports this principle.

Second, when investigations are under way, if there is a hypothetical reference to a particular case or to any of the cases that we may be processing, the Minister of National Revenue does not become involved. All files are handled by the department's investigators and they do an excellent job.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it would appear that, under the agreement reached in December between CINAR and the Customs and Revenue Agency, there will be no proceedings in this matter.

However, *La Presse* noted this morning that the Minister of National Revenue, before his entry into politics, was associated with the law firm of Smiley, Cauchon, which specialized in copyright and credit arrangements in the area of film and television production.

Out of a concern for transparency, would the minister tell this House that he never had any professional link of any sort, prior to 1993, with CINAR, subsidiaries of it or companies or individuals connected with CINAR?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in tax terms, as the public knows, I cannot comment on a specific file, especially the file referred to.

Now, if we are talking about my situation when I was a lawyer, have I acted as the lawyer for the company being referred to, that is, CINAR? To the best of my knowledge, I have never been

CINAR's lawyer, and I know that this has been stated publicly and that CINAR was approached on this.

I imagine that CINAR was approached on this question. But I, to the best of my knowledge, have never acted as counsel for CINAR, and, once again, I do not get involved in the investigations of Revenue Canada.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if it was intentional, but the minister forgot part of my question about whether he had acted as the lawyer of any of CINAR's subsidiaries, or companies or individuals linked to CINAR.

That said, in this particular case, could the minister confirm for this House that he does not intend to grant any form of immunity once the current police investigation of CINAR or its former directors has been completed?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is simple. The Income Tax Act is clear. There is a specific section on the matter of confidentiality.

I consider confidentiality one of the key elements of the Income Tax Act, and I intend to respect it, regardless of the number of questions I am asked on all of the files that may come before Revenue Canada. I will stand firm as the Minister of National Revenue on the matter of respect for confidentiality. The members of the opposition know that I cannot comment.

* * *

● (1430)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general has presented his report. Clearly, the employment insurance commission has no explanation of how it sets contribution rates. These high rates have helped to increase the surplus in the employment insurance fund.

Could the government explain what factors are used to determine contribution rates and why the rate is higher than the one proposed by the chief actuary of the commission?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general raised this question before the Standing Committee on Finance. The committee suggested that we review the rate setting procedure with regard to EI premiums.

The hon. member will know that the bill before the House actually proposes a two year review of the rate setting process. I am sure she will want it passed and that she will support it.

Oral Questions

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the auditor general keeps raising it. So does the public but the government does not deal with it.

The unemployment insurance surplus has ballooned to a massive \$30 billion and it continues to grow. According to HRDC's chief actuary, that is twice the reserve that is needed. The auditor general and all Canadians want to know why the EI bank account is so fat.

I ask the minister, how fat does the EI account have to become before she starts investing it where it belongs, namely on Canadians who want to get back to work?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to remind the hon. member that every year since taking office the government has reduced employment insurance premiums. Today the savings to Canadian employers and employees is \$6.4 billion.

I would like to add that in the House there is a bill that specifically deals with the auditor general's recommendation that we review the rate setting process. I again ask the hon. member to enjoin her party to get this bill passed very quickly so we can do just that.

* * *

ENERGY

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. It concerns the North American free market in energy, which he has discussed with President Bush.

Could the Prime Minister tell us whether that proposal includes water, and in any event, would he give a commitment to the House of Commons that before there is any serious discussions with the United States of America for free market in energy, that issue is discussed in the House and in committees of the House?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, energy is covered by the free trade agreement. There is nothing new to that. It is not an area of restriction. Canada sells a lot of energy to the United States, especially from Alberta. We profit a lot because we have a policy that permits us to export energy resources to the United States. I hope that the member from Calgary is not opposed to the fact that Canadians are selling energy to the American market.

* * *

AUDITOR GENERAL

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, I hope the Prime Minister will take a look at the question and answer, particularly those portions that relate to consideration in the House.

Oral Questions

Let me ask him a question about the auditor general's report as it relates to crown corporations, particularly the method by which the boards of crown corporations are appointed.

The auditor general says that the bible that is used now is the worst model available. It is a model that allows patronage appointments by the Liberal government. He recommends that there should be a change that would rely more upon search communities.

Will the Prime Minister give us a commitment now that that kind of change in the appointment of members of the boards of crown corporations will be adopted by the government?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the cabinet make appointments based on the laws passed by parliament. We of course have some discretion on the appointments because we want to ensure that every part of Canada is represented.

We made a lot of appointments to increase the number of women on these boards that did not exist before. We make sure that a proportion of francophones are represented according to the population. We make sure that the people from visible minorities can have the occasion to serve their country on those boards.

• (1435)

The Speaker: Order, please. I just want to draw to the attention of members that we have stretched the limits on questions and answers throughout so far and I would ask for co-operation in ensuring we stick within the limits.

* * *

GOVERNMENT GRANTS

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, as a result of questions we asked in the House yesterday, we now know that the industry department is demanding the \$100,000 grant back from ARC. Obviously the funds were used improperly.

Can the Minister of Industry tell the House exactly what the problem was with this file? Why did the government demand this money back?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a routine audit of the program, as is done on a regular basis, demonstrated that some \$98,000 worth of expenditure funds that had been transferred had not yet been accounted for. The department, taking routine measures, sat down with the receiving organization and came to an agreement to recover those funds. This is the purpose of the audit process when it is done on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it seems like the auditor general and the routine auditors will have to work overtime to keep up with the government across the way.

The fact remains that \$100,000 of grant money was misused by the same two men charged in two other cases of fraud and theft. If he will not ask the RCMP to get involved, will the minister table a full accounting of this matter with a complete explanation as to the improper use of taxpayer funds? Will he table it in the House?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be quite happy to invite the member to meet with me and I will give him a full briefing. I also would be happy to table before the House a full briefing.

Perhaps the member opposite does not realize it, but today he, and yesterday his colleague, mixed up several different files and several different organizations.

The fact of the matter is that the CCIP is a good program. Shawinigan was only one of 22 communities across Canada that received funding for this program. According to today's *Globe and Mail*, its own analysis shows that Shawinigan deserved—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lotbinière-L'Érable.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the auditor general's report, 25% of the boards of crown corporations are totally out of their depth, because the government appoints members according to political criteria rather than competency.

My question is for the Prime Minister. How can he justify the fact that, for his government, political allegiance holds more weight than professional competency, when the time comes to select people who will be administering billions of dollars through crown corporations?

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I invite the hon. member to take care in making such allegations. He must be aware that the government has appointed competent people from all over Canada as board members.

Is he telling us that someone like Julie Payette, the well known astronaut, ought not to be on the natural science board, that Dr. Dyane Adam ought not to be the commissioner of official languages, that Beverley McLachlin ought not to be the chief justice of the supreme court, that Phil Fontaine ought not to be a member of the Canada millennium foundation board?

These are the kind of allegations he seems to be making.

Oral Questions

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by making appointments on the basis of political allegiance instead of competency, is the Prime Minister not demonstrating that, for his government, it is more important to ensure that it has influence over the crown corporations by appointing Liberals, than that they be properly administered by appointing competent people?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are things we do and one thing we do not do.

This was the case of the Parti Québécois, which required Quebec representatives outside the country to formally declare that they were separatists or lose their jobs.

Here we appoint competent people. Certainly, we appoint Liberals, because there are far more Liberals in Quebec and in Canada than members of any other party.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there has been much speculation that the Russian government is trying to sweep the Knyazev drunk driving case under the diplomatic carpet.

Ten days have gone by since this tragedy occurred and not only are there no charges in Russia against Knyazev, but there does not even appear to be a criminal investigation under way.

• (1440)

My question is, has the Prime Minister been in touch yet with President Putin to ask him personally to move the case along, and if not, why not?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as recently as this morning I received a communication from our embassy in Moscow confirming once again that in their discussions with the Russian foreign ministry it has been confirmed that they are living up to the commitments that they made previously.

To me there is an internal investigation going on. It will lead to the request for the relevant documents to be forwarded by Canadian police to Russian authorities, which would then enable charges to be laid.

At this point I have every reason to continue to have confidence that they will meet the commitments they have made to us.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I will have to switch gears here to talk about the case of Canadian William Sampson who is sitting in a Saudi Arabian jail

right now facing murder charges and, if convicted, the death penalty.

Does the minister have confidence that Mr. Sampson's confession was not coerced, that our officials will have immediate access to him and that in fact he will get a fair trial?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been in contact with Saudi authorities. I have asked the ambassador to deal not only with my counterpart, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, but also with the interior minister with a view to obtaining renewed consular contact with Mr. Sampson. I really have no basis upon which to judge the alleged confession, nor do we have information about the case.

We would expect and request that any Canadian accused of criminal wrongdoing would receive a proper trial before an impartial arbiter.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general today confirmed in his report that the surpluses accumulated as at March 31, 2000 in the employment insurance fund amounted to \$28 billion, twice the figure the chief actuary of Human Resources Development Canada deemed sufficient to build a reserve for the plan.

Is the auditor general not confirming in his remarks what the Bloc Québécois has said for a number of years, namely that the government is unacceptably dipping into the employment insurance fund, thus making off with money that does not belong to it?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me remind the hon. member again of a number of things. First and foremost, unemployment numbers in Canada today are at record lows. More people are working, more people are paying premiums and that is good for us.

I would remind the hon. member that there have been times in the recent past where we have been in deficit and so we have to manage that account wisely.

I would also remind the hon. member that there is a bill before the House that will allow us to review the premium setting process. I am sure he will want to support that bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, did the minister not just acknowledge that the employment insurance bill, which will now

Oral Questions

enable her to use the fund surplus as she will, is intended to escape such scathing remarks by the auditor general in future reports?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems like the hon. member is asking us to review the process by which employment insurance premiums are set. In the bill before the House that is precisely what we are recommending.

Surely he will support that bill when it is in committee and we will move on.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the health minister allowed the Sagekeeng Solvent Treatment Centre to receive over 40 times the average funding for native addiction treatment. This enormous windfall was given in the face of his own auditors looking into corruption and misspending beginning in 1995.

Can the minister explain to Canadians why he poured such extraordinary amounts of the public's money into a group with a long track record of questionable practices?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first let me congratulate the member on her appointment as the health critic for her party.

Let me first say that she should know we have ordered a forensic audit of the centre to which she has referred. In fact, we are before the court this week to ensure that we get full access to all the records so that we can trace all the public moneys.

I share her concern that there be a full accounting for all public moneys spent. We have stopped funding the centre. We will get to the bottom of this. We will do everything possible to recover any funds that were misspent.

• (1445)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the point is that the minister ignored an earlier audit which showed incredibly questionable practices by this group.

Here are some of the warning bells in the audit that the minister slept through: more than \$1 million in payments to companies owned by clinic directors; a whopping bill of over \$300,000 for just one client; questionable vehicle payments; unsupported travel claims; and money spent on trips to Las Vegas, Australia and Hawaii. The list went on and on.

Why did the minister fail so badly in his duty to protect the public interest?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some of the transactions the member refers to and the entire

activities of the centre are now under careful scrutiny, not only by Health Canada and auditors but where appropriate by police authorities.

I share her concern that those public funds be accounted for fully. I assure her we will do everything to make certain that occurs.

* * *

AUTO INDUSTRY

Ms. Susan Whelan (Essex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, DaimlerChrysler has announced it is reducing its operations in Canada as part of its restructuring plan. In particular, Windsor and Brampton are the subject of job losses.

As one in seven jobs in Canada depends on the automotive industry, could the Minister of Industry inform the House and all Canadians today what action the government is taking?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Essex for her question. I acknowledge the interest of the member for Brampton Centre and many others in this place about the health of the auto industry.

Yesterday I spoke with the international president of DaimlerChrysler. I met with Mr. Buzz Hargrove from CAW last night. I offered the assurance of the government that we want to work with both the industry and the union to assist in the transition for those who for the moment have lost their jobs because of the downturn.

We stressed quite strongly with DaimlerChrysler our interest in seeing both R and D in Canada continue and a new product line for the Pillette Road plant.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general today issued several alarming reports showing serious negligence by the government regarding food safety and health protection.

One example is that Canadian meat exporters to the United States must meet certain standards regarding salmonella and E.coli. If the standards are not met, the establishment cannot export but can continue to produce for Canadian markets.

Given everything we know about salmonella and E.coli and now mad cow disease, how can it be that the government has no such standards? Will it immediately introduce a pathogens reduction program?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I confirm to the hon. member and everyone in Canada that the explanation of how this system works is being given to the auditor general.

Oral Questions

The United States asks that we use its system of inspection to reach a certain point. It is a different way of getting there. If we get there exactly the same way, only we use a different track with the Canadian inspection system, I can assure her that if a product is not suitable to be exported it will not be provided to the domestic food chain either.

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the health minister who has ultimate responsibility for food safety.

The auditor general showed that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has unilaterally and arbitrarily decided not to regularly inspect non-federally registered establishments. We are talking about infant formula, unpasteurized juice, peanut butter and other products in a sector where about half the recalls in terms of food happen and which only gets about 5% of the food safety resources of the government.

This is a violation of the Food and Drugs Act. The minister is in dereliction of duty. Will he correct this matter immediately?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I explained to the House before, the role of the food inspection system in Canada is to monitor and enforce regulations set by the ministry of health. The ministry of health monitors the actions of the Canadian food inspection system.

We have federally inspected plants. By the Constitution, we are not involved in the inspection of food produced in provincially inspected plants. That is the role of the municipality and the provincial governments.

• (1450)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Recent disclosed information tells us that the Virginia Fontaine clinic in Montana received \$37 million and is owned by Perry Fontaine.

There is evidence of highly questionable funding and spending practices. An exorbitant amount of money was approved by Paul Cochrane, an assistant deputy minister at health who resigned two weeks ago, and whose wife purchased condos at Mont Tremblant on behalf of Mr. Fontaine.

Could the minister explain how his former ADM could authorize such an enormous amount of cash with little or no departmental scrutiny?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the transactions referred to by the member are the subject of an inquiry, either by the police, by auditors or by both.

As I mentioned in response to an earlier question, we are before the courts in Manitoba this week to make sure we get access to all the documents necessary to understand how public funds were spent.

I assure the member and the House that we will do everything possible to trace every one of those public dollars, and if any were misspent to recover them on behalf of the public.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, it certainly begs the question when did the minister first become aware of it and why did he wait so long to act.

Given the staggering amount of taxpayer money that has been handed out by his department while hospitals across the country continue to struggle under his government's cuts, will the minister confirm that this matter, if warranted, will be turned over to the RCMP? Will the forensic audit also include an inquiry into why his department delayed so long before acting?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the question of timing, I can tell the member that some months ago when these matters were brought to my attention I directed the department to suspend further payments to the centre until all questions were answered.

On the subject of the RCMP, I can tell the member that the RCMP is already very much involved in investigating many of the transactions to which he has already referred.

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, native people all across the country are looking for financial accountability.

Let us take the example of the Sayisi Dene nation in Manitoba. The Virginia Fontaine treatment centre sent its staff on a Caribbean cruise. Guess who went along? The assistant deputy health minister who was wheeling and dealing with the president of the treatment centre to buy condos at Mont Tremblant.

The band council reneged on a \$100,000 payment to the Russell Funeral Home. It continues to owe \$3 million to Wing Construction and band members still do not have decent housing or schools for their children.

How much evidence does the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development need to initiate a forensic audit on this band's books?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already talked about some of these issues. I share the member's concern. I too am troubled by what we see at this centre.

Oral Questions

That is why we have undertaken a forensic audit. In fact we have stopped funding the centre, cut off further funds. We are in front of the court to make sure we get access to all the documents we need. I have assured the House, and I do it again, that we will do everything possible to trace every public dollar that went to that centre, and if any were misused to recover that money.

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this is much more than a matter of the health department. This is really under the jurisdiction of the minister for aboriginal affairs. This issue continues to grow and grow. It is just the tip of the iceberg. Unfortunately it is one of the many cases across the country.

In the throne speech the government stated that it would support first nations communities, implementing more effective and transparent administrative policies. I recently heard the minister say “It is time to stop the talk and start the walk”.

If he is serious about walking the walk, will he today order his department to initiate a full forensic audit of this band’s affairs and offer its members and all Canadian taxpayers full financial accountability of taxpayer money?

Hon. Robert Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome our new critic. The first thing he probably should do is get himself a full briefing by the department.

If he had bothered to take us up on our offer of a full briefing, he would already know that the department has put the Sayisi Dene under third party management. The department is looking after the books on behalf of the members of that band until their financial situation is rectified.

* * *

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister met with the new American president. We know that softwood lumber is one of the most contentious issues between Canada and the United States.

Could the Prime Minister confirm that the position he presented to the American president on the softwood lumber issue is a complete return to free trade?

• (1455)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the position that our government has always advocated. However, we must also take into account the fact that the Americans have some responsibility.

I think the president very clearly indicated that he was in favour of free trade and that one of his main concerns at this point was to make sure that the free trade that exists between Canada, the United States and Mexico was extended to the other countries of the hemisphere.

I then pointed out to the president that the principle which he was upholding should also apply to softwood lumber.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, could the Prime Minister tell us whether the American president gave him the assurance that, when free trade resumes on April 1, the United States will not impose countervailing duties on Quebec exports of softwood lumber, as they did in the past?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not get any such indication. We undertook a dialogue with the Americans and we hope to find a solution by March 31 of this year.

We know full well, however, that under the free trade agreement the Canadian government does not provide any subsidies to any lumber producer and that Canadian products can enter any part of the United States at no cost.

* * *

[English]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, first it was the billion dollar boondoggle at HRDC. Then it was the Shawinigan problem in the Prime Minister’s riding. Then it was the problem with the native treatment centre in Manitoba under the Minister of Health. Now it is the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The auditor general said today that an internal audit by the department states that 19% of files reviewed did not meet minimum standards of due diligence. It goes on to say that 37% of files are borderline acceptable.

Is the end of the line with the Minister of Canadian Heritage, or is everybody involved in incompetence and mismanagement?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism)(Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the audit which the auditor general refers to occurred last year, almost a year ago. All the recommendations which the auditor general made have been implemented.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that is totally unacceptable. The auditor general said in 1998 that they could not assure themselves that departmental officials had exercised due diligence. In 2000 he said they found that while some remedial action had taken place, it was not good enough. He went on to say that the department’s response to the audit was unsatisfactory. I do not believe the minister—

Oral Questions

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: It is most unhelpful for the member to suggest who he believes or who he does not believe. I know he would not want to suggest anything else. Perhaps he will put his question directly and avoid that kind of reference in his remarks.

Mr. John Williams: I will put my question directly to the Minister of Canadian Heritage. What does it take to light a fire under her to get the job done right all the time?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism)(Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry the hon. member thinks it is unacceptable to have implemented all of the auditor general's recommendations.

* * *

[Translation]

ASBESTOS

Mr. Gérard Binet (Frontenac—Mégantic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a little ways away and there is a lot of noise.

My question is for the Minister for International Trade and has to do with the safe use of asbestos.

The asbestos industry and its workers in Canada are being threatened by the arbitrary and unjustified decisions by a number of countries to ban asbestos, thus breaching the rules of international trade.

What is being done, and what does the Government of Canada intend to do to ensure that the rules of international trade are respected? Is the World Trade Organization the only avenue open to the Government of Canada to protect the asbestos industry and its workers?

• (1500)

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Frontenac—Mégantic for his interest in this matter. I also wish to congratulate him on getting elected, and welcome him to the House.

In October of last year, we appealed the ruling by the WTO panel on chrysotile asbestos. The panel should hand down its ruling sometime in March.

I would emphasize that our government worked hand in hand with the industry and the Government of Quebec on the wording of the appeal, and we can be proud of this close co-operation.

* * *

[English]

YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are growing increasingly more concerned over the violence associated with youth crime. Over the past three decades violent youth crime has increased by over 300%.

Since 1993 the government has promised substantive reform but it has failed to deliver. The minister's recycled act is simply the same old book with new covers and will be impossible to enforce. What is the point of introducing an act that cannot be enforced?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know better than most in the House that the act will be enforced.

The act is based upon three fundamental values shared by Canadians regardless of where they live. First, we prevent youth crime. Second, we hold young people accountable. Third, we make sure we rehabilitate them and reintegrate them into Canadian society.

The hon. member should know that is the only way we will truly create a safer and more secure society.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Ontario attorney general says that the new youth justice act is bad news because it does not deal with the reality on the streets, in the courts and in the hospitals.

The Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario attorneys general say that there was a failure to consult on the bill. If the minister has been consulting, why is she not listening?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have consulted on this legislation. We have been consulting for some three years and we have listened.

However, if the hon. member is suggesting that we on this side of the House will simply accept the solution of the attorney general of Ontario for youth crime, which seems to be let us put more young people in jail for longer, I am sorry but he can forget it.

* * *

[Translation]

WATER CONTAMINATION

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the water in the municipality of Shannon is contaminated and the source of this contamination appears to be on the Valcartier military base.

Yesterday, the Government of Quebec announced the measures it intends to take to rectify this situation.

Given that the pollution appears to originate on the Valcartier military base, does the minister intend to work with the Government of Quebec to identify its specific source?

Privilege

[English]

Mr. John O'Reilly (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, DND officials are aware of the contamination in the municipality. There remains a number of questions about the source and severity.

DND is very concerned about the health and welfare of the residents of Shannon and other communities near Valcartier. As a landowner, employer and community member, the department is working closely with provincial and local authorities to ensure the safety of area residents, many of whom are current or retired Canadian forces members and civilian employees of the Department of National Defence.

* * *

PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Tim Stevenson, Minister of Employment and Investment of the province of British Columbia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

* * *

● (1505)

PRIVILEGE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege related to a committee. I want to point out that last March the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs studied a matter dealing with confidentiality of the work of legislative counsel. In fact the matter was referred to the committee by the House.

During a series of committee meetings, which started on March 28, 2000, the committee heard from a number of witnesses. In fact, on March 30 two employees in the office of legislative counsel, namely Louis-Philippe Côté and Diane McMurray, appeared as witnesses before the committee at the request of the committee.

Before making any statements, one of the witnesses asked:

Is the committee in a position to offer any safeguards against future reprisals for our wish to fully assist the committee in its deliberations with respect to the rights and privileges of members of Parliament as they relate to solicitor-client confidentiality?

In an examination of the transcript of that meeting, it is clearly evident from the witnesses' testimony that they alleged—and I want to emphasize alleged—chastisement and harassment for a period of some four years prior to this event before the same committee of the House. In fact, there was an harassment com-

plaint laid by them at the committee on March 30, 2000 which had still not been resolved.

In the course of the discussions that ensued among committee members regarding the request for the granting of protection, the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough stated:

On this point, Mr. Chair, I would strongly urge you to give them certainly the assurance that they will if they tell the truth, which I fully expect they will, there is going to be no backlash or effect on their jobs or any sanction or any interference with their careers by virtue of coming before this committee—

After an examination of the transcript of that meeting, it was very clear and evident that the committee had afforded to them the protection of the committee.

It is extremely interesting to note that after their appearance these witnesses, as employees of the House, were shuffled. In fact, during early April they were told one would be seconded to the Library of Parliament and the other would be seconded to the Senate effective April 18. That was about two and a half weeks after they appeared before the committee.

There were a number of complaints later regarding this. On April 16 it was agreed that the two of them would go on sick leave for a short period of time. On June 9 they offered to return and were told no. They were put on leave with pay, notwithstanding their offer to work immediately.

In September, with a view to returning to work, the harassment charge, which was outstanding, was withdrawn. Again, they requested to return to work. They were not working, they were being paid but they were not allowed to return to work. It appears that they were ready, willing and able to return to work but they were being denied.

On Friday, October 13, after approximately four months of not working but being paid, and just as the election writ was descending, they received individual letters of termination. They were fired.

I want to suggest that the shotgun firing failed to relay or specify in any way specifics. There were no details or particulars. There was nothing but allegations and a push out on to the street. There was no severance package and no specific reasons. There was just a forced exit out onto the street on the eve of the election.

● (1510)

Beauchesne's 6th Edition, article 853 on page 237 states:

Every witness attending before the House or any committee thereof may claim the protection of the House in respect of the evidence to be given.

It is patently clear that this privilege was requested by these witnesses. It is patently clear it was given to these two people. That having been done, I would submit that the House cannot, should not and will not tolerate this type of interference with witnesses who have appeared before it.

Privilege

I would also submit that their careers have been poisoned after 26 years of collective service to the House. I would also submit that if these dismissals are allowed to stand, we will never again see or hear an employee before a committee giving any evidence. I would have to ask who would blame anyone?

Finally and most importantly, I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, the temporal connection between their appearance before the committee, their workplace shuffle, the secondment and then out the door and their ultimate firing on the eve of the election call is far too coincidental to be ignored.

In closing, I submit that this is a prima facie question of privilege and I await your ruling as to whether I can put the question.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this question of privilege. I am sympathetic to some of the points raised by my hon. colleague. I think many members of the House of Commons are asking for increased resources, especially in legal counsel.

It seems that some of the institutional knowledge and the historic understanding of how we do business has been lost because these very experienced lawyers are not here to serve us daily. Therefore, I understand the need to have increased resources in the legal department. It is something that the Board of Internal Economy and members should be concerned about. I hope they will continue to raise the issue of how best we can serve all members of parliament on both sides of the House who do not have access to the government resources.

Let us hope that the promise in the throne speech that talked about increasing research dollars for the library also includes legal services to members in a way that helps us to do our jobs most effectively.

However, I have a problem with raising personnel issues on the floor of the House of Commons. I hope we can come to a speedy resolution or even an understanding of all the complexities that go into this sort of an issue.

When these two employees of the House appeared before the standing committee and asked for protection of the House, we did not understand that there were outstanding grievances between management and the employees about the working conditions and different things. We ended up hearing a kind of a rehash of the ongoing problems for which we did not have the background knowledge to deal with. In my opinion, it was not appropriate for the standing committee to hear the grievance process. It is not what the union agreement calls for. We should not handle a grievance process, in a public forum, on the floor of a committee or on the floor of the House of Commons.

Individuals certainly have the right of protection before a standing committee when they bring testimony and they should be allowed to speak freely. However, there is a question which needs

to be asked before their testimony is heard. If it deals with an issue that has proper process in place, as long as the process is going ahead, then we should allow the management, the union and the representatives to move that forward.

Although I am sympathetic to many of the concerns raised by the member, especially in regard to resources to members in the area of legal services, I do not think that we should try to solve it on the floor of the House. I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that you also take that into consideration in your ruling.

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am disturbed, to say the least, by the matter raised by the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

I am well aware that, as a member of the House of Commons Board of Internal Economy, I am held to a certain degree of confidentiality as far as the decisions taken are concerned.

I believe my colleague, the House leader of the official opposition, has taken care to point out that there were two overlapping subjects, if I may say so. First, was the administrative problem, a personnel management problem, and on top of that, the matter of the appearance of two legislative counsels before the procedure and House affairs committee.

A number of decisions were taken subsequent to the first problem. I must acknowledge right at the start that the outcome described to us here by the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton does not seem to me to be in line with what the House leader of the official opposition calls the standard administrative procedure for dealing with a personnel management problem.

I must admit to being very surprised at the outcome of this so-called standard administrative procedure relating to a personnel management problem.

Returning to the other overlapping question, immunity of committee witnesses, perhaps there is no connection between the decision taken on the administrative level and the appearance of the two people before the procedure and House affairs committee. It must be admitted, however, that there appears to have been a very obvious connection between the appearance of the legislative counsels before the procedure and House affairs committee and what led to the standard administrative procedure, as the parliamentary leader of the official opposition called it.

In that regard, I wonder about the very legitimate issues raised by the member for Sarnia—Lambton. While parliamentary committees may not be the forum or the arena to deal with administrative or personnel issues, I must admit, in the defence of the two legislative counsels who appeared before the committee and who asked for and received the committee's protection, that it was not

Privilege

so much because they wanted to do reveal all that they did, but because the members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs asked them to do so.

Perhaps it was not prudent on our part to ask the questions that we asked. Perhaps we should not, as members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, have exposed all that. But the fact remains we did ask questions and the two legislative counsels answered them.

Indeed, some of the answers provided were disturbing to say the least. If we were, and this is in reference to the comments made by the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton, to accept what happened, we would send to these House officials or to public servants who may be called to appear before committees the message that, if they do their job may be on the line.

There may not be any connection, but some will make one. Our parliamentary institution would lose if House or departmental officials were afraid to appear before our committees to answer questions put to them by parliamentarians.

In that sense, I agree with the opposition House leader when he says that this situation is to be deplored.

Mr. Speaker, you know better than anyone that some in this House have for a number of years criticized the lack of resources at members' disposal to draft motions, bills and amendments. At the end of what appeared to be the conclusion of what my colleague the opposition House leader called the usual administrative process, it seems that we must assume we have lost, as my colleague the leader put it, part of the institutional memory of the House of Commons.

• (1520)

It must be acknowledged that, in recent years, we have lost a number of elements of the House's institutional memory. Be they services of the clerks, legal services or legislative counsel, we have lost these resources.

Do we have the means, as an institution, to do away with some of these resources? Mr. Speaker, I put the question to you.

I think the question of privilege raised by my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton should be considered and given a positive answer.

I submit this for your consideration, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I am very grateful for the members' interventions on this matter.

[*English*]

I know the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough is rising on the same point, and others may rise as well, but I

wonder if members could direct themselves more to the question of whether the privileges of this House or of its members have been breached. That seems to be the issue raised by the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton. I would appreciate it if members would direct their comments more to that point rather than to the events that led to the claim.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will try to follow that direction. Since this is an issue that really strikes at some of the grander issues and those that flow from parliamentary privilege that were discussed in the context of the committee, there is a tendency to go far afield.

However I think the member from Sarnia—Lambton is speaking specifically of two individuals whose careers have been sacrificed on the altar.

Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Board of Internal Economy, you will recall some of the specifics of this issue, so there is little need to delve into its history. However those individuals were given a false sense of security when they testified before committee. This perhaps touches on the larger issue of protecting the integrity of witnesses who appear before a committee.

Although the individuals were there on a personal matter, the issue was of great importance to the House as it bore directly upon the ability of individuals to draft private members' business and partake in matters of a legal nature. Those employees of the House provided a very valuable service, and that department provides, I would submit, a crucial service to members of parliament.

We realize, Mr. Speaker, that the matter was dealt with at committee in the last parliament. While some would argue that it may be administrative and reserved for the Board of Internal Economy, I would suggest that a broader issue must be examined here. When House employees are subject to reprisals for providing valuable information that may affect them or others, or members of the House, it creates an intimidating atmosphere.

Many have suggested that we should be looking at whistle blower legislation. Many internal, and some would deem labour, matters come before us as members of parliament, members of the board and on committees. We should be concerned about the atmosphere of intimidation and the fear that heads will roll. No one should feel that while seeking the truth about a matter, whether a personal labour matter or one pertaining to privileges of members, that there will be reprisals.

I believe there is such an air about this matter. Two longstanding public servants, valued members of the legal counsel, were dismissed and there does not appear to be a forum in which to settle this.

I would suggest, given some of the circumstances here, that this should go back to committee. We should perhaps examine all the

circumstances and bring all the facts forward because the fear is there. The fear is in the ranks.

● (1525)

I spoke to employees of parliament as recently as today who are embarking on similar exercises and trying to have matters addressed. I will be very frank. Members of the language staff provide services in terms of helping individuals to become bilingual. It is a very important service that is available to members. They are not satisfied, yet there appears to be no forum to address their issues.

I suggest that what has happened here was born out of frustration. It was a matter that had festered for some time. We must be concerned about the ability to get at the truth and the ability to get at the facts.

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton has raised the issue now. The Speaker has the prerogative to delve further into what has occurred. If in your wisdom you deem it appropriate, I suggest there are grounds for the matter to go back before committee so that there could be a proper resolution. At the very least members and the individuals affected would have peace of mind as to what took place so that we might avoid such situations in future.

When it comes to labour matters and the treatment of employees of the House of Commons, we should set a higher standard. We should set a standard for all Canadians to look at as a model. We should not be mired or back away from situations that arise because of the connotations or the potential personalities that are often involved. We should be very prudent and proactive when approaching these matters.

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too will try to focus on the precise issue of whether or not this is a matter of privilege which should be dealt with at this time or at your discretion later.

In my view it is not. While it is an issue that members have commented on and have concerns about, I do not believe it is a matter that directly or even indirectly involves the actual privileges of members of the House.

It looks more like a matter of employment conditions, termination of employment, or issues of that nature. Those generally, I think all members will agree, are taken care of by the Board of Internal Economy. If it is an employment related issue, the Board of Internal Economy should see to it. If it is not, it is the circumstances of employees that are at issue and not the privileges of members of the House.

Privilege

There is another perspective. In the event, Mr. Speaker, that you see this as a committee issue involving the protection of witnesses at committee, I suggest it is perhaps an issue that should be taken up at committee first.

If the issue has arisen in committee and is one the committee would want to look at—perhaps the committee should; I do not know—then the matter should be taken up by members at the committee. It should be looked at there first and, if necessary, brought back to the House.

I respectfully suggest that while the issue is of concern and while other discussions may be had elsewhere at committee, it is not a matter of privilege which the House needs or could or should take up at this time.

Mr. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will withhold my comments with regard to congratulating you until a more formal time in terms of a speech.

I wish to concur with my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton as well as with the comments of the House leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. I believe this is a matter that raises the issue of the ambit of privilege.

I am concerned that the circumstances, although dealt with by a committee, may not have had ample hearing from all members of parliament who at the time knew a bit more about the situation and were concerned that the two individuals, in my view and the view of many members of parliament such as those who have drafted successful private members' bill, were very capable and able individuals that were perhaps too good at their job.

I am concerned about the narrow question of the dismissal. I believe the House has an obligation to look at the reasons behind it.

● (1530)

I understand there are two other people who have now been replaced, one from western Canada. I am not convinced, when it comes to drafting private members' bills, that the individuals there can necessarily respond to and replace the effectiveness of those two individuals.

I would ask your consideration, Mr. Speaker, that this be duly treated as a matter of privilege and that the appropriate action be taken.

The Speaker: The Chair would like to thank all hon. members who have intervened on this matter and offered their advice and opinions to the Chair. I will take the matter under advisement and get back to the House in due course.

*The Address***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session and of the amendment.

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is February 2001 and we have heard from the government, at least in a circular way. The throne speech offered thin gruel of leftovers to a nation starved for administrative substance and political inspiration.

If Liberal backbenchers had the courage to truly speak up for their constituents, there would maybe be a New Westminster-like springtime in this cold town. Today, the lawns are green; the tug boats ply the mighty Fraser River; and the schoolchildren need no mittens as they play in my riding.

My former high school teacher, Mr. Morrison McVea, still warns to the challenge to remind me that Canada needs participatory democracy. These are concepts that he has talked about since the earliest days of his teaching career. He longs to see the realization of his vision of a political springtime for all of Canada, which sadly remains frozen in the past.

Canada needs a springtime of ideas. We should not be afraid of more democracy and accountability. That is what the Canadian Alliance offered in the last election, but too many frozen hearts could not feel it.

With a new Speaker and a renewed government mandate to hang on to power, we in Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition will keep trying to raise the standards of governance and to do our best to require the government to justify itself to the electorate.

Along the way let us pray for a thaw on the government side to allow the House to blossom with parliamentary reform and to lift the nation out of the grey mediocrity and missed opportunity that we see today.

Since I have been privileged to be in the House since 1993 I have observed Liberal backbenchers allow the inner few who are close to the Prime Minister to stumble along with disjointed incrementalism. I challenge those backbenchers to get some fire in the middle, to realize that no laws need to be passed and no standing orders need to be changed for the House to come alive. All they have to do

is gather the courage, empower their constituents through them, and simply take charge and live democratically.

They should refuse to co-operate with the corruption, the patronage, the lack of candour and the defending of their club at all costs. Backbenchers should empower themselves and all of Canada to give the nation a balanced, credible, citizen's initiative process law. That is what some of my constituents want from parliament. They want and expect higher standards of governance. They deserve to have mechanisms in their hands to ensure that it happens.

As long as the government backbench refuses to go along to get along, there will be little improvement and the nation will remain politically frozen in time.

British Columbians are provoked and resentful of the government's poor performance. They recoil from the political expediency of how all federal programs are refracted through a prism of regional advantage deliberately designed to shore up government support in the marginal constituencies needed to win a majority in the House of Commons.

That is why New Westminster residents sent me here to help fix it. However, because there was no change at 24 Sussex Drive, sadly many will just continue to pack up and move to the United States. They cannot bear the thought or cost of lost opportunity, of another four years of unnecessarily high taxes, wasteful programs, billion dollar boondoggles and pork barrel politics. They do not like cheaters, especially the smug political cheaters.

If Quebec thinks itself a nation then British Columbia is an alienation for we understand how so few determine so much in decision making. It is not simply that the cabinet drawn from the party of most members in the House and the Prime Minister have so much unaccountable power, for indeed they do. The tragedy is that too few Canadians take the time or find it worth while to get involved in federal governance. It is for good reason. They have found that it does not make much difference.

● (1535)

The Liberal Party of Canada is an amalgam of local riding associations, many with just a few hundred members at best. Of them 80,000 are national card carrying members, but only 2% attend a so-called national policy meeting as voting delegates where the planned script unfolds. A few thousand put on a show for television and elect a leader, who will then rule and not be accountable to those delegates.

When the local candidates for parliament are chosen, they might be appointed or perhaps elected by a few hundred delegates or less. Too few Liberal ridings in the run up to the last election had full blown secret ballot contests for nominations.

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Then the victorious candidate goes to Ottawa because perhaps 15,000 or 20,000 voters went that way locally for a number of reasons. From the crop of 172 Liberal MPs, the Prime Minister approves a list of a small group of MPs to become ministers, who will then be run by an even smaller number of perhaps unelected operatives close to the Prime Minister. Even the cabinet has its power subgroups, its Treasury Board, et cetera.

Only a few hundred people or less in Canada dictate the Liberal platform, choose the leader, and even fewer run for government. Consequently the time to care about our country is not when a minister introduces a bill for the dye is cast, especially according to the Prime Minister. The critical time is when a party is deciding what it stands for, who its leader will be, and what will be the rules for policy development.

It has been admitted many times everywhere that the Liberals stand for nothing more than getting power and keeping it. They have hurt Canada for so long in that way. That malaise must be overcome.

Canadians under the Canadian Alliance banner seek to remedy that national plight. We cast the net widely to permit as many Canadians as possible to participate in policy development and every member in Canada could directly vote for the leader. We are doing it right. We have the processes and the plans. We are ready to repair the nation. It all comes together under the broad themes of national fairness and the need for wealth creation.

The record shows that the government has failed to make that kind of leap forward. Our national productivity rates and the work ethic are not leading the world. We do not lead in technology or science. The government climate hurts the operation of the markets and the velocity of ideas and investment. We are far from the top. Fortunately we are not at the bottom. We are mediocre. We are in a daze.

The government's lackluster program remains dreary, and Canada could do so much better. That is what British Columbians said in the last election. That is why the west is not content with merely old style Liberal and Conservative governments.

What is there to inspire young people anyway? What will lift them? We must lift up our eyes and engage global competition with a national economic political machine that can fight like an army but yet nourish like a family.

We must better protect our natural environment for future generations while we more appropriately derive sustenance from its diminishing bounty. Polluters receive unfair subsidies. Failing to deal with environmental factors is deficit financing. Canada has been there and we must forsake it.

The talk around this place is of finding a legacy. The Prime Minister wants to be well thought of historically. I would oblige him, for I could not help myself if he delivered on our change the

system package of expanding the present boundary limits of democracy within the House and for the voter.

We need to empower Canadians democratically by giving them responsive parliamentary systems that give MPs the freedom to represent their constituents. We need to build a federation based on equality, respect and co-operation.

I close with this observation. Trudeau's legacy is the charter. The next step up is right before us. Let us have a real democratic country. It is called participatory democracy. That possible legacy is lying right there before us. Who is positioned to pick it up and carry it forward or higher? I say to the Prime Minister that Canadians are waiting.

The Liberal backbench should find the courage our country needs. The Prime Minister should use the gift of power wisely and make a legacy for the country, not for himself. We have enough people who think they can tell it like it is. What we need are more of those who can tell it like it can be.

• (1540)

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is getting tedious to hear yet another Canadian Alliance speaker who had no comment on the Speech from the Throne. I guess it is that good. They suggest that we should speak up on the Speech from the Throne. I would implore him to listen because I for one already have.

On the day of the Speech from the Throne I released a press release in my riding that explained a number of the excellent items in the Speech from the Throne. For the first time in a long time a number of issues dealing with social policies were addressed.

The throne speech is a great move forward for this country. It is great for my constituents because aboriginal children were addressed and emphasized in the speech. The speech helps those in poverty. It is great for businesses to improve trade investment. It is great for the science community and the new knowledge based economy. It will assist in the movement in trade and investment. It is good for the education system because lifelong learning has been addressed. It is excellent for our first nation people because there is support for first nation businesses. It is excellent for the municipalities because there is more support for infrastructure, for improving water and for improving the environment.

As a past president of our literacy association, I was delighted to see that literacy was being covered and supported in the Speech from the Throne.

The Canadian Alliance should stand up with courage, not us, and start to deal with the poor and the disadvantaged.

Mr. Paul Forseth: Madam Speaker, there we have it, a typical repetition of the mantra of the Speech from the Throne. I was talking about going beyond the banalities of a predictable throne

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speech and empowering Canadians so that they would be truly reflected here.

We need to have true participatory democracy. The throne speech vaguely alluded to parliamentary reform. We should continue to expand the bounds of democracy and that long tradition of great reform bills in England where it had the revolutionary idea of actually giving the vote to more citizens. We eventually gave the vote to women, but we continued to expand on those bounds of democracy by, believe it or not, giving aboriginal Canadians voting rights in 1960.

What I am talking about is the continuation of that tradition. Canadians should be empowered to participate and test what they want in a secret ballot box on national issues where a government has to be accountable on an ongoing basis to Canadians.

If we do not follow through on that vision, Canadians will not show up on national voting day because they know that they will have more of the same thin gruel for a nation that is starving for leadership and vision.

What we have been talking about in the House for a long time is empowering Canadians and expanding the bounds of democracy, not continuing to limit and not having top down control but bottom up liberation.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my colleague on his excellent presentation. I certainly agree with everything he has said.

The previous speaker from the Liberal side of the House talked about the throne speech, about all the wonderful ideas, about what they are planning to do and about all the new programs that they will implement. A lot of that is good news for a lot of people.

However, the most practical way of bringing these things about is that one presents not only the programs, but a budget and the cost to implement them.

Everyone across the country has applauded the throne speech. Everyone thinks it is wonderful. However, what we have done is given the government a blank cheque to do what it darn well pleases. Canadians are tired of this.

Does the hon. member believe that what he is talking about fits in terms of how we cost out these ideas?

• (1545)

Mr. Paul Forseth: Madam Speaker, I am not the most senior member of the House but I have experienced at least four throne speeches. I have some experience in listening to the generalities and banalities of throne speeches that have come from the government since 1993. There is a disconnection between nice sounding

phrases and practical, sound and wise management of government administration, especially at the street level.

We heard in question period today of how the government cannot manage. Today the auditor general has said again how the government cannot manage its money. We must change the system somehow. Instead of continuing the political rhetoric in the nation, we must provide real political power to Canadians through the ballot box so that they can drive the agenda and hold the government accountable.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the people of the riding of Westmount—Ville-Marie once again for giving me the mandate to represent them for the third time.

I must say that it is, I think, the title of which I am most proud. I am committed to working relentlessly for the social and economic development of that riding, which, through its diversity and its vigour, is a true reflection of Canada.

Just a few months ago, Canadians from coast to coast went to the polls. The result was a clear endorsement of the program set out by our government for the future of this country.

During the recent election campaign, we explained to Canadians the values that we believe in and for which we stand. Our platform was clear and our commitment, unequivocal.

Canadians embraced these values, the values of an open and receptive government that cares about the quality of life of people and communities across the country.

As we begin our third mandate, we will continue to build an even stronger and ever more inclusive Canada; a country full of opportunities where the quality of life is unparalleled; a supportive country that is respected throughout the world and cited as an example to show all the things people of various origins can do when they are bound together by common values and by a firm commitment to the welfare of the community.

In our two previous mandates, we were able to lay the foundation that will bring prosperity to Canadians. We must now protect what we have while continuing to build our future together.

In the new economy, success will come to those who concentrate on ingenuity, innovation and education. Canada remains a relatively young country within the international community. It is a young, vibrant and energetic country where ideas abound.

We need to encourage our scientists and our businesspeople to be daring. The government and the private and voluntary sectors have to work in partnership to provide the tools needed so that each of their projects can be carried out.

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To improve the quality of life for Canadians, we have to move on several fronts. Each and every department and government agency has a role to play.

The Treasury Board Secretariat is no exception to that rule. Granted, my department is not well known to the public. More often than not, our fellow citizens just have a vague idea of its main purpose. But the Treasury Board Secretariat does play a crucial role in the government. It ensures sound fiscal management, acts as employer for all civil servants and even oversees management reform.

In the last few years, we have also assumed increasing responsibility regarding some Canada-wide initiatives, like government on line and Infrastructure Canada.

• (1550)

[*English*]

I would like to discuss some of these activities in the context of the Speech from the Throne. Infrastructure is one of the most concrete and tangible programs we administer. It is also a central part of our strategy for laying the foundation of Canada's economy in the 21st century.

We can all agree that a strong national infrastructure base is essential to Canada's competitiveness and long term growth. Investing in our infrastructure is a direct investment in improving the daily quality of life for citizens across the country.

The government set aside \$2.65 billion for a new physical infrastructure program. The new program has two components: a municipal component that will account for \$2 billion and a highways component that will account for \$600 million.

Over the last few months we have signed agreements for municipal infrastructure with all provinces and Yukon. We have put together partnership programs where we share costs and decision making and work together to ensure that funding will go where it is needed most.

These agreements demonstrate the full potential of what can be accomplished when federal, provincial and municipal governments work together collaboratively for the common good. When we sat down with our partners we made it clear that we wanted to take a grassroots approach. We wanted the municipalities to be at the heart of the new program because they were in the best position to understand the needs of their communities and establish priorities.

We are already seeing positive results from our partnerships. As part of Infrastructure Canada we have set aside \$2.5 million for an important national initiative identified by stakeholders involved in the construction and upgrading of municipal infrastructures.

We are working with our partners on the production of a national guide to sustainable municipal infrastructure. Municipalities have told us that this is something they desperately need. It is a

compendium of best practices that will be a source of information for municipalities on infrastructure planning, construction, maintenance and repair.

We are projecting that the adoption of best practices and innovations will save municipalities across the country anywhere from \$800 million to \$1.5 billion a year on infrastructure maintenance costs.

When we factor in our \$2 billion commitment with that of our provincial, territorial, municipal and private sector partners, we are looking at an investment total of approximately \$6 billion over the next five years.

[*Translation*]

Another equally important commitment made by the government is to help Canadians to fully take advantage of the technological revolution. We have reiterated our commitment to put our services on line by 2004 so that Canadians can have quick and easy access to information and services provided by the Government of Canada.

To better use the technology, we have to make it more accessible and available. We have taken major steps to make Canada one of the most connected countries in the world. We have also promised to continue to help Canadians gain access to the Internet and to the world of new possibilities it has created for future generations.

There is an incredible potential for developing programs and services which are more open and more people-centered.

• (1555)

Our new website is an example of the kind of opportunities providing Canadians quicker and easier access to government information and services in the language of their choice.

Canadians want and deserve efficient, reliable and cost effective services from their government. They are also entitled to receive services in the official language of their choice, whether they are anglophones in Gaspé or francophones in Winnipeg.

I am particularly pleased about our government's firm and reaffirmed commitment to linguistic duality, a value that is fundamental to our Canadian identity.

Our government firmly believes that the official languages policy is a matter of mutual respect and that it shows our willingness to use our diversity as a driving force.

Building on the heritage of its predecessors, the government will revive efforts to promote and preserve this precious heritage and to allow Canadians of all ages to acquire a better knowledge of it, to contribute to it and to benefit from it.

Our government intends to develop an action plan in order to meet its objectives. Above all, we want our fellow citizens across the country to recognize linguistic duality as a value that is unique

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to us and that sets us apart, and to support our efforts in a concrete way.

We will see to it that government on line and other developments of this kind do not dilute support for both official languages, but rather that they result in increased services.

We will work actively to ensure that French has its place on the Internet so that the French language and the French culture can remain strong within a Canada where linguistic duality is considered an asset.

[English]

None of our initiatives, projects or objectives will be realized without the continued hard work and dedication of public service employees throughout Canada and abroad. After all, the best intentions and ideas amount to little without the talented and professional workforce to translate them into reality.

Canada is blessed to have an exceptional public service. The Public Service of Canada is a vital institution and the government is committed to ensuring its long term health and vitality.

The Speech from the Throne was clear. We will take the necessary measures to ensure that the public service is innovative, dynamic and reflective of the diversity of the country, and that it is able to attract and develop the talent needed to serve Canadians in the 21st century.

There can be no doubt that the government faces some very serious challenges. Demographics are changing and the workforce is aging. Competition for the talent we need to meet future challenges is becoming more and more intense. We are focusing on building a more inclusive and supportive environment, a working culture where people feel like they can make a meaningful contribution.

We are striving to fashion a new, more productive and mutually beneficial relationship between unions and management. We have engaged several outside groups such as the Advisory Committee on Senior Level Retention and Compensation, the Task Force on the Participation of Visible Minorities in the Public Service of Canada, and the Task Force on an Inclusive Public Service to identify areas where we can and should make improvements to our human resources management regime.

Much more work remains to be done but I am very confident that we have the will, the talent and the energy to effect the necessary positive changes. As President of the Treasury Board I have made this a personal commitment.

• (1600)

[Translation]

I have tried to quickly go over some of the elements of the throne speech that are more directly related to my department. I want to

conclude however by saying that these are only a few elements of an ambitious program.

Canadians have once again put their trust in us, because they realize that our balanced approach, and dare I say our Liberal approach, has helped us to gingerly step into the 21st century. They also realized that in a world of quick technological and economic changes, we did not intend to leave anyone behind. We firmly believe in equal opportunity, and that is the vision we expressed in the throne speech.

This Speech from the Throne forces us to provide the people of Canada with good government. What does that entail? A government with ambitious goals that focuses on results. A government that listens to the people. A government that shares the values of the people it serves.

That is what Canadians want and they deserve no less. This is exactly what our government intends to do during this new term.

[English]

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for her comments on the throne speech and specifically her comments on infrastructure. I should like to ask her about something that is concerning the people in Dartmouth and Halifax.

The harbour solutions project is a major infrastructure project to clean up the harbour. It will cost over \$300 million. Traditionally such infrastructure programs have been split one-third, one-third and one-third municipal, provincial and federal.

Is the federal government prepared to provide one-third of the cost for the harbour solutions project? Major environmental projects such as this one cannot be funded by a municipality. Often municipalities can go nowhere near that kind of funding. Where is the infrastructure program now in terms of this paramount project for Atlantic Canada?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Madam Speaker, as I said in my speech, we have already signed the agreements with all of the provinces and Yukon. It is clear according to the agreements we signed that the priority of the program should be on green infrastructure. This is an important element of the program with all provinces.

What is clear also is that the choices should be made by the municipalities. The municipalities should bring the project to the table so that we can study it and decide if a project is accepted or not. They have to decide their priorities.

There is a limit to the amount of money that each province receives. Even if it is a \$6 billion program for the country there is a limit. It is a matter of choice, but I would say that the project is eligible according to the infrastructure Canada program.

*The Address**[Translation]*

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Madam Speaker, I find it incredible to hear a speech such as this one. I am not used to it yet. I heard things such as “firm commitments” and “trust us”.

The President of the Treasury Board was there. She must have gone through my riding of Châteauguay on her way to Beauharnois—Salaberry.

• (1605)

At that time, she promised \$357 million to build two bridges as well as money for a little piece of highway.

I am wondering why, when the announcement was made only a few days before the election, such an important announcement, when one knows that the throne speech will be in force for three or four years, no mention was made of this important aspect, this commitment?

The minister talked about her government’s firm commitments and said voters should trust the government. But voters in Châteauguay and in Beauharnois—Salaberry were also to trust comments and promises made by the government.

What I am asking the minister is: How can she say that people can trust the government? Is she willing to make a commitment and say “Yes, these \$357 million will be reinvested in bridges and in the economic development of the Châteauguay area and the Beauharnois—Salaberry riding”? I would like the minister to answer my question.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Madam Speaker, voters trust us so much that they reelected us with a huge majority across the country and especially in Quebec. We saw how great was the trust of voters in every region of Quebec, including Montérégie.

We are very happy that Beauharnois—Salaberry is represented by a new member who is going to join the members of this government in improving the social and economic development of the south shore of Montreal.

This is very clear. We had an election platform and we presented it to the electorate. As a matter of fact, voters knew more or less what to expect. They have seen us govern the country for the last seven and a half years. They know this government is competent and they know this government is always true to its words. It is very clear, we presented our election platform to voters. They put their trust in us, and we are undertaking, during our mandate, to fulfil the promises we made in our platform.

[English]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu’Appelle, NDP): Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your elevation to an esteemed

position in the House of Commons. I wish you all the best in your deliberations. I will be splitting my time with the member for Dartmouth.

I thank the voters of Regina—Qu’Appelle for having confidence in me and re-electing me as their member of parliament. This is my ninth parliament. I was first elected in 1968. Over those years I have seen many changes in the House of Commons. There are a couple of general themes that I am really concerned about, the themes of democracy and equality.

I remember the sixties and seventies when there was a tremendous move in the country for better social programs and greater equality among people. There was a real fight in the student movement and others to have a more democratic society. I remember Pierre Trudeau and the talk about a just society and participatory democracy.

The word inequality or equality was not even mentioned in the throne speech last week. Some 30 years later we find that the gap between the rich and the poor, after narrowing in the fifties, sixties and throughout the seventies is now starting to widen again.

Recently there was a study of the family by the Vanier Institute which showed that the gap between the rich and the poor is now widening throughout the decade of the 1990s. That should really concern us as a country and as policy makers in Canada.

I should like to place a couple of very worrying trends on the record of the House of Commons in terms of the growing gap between the rich and the poor. If we look at the wealthiest 20% of Canadians, in the beginning of the 1990s compared to the latter part of the 1990s their share of the national income went up from 37% to 39%, an increase of 6.6% of their share of the national wealth.

• (1610)

If we look at the poorest 20% of the Canadian people, their share of the national income went down in the nineties. At the beginning of the nineties they had 7.6% of the national income and national wealth. At the end of the nineties they had 7.1% of the national income and national wealth. As we can see, the incomes of the wealthy went up while the incomes of the poorest went down. This is a sad commentary on the progress we have made as a society as a whole, not just at the federal level but at the provincial and municipal levels.

I want to mention a couple of other statistics that are interesting. In 1989, 29,200 households in Canada went bankrupt compared to 85,000 in 1997. This again is growing evidence of the widening gap between the rich and poor in Canada.

In terms of savings, the household average in 1989 were \$6,250. In 1998, household savings on average were \$1,664. This represents a tremendous drop throughout the decade.

According to the Vanier Institute, by the end of the 1990s 40% of the poorest Canadians spent more than they earned. The middle

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20% spent all that they earned by the end of the 1990s. If a dollar was earned, a dollar was spent. However, the wealthiest 40% of the Canadian population had increased savings in the 1990s while the average went down radically throughout that decade.

Once again, we see the redistribution of wealth and income widening. It seems to me that the challenge of a parliament in any country is to govern on behalf of the common good, to create greater conditions for equality and opportunity, and to redistribute wealth so that people have a better opportunity to pursue what they want in their individual lives.

An example more specific to my riding concerns the farm crisis. The grain and oilseed farmers today are facing the biggest crisis since the 1930s. Farm income is dropping. Between the fall of 1998 and the fall of 2000, 22,000 prairie farmers left the land. However, we have a federal government that provides very little assistance to farmers in comparison to what is happening in Europe and the United States. That is another example of the widening gap between the rich and poor.

People are homeless and living on the streets. We have young people who are poor. The Vanier Institute stated that among single parent families and the young, the poverty rate was increasing while take home pay was decreasing compared to wealthy people in Canada. It is our obligation as members of parliament to address those issues.

The other issue I want to address is the issue of democracy. Democracy in Canada is in a crisis today. We have to look at electoral democracy, parliamentary democracy and economic democracy.

In terms of electoral democracy, the Prime Minister will soon be naming 12 more people to the Senate, a legislative body that is not elected, not democratic, not accountable and supported by only 5% of Canadians. Yet, as parliamentarians, we do nothing about it. The time has come to abolish that unelected body and bring the purpose of the Senate for checks and balances into a reformed House of Commons. That should be done as soon as possible.

We should also look at bringing our democracy into the modern world. We should bring in an element of proportional representation, as have other countries in the world with populations of more than eight million people, such as the United States and India. Most countries in the world have some element of proportional representation that treats all voters as equal. This means that a vote is a vote and no vote is wasted. Those are some of the things that have to be done. If we do not do it soon we will have a tremendous crisis.

The turnout in the last election campaign was barely 60% of the population. In 1997 it was 66% of the population. If we go back to the fifties, sixties and earlier seventies, it was closer to 80% of the

population. There is no doubt that we are sleepwalking toward a crisis in democracy on the electoral side, on the parliamentary side and on the economic side.

• (1615)

In terms of parliament, the power of the Prime Minister is much too great in our constitution today. We need stronger committees that are more independent. We need to have fewer confidence votes in the House of Commons.

The power of the PMO to make appointments, whether it be the Senate, the Supreme Court, the RCMP or every important legislative body or important institution, should be thwarted and democratized. Perhaps we should have appointments nominated by the Prime Minister but approved or rejected by the relevant parliamentary committee.

The Prime Minister should not have the power to set election dates. There should be a fixed and set election date. Perhaps we should even have a term limitation for the Prime Minister of Canada. These are ideas that many countries around the world adopt.

When it comes to economic democracy, the trade deals today and the large transnational corporations are really an assault on democracy. They take away a lot of the political power which nation states used to have to make important decisions over the lives of individual citizens. That is an area we have to address as we begin a brand new parliament.

To that end, I want on behalf of our caucus to move a subamendment. I move:

That the amendment be amended by adding, after the word "provinces" the following:

"and further that this House strongly condemns the government for its support of the proposed U.S. National Missile Defence System as well as undemocratic trade deals such as the WTO, NAFTA, and the proposed FTAA that do not ensure respect for human rights, labour, and the environment".

In other words, it is an assault in democracy by these trade deals. We have lost democratic control.

It is not a question of being for or against trade. We are all for trade. We are a great trading nation. In the process of doing that let us make sure we reassert some national sovereignty and democratic control so that in these trade deals we can have minimum standards or a waiver for social programs, for the environment and for health. That is what we should be building. Also within those trade deals in the context of transnational corporations we should not give away our sovereignty and democracy.

There is nothing democratic about some of these large transnational corporations that have an economy bigger than these nation states. Wal-Mart has about the 10th or 12th largest economy in the world. That is bigger than nation states. These big transnationals

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are not run by entrepreneurs or free enterprise. They are run by technocrats and bureaucrats. They are like big icebergs that bump around the world destroying the economies of nation states.

The time has come for people to reassert democratic control when it comes to the economy of the world and the economy of our own country as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The Chair will take the amendment to the amendment under advisement.

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was struck by a comment that the member opposite made in his speech that household bankruptcies had more than tripled in the last 10 years according to the figures he saw. I wonder if that seems to correlate with the rise of gambling in the country.

In the last decade the gambling revenues coming from the general public started at zero and now account for more than \$1 billion.

• (1620)

Would the member opposite consider whether the rise in household bankruptcies may be connected with gambling which seems to be directed, particularly if we look at the casino in Winnipeg, toward the people who have the least to spend and who are probably the poorest in our society, and yet these are the ones most in jeopardy with the rise in gambling?

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Madam Speaker, I have never seen a study connecting gambling to household bankruptcies but I suspect there is probably a correlation there.

If we look at the number of people who become addicted to the practice of gambling, more damaging than casinos, and I am familiar with the casino in my home city of Regina, are the VLTs that have sprung up like mushrooms all over the country. The VLTs are sort of the crack cocaine of the gambling world. A lot of ordinary folk without much cash can go in and spend a lot of money. They get addicted to that particular practice. That is something we should probably take a look at as a parliament and at the provincial jurisdiction as well. That may be one of the factors.

Whether it is or not, the fact of the matter is the gap between the rich and the poor is widening instead of narrowing in a society that is very wealthy. As a Canadian that really disturbs me. We have to look at how we can turn that around. We were doing that particularly throughout the sixties but also into the seventies with some of the new social programs and changes in the tax system. Now all of a sudden we have gone in the other direction.

Mr. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there were very passionate comments made by the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle. I was very interested in his

comments with respect to transnationals which are part of his amendment to the actual amendment.

I was interested in his comments with respect to Wal-Mart. No doubt he is aware that other nations have taken it upon themselves to look at dominance by various retailers, particularly with respect to the impact on consumers and obviously the impact on competition. In Germany, for instance, even though Wal-Mart only had a few per cent of market share it was told to drive its prices up so it would not snuff out small business.

What I am concerned about and the question I want to ask the member deals more with the bigger question that he tried to illustrate under several points. He referred to bankruptcy, farms, poverty, democracy and the question of wealth in the nation.

We heard about a study this morning that almost counteracts and countermands the issue of people living in poverty with the assumption that for the first time since the 1960s, and certainly in this decade, we have seen actual incomes for Canadians rise, and there is a necessity now for two people to work in order to make ends meet.

Has the hon. member looked at this recent study? How does it reflect on the Vanier study with respect to poverty and families?

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Madam Speaker, I had a chance to take a glance at it. Indeed the average income of Canadians has increased over the decade. If my understanding is correct, it has increased mainly because we now have two people working in a family and sometimes three. It has also increased because people have been working extra hours or have an extra or part time job. The family income has gone up because of the extra hours that the family puts into the workplace. I am not sure that is the way we should go.

Through a technological society and innovation we were supposed to have more leisure time. I remember these debates about 10 years or 15 years ago when technology started to become the thing to talk about. One of the advantages of technology and computers was to reduce the time at work and free up more time to pursue leisure, arts, sports or whatever one wanted to do. The fact that we have more and more part time jobs and fewer full time jobs, and probably fewer jobs in the general sense that are unionized and have good benefits and wages, people are generally making less per hour and putting in more hours. At the end they make more money but what happens to the quality of life.

These are all things we should look at. We are beginning a new parliament which is really a new phase in the development of our country. It is important that we look at the issues of equality and how we close the gap rather than see it widen. I really mean it when I say the issue of democracy is one that is really important. Our electoral and parliamentary system and the thwarting of democracy or the assault on democracy by big transnational corporations is

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really quite a thing. It is not really a free enterprise thing either. Free enterprise and entrepreneurs believe in the marketplace. A lot of the big corporations are run by technocrats and bureaucrats with little sensitivity to anything called a free market or fair market. Again, that is a thwarting of democracy.

• (1625)

These things are sort of fleeting away from our hands. We have to look at ways to return power to the people, empower them and make our society and our country more inclusive. I think that can be done.

One way to do that is to make this place a little less partisan through fewer confidence votes and stronger committees, and by electing the chairs of committees and letting them have the right to timetable things out. These are not radical moves. These things happen in countries around the world that are advanced democracies.

Let us look at the idea of proportional representation as well. The time has come. We are one of only three countries in the world with populations of more than eight million people that does not have it. That would create the situation where all votes are equal, no votes are wasted and people would genuinely be empowered.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The Chair has had occasion to examine the subamendment proposed by the member from Regina—Qu'Appelle and the motion is in order. Debate will continue on the subamendment.

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like also take this opportunity to congratulate you on your new appointment.

I would like to thank all of the members who ran in this election, the people who won and those that did not. It is an important place to be and I value the struggle that everyone went through.

I would also like to thank the people of Dartmouth, Cole Harbour, the Prestons, Cherry Brook and Lake Echo who have once again returned me to this place.

Maybe I should also make a comment with respect to Her Excellency the Governor General. She is doing a most excellent job and is a credit to her office and her country. I would not like it to be thought that my comments on her speech reflect poorly upon her.

This is the third Speech from the Throne which I have witnessed since being elected in 1997. Like the others, I believe the speech was long in rhetoric and short on specifics.

I would like to use my time to comment on two things which are the skepticism created by failed Liberal promises and the lack of overall vision to deal with the problems facing us in the years to come.

I am from Dartmouth. People in Dartmouth are not usually satisfied with good intentions. They want to know what we are going to do. They are skeptical and, given past Liberal performances, they have a right to be.

A current example of how Liberals created this feeling is the so-called home heating rebate, which is now being received by some of my constituent. People were led to believe they would get help. Page 5 of the Liberal platform said “we will provide fuel tax rebates of up to \$250 per household to help low and modest income Canadians cope with the higher costs of fuel prices this winter”.

What has been delivered instead is a slightly augmented GST tax credit which does nothing to rebate anyone. The cheque is being given to people based on their eligibility for the GST tax credit, not on their heating cost. This program also does not go to any modest income families because they make too much to qualify for the GST rebate. In short, the program has no bearing on the ability of a person to pay his or her heating bill.

While I have always believed that tax support for our lowest income families has been too low and support an increase to this tax credit, calling this a home heating rebate fails every test of good public policy or even common sense. It does not deliver what has been promised because there are working families facing desperate economic circumstances but receiving none of the promised help from the federal or the provincial government.

There is also a social division being exploited as those with high heating costs get no help and many who are getting help do not directly pay for their heating.

This policy is not helping my community get together, it is dividing it. My riding office phone has been ringing off the hook. I sympathize with the callers. As I said, this kind of thing keeps them skeptical.

The Minister of Finance said that this happened because the government was anxious to get the cheques out quickly. However, the timing of the rebate only seemed to allow an announcement before the election and then to release the flawed details after the election. I am not convinced by this explanation.

• (1630)

Millions of Canadians are now on the verge of filing their taxes as they do every spring. If the government were serious about actually getting help to those facing huge increases in heating costs this winter, it could have used the tax system to help them when the mini-budget was announced last fall and people would have received rebates when they filed their taxes.

After all, the oil companies, which are reaping record profits because of the increased fuel prices, received help on their

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corporate taxes in last fall's budget. Their cheques, a real rebate in the form of reduced corporate taxes, will soon be in the mail. However hard working, modest income families in Dartmouth have been left with a promise, not a cheque.

This is simply one example of how the government has made choices under the cover of platitudes. I believe the other modest initiatives mentioned in the throne speech will suffer a similar but predictable fate.

The mention of support for employment programs for persons with disabilities will probably do nothing for the millions of Canadians who have a disability but are currently unable to qualify for EI or CPP because of their tenuous relationship to the labour force.

The building of broadband access does not say how low income Canadians will be able to afford this service, let alone buy a computer. It seems predestined to support bigger dot com profits before providing support to the people who are not willing to line up at community access sites.

The cultural initiatives in the throne speech are likewise vague. While artistic creators still receive no targeted tax relief and exist at minimum wage levels, my constituents and I remain skeptical.

My most important concern is the lack of a real vision of Canada in the Speech from the Throne. Last year we saw the passing of the Right Hon. Pierre Trudeau, someone who had a vision for Canada. He could inspire us. We did not always agree, but we always had some respect for him. He was not ambiguous. He saw our country's problems on the horizon, brought them to our attention and offered his opinion.

The current throne speech has failed to do that. There are huge problems facing the people with which we have to deal. Our democracy is declining. Voter turnout is plummeting. Alienation is growing in many regions and among our young people.

There is a wide belief that the powers of this place have been subverted to those in the Langevin block. Above all, there is a growing sense that the powers of Canada as a state have been subverted to the powers of trading blocks, transnational corporations under NAFTA, the WTO and, maybe worse, the proposed free trade of the Americas regime.

The throne speech is silent on how to reintegrate young people and the disaffected of Quebec or the west into our democracy. It is silent on how to reassert our national sovereignty when foreign companies demand our resources at a lower price, demand access to our water, and demand an end to public delivery of our health services, our education system and our public environmental protections. In my humble way I will be bringing forward suggestions on how to give us some protection in parliament.

I believe the government should limit the concentration of ownership in our private media and restore its past support to the CBC so that information can flow to citizens as ideas for public debate, not just as content dressed up to attract advertising dollars. Any parliamentary package which neglects this aspect of our living democracy is flawed.

The lack of any mention of our need for cultural, environmental, labour and public service safeguards, while talking about new trade agreements including the free trade of the Americas initiative which the throne speech so proudly supports, is shameful.

Has the government forgotten the humiliation which we suffered two years back when we surrendered control over our magazine sector because the cultural carve out in the FTA and NAFTA proved to be worthless?

Has the work of the Minister of Canadian Heritage on building a separate international agreement on culture already been sacrificed to the Americas so the Prime Minister can go bass fishing in Texas or host a banquet in Quebec City in April?

Is the fact that government subsidies to public broadcasters are being threatened in Europe under the free trade rules being forgotten by officials in the Langevin block, or have they simply decided that private media conglomerates should control all information for the Canadian public?

• (1635)

We need to take a stand saying that we are a rich people with a great and vast country and that we will trade fairly with the world. At the same time we must tell our trading partners that this country is ours and this parliament should make our laws, not some NAFTA trade arbitrator and not a transnational corporation.

The throne speech should have made it clear that until we have binding protection for our culture, environment, education and health care systems, we will not expand our trading agreements.

We must make it clear to all abroad that only we as members of parliament are accountable to our constituents. We should be saying to Canada: let us work together; let us prosper; let us defend our country together from the onslaught of corporate power; and let us revitalize our democracy together. That should have been the primary vision of the throne speech. The government had the opportunity to give us this vision but it declined. I hope that over the life of this parliament we can get the government to change its mind.

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I too congratulate you on your appointment. I think the Prime Minister made a very good choice. I have worked with you in the past and I know you will do a very good job.

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I wholeheartedly support the throne speech given by the Governor General last week. My question to the hon. member deals with rebates that she mentioned she opposed.

I campaigned at the same time as her but in different provinces. My riding of Brampton Centre was happy with the rebates. I do not know what is the complaint. She says that we are giving rebates to those who have low incomes and receive the GST rebate. We did not hear about a government giving rebates to those with high incomes.

Would she support giving rebates to those with high incomes and high taxes? I do not know what her objection is regarding giving rebates to those with low incomes who receive the GST rebate. I am confused. I do not know which way she will go. Maybe it should be changed again and the rebates given to those with high incomes and those who pay high taxes to the federal government.

Ms. Wendy Lill: Madam Speaker, I believe that the \$250 maximum tax rebate being given to people who are eligible for the GST tax rebate is a start. We accept the minister's statement that this was a speedy method of getting some money out to people.

We simply do not believe that it went far enough. Many Canadians are now facing a 38% increase in fuel bills and have no way on earth of paying these increased costs. The government should create a much more substantial support program to help Canadians with these home heating fuel costs.

Mr. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for clarifying her position with respect to the home heating fuel rebate. She will remember in the last parliament that it took almost three and a half years to try to convince everyone in the House that it was the best way to provide people with an opportunity to fend off a particularly cold winter.

Given that oil companies have a tendency to add 20% margins in Canada on home heating fuel over and above what the U.S. market would allow, I was glad and comforted to hear that the government had taken a good first step. It was validation of the work this member of parliament had undertaken for a couple of years.

Further to the member's concern about Canadians being able to fend off the high and unusual increases in non-discretionary items like heating, would she comment on the level of concentration in Canada's energy industry? That may be at the root of her concern.

Would she also comment on the good work done by the Competition Bureau in removing the restricting covenant on the Come By Chance refinery, which has now permitted the possibility of having yet another competitor come in and provide home heating fuel in the Atlantic provinces?

• (1640)

Ms. Wendy Lill: Madam Speaker, I must say I cannot comment on that. I am not familiar with that regulation.

Although I have stated that the particular rebate is giving some comfort to Canadians, some of the are things that were absent from the throne speech would have given much more comfort to Canadians. New Democrats are very concerned about a national child care program. We did not see it in the throne speech and we will still be fighting for it in the 37th parliament. It would go a long way in buffering the harsh economic climate out there. We need a pharmacare program and a home care program. People with disabilities need adequate income support programs.

The throne speech mentioned an increase in training programs for persons with disabilities. It is limited to people who are eligible for EI. Many Canadians with disabilities, up to 70% of them, are not in the labour force and not even eligible for EI. Many people live in quite a vulnerable state and are totally at the mercy of such things as increased heating oil. That is the kind of issue we have to deal with.

Mr. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore. I congratulate you and your fellow Speakers on your appointments. The positions that you occupy are of paramount importance for decorum in the House. Some 301 representatives debate the issues of the day and try to ensure that Canada remains one of the best countries in the world in which to live.

I thank the electors of Kitchener—Waterloo for the great honour they have bestowed upon me by electing me as their representative to the Parliament of Canada for the third straight time since 1993.

I thank all the volunteers who assisted candidates of all political parties in the last election for involving themselves in the democratic process which has resulted in the 37th parliament. The volunteers in Kitchener—Waterloo who assisted in my re-election as their representative to the Chamber give a deeper meaning to the democratic process for me. I am certain these sentiments are shared by all candidates in the last election with respect to the thousands of volunteers across Canada who worked on their behalf.

I would be remiss if I were to forget to mention the support of my wife Nancy and my daughter Erin who have been my partners on this journey.

I give my first speech in the 37th parliament with a sense of humility for the privilege of being a member of the Chamber and with a new sense of collegiality and respect for all members who are here representing their respective constituencies.

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While I will vigorously debate the points or differences of my colleagues based on differences in policy, I hope I will do so with respect, in recognition of the fact that we have all been sent here by our respective electors as temporary guardians of the public trust. We are here to serve our constituents to the best of our abilities and to contribute to building a strong and united Canada, a Canada that works for all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

When I was first elected to the House in 1993 the fiscal challenges we faced as a national were most daunting. We had a \$42 billion deficit, the highest in the nation's history, coupled with an ever increasing national debt in excess of \$500 billion. These fiscal circumstances threatened the economic sovereignty of our country. Due to the hard work of Canadians and the sound fiscal management of the government, the deficit has been eliminated and the debt is being paid.

Because we have put our fiscal house in order, we have been able to cut taxes fairly. This will serve us well in meeting present economic challenges. By having effectively addressed our fiscal reality we have struck the right balance of investing in health care, families and children, investing in protecting the environment, and investing in research and innovation.

My riding of Kitchener—Waterloo is a good example of what is entailed in the new economy: innovation, research and development, and investing in Canadians through higher education and skills training. The economic profile of my community is based upon insurance, education, high tech companies, many medium size businesses and the service sector.

● (1645)

In the area of insurance we have the head offices of Clarica, Equitable Life, Lutheran Life, Economical Mutual and the Canadian headquarters of Manulife.

Since my time is limited I will focus on the importance of post-secondary education, skills training and research and development from the perspective of my community. I want to share with the House how education benefits my community at the local level and how it contributes to our national economic well-being.

Conestoga College, the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University are all in my riding. The excellence of our post-secondary institutions is well known worldwide. They are the engines of our economic growth. They provide occupation opportunities to Canadians and contribute to the economic output at the local, provincial and national levels.

The work of the visionary pioneers in Kitchener—Waterloo who invested their time and effort in starting up our post-secondary institutions has resulted in great contributions to and are at the core of the community's cultural, social and economic life.

When the University of Waterloo was started in 1957 in a farmer's field, it inspired a book titled *Of Mud and Dreams*. The university established the first co-operative engineering program. The pioneers who started that co-operative program were called heretics, as one did not take a professional program like engineering and debase it with a blue collar component such as work terms. Co-operative education, which offers an academic term matched by a work term, is now common practice throughout Canada and the world.

Since its inception, the University of Waterloo has also embraced computerization. It now has the biggest computer and mathematics faculties in the world and is world renowned.

The three post-secondary educational institutions in my riding are equipping Canadians with the cutting edge skills and learning that they will need to prosper. This will enable them to realize their unique potential and through lifelong learning to succeed in the new digital economy.

This government's record of supporting achievement in education is reflected in our having developed the Canada millennium scholarships, the Canada education savings grant, the Canada foundation for innovation and increasing the education tax credit. All of these will build upon our goal of having at least one million more adults take advantage of learning opportunities during the next five years.

The economic spinoffs from our post-secondary institutions are found in the association of Canada's Technology Triangle and Communitech.

I recall how the Atlas Group, representing the largest information technology companies in my community, made its first visit to Ottawa in the fall of 1994. Today the group has evolved to over 200 member companies of the technology industry within Cambridge, Guelph, Kitchener and Waterloo. Counted among its members are software developers, system integrators, telecommunication companies, Internet companies and more.

Names such as Research in Motion, Open Text, Dalsa, Descartes and Mitron are just a few of these companies, and they are world renowned.

I remember visiting the company Research in Motion in Waterloo with the Minister of Industry in 1994. The company had just 40 employees operating out of rented space. Since then, it has received two Technology Partnership Canada loans totalling less than \$40 million.

Today Research in Motion employs over 1,000 people in high paying jobs, owns its facilities, has produced two billionaires and hundreds of millionaires in my region. Its product is the blackberry, a wireless e-mail device that many of my colleagues in the House now use.

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The Prime Minister sent his first e-mail on the device, and the new Minister of External Affairs was the first cabinet member to have one. The blackberry is the favoured communication tool of people such as Bill Gates of Microsoft, Michael Dell of Dell computers and former vice-president Al Gore.

Research in Motion is a world leader in wireless communications. Besides creating a tremendous amount of wealth and providing employment opportunities to a large number of people, it has also given back to the community.

Two former Research in Motion employees, Louise MacCallum and Michael Bamstijn, donated \$12 million to the community foundation in the Waterloo region and \$1 million to the Waterloo Regional Museum. This was to celebrate their retirement at the ages of 39 and 41 respectively.

• (1650)

Some \$100 million was donated by Michael Lazaridis, along with \$10 million from Jim Balsillie and \$10 million by Douglas Fregin, for a total of \$120 million to establish a world class research institute for theoretical physics. It is believed to be the largest private donation in Canadian history.

More important at the time, much criticism was made of research in universities being driven by company priorities. Here we have a record donation made by Research in Motion, with no strings attached, to expand the boundaries of pure research. In establishing the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, Mike Lazaridis, Jim Balsillie and Douglas Fregin from Research in Motion more than met the challenge issued by the Prime Minister for corporate sponsorship of research.

In the new economy, knowledge and technological innovation are the cornerstones of new prosperity and better quality of life. Research and development are the lifeblood of innovation.

As one of the founding members of the Liberal caucus on post-secondary educational research and development, I am excited that we will at least double the current federal investment in research and development by 2010. That will strengthen the research capacity of Canadian universities, government laboratories and institutions. I also strongly endorse our commitment to ensure access to affordable post-secondary education and to work toward making Canada a country that embraces lifelong learning.

Ms. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me say how pleased and proud I am to see you in the chair. I congratulate you and all of your colleagues on their appointments. It is great to see you there. I have no doubt that you will preside with the fairness and wisdom you have garnered over the years.

I thank the people of Etobicoke—Lakeshore as I begin my initial speech in the House. In returning me for a third term to the House they have placed their confidence in me to represent their interests in parliament. It is my privilege to represent the people of this riding. I can assure them I will do my very best to make their concerns heard in the House.

I also thank my family, friends, campaign team, the many volunteers and all those who worked so hard to ensure a re-election victory. I say to them and to the House that I am indeed very grateful.

I am honoured to respond to the Speech from the Throne, to take this opportunity to speak at the beginning of the 37th parliament. I will focus my remarks on the theme of creating opportunities for Canadians, as this is central to the Liberal government's plan for building a progressive and dynamic Canada.

Let me say a few words about my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore. Situated in proximity to Lake Ontario, my riding is as diverse as Canada itself. It is the southernmost of three federal ridings in what was formerly the city of Etobicoke. Over 360 small and medium size businesses in Etobicoke—Lakeshore cut across the manufacturing, retail trade and business service sectors of the economy.

The Speech from the Throne gives me the opportunity to assure the people of my riding that they can count on the government to create a brighter future, a Canada that will have an even stronger economy in this century, a Canada in which every Canadian will have a higher quality of life, a Canada in which all Canadians will have the opportunity to harness their skills and talents. This is the Canada the constituents of Etobicoke—Lakeshore envision.

The challenges and the pace of the new global economy put a high value on knowledge, research and innovation. The member who spoke prior to me brought to the fore the research and innovative things in his riding.

• (1655)

Canada cannot afford to be unprepared to meet the challenges of the new economy and of the future. We must ensure that the doors of the new economy are open to all Canadians. We must continue in our efforts to ensure their talents, ideas and skills are utilized in building our country in the global economy.

Throne speech 2001 outlines the next steps in the government's moderate, balanced plan to create opportunity for all Canadians in the 21st century.

The federal government will make good on its commitment to make education accessible to my constituents and to all Canadians. It is important to the government that no man, woman or child is left behind as we move forward in building economic prosperity and sharing opportunities. That is why we continue to promote

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skills and learning as part of our plan to create opportunities for Canadians.

I spent many years in education and can say that skills and learning are essential, especially to our young people. Equipping Canadians with marketable, cutting edge skills will ensure they have the tools to prosper and to realize their potential.

This is reassuring to many young people in my riding. They will not be caught in the never ending cycle of no skills no jobs, no jobs no skills. The government will continue to help young Canadians contribute to their country, gain employment and apply their business and creative skills.

Building a skilled labour market is not an easy task, which I think the government realizes. We know that many Canadians have difficulties finding the resources to commit to learning and skills upgrading. We know that youth at risk are more vulnerable to being left behind.

The government's commitment to skills and learning in the 2001 throne speech will meet these challenges. As the Prime Minister indicated, the government wants to help at least one million more Canadian adults take advantage of learning opportunities.

To this end, the government outlined in the throne speech that it would create registered individual learning accounts to assist Canadians to finance their learning needs, to improve loans available to part time students and to help workers learn while they earn.

We will work in partnership with the provinces, the private sector and voluntary organizations to ensure that young people who are at risk, who need help staying in school or getting their first job, will receive that support. We will work to ensure that persons with disabilities and aboriginal Canadians are able to realize their full potential.

These are laudable goals, but I want to address the issues of one group at this point. I am referring to immigrants who have contributed to our economy and our quality of life since the formation of Canada. Every year Canada receives newcomers. They are eager to put their skills and talents to work in our economy. Like so many other Canadians, they want to participate fully in the various sectors of our society.

We cannot afford to have highly skilled, well educated immigrants languish on the margins of Canadian society. We cannot afford to watch them toil away at dead end jobs, especially when they could put their skills to use for the betterment of Canadians.

In Etobicoke—Lakeshore many well trained, highly skilled new Canadians are not realizing their full potential. Some come from various parts of Europe and Africa with degrees as lawyers, doctors and engineers, to name a few. They come with the hope and dream of continuing to practise their professions and to create a better life

for themselves and their families. Sadly they are often disappointed when they learn their foreign credentials are not recognized in Canada.

• (1700)

I am very pleased that the Speech from the Throne addressed that issue. I will work, and I am sure you will work with me, Madam Speaker, as will all members of the House, to ensure that we find a way of working with the provinces and with the various authorities to ensure that Canadians' experience and credentials and those requested of newcomers will in some way be recognized as well as the credentials of those individuals. I thank the government for that initiative.

I also want to address the issue of the high speed broadband Internet access, which will be available to the residents and the businesses in Etobicoke—Lakeshore by the year 2004. My colleague, the member for Winnipeg South, who has some expertise in that area, spoke to that this morning. This issue has some resonance for the businesses in my area.

I congratulate the government again on that part of the speech that addresses the issue and that would put us in that forward global economy and provide the kinds of experiences Canadians will have as we build the kind of society in which young people, those at risk, new immigrants and newcomers to our society, each and every one of us, will have the opportunity to grow, develop, build and have a country that will continue to be one of the countries in the world that is admired by all.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Madam Speaker, I as well must say what a pleasure it is to have you in the chair. Congratulations on your position.

In regard to the hon. member's comments on the throne speech, I must preface my remarks by saying that I highly value the contribution the member has brought to the House of Commons, but earlier we heard from one of the members on the backbenches of the Liberal side who gave us a great discussion about the crisis in our farm industry. Right now we have a grave situation facing our family farmers throughout the country. It is the same situation that is facing our family fishermen. I would like the hon. member to address why the throne speech was so silent on those very important issues which face so many rural Canadians in Canada.

Ms. Jean Augustine: Madam Speaker, I have admiration for the member and his concern for the issue of farmers and farming and the situation of subsidies and the comparative nature of our agricultural base as we look at what is happening in other areas.

I know and have sat with so many of the farmers who have come to my constituency. Although we are in an urban area, the issue that

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is of concern to them is an issue of concern to all of us as Canadians. As legislators I think we have to do everything possible to assure the farmers who provide food and sustenance to our entire country that we support all of their efforts.

It is difficult at this time to begin to discuss the issue of subsidies, of what we need to do and how we need to do this, but I think a good scrutiny of the Speech from the Throne will also show that the words are there that do address themselves to the issue of agriculture.

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Madam Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to say a few words in this debate. Let me congratulate you on your elevation to the chair. I will be sharing my time with the member for Fundy—Royal.

• (1705)

In the throne speech debate today, let me touch briefly, if I may, on three very important points as they affect the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

During the last parliament I spoke repeatedly about the devastating effect that cuts to the federal transfers for health and post-secondary education were having on the smaller provinces in Canada, but especially on the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. For many Canadians, those transfers have been restored to early nineties levels with the new agreement on health and post secondary education. However, in the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, we will not return to nineties levels until the year 2006. That is having a very devastating effect on poorer provinces. It is having a devastating effect on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is one issue that I hope the regional minister for Newfoundland will be able to address. He is a very good friend of the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister, so I know that he will be quite happy to deal with this particular item when it comes across his desk.

As a matter of fact, when he was premier of Newfoundland just a short time ago, he described the agreement that the federal government signed with the provinces as being no bonanza for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. He pointed out that the funding formula was done on a per capita basis. When the population is declining like it is in Newfoundland and Labrador and when health care is funded on a per capita basis, that is bound to have a detrimental affect.

The old EPF funding formula in place prior to the CHST always had in place an equalization component that could be used for areas with small populations. The equalization formula in the old EPF scheme of things also took into account geographic differences. For instance, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has hundreds of smaller communities scattered along thousands of miles of

coastline. The old EPF formula ensured that an equalization component was built in so that it could take into account the geographic differences we have. We do not see that today in the CHST.

A second item I want to have a word on is an important item, an environmental problem currently being experienced in my riding in St. John's. It has to do with the cleanup of St. John's Harbour. This is an issue that is not only a very important environmental issue but an issue that came to the fore in the recent election campaign and I would be remiss if I did not say a few words about it. It is a matter I raised in the House on a number of different occasions in the last parliament and is an issue that I raised on a number of different occasions in the media. Of course in November it became an election issue.

I was pleased to hear the regional minister for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, who is the present Minister of Industry, make the statement that he would be working very hard with the Prime Minister and with the Minister of Finance, who is a very close friend of the regional minister, to secure funding for the St. John's Harbour cleanup.

• (1710)

It is only a \$100 million project, and the province has committed its \$30 million. The city of St. John's, Mount Pearl, and the surrounding area, Paradise, have committed their \$30 million. The only holdout in this whole funding problem is the federal government. I note that the federal government made available, just before the election campaign, \$1.5 billion for the cleanup of Toronto Harbour.

None of us would begrudge Toronto its right to have its harbour beautified and what have you, but I would ask for similar treatment to be given to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in the area of harbour cleanup, a very important environmental issue that needs a measly \$30 million.

I note that the federal government had no problem coming up with \$2 billion a couple of days ago for Bombardier. Again, we do not begrudge Quebec or any other province their windfalls, but surely an environmental problem of this proportion needs to be looked at very closely by the federal government. Hopefully the regional minister can get together with his good friend, the Minister of Finance, and have this problem looked after immediately.

The other subject that is very close to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador is the current equalization formula that we happen to be under. The Canadian equalization system is a really good system. It will keep us from drowning but it falls far short of helping us swim by ourselves. This is where the equalization formula, in the way it is drafted right now, fails the poorer provinces that have to be recipients of it.

Let me elaborate a little. Under the current equalization formula, new resource revenues raised by the provincial treasury are clawed

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back dollar for dollar by the federal government. That is not a very good way of doing business. A province is trying to develop resources, but for every dollar in resource revenue taken in by the province the federal government comes along and takes a dollar back. There are not too many incentives built into that kind of system for any province that wants to develop its resources in the manner it wishes.

I am very encouraged by the fact that today we have the premier of Nova Scotia, Mr. Hamm, in town to talk about the current equalization formula. Hopefully he will put forth a series of recommendations to help rejig or retool the formula we have at present.

In Newfoundland we had the Hibernia project, developed just recently. We were able to do a deal with the federal government in which the federal government said it would take back 70 cents instead of a dollar, thus allowing the province to develop the resource base a little more and to keep some of the revenues associated with that. On top of that, the federal government came up with a \$1 billion loan guarantee and a \$1.5 billion grant. In spite of that, it was able to say that we needed some kind of a better deal as it pertained to the Hibernia development. Of course that was done by the federal PC government.

• (1715)

We have had virtually no recognition from the federal government since that time that the equalization formula should be retooled and rejigged to help provinces like Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Only at the point when we have a new deal on equalization for Newfoundland and Labrador will we be able to rise above a beggar.

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to note that the zone guarantee was not moneys that were directed toward Bombardier as loan guarantees. My hon. colleague knows that.

I listened very carefully to what the he had to say. We have agreements to help less productive provinces, which basically is the member's point today? How would the member respond to Mr. Klein's accusations that too much money is coming out of Alberta, that it is not getting its fair share and that Atlantic Canada is getting a tremendous amount? There seems to be a different philosophy in the member's party from one area of the country to the other.

Mr. Norman Doyle: Madam Speaker, it is great if one happens to live in a very affluent province. Alberta is rapidly becoming a very affluent province and probably already is. It has its own set of problems to deal with.

Atlantic Canada constantly gets criticized for the kinds of regional programs it has to prop up its economy. The Liberals, the

Alliance and other parties criticize the kinds of regional development programs there. They say that they do not work and that we have to do something new.

We are now in the year 2001. The have not provinces, the provinces that are the recipients of equalization payments, want to be net contributors to this country. The only way they can do that is to have some kind of an incentive to develop these resources. The only way to do that is to retool and rejig the equalization formula.

There has been some recognition. When the Minister of Finance came to Newfoundland during the byelection campaign in St. John's West, he made some very good comments about equalization. He said it was time to have a look at it and see what could be done to help out the poorer provinces. A couple of days after he got back, I questioned him on that particular issue and he skated around it. I had reason to believe that he was not really serious about what he had said in Newfoundland.

If the current regional development programs in Atlantic Canada are not working, and maybe some of them are not, then I believe it is time to try something new. The various provinces like Newfoundland, Labrador and those that are the recipients of equalization payments need to have a rejigging and retooling of that formula.

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague if he shares with me a certain excitement about the future of Atlantic Canada.

If we look at Ireland 10 years ago and compare it to Atlantic Canada today, I think the House would agree that a lot of comparisons that can be drawn. The fact is that a tax based strategy, largely based on the transfers from the EU, allowed Ireland to transform itself over that period of time.

• (1720)

We could change the equalization to make it more effective and enable provinces such as Nova Scotia and Newfoundland to keep more of the offshore revenue to lower taxes and debt. Would the hon. member agree that transforming Atlantic Canada by using economic development strategies we know work in other parts of the world would be a great legacy? Can we not change equalization to work now instead of dilly-dallying and doddering around and dealing with old economic development strategies that have failed?

Mr. Norman Doyle: Madam Speaker, how could I not agree with the hon. member? He is such a forward looking individual and such a sound thinker. How could we not agree with him?

We have a very exciting future in Atlantic Canada but we have to have a forward thinking government to take advantage of the opportunities that are in Atlantic Canada.

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Mr. John Herron (Fundy—Royal, PC): Madam Speaker, before I begin, I have to take care of three very important orders of business.

First, Madam Speaker, I would like to compliment you on your appointment to Acting Speaker. I know it is something you are going to appreciate. You will get to learn from the learned member from Kingston. I wish you all the best throughout this term in your capacity as Madam Speaker.

I have this opportunity to speak in the House of Commons, the sacred place that as parliamentarians we all should embrace, due to the privilege that has been bestowed upon for the second time by the electors of Fundy—Royal. I want to thank the electors who reside in my fabulous riding of Fundy—Royal for this opportunity.

I would also like to pay tribute to two individuals who have made an immense contribution in the last parliament with respect to getting the EI issue for seasonal workers on the political map. Lots of other individuals played a role in that but I would like to pay particular tribute to Jean Dubé and Angela Vautour. They spoke out for the seasonal communities who really needed a voice in this parliament. They were clearly magical components in the recipe that got that bill tabled. We now have the bill before us again. Their legacy will benefit many citizens who reside in their communities for many years to come.

I would also like to pay tribute to my colleague Jean Dubé who was successful last evening in a byelection. He is now the member of the legislative assembly in Fredericton and for the riding of Campbellton. He is going to continue that public service commitment. I also want to pay tribute to Mr. Moore, another Tory, who was successful in the riding of Caraquet. The legislature only got stronger last night in New Brunswick.

I referred to the EI bill which has just been reintroduced. The bill with respect to immigration has also been reintroduced. We are also going to see the government make its third attempt at bringing forth legislation with respect to protecting species at risk. Also, there was a bill on the order paper with respect to financial services. The government tabled it five years after it said it was a priority however it died on the order paper.

● (1725)

It would be quite appropriate to say that the government is a government of improvisation. It makes it up as it goes. No longer are we seeing that with respect to the Marshall decision. The government was not ready for that particular incident, despite the fact it must have had people in the Department of Justice saying the decision may not have gone the way the Government of Canada had expected. We saw that in 1995 referendum, in the postal strike and in the farmers' crisis as well. It is a government that manages by crisis and not by vision.

In the throne speech there was no real commitment to developing and augmenting health care in the country. Basically, the government reflected back upon the agreement it signed with the provinces in September or what I call the postdated cheque bill. The government returned the money that it gutted from the health care system in 1993-94 and agreed to return descending levels to that threshold again. When? Not today but three years from now.

When I campaigned in the recent election, they said categorically that given the government was in a surplus and if it had its priorities in order, before it did anything else, it would have returned that money to the health care system today, not three years from now. This fact may not be known, but the province of New Brunswick will not return to the 1993-94 threshold for health care funding until the year 2005-06. New Brunswick actually waited five years for the government's postdated cheque on health care.

I challenge the Minister of Health to return that money now and to escalate the accord that was signed in September as opposed to the take or leave it deal that it left the provinces in that regard.

I also want to talk about one perspective. We have seen a lot of economic indicators in the last little while that would say the North American economy is starting to slow down. It is unheard of and unprecedented that the Minister of Finance would not have the fortitude to provide the leadership that the country fundamentally needs to ensure that Canada will make the necessary investments in our economy to ensure that it maintains its place in the world economy.

Why do we not have a budget tabled that would recognize the fact that Canada has the second highest corporate and personal income taxes as a per cent of its GDP in the industrialized world? Why would we not have a budget right now that would send a signal that Canada is going in the direction of lowering its taxes so it can have more growth to keep up with its principal trading partner, the United States?

Moreover, we categorically have to make investment for the younger generation. The best investment we could possibly make for younger generations right now is to set out a methodical strategy about paying down our national debt. That is the least we owe to our future generations.

There was no clear signal that the government will in a prudent, methodical way pay down debt. If we want to send a signal to the international investment community that Canada is getting its economic fundamentals in order, that it is a place to grow and invest those important dollars in, no signal would be more valuable than a methodical approach to paying down national debt. I want to pay tribute to the member of Kings—Hants, our finance critic, who played a fundamental role in ensuring that that element was in the platform we bestowed upon Canadians in the recent election.

There is one issue that I was very shocked by and that the Right Hon. Adrienne Clarkson did not utter the words because they were not placed before her in the throne speech. The member for Burin—St. George's obviously does not think my next point is going to be all that important. I know students who live in Burin—St. George's. When the member was a Tory, he actually thought this was a problem. Now that he is a Liberal, he has forgotten about the students.

● (1730)

Can you, Madam Speaker, go to a high school, a community college or a university near your riding and say that post-secondary education is accessible to everyone? We cannot do that right now because we do not have the guts to invest in post-secondary education to the level that we should.

The message I want to send throughout this debate on the throne speech is that this is a government of improvisation. I want to be a friend of Fundy—Royal and a friend of Canadians as a parliamentarian who advocates these particular issues. I want to be a friend to farmers to ensure that we actually have an income stabilization system that would address catastrophic loss of income.

I want to ensure that we are friends to students. I want to ensure that we do things in terms of being a friend to the environment, to safe air and safe water, to protect species at risk and to address climate change. Those are the issues that we had in our platform. I am sure, Madam Speaker, that you actually read our platform with wholehearted intensity during the course of the election.

I am a friend of the environment, of farmers, of students and, above all, I pledge today that I will be a friend of my great riding of Fundy—Royal.

Mr. Bill Matthews (Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment to the chair.

I want to ask a question of my colleague from Fundy—Royal. Is he suggesting that the government should totally neglect and forget about the \$42 billion deficit that the former administration left this country with before the Liberals came to power in 1993?

Does the hon. member not realize that student debts and problems with student loans is a result of the mismanagement and overspending of the former administration led by former Prime Minister Mulroney?

Is the member for Fundy—Royal advocating that we should return to blind spending, to increased student debt and to not dealing prudently with the finances of this country? I would like to hear the hon. member's response to those questions.

Mr. John Herron: Madam Speaker, a lot of my friends who have been in public life before have always said that the second

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term is always more enjoyable. If I get more members on the other side leading with their chins like that, it will indeed be that much more enjoyable.

Mr. Flip-Flop, as we refer to him right now, understands that economies such as Great Britain, the United States and most of the industrialized nations were in a worldwide recession at that time. The only reason we are in a surplus position right now is because of initiatives brought forward by the Progressive Conservatives.

I would remind the member that when he was the chair for the Brian Mulroney campaign he actually had some good sense. The initiative that was brought forth during that era was something called the free trade agreement. Some of my colleagues here might remember that.

We left a legacy for this country in terms of economics. In 1988 our trade with the Americans was about \$90 billion. Compliments of the free trade agreement, today trade with Americans is \$320 billion.

I am not advocating that we go back into a deficit scenario, because systematically what this country needs is a debt repayment schedule. That is the least that we owe future generations.

● (1735)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Madam Speaker, as I would say in your native language, *evha risto* and *kali nehta* to you as well.

I heard the member of the Conservative Party talk about health care, education and the environment. I was just about to sign him up for the NDP because those are what we have been preaching about for years and years. It is nice to see them turn on the light.

He keeps harping on about the great amount of trade we have done with the United States and what a great thing it is for Canada. The fact is that child poverty has increased in Canada. When they were in government in 1989 Ed Broadbent moved a motion in the House to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000 that was agreed to by all parliamentarians.

Regardless of free trade, NAFTA, deficits, debts and surpluses, child poverty has increased by four times. The Conservatives were in government for four of the years. The Liberals were in government for nine of those years.

The fact is the throne speech is silent on what they will do to help the children and the parents to get out of child poverty. What immediate answers does my good colleague from Fundy—Royal, in the beautiful province of New Brunswick, have to address those serious issues at this very important time?

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Mr. John Herron: Madam Speaker, the question is quite long to give an appropriate response. Clearly we should be sending some signals such as raising the basic personal exemptions for working poor individuals. It sends a very wrong signal that we tax individuals who make about \$14,000 less than the poverty line. Raising the basic personal exemption would be a step in the right direction.

There are some other things we should be doing, such as doing away with the HST and GST on home heating fuel. Those are the kind of initiatives that we should be doing. We should be doing those initiatives rather than sending a fuel rebate tax to prisoners.

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your new appointment. I know that your experience in parliament and all the work that you have done will lead you as an excellent Speaker in the House. I look forward to listening to you and working with you throughout this parliament.

I thank my constituents in Chatham—Kent Essex. I appreciate the support they have given me in returning me to the House. I know that I will work as hard as I can to help with the confidence they have given to me and the Liberal Party in returning a Liberal government for a third mandate. I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

As I listened to the comments made by hon. members in response to the Speech from the Throne I was struck by the comment made by the Leader of the Opposition. He said that reducing taxes and debt and investing in the needed economic and social infrastructure were complementary goals. By reducing taxes, reducing the debt, invigorating our economy and increasing revenues, it is with an invigorating type of fiscal position that we can help with social programs for Canadians, social programs that Canadians need.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for endorsing the Liberal plan. This is exactly the approach the Liberal government has taken. It is an approach that has received overwhelming support from people across Canada in three successive elections. The Liberal vision has long been based on striking the right balance between prudent fiscal management and smart investments in key economic and social priorities.

This vision has served Canada extremely well. It is no coincidence that for the past seven years in a row the United Nations has proclaimed Canada as the best place in the world to live. There is absolutely no question that since 1993 our nation has come the distance step by step.

In 1993 our public finances were in a mess, with spiralling debt, a record \$42 billion deficit, high interest rates, combined with more than an 11% unemployment rate and continuous tax increases.

Together we have eliminated the \$42 billion deficit we inherited and the Liberal government has recorded three consecutive sur-

pluses. Last year we reduced the national debt by more than \$12 billion, the largest paydown in Canadian history.

● (1740)

The Speech from the Throne reaffirms our commitment to rock solid, prudent, fiscal management. Our extraordinary fiscal turn-about has allowed us to introduce the largest tax cut in Canadian history of some \$100 billion. This means more money in the pockets of every Canadian, particularly moderate and middle income Canadians.

The unemployment rate has fallen to 6.8%, its lowest level in over two decades. Over two million new jobs have been created under the Liberal government.

Canada's economy is doing well. In fact our economy is enjoying the longest run of growth since the sixties. At the same time the Liberal government has been investing in our youth, our children, our families, health care, knowledge, innovation, infrastructure and environment. Together we have built a strong foundation, but we cannot rest on our achievements. We must and will do more.

Many challenges and opportunities lie ahead for us as we enter the new millennium. We will continue to build a stronger Canada, secure a higher quality of life for all Canadians and ensure all citizens have a chance to participate fully in making our society the best it can be.

Our success today and in the future is in the hands of our children. The Liberal government takes this investment seriously with the early childhood development agreement and the national child benefit, and by doubling the length of maternity and parental benefits our investments in families and children have been second to none.

The government believes there is no higher priority than the welfare of Canada's children. That is why in the throne speech we have committed to developing new measures to help single parents, to working with provinces to modernize the laws for child support, custody and access, and to improve the support to parents and caregivers in times of family crisis.

Our health care system is also cherished by Canadians. Canada's health care system embodies the values we share as a nation. It reflects a society that is caring and compassionate with a strong sense of justice. It provides quality service to all citizens, not just those who can afford to pay for it.

The recent health action plan agreement, agreed to by all first ministers, marked a historic step forward to renew our health care system for the 21st century. The Speech from the Throne echoes the deep commitment of the Liberal government to universal, publicly funded health care, to upholding the principles of the Canada Health Act, and to ensuring our system better meets the needs of Canadians.

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The Liberal government plans to invest in health care more than \$21 billion over five years, including \$8 billion in Ontario. This means shorter waiting lists, more doctors and nurses, better delivery services and improved access. This is important for all Canadians, especially those who live in rural and remote areas.

Another aspect of the throne speech which is of particular relevance to rural Canadians, including those of my own riding, is the government's pledge to help Canada's agricultural sector move beyond crisis management.

Many farmers are facing a crisis beyond their control. High foreign subsidies and historically low prices are making it difficult for farmers to survive and compete. It is incumbent upon us to commit to doing more to support our farmers to enable them to compete on equal footing with their American and European counterparts.

Many Canadians face the challenges of this intense competition. We live in a fast paced, technology driven, global economy. The government has developed bold programs to ensure that all Canadians have access to the education, tools and information they need to develop skills that are in demand. Prospering in an economy requires being connected to the technologies that will drive the future.

To date our government has achieved an enormous success with initiatives such as SchoolNet and community access programs which help communities, public schools and libraries across Canada get on line.

• (1745)

Many communities in my riding, including Blenheim, Chatham, Highgate, Leamington, Merlin, Ridgetown, Tilbury and Wheatley, have benefited from the national strategy for connecting Canadians across the country. I am pleased to see that the federal government will continue to support this strategy and build on its progress.

The throne speech sets forth bold goals in the areas of skills and lifelong learning as well as research and development. We intend at least to double the current federal investment in research and development by the year 2010. Over the next five years we will help at least one million more Canadian adults take advantage of learning opportunities and improve their skills.

We will make it easier for Canadians to finance their learning by creating the registered individual learning accounts. By supporting our youth employment programs we will help our young people make the transition from school to work where they can apply their creative talents. By working with our partners we will assist persons with disabilities who face barriers to full participation in our economy and society. We will invest aggressively in the skills and talents of Canadians to ensure that no one is left behind.

Building a skilled workforce also requires attracting skilled labour from abroad. I am pleased the government intends to reintroduce changes to the immigration legislation. It wants to facilitate the entry of temporary workers to allow for the immediate needs of employers to be met very quickly. It also wants to modernize the system to attract the world's best and brightest to Canada. Canada is a nation of immigrants. It is a country that was built by immigrants, and everyone knows that diversity has made Canada strong and will continue to make us strong.

Strong communities are the goal of the Liberal government and continued work to make our communities strong is the goal the Liberal government will attempt to achieve over its mandate. The throne speech makes it clear that every Canadian should have the opportunity to share in the prosperity of the country. We will do our best to make sure that happens for every Canadian.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about agriculture. There is one sentence in the throne speech about agriculture and it referred to moving beyond crisis management. What is meant by the phrase moving beyond crisis management? No one from the Prime Minister downward has specified exactly what that means.

Would the member explain what he thinks it means? Also, would he be specific on what steps the government is taking to move beyond the income crisis that we are in today?

Mr. Jerry Pickard: Mr. Speaker, when we look at Canada's safety nets we look at the programs that have been developed and the programs that have evolved over the last many years. The programs have been focused on crisis management, the management of time when there is a great deal of problem. We have not really taken the lead in moving beyond that.

Canada must take steps with our international partners to make sure that rules for fair trade, rules for access to products of other countries and rules of subsidies need to be challenged and need to be met. There is no question that we need to set agreements that will ensure our farm community has the right and the opportunity to compete on an equal footing and on an equal basis.

When we talk about the kinds of strategies that are needed, the Prime Minister had the opportunity to talk quickly with the new President of the United States this week to bring forward some of the issues that have to do with trading in softwood lumber, industry or agriculture.

The fact is that Canada has farmers who are technically well advanced in production, who have a tremendous ability to produce food, and who are under the gun in unfair trade subsidies at this point in time. We have always arrived at situations where our farm community or others have run into those kinds of pressures and problems. I believe going beyond crisis management means that we manage a program that puts them on a fair footing with

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everybody else in the world, and that is most important. I have not met one farmer who does not want the opportunity to farm and compete on an equal square footing base with everyone else. That is what our farm community is demanding. That is what our Liberal government must deliver.

• (1750)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that 22,000 prairie farm families left the farm just last year alone.

Who does the member think the future farmers of the country will be? Will it be the children of those farmers who have left or will it be the corporate farms that are coming on stream very quickly?

Mr. Jerry Pickard: Mr. Speaker, I obviously cannot identify exactly who will be farming what areas in the country. I can say that there has been a major problem in the oilseeds industry.

There is no question that grains and oilseeds have taken the brunt of difficult times. First, the prices have been low. Second, the competition has been difficult and American and European subsidies have distorted the markets and the farmers' abilities to get a proper price out of the commodities they sell. Third, Canadian food prices are lower than anywhere else in the world. However, it is very clear and important to realize that we have to negotiate agreements in agriculture that will put our Canadian farmers back on track in a fair, competitive face.

I do not think for one minute that anyone is ignoring this issue. It is a matter of bringing people to the table. In the past it has always been a competition where larger countries such as the United States—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment.

It is a pleasure to take part in this historic throne speech debate as we set a course for the new millennium. I first want to express my appreciation to the constituents of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex for their continued support on my third consecutive election. They can rest assured that I will continue to put their views and concerns first and foremost.

In this, my maiden speech in the 37th parliament, I want express my sincere thanks to my family, Terry, Sandy, Michelle, Paul and my husband Louis for their dedication and support. Without them I could not do this job. To my friends, my staff, my campaign team and to the many volunteers who believe in me and continue to believe in me and support me, I certainly appreciate it.

This throne speech proposes an action plan to move Canada forward as a nation that creates opportunity, rewards excellence and ensures all citizens are full participants. We will focus on our efforts of ensuring that all share in the benefits of a strong economy and to create a workforce that is ready to meet the challenges of the new economy.

However, it is the current state of agriculture and its future that is most notably on the minds of many of my constituents.

With my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex harvesting more crops than all the maritime provinces combined, agriculture is without a doubt the economic backbone of southern Ontario, indeed Canada.

As agriculture goes, so goes our rural areas. If rural Canada has a future, we must work to ensure a positive future for agriculture.

To put this in perspective for everyone, I will present some numbers to summarize the vital importance of agriculture. For example, of Lambton county's nearly 600,000 acres, 491,000 acres are devoted to growing crops, representing 14% of the total jobs in that county. This results in over \$773 million in annual sales. That is nearly a billion dollars of positive economic activity in one county.

The employment and sale expenditure multipliers indicate that for every job in agriculture there are an additional 1.28 jobs outside agriculture, and for each dollar in sales in agriculture there are \$1.57 in agriculture related businesses.

• (1755)

Kent county produces 25%, one-quarter of Ontario's total corn crop. In Middlesex county in just one month over 20 million eggs will be produced. There is enough wool produced from sheep each year to knit 19,000 sweaters. The swimming pool at the London Aquatic Centre holds nearly one million gallons of water. There is enough milk produced in the county of Middlesex each year to fill 22 pools that size.

Almost 4,500 acres of land are used to grow fruit such as peaches, pears, cherries, grapes and strawberries. Most of us enjoy a good steak. There are 13,500 beef cattle in Middlesex, producing not only meat and milk but car polish, medicine, leather, camera film, crayons, candles and sports equipment.

The feather industry in one county of my riding has nearly two million chickens and turkeys. In all counties of my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, wheat, oats, barley, mixed grains, corn, alfalfa, soybean, tobacco and potatoes are the cash crops which are grown. Bike tires, suntan lotion, toothpaste, fuel, makeup, ink and bread can be made from these crops. Tomatoes, mushrooms, asparagus and cauliflower are grown as well. Lambton—Kent—Middlesex is truly a diversified riding.

The Address

When we talk of a growing economy it means many things. Agriculture is not just food but value added products that we all use in our daily lives whether we live in downtown Vancouver or Toronto or in the villages of Alvinston, Eberts or Melbourne.

Some individuals may be indifferent to the farming crisis. However everyone must recognize the three necessities of life: clean air, clean water, and a safe and abundant food supply. Agriculture is the third largest employer in Canada, generating about \$95 billion in domestic retail and food services sales each year. That is why I was pleased to see that agriculture was mentioned in the throne speech last week. It was a recognition of the essential place agriculture has in the economic success of Canada.

I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister state that we must address the subsidy problem. There are problems on the farm. Low commodity prices, coupled with bad weather, high input costs and overproduction due to high subsidies in the U.S. and the European Union, are putting our farmers in a financial vice, wounding the industry by cutting off its circulation as the lifeblood of our rural and urban economies.

The current three year \$5.5 billion national safety net agreement is a positive factor in support of our farmers. Our agriculture minister worked very hard with the provinces to finalize this agreement, but we as Liberals know that more must be done. Unless and until the U.S. and EU drop their subsidies, all industries must be treated fairly in the face of international subsidies.

National and provincial farm groups are suggesting that an additional \$300 million to the farm safety net for Ontario would be reasonable, with 50% from the federal government. I stress that what is happening today in agriculture has nothing to do with bad farm management decisions. It is out of the farmer's hands.

It is also important to point out that the Ontario government has a role to play here as well. Quebec farm support, for example, is 2.35 times greater than similar funding for income support and stabilization in Ontario. Over the past three years Quebec has spent \$457.3 million on farm support. Ontario spent just \$194.8 million, and that is going down.

Since 1995 federal support has increased by 85%. We are moving in the right direction. While the current Ontario government spends less than one-half of one per cent of its budget on agriculture, it is eight per cent of Ontario's gross domestic product.

Today, February 6, is Food Freedom Day. It is a day of celebration for those who eat at least once a day, but it is not as happy for those who produce our food.

• (1800)

Today Canadians have earned enough money to pay for their entire year's food supply. It takes just 37 days out of the whole year

for the average Canadian consumer to pay for his or her groceries. In 1999 Canadians spent 10% of their personal disposable income on food. That compares to 13% in France, 15% in Germany and 33% in Mexico.

Farmers are earning just a fraction of the average food dollar. While Food Freedom Day is February 6, January 9 is the day on which we have paid for the farmers' amount. That is right. It takes only nine days to pay the farmers for a year's worth of food. Nine cents of a \$1.50 loaf of bread is returned to the farmer. Sixteen cents goes to the dairy farmer on a \$1.50 glass of milk. A waiter or waitress in a restaurant earns more on tips for serving the food than the farmer who produces it in the first place.

The throne speech of this new session is an important document. While it outlines the goals and proposals of the government on many fronts, it is agriculture that needs our immediate attention.

Our nation is a success, with a strong and viable agriculture industry. Ontario has always been a leader in agricultural production and agribusiness in Canada, and our nation's farmers are the most efficient in the world.

The Liberal government recognizes agriculture's value, not only to the Canadian economy but also to the quality of life in rural communities. I support the action we have taken to support agriculture through research and development, the Canadian adaptation and rural development fund, enhanced farm income programs and support for rural communities through such excellent programs as community futures, but we can and we must do more.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6 p.m. it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the amendments now before the house. The question is on the subamendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the subamendment?

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the subamendment lost.

The next question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Address

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1830)

[*Translation*]

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

(Division No. 2)

YEAS

Members

| | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Abbott | Ablonczy |
| Anders | Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands) |
| Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska) | Bailey |
| Benoit | Borotsik |
| Breitkreuz | Brisson |
| Burton | Cadman |
| Casey | Casson |
| Chatters | Clark |
| Cummins | Day |
| Doyle | Duncan |
| Elley | Epp |
| Fitzpatrick | Forseth |
| Gallant | Goldring |
| Grewal | Grey (Edmonton North) |
| Harris | Hearn |
| Herron | Hill (MacLeod) |
| Hill (Prince George—Peace River) | Hilstrom |
| Hinton | Johnston |
| Keddy (South Shore) | Kenney (Calgary Southeast) |
| Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands) | Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni) |
| MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough) | Manning |
| Mayfield | McNally |
| Meredith | Merrifield |
| Mills (Red Deer) | Obhrai |
| Pallister | Penson |
| Peschisolido | Rajotte |
| Reid (Lanark—Carleton) | Reynolds |
| Ritz | Schmidt |
| Skelton | Solberg |
| Sorenson | Spencer |
| Stinson | Strahl |
| Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest) | Thompson (Wild Rose) |
| Toews | Vellacott |
| Wayne | White (North Vancouver) |
| Yelich —69 | |

NAYS

Members

| | |
|-----------|-------------|
| Adams | Allard |
| Assad | Assadourian |
| Asselin | Augustine |
| Bagnell | Baker |
| Barnes | Bélair |
| Bélangier | Bellehumeur |
| Bellemare | Bennett |
| Bergeron | Bertrand |

| | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Bevilacqua | Bigras |
| Binet | Blaikie |
| Blondin-Andrew | Bonin |
| Bonwick | Boudria |
| Bourgeois | Bradshaw |
| Brien | Brown |
| Bryden | Bulte |
| Caccia | Calder |
| Cannis | Caplan |
| Cardin | Carignan |
| Carroll | Castonguay |
| Catterall | Cauchon |
| Chamberlain | Charbonneau |
| Chrétien | Collenette |
| Comuzzi | Copps |
| Cotler | Crête |
| Cullen | Cuzner |
| Dalphon-DuGirard | Davies |
| Desjarlais | Desrochers |
| DeVillers | Dion |
| Dromisky | Drouin |
| Dubé | Duceppe |
| Duplain | Easter |
| Eyking | Farrah |
| Folco | Fontana |
| Fournier | Fry |
| Gagliano | Gagnon (Champlain) |
| Gagnon (Québec) | Galloway |
| Gauthier | Girard-Bujold |
| Godfrey | Godin |
| Goodale | Graham |
| Gray (Windsor West) | Guarnieri |
| Guay | Guimond |
| Harb | Harvard |
| Harvey | Hubbard |
| Ianno | Jackson |
| Jennings | Jordan |
| Karetak-Lindell | Karygiannis |
| Keyes | Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast) |
| Knutson | Kraft Sloan |
| Laframboise | Laliberte |
| Lalonde | Lancôt |
| Lastewka | Lavigne |
| Lebel | LeBlanc |
| Lee | Leung |
| Longfield | MacAulay |
| Macklin | Mahoney |
| Malhi | Maloney |
| Manley | Marceau |
| Marcil | Marleau |
| Martin (LaSalle—Émard) | Mathews |
| McCormick | McDonough |
| McGuire | McKay (Scarborough East) |
| McLellan | McTeague |
| Ménard | Mills (Toronto—Danforth) |
| Minna | Mitchell |
| Murphy | Myers |
| Nault | Neville |
| Normand | Nystrom |
| O'Brien (Labrador) | O'Brien (London—Fanshawe) |
| O'Reilly | Owen |
| Pagtakhan | Paquette |
| Paradis | Parrish |
| Patry | Peric |
| Perron | Peterson |
| Pettigrew | Phinney |
| Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex) | Pillitteri |
| Plamondon | Pratt |
| Price | Proctor |
| Proulx | Provenzano |
| Redman | Reed (Halton) |
| Regan | Richardson |
| Robillard | Robinson |
| Rocheleau | Rock |
| Roy | Saada |
| Sauvageau | Savoy |
| Scherrer | Scott |
| Serré | Sgro |
| Shepherd | Speller |
| St. Denis | St-Hilaire |

St-Jacques
Steckle
Stoffer
Telegdi
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tobin
Tremblay (Rimouski-Neigette-et-la Mitis)
Valeri
Venne
Wappel
Whelan
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St-Julien
Stewart
Szabo
Thibault (West Nova)
Tirabassi
Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
Ur
Vanclief
Volpe
Wasylcia-Leis
Wilfert

PAIRED MEMBERS

*Nil/aucun

The Speaker: I declare the amendment negated.

* * *

WAYS AND MEANS

FINANCIAL CONSUMER AGENCY

Hon. Jim Peterson (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions), Lib.) moved that a ways and means motion relating to assessments of expenses of a financial consumer agency, notice of which was laid upon the table on Wednesday, January 31, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Pursuant to the order made on Monday, February 5, 2001, the House will now proceed to the deferred recorded division on ways and means Motion No. 1.

• (1835)

[*English*]

Ms. Marlene Catterall: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. If the House would agree I would propose that you seek unanimous consent that members who voted on the previous motion be recorded as having voted on the motion now before the House, with Liberal members voting in favour.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in such a fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, Canadian Alliance members will be voting yea on this motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, members of the Bloc Québécois will vote against the motion.

The Address

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, NDP members will vote against the motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, members of the Progressive Conservative Party will be voting yes to this motion.

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

(*Division No. 3*)

YEAS

Members

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Abbott | Ablonczy |
| Adams | Allard |
| Anders | Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands) |
| Assad | Assadourian |
| Augustine | Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska) |
| Bagnell | Bailey |
| Baker | Barnes |
| Bélair | Bélangier |
| Bellemare | Bennett |
| Benoit | Bertrand |
| Bevilacqua | Binet |
| Blondin-Andrew | Bonin |
| Bonwick | Borotsik |
| Boudria | Bradshaw |
| Breitkreuz | Brison |
| Brown | Bryden |
| Bulte | Burton |
| Caccia | Cadman |
| Calder | Cannis |
| Caplan | Carignan |
| Carroll | Casey |
| Casson | Castonguay |
| Catterall | Cauchon |
| Chamberlain | Charbonneau |
| Chatters | Chrétien |
| Clark | Collenette |
| Comuzzi | Copps |
| Cotler | Cullen |
| Cummins | Cuzner |
| Day | DeVillers |
| Dion | Doyle |
| Dromisky | Drouin |
| Duncan | Duplain |
| Easter | Elley |
| Epp | Eyking |
| Farrah | Fitzpatrick |
| Folco | Fontana |
| Forseth | Fry |
| Gagliano | Gallant |
| Galloway | Godfrey |
| Goldring | Goodale |
| Graham | Gray (Windsor West) |
| Grewal | Grey (Edmonton North) |
| Guamieri | Harb |
| Harris | Harvard |
| Harvey | Hearn |
| Herron | Hill (MacLeod) |
| Hill (Prince George—Peace River) | Hilstrom |
| Hinton | Hubbard |
| Ianno | Jackson |
| Jennings | Johnston |
| Jordan | Karetak-Lindell |
| Karygiannis | Keddy (South Shore) |
| Kennedy (Calgary Southeast) | Keyes |
| Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast) | Knutson |
| Kraft Sloan | Laliberte |

The Address

Lastewka
 LeBlanc
 Leung
 Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
 MacAulay
 Macklin
 Malhi
 Manley
 Marcil
 Martin (LaSalle—Énard)
 Mayfield
 McGuire
 McLellan
 McTeague
 Merrifield
 Mills (Toronto—Danforth)
 Mitchell
 Myers
 Neville
 O'Brien (Labrador)
 O'Reilly
 Owen
 Pallister
 Parrish
 Penson
 Peschisolido
 Pettigrew
 Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
 Pratt
 Proulx
 Rajotte
 Reed (Halton)
 Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
 Richardson
 Robillard
 Saada
 Scherrer
 Scott
 Sgro
 Skelton
 Sorenson
 Spencer
 St-Jacques
 Steckle
 Stinson
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Lavigne
 Lee
 Longfield
 Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
 MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
 Mahoney
 Maloney
 Manning
 Marleau
 Matthews
 McCormick
 McKay (Scarborough East)
 McNally
 Meredith
 Mills (Red Deer)
 Minna
 Murphy
 Nault
 Normand
 O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
 Obhrai
 Pagtakhan
 Paradis
 Patry
 Peric
 Peterson
 Phinney
 Pillitteri
 Price
 Provenzano
 Redman
 Regan
 Reynolds
 Ritz
 Rock
 Savoy
 Schmidt
 Serré
 Shepherd
 Solberg
 Speller
 St. Denis
 St-Julien
 Stewart
 Strahl
 Telegdi
 Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
 Thompson (Wild Rose)
 Tobin
 Ur
 Vanclief
 Volpe
 Wayne
 White (North Vancouver)
 Wood

NAYS

Members

Asselin
 Bergeron
 Blaikie
 Brien
 Crête
 Davies
 Desrochers
 Duceppe
 Gagnon (Champlain)
 Gauthier
 Godin
 Guimond
 Lalonde
 Lebel
 McDonough
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 Desjarlais
 Dubé
 Fournier
 Gagnon (Québec)
 Girard-Bujold
 Guay
 Laframboise
 Lanctôt
 Marceau
 Ménard
 Paquette
 Plamondon
 Robinson
 Roy
 St-Hilaire
 Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
 Venne

PAIRED MEMBERS

*Nil/aucun

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It being 6.36 p.m. the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.36 p.m.)

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