



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 8, 2001

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 8, 2001

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-250, an act to amend the Criminal Code (theft of a motor vehicle).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Athabasca for seconding the bill. I have the pleasure to reintroduce legislation to amend the criminal code, specifically concerning the offence of theft of motor vehicles.

This amendment applies only to those offenders who are in the business of stealing motor vehicles. Organized crime and other gang related enterprises are becoming quite active in this type of criminal activity.

The purpose of the legislation is to impose a mandatory minimum sentence of four years of imprisonment on anyone who is convicted of more than one theft of a motor vehicle.

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

* * *

• (1005)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-251, an act to amend the Criminal Code (abduction).

He said: Mr. Speaker, again I thank my colleague from Athabasca for seconding the bill. I am reintroducing legislation to amend the criminal code, specifically the section concerning the offence of abduction of young persons. Section 281 currently provides for the offence of abduction of persons under the age of 14 years by a person other than the person's parents or guardian.

I am proposing to change the offence so that it applies to the abduction of all persons under the age of 16. My intent with this change is to provide law enforcement and the courts with another arrow in their quiver to combat the sexual exploitation and abuse of young people by those involved in the sex trade.

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

* * *

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-252, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (statutory release granted only when earned and subject to mandatory supervision).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I too thank my hon. colleague from Athabasca for seconding the bill. The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that all inmates applying for statutory release establish that they are rehabilitated to the extent that public safety and the safety of individuals are not jeopardized by their being at large.

It also requires that all those on statutory release to be subject to a mandatory supervision order. Statutory release would not be granted if the offender has shown behaviour that raises reasonable doubt about public safety or complying with the supervision order.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I seek unanimous consent of the House to introduce Bill C-253, an act to amend the Canada Maritime Act, which could not be included in the order paper. It was supposed to be there today. I am therefore requesting leave of the House to introduce it today.

Routine Proceedings

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the hon. member to introduce this bill today?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Kraft Sloan: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the House to introduce a bill on behalf of the member for Lac-Saint-Louis who is unable to be here today.

The purpose of the bill is to protect human health and environment against certain harmful or potentially harmful automotive fuels by reducing automotive pollution in Canada.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to allow the hon. member to present the bill on behalf of the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

* * *

PETITIONS

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present the most recent instalment of the petition which calls on parliament to enact legislation that would raise the age of consent from 14 years to 16 years for sexual activity between a young person and an adult.

During the 36th parliament I presented a number of instalments of the same petition on behalf of Mrs. Diane Sowden in Coquitlam, British Columbia.

The intent of the petition is to provide another tool with which to combat sexual exploitation of our youth by those involved in the sex trade. With the addition of the 1,200 names on this instalment, the total number of citizens who have signed this petition now stands at over 13,000.

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am the spokesperson for some 50 people in my riding who are calling upon the government to pass legislation requiring the identification of genetically modified products.

I have just heard it said out in the lobby that it was important for this to be done because people with allergies to certain products are at risk of a major reaction if they do not know the contents of what they are eating.

I recently read an article that said there is a plan to cross tomatoes with spiders. When the tomatoes start climbing the walls, it will be a bit too late to pass any legislation. One may well wonder why such crosses would be done, unless it is to avoid shipping costs and have the tomatoes take themselves to consumers.

[*English*]

GASOLINE ADDITIVES

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I wish to present a petition on behalf of the citizens in the Grand Bend, Sarnia and London areas.

They urge the government to eliminate the gas additive MMT as it has a negative impact both on people's health and on our ecosystem at large.

ENERGY PRICES

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to be able to present, under Standing Order 36, a very hefty document with literally thousands of names of people in my riding who are appealing to government to help them with the staggering skyrocketing fuel costs they are currently living with.

Their recommendation is that the government establish a national energy price commission. This independent national commission would be charged to regulate the costs of gasoline, home heating fuel, natural gas and other energy sources.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As we are still in routine proceedings, I wonder if there would be consent in the House to revert to introduction of private members' bills to deal with two items that members apparently wish to bring to the House?

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

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CANADA MARINE ACT

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-253, an act to amend the Canada Marine Act.

Supply

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill is intended to give greater viability to regional ports in the future and ensure that, in the context of the current policy on the divestiture of ports, people can have a structure in order to properly develop regional ports Canada wide. At present, these ports have no specific status under the Canada Marine Act.

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

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Kraft Sloan: Mr. Speaker, again I would seek the unanimous consent of the House to introduce a bill on behalf of the member for Lac-Saint-Louis who is unable to be here today.

The Speaker: Is it agreed that the hon. member for York North may present a bill on behalf of the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE POLLUTION REDUCTION ACT

Mrs. Karen Kraft Sloan (for Mr. Clifford Lincoln) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-254, an act to protect human health and the environment by oxygenating automotive fuels and eliminating the gasoline additive MMT.

She said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill is to protect human health and the environment against certain harmful or potentially harmful automotive fuels by reducing automotive pollution in Canada.

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

* * *

● (1015)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—ETHICS COUNSELLOR

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance) moved:

That this House adopt the following policy from Liberal Redbook 1 and call for its implementation by the government: "A Liberal Government will appoint an independent Ethics Counsellor to advise both public officials and lobbyists in the day-to-day application of the Code of Conduct for Public Officials. The Ethics Counsellor will be appointed after consultation with the leaders of all parties in the House of Commons and will report directly to Parliament."

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I believe you would find consent for the following motion:

That at the conclusion of the present debate on today's Opposition Motion, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders on Tuesday, February 13, 2001.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is there unanimous consent to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, all members of the Canadian Alliance will be splitting their time.

Mr. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Fraser Valley.

We find the motion fascinating because it is a motion that was brought forward by the Liberals in their so-called red book one. I have indicated that it is our honour to support the government on initiatives that we feel are positive and that will serve the country well. We are here to help members opposite recognize that this is a good motion.

We do not mind giving the Liberals full credit for their idea. It is contained in their red book one. I have it in front of me and it is fabulous.

Supply

[*Translation*]

This motion was part of the first red book in 1993. It was part of the Liberal election platform. Here is a description of the remarks of the Prime Minister during the 1993 election campaign.

[*English*]

During the election campaign the Prime Minister said, and it was picked up by the Canadian Press, "It's time to elect politicians that serve the public rather than serve themselves." We agree with that.

I think Liberal members will remember the months leading up to the 1993 election, but if not I hope to refresh their memories in about three or four years from now. However, on February 17, 1993, when the Liberals were in opposition, the present House Leader, the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, tabled the following motion:

That this House condemns the government for its continued failure to establish and to adhere to a clear and high standard of public sector ethics, for its incessant inability to function within the framework of existing legislation, guidelines and standards, and for its reluctance to bring forward strict new codes and legislation with regard to conflicts and other public ethic matters.

Again we hear a wonderful motion coming from the Liberals. Motions and words are one thing, but we are looking for action.

• (1020)

During the 1993 election the present House leader went on to quote the promises of the then Prime Minister, Mr. Mulroney. He denigrated the Conservatives as the "orgy of patronage", as he called it, and demanded other things. He demanded an independent commission to scrutinize the contracting process. He demanded that a member of parliament be excluded from involvement in the awarding of contracts. Today they are allowed to award grants. He also demanded a non-partisan process of review of cabinet appointments. These were Liberal motions from seven years ago.

Eight months later the Liberals actually ran their campaign on the image of being squeaky clean compared with the then Mulroney government.

Canadians at the time put their trust in today's Prime Minister thinking that the Liberals would "scrap, kill and abolish the GST". The Liberals were also opposed to free trade at the time. The historic reality is that before an election the Liberals will say one thing and after an election they will say almost anything.

Another forgotten promise was the appointment of an ethics counsellor who would report to parliament. We are reminding the Liberals of that promise with their own motion. The Liberals refused to deliver the very legislation that they called for while they were in opposition. The hypocrisy is astounding. It has resulted in a situation where we have an ethics counsellor who actually has no powers of investigation.

Any comments that I am making today related to the present ethics counsellor are in no way a reflection on the integrity of that gentleman. However, the straitjacket within which he operates keeps him from doing what the people of Canada would like him to do and what the Liberals at one time said they wanted him to do. He is appointed by the Prime Minister, has no powers of investigation and, amazingly, reports directly to the Prime Minister not to the House.

When someone hires me, gives me a job and a salary and then tells me to report to him and to let him know if I like him, human nature kicks in. I am not questioning the ethics counsellor's abilities but he has been put in a straitjacket. We are asking for that straitjacket to be removed.

The Liberals say that they have ethical guidelines for ministers. We have never even seen them. The Prime Minister can call the ethics counsellor any time to say hello and to remind him that he is the guy who hired him and who pays his salary. He can ask him to read the secret list of guidelines, which nobody knows about, because he has been accused of some bad behaviour, and to let him know that everything he has done is okay. That is presently how it works and it is just not acceptable. We need a public servant who reports to the House, not one who defends the Prime Minister at every turn no matter how outrageous the incident.

During the election, there was an experience that demonstrated the restrictions that are placed on the ethics counsellor. It was brought to our attention, through some very significant investigations, that there was in place a secret and parallel political process for the granting of HRDC grants. It was brought out, accepted and realized by the Liberals. They admitted it and did not challenge it.

We found out about that grant two years ago when we had asked the ethics counsellor for documents regarding Pierre Corbeil and his conviction for influence peddling related to the HRDC grants. In that particular process, the ethics counsellor had conducted an investigation but refused to give us the information. We then had to appeal to the information commissioner. We could not get the documents because the ethics counsellor was in a straitjacket.

The information commissioner had to fight the office of the ethics counsellor for two years in order to get the documents. The few pages that were finally released to us just before the election were the very pages that showed that there was a highly unethical parallel political process in the approving of these grants. That is not acceptable and it must change. We demand the Liberals live up to their word and make these changes.

Further to that, and a subject of much attention to Canadians, when it became public during the election that the Prime Minister had demanded loans from the president of the Business Development Bank and possibly even forced the president to resign when he wanted to call those loans, I wrote to the ethics counsellor and asked him eight very straight questions.

Supply

● (1025)

He replied to me, and I appreciate the reply only took two days. Whether that was a reflection of the gravity of my letter or the straitjacket that the counsellor was in, I am not sure. However he did reply and I appreciated that. He said that there was no rule preventing a minister, including the Prime Minister, from having direct contact on behalf of a constituent with a crown corporation.

To support that, he quoted as his authority the independent B.C. conflict of interest commissioner. The ethics counsellor had replied in terms of protecting the Prime Minister from any wrongdoing, saying that there had been no wrongdoing. The B.C. conflict of interest commissioner concluded that constituency assistance in a minister's office could give advocacy assistance to constituents, provided it was not before a commission, board, agency or other tribunal within the sphere of the minister's responsibility.

He quoted from that to say he thought the Prime Minister was okay. However in quoting from the report he neglected to quote the preceding paragraph, and that was a very significant omission, which indicated that the B.C. conflict of interest commissioner had ruled that a minister must not make personal representation on behalf of a constituent in such a forum, commission, board, agency or other tribunal established by the government, regardless of the ministry under which the commission, board, agency or other tribunal operated.

It went on to say that a minister acting in such a way would always be seen as a minister of government, which is a position of responsibility that he or she cannot shed at will, and that it would be improper to appear in an advocacy role of this kind. Those were the words in the preceding paragraph. If he is going to quote this citation, let us have the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The Business Development Bank of Canada is a crown corporation as we know. The BDC president is a cabinet appointee. These things need to be dealt with. He also did not refer to the Ontario integrity commissioner who said that parliamentary convention prohibits all ministers from personally appearing or advocating on behalf of a private party with an agency, board or commission.

[*Translation*]

Since coming to the House, I have heard Liberal members say from time to time that they think provincial legislatures are the minor leagues and that this is the major league. That is not true. In many provinces, the standards are higher than those of the federal government.

[*English*]

That is simply the case that has to be recognized. We want to look at this issue. We recognize that one of the most important ways of ensuring that politicians serve the public rather than themselves is by ensuring the integrity and independence of the ethics counsellor's office.

[*Translation*]

One of the main ways of making sure that politicians serve public interest and not their own interest is by ensuring the integrity and the autonomy of the office of the counsellor, who is in charge of these standards.

[*English*]

This is absolutely necessary. I close by quoting the Prime Minister's own words, as we now give the Liberals the great opportunity to clear their name. People are suggesting that they are being less than honest, less than straightforward. I would like to help the Liberals clear their name by getting them to support their own motion. In the 1993 campaign the Prime Minister said "It is time to elect politicians that serve the public rather than serve themselves".

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the question on most people's mind is: Will the Liberals vote in favour of a motion that is lifted verbatim out of the Liberal red book?

There will be other tangential questions that will be debated today. They will be kind of interesting, but the essence of today's debate and the subsequent vote that will be held on Tuesday of next week is the agonizing political question that the Liberals must face head on. Will the Liberals vote in favour of today's motion that will create an independent ethics counsellor answerable not to the Prime Minister but to parliament itself?

It should be an easy answer. How could they say no? Surely they would want to support a motion which they in essence drafted themselves. Let us hope that it is the case. Let us hope they will follow through on an old promise and vote in favour of an independent ethics counsellor. All MPs from all political parties should support the motion. I suggest four reasons why we should do so.

We should support it because it will rebuild our reputation as a people who ensure a fair process for all Canadians. That is one of our primary purposes as members of parliament. We are to safeguard the sanctity of fair and equitable process for all Canadians.

● (1030)

Earlier this week the auditor general described the abysmal track record of the Liberal government, especially in the area of patronage appointments. He said that the government's failure to appoint the best people to positions of authority, instead of the people with the best political connections, was weakening our institutions and tainting the political process. He said that the Liberals had failed to protect the process.

Nobody likes to see patronage misused in this way, including the government House leader, who actually called on the Mulroney

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government to create a committee to review and disallow obvious partisan political patronage appointments.

It is strange that the government House leader rejected that idea when I proposed exactly the same thing just last month. The reason he proposed that idea back in 1993, the reason the Liberals originally campaigned on the promise to put in place an independent ethics counsellor, and the reason we have the motion before us today is obvious. Members of parliament have an obligation to make sure that the process is fair, not just for friends of the government, but fair and open and accessible for all Canadians. We are the keepers of the process. That process can be fixed today by supporting the creation of an independent ethics commissioner.

The second reason for supporting the motion is that it will enhance the reputation of the House of Commons. Public opinion polls suggest that Canadians simply do not hold members of parliament in very high esteem. Members of parliament contribute to that image problem by the way we sometimes act during question period and the manner in which we treat one another, or by the very public airings of our foibles and weaknesses. Heaven knows, we are not perfect and we have all made mistakes. In some ways one can understand why people come up with jokes like the one about how many politicians it takes to grease a combine. The answer is only one if you feed him in really, really slowly.

It is not just voters who are convinced that something is out of whack in the House of Commons. A recent poll published in *Maclean's* magazine concluded that only 7% of business people believe that members of parliament have a significant impact on the actions of the government. Only 7% think that we make a difference by our actions in the House.

More and more often, businesses and special interest groups simply bypass parliamentarians and go directly to the real power brokers. The real power brokers are those people who are close to the Prime Minister in his office, those who are close to the Prime Minister because they have been appointed by him to important positions, and those who have the ear of the Prime Minister because they are political friends and allies.

Let us think of how an independent ethics commissioner, with powers to investigate the improprieties of lobbyists and public officials, would change the way Canadians view their members of parliament. Instead of viewing members of parliament as, in that famous quote of Mr. Trudeau, nobodies when they are 50 feet away from this place, they would proudly say that their members of parliament have a published code of ethics; that they are accountable for their actions in a fair, transparent and open process; and that people would no longer be able to bypass the Parliament of Canada simply because they have access to a coterie of unelected yet incredibly powerful and influential friends of the Prime Minister.

There is a third compelling reason to support the motion to establish an independent ethics commissioner. Establishing this

commissioner would complete a circle of accountability that would have within the circle the following: a financial watchdog called the auditor general; a privacy commissioner who reports regularly to all Canadians, sounding the alarm whenever the government intrudes improperly into their private lives; an access to information commissioner, who has done so much to open up the closed door mentality of big businesses and big bureaucracies; and the long promised but yet to be delivered ethics commissioner, a watchdog who would report regularly to parliament on the ethics of those who have the honour and privilege to serve in high office.

This circle of independent, professional and skilled advocates, reporting regularly to parliament, with their advice, admonitions and observations available to all Canadians, would finally establish a complete system of checks and balances on the absolute powers of a majority government. In this respect the creation of an independent ethics commissioner would raise accountability to a new level. It would raise the accountability of the House of Commons to a high level among all parliamentary democracies.

• (1035)

The fourth and final reason for members of parliament to vote in favour of an independent ethics counsellor who reports to parliament is this: an independent ethics counsellor would expose the inappropriate behaviour of public officials and lobbyists but would also offer the best protection an honest, hardworking, ethical member of parliament, cabinet minister or prime minister could ever have.

Let us imagine the powerful, positive impact that this counsellor would have upon the reputation of those in public life. Let us imagine the leader cleared of wrongdoing by an independent ethics counsellor who could stand proudly in his or her place and deliver the leadership that Canadians applaud, deserve and admire.

Let us imagine the condemnation of frivolous, politically motivated witch hunts, which would be ruled on as out of order and inappropriate by the ethics counsellor. Just as the other watchdogs in this circle can laud the government when it does its job well, an ethics counsellor could preserve the reputation and enhance the effectiveness of ethical leaders who have given themselves to public life.

There are four reasons to vote yes to this motion: to ensure that the process of government is fair and open, to enhance the effectiveness of parliament itself, to complete the circle of government accountability, and to protect ethical members of parliament from wrongful or politically motivated attacks while exposing improper behaviour for all to see.

It goes without saying that an independent ethics counsellor would from time to time ferret out improper actions committed by

some in public life. Hopefully that would happen only rarely, but by voting in favour of the motion before us today members of the House would send a signal that would be received with joyous hearts from coast to coast.

There would be a standard by which we will be judged. It would be fair, open and transparent. It would transcend political parties because it would be based on principles that Canadians believe to be proper and self-evident. It would be a cornerstone in our collective efforts to build trust and confidence between elected officials and the voters who sent them to this place to represent all Canadians. I therefore move the following amendment:

That the motion be amended by inserting before the word "implementation" the word "immediate".

It is with pleasure and pride that I support this motion. I urge all members of parliament to do the same.

The Speaker: Debate is on the amendment.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, if the official opposition House leader read the speech of the House leader who sits across the way today, he would probably be able to read to us most of the things that he has just finished saying.

In opposition it is pretty easy to say these things, and I imagine the House leader will stand and say something like that. What possible assurance would the Canadian public have that we in opposition would not just say these things but would actually carry them out when we form a government?

Mr. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Speaker, this is not only something we campaigned on. We have put forward details in regard to how this would be implemented.

These details include the creation of a committee that would receive reports from the privacy commissioner, the access to information commissioner and the new ethics counsellor himself or herself. Not only do we have the theory. We have some of the flesh on the framework, the bones, as it were, of the process. Not only do we have all party consent on this side of the House for it. We also have the approval of the governing party. In other words, I think this is a unanimously approved concept.

When the government House leader was in opposition he asked for basically this sort of accountability. In fact he went further. He asked for a committee that would review government patronage appointments and would have the power to disallow those appointments if it thought they were too politically motivated.

• (1040)

It is one of the ideas I put forward earlier this year in a document called "Building Trust". Sadly the government House leader said that it was unworkable and that we could not do it. He called my

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ideas half-baked, but it is interesting to note that the idea of having an ethics counsellor is not mine. It originally came from the Liberals. These were their exact words. The idea of accountability for patronage appointments is not my idea. It came from the government House leader. We are just putting it forward again.

There is also the idea of having secret ballot elections for committees, on which we will be voting in the procedure and House affairs committee on Monday, for those who are interested in seeing if the government follows through. That also is a Liberal Party idea which I hope the Liberals will support.

In other words, as we go through the list of things we can do to build trust in this place and in parliamentarians, the ideas have support from all political parties. It should not be hard for any political party to follow through on a promise that has unanimous support.

That is why this step today, something that Canadians have long looked forward to, is a step that will help to build trust not only between this party and the electorate but between the House and the electorate. Heaven knows we need to rebuild that trust as quickly as possible.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the House leader of the official opposition who put forward a document called "Building Trust" a few weeks ago. It is about bringing back ethics, transparency and accountability to this institution.

The House leader for the government responded, at least in the media, that we would actually need constitutional change. I am wondering if he will come up with the same kind of argument now. I admit that I studied constitutional law at law school. I cannot see, for the life of me, how he could possibly see that any of those things would require constitutional change. It is absolutely ridiculous.

I would like the House leader to comment on this point, in the anticipation that the government House leader could stand and say that he actually loves this idea but we would have to change the constitution.

Mr. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Speaker, none of the proposals that have come from our document "Building Trust" are constitutional in nature. I am not sure exactly what message the government House leader is trying to send, other than one that he just does not like the idea of that much transparency. There certainly is nothing constitutional in it.

There is a reason we are asking for the particular motion today on the ethics counsellor. I will quote Lawrence Martin, who talked about the ruling that the ethics counsellor made during the election

Supply

campaign. He said that the ethics counsellor made a ruling without having made an investigation. Howard Wilson exonerated the Prime Minister in the hotel loan affair without interviewing those involved, without responding to the specific questions posed by our opposition leader, without delving into the suggestion of political interference raised by the principals in the affair.

The point he made is that he did not substantially research the matter before him, therefore the ethics counsellor had brought in a verdict that was both timely and, in terms of merit, worthless. He added that it was of great political benefit to the man who appointed him.

In other words, although I have a lot of respect for Mr. Wilson, he has been put in an intolerable position. He has been hired by someone and reports to that same someone. He is not allowed to release any reports publicly without that same someone's okay. If the ruling does not look good the first time, he can go back and rewrite it. He does not have to investigate. He does not have to interview. He does not have to report to parliament. It is a political sham.

[Translation]

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address today's motion from the official opposition, which reads as follows:

That this House adopt the following policy from Liberal Redbook 1 and call for its implementation by the government: A Liberal Government will appoint an independent Ethics Counsellor to advise both public officials and lobbyists in the day-to-day application of the Code of Conduct for Public Officials. The Ethics Counsellor will be appointed after consultation with the leaders of all parties in the House of Commons and will report directly to Parliament.

• (1045)

[English]

I am more than pleased to speak on this motion because as a government we know the importance of ethical behaviour. We have a Prime Minister who is personally accountable for the government's outstanding ethical behaviour. We have a record of taking action which I point to with pride. We have made sure that ethics reach all levels of government and are part of the everyday ongoing work. Gone are the days before 1993 when we had a government that had little if no concern for ethics at all.

After we were first elected in 1993 we introduced a tough ethics package with a fundamentally different approach to politics than the previous Conservative government. We restored public confidence in the decision making process and returned integrity to public life as we had promised in the 1993 election and the red book.

Let me remind all colleagues of the excellent record of this government on integrity. We know the importance of ethical

behaviour. We have a good understanding on this side of the House that the most important asset a government can claim is the confidence it enjoys of the citizens to whom it is accountable. We know that if our government is to play a positive role in society, as it must, honesty and integrity must be maintained in our political institution. Public service is a trust. Canadians expect their government to serve the public interest with fairness and to manage public resources properly on a daily basis.

When this government took office in November 1993, it was evident that Canadians had been losing faith in government. We know honesty, integrity and trust are important, not just for winning elections but because we have a responsibility to maintain the trust of Canadians in their political institutions and in the greatest institution that we have in the country, the House and parliament.

The Prime Minister told the House in 1994 that "trust in the institution of government is not a partisan issue." I would like to remind my colleagues who just made their speeches of that point. I quote further "—but something all of us elected to public office had an obligation to restore." The Prime Minister added that trust in institutions is as vital to a democracy as the air we breathe. For this trust we owe a duty of conduct to all Canadians.

[Translation]

We promised Canadians that they could count on an honest, transparent and responsible government. We truly want them to regain confidence in government institutions and we clearly stated that our actions and decisions, taken individually and collectively as members of the government, would be marked by integrity.

[English]

As members of the government we are accountable to a Prime Minister who is personally accountable to the House and to Canadians generally. The Prime Minister understands the importance of ethical behaviour and has himself said "setting high standards for the holders of public office is essential in renewing and maintaining the faith of Canadians in their public institution. In particular, ministers must remain above reproach." That is a message that our Prime Minister gives to all of us in cabinet all the time. He reminds us constantly that is the guiding principle under which we operate.

The Prime Minister is responsible before Canadians and to the House for the conduct of ministers. That is the burden of his office. As ministers we all undergo daily scrutiny in the House. We are not exempted from that. Yet the burden to remain above all reproach at all times in all of our activities is one that we gladly accept because we want to be accountable and behave ethically, and we are.

It is the Prime Minister's prerogative to establish standards of conduct for ministers and to ensure that these standards are met. It

is his prerogative and his personal responsibility both in a constitutional sense and to the House.

• (1050)

As signs of his commitment to this responsibility, in 1994 the Prime Minister announced the appointment of the first ethics counsellor we have had in the history of Canada. The role of the ethics counsellor with regard to ministers is clear. He is the Prime Minister's adviser on matters relating to conflict of interest and the ethical conduct of government officials, including ministers.

The ethics counsellor also has another job. He provides reports to parliament on his duties and investigations under the Lobbyists Registration Act. In that regard he already reports to the House of Commons. The Prime Minister bears responsibility for the conduct of ministers. He recommends the appointment of ministers to Her Excellency. He sets the standards of conduct which ministers follow, considers possible breaches of those standards should they occur and, should the need ever arise, would take the appropriate action.

The Prime Minister's responsibility for the ethics counsellor reflects his personal responsibility for establishing the standards of conduct for ministers. It is quite clear that the Prime Minister cannot answer members of the House, or anyone else for that matter, and say "I have an ethics counsellor, therefore nothing is my fault and nothing is my responsibility". None of us would ever accept that kind of answer. He is personally accountable and, as he said, he will never abdicate that responsibility. He will never pass the buck, to use his words.

The ethics counsellor provides reports to parliament on his own duties regarding the Lobbyists Registration Act. To establish a similar reporting on his duties in advising the Prime Minister would undermine the Prime Minister's responsibility for ministerial conduct. The Prime Minister, and he alone, is responsible to parliament for the conduct of ministers, and he will not shirk this duty. The ethics counsellor advises the Prime Minister of course on the overall policies and in particular cases but in the end it is the Prime Minister who is accountable to the House, and I would not want it otherwise.

The Prime Minister is accountable for the public. The opposition may imagine that it carries out that responsibility but of course it does not. It is the responsibility of the House and all its members to question the government on its action, including ethics, if that is what it wants to do. We are pleased to answer these questions when they occur. That is the way parliament works.

[*Translation*]

We have an excellent track record, thanks to our Prime Minister. I give him full credit and I am very proud of that performance. The

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appointment of an ethics counsellor is but one of the measures that have been taken by our government and I am proud of it. I am proud to be part of a government that takes measures to ensure that public affairs in Canada are conducted with integrity.

Let me give some examples. In 1994, the Prime Minister reviewed and strengthened the code governing conflicts of interest. Since then, it is prohibited to grant preferential treatment to individuals or groups simply because go-betweens were hired to promote their interests.

[*English*]

The Prime Minister appointed the ethics counsellor to administer the code. He also provides reports to parliament under the Lobbyists Registration Act. That is a promise we made and a promise we kept. We gave the job real teeth. The job has strong investigative powers with the amendments to the Lobbyists Registration Act. When we amended the act we even incorporated amendments that I think were proposed by the hon. member for Elk Island who is sitting across the way. The government brought forward amendments strengthening that act, increasing transparency for lobbyists and so on.

The government took measures to reform the pension plan for members of parliament and senators to put an end to double dipping, for instance. In 1999 the government established guidelines on donations made by crown corporations to political parties. We have done that as well.

Our amendments to the Canada Elections Act also put very strict controls on third parties that were outside forces influencing the political process and who had no rules guiding them. We have put them on a level playing field with candidates. We have made sure that ethics are anchored in all levels of government.

• (1055)

Under the leadership and direction of the Prime Minister, departments and agencies have taken greater steps on values and ethics than under any previous government. In 1996 a report was produced on public sector values and ethics. It has helped forge a consensus on such issues. Fair and reliable public services inspire public trust and create favourable environment for business.

The opposition likes to quote the auditor general. Just last fall, the auditor general told the House that there was a strong foundation of values and ethics in the federal public sector. We have put in place those rules governing that.

The auditor general also said that the government is taking steps to maintain some values and ethics. I wonder why the opposition is not quoting that part of the auditor general's statement. He also pointed out at the time that a prerequisite for the success of ongoing

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measures is the leadership of parliamentarians, ministers and senior officials. It is thanks to that leadership that we have that high set of ethics not only for ministers, indeed I hope for all of us in the House, but also for our public servants.

While I cannot speak for the leaders of other parties, I can guarantee that under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Canadians will be able to go on depending on the federal public service to provide fair and reliable services to Canadians.

In 1998 the Government of Canada established the office of values and ethics to promote values and ethics in the public service. The head of the public service has been a driving force behind value initiatives across the government. Public servants have access to training and publications to promote awareness on ethical issues and to assist employees in developing skills for handling ethical situations.

It is quite obvious that the government believes that ensuring sound values and ethics is a vital part of good government which supports and respects fundamental democratic values. We also believe that understanding ethics involves not only knowing the difference between right and wrong but also making a commitment to do the right thing.

On June 16, 1994, the Prime Minister stood here and pledged to the House and to all Canadians that the government would guard its good name with all that it can. That is what it has been doing.

The public's political expectations and values have undergone enormous changes over the years. On this side of the House, we have taken the steps to help raise those standards and expectations. Through the standards we have met and kept, we have retained the trust of Canadians.

The opposition day motion suggests that the government is not accountable to parliament for its ethical policies. Our government is accountable to parliament. Our Prime Minister is in the House all the time.

Parliament has considered and passed the Lobbyists Registration Act. The auditor general can now report to parliament up to four times a year. A strengthened conduct code has been tabled in parliament. The ethics counsellor reports to parliament on his duties on the Lobbyists Registration Act. The Prime Minister and ministers continue to be accountable to parliament for their policies and ethical behaviour. In other words, we have not only met our red book commitments, we have exceeded those commitments.

An independent ethics counsellor has been established to advise the Prime Minister on ministerial ethics issues. The ethics counsellor is independent and reports to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister reports to parliament. The opposition members were consulted and agreed with the selection of the ethics counsellor.

They even spoke glowingly about the individual earlier this day. The ethics counsellor can be asked to appear before parliamentary committees. He has done so in the context of estimates and otherwise.

We will not apologize for our record on integrity. We will not apologize for meeting or exceeding our red book commitment. We will not apologize for having an independent ethics counsellor, whose selection was done after consultation with the opposition, who reports to parliament directly for the Lobbyist Registration Act and who reports to the Prime Minister who, in turn, is accountable to parliament regarding the issue of ministerial ethics.

• (1100)

This government's record on ethics is clear to all members of the House, and it is second to none. It is part of a record of achievement, of improving the quality of life for Canadians, of creating jobs, of putting the fiscal house in order, of strengthening Canada's health care system and of making our communities safe and governing with integrity.

These things are all part of the record of this government. That is why, last November 27, the people of Canada chose to re-elect our Prime Minister and our government with a third successive majority.

Today's opposition motion is simply an attempt to distract members of parliament and Canadians from this government's excellent record, and perhaps to distract Canadians from the terrible situation that the Leader of the Opposition finds himself in. Therefore I would move the following amendment:

That the amendment be amended by deleting the word "immediate" and by substituting therefore the word "continued".

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think all people can appreciate what the government House leader is attempting to do here, which is to not only amend the supply day motion but to actually amend the amendment.

I would argue that the amendment is completely out of order in that it changes, and not in a small way, but completely changes the intent of the amendment to the supply day motion.

We are talking about an immediate implementation of a certain course of action. To try to amend it in this manner would completely change the intent of the motion. I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to rule it out of order.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I would say to the Chair that accepting this amendment would certainly be in contravention of

what has come to be the established practice with respect to the acceptance of amendments.

It is unfortunate that we have developed the habit whereby the same party that moves the motion immediately moves to amend it. However that practice developed, as you know, because without it the government had a tendency to amend the motion into something it could support. In doing so it could vitiate the purpose of motions moved by opposition parties and render opposition days useless.

The purpose of opposition days is to allow opposition parties to put forward a motion, have it debated and have the House decide on it or divide on it if necessary, and most likely, or it may even pass. However to permit this kind of practice would eviscerate the politics from opposition day and give the government the hammer, so to speak, to use its majority to amend motions. In theory, all opposition day motions would pass but they would, ultimately, all be motions designed by the government and not by the opposition.

• (1105)

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. The opposition is arguing that it has a right to amend the motion but that the rest of the House does not have a similar right. I suggest that is not at all how motions are supposed to be dealt with in the House.

Need I remind the Speaker that for a political party to move a motion and amend it itself is a rather recent innovation of the House that is only two or three old. Prior to that motions were routinely amended.

Further, in the amendment of the hon. member across the way he is arguing that the program in question, the subject of the debate, is the immediate implementation of a particular initiative as opposed to the implementation of the same subject. I am arguing that if he can amend the main motion by referring to it as immediate, I can also propose an amendment to the amendment by substituting the word and making it a continued implementation.

I am not changing the sense of the original motion at all. We are arguing the implementation. The matter of whether the issue is continued or is immediate or started or otherwise is a matter of debate, not a matter of whether the amendment should be in order.

I submit that the amendment to the amendment is in order because it in no way damages the intent of the proposition that is on the order paper today, which is the implementation that the opposition is calling for. Therefore the amendment to the amendment is in order.

I draw the attention of the Chair to Erskine May and to the practices in effect in the House of Commons in the United

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Kingdom and say that the amendment to the amendment is perfectly in order.

Mr. Chuck Strah: Mr. Speaker, it is a pity that we are taking up valuable time in this regard. If the amendment to the amendment were allowed to stand in the government's name, it would be unprecedented in my time as House leader and in my memory here in eight years, in that the government is trying to eviscerate an opposition day motion by so doing.

If you allow this to take place, Mr. Speaker, opposition day motions will become a lark. For example, if we put forward a motion that condemns the government for its lack of action on paying out aid to farmers in crisis, it could be changed by the government to congratulate itself for its fine work in the farm crisis area.

You cannot allow the government to do this. If you allow it, the government House leader will never again allow a motion to reach the floor of the House of Commons because he will just amend it to one that is favourable to the government. He will simply change the motion to one which congratulates the government for its implementation of an ongoing program.

It would completely eviscerate opposition day motions. To allow a subamendment like this one is contrary to the letter of the standing orders, as I mentioned earlier, because it completely changes the motion.

I ask the government House leader to reconsider. This is the first time in the eight years I have been here that he has ever tried a stunt like this one, and I consider it a stunt. I ask him to withdraw it in the spirit of co-operation we had when working on other issues and to understand what he is doing by putting this subamendment forward.

If he continues with it, he is throwing down the gauntlet, saying that he will run the House with an iron hand and will not allow opposition members of parliament to bring forward anything that contradicts the government agenda.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is with some amusement that I join the discussion. The newfound friendliness and fondness that the opposition House leader had for the government House leader just a few short days ago seem to be crumbling.

With that aside, I find that what is taking place here is obviously an attempt by the government to hijack an opposition motion that is very legitimate in its intent and has opened up a discussion which is very fruitful and favourable to democracy.

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The government House leader, as has been stated by the previous speaker, is very much trying to change the entire intent and spirit of what is being discussed in the motion.

• (1110)

As a long time defender of adhering to the rules of procedure, Mr. Speaker, you will know that is not supposed to take place on a supply day amendment. We are not to change the entire spirit and intent of the motion as the government is doing in the self-congratulatory way to which we are accustomed.

The motion is very serious. It once again raises the ire of the government because of its sensitivity of the particular subject matter. This day we have embarked upon will be very important and very interesting as we delve into discussions of the Prime Minister's activities in the Auberge Grand-Mère situation.

On a broader scale it is a discussion of the credibility of offices like the ethics counsellor, and the importance of what we say prior to elections and what we do after elections, which is a lesson for all of us. It is a lesson that Canadians are waiting for us to listen to.

I strongly urge you, Mr. Speaker, in your discretion not to allow the subamendment. I urge you to accept the submissions that other members have put forward in opposition to what the government House leader has suggested, which is obviously an attempt to hijack and reverse the intent of the motion before the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to join my opposition colleagues in condemning this outrageous attempt by the government to denature—for that is exactly what it is, and I emphasize this for the benefit of the government House leader—the very idea of opposition days and the very essence of the Canadian Alliance motion.

When the government House leader attempts to play down the introduction of this practice in the House by saying that opposition motions have only been amended, or amendments brought to these amendments, for the past two or three years, I would remind him that this practice has been around much longer than that.

It first began when the Bloc Québécois was the official opposition in this House, in other words just after the 1993 election. This has been an established practice in the House for almost seven years now.

This is why I would agree with those who say that we have never seen or gone along with the government introducing amendments to amendments introduced by the opposition parties on allotted days since, if memory serves, we first came to this House, in 1993.

Clearly this practice of the opposition parties amending their own motion has become established practice in the House. Why? The simple answer, as the leader of the New Democratic Party points out, is that the government has taken to amending the opposition motion in order to vitiate its very purpose.

I would respectfully submit to you that what is going on right now has no other purpose than to vitiate the Canadian Alliance motion.

Not only is the government's outrageous attempt contrary to established practice in this House but, if you read the government's motion to amend the amendment, it vitiates, or denatures the very essence of, the motion.

I urge you strongly, Mr. Speaker, to reject this government motion to amend the amendment and to rule it out of order.

• (1115)

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will briefly speak to the procedural issue. I hope I can be helpful to the Chair.

The purpose of an amendment is to make an item under consideration more acceptable to the House. I submit that is what is intended by the subamendment. I would not view it as a wrecking amendment, and I hope the Chair would not view it as such.

The opposition has suggested that some political stuntery is involved in the subamendment. The opposition has proposed its own amendment by inserting an adverb or putting a new definition into the motion. The subamendment proposed by the government House leader merely changes the adverbial definer that was inserted in the amendment.

Standing Order 85 specifically authorizes and speaks to the issue of an amendment and subamendment to supply day motions. It is specifically authorized in Standing Order 85.

In terms of whether or not the government has done this before I regret I do not have a specific citation, but I am advised that the government has been offering amendments to supply day motions since the days of Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent back in the fifties. I am advised as well that it has occurred since 1993. In the next few moments a citation may find its way to the Chair. If I am wrong in that regard I apologize and stand corrected, but this is what I am informed.

I suggest the subamendment is certainly in order. It does not reverse, undermine, negate or denature the opposition motion dealing with a particular subject matter. I submit that it is in order. Some members in the House may find the subamendment refreshingly appropriate.

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Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I am referring to the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 727, which states:

Amendments which have the effect of providing the basis for an entirely different debate are not in order. When a party has been allocated an allotted day and a subject has been proposed for debate by way of an opposition motion, the day should not be taken away by way of an amendment.

I would argue that when the government changes the words to “continuing to implement”, it is deliberately misleading the House. It is changing the entire context of the motion, as we are asking for immediate implementation. It is 180 degree diametrically different from the motion we have put forward.

If you follow what was written by the very astute former clerk of the House, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that there is no way you could possibly accept this subamendment.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, obviously the government House leader and the government are setting the tone right off the bat. We saw that in the response to the Speech from the Throne when the new member poked the Bloc in the eye. We are now seeing this procedural wrangling. We know the government House leader is an expert at this because he has had many years of practice in opposition. Perhaps he is time warping to those days.

The subamendment proposed by the government House leader is inconsistent with the main motion. I would direct you, Mr. Speaker, to Beauchesne’s citation 580(2) which says:

A subamendment must attempt to explain the substance of the amendment and may not substitute an entirely new proposal.

The amendment by logical thought processes would indicate that the motion we are bringing forward is not currently in place and is not happening. That is why we are asking for it to be immediately put into place.

• (1120)

The government House leader’s subamendment, by logical processes, would infer that this process is in place and should just keep going. The two are logically inconsistent with each other. It is a substantive change to the motion and should be ruled directly out of order.

Mr. Stan Keyes (Hamilton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for clarification, for your consideration and for members opposite, I do not understand what would be more immediate than continued.

That aside, let us talk about the political stuntery that went on here. It is common knowledge that the opposition wants to put forward a motion in the House of Commons for consideration and

for all to vote. In a procedural vote on an issue that may have been of interest to constituents watching, it is about now that constituents will change over to their favourite game show on the television set. This is the kind of thing that bores them to death.

The opposition refers to political stuntery and who brought it up. If the constituents are still watching, they might want to take this into consideration. The opposition leader made his speech. Then, for the benefit of the folks at home, members of the opposition decided to split their leader’s time.

Why did they do that? They did that because the second opposition speaker, and this is directly related to this issue, will move an amendment to the motion. What that does is kill the opportunity for any other party in the House to move an amendment to the motion.

Where is the political stuntery in that? The opposition is claiming that we are politically—

The Speaker: With great respect, I know the hon. member for Hamilton West is trying to be helpful, but the Chair is looking for assistance on the admissibility, and only the question of the admissibility of the subamendment, not on what may have happened in the House for the benefit of the folks at home.

We are taking up time from the debate and I am concerned that it is going on a little long. Unless members have something that is directly relevant to the admissibility of the subamendment, I would prefer to bring this to a conclusion very quickly. If the hon. member for Hamilton West has something else on that point I will hear him.

Mr. Stan Keyes: Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, having given that brief explanation, I think the subamendment is in order because it seeks to clarify the amendment that had been put forward in somewhat of a stunt fashion by the opposition. It clarifies for yourself and for the House that we want a continuation of exactly what the motion addresses.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this debate for a while and I want to warn the Chair that the proposal by the party currently in power will literally change the nature of opposition days in the House.

What we call an opposition day, unfortunately for the government, is not generally a day of praise. What the House leader of the party in office has said will turn opposition days to the advantage of the party in power.

To remedy that there will be a vote this evening, or a deferred vote, if the party in power does not agree with the proposal and the

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amendment by the opposition parties. It can always catch up, with its parliamentary majority, in the vote at the end of the day.

I therefore ask that the Chair pay careful attention to avoid creating a dangerous precedent for the opposition, which is in the minority in the House, as we all know.

[English]

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, as a scholar of the affairs of the House, I am sure you of all people would be aware of the reason for the amendment in the first place. It became a practice of the House back in 1993 and has been a standing practice of the House since then.

I believe you would agree with me that in addition to Erskine May, Beauchesne's and the rulings of the Speaker, the House over a period of time does come to certain practices. This has been an accepted practice from the time I became a member of parliament in 1993.

• (1125)

If you permit the subamendment as stated, which basically eviscerates or guts the opposition motion, you will have created a situation where the opposition parties will no longer be able to bring to the attention of the House motions that are contrary to what the government would prefer to have in the House. That is the purpose of opposition day. You would be setting a precedent, Mr. Speaker, and I suggest that it would not be a good precedent.

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, it might be helpful to the Chair in deciding this issue so that we can get on with the debate, to refer to Marleau and Montpetit's *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. On page 453 in chapter 12 it states:

An amendment should be framed so that, if agreed to, it will leave the main motion intelligible and consistent with itself.

In elaborating on this point, it goes on to say that an amendment should be out of order if it would produce the same result as the defeat of the main motion.

I would contend that the government subamendment in this case is designed to do exactly what subamendments should not be designed to do. This subamendment, if adopted, would make the original motion as amended inconsistent with itself. It would be inconsistent with the claim of the opposition that a particular policy has not been implemented and must now be implemented and, as amended, immediately implemented. The insertion of the words continue to implement is inconsistent with the main motion insofar as the word continue implies that this policy is being implemented when the contention of the motion is that it is not being implemented. Therefore, the passage of that particular subamendment would in effect produce the same result as the defeat of the main motion.

On those grounds it would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that you would have ample room to not only rule technically that this subamendment is out of order, but also to save supply days for the purpose for which they were created, which is for the opposition to lay down a motion that must be debated on the opposition's terms. If you do not, I submit that you will be creating a problem that will grow in proportion. As supply days continue the government will have secured a loophole if you rule differently than the opposition is advising on this and it will not be healthy for the House.

I also suggest that it would not be healthy for the government House leader's relationships with the opposition. I say to him that this is inconsistent with the relationship that I think he has tried to establish with the opposition.

The Speaker: I think the Chair has heard enough on this point.

[Translation]

In my opinion I have already heard a lot of members. The quote from this book has already been cited in the House. I give the floor to the hon. Bloc Québécois whip, and this will be absolutely the last intervention.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I realize that several quotes from Marleau-Montpetit were submitted to the Chair on the admissibility of motions in amendment and, in this particular case, regarding the very nature of the main motion.

I would like to quote an excerpt from Marleau-Montpetit dealing with your responsibilities vis-à-vis the minority in the House, namely opposition parties which unanimously share the same view on this issue. On pages 260 and 261, it says:

The duties of the Speaker of the House of Commons require balancing the rights and interests of the majority and minority in the House to ensure that the public business is efficiently transacted and that the interests of all parts of the House are advocated and protected against the use of arbitrary authority. It is in this spirit that the Speaker, as chief servant of the House, applies the rules. The Speaker is the servant, not of any part of the House or any majority in the House, but of the entire institution and the best interests of the House as distilled over many generations in its practices.

The Speaker: The Chair would like to thank all the members who took part in the debate on the point of order raised following the amendment to the amendment proposed by the hon. leader of the government in the House. I truly appreciate your input on this issue.

• (1130)

[English]

The Chair will take the matter under advisement. I propose to come back to the House with a decision at 3 o'clock, following question period, on the question of the admissibility of the subamendment.

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I know hon. members have expressed a certain outrage. As a past participant in the discussions relating to these amendments and motions on supply days, both as an opposition member and as a government member involved in these kinds of arguments, I sympathize with the views expressed on both sides of the issue. I am well aware of them. I will take under advisement the matters that have been referred to Chair and the submissions. I will look at the authorities and come back to the House shortly.

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Can one assume that in debate we are debating the amendment?

The Speaker: The question before the House is on the amendment. The subamendment has not been put to the House and will not be until I make a ruling that it is in order.

Mr. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As I said earlier, it is very unfortunate that we have been on this point of order for the last half hour. I wonder if there would be consent of the House to extend the orders of the day for a half an hour at the end of the day to make up for it.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to extend orders of the day by half an hour today?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, without again getting into what I think is just a detestable move on behalf of the government House leader, I will wait for your ruling. I cannot believe he has actually done this.

The essence of his speech is that everything is glowing, everything is wonderful on the government side, democracy is going on without a hitch and life is grand.

I bring the attention of the House to two or three different quotes from independent watchdogs of parliament who say otherwise.

The access to information commissioner's report begins with "Mayday-Mayday, democracy is at risk". The commissioner goes on to say that he has never in his 17 years on the job seen a government that has been so intransigent as the current Liberal government. In fact he said that the government routinely intimidates those who put forward legitimate requests for information.

The auditor general's report that was released yesterday states that the process of political patronage appointments is tainting the institutions where those appointments take place and tainting the political process. That is not a glowing report.

The privacy commissioner has routinely chastized the government for the intrusive actions of this government into the private lives of others.

It is no wonder that the government House leader is trying to eviscerate this motion today by pretending that all is well. He

apparently does not want a watchdog with some teeth, he wants a lapdog to do his bidding.

An independent ethics counsellor who would report to the House through a standing committee instead of reporting to the Prime Minister, the guy who signs his paycheque, is the difference between night and day. By approving this motion today, not only could the Prime Minister keep his promise from the Liberal red book, but for once he could reassure Canadians that we will have a complete set of guidelines for members of parliaments and prime ministers, which we could have access to.

Yesterday members from the Progressive Conservative Party asked if they could see the ethical guidelines and could they be tabled in the House. What was the response? The Prime Minister said no. We cannot see or have access to the guidelines. In fact we are not allowed to even know to which standards we are being held.

By not giving the motion the chance to go ahead and by perhaps denying the House even a chance to vote on it, which I think is almost unspeakable, he is basically saying that the guidelines they are going to hold themselves to are their own guidelines. They make them up. Not only that, after they make them up, they keep them secret. Then they give them to somebody who judges them without calling in witnesses or doing investigations. Further, the person reports only to the person who is signing his paycheque, and finally, he releases only what he wants to release to the public.

When he said that this ethics counsellor has come before committees, he just had to throw in there that the current ethics counsellor comes before committees to talk about his estimates, about how much he spends. We cannot ask him about a ruling.

• (1135)

We know and I think the Canadian people know what is going on. The Liberals made a promise. The motion today was lifted verbatim out of the Liberal red book. The Prime Minister made a promise. All he has to do is follow through on the promise that was made in writing to the Canadian people. We did not change a single word. All he has to do is say that it is a good motion. In fact, they drafted it. All we want is to have a go at it and to have a vote on it.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. House leader for his question. I believe, though, that there is a certain misunderstanding or perhaps an inaccuracy in what the House leader for the official opposition has just stated. I believe he said that the guidelines for public officeholders are not public. That is not accurate. The guidelines for public officeholders are public, both category A and category B. They have been in place for a very long time and they are public.

The hon. member also said that the ethics counsellor does not report directly to parliament, but he does. Let me elaborate on this a little. The ethics counsellor reports directly to parliament for the registration of lobbyists and reports to the Prime Minister for that additional threshold of accountability that the Prime Minister asks

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of his own ministers in addition to the regular guidelines for public officeholders that are the exigencies of everyone else. With respect, I believe that is what the hon. member does not correctly understand.

The Prime Minister is obviously in a system known as responsible government, with a capital *r*. We could argue that the government is also very responsible in the regular lower case *r* for that matter. In the system of responsible government it is the Prime Minister who appoints cabinet and it is the Prime Minister who has the ultimate responsibility for recommending to Her Excellency to of course remove someone who is behaving in a way that is inappropriate. Therefore that responsibility is upon him and not upon anyone else, and it cannot be. I am sure none of us would want it to be otherwise. How could we ever tolerate a situation in the House where someone, a prime minister some day, could say "It is not my fault. I have nothing to do with this. Ask the ethics counsellor".

That is not the way in which the Prime Minister does his job. This Prime Minister is accountable to parliament, does not try to pass the buck to someone else and takes full responsibility for his ministers. That is the way I believe it should be, both in terms of accountability in the House and in terms of the constitutional requirement of how it should be done.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in an odd sort of way, what we see here today reinforces the point that I think the opposition has been trying to make over the last little while with respect to the Prime Minister.

Because this motion impinges on the Prime Minister's behaviour, and because it causes distress to the Prime Minister, when it comes to the Prime Minister there are no rules, or what rules there are have to be bent, twisted, ignored or reinvented, whatever the case may be when it comes to the Prime Minister.

It just seems to me that in a strange sort of way the government, by its behaviour today with respect to this motion, is reinforcing the very point that many of us on this side are trying to make: that when it comes to the Prime Minister the ordinary rules of behaviour, particularly in terms of appearance but also with respect to how certain things are handled, do not apply.

I ask the government House leader, given that this was a red book promise and that he had 20 minutes to speak, why he at least did not explain why the Liberals did not keep their promise. It was their promise, not our promise. They promised that this person would be an officer of the House. It was not something invented by the opposition.

It would seem to me that at the very least the government House leader could have taken some time, in the time that he had on his feet, to explain why the Liberals changed their minds. People change their minds. They obviously changed their minds. If they did change their minds, why did they? Or is this simply a case of a

broken promise and something they did not mean to do in the first place? Could we please have an explanation?

• (1140)

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, the hon. House leader for the New Democrats raises two propositions, one in which he alleges that the ordinary rules of behaviour have somehow been modified for the purpose of this debate. That is factually incorrect. The hon. member has been around here so long that he has been here even longer than I and that is a long time. Of course there is another hon. member near him who has been here even longer. They will both remember, of course, that an opposition motion being amended is not something new. It is something that has been done for 50 years. To say that it has been suspended is wrong.

What the opposition, cleverly or otherwise, discovered a few years ago was to find a way of making a minor amendment to its motion to prevent someone else from offering one later. I have offered a subamendment today which I believe is acceptable. If the Speaker decides that it is not, I will certainly accept that. I hope the hon. member does the same.

Insofar as the ethics counsellor being, as I believe the hon. member said, an officer of the House, I do not believe that particular feature was ever in the red book. There was a reference to reporting directly to parliament, which he does in relation to one part of his work. He reports to the Prime Minister on the part dealing with ministers. For the part dealing with backbench MPs, all of us collectively have not yet put in place a system regarding the code of conduct for other MPs, so it does not apply there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the Bloc Québécois whip, the hon. member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes.

Since last November 27 I have heard members of the House, either within these walls or elsewhere, including in the media, asking why there was such a poor turnout at the last federal election.

Surely one of the reasons is that the public so often feels betrayed and misled by people who do not keep their promises. When there are more people believing Elvis is still with us than people believing that politicians are to be trusted, that should send some pretty strong alarm signals to all members of this House.

For once the Canadian Alliance had a good idea: to bring before the House an issue that would normally be totally non-partisan. The proof of its non-partisan nature is that they actually repeated, word for word, a promise made in the 1993 Liberal red book, and are merely asking that it be adopted by all members of this House.

It seems that the members of the four opposition parties are the only ones who want to honour this promise originally made by the

Liberals, which is ironic to say the least. Moreover, the Bloc Québécois election platform for the year 2000 stated as follows:

The Bloc Québécois proposes that the ethics counsellor report to the House of Commons rather than to the Prime Minister's Office.

We are therefore fully involved in this movement, which seems to be unanimous on this side of the House, to have the ethics counsellor not be answerable to a single person, the person who signs his paycheque, in other words the Prime Minister.

The purpose of this proposal in 1993—I remember the debates on it then, and nothing has changed—was to restore at least a little of the public confidence in politicians. Unfortunately the government has failed miserably at that.

It is perhaps worthwhile reminding hon. members that, since the quiet revolution, no hint of scandal has involved any Quebec political party in power, regardless of political stripe. I am referring to the Union Nationale government, the Quebec Liberal government and the Parti Québécois government

• (1145)

There has been a broad consensus, the result of which is that the sorts of political and financial scandals we see on the federal scene are unheard of in Quebec. Unfortunately, or fortunately, this has been a lesson that Quebecers have learned the hard way. We went through the terrible excesses of the Duplessis period, which preceded the quiet revolution, but the problem began before that. The government of Quebec was wallowing in patronage and was helping itself to public monies.

I put myself in the shoes of a young Quebecer. A young Quebecer is amazed by the sorts of scandals we are seeing in France with the Sirven affair, in Germany with the CDU problem, in various countries, and even on the federal scene. As a young Quebecer I am rather proud, damned proud, that these sorts of scandals do not exist in Quebec.

I have heard friends or relatives talk about them, and I have read about them in history books, but they have not been seen in Quebec for the past 40 years. When someone oversteps the limits, which are very strict, they are dealt with by the courts and no more is heard about them. They are dealt with effectively and efficiently.

It is rather sad for young people to see that Duplessis-style politics have now sprung up on the federal scene. This increases young people's disillusionment with politicians in this country. It is all the sadder since the Prime Minister, who comes from an old red family, having fought the Duplessis system, has come himself to the point of setting up much the same system.

The example of Placeteco comes to mind. In it \$1.2 million in public funds were squandered without an invoice to account for the

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spending. There is the Auberge Grand-Mère, a subject of much discussion these days. There is also the business in the riding of my colleague from Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, which—we will recall it having been brought up—magically ended up in the riding of the Prime Minister.

This sort of attitude on the part of the federal government leads it to consider the money of Quebec and Canadian taxpayers its own, so it can spend it as it likes. One of the most effective ways of stopping that is to have a man or a woman outside the parliamentary system and not accountable to the Prime Minister, who usually makes the decisions that often benefit his friends, his riding, under a very vague set of rules, but accountable instead to parliament, a bit like the auditor general.

In conclusion, the position of the Bloc Québécois is very clear. We support this motion. I hope the Liberal government will honour its promise in 1993, when it made this proposal we all fully support.

I will conclude therefore by saying that Quebecers learned the lessons of the Duplessis system the hard way. We have built a just and fair society, which has created strict and clear rules for itself thereby ensuring there will be no scandals in Quebec.

I am truly and firmly convinced that this attitude of Quebecers in general to scandals and the need for their MNAs to be honest, augurs very well for the political system we will soon be setting up in Quebec.

• (1150)

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the comments of the Bloc Québécois member.

He said that the public had lost confidence in the government. Looking back at the results of the last election, it looks as though Quebecers lost confidence in the Bloc Québécois, which lost six seats, while we made gains.

Be that as it may, in his speech, the hon. member often referred to the standards of the Quebec government. He contends that there were no scandals. I find this strange, because over the past three years, the media have reported on people being prosecuted, on scandals relating to several issues, on suspicious discretionary budgets.

How does the Bloc Québécois explain then that, in 1994, it voted against a bill to increase transparency in the Canadian government, when in Quebec the act governing the National Assembly includes provisions such as the following:

The juriconsult is appointed under section 74 of the Act respecting the National Assembly, on the motion of the Premier and with the approval of two-thirds of the Members, for a renewable term not exceeding five years.

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Indeed, the act respecting the national assembly creates the office of juriconsult, a position currently held by Quebec's former chief justice Claude Bisson. The juriconsult's advisory role only extends to members of the national assembly. Several Quebec premiers have added directives that apply to cabinet members.

These rules are similar to those established at the federal level and in the other provinces.

I will conclude by saying that the responsibility of the current premier of Quebec is made even clearer in the final paragraph of the letter Mr. Bouchard wrote his ministers on January 29, 1996:

In contentious cases, the Premier (of Quebec) is responsible for the interpretation of these directives.

Is it true or not?

Mr. Richard Marceau: Mr. Speaker, I find it scandalous that a Quebec MP can rise in this House and refer to the fact that the Quebec scene has been filled with scandals, but not be able to name a single one of them. That is scandalous.

Mr. Ghislain Label: Not a one.

Mr. Richard Marceau: We can certainly list some on the federal level: Auberge Grand-Mère, Placeteco.

Speaking of the government's ethics, Tremblay—Guittet Communications received more than \$2 million from the Canada Information Office and Public Works Canada. Mrs. Michelle Tremblay of that company has been involved in all Liberal election campaigns since 1988.

Communication & Stratégie also obtained more than \$2 million from the CIO in order to organize federal ministerial visits to Bloc Québécois ridings. The head of that company is Serge Paquette, who ran for the federal Liberals in the Laurentides riding.

Another buddy of the Liberal Party of Canada, Richard Mongeau, was legal counsel for the CIO, as well as its head of communications at the same time. He has since been appointed to a judgeship.

Groupe Everest and Lafleur Communications both received contracts of several million dollars, either from the CIO or from Public Works and Government Services Canada through its "initiatives sponsorships" program, and all these companies have contributed tens of thousands of dollars to the Liberal Party of Canada's campaign chest.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Richard Marceau: I could go on. This is the kind of attitude the Canadian Alliance motion is aimed at avoiding. This is the kind of feeding from the public trough that the Liberal Party has demonstrated, this is the kind of proprietary feeling about public funds that the Alliance motion is aimed at doing away with.

This is why I am calling upon the Liberal Party, and this member in particular, to vote and to respect the Liberal campaign promise of 1993.

Mr. Serge Marcell (Beauharnois—Salaberry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really something to see how self-righteous they are in the House, when earlier they were demanding proof that nothing is going on in Quebec City with appointments.

How is it that the husband of Pauline Marois was appointed president of the Société générale de financement?

Let the Bloc Québécois explain to the public how they indirectly broke the law on the funding of political parties introduced by René Lévesque by inviting Mrs. Marois to a dinner to raise campaign funds?

I could provide a number of examples. Why was Mr. Larose appointed—

An hon. member: Tell us about your bridges.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier.

• (1155)

Mr. Richard Marceau: Mr. Speaker, in politics, there are certain debates we have been dreaming about, and this is one of them.

The member for Beauharnois—Salaberry, who has just put a question to me, went through three election campaigns promising the same bridge and not once did he ever deliver on this promise. We will soon see a picture of the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry beside the definition of broken promise in the dictionary.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this very important debate on the question of parliament's need to be able to count on the services of an ethics counsellor, whose role it will be to examine the probity and the actions of members of cabinet and to report to the House on his findings.

In the questions and comments we have just heard from the two Liberal members, I find it particularly interesting that they mention that the public has lost confidence. However the public gave the Liberal Party a greater majority than in the last election. That is the trouble with this government, which still only wants to see part of the picture.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik has taken great care to conceal the fact that the turnout rate for this election was one of the lowest in federal election history. That must indicate something.

When we speak of loss of confidence, we mean a loss of confidence in political institutions and parliamentary institutions. Why was there such poor voter turnout? Perhaps because our fellow citizens did not find it was worth while. It makes no difference who gets elected, they feel.

What is it that gives them such a negative attitude or impression of the public and the political scene? It is the sort of things we saw during the election campaign, when the Prime Minister was suspected of involvement in some rather dubious undertakings. The ethics counsellor was consulted and his response in the midst of the election campaign was “I do not think the Prime Minister can be faulted in any way”. I shall return to this point.

I also found of particular interest that the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik raises the code of ethics of the National Assembly. Really now.

Here in Ottawa we have a nearly secret code of ethics, one established by the Prime Minister, enforcement of which is entrusted to a man who was appointed by the Prime Minister, who administers rules set by the Prime Minister, and who is answerable for his actions to that very Prime Minister.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik told us “It is no better in the National Assembly”. To that, I will say that there is one major difference, though. In the National Assembly, the code of ethics is a law. There is a statutory basis for ministerial integrity.

He spoke of the function of juriconsult, saying the appointment is made by the premier after a vote in the National Assembly. That is a lot better than here, where the Prime Minister alone makes the appointment without consulting anyone. The members of the National Assembly have the opportunity to comment on the appointment of the juriconsult.

Before the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik starts denigrating the Quebecers’ National Assembly again, I would advise him to find credible and relevant examples under the circumstances.

I think it is also interesting to note that our friends in the government are just as vigorously resisting the idea of having to agree to the motion presented by the Canadian Alliance.

• (1200)

Yet, we are simply asking them to honour an election promise they made in 1993.

We saw earlier—and the Speaker will be coming back to it later on, so I would not want to elaborate further—how twisted the government House leader got in his efforts to have the motion of the Canadian Alliance say what it does not, to avoid voting against their own red book this afternoon.

There is no way around it. The motion by the Canadian Alliance reiterates verbatim the promise in the Liberal Party’s red book in 1993. It would be embarrassing, to say the least, for the govern-

ment to have to vote against one of its own election promises. However, this would not come as a surprise, since we have seen the government, on a number of occasions, not fulfil its commitments.

The Liberals are in effect rising in this House, this symbol of Canadian democracy, and saying “Dear fellow citizens, we lied to you in that we did not intend to fulfil the promise we made in 1993”. I will admit that it could be embarrassing to say the least for the government to have to rise and vote against its own promise. This is why the Liberals tried their best to have us believe that this motion says something that, in fact, it does not really say.

I alluded to the broken promises of the Liberals. What about the infamous promise to scrap, to abolish the GST? What about the infamous promise to tear up the free trade agreement? What about this other Liberal promise the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry mentioned in responding to the speech by the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier? What about the promise made during the last election campaign to build two bridges and 14 kilometres of highway?

The government now seems less anxious to provide an answer and to fulfil that promise. This is common practice among Liberals. It is no wonder that the participation rate at the last general election was one of the lowest in Canadian history. It is no wonder that, after such a display of cynicism and arrogance on the part of the Liberal government, people are much less inclined to take part in the electoral process.

The ethics counsellor answered one question and I will get back to it in a few moments.

First let me say that our comments here today are not in any way aimed at the ethics counsellor himself. Given his professional background, I presume that Mr. Wilson is a person whose probity cannot be questioned and that he has very high professional qualifications. This is not what is at issue here today.

What is at issue is the relevance of an ethics counsellor position, if the incumbent does not report to parliament. What is at issue is a broken Liberal promise from 1993 to create an ethics counsellor position, and fill it with someone who would be appointed by the various political parties in the House and who would report to parliament.

I come back to what I was saying earlier. The ethics counsellor gave his interpretation of the reasons why he does not report to this parliament. He said that the first reason is that the Prime Minister is responsible to parliament for the conduct of his ministers. He invoked ministerial responsibility. He said that since he reports to the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister reports to the House, the necessary transparency is there.

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I will, if I may, mention something very much in the news right now which makes me question the validity of the ethics counsellor's response. We have only to look at the CINAR affair and the somewhat special role played in it by the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency.

When we question the Minister of National Revenue, he tells us that he cannot answer because of the confidential nature of tax files. What about ministerial responsibility? Is he not responsible to this parliament for the actions of his department?

• (1205)

His answer is: "I cannot answer. I do not know what is going on. My people are professionals. They are doing their job and I cannot interfere". What is the point of having a minister who reports to the House?

I would close by urging all members to vote in favour of this motion, first of all because it is important for Canadian democracy and the Canadian parliamentary process, and also because it will allow the members opposite to finally deliver on one of their election promises made seven years ago.

Mr. André Harvey (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Alain Dubuc, from *La Presse*, was right to say that the Bloc is out of touch with reality. The former member for Beauharnois—Salaberry has been replaced by my hon. colleague. Someone has reviewed all the speeches made by the member for that riding. That member never had any concern for the issues his riding and his region were faced with.

I would like to ask the hon. member this: the real scandal, is it not the fact that the Bloc and the PQ let the regions die off while they keep talking about the Constitution, at a time when 8% of Quebecers are still willing to hear about the Constitution and 92% of Quebecers and people in the regions prefer to hear about the economy and health? Meanwhile, they are still discussing very nebulous items of parliamentary procedure, whereas we are focusing our initiatives on research and development, the infrastructure program and the upgrading of our small and medium size businesses to make them even more efficient. They are always out of touch with reality.

I see the hon. member for Jonquière who once wrote to President Clinton. I am sure the president did not find the time to answer her letter before leaving office.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague for Verchères—Les-Patriotes if, to his mind, the real scandal is not seeing the PQ and the Bloc Quebecois let the regions decline and fall at a time when our policies as a government are focused on structural initiatives?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague, the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, for his question, which is at the very least twisted and warped. I thank him, nevertheless, because it will allow me to set the record straight.

I use the words twisted and warped because we are discussing government integrity and the necessity for the government to justify its actions before the House. All the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord has done is to bring us back to the constitutional debate, while accusing us of always bringing up that issue.

I will answer his question, first to say this. I find it at the very least outrageous that the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord should undermine the work of the former member for Beauharnois—Salaberry, Daniel Turp, by saying that he never cared about his riding. That takes some gall. I challenge the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord to go to Beauharnois—Salaberry to see what is going on in that riding and what was going on, these last years, when my colleague, Daniel Turp, was its representative in parliament.

Some say that the constitutional issue is not among the priorities of Quebecers. I would like to say something about that.

What are the priorities of Quebecers? Like most other people, their priorities are employment, health and education. Not foreign affairs, not national defence or the coast guard. The federal government has understood that well. This government invests as little as possible in areas which are under its responsibility. It cuts payments to the provinces and uses this money stolen from the provinces to invest in health, education and employment. These are all jurisdictions which do not belong to the federal government, under the Constitution. No wonder we want to talk about the Constitution.

• (1210)

[English]

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add some comments to the debate and perhaps bring some focus back to what we are here to discuss, that is, the ethics counsellor, the integrity of government and the ability of the government to portray itself with confidence to the Canadian people.

It troubles me greatly when I hear the government House Leader get up and speak of the pristine ethics of the government and, in particular, of the Prime Minister. I know the hon. member who just spoke will recall what occurred in his province with respect to a Liberal fundraiser who, armed with lists of persons from HRDC and ACOA who had applied for grants, went far afield with that information and attempted to raise funds for the Liberal Party of Canada. I also know the member from Chicoutimi would recall that incident.

I wonder how the government reconciles that with its position of pliable ethics that it is so proudly clinging to today. I wonder if the hon. member would comment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciate your indulgence and your concern.

I would simply like to thank the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough for his question. He is bringing the debate back to its real purpose, that is to the issue of the ethics counsellor and the government's accountability to the House.

That being said, I believe he raised a very clear case where, if the ethics counsellor were appointed by the House and reported to the House, dubious actions on the part of the government could have been prevented or corrected.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle. I still think of the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle as the member for Yorkton—Melville. I have not quite adjusted to the fact that he is not known by the riding that he was known by for 25 years.

I have a couple of things to say about the motion. We are talking about two things in the motion. We are talking about broken promises and we are talking about the substance of promises made, and whether or not those promises should now be implemented.

First, with respect to the question of broken promises, clearly this is a broken promise. It was very clearly promised in red book one that there would be an ethics counsellor created and that the counsellor would be responsible to the House of Commons. That has not happened and the government has given us no indication today as to why that has not happened. It has been very self-congratulating in terms of its record. It looks good only because it compares itself to the previous Conservative administration which was rife with controversy and scandal.

Sometimes I think that the only difference between the Liberals and the Conservatives, when it comes to that sort of thing, is that the Conservatives never really got out of their amateur status when it came to patronage, scandal and other things. The Liberals are the real professionals when it comes to that sort of thing. They are better at not being caught. They are better at hiding what they do. They are better at covering things up. The Tories were just a bunch of rank amateurs.

In fact, when the Tories were in government, I remember some Liberals in opposition saying to me off the record that the Tories were a bunch of rank amateurs, that they were really the people who knew how to do that. The Liberals have been back since 1993 and they are still doing it, in part because they have not kept the

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promises they made with respect to those kinds of issues. One of those promises was the creation of an ethics counsellor, an ethics counsellor that would be responsible to the House not to the Prime Minister.

● (1215)

The government House leader made the argument that the Prime Minister was ultimately responsible and therefore we could not have the ethics counsellor reporting to the House. The Prime Minister is ultimately responsible for the official languages policy, for the privacy law and for the freedom of information law, but that does not prevent us from having privacy commissioners, official language commissioners and freedom of information commissioners. It also should not prevent us from having an ethics commissioner, if that is what that person would come to be called whenever that position would be created, who would be responsible to the House of Commons. On the face of it, the Liberals have broken this promise and offered no explanation as to why they have.

What has given rise to the debate? It is of course all the controversy surrounding the things that have happened in the Prime Minister's riding.

I have listened to the Prime Minister carefully over the last 18 months to two years. It is not a question of whether the Prime Minister did anything wrong in the criminal sense. I am certainly not making that charge and some people who have made that charge have withdrawn it. What the Prime Minister does not seem to get is that he is not just an ordinary member of parliament. I just do not think there is any substance to that argument.

Yes, the Prime Minister can do the same things as an ordinary member of parliament can do, but to suggest that it is ordinary behaviour for the Prime Minister to have people over to 24 Sussex to talk to them about loans to hotels in his riding, not to mention hotels that the Prime Minister has had something to do with in the past, and that it is the sort of thing that I get to do every day as a member of parliament, is just ridiculous and the Canadian people know it.

Given the election results, the Canadian people seem resigned to accept this. They seem resigned to accept a certain level of that kind of behaviour. Unfortunately, they just seem to think that goes with the Liberals. They seem prepared to tolerate that behaviour with the hope that the Liberals have other virtues.

However, we as members of parliament do not have to tolerate it. We do not have to tolerate it as opposition parties. As members of this place we have a responsibility not to tolerate and that is why we are up on our feet today.

I say to the Prime Minister and to the government, not just for their own sake but for the sake of the political process in general,

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that they should behave differently. They should see that there is a distinction to be made between the kinds of opportunities that the Prime Minister has, the clout that the Prime Minister has, the question of how that clout should be used and whether there are times when the Prime Minister should resist the temptation to use that clout, even if it is for the benefit of his own constituency, because it puts the whole political process in jeopardy.

There is no question, from some of the figures I have seen, that the Prime Minister's riding has done very well indeed by virtue of having the Prime Minister as its member of parliament. When it gets so out of whack, when there is so much more money going into the Prime Minister's riding over what goes into other ridings, and when we see that there are secret opportunities for transitional funds going into Liberal ridings that people in other ridings do not even know about, all these kinds of things do not exactly bring a healthy smell to the political process.

I would urge my Liberal colleagues to see if they can find a way to act more appropriately when it comes to this sort of thing.

We often talk about governments breaking their promises. I want to say with respect to the party that moved the motion today that it is one of the rare political animals in our political system. It has managed to accumulate a whole number of broken promises while it is still in opposition. It is not something that everybody can do. One has to have a special talent to do it. Members of that party made promises as to how they would behave in opposition. They did not say how they would behave in government because they have not had a chance to govern, and God help us if they ever do, although if they ever do become government I hope they do break some of their promises. I hope they never bring them into being.

• (1220)

The Canadian Alliance promised that their leader would not move into Stornoway. They promised their leader would not take a freebie with respect to a car. Many of them promised they would not become members of the pension plan.

Having said all that, I think they have done some growing up while they have been here. They have appreciated some of the policies that were in place, that they made a political career out of criticizing, and have changed their mind. However, when they changed their mind, they broke another promise. They were the ones who said that when members of parliament change their mind or make a decision contrary to what their constituents thought they were voting for, then they should put themselves at the mercy of their voters once again.

With respect to the members of the Canadian Alliance who indicated that they would opt into the pension plan before the last election and the people voted them in, fair enough. What about the people who indicated after November 27, 2000 that they would opt

into the pension plan? Do those members not have an obligation, given the things that they have said in the past, to submit themselves to the mercy of their constituents in a form of self-imposed recall? Do we see any of that? There is another broken promise.

It strikes us as a bit odd, without prejudice to the well deserved criticism that the Liberals deserve when it comes to breaking promises, that the official opposition should be on its high horse when it comes to broken promises because they are the one political party in the country that has managed to accumulate a record of broken promises without ever having been in government.

Hon. David Kilgour (Secretary of State (Latin America and Africa), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona knows that I have a lot of respect for him. In his view, what would be proper for a prime minister to do for a riding that has an unemployment rate, as I believe the Prime Minister's has, of approximately 20%? What in his view is proper?

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, we do not all have ridings that have 20% unemployment. Many of us have ridings that have less than that and some that have more.

The point is that the Prime Minister ought to let the ordinary process take its course. I would submit that having people over to 24 Sussex and using the full context of the Prime Minister's office is not always the appropriate thing to do.

The appropriate thing to do, not with respect to ridings but with respect to the issue before the House, is to keep the promise that was made in the red book.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too have great respect for the member from Manitoba, but he said something in his remarks that I could not support. He said that if the Prime Minister thought there could be or might be some challenge to a particular project in his riding that he should probably not do it.

It is almost like reverse discrimination. If the Prime Minister cannot use his position to influence a half a dozen projects for the cumulative total of not more than \$5 million or \$6 million, I just cannot figure that reasoning out.

In my riding, a week before the election was announced, we talked about a \$500 million project. Everybody was happy about it. We are making a big fuss here about a \$200,000 fountain and a \$500,000 loan in a tourism industry that is going through a very difficult time.

I do not think Canadians are putting it in perspective. I never had any problem when the former Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Mulroney, put a \$300 million prison in his riding. That is just the way it goes.

I would never want to see a situation where because one becomes the leader of the country, one has to discriminate against one's own constituents.

• (1225)

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I was not suggesting that the Prime Minister should discriminate against his own constituents. I was suggesting that there is an appropriate balance to be struck between not discriminating against one's own constituents and being seen to discriminate a bit too much in favour of one's own constituents.

This is all a matter of perception and judgment, but the Prime Minister has an obligation for the sake of the whole political process not to leave himself open to those kinds of perceptions. He should not be wrong on the facts, as he apparently was when he was very absolute about the fact that the hotel in question did not receive any money from the immigrant investor program, and then we find out that it did. Why was he so assertive about that? Why did he not check the facts? This does not help.

I want the Prime Minister to behave differently because that would benefit the whole country. I am not saying that people in the Prime Minister's riding should never get anything. I do not know about the \$500 million project in the member's riding, but it sounds to me like something that is going on in the whole of Toronto, not just in the member's riding. Or, perhaps we should be looking more closely at the member's riding as \$500 million is a lot more than most of us put together would get in terms of special grants and projects for our ridings.

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Winnipeg mentioned broken promises. Coming from Saskatchewan I could talk until midnight about broken promises.

The NDP member who just spoke was in the House when we had gold plated pensions. He was here when we had to serve six consecutive years. Conceivably a member could be elected at 19 years of age, retire at 25 and get a pension. Does his conscience bother him in that he sat in the House and supported that pension?

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, here is the line that we all had to live with in the early nineties, that somehow we received a gold plated pension if we were in this place for six years.

Actually, after six years a member received six-fifteenths of a pension. All of the ads by the National Citizen's Coalition and the Reform Party implied that if a member were here for six years and retired or was defeated, he or she received a cheque for \$1 million or something like that amount, instead of six-fifteenths or 75% of the average of their best five years.

Supply

No, I am not embarrassed because when that so-called gold plated pension was brought in, in 1981, I voted against it. I did not have any choice but to be in it. People who did have a choice have since made different choices than the ones they said to the Canadian people.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope my friend from Souris—Moose Mountain does not leave the Chamber. The motion today provides us with an opportunity to talk about our vision of democracy: electoral democracy, parliamentary democracy and economic democracy.

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition moving a motion to make the ethics counsellor responsible for reporting to the House and not to the Prime Minister himself. It only makes sense. People cannot report to someone they are responsible to and then investigate the same person. There is an apparent conflict of interest.

It struck me rather strange this morning when I heard the opposition House leader talk about the importance of accountability and things being built on trust. I think 11 members of the Canadian Alliance Party campaigned against the MP pension plan. In many cases, after the election on November 27, these members decided to pay back into the pension plan. They broke a fundamental trust and a fundamental promise that they made to the voters in their ridings.

If we want to build a parliamentary system on trust, on confidence and accountability, it seems to me that the deputy leader of the Reform Party from Edmonton and others should do one of two things. They have now bought back into the pension plan after criticizing us strenuously and comparing us to hogs slopping at a trough. They should either submit themselves to a recall of their voters or resign their seats like the member from Hamilton, the Minister of Heritage, did when she campaigned against the GST and then was part of a government that supported it. If they have changed their minds the members should resign their seats and face the voters in a byelection to receive a new mandate. That is accountability.

• (1230)

If some of the Alliance members had said before the November election that they had changed their minds on the pension and would opt in and buy back past service, that would have been a different story. However, those who did not do it broke a fundamental promise and a fundamental part of what that party is all about in terms of accountability and respect for the House. They should resign their seats and submit to a byelection if indeed they mean what they say. That is an important part of what we are debating today.

I will use the words again of the Leader of the Opposition and the House leader of that party who talked about the importance of building on trust and the importance of accountability.

Supply

When we talk about the ethics counsellor being responsible to the House of Commons, we do this in a broader vision of our democracy. I believe our country is in a democratic crisis. Our parliamentary system gives the Prime Minister far too much power. The Prime Minister appoints all the senators, all the supreme court justices, the head of the army, the head of the RCMP, all the important heads of agencies, and makes thousands of patronage appointments to all kinds of organizations, agencies and crown corporations. He does this without any parliamentary accountability whatsoever.

If the Minister of Industry had any zeal for democratic reform he would lead a crusade to make sure that some of the powers of the Prime Minister's office went to the House of Commons and parliamentary committees in terms of important appointments.

We also have too many confidence votes in the House. If we had fewer confidence votes parliament would work in a more congenial and democratic way in trying to solve the problems that face the Canadian people. Those are just some of the issues we should be dealing with.

Parliamentary committees should have a lot more power and independence to initiate and timetable legislation. However the government will not even take the minor step of allowing the committees to secretly elect their own chairs. Such a step would simply follow the precedence of secretly electing a Speaker of the House. The government is in the dark ages in terms of basic democratic reforms.

On the electoral and democratic side, no wonder the Minister of Industry hides his head in shame. Only 5% of Canadians polled support the unelected Senate. The minister, however, sits across the way and says aye, aye and cheers on the Prime Minister to make more and more Senate appointments to that house of hacks, flacks and political has-beens.

The time has come for genuine reform to abolish the unelected, undemocratic and unaccountable Senate. Canada should also take a serious look, as has almost every other country in the world, at some kind of proportional representation in our electoral system so that every voter could have equality and not cast a wasted vote.

The Liberal majority government, elected constitutionally for another five years, received 40% of the vote on a turnout of less than 60% in the last election. That means fewer than a quarter of Canadians voted for the government of the day.

Canada is one of only three countries in the world with a population of more than eight million that does not have some form of proportional representation in its electoral system. Only Canada, India and the United States do not have some kind of proportional representation.

Under a PR system every voter would be equal. No vote would be wasted. People would be included and involved in creating a parliament that would actually reflect how people vote. That is the kind of democratic reform we should be looking at.

We should also get rid of the kind of enumeration mess we had in the last campaign. Over a million people were denied democracy because there was no house to house enumeration of voters. Most of those missed were younger or poorer people living in inner cities or younger people who had moved.

These are some of the things we must change to make Canada more democratic and inclusive.

● (1235)

We must also look at the question of economic democracy and the fact that Canada is now governed more and more by trade deals, the WTO, NAFTA and huge transnational corporations that have more and more power.

It is not a question of trade per se. There will be trade. There will be more and more international trade and more globalization because of technology. It is a question of losing democratic control over issues that affect our lives because of the power of transnational corporations.

These huge corporations are not really run by entrepreneurs. Many are run by bureaucrats and technocrats who are responsible and beholden to no one. They are like big icebergs at sea, bumping up against countries, distorting economies and denying local control and decision making over social programs, health programs, cultural programs, labour standards and farm programs.

This should change. Canada should lead the way in trying to build labour, social and environmental standards into trade agreements. Such agreements should protect the cultural identities of nation states and allow them to make important decisions over the lives of their citizens in health care, shelter, employment and other important areas.

That is part of the democratic vision people should hope for and espouse from the Parliament of Canada. The country is sleepwalking toward a crisis in democracy. Barely 60% of the people voted in the year 2000. In 1997, 67% of the people voted. Thirty or forty years ago it was routine to have 80% or more of the people voting in federal and provincial campaigns.

People are disengaging from the process because they feel politicians do not listen. In so many ways the people are right. We elect a government that has a mandate for five years and there is no power sharing. About 60% of the people voted for the opposition parties and 40% for the government party, and yet the Prime Minister has the unilateral power to make most important decisions.

If the Prime Minister wants to leave a legacy he should begin the process of democratizing the political institutions, the economic and electoral systems of Canada, so that the ordinary people, through their representatives, will have a real say over the common good and the direction of Canada.

The motion today is but a small step in that direction. It would make the ethics counsellor responsible not to the Prime Minister but to the House of Commons. The person would report to the House of Commons as does the chief electoral officer, the privacy commissioner, the official language commissioner and many others who operate in a way that is just and proper and in a way that governments past said would never work.

Let us not be afraid to take at least that one step toward democratic reform.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with a lot of what the member said about trade. I have been racking my brain on the issue of unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats in multinational corporations, and the way they move around like icebergs. We are responsible as members of parliament to maintain jobs in our communities and in our country.

What idea does the member have for handling multinational organizations in such a way that they will not hold us to ransom for all the jobs they control?

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, the member from Toronto made a very good comment. He talked about the multinational or transnational corporations that can hold us to ransom for the jobs in our communities.

Part of the problem with the trade deals today is that they are like charters of rights for transnational corporations. We must somehow augment that with an international people's charter of rights which builds into these agreements minimum standards in terms of labour and labour mobility and in terms of environmental and social standards. Such a charter might even look at radical ideas such as a minimum global tax on transnational corporations so they cannot play off one country against the other.

In other words, I think many powers once enjoyed by the nation state must now be transferred to the international forum.

• (1240)

We have transferred the powers of capital to huge transnational corporations, but we have not counterbalanced that with a counterweight, which is the democratic control of people through their governments as institutions, and transferred other powers such as people's rights, labour rights, agricultural rights, environmental rights and environmental standards. One of them might be a minimum tax on transnational corporations.

Supply

Another idea endorsed by parliament in a 2:1 vote was contained in a private member's motion which I put before the House two years ago endorsing the idea of what was called a Tobin tax on currency speculation to help curb speculation in currency. About a trillion dollars are traded every day. There is no control of this or of the international casino of currency which distorts a lot of economies.

We became the first parliament in the world to endorse the idea of a small currency tax, which is called a Tobin tax, in concert with the world community. Our government should be aggressively selling the position of the Parliament of Canada at international fora like the World Bank and the IMF. These are some of the things we can do.

The main point is that democracy has been denied, thwarted and abrogated because of trade deals and because of transnational corporations. We have lost that democracy. These people report to no one. We as a nation have to take a leading role in trying to get that power back for ordinary people.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is enlightening to see you in the chair. I know the impartiality you bring to this place.

I want to pose a question to the hon. member with respect to his comments about the credibility and importance of an ethics counsellor. Reference has been made throughout this debate to various parties and to which party did what first. The hon. member's own party is not devoid of indiscretion or discrepancies.

I remind him of the former premier of British Columbia, Mr. Vander Zalm, who found himself in some difficulty. It resulted in a report published by Ted Hughes, a former deputy attorney general and superior court judge in Saskatchewan.

The report dealt with public land transactions and money that was then returned for a promise of a speculator acquiring adjacent properties. Federally owned oil companies were involved. All of this resulted in another premier from British Columbia resigning, Premier Harcourt. Although he was not personally implicated in the wrongdoing, he resigned after a forensic audit by an auditor he had appointed who found that party officials during the eighties had concocted a scheme to divert funds legally designed for charity into NDP coffers.

This demonstrates that the independent counsellors, the independent auditors, and in this case a former judge, were able to flesh out a situation that obviously was wrong.

Is the office of the ethics counsellor tainted by what has occurred in this situation? Should we be looking at a separate judge or special prosecutor to be assigned to cases like this one? He would

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be at arm's length from government. Perhaps he would be appointed by government but would not have that connection and therefore could credibly come before the Canadian people and lay out the facts so that there would be a credibility process.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I should like to clarify what might be a misunderstanding. Mr. Vander Zalm was not an NDP premier but a Social Credit premier. Mr. Harcourt was a New Democrat and he did resign. Mr. Vander Zalm is now the leader of the Reform Party of British Columbia. His cousins sit over to my extreme right.

The ethics counsellor should be an independent person. Perhaps he should have the power to appoint an independent prosecutor to investigate certain things. A committee of the House could look at what additional powers the counsellor should have. He should certainly have the power to launch independent investigations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to indicate that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough.

I will start by making a few brief comments. Following the government House leader's procedural stunt, the debate seemed to cool down, except perhaps that our colleague from the New Democratic Party managed to heat it up a bit.

We got tripped up by procedural considerations on the appropriateness of an amendment and an amendment to an amendment. In my humble opinion, we are ignoring the purpose of the motion under consideration.

● (1245)

Of course, we can talk about the promise broken by the Liberals in 1993. We are used to that. However, the real reason we have this motion before us today is because of the Auberge Grand-Mère issue. Nor must we dismiss the Canadian Alliance's desire to bring forward a motion about the ethics counsellor, because the Auberge Grand-Mère affair is a case in point.

The real debate must be centred on the Prime Minister, the ethics counsellor and a specific affair or affairs that have led to this debate.

When we look at the facts, we are told "You know, the Prime Minister did his job as an MP". There is a big difference between the prerogatives of a Prime Minister and those of an ordinary MP. It is not the same thing at all.

Finally, what we want today is to know exactly what happened. We only get snippets of information about what the Prime Minister did in this affair.

When the Prime Minister called the president of the Business Development Bank and told him "Drop by 24 Sussex; we have to

talk", it was clearly not to congratulate him. Then he told the president "Look here, there is a loan application. You have to see to it. Understood?" Suddenly the loan is approved. Soon after there is a default of payment. Something is wrong.

The president of the bank says "Listen, we must call in the loan". He gets a phone call from the Prime Minister who asks "What is going on?" He replies "They are not making any payments, so I have to call in the loan". It is a Business Development Bank policy, but this is not how it worked.

A little while later, Mr. Beaudoin was moved out of the Business Development Bank. He got pushed out and the loan was not called in.

I hope the Prime Minister does take care of his riding. However, at one point, the prerogative of a Prime Minister should implicitly and explicitly require a certain amount of reserve, beyond what would be required of an ordinary member. I am not the Prime Minister, but he acted wrongly in this case, he acted very wrongly. That is what we say when we blame the Prime Minister.

As far as the ethics counsellor is concerned, we would like to know what data, what discussion, what evidence brought him to absolve the Prime Minister. Whom did he speak to? Over a two day period, he did not have time to meet with too many people. What evidence was his decision based on? Is he well informed about the whole issue? Did he speak with the representatives of the Business Development Bank? The answer is no.

After two days, he replied: "Everything is fine. I am reacting rapidly because this is an urgent matter. The urgency justifies a thorough analysis of the issue".

We are asking for the truth, the whole truth. Did the ethics counsellor do his job properly in this case? This is an important case, because the office of Prime Minister deserves respect.

However, if we are to respect the person who holds that office, we must have reasons to do so.

We are told that we keep accusing the Prime Minister. Give us good reasons not to do so, and we will stop. Let the Prime Minister have the ethics counsellor meet with members of parliament. Let him have a good talk with the elected representatives of the Canadians. That is not too much to ask. Does he need the permission of the big boss? Let the big boss tell him to meet members on both sides of the House. We will ask him with whom he had discussions on this issue. Will his answer be "The Prime Minister? I had coffee with him". That is not good enough. We must go deeper than that.

Once again, the reason we are having this debate today is the questionable conduct of the Prime Minister, who, among other things, approached directly the president of a bank.

It is cloudy, and this had nothing to do with the storm that is coming tomorrow.

● (1250)

It is getting quite cloudy on the government's side, concerning the role of the Prime Minister. The best way out of these problems, the best way to bring sunshine back in the Prime Minister's Office and his function is to free from political limitations the person whose role it is to check the conduct of elected officials, Prime Minister included, and let the ethics counsellor be more open.

The ethics counsellor is a good guy, but François Beaudoin, of the Business Development Bank, is a good guy too. Unfortunately he did not do exactly as told by the Prime Minister's Office, so he is gone.

The ethics counsellor must like his work, and I can understand. He probably does not want to frustrate his big boss. That is why we are asking that the counsellor's code of ethics be improved. He should be made independent. The only way for him to be totally independent is to report to parliament as a whole, and not to a group, a party or an individual. That is the way things should be.

The Auberge Grand-Mère issue will not go away as long as the Prime Minister refuses to be more open. It will not go away until the Prime Minister allows the ethics counsellor to meet with us.

Let us not delude ourselves. Something fishy has prompted today's opposition day motion. Parliament should take all action necessary to ensure that the positions of Prime Minister and ethics counsellor are respectable and respected ones.

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the comments by the member for Arthabaska, and I have a question for him.

I have read all the editorials, especially in Quebec. Members will forgive me for reading the French ones in particular, but I assume the English language newspapers are saying pretty much the same thing. Throughout this whole business of handing out contracts and favours the Prime Minister has been saying that he is an ordinary MP and that he is doing his job as an MP.

The editorial writers are saying that this is not true; he is not an ordinary MP. Democracy imposes him on us every three years and four months, or thereabouts, but once elected our Prime Minister is a dictator. He has the discretionary, decisional power to hand out money without being accountable to anyone. Can he claim to be an ordinary MP like I and all the other MPs on this side of the House? Is he not something more? That is the first part of my question.

The second part is this. In a divorce proceeding would it be considered normal for the mother of one of the parties seeking divorce to also serve as the judge and award child support, assign

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fault, and determine access? It seems to me that one could say that this is not transparent, even if the mother-in-law in question were mine—she is very fair—and if she perhaps had a tendency to favour me, which I am not in any doubt about. One might wonder whether her ruling was an impartial one.

During the election campaign did the ethics counsellor not come up with his decision a bit too quickly, before he had all the facts? Does this not leave him open to criticism for the simple reason that he was appointed by his friend, that he is acting for his friend, and that his decisions favour his friend? I would like to hear what the member for Arthabaska has to say about this.

Mr. André Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member and congratulate him for having a nice mother-in-law. That being said, I want to point out that the Prime Minister is not just another member of parliament, and nor should he be.

As a member of parliament I cannot designate my chief of operations as the new vice-president of the Business Development Bank of Canada. I cannot call Jean Carle, who has worked in my office for some time and tell him that I have made him the new vice-president of the Business Development Bank of Canada. I cannot do that.

● (1255)

Even with all the credibility a Conservative member has, I cannot call the president of the BDC and tell him "I want to see you at my place, at 206 Brault Street, in Asbestos". I do not think he would show up. It is not the same thing.

Of course it is quite an honour to have a premier or a Prime Minister as the member of parliament for one's riding. Does it come with some perks? The Prime Minister should be clear on this issue.

A certain amount of reserve should be exercised. If we look at the way the Prime Minister has been acting since 1993, we see that he has appointed a number of his friends to key positions. He has acted on his own. He will then be able to tell them what to do. That is what is going on.

This is why it is so important to have an independent ethics counsellor. There is a cloud hovering over the Prime Minister Office because of his involvement in crown corporations, federal programs, and so on, which is why we need an independent person to investigate.

Some may argue that an opposition member may not be fair enough to pass judgment on a prime minister, and they may be right. However an ethics counsellor appointed by the House and accountable to the House will be independent enough to clarify the whole issue.

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The Prime Minister is not just another member of parliament. Unfortunately our current Prime Minister is nothing like the prime ministers we had before him.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his speech, my colleague pointed to the unhealthy situation that currently exists.

I will give an example. During the election campaign people must decide which party will be elected, which one will form the government and how it will operate. During the last campaign a few days before election day, a person appointed by the Prime Minister had to give his view on a very important issue, the Prime Minister's integrity. The next day the headlines read "Prime Minister Exonerated".

Could we not make a comparison? If the auditor general were to report to the Prime Minister rather than to the House of Commons, would we have received this week a public report, like the one tabled, showing the good and the bad sides of the government, instead of something giving no sense of justice?

Mr. André Bachand: Mr. Speaker, it is essential that the person appointed be independent from the House.

We cannot bet on that, but unfortunately I am sure that, having acted like he did since 1993, the Prime Minister will not put his head on the log by appointing an independent ethics counsellor not reporting to his office.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am always honoured to rise in the Chamber to take part in a debate such as this one.

What has happened in this instance is that a cloud has descended over the Prime Minister and over his behaviour. This debate is very much focused on the ethical behaviour of the Prime Minister. As a result it broadens to how parliament operates and how we should hold elected officials and their conduct to a certain standard.

It is only through an independent and impartial examination of circumstances that we can arrive at the truth. This should be a truth seeking exercise.

The tragedy in all of this is that the government and the Prime Minister are hiding behind this office they have created. They are holding it up to Canadians and saying that they have been cleared by this individual, this individual who is appointed by the Prime Minister and reports to the Prime Minister.

They are telling Canadians that the Prime Minister makes the rules, is the judge and appoints the referee. However the referee only reports to him. How can Canadians have any faith in what that

referee might say, let alone know the standard or the guidelines that the referee is operating by?

• (1300)

We have asked the Prime Minister to, at the very least, put forward the guidelines and the framework within which the counsellor is to work. This is not a reflection on the counsellor himself but the office. Sadly, what may emerge from this is that the office itself has been so denigrated by the process that Canadians will never have faith in that particular form of office. That is why we should explore other avenues, such as the one in British Columbia. Perhaps we do need an independent special prosecutor who can be arm's length and can help to gather evidence in order to shed light on these types of circumstances.

There are many, particularly the supporters of the Prime Minister, who want him to be exonerated and want him to clear the air on what has taken place in these circumstances. That can only happen with a credible examination of all the facts, not the blurred facts, the fuzzy facts, the special words, the nuances and the treatment that we might tend to put in this Chamber, but done by an impartial examiner. It can only happen if, and only if, there is an office created that will allow an individual or group of individuals with staff to examine facts.

The whole substance of the motion before the House was originated by the Prime Minister and his government. This is not the creation of the opposition. This is not something that came out of thin blue air. This motion came directly from that now infamous fairy tale called the red book. This was an example of a promise that the Liberals put before the Canadian electorate on the eve of an election because they new the electorate wanted it. However, as we have seen time and time again from the government, it was pulled back and put on a shelf when the election was over. When the votes were counted those words no longer rang true. They had no validity whatsoever.

What we hope to do in the brief time that we have as members of the opposition is to pose the important questions that come from this particular circumstance. This standard of behaviour coming from the Prime Minister should be something that is particularly troubling to Canadians.

I would like to refer to a member of the current government's own backbench, the newly elected member for Vancouver Quadra in British Columbia, who has quite a storied past with respect to the justice system and to examinations of these types of questions. He is a former land use commissioner and deputy attorney general, positions that would give a unique perspective on ethical performance of government. He said that one of the things we needed was a conflict of interest commissioner who would be a legislature officer rather than a part of the executive of government and therefore independent of the executive. There is a lot of wisdom in those words. He went on to say that the more senior the politician, the greater the need to be explicit about what the rules are and what the communication is about. This is in the context of a communica-

tion between a senior member of government, in this case the head of the country, and an appointed official, and what the communication between those individuals is meant to bring about.

What we now know is that the Prime Minister of Canada, acting in his capacity, so he says, of a simple and humble member of the House, called the head of the Business Development Bank and said that there was an individual, a constituent who was in need of a loan, and that he would like the bank to look favourably upon.

It did not stop there. There was another phone call. It was an invitation to come to 24 Sussex, which again, I dare say, no member of the House, short of the Prime Minister, has unfettered access to. We cannot say what took place during that conversation in the cozy confines of the living room of the Prime Minister, but lo and behold we do know the result. The loan was approved against previous recommendations by individuals in the Business Development Bank.

Where it again became very blurred was the personal connection of the Prime Minister to the particular deal. He was the former owner of the hotel and owned lands adjacent to the particular hotel that was partitioned some time previous. This element of personal connection to the property for which the loan was secured is troubling because it was the personal benefit that might flow by having a loan approved that would improve and enhance the value of the hotel and therefore vicariously enhance the value of the adjoining lands.

• (1305)

There is much speculation as to when the Prime Minister actually disavowed himself, when he actually sold that property. That is very unclear. All of that examination, were it actually done by the ethics counsellor, is not available to the general public or to members of the House. It is exempt from public examination.

These are parts of the factual background of the situation which highlight the need for independence from counsellors if, most important, they are to have any credibility in the eye of the public or any credibility in the way members of the House conduct themselves and conduct their personal business affairs.

The Prime Minister made many promises to Canadians during his tenures as official opposition leader and Prime Minister, and during his ongoing attempt to build a legacy for himself.

As reported in a 1994 edition of the Ottawa *Citizen* the Prime Minister said that there could be no substitute for responsibility at the top. He indicated that he set the moral tone for the government and must make the ultimate decisions when issues of integrity and trust are raised.

Supply

Those words ring hollow today. When simple questions are posed to the Prime Minister in the Chamber he will not even dignify them with a response. He is completely backing away from his previous words, as we have seen him do on many occasions.

By appointing an ethics counsellor and then having that counsellor report only to him, the Prime Minister is so shallow and denigrates so much the entire idea of having an ethics counsellor that it further undermines public confidence. It drives even further underground the ability of the public to respect and have faith in public officials. That is perhaps what is most troubling of all about the subject matter.

There is a unique opportunity here for the Prime Minister not only to fulfil an electoral promise but to signal to Canadians that the Chamber can create a change and the public can once again have confidence in elected members. These are basic principles that should and could guide the Chamber in our future attempts to govern the country.

The ethics code and the ethics counsellor have lost credibility for reasons now very apparent to the Canadian public. The counsellor has lost the ability to report directly to the House and to report to the public on how the Prime Minister and ministers of the government conduct themselves. A higher standard has to be applied.

The argument of the Prime Minister and the government House leader that ultimately the Prime Minister reports directly to the House falls short. They left out important detail. The Prime Minister has to be responsible to the House. We have seen an utter and complete failure of the Prime Minister to be accountable and to be respectful of the House in the way he has conducted himself in these affairs.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the comments of the member from the Conservative Party. It was a character assassination or a witch hunt. He can confirm what I say by going back to *Hansard*. He went on and on with allegations that supposedly the Prime Minister said in a meeting to the representative from the bank, that he would like him to look favourably on the issue. Further the member said that he could not say what was said in that meeting. If they stand to state their position, let them state it firmly as they did during the election campaign.

The leader of the Conservative Party sent a letter; the leader of the Canadian Alliance Party sent a letter; and the ethics counsellor responded to them. They did not let it go during the election, as they state here. They did not leave a cloud hanging over it. After the election they pulled it back. It continued. We can read in today's *Quorum* about the inquiry.

Supply

• (1310)

They are not being fair to the Canadian people by making these innuendos and allegations. They are not being fair by saying one thing one moment and contradicting it in the next moment. It is total hogwash.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the facts. Someone in the Prime Minister's Office denied that he in fact spoke to Mr. Beaudoin, president of the Business Development Bank. We know that happened. I may have characterized what took place, but we know that conversation happened. Only two people know what happened between those individuals, what transpired in that conversation.

The Prime Minister should come forward and tell us. He should be completely frank and open with Canadians. He has an opportunity to do that. There is nothing stopping the Prime Minister from telling us what transpired in his living room. If he has nothing to hide, if there is nothing that he is ashamed of as he so vehemently states outside the House, let him come forward and table what took place in his living room. Then we will have trust and we might have faith.

Excuse me if I am not completely enamoured with the argument that we should trust the Liberals. We have heard time and time again about the GST, about free trade and about what they would not do if they were elected to office. They have swallowed themselves whole on their promises time and time again.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I compliment the hon. member on his speech contrary to the position across the way and have a question for him.

If we in the House find or sense an ethical problem with a minister, in what way would the member propose that we get an investigation underway? In order to do so we seemingly have to make a nuisance of ourselves in the House of Commons and raise the issue to such an extent that we force the government or use some other means.

My question relates to the fact that the ethics counsellor reports to the Prime Minister. How is it possible that anybody else other than the Prime Minister can get an investigation underway on the ethics of ministers?

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the thrust of the entire debate is how Canadians can have faith in an individual appointed by and reporting only to the same person who is the subject of the inquiry in terms of conduct. There is absolutely no credibility whatsoever.

I refer to a quote from Gordon Robertson, a widely respected retired clerk of the Privy Council, the head of the Public Service of Canada who served under Prime Ministers King, St. Laurent, Pearson and Trudeau. This is what he had to say about the ethical standards of the Prime Minister, as reported in the Toronto *Star* of

January 6: "What happened in Shawinigan never would have met the standard set in Pearson's code of ethics. I should know. I drafted it. This Prime Minister has lowered the bar".

Is the lasting legacy of the Prime Minister that he lowered the ethical standards and lowered the bar on how a prime minister conducts himself in office? If that is the legacy he wants, he has it right now.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this being my first speech of the 37th parliament I should like to make some brief introductory remarks. First I thank God for the privilege of being here. I thank my wife and family for their unending support over the last seven years of political life. I thank the voters of Kootenay—Columbia who returned me to the House with a 68% margin, but I am concerned about the other 32% and I commit to them my unwavering support.

• (1315)

I thank my dedicated campaign team. I also thank my staff who have consistently served me over the last two terms and who are continuing into the third term. If they are listening today I hope they do not give up on me yet.

On the topic at hand, I am going to be referring the Liberal members to a person who is a former provincial ombudsman. He was a former land use commissioner and a former deputy attorney general. I consider this person to be an expert.

Apparently the Prime Minister also considered this person to be an expert because he selected this man over the incumbent Ted McWhinney who was the sitting member for Vancouver Quadra. Ted McWhinney was a constitutional expert and a foreign affairs consultant with a broad range of contacts. He served two terms very honourably in the Chamber. He was well respected and just an all around decent guy.

If the Prime Minister is going to dump a person like that, clearly he must have in mind the calibre of the individual that he is bringing in. The member who came in, as I say, is a former ombudsman, a former deputy attorney general and a former land use commissioner for the province of British Columbia. If the Prime Minister needs to know much more about the things that we have been discussing today, and how these things should be handled, all he needs to do is consult one of his newest MPs, the new member for Vancouver Quadra.

I give credit to Vaughn Palmer who is a reporter and who asked a number of questions of the new member for Vancouver Quadra. As he pointed out, the member needs little introduction to B.C. The positions he has held give him a unique perspective on the importance of independence and openness where elected office

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holders are accused of wrongdoing, as has been the issue with the Prime Minister.

The reporter said:

I interviewed (this person) recently on Voice of B.C. on the Shaw Cable. To his credit, he didn't shirk at the comparison between the way things are handled here in B.C. and the way things should be handled in the case involving the Prime Minister.

The member for Vancouver Quadra stated:

B.C. is often looked at as the neanderthal of politics but B.C. on a number of fronts is a leader in new government. . . We've led the country in conflict-of-interest legislation. . . Our special prosecutor legislation is unique in Canada and in the Commonwealth.

When questioned on what specifically could Ottawa learn from B.C., the new member for Vancouver Quadra answered:

One of them is a conflict-of-interest commissioner who is a legislative officer rather than part of the executive of the government and therefore independent of the executive. We've gained good experience, proud experience and the federal government may want to look at that.

He went on to say:

One of the most difficult things for politicians to understand and senior bureaucrats to understand is that there is a line between the political and the administrative. When a politician speaks across that line to a senior bureaucrat, there is a danger of miscommunication and what may, perhaps, look like urging on behalf of a constituent might be taken as political direction to deviate from the duty of administrative fairness.

He further stated:

The more senior the politician, the greater the need to be explicit about what the rules are and what the communication is about.

The most senior politician in Canada is the incumbent Prime Minister who hand-picked the member for Vancouver Quadra.

The reporter asked:

This case you are talking about where a senior person calls a public official on behalf of a constituent sounds an awful lot like the Prime Minister three times lobbying the federal business development bank on behalf of a constituent who wanted a loan.

The reply from the member for Vancouver Quadra in January of this year was "Yeah, I don't think any of us should be comfortable with the confusion and the public unease that it caused".

This is a quotation and I want to underline this. He further stated:

This is something we've learned earlier in B.C., that you need to make the rules very explicit, that you need to make the review processes very transparent and independent. I think this is something I can take with experience to Ottawa.

That being the case, and with there being a number of speaking slots open for the balance of the afternoon, I would naturally assume that the federal Liberals would be happy to have this member in the speaking rotation.

• (1320)

I think he would be able to bring a lot of light to this issue and speak directly to the Liberal members across so that they could understand what the issue is about. Clearly to this point they have not understood.

Yesterday I asked the industry minister the following question:

Mr. Speaker, Justice Ted Hughes, the B.C. conflict of interest commissioner, has established this rule for the ministers of B.C.: "A minister must not make personal representations on behalf of a constituent to—a commissioner, board, agency, or other tribunal established by the government."

The Prime Minister obviously violated this principle in lobbying the president of the Business Development Bank on behalf of Yvon Duhaime.

Rather than answering the question directly, the industry minister attempted to deflect it. He said:

Mr. Speaker, the ethics counsellor has written recently to the Leader of the Opposition and has responded to the most recent correspondence from the Leader of the Opposition. He has made crystal clear that all these matters, all the allegations being raised today, have been addressed. There were no private benefit by the Prime Minister whatsoever and no conflict of interest.

The issue is who does that ethics counsellor answer to. If the ethics counsellor answered to the House there is no possible way the House would ever permit the ethics counsellor to say "We don't have any rules about someone actually trying to take direct influence on a member of a crown corporation so, therefore, I am exonerating him".

I am not questioning the ethics or the competence of the ethics counsellor. What I am questioning are the rules under which the federal ethics counsellor has been set up.

Under the British Columbia conflict of interest act, clause 14(1) says "There must be appointed a commissioner who is an officer of the Legislative Assembly".

That is the most important part but it goes further in paragraph two. It says:

On the motion of the Premier in the Legislative Assembly and on the recommendation of 2/3 of the members present, the Lieutenant Governor in Council must appoint the person so recommended to the office of commissioner.

The point is that in the province of B.C., he not only answers to the legislature in terms of his reporting, but clearly two-thirds of the legislature, the majority, would also be involved in setting the terms and conditions under which he is actually operating.

If we are ever going to re-establish the whole concept of trust, we cannot allow this situation to continue where we have the ethics commissioner reporting to his boss. If the standards are established by the Prime Minister, we end up with the kind of answer we got from the industry minister that I just quoted.

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If parliament is not supreme, then the prime minister is king, autocrat, dictator and supreme ruler. The issue here is accountability. It would be my hope that the member for Vancouver Quadra can get these people to wake up, smell the coffee and realize that it is an issue of accountability. Furthermore, it is an issue of the government keeping its word that it put down in black and white in the 1993 campaign.

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for bringing the debate around to something a bit less over the top and more rational. I am very pleased to have a chance to comment on his remarks.

He made reference to the framework under which the ethics counsellor operates. Other speakers have questioned whether or not such a framework exists and suggested they could not find it. I have a copy obtained from the Internet this morning. The document is public and the rules under which the ethics counsellor operates are quite public and available. One could argue that those rules should be expanded, but in any event what is there is there and available for all to see.

The member opposite, and other members have also done this, moved from referring to an ethics counsellor to an ethics commissioner. There is a difference between the two. It is important to realize the distinction. The Liberal Party's commitment in 1993 was for an ethics counsellor.

• (1325)

I submit to members that this is not necessarily an ethics enforcer or an ethics policeman, but rather a counsellor who will counsel officeholders.

Does the member opposite not think there is at least room for disagreement here or misunderstanding? Officeholders rely on a counsellor. We would not be as forthcoming to a policeman as we would a counsellor. The counselling function is very important. We may need a policeman, but a counsellor we have.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I do not take the member's comments as splitting hairs. Clearly there is a difference between a counsellor and a commissioner.

However, the words in the motion were lifted directly out of the promise that the Liberals made in 1993. However, the promise was not only about an independent ethics counsellor. Therefore, I agree that there is a difference. However, I give him the last five words "will report directly to parliament". Clearly they have not done that and as a result, unfortunately the Prime Minister is under a cloud because he is the highest politician in the land. Unfortunately, if he is under a cloud, every other politician is also under a cloud.

What would work to his benefit is to simply follow through on the promises that he authored and he spoke about. He stood in front of the television cameras with his red book and said that people could go to the red book, however many days after he was elected, and see what he had done.

We are saying fine, we are going to the red book and we want this put in place. If the ethics counsellor was answerable to parliament, we and perhaps the people of Canada would have some confidence would have some confidence in the Prime Minister.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my people back home for having elected me for the last 27 years, not only here, but at home also.

What is happening with this debate on the ethics counsellor is reflecting on every member of parliament on both sides of the House.

In the 1993 red book it was stated: "The erosion of competence seems to have many causes. Some have to do with the behaviour of certain elected politicians, others with an arrogant style of political leadership".

During the selection of any officer presiding over the ethics of the House should that person be selected by this House? Should that person be selected by an independent committee of credible people on both sides of the House? Should the person not be reporting back to this House, not just to one person, so we can bring some credibility back to the House of Commons on both sides of the House? Could the member comment on that.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with the respected member of this chamber. The province of Alberta act says: "There shall be appointed as an officer of the legislature by the lieutenant governor in council, on the recommendation of the legislative assembly, an ethics commissioner to carry out those duties and functions".

The province of Ontario's act says "There shall be an Integrity Commissioner who is an officer of the Assembly".

I recognize the difference between counsellor and commissioner. However, when we look at the standards of these ethics commissioners, we see that there should never be a situation where we have the highest ranking politician in Canada twisting the arm of the president of the federal Business Development Bank, who he appoints, who he can fire, and indeed we suspect did fire. It casts aspersions on all of us.

Clearly, if the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario can get their acts together, what is holding up the federal government from simply getting its act together and getting all of us out from under the cloud which the Prime Minister has put us under?

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Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to speak to this issue. I too would like to thank the 39,000 people who voted for me in the last election. I would also like to thank them for the 70% plus vote we received.

• (1330)

I guess it is due to the common sense of the common people in British Columbia who look for a relatively conservative type vote, and I do thank them for that.

I would also like to thank one of the individuals who has been a big part of my life in politics and a good person to bounce issues off and that is my mother, who is watching in Chester, Nova Scotia.

I want to talk about the ethics counsellor and how individuals in the country or in the House of Commons initiates an investigation by this individual, because therein I think lies part of the problem that we face.

The ethics counsellor is supposed to be, in my mind, independent of the executive, which he is not. He reports to the Prime Minister. This individual should be looking at the ethics, the morality and the issues facing members of parliament, but he is not. He reports on ministers of the government who report to the Prime Minister. This individual should be interviewed by a committee of the House, short listed and selected by members of a committee of the House. He is not. He is basically selected by the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister says that he has drawn counsel from the official opposition leader on the appointment, but basically that is not the case. It is "Hi, how are you doing, thank you, good-bye". What is presented on one side is not reality.

The necessity of having an individual who is independent of the executive and who will report on even more than ministers is obvious.

I will go back to the issue I first introduced, which is, how is it possible for an individual, like myself for instance, to initiate an investigation when I feel something has happened that is unethical. For example, during the election the current Minister of Citizenship and Immigration basically said that members of the Canadian Alliance were Holocaust deniers, racists and bigots.

In my opinion, not only is that a slanderous comment from a minister of the government, but it is a comment that should have been challenged by an individual. The Prime Minister should have dealt with it but he did not. Instead, he has taken it upon himself to leave that minister in that position.

I have heard from thousands if not tens of thousands of people on the issue. They are all concerned about the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and her ethical standards of saying such a thing

about so many Canadians. The idea of Holocaust denier offended so many people that there was a great call for her resignation.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: But she was re-elected.

Mr. Randy White: A member across the way said that she was re-elected. Well there were tens of thousands of people who were concerned about the comment.

Where do people or members of parliament go when such a slanderous, demeaning comment is made? They can come into the House and complain about it as much as they want, but with a majority government it will basically laughed at them. They can go to the Prime Minister but he will only say that if he gives it to the ethics counsellor that person might come back and say that something is wrong and then he would be embarrassed. He will not do that. Why should he embarrass himself?

The control and the jurisdiction that the Prime Minister has over the ethics counsellor is totally inappropriate. It would never exist in any normal organization. We have a minister who, in my opinion, has a lack of ethics that should be challenged, and people want it challenged, but there is no avenue to do so because the Prime Minister would see it as a problem for himself, a problem for his cabinet.

• (1335)

Therein lies the problem. If that individual did not report to the executive but reported to the House of Commons in general, I would bet my bottom dollar that minister would be up for investigation now.

The way the whole ethics problem in the House of Commons is handled is totally inappropriate. It should be a matter of ethics for all members of parliament on this side and that side, not just ministers.

We have heard a lot about the Prime Minister and his flirtation with money for the last few years. People are speaking about that today but I guess the same problem exists. Why would the Prime Minister appoint the ethics counsellor to investigate the Prime Minister? How naive would anybody be to think that the Prime Minister would even permit that? That will not happen. That is why the whole situation has to be reviewed.

One of the members on the opposite side said there was a difference in that he is an ethics counsellor and not an ethics commissioner. An ethics counsellor counsels. He is not an enforcer yet he should be. If the problem is that they cannot understand the difference between names and roles then we should do away with the ethics counsellor and bring in an ethics commissioner who does not report to the executive but reports to the House of Commons.

It is simple. To suggest for a moment that the real problem is the difference in a name between counsellor and commissioner is

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assuming that we on this side of the House and the rest of Canadians are just plain stupid. The real problem is that there is no chance on earth that the Prime Minister will allow an investigation of ethics of his ministers, members or himself, because he would bear the political outfall from that.

The position is a plain waste of time. As much as we would like to talk about having a person do one thing or another, we are really wasting our time. If we cared about ethics in the country and in the House on the part of all members, we would concentrate first on an ethics commissioner, shortlisted, hired by a committee of the House of Commons and reporting to the House on any issue not passed on a motion of the majority. Then again the majority government would get to pooh-pooh all investigations of the majority government and allow them or even push them all on the opposition. There has to be some other mechanism to kick in an investigation by this new position.

I want to summarize two things. First, the current Minister of Citizenship and Immigration undertook a particular and devastating ethical error and still sits in her job unaccountable for it. Second, we cannot make ministers or anybody else in the House accountable to a position that reports to the Prime Minister. That has to change.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I support the motion put forward by the opposition leader in the House today and the comments by the Canadian Alliance about the importance of ethics and accountability.

I want to ask a question of the former House leader of the Reform Party about the message it conveyed when members of his party like the deputy House leader spoke often about parliamentary pensions and pigs going to a trough and then after the election did a total flip flop and bought back into the plan.

• (1340)

I am just wondering whether he would agree that she should follow the precedent of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and resign her seat, in other words be voluntarily recalled, go back to her riding and consult her voters through a byelection. It seems to me that would be the proper way in terms of ethics and in terms of accountability. Otherwise, how can an opposition party criticize the government for the lack of ethics when its own ethical standards in terms of accountability are also tarnished?

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question because I think it involves everybody in the House of Commons, which was the basis of my thesis in the first place.

When there are questions about whether or not something is ethical, they deserve to be answered regardless of the particular situation. The House of Commons should have a mechanism to challenge ethics, not just for ministers but for all members, including myself, on things we have done or failed to do.

However, the problem here is that there is no mechanism to undertake these kinds of things. We could not possibly leave these kinds of questions to an ethics commissioner for those folks across the way. For goodness sake, they have a majority government and we all know what happens in that situation. They out vote everybody else. They could charge, for political reasons, everybody over on this side and win all of those charges.

It is a question that has to be worked out. I think all members should be under the watchful eye of an ethics commissioner.

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have to agree with what I heard in the hon. member's speech. I also heard complaints about the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration with regard to some of her comments during the campaign. The ethics counsellor could be an avenue where that could be addressed.

I also understood the member to say that an ethics commissioner is already in place in British Columbia. Did this position come into place after the NDP were caught raiding the charities, filtering the money out of that and using it during its campaigns? If so, it is a good example of why we do need that here in Ottawa.

My understanding of the way it is set up now is that it is almost like asking Frank James to look after Jesse James or Bonnie to look after Clyde.

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Speaker, I do not know when the ethics commissioner was appointed in British Columbia. However, no matter when he was appointed, I have not seen many ethics in the government of British Columbia for a number of years.

We will be throwing out the NDP very shortly. That is one of the good blessings of elections. Perhaps then, once again British Columbia will lead the country in the economy.

Even if an ethics commissioner is in place, as we have in British Columbia, it does not guarantee an ethical government. However, at least an ethics commissioner will bring issues to the public and then the decision will be made at the polls as to whether or not justice is done.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, with respect and with deference, I wonder if the member would answer the question I asked. I asked him whether the ethical thing for the deputy leader of the Canadian Alliance Party to do, because of her decision after the election to buy back into her pension plan after promising not to, a fundamental commitment that she made, would be to voluntarily resign and face her electorate in a byelection like the member for Hamilton East did on the GST issue?

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the NDP is trying to degrade the discussion.

If we want to talk about ethics, I only need to look to my left down here at the NDP and I can really spend all day talking about ethics or the lack thereof.

Mr. Steve Mahoney (Mississauga West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not often that I get a chuckle out of things that are said over there, but it is interesting that the former speaker accused one of the NDP members of degrading the discussion. All we have seen in this House, and once again we see today by putting this motion forward—

• (1345)

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am the former House leader, not the former Speaker. I came this close to Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): So noted.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Mr. Speaker, I will refer to him as the person who just finished speaking. Is that any better?

Never mind Jesse James or whatever that was. It is like Homer looking after Bart Simpson over there. We are seeing that on an ongoing basis.

I want to address the issue that the person who just finished speaking brought up. It is the issue of comments made during the election by one of my colleagues, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Is it not interesting to note that when comments are made outside of this place there is no legal protection for any member? If the party opposite was so incensed in its rather thin skinned approach to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, who was at the time a candidate for re-election for the Liberal Party, why did it not simply do something about it? The comment was not made under the protection of the House of Commons. That party has access and recourse to the legal system if its members feel they have been slandered in some way.

The comment that was made was based on the fact that over the years enough things have been said by people purporting to represent that party and its predecessor such that an image has been created within the broader public in Canada that it attracts people with some unusual, perhaps to be kind, fringe ideas.

I recall during the election campaign having a very fine gentleman representing the Alliance Party running against me in my riding of Mississauga West. He was a member of the Chinese community, in fact, the president of the Chinese Association of Mississauga. I remember how upset he was at an all candidates meeting about the comment that came from one Betty Granger, a candidate for that party, who talked about the Asian invasion.

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Members can imagine how my opponent, being of Asian extraction, reacted and how he felt in regard to that kind of insensitive comment. That is the problem and that is what the minister, the candidate at the time in Thornhill, was referring to. So if those members opposite want to say that she did not have a right to make those comments, I beg to differ, and they have a right to take action.

Let me share another example of what is, in my view, unethical behaviour, a statement that I am quite prepared to make either in this place or outside this place. I am referring to the current Leader of the Opposition who, when a member of the Alberta legislature, wrote a letter—he did not say this in the Alberta legislature—to the editor slandering a lawyer who was representing a person who had been charged, not yet convicted, with pedophilia.

The implication in the letter written by the Leader of the Opposition, the implication that people took, was that somehow this defence attorney was in support of pedophiles because he had the gall to represent someone who had been charged with a criminal act. Do members see the fundamental problem with that? He did not say it exactly. It was implied. The court seemed to agree that the implication was there because it forced the Leader of the Opposition into a settlement.

If the Leader of the Opposition was not afraid of having his day in court, why did he settle? I presume he received advice from his lawyers who told him he was in deep trouble and that he had better cut a deal, settle and get out.

• (1350)

The fundamental principle in our justice system is that whether we like the charge or not, whether or not in our opinion the person is as guilty as we can imagine, it is not up to him and it is not up to any one of us to sit in judgment of a fellow citizen who has been charged but has not yet had their day in court or had an opportunity to present a defence and tell his or her story.

That did not seem to matter to the then member of the Alberta legislature. He felt that it was very justifiable, outside of the protection of that chamber, to publicly castigate this person.

If we want to talk about ethics, I think it is indefensible for him to make that kind of assertion as someone who has tried to stand tall as a member of the Alberta legislature in a very important position, who I believe was a minister of labour, who certainly was a finance minister, who worked in that distinguished position in that distinguished facility and who was entrusted with the confidence of the people of his riding.

I do not know how anyone, including that particular member, can defend it. It grates on us a bit on this side of the House to see someone who actually did that stand here and lecture us about ethics. I do not know that they on that side understand the implications of the word.

S. O. 31

Then he left town and came to Ottawa as the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, leaving behind him a bill for the taxpayers as a result of the settlement that was made as a result of the letter that he wrote. As a result of the unethical practice of castigating a member of the bar in the province of Alberta and attacking that person with his personal views, he left behind an \$800,000 tab for the taxpayers in Alberta to pick up.

There is a former attorney general from Alberta in the House. I find it hard to believe that the hon. gentleman can stand with a straight face or can stomach the activity by the person who is now his leader.

To give members another example of this holier than thou populist prairie preacher who comes into the House of Commons pretending to be the new sheriff in town, pretending he is going to change the way we do things, this is the fellow—

Mr. Richard Harris: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point order. I strongly object to the characterizations of the member opposite, who is known in the House for his personal attacks during his speeches. I ask that he withdraw that sarcastic reference to our leader he just uttered.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): That is not necessarily a point of order, but on the other hand I would ask the hon. member for Mississauga West to be more judicious in his choice of words.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure which one of the sarcastic remarks he wants me to withdraw, so it is difficult for me to respond to that. The problem I have is that I am only telling the truth so it means that I cannot withdraw comments that are based on fact.

Let me also tell members about comments made by the Leader of the Opposition in the election. He informed the public that the seat he was running for had been voluntarily and cheerfully vacated by Mr. Jim Hart, who was the member of the day. He said that. It is in black and white. We all know he said it and the members opposite know he said it, only for us to find out at a later date that Mr. Hart was given \$50,000 in return for vacating his seat.

I found it interesting that the member for Wild Rose was quoted as saying "Fifty thousand dollars? That is an awful lot of bucks". He was pretty upset about that.

• (1355)

Those members who purport to tell us how we should behave in government paid off one of their members to open up a safe seat for their leader to run in. I think the Canadian people did judge. I found it interesting when I heard a member opposite, one who spoke earlier, say that we need to change this so the people of Canada could have confidence in the Prime Minister.

Our party has 172 seats in the country, with parliamentarians representing every province, every territory and every part of the

country. I will admit we are not as strong in some parts of the country as we would like, but we clearly have a larger majority. I believe the Canadian people showed their confidence in the Prime Minister and in the government. More important, they showed that they were not prepared to entrust the Canadian Alliance or any other party with the responsibility of governing.

Let me also say that it is very difficult for us to accept lectures from a party when its deputy leader decides, after having railed against gold plated pensions in this place, to invest \$89,000, magically turn that into a \$1 million asset and then say that she needs to take care of her family. The hon. member should have thought of that before she came in here with the pigs, the buttons and the snorting that went on in the most disgusting display that most of us have ever seen in this place.

Now we find out today that a second member, the member for Medicine Hat, has invested \$50,000 to buy back in. This is what he said in an interview from Ottawa: "I probably cannot square it. We will try to do our best to explain it".

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I know that in a former life as Deputy Speaker you used to hold an awful lot of us to the issue of relevance. I do not find any relevance in what this member is talking about.

The Speaker: I know that after question period the hon. member for Mississauga West will have nine minutes remaining. I am sure he will point out in the course of those nine minutes the relevance of the statements he is making to the motion before the House dealing with a statement about the ethics commissioner being responsible to parliament. I am sure we will hear from the hon. member for Mississauga West as to relevance later this afternoon.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Aileen Carroll (Barrie—Simcoe—Bradford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand to congratulate the Hon. Minister of the Environment for being the first Canadian to be elected as president of the governing council of the United Nations Environment Program, UNEP.

UNEP is a forum for governments to tackle critical environmental issues. Canada is now positioned to become a leader in developing the international environmental agenda for the next two years.

In the same forum scientists warned that greenhouse gases that have been locked in the Arctic's permafrost for millennia are now being released because of global warming. Damage to the perma-

frost will unleash enormous environmental harm, thus the need for UNEP to attempt a speedy ratification of the 1997 Kyoto protocol.

Canada, as a signatory and now positioned to be a world leader, must demonstrate that we are working diligently to honour our commitments made in Kyoto.

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EARL McCUTCHEON AND ROSS WEAVER

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sergeant Earl McCutcheon from my riding of St. Albert and Corporal Ross Weaver from Edmonton. They were recently awarded the Medal of Bravery by the Governor General for their heroic actions in Kosovo.

Sergeant McCutcheon and Corporal Weaver entered an undefined minefield to rescue an elderly civilian who had been seriously injured by stepping on a mine. Realizing that immediate care was required to save his life, the two officers cautiously made their way through the unmarked minefield, administered first aid and co-ordinated the evacuation of the victim to a hospital for intensive care that saved his life.

It is the heroic actions of our soldiers like Sergeant McCutcheon and Corporal Weaver that define Canada as a nation committed to peace and human rights. On behalf of the people of St. Albert, Edmonton, and indeed, on behalf of all Canadians, I thank them for acting selflessly in the face of danger. We can be proud of their dedication and service to our nation.

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● (1400)

SAFE DRINKING WATER

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to the Sierra Legal Defence Fund, most Canadian provinces and territories have inadequate laws to ensure the safety of our drinking water. The survey it conducted shows that regulations in four other Canadian jurisdictions are as bad or worse than those in Ontario prior to the Walkerton tragedy.

The situation calls for federal leadership. The Speech from the Throne contains a commitment to safeguard our freshwater supply. We have to move from non-binding drinking water guidelines to strong regulations to prevent toxic substances and waterborne contaminants resulting from industrial and agricultural operations from reaching the water supply.

Legally binding standards aimed at ensuring a safe drinking water supply for Canadians are needed from coast to coast.

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CATRIONA LEMAY-DOAN

Mr. Rick Laliberte (Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to recognize the accomplishments of Canada's best amateur athletes.

A world class Olympian is what Catriona LeMay-Doan of Saskatoon is today. The undisputed star of women's long track speed skating captured gold medals in both the 500 metre and 1,000 metre World Cup races held this past Saturday in the Netherlands.

The reigning Olympian speed skate champion in the 500 metres has won six of seven World Cup races this season in the 500 metres and on two occasions bettered her world record.

Training out of the Calgary Olympic Oval, which is still recognized as the best ice in the world, Ms. LeMay-Doan leads a strong Canadian speed skating team that is preparing for the 2002 winter games just one year away.

I congratulate Ms. LeMay-Doan for being an exceptional Canadian. We are all very proud of her and wish her the best in her future endeavours.

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Georges Farrah (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the few minutes I have at my disposal to draw attention to the exception results our government has had with its action aimed at economic recovery in the Gaspé and Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

The Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada announced on October 4, 2000, that a new regional office of the Economic Development Agency would be opening at Gaspé. It has been providing service since the fall to the Gaspé and Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

The performance of this new office over its first four months confirms without a doubt that it is an important tool in the regional economy.

In just a few months 50 new applications have been formally submitted, and decisions already reached on 18 of them. As a result the federal government has been able to contribute \$2 million, which has generated investments of \$5.2 million and created or maintained 233 jobs.

From the number of applications it is clear that what our government is doing in the Gaspé and Îles-de-la-Madeleine region is appropriate. Its commitment to the future of the people of that region is equally clear.

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[English]

CUSTOMS

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, according to the *National Post* we have just learned that the Liberal government in the past couple of years has relaxed our customs regulations to the point that they have now become an honour system called CANPASS.

Private aircraft with less than 15 passengers are free to land at any airport without customs inspection merely by calling a central phone number to report their arrival. To make matters worse, the itineraries of these planes are considered confidential information by Nav Can so customs is truly working blind.

With regulations this loose Canada will quickly become the number one destination for organized cartels and their smuggling of drugs, guns and human beings.

The American government is so concerned with Canada's sieve-like borders that it is now considering the placement of troops along our border. It has no alternative, since drug cartels can simply load up, fly to Canada and distribute south of the border. Does it honestly make sense to the minister of customs that we do not search international flights?

The solution is simple. CANPASS must be scrapped immediately. Anything less is not only unacceptable but a dangerous threat to all Canadians.

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[Translation]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February is an important month to me and to many Canadians.

As the House is aware, it has been officially designated Black History Month. This is an opportune time for all Canadians to think about the important contributions of black Canadians to the development of the Canadian identity and to the realization of an open society focussed on the individual.

[English]

February also presents an ideal opportunity to highlight a book which has recently been published and is entitled *Millennium Minds: 100 Black Canadians*. Written by Ottawa author Patricia Holas, this beautiful photo biographical book draws the profiles of men and women in black communities across Canada who have contributed or are still contributing with both passion and pride to the diversity of Canadian culture and to our country's evolution.

I congratulate Patricia Holas for an outstanding accomplishment and best wishes to all for a great month of black history.

* * *

• (1405)

[Translation]

CLONING

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with human cloning the topic of the day, and countries like Great Britain, the United States, France and Germany drafting legislation to cover practices in this matter, Canada cannot manage to even produce a bill or initiate debate.

Cloning is a serious matter raising fundamental issues about the future of humanity. This sort of thing should not be discussed in secret but rather in the House of Commons.

For five years I have been asking the government to act on the issue, and the minister says he is still thinking. While the federal government is thinking, other countries are acting and changing their laws to permit human cloning for therapeutic and scientific reasons.

This government's inaction, lack of transparency and lack of initiative put Canada once again dangerously close to missing the boat.

* * *

ALEXANDRE LAFLEUR

Ms. Hélène Scherrer (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me first to sincerely thank the people of my riding of Louis-Hébert for according me the honour of representing them in Ottawa.

In addition, I would like to congratulate a young student in Sainte-Foy, Alexandre Lafleur, who is studying natural science at the CEGEP there. He is going on the team Canada trip to China today, sponsored by the pharmaceutical and telecommunications sectors.

This will be a unique experience for this young man and an honour for us to be represented by Mr. Lafleur, nicknamed the "whiz kid" by Quebec City's paper *Le Soleil*.

I wish Alexandre, an excellent trip.

In closing, I invite my colleagues in the House of Commons to visit the Quebec City region during the carnival, which ends this weekend. There will be the sculptures, the ice palace, hooch filled walking sticks and, of course, Bonhomme Carnaval.

[English]

KAMLOOPS, THOMPSON AND HIGHLAND VALLEYS

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, today I rise for the first time in the House of Commons to give thanks to my family, to my campaign workers and to the wonderful constituents of Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys. On November 27 they elected me as their representative by an overwhelming majority. I consider it a great honour and a great responsibility.

My riding is one of the most beautiful places in Canada, if not the entire world. It is an area of sage, pine forests, majestic mountains and clear, crisp rivers and lakes. My riding is home to Nancy Greene-Raine, a two time Olympic gold medalist and the Canadian female athlete of the century. It is also home to the Kamloops Blazers, winners of six WHL championships and three Memorial Cups. My riding is home to Helmeken Falls, It Lake, Shuswap Lake, Highland Valley Copper and some of the finest cattle ranches in Canada.

The fine people in my riding sent me here with a mandate and a very simple message for the Liberal government: Rome is burning and it is time to stop fiddling.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WEEK

Mr. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is International Development Week which brings together a wide range of public and private institutions, NGOs, government agencies such as CIDA, CUSO activities, CESO and the IDRC. They work in a dedicated way toward the belief that development and the reduction of poverty are absolutely essential to human rights, democracy and peace worldwide.

The Government of Canada recognizes this importance. In the budget of 2000 it increased spending for CIDA by \$435 million and the recent throne speech announces further increases to that budget.

This properly recognizes the balance between Canada's enjoyment of and success in the global economy and meeting its global social responsibilities.

* * *

NUCLEAR MISSILE DEFENCE

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with the election of George Bush in the United States it appears that the U.S. will move quickly to deploy the nuclear missile defence shield. It is planning to coerce an already gullible foreign affairs minister and an all too willing Liberal government into joining them.

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Last year my former colleague Mr. Gordon Earle of Halifax West stated that a top U.S. defence official was quoted as saying that for all practical terms Canada is the 51st state. The nuclear missile defence shield program will not only give away more of our sovereignty in terms of our defence policy, but it will also suck away hundreds of millions of dollars from our already financially starved armed forces. In the end it lead us down the path of nuclear missile madness and accelerate the arms race.

• (1410)

New Democrats across the country stress upon the government and all political parties that instead of shielding us from other countries, we should all work together toward a global initiative on world peace, human rights, decent labour standards, fair trade, world poverty and the environment.

* * *

[Translation]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this month marks the second anniversary of the agreement on social union.

Under that agreement, all the provinces, with the exception of Quebec, agreed to let the federal government intrude into provincial jurisdictions. Moreover, the throne speech recently confirmed the government's intentions to continue to infringe on provincial jurisdictions and, worse still, to build Canada by denying the Quebec reality.

The intergovernmental co-operation that the government raves about seems to apply only to provincial issues.

Indeed, the federal government has never agreed to co-operate with the provinces in its own areas of jurisdiction, such as monetary policy.

The choice that Quebecers will have to make is not between the status quo and sovereignty. They will have to choose between a Canadian state that is increasingly centralized and unitary, and the country of Quebec.

* * *

[English]

EAST COAST MUSIC AWARDS

Mr. Shawn Murphy (Hillsborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that this weekend the city of Charlottetown will be hosting the East Coast Music Awards. More than 1,200 delegates representing every facet of the music industry will be in Charlottetown for talent showcases, jam sessions, workshops and the nationally televised awards show.

The festival recognizes the finest singers, songwriters and musicians in the region. Since its creation in Halifax more than 10

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years ago, the East Coast Music Awards has grown into one of the biggest entertainment events in the country. The highlight of the weekend shall be the presentation of the director's special achievement award, being awarded this year to Anne Murray.

I congratulate the organizers of this event and I wish all participants, organizers and fans a most enjoyable and rewarding weekend.

* * *

HEATING FUEL REBATE

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are outraged. The government has so mismanaged the heating relief fund that multiple cheques are going to some households, prisoners are receiving the rebates and people who do not pay for heat are qualifying for heating relief. Yet Canadians who need the assistance to help combat the high cost of heating fuel are not receiving these funds.

How could the government have administered this program so poorly? Canadian taxpayers do not want to see their money being given to people who are not bearing the burden of high heating costs. The government has allowed all GST credit recipients to qualify for this relief, at a cost of \$1.3 billion. There is no connection between receipt of a GST rebate and entitlement to a heating fuel rebate.

The government has shown once again that it is governing by default. Could the government tell us why some people are receiving rebates when they are not paying heating fuel costs? All we are asking for here is a bit of common sense.

* * *

BRAS D'OR—CAPE BRETON

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise in the House today to thank the people of Bras d'Or—Cape Breton for electing me as their member of parliament. I extend a special thanks to my family for their love and support and to all those committed individuals who worked countless hours on my election campaign.

As the member for Bras d'Or—Cape Breton I will work to represent the needs of my constituents. I will be a strong voice on the issues of employment insurance and job creation. I will work toward a strong, thriving economy to ensure that our young people have a future on Cape Breton Island.

I look forward to working with and serving the people of Bras d'Or—Cape Breton and once again thank them for their support.

HEATING FUEL REBATE

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, here is another bit of brain surgery by the other side. We know the federal government is giving natural gas rebates. Are they based on the people who paid the bills in the first place? Nope. They are based on the 1999 GST rebate.

Who is getting these rebates? Why, federal prisoners who have not paid one cent in natural gas bills are getting the rebates. People who are out of the country are getting the rebates. People who are deceased are getting the rebates.

What is wrong with the government over there? Does it have no sense? Does it have no sense of responsibility at all?

* * *

• (1415)

[Translation]

AMERICONTACT 2001

Mr. Claude Drouin (Beauce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few moments to mention one of the many measures taken by our government to support exporters in their efforts to consolidate and diversify their export markets.

On January 22, the Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State for the Economic Development Agency of Canada announced a non refundable contribution of \$700,000 by the Government of Canada for an economic forum organized by Americontact 2001.

This international event, which will take place from April 3 to April 5, 2001, will be attended by business people from the greater Quebec City region and by financial partners from the 34 countries that will participate in the Summit of the Americas.

This is a unique opportunity to promote the commercial, scientific and industrial value of the Quebec City-Chaudière-Appalaches region.

This is a clear commitment by our government toward the future of Quebec and Canada.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Prime Minister about his involvement in arranging \$2.35 million worth of immigrant investor funds for the Auberge Grand-Mère. I remind the House that the

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auberge had a golf course right next door to it, which the Prime Minister owned at the time. He said there was no conflict because the Quebec government administered that fund.

No such luck. In 1996 brokers decided where those immigrant investor funds were spent and the Prime Minister met with those brokers. Why is he denying the link between his meeting and those millions?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have explained all that very clearly to everybody. I receive visitors in my office. I receive all members who want to come and have a picture taken in my office. A group came, took a picture, and I never talk to anybody. I have nobody to take notes.

What surprises me is that for two elections the member was telling the people that she was holier than anybody else and that she would never accept a pension from anybody. Now she is elected and is entitled to a pension, she changes her mind. What about hypocrisy?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. We all want to hear the questions as well as the answers. I invite hon. members to restrain themselves while the questions are being put and the answers being given. The restraint must apply to both sides of the House.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I know they changed the ground rules on the pension, but we should not be surprised they change it on just about everything.

In fact, the Prime Minister just reiterated what he said:

I receive members of parliament from both sides every day at 3 o'clock (now it is for photos) and visitors also come to see me. . . We shake hands, discuss things for two or three minutes and then they leave. This visit was of the same nature.

Now it is for photos. I could only imagine how many the millions could have been raised if they had stayed for six minutes in his office.

The Prime Minister needs to clarify this point. Did he have more than one meeting with the immigrant investors?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I met them. I never had any other meeting. I do not remember the names of these people. I saw their picture later on.

I meet hundreds of people and I try to be nice with everybody, even if the hon. member comes to my office with some of her own electors.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): So, Mr. Speaker, here he is. He did not have relations with those people.

There is an unbelievable connection here with a meeting that he had with a representative of the immigrant investor fund and

money flowing to the Auberge Grand-Mère. He could try and trivialize it away, but during the election campaign he said "He has not invested a damn cent in that". Surely he must know who he is talking about.

The fact is we now know that \$2.35 million was invested and funnelled into his own riding. I am sure the Prime Minister would never try to mislead Canadians during an election campaign, so why did he deny that that money was ever invested?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister would have no reason to know what the immigrant investor fund is investing or not investing. It is administered by the government of Quebec, and the member ought to know that.

Today is February 8. As recently as January 29, the ethics counsellor wrote to the Leader of the Opposition in a two page missive in answer to the latest allegations: "Therefore it has been my position that the Prime Minister had no financial links with either the golf course or the auberge". It is time to stop these scandalous attacks on the Prime Minister.

• (1420)

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the new member for Vancouver Quadra says it is dangerous when a politician bends the rules to benefit a constituent.

When asked specifically about the Prime Minister lobbying the president of the BDC, the member for Vancouver Quadra said "I do not think any of us should be comfortable with the confusion and the public unease that it caused".

I have a question for the Prime Minister. Who is right on this? Is it his new member, the former ombudsman for British Columbia, or him?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will tell the member who is right. Who is right is the gentleman, and the only gentleman, who has done an objective analysis of this issue.

He is not part of a partisan campaign. He was not part of the same nonsense that was raised during the election and failed to persuade the people of Canada. That is the ethics counsellor who has answered every question with a clear statement that the Prime Minister has acted with integrity. That is who is right.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I wonder what the minister thinks of his colleague. The member for Vancouver Quadra went on to say that a case like this should be put into the hands of an independent conflict commissioner and a special prosecutor.

Why will the Prime Minister not allow for a truly independent investigation into his dealings in Shawinigan?

Oral Questions

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this matter has been looked into by an independent ethics counsellor.

What has not been looked into by an independent counsellor is the fact that the leader of the Alliance has personally benefited from public funds to the tune of \$800,000. That has never been looked into but may in a court of law in the province of Alberta.

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[Translation]

FOOD INSPECTION

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said in the House, and I quote “We have one of the best food safety systems in the world—”

This morning, we learned that not only does the auditor general have doubts about this, but the agency’s even said they are unable to say when food inspection problems will be corrected.

Does the minister still stand by his statement about the superiority of our inspection system, or does he intend to take the necessary corrective action?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have always said, we appreciate the comments and the review by the auditor general.

I believe the hon. member was referring to a specific area. The auditor general was concerned with structural things. I think he referred to such things as paint chips and rooms in facilities that needed to be painted.

I assure the hon. member and all Canadians again that food provided to Canadians through our food processing and manufacturing facilities is safe.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the system is so good that the agency spokesperson tells us he does not even know when it will be possible to correct the problems and that they will not be corrected at all unless 500 inspectors are hired to do the work properly.

Does the minister in fact intend to hire the 500 inspectors that would make the system the best in the world, as he describes it, when this is not at all the case right now, and agency officials are themselves questioning the quality of the job they are doing?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think it is raising the level of confidence or assuring the level of confidence in our food system,

which is there as our track record has shown very clearly, when the hon. member makes those type of statements.

As a government we have put many more millions of dollars in the last year into the food safety system through the Department of health and through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. We are constantly adding resources and personnel to continue to assure Canadians that our food system is one of the safest systems in the world.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general has pointed out that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has not been doing its job properly. Regardless of what the minister has to say over and over again about our system being one of the best in the world, this is of great concern to all Canadians.

My question for the Minister of Agriculture is this: Does the minister seriously believe his words are reassuring to consumers when 75% of problem cases relating to cross contamination are still not being settled within 12 to 28 months, and the agency spokesperson cannot give any guarantee that this will change in the coming year? How can he continue saying the same thing when the experts are saying something that is virtually the opposite?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify by suggesting to the hon. member again that he not make statements which lower the confidence of Canadians in our food system.

When the production or safety of food in a plant in Canada is found to be in danger, the production of that product is stopped immediately. If he would read the whole section of the report, the auditor general refers to such things as chipping paint or something like that in a room. The operation is given a period of time to correct that. If it is not done over a period of time—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Roberval.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can the minister be so confident? How can he keep on saying there are no problems in the system, that it is one of the best in the world? Our auditor general is also one of the best in the world.

He says that the government and the agency are not doing their job. Why should we believe the minister under these circumstances, when even the experts at the agency are saying that the problem would not be settled with 500 more inspectors, even in a year. He should open his eyes before something happens.

Oral Questions

[English]

● (1430)

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat. When the auditor general points out situations like this one, which is his job, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and every other ministry move to correct them and to find the resources as quickly as possible.

However, I repeat. The best statement about the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the work it does is the track record of the safety of food in Canada, and it is second to none.

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TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that tobacco kills. That is why the government spends taxpayer money on anti-smoking campaigns.

Tomorrow the Prime Minister goes to China. He will bring with him his toothbrush, his pyjamas, and a couple of tobacco companies.

Why does the government think that selling toxic products to Canadian children is bad but selling the same lethal product to Chinese children is perfectly all right? Is that not the height of hypocrisy?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, selling tobacco is not illegal in Canada; nothing is illegal. We have some farmers in Canada who produce that product and would like to sell their product.

They asked the government of Ontario to be members of the delegation and the government accepted putting them on the delegation to go with team Canada.

I think when we can help farmers in Canada it is our duty to do so.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, why does the Prime Minister want Canada to be a merchant of death? Listen to this quote: "The fight against tobacco use is global. It is hoped that other countries will benefit from Canada's approach".

Who said that? The Minister of Health said it last summer. By promoting tobacco in China the government is doing exactly the opposite of what the health minister advocates. Every year 800,000 Chinese die from tobacco related illnesses. How many more is the Prime Minister willing to see die?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they are saying that we should let farmers produce tobacco for Canadians, but we should not let farmers produce tobacco for the Chinese. I understand now why the Canadian people think that party is completely irrelevant.

ETHICS COUNSELLOR

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister consulted the ethics counsellor in January 1996 to advise that no payment had been received for the Prime Minister's shares in the Grand-Mère golf club. Less than 90 days later the Prime Minister intervened with the Business Development Bank, lobbying for a loan for the Auberge Grand-Mère which adjoins and enhances that golf course. With his ownership of the golf club shares still in question, how can the Prime Minister possibly claim that there was no conflict of interest?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to the question raised by the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, let me read from the letter dated January 29, 2000. It states:

My conclusion, on November 21, 2000, was that "the Prime Minister, in calling the President of the BDC, did not violate any rule which has been established by the Canadian Government in terms of Ministers dealing on behalf of constituents with government agencies".

The ethics counsellor went on to say that the ownership of those properties were transferred in 1993 before the now member for Shawinigan became Prime Minister of Canada.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is familiar with Mr. Justice Ted Hughes who headed the Vander Zalm inquiry in British Columbia. The Prime Minister himself named him to head the APEC inquiry. He is a man of unquestioned integrity and independence.

The Prime Minister wants this auberge issue settled. Would he agree to name Mr. Justice Ted Hughes to examine all the evidence, determine if there has been a conflict of interest in this case and report to the House of Commons? This deserves an answer from the Prime Minister of Canada.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. I would caution the House that I think booing is quite inappropriate.

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the leader of the Conservative Party admitted to the press that he had absolutely no proof of wrongdoing and told the journalists "Let's leave it that I am fishing at this stage". Yes he is, and he has come up empty once again.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL LOANS

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I questioned the logic behind the Liberal

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government's \$500 million low interest loan to Brazil because of Brazil's policy to promote its aerospace industry with massive subsidies.

The Minister of Finance told the House that Brazil never exercised that option. However, page 33 of his department's 1999-2000 performance report states that Canada did indeed lend the money to Brazil and that Brazil paid it back along with \$20 million of interest.

Was the finance minister talking about an additional loan he was making to Brazil, or would he just admit he was wrong?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the loan that is being raised, in terms of Brazil, on behalf of all the countries was made not by individual countries but by the Bank for International Settlements. It is the one that provided the loan and a number of G7 countries guaranteed parts of the loan. Canada guaranteed \$500 million of that loan. The loan was paid back. The guarantee was never exercised, as I said yesterday.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I guess we should send back the \$14 million in interest that we received as a result of that loan.

Does the finance minister not understand the irony of the situation of loaning money to Brazil which allowed them to subsidize their aerospace industry to the detriment of Canadian companies such as Bombardier?

Liberal bungling may have put Canada on both sides of this trade war.

Why were the Liberals so careless about protecting Canada's interests? Were they too busy playing international boy scout to remember their national responsibilities here at home?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. member ask his researcher to look it up. The loan was not made by Canada. The loan was made by the Bank for International Settlements. What Canada did was to provide a guarantee, for which we were paid. The guarantee was never exercised. I said that yesterday and I am saying it again today. That is the fact.

• (1435)

More important, to the point about Canada's international responsibilities, we are a G7 country. As a G7 country we will exercise those responsibilities on behalf of the vast assembly of nations. At the same time we are capable of—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Mercier.

[Translation]

SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Canada is currently negotiating a free trade agreement with governments of the three Americas, which will affect the daily lives of Quebecers.

People want to know what is contained in the working documents in order to debate them. Did the Prime Minister himself not say the following before the OAS on Monday, and I quote: "Canada believes that openness and transparency are vital to building public acceptance".

Along the same lines as his statement, will the Prime Minister undertake to make public the working documents, before the Summit of the Americas is held, as people are asking him to?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I explained to the House a few days ago that Canada had made its position known. It made it public, put it on the Internet, and it is accessible to everyone.

The positions of the other governments are a matter of discretion for them and for them to make public if they so wish.

I think the United States has decided to make its position public, but the position of other countries cannot be made public if they do not want it to be.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let the Prime Minister understand me clearly. We are not asking for the positions of the other countries, but the working documents that are used in preparing the positions each of them will be negotiating.

We also want the Prime Minister to promise to debate these documents in the House and for there to be no ratification without parliament's approval.

[English]

Mr. Pat O'Brien (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member should know that there has been a collective process put in place to receive written submissions from different civil organizations in the province of Quebec.

Indeed every day on our website the comments of Canadians are welcome. Canada is again showing leadership in encouraging other countries to welcome the participation of their civil societies.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there has been another disturbing allegation involving

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foreign affairs officials covering up crimes within our country. In this case officials are accused of covering up several cases of foreign diplomats smuggling children into Canada, abusing them as underpaid embassy domestics and sexually assaulting them.

Does the minister have any evidence of such incidents? Has he asked his officials to investigate these allegations, and if not, why not?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have asked for an investigation of these allegations. I expect it to be part of the report I receive from the department concerning the situation with respect to the Russian traffic accident, as well as other incidents where diplomatic immunity has been sought with respect to incidents that have occurred in Canada.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for that answer.

This is a serious allegation. We know that in the past there have been diplomats who have engaged in behaviour that has harmed Canadian citizens. This is a different situation. We are talking about people who are not Canadian citizens being abused, but nevertheless it is extraordinarily serious.

Can the minister give his assurance to the House that if diplomats are found engaging in this kind of activity they will be expelled from Canada?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, incidents, such as the one the hon. member has pointed out, may not be affecting Canadian citizens but nevertheless represent activities which are not permissible under Canadian law and which are not condoned in any way by Canadian values and certainly not by the Canadian government. Those people should be asked to return home.

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[Translation]

CINAR

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in response to a question put to him on Tuesday, the Minister of National Revenue stated in this House that, in addition to voluntary disclosures and decisions based on the discretionary authority of the Minister of National Revenue, there were, and I quote, “many more ways of resolving files”.

• (1440)

Could the minister tell us which other ways, in addition to voluntary disclosure and a discretionary decision, can be used to settle a case?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are two important factors here. First, I cannot comment on any file—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. Martin Cauchon: I would like to be able to finish answering the question.

Section 241 is very clear on that. The second important element, which I have mentioned several times, is that the Minister of National Revenue must not get involved in any of the investigations that may be conducted by the department.

Third, there are indeed various ways used by the investigations branch to settle all the issues. It goes without saying that a number of investigations must be conducted. The hon. member of the opposition should look up the Income Tax Act.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is something interesting about these investigations. In a press release issued on January 18, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency indicated that there is only one way to settle a case, that is through voluntary disclosure, and this option is only available if there are no investigations or proceedings.

How does the minister explain that the agency for which he is responsible is contradicting him by saying that there is either voluntary disclosure or else an investigation followed, if necessary, by legal proceedings?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, generally speaking we look at the Income Tax Act.

There are indeed cases which may involve legal proceedings. Then there are other ones that may involve voluntary disclosure. There are a number of ways to deal with a file. Each case must be examined on its own merit. We must look at the global picture. Again, I would refer people, and particularly members of parliament, to the Income Tax Act.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Andy Burton (Skeena, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday the minister of Indian affairs stated that the Sagkeeng band was in third party management. What he neglected to say was that the first third party manager was fired on January 31 for reportedly contributing to the ongoing deficit problems on reserve and that the new managers are insensitive to the needs of the band members.

We have spoken with these band members and they are discouraged, fed up and feel complete mistrust for band leadership and Indian affairs.

When will the minister do the right thing by opening all of the Sagkeeng band books and initiating a full forensic audit?

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Hon. Robert Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the normal practice of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to work with first nation communities across the country in a situation where there is a deficit.

It is not new to any government in Canada to have a deficit. What we do is we work to build capacity in those communities in order to put the administrative finances in proper order. We are doing that in Sagkeeng. We do that in other communities. We are working very closely with them to build the capacity to run good, solid governments and to deliver services to their community members.

Mr. Andy Burton (Skeena, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear this response, but the Sagkeeng band of Manitoba has much to be financially accountable for. Band members have formally questioned the sincerity of the chief and council over a new school project. The general contractor has been forced into bankruptcy due to unpaid bills on this project.

The auditor general confirmed on Tuesday that Indian affairs has a poor educational funding record. Third party managers do little to address past wrongs.

Why will the minister not resolve this issue today and get the much needed school built?

Hon. Robert Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that we confront on a daily basis is the fact that first nation communities have the fastest growing population in all of Canada. With that comes a lot of financial issues and a lot of stress on the department of Indian affairs to keep up the building of schools right across the country.

If the member would look, it is a well known fact that this department spends some \$140 million a year in capital projects, many of them involving the building of new schools. We are looking at Sagkeeng to help them and we will continue to do that all across the country.

* * *

[Translation]

ROAD TRANSPORT

Mr. Raymond Lavigne (Verdun—Saint-Henri—Saint-Paul—Pointe Saint-Charles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

Since all studies to date have shown that the Champlain Bridge will not be able to handle the increased traffic between the South Shore and Montreal and that it is necessary to take some of the load off the bridge and to improve public transit across the river, could

the minister tell the House whether any money will be invested to follow up on the project for a light rail transit system on the bridge's ice control structure?

• (1445)

Hon. David Collette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question, which is an important one. The member for Brossard—La Prairie is also working very hard on this issue.

I am pleased to announce today that the Government of Canada will invest \$7 million in the preliminary design study required for a light rail transit system on the Champlain Bridge in Montreal.

This is an important step forward in this project, which is so vital to the economy of the greater Montreal area.

* * *

[English]

THE SENATE

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. As he knows there are now 12 vacancies in the Senate.

Since the government now has the majority in the Senate and there is no necessity to have immediate appointments, and since there is no election in the immediate future, will the Prime Minister, in the spirit of democratic reform, at least place a temporary moratorium on the appointment of new senators and instead contact the premiers and ask them to join him in beginning the process of abolition of the existing unelected, undemocratic and unaccountable Senate, which nobody in the country supports except the senators themselves?

The Speaker: Before the Prime Minister answers, I know that the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle is aware of the rules of the House that prohibit members from speaking disrespectfully of the other place and I know he would want to restrain himself in any subsequent question.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here in the House of Commons sometimes the interpretation of statements is stretched perhaps a bit and some people around me are telling me "Jean, he would like to go to the Senate".

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, drug, alcohol and solvent abuse are serious problems in many first nations communities. Treatment and healing centres are vitally important in the fight against substance abuse.

We now know that Health Canada knew about the mismanagement going on at the Virginia Fontaine Treatment Centre, long

before it became public, but kept signing the cheques. Meanwhile, other first nations were struggling to provide treatment and healing and could not get a dime from the department.

Could the health minister tell us why he waited until the mismanagement became public before he cut the funding? Why did he allow the waste of first nations health dollars to go on for so long?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the record is clear that as soon as it came to my notice there was any suggestion that public funds were being misused I did three things immediately.

First, I directed that a forensic audit take place. Second, I told lawyers for the government to go to court and ensure that we got every document we needed to trace the funds. Third, I directed that no further funds be paid to that centre until all outstanding questions were responded to.

The government believes strongly that all public moneys have to be accounted for carefully. I assure the House that we will do whatever is required to trace public spending at the centre.

* * *

PUBLIC WORKS

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, on August 17 last year, the minister of public works initiated a maritime helicopter program to replace Canada's outdated Sea Kings.

Canadians now know that the terms and conditions of the contract have the potential to eliminate key helicopter industry bidders. Could the minister explain to the House why he has chosen a restrictive procurement approach that will limit competition and could well predetermine who is awarded the contract?

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not agree with the premise to the hon. member's question.

We are now consulting with the industry on the procurement. It does the contrary to what the member claims. As a matter of fact it will allow a more open competition and more companies to participate. We will make sure to get a better price and better equipment and naturally protect the interests of Canadians who will be paying.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Sea King replacement program has already been the subject of one complaint to the Canadian International Trade Tribunal and could possibly face further legal challenges in the courts.

I do not have to tell the minister that helicopter industry stakeholders have suggested significant changes to the process or they are still awaiting various rulings concerning them from the government.

Oral Questions

• (1450)

What assurances could the minister of public works give the House today that not just delivery dates for the process will be made but that the process will—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the process will be open and transparent. What is more, we invite everybody to participate. Yes, there was one company that took us to the CITT and the case was dismissed.

We believe we have a fair process. We continue consulting the industry. I am sure we will get the best equipment at the best price, and the sooner the better.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, several senior health bureaucrats, including the assistant deputy minister, knew beforehand that last fall 70 staff members from the federally funded Fontaine Foundation were going on an all expense paid Caribbean cruise. It is not the first trip members of this foundation have taken.

The health minister waited for this issue to become public before trying to save his political face by calling for an audit. The foundation was flagged for mismanagement for many years. How high does the mismanagement go within his own department?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my senior officials assure me they were not aware in advance of this cruise that there was any suggestion public funds were being used for it. At no time did they give authorization or approve the use of public funds.

The member knows the very day that news became public I directed the forensic audit. We subsequently went to court to ensure that all public moneys were traced fully. I have given my assurance to the House, which I repeat now, that we will not rest until we trace every dollar and account for it publicly.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am assured of that. The minister said he would call an audit and get to the bottom of the matter.

Yesterday it was revealed in court that there may be no books to audit. The minister's own auditors knew that there were irregularities in the Fontaine Foundation books back as far as 1995.

It has been six years, \$37 million, over 70 vacations, and several audits later. How much longer will it be before the minister takes

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responsibility for mismanagement within his own department? How much longer will he take?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is apparent even from the question put by the member that we are now doing everything possible to ensure that all documents are examined and all moneys are traced.

That effort will continue. We will do what is required to ensure the public money is accounted for to the public.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that Air Canada is currently surveying passengers on its regional flights in the west as to whether they prefer service in English or in French. In this way, Air Canada hopes to get out of its obligation to provide services in French if at least 5% of its clientele demand services in both official languages.

Can the Prime Minister tell this House whether this 5% figure is the one he had in mind when he introduced in the throne speech the concept of “sustainable minority community”?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the air industry restructuring legislation, our government has ensured that not only Air Canada but also all of its subsidiaries in all regions of Canada provide services in both official language, where demand warrants under the terms of the Official Languages Act.

Official languages are governed by this legislation, not by Air Canada.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORT

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Air Canada is not only preparing to renege on its commitments with respect to the use of French on its flights in Canada, but, with its government approved monopoly in Canada, is severely cutting back its regional service.

How can the Minister of Transport tolerate the behaviour of Air Canada, which is literally destroying regional air service, as was the case in November, with the Baie-Comeau—Quebec City link? Is the minister going to continue to sit and do nothing for much longer?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Air Canada is honouring its agreement with the government, that is Bill C-26. It is our intention to have air service throughout the country conform to the provisions of the Official Languages Act.

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Richard Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development appears to be quite ready to let the town of Burns Lake in my riding be hung out to dry for about \$1 million in municipal taxes owed to them by the Burns Lake Indian Band.

• (1455)

To help this along the minister appears to be ready to spend an estimated \$10 million over the next five years to duplicate the same services that are now offered to the band for which they have not paid their back taxes and refuse to pay any more.

This is an urgent situation. Will the minister meet with the mayor of Burns Lake and his officials on an urgent basis within the next two to three weeks to get this impasse resolved?

Hon. Robert Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member would know that the answer to that question is yes, because I told him yesterday that I would.

Mr. Richard Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that is not exactly correct. In fact the minister told me that he would be willing to meet with the mayor and his officials in a month or so. A month or so is not good enough, because water and sewer services to the band will be cut off at the end of March.

The minister is prepared to spend about \$10 million over the next five years to duplicate these services for a 59 person band rather than try to solve the current problem immediately like he should be.

Hon. Robert Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member has such a short memory I will do him a favour and talk directly to the mayor. I think his memory will be better.

* * *

[Translation]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Laval East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State for Latin America and Africa met the new President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Joseph Kabila, in New York last Friday. Could he tell us the outcome of the meeting?

Hon. David Kilgour (Secretary of State (Latin America and Africa), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I informed President Kabila of Canada's position, including our support for a negotiated solution

to the conflicts based on the Osaka agreement and the appropriate resolutions of the Security Council.

We support a dialogue among the Congolese, which would lead to democratic institutions and, if necessary, the deployment of UN forces.

In short, Canada like other countries is looking for a viable solution to the conflict to put an end to the enormous suffering of the Congolese people.

* * *

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Veterans Affairs. In 1975 the government's task force said that it owed money on interest it had held in trust for disabled vets.

Again in 1985-86 the auditor general gave the same warning, but in 1990, rather than listening, the government passed a law saying that veterans could not sue for the money owed them.

Last year a judge said the government's law was illegal, but rather than act in the best interest of disabled vets the government has appealed the decision.

Will the minister now do the right thing and return the money owed to the vets, or will he drag this issue through the courts indefinitely?

Mr. Carmen Provenzano (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Souris—Moose Mountain for his question. The fact of the matter is that the decision of the lower court in what is known as the Authorson class action has implications for the operations of the Canadian government. That is why the government has appealed the decision.

In fact yesterday the department filed its appeal papers with the Ontario Court of Appeal. To comment further on a matter before the courts would be inappropriate.

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, rather than correct a past injustice the government is dragging this issue through the courts and we wonder for how long.

The minister is quite right that in October the Ontario Court of Appeal said that the government was wrong and that what it had done was illegal.

The courts say that the government owes these vets money. Will the minister now do the honourable thing, drop the appeal and negotiate with the vets? Will he do the right thing and do it now?

Mr. Carmen Provenzano (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that a decision of a lower court is not a final determination.

Oral Questions

Until the appeal process has been exhausted there will be no final determination. Again I repeat that until that is done it is inappropriate to comment.

* * *

• (1500)

[Translation]

CHINA

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bloc Québécois members have expressed their support to the Dalai Lama in his efforts to initiate a rapprochement with China and begin a dialogue between Tibet and Chinese authorities. In the coming days, a Canadian trade mission will travel to China.

During his visit to China, does the Prime Minister intend to raise the issues of Tibet and Falun Gong's freedom of religion?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always had a very frank dialogue with the Chinese on human rights issues. In fact, when we first started going to China, we could not even use the words "human rights". During our last visit, I was invited to deliver a speech on human rights at the University of Beijing. This was a first.

When the chairman came to Canada, I even told journalists to put questions on human rights in China to him directly. A lot of progress has been made and I intend to raise these issues again next week.

* * *

[English]

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Mr. Tony Tirabassi (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Secretary of State for Children and Youth. Most people today understand that the first years in a child's life are most important. These are the years when the foundations for success are laid. These are the years when our country's future prosperity is determined. However all levels of government are still struggling with the complexities of early childhood development.

Could the secretary of state tell us what the government is doing to help develop the best possible social policies, programs and services that will be of the greatest benefit to Canadian children and to their families?

Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew (Secretary of State (Children and Youth), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Niagara Centre raised a very important point. That is why on January 16 the

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government announced it would invest over \$2 million over five years to help establish the Canadian child and youth development research network.

The network will be made up of research centres at the University of British Columbia, the University of New Brunswick, the University of Montreal and McMaster University. It will provide a unique way to gather and share information to help ensure that we continue to improve the development of our policies to support children and families.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government House leader would inform the House of the business for the rest of this week and into next week, and particularly if he has any comment on the very interesting proposals on parliamentary reform both in the procedure and House affairs committee and in the debate today. Does he have anything that he would like to highlight in that area?

• (1505)

The Speaker: I hope the government House leader will stick to the business of the House in his response. He may have some of that in the business, but I would not want him to wander off on other subjects on the normal Thursday question, despite the open invitation from the opposition House leader.

[Translation]

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will continue with the Alliance Party motion.

Tomorrow, we will complete the Address Debate. Votes from Thursday and Friday will be deferred to Tuesday evening, in accordance with an agreement between the parties.

On Monday, we will begin debate on the financial institutions bill. Later that day we will return to Bill C-2, the employment insurance bill.

On Tuesday, I hope to call Bill C-6 respecting boundary waters, and Bill S-2 on marine liability.

I should like to advise the House at this time that it is the Government's intention, continuing in the spirit of parliamentary reform, to propose that Bill C-6 be referred to committee before second reading, pursuant to Standing Order 73.

Next Wednesday, I expect to call Bill C-7, the youth justice bill. Next Thursday will be an Allotted Day.

[English]

In the area of parliamentary reform, I am pleased to inform the House that I have offered all House leaders full briefings on the international trade issues relevant to the Quebec City Summit of

the Americas. I hope members will avail themselves of this opportunity.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order, please. I have been informed that certain members had some concerns about the French wording of the opposition motion, saying that it did not render what the English version said.

I have contacted the Translation Bureau and have been told that the wording of the motion is taken directly from the French version of the Liberal red book.

Copies of the quote are available on the desk for any hon. member wishing to obtain one

* * *

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

ALLOTTED DAY SUBAMENDMENT

The Speaker: Before I call orders of the day, I wish to deliver to the House my ruling on the point of order raised earlier this day.

I am now ready to rule on the point of order raised by the hon. House leader of the official opposition, the hon. member for Fraser Valley, concerning the procedural acceptability of the subamendment proposed by the hon. government House leader on the amendment to the opposition day motion concerning the ethics counsellor.

I wish to thank the hon. opposition House leader, the hon. House leaders of the Progressive Conservative and New Democratic Parties, the hon. whip of the Bloc Québécois, and the many other members who sought to assist the Chair on this matter.

The Chair has considered the interventions made on either side of the argument. As I said earlier in my remarks this morning, as a former practitioner of the art of dealing with opposition days, drafting motions and amendments from either side of the House, I have considerable sympathy for the point of view expressed on either side of the issue in the House today.

There is little doubt that the authorities are clear on the nature of opposition days. In the oft quoted words of Mr. Speaker Lamoureux on March 16, 1971:

—when . . . opposition parties agree as to . . . a subject on a particular day, the spirit of fair play would require that the day should not be taken away by means of an amendment.

[Translation]

As it says on page 727 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*:

Amendments which have the effect of providing the basis for an entirely different debate are not in order.

[English]

However, Standing Order 85 states:

Only one amendment and one subamendment may be made to a motion proposed in the Budget Debate or to a motion proposed under an Order of the Day for the consideration of the business of supply on an allotted day.

In fact, a review of our practice in this regard indicates that deftly worded amendments can and have been used to render opposition motions more palatable to the government.

For example, on February 12, 1992, on a motion regarding a final GATT accord that was phrased “to call on the government to support unequivocally” any final GATT accord, an amendment was proposed to replace those words with the words “supports the government’s efforts toward reaching”.

On June 7, 1994, when the House debated a lengthy opposition motion that began “That this House strongly affirm and support the desire of Canadians to remain federally united as one people” and went on for eight lines describing the terms of such union, an amendment was deemed acceptable that deleted all the words after “Canadians to” and substituted simply “continue to live together in a federal system”.

• (1510)

Perhaps the closest to the situation we face today is a precedent from October 28, 1997, where an opposition motion calling upon the government “to establish a comprehensive national fisheries policy” was amended to delete the word “establish” and substitute the words “continue the implementation of”.

[*Translation*]

However, the situation that concerns us today does not involve an amendment, but rather a subamendment. Once again, Marleau-Montpetit is very useful, because it states, on page 454:

Sub-amendments must be strictly relevant to the amendment and seek to modify the amendment, not the original question; they cannot enlarge on the amendment, introduce new matters foreign to the amendment or differ in substance from the amendment.

[*English*]

The restrictions on subamendments are therefore severe. Indeed a student of the evolution of House procedures might well suggest that the current practice, where the mover of an opposition day motion splits his or her time to allow another party member to move a single word amendment, was in fact developed in order to thwart the proposing of amendments that would transmogrify the original opposition motions into propositions acceptable to the government. The possibilities for amending a single word sub-amendment are by their nature extremely limited.

Such, I believe, is the case before us today where the government House leader has made a valiant, though not successful, attempt to propose a subamendment. I must conclude that the proposed subamendment does not modify or refine the amendment but seeks

Supply

rather to amend the original question. Accordingly the subamendment is not in order and cannot be put to the House.

I thank all hon. members for their interventions on this point.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—ETHICS COUNSELLOR

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

Mr. Steve Mahoney (Mississauga West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me remind you that just before we had to leave the debate and go to question period and members’ statements a point of order was raised by an opposition member questioning the relevance of my speech.

I do not want to spend the entire nine minutes reiterating what I said, but I was pointing out that some questions of ethics were coming from the other side. Notably there was one from the leader with regard to his lawsuit and the \$800,000 bill that he left foisted upon the taxpayers of Alberta. Also there was the \$50,000 payout to Jim Hart to free up a seat so that the hon. Leader of the Opposition could run, after that individual said Mr. Hart left voluntarily, voluntarily with his pockets bulging with money I might add.

I also question the fact that, contrary to the public statements two members made in the past castigating the pension plan, they decided to reinvest \$89,000 for Edmonton North and \$50,000 for Medicine Hat into the pension plan.

The relevance of all of that is quite clear to me and I think to taxpayers. They cannot have it both ways. They cannot say that they will bring a new attitude to parliament somehow, that the pension is awful, and then buy back in and create a million dollar asset for themselves. They cannot say that they are prepared to deny an individual charged under the laws of this land his due right to defence in law and then duck the bill when it comes in as a result of a slander charge.

• (1515)

The point of the relevance here is that we do not need lectures from opposition members about ethics. They have shown no character, no moral fibre, no ability to stand behind the words they have uttered for pure crass political advantage on their part. They have misled the Canadian public by coming into the House holier than thou and saying parliament needs to appoint an ethics counsellor.

Supply

One cannot in parliamentary terms use words like hypocrisy, so I will not. However the things members opposite have said in public and with their own constituents border on questionable judgment.

Let me talk a little about the ethics counsellor. The ethics counsellor has upon request appeared in the past before parliamentary committees. Is it reasonable to assume that is the method that would be used for any official to answer to parliament? Do we expect the ethics counsellor, or any other official, would be allowed to walk into the House and answer? I do not think so.

In the normal course of business we would expect any official appointed either by the Prime Minister or by the governor in council, with a job to do which relates to public business, would appear upon request before a parliamentary committee.

It is puzzling to me how opposition members can stand in their places, in spite of the litany of unethical activities that have occurred within their own ranks, and say that the ethics counsellor does not report to parliament. Of course he does.

The leader of the fifth party, the former prime minister, wrote a letter asking for action and investigation on certain subjects. He received a response.

During the election campaign the Prime Minister did not duck the issue. When accused of having done something wrong he asked the ethics counsellor to report immediately, unlike the Leader of the Opposition who asked that his court date regarding slander charges against him be conveniently deferred until after the election.

Our Prime Minister said to the ethics counsellor "Here are the allegations. Yes, I am in the middle of an election campaign. I want you to report now. I am not afraid of anything. I am not prepared to hide, duck and run like the Leader of the Opposition".

The ethics counsellor wrote the letter which says that there was no conflict or wrongdoing. It puzzles me, although I guess it should not, how the opposition has interpreted what he said. The counsellor has examined the issue at least twice and reported as such. He has done so in a letter released publicly. Is that not accountable to the place?

To then turn it around is the game that is played. This is not about the ethics counsellor. Opposition members are still bitter about what happened in the election. They cannot believe it. They are still in shock. They think the Canadian people made a mistake.

I have been on both sides of electoral activity. I have won and lost in 11 election campaigns. I lost three and won the rest. I believe that in every one of those eleven campaigns the voters were right. When they make a decision that they do not want an individual around again that is their right. The voters are never wrong. I do not care if members like it. I do not care if they think it

is unfair. The voters are always right. It is a clear message in a democracy. They have the authority and only they have the authority to make those decisions.

What happens? We come back here again. We have five parties in this place. We have 172 seats. We have a resounding majority. We have representatives from sea to sea to sea.

● (1520)

The Prime Minister is elected for the third successive majority government and what happens? Not even two weeks past the opening of parliament and the Prime Minister is attacked every day. They get into the gutter. They accuse. It is personal.

I have not heard questions about issues other than a few from the backbenches. The frontbenches of the opposition parties seem bent on personal assassination and destruction of one of the greatest parliamentarians the House has ever seen. Like him or not, the man's credentials are impeccable.

When they cannot deal with the issues and realize the people have shown confidence in the government, what can they do? The only thing left to do is to get personal. That is sad. It frankly shows a lack of depth, a lack of ethics and a lack of moral fortitude within the ranks of the opposition that is quite shameful.

Whenever I talk in the House I get an e-mail from someone in Vancouver who gets upset, bent out of shape and tells me what a terrible person I am because I say these things. Let us be clear. The games played in this place are for nothing more than political advantage. They have nothing to do with good governance. They have nothing to do with representing individual constituencies when we get into this kind of nonsense.

Members opposite know that full well. They have even said it. I could read quote after quote about the ethics counsellor from members opposite. Even today one member opposite stood in the House and said "I am not talking about the individual; he is an honourable person". The opposition House leader at one point accused him of being a barking dog, which was most unfortunate. Then some of his colleagues stood and said it was not true and that they thought he was an honourable gentleman.

They are trying to portray the ethics counsellor as an appointee of the Prime Minister who only talks to the Prime Minister, even though he has appeared before a legislative committee and answered in a public letter all accusations and charges.

Those members should be ashamed of themselves. Instead of harping on personal attacks against the Prime Minister, why do they not look at the agenda and deal with things that Canadians care about like health care and education and EI reform? Let us deal

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with substantive issues that make Canada the greatest country in the world, and let us try to make it better.

I am sorry to be so fervent about it, but it is a disgraceful display by opposition members and a waste of a parliamentary day at great cost to the taxpayer. They have no business pointing the finger at this side of the House.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, speaking of moral fortitude, I am rather surprised at the member because he should know, with respect to the leader of the Canadian Alliance, that the reason it was decided the case would not go to court is best known to himself. A judge made the determination that no jury would be allowed. That is absolutely unprecedented in Canadian history.

The fact is that almost \$500,000 was spent to that point by the government of Alberta. It then recommended that the Leader of the Opposition not go to court because he obviously would not have a fair opportunity to present his case.

The member should also know that the independent ethics commissioner in Alberta, who answers to the legislature, instructed the leader of the Canadian Alliance when he was the Alberta finance minister that he could not raise independent funds and was to see the case through with this method of payment. The member knows that, and I am surprised he said things that were simply not true in his earlier statement before question period.

• (1525)

My question for the hon. member is: What is wrong with asking the Liberals to live up to their red book promise of 1993? What is wrong with the words that the Liberals put in their red book and that the Prime Minister said they would be following through on at every opportunity they had? Why does the Prime Minister choose to hold himself and his cabinet ministers to a lower standard than the premiers of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario?

I do not understand this. Perhaps the member can help me with this one.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Mr. Speaker, I highly doubt that I would be successful at helping the hon. member.

The Prime Minister has appointed an ethics counsellor—

Mr. Jim Abbott: Not independent.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: —an independent ethics counsellor who has reported to a parliamentary committee and has written letters that have been made public. I do not know exactly what the hon. member wants, other than to portray this as something it is not.

In reference to the member's remarks with regard to his leader's shameful position, I want to point out that the former speaker of the Alberta legislature, who happens to be a former colleague of the Leader of the Opposition, is issuing a court challenge as of 9 o'clock this morning mountain standard time wherein he claims it was not only unethical but also contrary to the rules of the Alberta legislature that taxpayer funds were used to settle the Alliance leader's defamation lawsuit.

The hon. member can give me all the justification he likes for that decision, but the Leader of the Opposition should pay the \$800,000 that he generated because of his shameful activity. He could have settled the case earlier for \$60,000 but refused to do so.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you for your wisdom in your first official ruling from the chair. It certainly breathes new hope and aspirations for your humble servants in this place.

I have listened to hon. members on both sides of the House trade barbs and attack each other's leaders. Fortunately in the Progressive Conservative Party we do not have to defend the ethical standard set by the right hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Let us turn back to the matter at hand, the matter of an ethics counsellor.

First, stripping away the rhetoric and passion that he brings to the debate, does the hon. member opposite not agree that it would be in the interest of Canadians to have the ethics counsellor report to parliament and to have an impartial committee of the House determine the appropriateness of the ethics counsellor so that there would be no question as to the person's arm's length attachment to any member, be it the Prime Minister or any member of this House who might be questioned about their behaviour? Would it also not benefit this Chamber, this institution, this parliament to allow all members of the House to have input on the appointment of that person?

Second, would it also not benefit the credibility of that individual, after going through that process of selection, to report directly to parliament and not to the Prime Minister or the cabinet or the executive branch?

Would it not also benefit the ethics counsellor's credibility to not appear after the fact before a committee, which is what has happened in this instance, and not to leak out in dribs and drabs correspondence and information that might have been exchanged between the PMO and this person?

Would Canadians not benefit if the government simply lived up to its red book promises? We know commitments have been broken. We can talk about that ad nauseam.

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Would the hon. member not agree that this is a preferred option, which is the intent of this particular motion?

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Pictou—Antigonish for his usual ability to bring some calm back to the debate. I accept that he is sincere, unlike the official opposition. However, I would say to the hon. gentleman that Mr. Wilson was appointed after consultation with leaders of the parties in the House. I think it would be unfortunate to call into doubt the integrity of Mr. Wilson, which I do not think was the member's direct intent. It certainly could be construed as such, but I am sure he would not want to do that.

• (1530)

There was agreement that he was an acceptable candidate, an acceptable person to act as an ethics counsellor. It is quite standard, if we look at all of the agencies where individuals are appointed by the Prime Minister and by order in council, to have them appear before a committee to defend their actions and to answer for their department. That was exactly what happened here.

The ruling by Mr. Wilson was clear when he said:

Let me answer that, sir, by saying that it's my view that Mr. Chrétien does not have an interest in this matter. He sold his interest. He sold it. According to his lawyer, this is an unsecured sale. In other words, the only way he's going to be able to recover payment is either to take the individual in question to court or, as is now happening, try to organize a way by which the payment will be made.

He has investigated it. He has ruled. He has been clear that if we were unhappy with it then we should go to committee and put a motion to call him before the committee and question him just as we would do for any other official.

That is accountability to parliament through the processes in place, and the member knows that full well.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am always interested in hearing what my colleague from Mississauga West has to say. Although he may engage in nuclear rhetorical warfare at times, he does have some positive things to say. I am not sure that this is one of them.

I would like to rebut a couple of the comments he made. One of them had to do with his interpretation of consultation. It is my understanding that when he talks about consultation, what it means is that the House leader or the member of the government phones the other House leaders and says to them that this is the person they are appointing. That is the definition of this type of consultation.

Would the member agree with his House leader who said earlier today that the ethics counsellor does report to parliament? Would he agree with me that it is clearly the case the ethics counsellor does not report to parliament on matters having to do with the

minister or the Prime Minister in terms of all the details of that investigation? Would he agree with that comment?

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition would like to recant the consultation and the consultative agreement that was made to appoint Mr. Wilson, I would invite the member to go to his leader and have him do that either in the House or in a letter.

If he does not like it now then he is trying to turn the tables. If the consultation took place and the leaders agreed to the appointment, it is a little tiring to hear the complaint. It is quite obvious what they do not like. They do not like the conclusion that Mr. Wilson arrived at, or they would not have the motion on the floor and they would not be consistently trying to attack and personally assassinate the character of the Prime Minister during question period.

That is all this is about. They cannot get their teeth into any of the programs the government is putting forward for the betterment of Canadians, including tax cuts and reinvesting in health care, so they attack personalities.

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to the motion. I will be splitting my time with my hon. friend and colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands.

We are talking about ethics and credibility. We should ask ourselves whether or not we truly have credibility in the eyes of the public. That is what we are dealing with today. That is why my party has put a motion today on the floor of the House for which there should be widespread agreement because it comes from the Liberal 1992 red book.

It stated that the Liberal government would appoint an independent ethics counsellor to advise both public officials and lobbyists in the day to day application of the code of conduct for public officials. The ethics counsellor would be appointed after consultation with the leaders of all parties in the House of Commons and would report directly to parliament. We are putting the motion forward today because the government has not done this.

• (1535)

We have heard time and time again the cry of why there are not more ethics in parliament. Why do we not have a system of accountability in parliament? We have heard from the auditor general, Mr. Denis Desautels, eloquent interventions to the House on why we need ethics in the way we engage in governance today.

He despaired again this week of the absence of ethical decision making in the way in which we engage in governance. He repeatedly made reference to the willy-nilly spending on the part of government bureaucracies, with little or no accountability and little

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thought as to why or where these moneys were being spent. He said that underlying all this was the absence of a culture of ethics.

A culture of ethics would only come from those who practise ethical leadership. Some may wonder why we should have ethical leadership. In the application of ethical leadership we develop a system or a structure beneath us that engages in ethical behaviours because their behaviours are patterned on the moral ethical behaviour they see. That is what all this is about.

Many of the large flaws and mistakes that occur are based in errors in ethics. My party and other parties have repeatedly raised examples in this regard. We saw it in the HRD scandal. The auditor general echoed that gross abject failures in the spending of the public's money and violations of the public trust took place time and time again because there was a lack of ethics ingrained into the culture of that organization.

I want to make sure that everyone understands there are many good people in the public service who are working hard to do the best they can, but in the cases we brought forward there was an absence of ethical leadership within the organization.

In the department of aboriginal affairs we saw an absence of ethical leadership in the application of moneys that should be going to those people who are most in need. My party and members out there in the aboriginal community are becoming more vocal because the moneys are not going to the hard edge of helping these people who are most in need in society.

Aboriginal people have some of the worst health care parameters, the worst housing circumstances, the greatest unemployment, the highest maternal mortality, the highest infant morbidity, and the highest infant mortality statistics in Canada, as a direct result of the absence of ethical leadership at the highest levels of the department and an absence of appropriate spending of those moneys for the benefit of those people most in need.

I know the minister would very much like to see that those moneys are spent wisely. I know the members that he serves would like to see it spent wisely. However, if there is an absence of ethical leadership, these problems will not be addressed and the culture that supports the absence of ethical behaviour will not change.

That is why my party and the government have said that we need an ethics counsellor that reports to the House, an ethics counsellor that reports publicly to the people who pay the bills of the House and pay that person's salary.

It was interesting to hear what the government proposed. It proposed the ethics counsellor as I mentioned before. It proposed an ethical review of government contracts and ethical government advertising. The government House leader said that there should be established within the House of Commons a non-partisan nomination confirmation procedure for order in council appointments such

as officers of the House and that the committee reviewing the procedure should have a veto power.

If we were able to do this and if it were supported by an ethics counsellor, the public would have a greater faith in what we do. Our House leader and many other members of my party have put forth ideas on how we could reform parliament. Why? Because, if we do not have parliamentary reform, if we do not democratize the House, which has become a veritable dictatorship, then we will not be able to engender the faith of the public. We will not be able to engage, invigorate and stimulate the public in the decisions that take place in the House.

• (1540)

We all know there are members from across party lines that share the utter frustration of living in the other virtual democracy that we have today. The proof of the pudding can be found in the behaviour of the public during elections. As we saw in the last election, fewer and fewer Canadians are actually voting. They do not seem to think there is any relevance to the process of voting. They feel disempowered, disaffected, disinterested and not engaged in the House and, to a large extent, they are absolutely right.

If we were able to engage in the parliamentary reforms that my party has put forth, that indeed the government House leader put forth when his party was in opposition and that members of cabinet put forth when their party was in opposition, then we could make the House a democracy, a vibrant place where ideas could be thought over, constructive ideas could be battled over and at the end of the day we would have action on the big problems that affect all of us.

On the issue of free votes in the House of Commons, I am pleased to hear that the government House leader mentioned electronic voting. It is about time. How about making committees more responsive to the public and less responsive to the Prime Minister and the minister at hand? How about removing the parliamentary secretaries from all committee structure? How about bringing government bills in draft form to committee? It is what is being done in England. Westminster is engaged in the same process as we are and is frustrated by the lack of democracy and accountability that exists. Its system is far more democratic than ours but its members are apoplectic at their lack of power to represent their constituents.

The public has moved from anger to disinterest to apathy over this House. What a profound tragedy to have in the House the amazing potential that exists with all members across party lines, that we cannot employ their talents and use their ideas in the House and in committee. We could apply those ideas, as the previous speaker from the government side said, to the big issues of health care, economics, social program renewal, demographic changes that affect us, aboriginal affairs and the environment.

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One of the things I suspect all members find greatly disheartening is to sit in committees and hear wonderful ideas come from members of the public, ideas that if employed would have a positive impact upon the lives of Canadians. However, we know in our hearts that those ideas will be put into a document that will be put on a shelf to collect dust forevermore. Maybe a few years down the line the government of the day will see fit to study the issue once again.

Where is the action? We need an ethics counsellor to keep all of us on our toes. We need an ethics counsellor who has the power of reporting like the auditor general does. We need to be held to account to act on what we have been tasked to do. If we do that, we will have a positive effect on the lives of Canadians and all of us in the House will be a much happier lot.

At the end of the day the public would be very interested to know that the House is a demoralized House. The House is yearning for change. The House is yearning to apply the skills and talents of the people in the House and the skills and talents of the people in the public to come to bear on the problems that we have.

We beg and plead for the government to live up to its red book promise that said we need an ethics counsellor, to live up to its promise of democratizing the House and reforming parliament, not to give lip service to it, but to truly make the fundamental changes that will not damage its power nor its ability to shine in the public but that would strengthen its position and the position of all members.

• (1545)

Mr. Murray Calder (Dufferin—Peel—Wellington—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with a lot of interest to the speech across the way. The member talked about ethics and credibility. I am 100% in support of what he said but I have a question for him.

However, we are not quite three months after the election and just recently two of his colleagues, the member for Edmonton North and the member for Medicine Hat said they would be taking the pension. However, in the last three elections they campaigned against taking a pension.

How fair is that to the voters in those two ridings who listened to these two individuals at all candidates debates say they would not take a pension? Then, less than three months after the election they reversed their decisions. That is the party that talks about recall. Should ethics not demand that those members voluntarily put themselves forward for recall and that a byelection be called in their ridings to give the voters a chance to vote on this?

Mr. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, let us talk about some truth on the issue of pensions. I am glad the member brought it up.

First, when we were elected in 1993 our position was to have parity with the public service. Second, when we were elected in 1993, the MP pension was far more lucrative than it is today. Why? The then Reform Party brought up solutions and forced the government to change the pensions so that there would be no more double dipping and MPs could not receive a pension when they left after six years. Now MPs receive the pension after the age of 55 and the pension is far less lucrative.

That is what this party did. It would have never happened if the Reform Party had not come on the scene. We are looking for equality and parity with the public service. We have pushed the government far along those ways and we have a lot of which to be proud.

[Translation]

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Speaker of the House of Commons. I am satisfied, based on what you said concerning a government motion, that we will have a very good Speaker of the House.

I would like to put a question to my colleague in the Canadian Alliance. I am finding that, at the moment, the members of the Liberal Party are arrogantly trying to cloud the issue, instead of debating the text of the motion taken from their 1993 red book. Our Liberal colleague who asked a question before me surprisingly spoke of pensions, after the Canadian Alliance members accepted pensions.

We are talking about an ethics counsellor. We are not concerned with the person who is the ethics counsellor, but rather the rules that should be set in order to give this counsellor real powers under the authority of parliament or of the leaders of the political parties. At the moment, the Prime Minister makes the appointment, with his rules, and is the one to whom the counsellor is accountable.

I would like to ask my colleague in the Canadian Alliance how his party's motion, a verbatim copy of the 1993 Liberal Party red book, should be understood and accepted so that we may proceed with real parliamentary reform?

[English]

Mr. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, this particular motion comes directly from the government's red book. It is a promise the government made.

We agree with the government's position in the Liberal red book. The simple question we are asking is why has it not implemented the promise for an independent ethics counsellor. It is that simple. We are also saying to the government that it has widespread agreement on all party lines on its promise to have an ethics counsellor. Why has it not implemented an ethics counsellor? I do

not know why that is. That is why we are asking these questions. Not one member of the government has stood up today and given us one rational answer as to why they have not implemented their original promise.

• (1550)

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to commend you on your decision. I was very pleased to see that and hear the reasons for your decision. We look forward to your speakership over many years to come.

The debate we are having today is all about one word. It is about ethics. I listened to the Liberal members. I hope they will take this in all sincerity. It is time we start to bring about changes to the House for the betterment of all Canadians and for all members, not just the members on this side. We do need to make changes and they know it.

There is far too much power surrounding the office of the prime minister which has evolved over the years. It has grown and grown and has got stronger and stronger, even more so since the Liberals took power. It is time we changed that.

We have a House of 301 members. We are not all utilized in the House. There are great ideas that we bring forward from our constituents. When I was first elected to the fisheries committee in 1997, we wrote unanimous reports. Those reports are now collecting dust.

The motion is a small step that we can bring forward for a positive change. It is a change that one would think the government would be open to, particularly as the Liberal red book of 1993 said:

A Liberal government will appoint an independent Ethics Counsellor to advise both public officials and lobbyists in the day-to-day application of the Code of Conduct for Public Officials. The Ethics Counsellor will be appointed after consultation with the leaders of all parties in the House of Commons and will report directly to Parliament.

The key is reporting directly to parliament to ensure that we have openness and transparency.

I heard some members say a few minutes ago that there were consultations with the leaders of all parties on the appointment of the ethics counsellor, Mr. Wilson, and I am sure is a man of integrity. At that time, it was the Reform Party and the member for Calgary Southeast was the leader. I spoke to him about the consultation. He described the consultation as being a phone call from the Prime Minister who said Mr. Wilson was being appointed as the ethics counsellor. We have seen that time and time again from the executive of the government. Its idea of consultation is to tell us what it is going to do.

The government talks about partisanship, and how dare the official opposition bring this motion forward. It says it is trickery and all of that. I point out that there are five official parties in the

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House of Commons and that the Canadian Alliance, the Bloc, the Progressive Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party are all united on this motion. They just happen to be all in opposition. All of these parties agree that this is very important and that it is the right thing to do. Some of the speeches I listened were quite passionate about this.

If the Liberal Party was in opposition there is no question that it too would agree with this. Let me give you some quotes from when it was in opposition. On February 17, 1993, the government House leader moved the following motion::

That this House condemns the government for its continued failure to establish and to adhere to a clear and high standard of public sector ethics, for its incessant inability to function within the framework of existing legislation, guidelines and standards, and for its reluctance to bring forward strict new codes and legislation with regard to conflicts and other public ethic matters

• (1555)

When the Prime Minister was the leader of the opposition, he said “In order to achieve this agenda’s integrity and public trust in the institutions of government are essential”. He went on about the word trust. Right now we have an ethics counsellor who does not report to parliament. He reports in secrecy to the Prime Minister. There is no openness. There is no transparency.

Unless all 301 members of the House have the courage to stand up and start doing what is right and start bringing about changes to this institution, the public’s perception of this institution will continue to decline. We can change that if we want to want to bring back meaningful debate.

On Monday the Board of Internal Economy will be voting on whether the committee chairs should be voted in by secret ballot. There is another opportunity for government members who sit on that board to do what is right.

When the backbenchers step outside this door, when they are not on the record, they tell us all the time that yes, we need changes. They say they would like to have some influence with the government. Many of the government members will argue that they have less influence than the members of the opposition. Again, it is time that we start earning respect. We will earn that respect only if we have the courage to bring about these changes.

The motion put forward the Canadian Alliance was drafted by the Liberal Party. I know it was drafted before the Liberal Party was elected to government. It was a 1993 election promise which they have not fulfilled.

I ought to emphasize that, setting patronage aside, the four opposition parties passionately want to see this happen. It is time that the members on the other side have the courage to do what is right so that they can look at themselves in the mirror. It is time

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they start bringing about changes to this institution. It is essential that we do that.

I want to commend the one member from the government, the new member for Vancouver Quadra. I do not know if someone from the House leader's office has got to the new member yet and rapped his knuckles, but he had the courage to speak out and do the right thing.

This new member for Vancouver Quadra, the former ombudsman for British Columbia, was asked about this very issue on the weekend. Again, I would like to commend Vaughn Palmer from the Vancouver *Sun* for writing about this and bringing it to the attention of all Canadians.

I will quote the Liberal member for Vancouver Quadra. He said:

We've led the country in conflict-of-interest legislation. Our special prosecutor legislation is unique in Canada and in the Commonwealth.

He went on to say:

One of them is the conflict-of-interest commissioner who is a legislature officer rather than part of the executive of the government and therefore independent of the executive.

It is not so in the federal parliament. He continued:

We've gained good experience, proud experience and the federal government may want to look at that.

This is the Liberal member for Vancouver Quadra who was putting forward positive ideas that were absolutely in sync with this motion. I have to say that the member was completely open and forthright.

● (1600)

When asked about the Prime Minister lobbying the federal business development bank three times on behalf of a constituent, the member said he was not comfortable with what happened with the Prime Minister and the federal business development bank. The member said:

I don't think any of us should be comfortable with the confusion and the public unease that it has caused. This is something we've learned earlier in B.C., that you need to make the rules very explicit, that you need to make the review processes very transparent and independent. I think this is something I can take with experience to Ottawa.

Let me sum up. We have to earn the trust and confidence of every Canadian and they want to see changes. We can make this institution so much more effective. We can utilize the talents of all 301 members from all sides of the House if we have the courage to do so.

On Tuesday the government members will have the opportunity to vote on their own idea, their own motion that they drafted back in 1993. I hope they will have the courage to do what is right and start taking the first baby steps toward bringing positive changes back to this institution.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to look at the transcript of the ethics counsellor's appearance before the industry committee in the last parliament, which I think would be useful as a preamble here. It states that the provisions of the conflict of interest code

apply to members of the cabinet, parliamentary secretaries, spouses and dependent children, members of ministers' political staff, and essentially all full-time Governor-in-Council appointees—in other words, the senior members of the executive branch of government. This involves approximately 1,200 persons, with another 1,900 part-time appointees subject to the principles of the code.

Interestingly enough, the code does not apply to other members of parliament or to senators. I think it is a very important point, because both the last speaker and the previous speaker talked about how we need this ethics counsellor so that we can be kept on our toes. In fact it is not applicable to MPs. It opens up quite a different question if that is what the member is proposing.

However, my question to the member would be maybe more fundamental. Could the member advise the House what it is members of parliament would be able to do if the ethics counsellor reported through a reporting system and a committee that they cannot do today under the current arrangement? What exactly can they not do today?

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Speaker, let me take the questions in order. First of all with respect to the point that opposition members and backbench government members do not come under the purview of the ethics counsellor, I agree with the member. Absolutely we should. There is nothing wrong with that. I agree 100%. Right now the power is surrounded, in the Prime Minister and the executive. The member is quite right and I would support that. It would be another positive step that all members should be made accountable.

On his second question about what we cannot do now, the ethics counsellor reports only to the Prime Minister. We cannot get those reports. They go only to the Prime Minister. They do not go to all members of parliament. They are not tabled in the House. That is what would change. If we had that openness, that transparency, that total public scrutiny, it would hold all people to a much higher level of standards. I believe it would probably lead to keeping some of them a whole lot more honest.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the previous speaker. I know he is very sincere in his remarks and he brings the appropriate tone to this debate.

He began his remarks by speaking of the main issue being ethics. I think the majority of people who have participated in the debate would certainly agree. However, there has to be credibility behind those asking the questions as well. There has to be an element of accountability. That is to say that a person is on solid ground when

he or she is asking the questions or, in this instance, that when the ethics counsellor is tasked with overseeing the activity of the Prime Minister or another member of the House, he or she has that credibility and that accountability to this place.

● (1605)

The member has honed in on the difficulty of that position here. It is not personal. It is not about Mr. Wilson. It is about the office and the position he holds. Would the member not agree that the intent was that he would report to the House, that he would do just that? Would the member not agree that was certainly the intent when the Prime Minister and his government went before the electorate representing to the public that this commissioner was going to report to parliament?

I want to quote from the backgrounder that was attached to the original release when it was announced that the position of ethics commissioner—counsellor at that time—would be created. It said “The ethics counsellor will be available to the Prime Minister to investigate allegations against his ministers and senior officials involving conflicts of interest or lobbying”.

The difficulty is that if he is available to the Prime Minister, he is not available to the House when he is investigating the Prime Minister. Would the hon. member comment on that suggestion?

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from the Progressive Conservative Party. He is absolutely right. If I understand him correctly, what he is referring to is this: not only is it important, as this motion says, that the ethics counsellor reports directly to parliament, but it is also important that all members of parliament and other people have access to the ethics counsellor during the investigations so that they can put forward submissions, so that they can have a dialogue. Right now that ethics counsellor is only available to one person, the Prime Minister, the person who appoints him.

Mr. John McKay (Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time.

It seems to me that when we are talking about ethics, the first way to derail the conversation is to trash talk and put the opposition, or in the other case the government, on the defensive. At the end of the day all we end up doing is maybe improving our eligibility to be NBA players. Beyond that it does not seem to add much to the debate.

Possibly we can refrain from discussing specific instances and try to deal with the merits of the case. I appreciate that this may be a novel concept in this Chamber.

The motion reads:

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That this House adopt the following policy from Liberal Redbook 1 and call for its implementation by the government: “A Liberal Government will appoint an independent Ethics Counsellor to advise both public officials and lobbyists in the day-to-day application of the Code of Conduct for Public Officials. The Ethics Counsellor will be appointed after consultation with the leaders of all the parties in the House of Commons and will report directly to Parliament.”

On the face of it there does seem to be merit in the motion. The response of the government to the red book promise in 1994 was to create an office of an ethics counsellor who is independent. I would dare to say that we have done that. We have created the office of an independent ethics counsellor to advise public officials, mainly the government, the cabinet and parliamentary secretaries, and lobbyists, which is a separate item altogether, of the day to day application of the code of conduct. That has been done.

The nub of the issue is whether the ethics counsellor should report directly to parliament. The ethics counsellor is to review ethical issues that come before the Prime Minister and ministers of the crown, to deal not only with real conflicts of interest but with perceived conflicts of interest. He is there to give guidance and counsel. He has additional responsibility under the Lobbyists Registration Act, which, as I said, is not relevant to this debate.

● (1610)

I take it as a given that the opposition is not seeking an expansion of the role of the ethics counsellor; rather, they are merely wishing to change the reporting function from what it is presently, namely to the Prime Minister, to directly to parliament. Again on the face of it, there does seem to be merit in the position of the opposition—if opposition members had no access to the decisions made by the ethics counsellor.

However, as members of the opposition know, the ethics counsellor is a compellable witness before a House of Commons committee. He is even compellable before the House. Indeed, his decisions and his material are subject to freedom of information. It is hard to imagine a more accessible officer. If a member wants to review the activities of the ethics counsellor, a committee can summon him to appear, regardless of what the Prime Minister thinks.

The essence of the debate is therefore quite simple. Should an ethics counsellor report directly to the Prime Minister with an additional reporting function to a parliamentary committee and, indeed, parliament, or should he have a statutory responsibility to report directly to parliament?

It seems to me that if there is to be a change from reporting to the Prime Minister with a potential of reporting to a committee, as opposed to reporting to parliament directly, then there has to be a case made by the opposition that the work of the current ethics counsellor is deficient in some respect. May I suggest that if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

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At this point it is my view that the opposition has not made its case. In fact, a number of members of the opposition have indicated that they believe that the ethics counsellor is a man of untarnished reputation. I appreciate the concession on the part of the opposition that this is not a personalized attack on the ethics counsellor.

The next question therefore becomes, is there material before the House which would lead a reasonable person to conclude that the current ethics counsellor is not doing his job in a fair or impartial manner?

Having listened to the representations of the opposition members and having read in the press about interpretations and representations of all members, I am not at all persuaded that there has been any evidence produced that this ethics counsellor is not doing his work in other than optimum conditions, and I am persuaded that he speaks with a force of moral authority to members of the government, which requires those members to take action. On the face of it, members of the cabinet, the Prime Minister and parliamentary secretaries respond very quickly to what the ethics counsellor has to say.

I suppose the best evidence is that in the course of three elections and subsequent mandates, there has not been a taint or a whiff of scandal or conflict among the members of cabinet, the parliamentary secretaries and the Prime Minister himself, notwithstanding vigorous attacks by the opposition and the press. Indeed, the press seems to be somewhat fatigued by the exercise.

The biggest endorsement, of course, is three majorities in a row. My recollection of the election is that notwithstanding the effort on the part of certain opposition parties to call into question the integrity of the Prime Minister and indeed to raise the spectre of a charge under the criminal code, it in fact had no impact on the result of the election.

The opposition has started to circle in on an issue and obviously the most political one concerns the Prime Minister and a golf course in Shawinigan. The report of the ethics counsellor exonerated the Prime Minister. This is somewhat regrettable if one is a member of an opposition party, but it is a little like calling the system of justice into question because we do not like an individual judge's decision: if we do not get a decision we like, perhaps we should change the forum so that a better decision can be obtained.

I am therefore persuaded that this system does seem to work and I have some confidence that this ethics counsellor is doing a job under conditions that he sees as satisfactory. I have yet to hear the ethics counsellor himself complain that the conditions under which he finds himself working and the person to whom he reports in fact compromise anything he might do. I can recollect no evidence of any comments by this counsellor which indicate that he feels that his work is compromised by the system.

It seems, therefore, that the opposition needs to show that the ethics counsellor is compromised by the process. It needs to give

concrete and specific examples which show that the ethics counsellor and the process are compromised. It needs to show that the existing system does not work.

• (1615)

The opposition has demonstrated that the current system of reporting to the Prime Minister on request to a parliamentary committee, and indeed if requested to parliament itself, is a fair and open process whereby members of all sides have access to the decision and the decision making process.

In conclusion, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. The system is currently working. I cannot see any compelling reason for the arguments on the part of the opposition.

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there is one compelling argument for changing the system as it exists. The compelling argument was a document that the member campaigned on in 1993. He knows that he campaigned on the document. He knows that he campaigned on this principle.

We are asking him and his colleagues to keep their word on what they said they would do. It surprises me how they can talk around the issue and say there is no compelling reason to keep their word.

If there has been a change in circumstances I would like to have the member tell me what is that change in circumstances, because a change in circumstances would mean that the promise was null and void. If there is no change in circumstances from 1993 when he campaigned on the red book and this issue, I would ask him to vote for the principle because he campaigned on it. I ask him to tell me how he could do otherwise.

Mr. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I am not that old. For the record I did not campaign in 1993.

Having said that, I want to go through the details of the election promise. It stated that a Liberal government would appoint an independent ethics counsellor. That part was done. The ethics counsellor has been in place since 1994 and has rendered decisions, which possibly the government did not really like.

It stated that the government would advise both public officials and lobbyists in the day to day application of the code of conduct for public officials. The Lobbyists Registration Act has been passed and has been put in place. I am assuming that public officials means the government, the cabinet, the Prime Minister, parliamentary secretaries, and so on. Again, that has been done.

It stated that the ethics counsellor would be appointed after consultation with leaders of the parties. I understand that has been

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done. Possibly certain members of the opposition did not see that as being a satisfactory form of consultation.

It also stated that he would report directly to parliament. The point of the debate is whether he has to report directly to parliament by statute or whether he has to report directly to parliament through the Prime Minister or through parliamentary committees on request. As I said, I do not see circumstances which compel that to change.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the member opposite. I know he thinks in a very technical and reasonable way. He has given the example of a judge in this instance and I want to draw an example to his attention.

Let us take an individual named Jean who is to go before a judge to be judged. Before he goes before the trial judge on allegations he gets to pick and appoint the judge. Then Jean appears before the judge. While Jean is there, he is the only one who gets to present the evidence. Jean presents his case to the judge that he appointed and hired. After the judge has heard Jean's submissions he then retires. After making his decision on the evidence presented by Jean, he then reports back to Jean. He reports back to the person who hired him and then passes judgment.

The hon. member talks about the perception. I know he appreciates the nuance. The public should have confidence in the office of ethics counsellor which in and of itself includes the important distinction of ethics. Would he not agree that the perception here is wrong?

Would he not agree that the in this instance the Prime Minister is being judged by a person he has appointed and who reports only to him? Does the hon. member not see something wrong with the perception here?

• (1620)

Mr. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises an interesting question. My belief is that the answer is in the difference in the quality of the office, between what is a judge and what is an ethics counsellor.

A judge necessarily needs independence in the process. A judge necessarily hears evidence in an open and impartial manner. A judge necessarily gives a judgment which has consequences. However, we are talking about an ethics counsellor. An ethics counsellor gives advice. An ethics counsellor gives counsel. An ethics counsellor gives guidance. There are no sanctions. It is in the area of morality and ethics. It is not in the area of legal precedent.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since this is my first opportunity to rise in the House since you have been elevated to

your august position, let me say congratulations and all the very best to you as Deputy Speaker in the months and years ahead.

I rise today to speak against the opposition day motion. As we are all aware, members of the House are proud of our traditions as a parliamentary democracy. A parliamentary democracy means that the Prime Minister and ministers are accountable to parliament. This includes the ethical behaviour of ministers.

As a government we know the importance of ethical behaviour. We have a Prime Minister who is personally responsible for the government's ethical behaviour. We have a record of taking action and we have made sure that a commitment to ethical conduct reaches all levels within the Government of Canada and is part of its everyday ongoing work.

Public service is a trust, and trust in institutions is vital to a democracy. The Prime Minister is personally accountable to Canadians and to the House for the conduct of his ministers and his officials. The Prime Minister's responsibility for the ethics counsellor reflects this.

The ethics counsellor provides reports to parliament on his duties under the Lobbyists Registration Act. To establish a similar reporting on his duty in advising the Prime Minister would undermine the Prime Minister's responsibility for ministerial conduct. At the heart of the Canadian system of government is collective ministerial responsibility. This means that the government is responsible to parliament and it must maintain the confidence of the House in order to govern. Collective responsibility requires cabinet confidentiality.

Initiatives to strengthen integrity and transparency in government include more opportunity for policy debates in the House, changes to the pension plan for MPs to end double dipping, a conflict of interest code available to the public, a strengthened Lobbyists Registration Act, and the possibility for the auditor general to report to parliament up to four times a year.

We on this side of the House oppose the Canadian Alliance opposition day motion on the ethics counsellor. The opposition day motion suggests that the government is not accountable to parliament for its ethics policies and behaviour. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our government is accountable to parliament. Parliament considered and passed the Lobbyists Registration Act. The auditor general can now report to parliament up to four times a year.

A strengthened code of conduct for public officeholders has been tabled in parliament and the Prime Minister and ministers continue to be accountable to parliament for their policies and ethical behaviour.

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An independent ethics counsellor has been established to advise the Prime Minister on ministerial ethical issues. The ethics counsellor is independent and reports to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister reports to parliament. The opposition was consulted on the selection of the ethics counsellor. The ethics counsellor reports to parliament on his duties under the Lobbyists Registration Act. The ethics counsellor can be asked to appear before parliamentary committees and in fact has done so. As we have heard from my colleague, the hon. member from Scarborough East, not only has he appeared, but if necessary, he is a compellable witness before parliamentary committees.

• (1625)

In other words, not only have our actions reflected the spirit of our red book commitments on ethics and integrity, we have exceeded those commitments. Our position is that we are implementing our red book commitments and that is why we are voting against the opposition day motion.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, my first question to the minister has to do with the ethics counsellor. When an ethical blunder that may be worthy of rebuke is reported to the Prime Minister why are the criteria not released to the public?

Second, the minister made constant reference to ethics, policies, great behaviour and integrity. She said that the government has exceeded those expectations. I am curious to know what steps have been taken to rebuke the unethical comments made by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration during the election campaign?

Hon. Anne McLellan: Mr. Speaker, in relation to the hon. member's last unfortunate and gratuitous comment, it is most inappropriate for him to bring those comments into a debate that was begun today by the opposition in relation to the role of the ethics counsellor.

I would suggest that red herrings, such as the one he just raised, are inappropriate if we are to take the debate in relation to the ethics counsellor seriously.

The hon. member's first question was—

An hon. member: What about Debbie's pension?

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I just want to remind members on both sides of the House to please make their interventions to one another through the Chair.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Mr. Speaker, I have here the conflict of interest code for public officeholders. In fact, it is a public document. It clearly outlines the principles of the code of conduct. It begins with objects, principles, the interpretation thereof, the duties of the ethics counsellor and compliance arrangements. It is a very detailed outline in terms of what any one of us has to do in

relation to our assets and our liabilities, gifts, hospitality and other benefits. It lists failure to comply, failure to agree and consequences thereof, compliance measures.

I cannot imagine what more information the member would need than this. The information is available. All he has to do is take it off the net.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish the minister had the grace to admit what the Bloc Québécois and its leader pointed out during the election campaign, which is that we all stand to gain from a process in which the ethics counsellor is selected, appointed and recognized by parliament.

I think that all the opposition parties would support rapid action in this direction. There would be no doubt as to the integrity, legitimacy and relevance of the duties of a bona fide ethics counsellor.

Will the minister admit, as a parliamentarian, that this kind of appointment must be the prerogative and the responsibility of all parliamentarians and not just of the Prime Minister, who uses it for partisan ends?

[*English*]

Hon. Anne McLellan: Mr. Speaker, I fundamentally disagree with the premise of the hon. member's question.

• (1630)

In fact, as I have already indicated, the ethics counsellor is appointed by the Prime Minister after a process of consultation with leaders of the opposition parties. For the hon. member to suggest that there is anything dishonest or dishonourable, either in relation to this particular ethics counsellor or this office of the ethics counsellor, is certainly unbecoming.

I have already indicated that our system is one of parliamentary democracy and accountability. The Prime Minister is accountable to the House. He is accountable to the Parliament of Canada. Therefore, to suggest that somehow in the appointment of the ethics counsellor we are in any way treating the House lightly is a mischaracterization of the situation.

Unlike in most functioning democracies, the Prime Minister comes here virtually every day and is accountable to everyone in the House for everything he does, including the appointment of the ethics counsellor.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Given the importance of the issue and given the presence of the justice minister, who is without a doubt the highest ranking lawyer in the country, I wonder if we could have unanimous consent of the House to continue the question and answer period with her for another 10 minutes.

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The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I can quote the Minister of Justice from just a couple of minutes ago, when she said that our system is one of parliamentary democracy. I believe she also said that public office is a public trust.

What we see today in the debate on the motion and in the response and the defence being put on by the government is that the government really does not believe that we have a working parliamentary democracy. I do not think they appreciate that public office is a public trust.

The reason I say that is that it does come down to the heart of accountability. Human nature being what it is, unless we are accountable to someone else or to some external force, human nature tends to suggest that we cover up for ourselves. We do things that are not totally proper, but then we hope to get away with them.

Here is how I define accountability. I have done a lot of work on the topic. I was chairman of the public accounts committee in the House in the last parliament and a member of the committee in the parliament previous to that, and I deal a lot with accountability. I work a lot with the auditor general who, in his way, tries to hold the government accountable by releasing his independent reports, his criticisms and the problems that he finds. Sometimes they are overlooked by the government. Accountability means that one is responsible to forces that one does not control and that will affect one's behaviour. If the forces are not totally and absolutely out of one's control, if one can manage them, manipulate them and dominate them, then there is no accountability, regardless of what the justice minister says.

Parliament was created and then evolved over several hundreds of years in the U.K. It started off with a monarch who had absolute autocratic authority. He did what he wanted. He hung people, imprisoned people, taxed people and went to war. He did whatever he wanted with absolute, total, autocratic authority, and the people said no. Over several hundred years, the people wrestled from the monarchy the right to hold the government and the monarch accountable.

In the House, as 301 parliamentarians, perhaps excluding the government benches, it is our role to hold the government accountable. Unfortunately, we in this House either tend to think that we are part of government or, on the opposite side of the House, we hope that we become government. Therefore we lose our focus on what we in the House should be doing, which is to hold the government accountable.

As long as the Prime Minister says that he is doing his bit, that he has an ethics counsellor who reports to him, it is an outright sham when it comes to accountability. For the justice minister to speak in the House about how accountable the government is and to say that they will vote against the motion indicates the disdain by which they hold the House and the members who sit in the House.

• (1635)

We only have to look in the recent past at the HRDC billion dollar boondoggle. There were numerous HRDC audits in the last number of years, internal audits that did not cause change. However, when the final audit got into the public domain and the minister could no longer control the response to it, we finally had some real accountability because the minister had to respond to forces outside her control.

We had the Minister of Health, just yesterday, answering questions about the native treatment centre scandal in Manitoba. Why is that a scandal? Because there is no accountability. The financial statements are not available. The chief said that once the money flowed to the reserve it was no longer public money and he did not have to answer to anybody. Now we find after years that thousands and millions of dollars have gone astray.

We find that people are off on Caribbean cruises and they call it training. How can that be? The minute it becomes public and the minute that the chief no longer controls the responses and the demands for information, we find there is real accountability.

We had the Shawinigan affair in the Prime Minister's riding. Let us compare the ethics counsellor reporting to the Prime Minister and the chairman of the business development bank who lost his job because he was suggesting that he did not do what the Prime Minister wanted. I would expect that the ethics counsellor would have lost his job too if he did not do what the Prime Minister wanted. That is a great affront.

I draw attention to a parallel a couple of weeks ago in the U.K. parliament. The minister for Northern Ireland, Mr. Peter Mandelson, was economical with the truth. He gave some information to a junior minister who reported to parliament that turned out to be a bit shy of the whole story. Within two days he was no longer a minister. If that type of thing happens in our parliament, unfortunately it is glossed over and it is business as usual.

In the last few days the Minister of Foreign Affairs admitted to the House that he had not been in full command of all the facts in his department and his department had not been in full command of all the facts regarding the Russian diplomat who was expelled from Canada. He has by and large mislead the House because he was not up to his job.

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The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am having some difficulty with the last statement made by the hon. member. I would hope that he might continue his remarks by being somewhat more judicious.

Mr. John Williams: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has provided us with more information as the days go on which does not support what he said in the days before. He has suggested that he now is in command of more facts he has a different story to tell.

We can draw whatever conclusion we want from that. Had it been in the U.K. parliament he would have been gone. There is no question about that, none whatsoever. It did not cause a ripple in this place. That is why there is very little accountability here. That is why the Prime Minister is getting away with an ethics counsellor that reports to him rather than to the House. It is time the House wrestled back the responsibility it should have never given up to hold the government accountable.

We cannot expect the citizens on the street who are going about their daily lives to hold the government accountable. That is why we were elected.

• (1640)

The Parliament of Canada should hold the Government of Canada responsible. For the Prime Minister to suggest anything else would suggest that he is more of an autocrat than a democrat. Members of the House are getting fed up with stories about the ethics commissioner saying no rules were broken and that everything is fine. No rules were broken because there are no rules to break. That also speaks volumes.

Lack of accountability led to a billion dollar boondoggle at HRDC. Lack of accountability in the native treatment centre in Manitoba led to a huge waste of money. We now have all kinds of misgivings about the deal going on in the Prime Minister's riding. The auditor general is talking about gross incompetence in the Minister of Canadian Heritage's department because due diligence was not performed on 19% of the files.

Across the frontlines the government does not respect the fact that parliament's job is to hold it accountable. We unfortunately have given up far too much of our power. It is time we got it back. It is time the government was answerable to us and the Canadian people.

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suggest to the hon. member opposite that there may be a profound misunderstanding, wilful or inadvertent, on the part of some members about what the ethics counsellor is or does.

I heard the hon. member refer to the ethics counsellor as an ethics commissioner. There is a very big difference. The opposition is clearly seeking someone who will be an enforcer, a policeman, a

judge, someone who will do his or her job in enforcing a code of conduct or ethics. The ethics counsellor is none of those.

The ethics counsellor is a counsellor to those who are appointed, who are ministers, who are parliamentary secretaries, so that they can avoid the difficulties of conflict of interest and pre-empt difficult situations. That issue has been addressed back and forth today.

Let me put another issue to the hon. member. All of us in the House are busily holding forth on the issue of compliance with a code of conduct which would exist for ministers, for officeholders and for parliamentary secretaries. There is no code of conduct. For all of those here who are holding forth, there is no code of conduct for members of parliament. They are very willing to hoist upon the other officeholders a code of conduct, but not one element of a code of conduct applies to members in the House. That is business that we have to do.

Before we wax eloquent on what is missing in all of the other codes of conduct, I suggest we get our own House in order. I ask the member to comment on that.

Mr. John Williams: Mr. Speaker, the member was talking semantics about counsellor and commissioner. The Prime Minister is not accountable to the House and he should be. The intent of the red book motion was that the Prime Minister and the government be accountable. If the forces are beyond our control to manage then we are not accountable.

With regard to the second point raised about members of parliament not having a code of conduct, the Council of Europe has developed a clear code of conduct for its parliamentarians. I will be glad to work with the member to see if it can be introduced in the House.

I hope members of the House can move on, hopefully with the encouragement of the Prime Minister and the government. The justice minister said public office is a public trust. I hope we can rise to that level to ensure that our constituents have faith in us as we perform our responsibilities.

Let it start with the Prime Minister. Let him demonstrate how he will rise above the smelly little scandals that seem to be cropping up each and everywhere. He could set them aside by rising to a higher level of principle and ensuring that the government is accountable to the House.

• (1645)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I must agree with the hon. member who just spoke. There are a lot of semantics and careful, niggling little words being used in characterizing the office.

It is clear that the intent in the red book was to bring about accountability. The hon. member knows well about accountability. He very much makes it his passion in this place. He is the fiscal

thistle who often brings out barbs of information against the government and its accountability to the House and to Canadians.

I want to put to the member the chronology of how things have unfolded. The Prime Minister owned a property. The Prime Minister sold the property. The property sale did not go through, therefore in some form it came back to him. It may have been in a blind trust, but it was a blind trust with a lot of peripheral vision. However, during the time that the property was not sold, when it was in an inbetween, purgatory stage, the Prime Minister was making representations to the Business Development Bank to assist an individual, well known by the Prime Minister, in the sale of a property adjoining his own that would therefore enhance the value of the property held by the Prime Minister.

Is this perception or reality? Is this not a conflict of interest that should be viewed by an individual with impartiality, not connected to the Prime Minister in any way, shape or form? That is what is at the crux of the issue that has led to this debate.

Does the hon. member have a comment with respect to the perception of the public in the chronology that I have just laid out?

Mr. John Williams: Mr. Speaker, in the words of a wise person, whom I cannot remember at this time, if we have to ask if it is a conflict of interest, we can bet our boots that it is. Therefore, if we are ever concerned that we may be in a conflict of interest then we probably are in a conflict of interest.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker. As a new member I will certainly look to you for guidance as I deliberate in the House of Commons.

It is an honour and a privilege to stand here today in our national parliament on behalf of the people of Edmonton Southwest. Since this is my first address in this distinguished Chamber, I take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to the people of Edmonton Southwest. They have bestowed upon me a tremendous honour, but also a tremendous duty and a tremendous responsibility.

I also thank those people without whose efforts I would not be standing here today, not only for their efforts but also for their love and support. I especially thank my family, particularly my mother and father. One could not ask for more supportive parents. It is to their credit, as well as a credit to the democratic principles of our citizens, that the son of two school teachers can rise and be selected by his fellow citizens to represent their concerns and aspirations in our national parliament.

I also thank my friends, mentors and colleagues at the University of Alberta, particularly in the department of political science. I am quite cognizant to the reality that many individuals there may not have intended to help mould a Canadian Alliance member of

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parliament, but I am genuinely appreciative of their goodwill over the past number of years.

Last, I thank the previous member of parliament for Edmonton Southwest, Mr. Ian McClelland, with whom I worked for four years. This hon. gentleman is well known to members of the House and achieved something notable during his time here: respect from members on both sides of the House.

Since my arrival in parliament, many members have told me that I have big shoes to fill, in more ways than one. Ian himself would likely describe this as a Sisyphean challenge, but it is a challenge I readily and heartily accept.

The residents of Edmonton Southwest, if I can characterize them, are tough-minded, warm-hearted and principled people who focus on big issues and offer pragmatic solutions. They are very honest in their critiques, but when there is work to be done they roll up their sleeves and get to work.

During the recent election I noticed that their concerns related primarily to fiscal responsibility and the democratic nature of government.

• (1650)

That is why I am pleased to speak today to the official opposition motion. This motion speaks to the broad themes of democratic and parliamentary reform, accountability and transparency in government.

The motion states that the House adopt the following policy from Liberal red book one and calls for the immediate implementation of it by the government:

A Liberal Government will appoint an independent Ethics Counsellor to advise both public officials and lobbyists in the day-to-day application of the Code of Conduct for Public Officials. The Ethics Counsellor will be appointed after consultation with the leaders of all parties in the House of Commons and will report directly to Parliament.

While this motion is specifically related to the ethics counsellor, it does relate to the broader themes of parliamentary and democratic reform, fiscal responsibility, accountability and transparency, and members of parliament themselves.

During the recent election, people in Edmonton spoke passionately about the need for accountability from the government to ensure they were respected as citizens and that their taxpayer dollars were treated as funds in trust.

They were very frustrated by the spending problems within the Department of Human Resources Development, but were more frustrated by the unwillingness of the government to take responsibility for those financial problems.

They were particularly upset by the revelation that the auditor general was not able to present his report to the respective committee because of lack of attendance by government members.

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When this was combined with report of the information commissioner, in which he detailed concerns about the lack of openness in this government, people expressed grave concern about the lack of accountability and transparency of a government elected to serve their best interests.

A common frustration I encountered from people was that public officials did not seem accountable to them as citizens. They felt the only control they had was the opportunity every four years, or three and a half in this case, to walk into a polling booth and mark an X on a ballot.

One of the most serious problems facing Canadian democracy today is the concentration of political power within the Prime Minister's office and the lack of checks and balances to that power.

Canada today has what political scientist Donald Savoie called court government as distinguished from the cabinet government and parliamentary government of earlier political eras. We have almost reverted to what the hon. member for St. Albert was talking about, a monarchy style of government with a court that advises the monarch.

The Prime Minister's office has grown in size and scope since the 1960s. This size and corresponding increase in power is a threat not only to our fundamental rights and duties as parliamentarians, but also to our basic liberties as free and equal citizens.

Those are strong words, but I ask my fellow parliamentarians and fellow citizens to consider the powers currently exercised in Canada by one individual: the power to appoint all the members of the cabinet; the power to appoint all the members of the Supreme Court of Canada, which has become more involved in public policy decisions and our daily lives; the power to appoint all the members of the second national legislative body, the Senate; the power to influence and appoint all the chairmen of the parliamentary committees; and the power to control the House of Commons by disallowing free votes through a misuse of the confidence convention.

We have to ask ourselves whether having so much power in one office with one individual is healthy for our democracy. I believe we even have to question whether we are fulfilling those democratic traditions and principles we hold dear.

Regardless of the political party in power, regardless of the person in the office, the concentration of political power, combined with the extension of the state more and more into our everyday lives, is a serious threat to our fundamental rights as citizens. As more and more decisions are made that impact our lives, we as citizens have less control, if any, over these decisions.

One step to address the problem is to restore parliament to its proper role. With the increasing power of the Prime Minister's

office and the increasing influence of the judiciary on public policy, the third aspect of our democracy, the legislature, has declined in importance. This is an unfortunate trend for a nation that was established in the British tradition of parliamentary democracy, where parliament was intended to be the highest institution of political authority.

Apart from historical reasons, one of the best reasons today for reinvigorating parliament and empowering parliamentarians is to fully utilize the talents of members in the House.

• (1655)

In my previous life as a political assistant and in my short time here so far, I have had the opportunity to witness some fine parliamentarians, men and women from all parties who are intelligent, independent minded individuals.

The current function of parliament within our institutional framework, combined with the manner in which this place operates, both of which are primarily caused by the concentration of political power, means that the skills of these thoughtful and deliberative MPs are not fully realized. I would argue in fact that they are barely realized.

One only has to think back to the debate this morning, when a member from another political party, the hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona who I think all members would agree is one of the more thoughtful, deliberative parliamentarians spoke. He is has been in opposition almost his entire career. Think of what he can effect in terms of change? Are we fully utilizing the talents of members of parliament such as him if we simply sit on two sides of the aisle and have power so concentrated within the Prime Minister's Office?

In my view this motion attempts to tilt the balance back from the Prime Minister's office to parliament by having the ethics counsellor being appointed only after genuine consultation with the leaders of all parties and by having the ethics counsellor report directly to parliament.

This reporting directly to parliament will ensure the process is open and transparent to all Canadians. It will make public officials and lobbyists truly accountable for their actions. It will begin to make parliament and parliamentarians resume their rightful place as the institutional guardians of the public trust.

I would encourage all members on both sides of the House to reflect seriously on the motion and join with me in supporting its passage and implementation.

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a previous speaker alluded to the fact that there is no code of conduct for MPs in the House.

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I would like to ask the new member whether he feels there should be a code of conduct for MPs and whether that code of conduct should be enforced by an ethics counsellor, some person outside of parliament who reports to parliament. Would he like to see such a situation?

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, the best control over parliamentarians is the voters. As parliamentarians, we are directly responsible to the voters.

There is a difference between the government and parliament, and I think the hon. member for St. Albert alluded to this. There is a difference between the cabinet, which is responsible for ministries and departments, and parliament.

The change that happened in the Magna Carta was fundamental. It is fundamental that parliament, as the representative of the people, control how the cabinet exercises and disburses the money.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to be splitting my time with the hon. member for Waterloo—Wellington.

Congratulations on your appointment as Deputy Speaker. It is good to see you there. I am very comfortable with you being there.

I would like to extend my condolences to the family of the late David Iftody, our colleague who died so suddenly this past week.

I would also like to say hello to our colleague from Vaudreuil—Soulanges who has not been able to join us yet. His wife has been quite ill. We send our best wishes to him, to his wife and to his family.

I will start my comments by relating to the House some of the testimony of the ethics counsellor, Mr. Howard Wilson, which he gave in the 36th parliament to the industry committee. It is interesting that the ethics counsellor is appearing before a parliamentary committee. The members should know that one of the opportunities we have is that the ethics counsellor can be summoned to committee and in fact has been summoned to committee.

● (1700)

In his testimony, and it was related to many of the issues that have been raised in debate today, he referred to the conflict of interest code. The most recent version was tabled in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister in 1994. The member who just spoke should note that it applies not just to cabinet ministers, it also applies to parliamentary secretaries, their spouses and dependent children, members of ministers' political staff and essentially all full time governor in council appointees, senior members of the executive branch of government as well as part time appointees. In total the conflict of interest guidelines apply to an estimated 3,100 persons.

Imagine the number of times questions of ethics may come up with that many people. Imagine what would happen if all of a sudden the ethics counsellor were required to prepare a report or report through committee on the activities of his office in regard to some 3,100 people. Imagine the allegations that could be made. Even with the debate today, allegations have been made with regard to some of the current issues allegations have been made. All of these have been shown to be unsubstantiated allegations. All members would have access to all of this information, and it puts us in a very awkward position.

I really have some concern about having the ethics counsellor being a position where at the whim of parliamentarians they could start to get into a lot of the details of the operations of that office.

The parliamentary secretary to the House leader indicated that there was a difference between an ethics counsellor and an ethics commissioner. Much of the discussion today has taken place with regard to the policeman, the person who would be judge and jury. That is not exactly the description of the ethics counsellor. I wanted to put that on the table because we have to put this in context.

We also need to confirm that the code of ethical guidelines does not apply to members of parliament, nor to senators. Imagine the allegations that would be made, never mind by another member of parliament, perhaps by people in the public generally. Members will know from experience with their constituency offices that there are some fairly inquisitive people. Imagine if someone bought a \$50 or \$100 ticket for a fundraiser and then all of a sudden the person got an appointment. Someone in the House, regardless of what side, would jump up and say it was a conflict of interest or influence peddling and all kinds of things.

There is an incumbency on all members of parliament to be honourable members of parliament. We are taken at our word and when we speak in this place we always speak the truth. To suggest that a member has misled or lied or whatever is contrary to the rules of this place. We are all honourable members of parliament.

With that as a preamble, I would like to address specifically the details of the motion that is before this place. It is with regard to an undertaking that the government made in the 1993 election about establishing an ethics counsellor in the first place.

There are a number of elements to it. The government itself is accountable to parliament. We considered and passed the Lobbyists Registration Act and the ethics counsellor must enforce the provisions of it. The auditor general now reports to parliament up to four times a year. He can report almost as often as he wants in certain circumstances. The code of conduct has been strengthened for public officeholders. That was tabled in parliament and a copy is available to all Canadians on the parliamentary website. The Prime Minister and his ministers continue to be accountable to parliament for their policies and ethical behaviour.

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We are accountable in this place. We are accountable for all of the things that we do. All of the information that passes through this place is available to members in one fashion or another, whether it be in the House during question period, or during debate, or during committee or other forums as well.

An independent ethics counsellor was established in accordance with the undertaking back in 1993. Principally, his job is to advise the Prime Minister on ministerial ethics issues. This is where I think the big responsibilities lie, because there is such a breadth of operations and responsibilities on our ministers.

• (1705)

It is important for Canadians to know that there is a very comprehensive code of ethics and guidelines on a variety of requirements. Members of parliament must declare their assets. They must establish blind trusts for certain assets. They are restricted in terms of certain outside activities. There are rules with respect to gifts and hospitality to ensure that there would not be in fact or an appearance to be out of line with hospitality type items to the avoidance of preferential treatment. It also sets out what happens in the conditions of failure to comply. It is a very important code of ethics that has been presented to the House by the Prime Minister.

In its totality what has happened so far fully complies with the spirit of the undertaking of the government that was laid out back in 1993. The Prime Minister has an ethics counsellor to ensure that he has the advice on all material matters of ethical conduct so that he can ensure that he is kept apprised of areas where there may be risks or problems of an ethical nature.

I stress though that we are not talking about illegal acts. Illegal acts are dealt with by our judicial system and by the RCMP. Members will know that RCMP investigations have been raised with regard to a number of allegations, whether they be HRDC or other matters that have come up over the years through the House.

In a fundamental sense because the ethics counsellor discharges those responsibilities, he is accountable to the House from the standpoint that he can and has been subpoenaed to appear before committee to answer questions.

Throughout the debate today we heard about a particular issue that had to do with the Prime Minister. The question is fundamental. Does the prime minister, when he becomes prime minister, cease to be a member of parliament? Do the constituents of the prime minister's riding give up their opportunity to be served and assisted by their member of parliament? It is an interesting question. It is pretty hard to imagine anyone not knowing that their member of parliament was also the prime minister. That fact alone, which is indisputable and certainly there is not much one can do about it, probably would have some influence in certain corners.

Fundamentally a member of parliament has to have the opportunity to represent the interests of his or her constituents, and in this particular case the Prime Minister did.

Today, I heard so many people rave about the allegations of impropriety of wrongdoing, when in fact the ethics counsellor, who was given a vote of confidence by all parties after appropriate consultation, opined on that. He said the Prime Minister had sold his interest in the golf course on November 1, 1993.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, it has been rather interesting to watch respected members, and I say that about this member, of the Liberal Party attempting to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

This issue is very simple and straightforward. With the greatest respect, I point out to the member that we are not talking about the spirit of what was promised by the Liberals. We are talking about the words that the Liberals promised. Apparently, there is a big difference between those two things.

The difficulty is that when the ethics counsellor does not report directly to parliament, and the Prime Minister sets the rules for the ethics counsellor, then the ethics counsellor will make the ruling based on those particular rules.

• (1710)

We all know that from time to time the House has to alter the criminal code. It has to alter the Health Act. It has to alter things to do with metric measurement. Things do evolve. In this instance, as long as it is out of the reach of parliament to set the rules, which a person of integrity like Howard Wilson will be deciding on, then it is not doing the job.

In 1993 this member and other Liberal members campaigned on the principle that the ethics counsellor "will report directly to parliament". Those are five simple words. Let us not worry about the spirit. Let us worry about the words on which they campaigned. Why is the member trying to thread the needle here in such a way as to say that they are already doing it and that they do not need those words? We are simply asking him to do what he promised in 1993.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, the ethics counsellor is independent and the member will not even acknowledge that. The rules are not set by the Prime Minister. The rules guiding the conduct and the role of the ethics counsellor are set out in the conflict of interest and post-employment code for public office holders of June 1994, under which the ethics counsellor operates. I think the hon. member maybe misspoke himself in describing what the facts really are.

Second, the question comes down to whether it is better that he report to parliament. I do not know exactly what that means. Maybe it means to report annually to a committee or something or

to allow us to go on a fishing expedition. The point is that I believe members of parliament, as demonstrated by what has happened so far, can have the ethics counsellor appear before committee to answer all the questions and to be fully accountable for all questions on matters that are his responsibility.

Third, members also have the opportunity to receive from the ethics commissioner any reports on anything. In fact the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of fifth party wrote letters asking for information and received it.

I do not believe that changing the instrument or vehicle in which the ethics counsellor operates could at all change what rights or opportunities members currently have. It would not change anything other than the fact that it might give parliamentarians an opportunity to go on wild fishing expeditions with regard to 3,100 persons who are covered by this code of ethics.

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, have listened to quite a bit of the debate on this motion today. I am going to give a hypothetical case because it has not happened in parliament but it has happened in a provincial legislature.

I would like to ask the member for Mississauga South whether he believes that the fact that the ethics commissioner is appointed by the Prime Minister would have any impact whatsoever on the ethics counsellor's integrity and independence in judging a complaint about a leader of an official opposition party benefiting to the tune of \$800,000 of taxpayers' money to settle a private—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The hon. member for Waterloo—Wellington.

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first, I had an opportunity to review this opposition day motion. Quite frankly it is crass politics at its worst. It simply comes from the dying days of the campaign prior to November 27, when the reformed alliance people were floundering and did not know which way to turn, so they came up with this smear campaign against the Prime Minister. This is a man of enormous integrity, a man who has fought all his life to ensure good, decent and honest government, but here we have the kinds of antics we saw not only today but certainly leading up to the election as well, antics that denigrate the good character of the Prime Minister and others associated with him. I find it objectionable. I want to go on record as noting that. I think the good people of Waterloo—Wellington do as well.

● (1715)

We need to be very clear in terms of what has taken place. First, the ethics counsellor has repeatedly said that the Prime Minister at every step acted with great integrity and did not show favouritism

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or any kind of partiality. He did so on behalf of his constituents. Next, the highest court, the court of the electorate, spoke on November 27 and, first, re-elected the Liberal government but, second, noted that there were in fact some questions about the integrity of the leader of the reformed Alliance group.

Let us consider the evidence on that fact. First, as was pointed out by the hon. member in her question to the other member who spoke, the leader of the opposition has \$792,064 worth of reasons why he should be looking at his own nest before he starts considering others. This was taxpayers' money that was paid out as a result of ego, arrogance and error. He could have settled with Mr. Goddard for \$60,000. Did he do it? No, he did not. He let the taxpayers of Alberta pick up the tab.

It is hard to take when we put that in the context of the grandstanding we are seeing today. It is doubly galling when we think of the fact that on this very day, at nine o'clock mountain standard time, a civil court challenge is being launched by none other than the former Speaker of the Alberta legislature, who happens to be a colleague of the Leader of the Opposition. The former Speaker claims that that \$800,000 price tag—for ethical or unethical behaviour, take your pick—was in fact unethical but also contrary to the rules of the legislature of Alberta and that taxpayers' funds were indeed used to settle a private defamation lawsuit. How ironic that it is happening on this very day.

Let us not forget another little story that took place about a month ago. When he was seeking a seat in the House of Commons last summer, the Alliance leader claimed that Jim Hart, the sitting member for Okanagan—Coquihalla, had willingly and of his own volition offered to give up his seat. Only recently did we find out that the seat had a price tag of \$50,000.

Well, is it not so ironic that those people opposite, those holier than thou, reformed Alliance people, can always be on the side of the angels, depending on which way they spin their little web in their zealotry and other things? Fifty thousand dollars is a lot of money. In the *Ottawa Sun* of January 24, 2001, there is a quote which reads, "People would find it shocking. Fifty thousand bucks is a lot of money". That was the member for Wild Rose saying this about his very own leader and his very own colleagues. There is a joke circulating on this point which says that the Alliance leader had the Albertans pay for his mouth and the Alliance Party pay for his seat. Whether or not that is funny I will leave for you to decide.

This is all on the heels of the former leader having a secret fund of \$40,000 for clothing and other things. Here we go again with the duplicity and the hypocrisy.

Speaking of duplicity, hypocrisy and other matters, ethical or unethical, let us remember the member for Edmonton North, the

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high priestess of principle herself on pensions. There were pigs squealing, buttons in the House, pigs on the front lawn and other things, but she has found it in her heart, bless her dearly, to find \$90,000 to buy back into the pension.

• (1720)

Do we not read today that the member for Medicine Hat has found \$50,000 to do the same? He says he is finding it quite difficult to square with his constituents. Is it not always interesting to note that at one time they say one thing to certain groups of people in parts of the country when it is convenient to their purposes and quite another to another set of people at another time? It does not always seem to jibe, and the circle always does not get quite squared, but holier than thou as they are, they keep plugging away.

I will say here and now that we as a government take pride in the fact that we have provided an excellent service to Canadians. We have provided good governance in the keeping of Canadian values and institutions. The Prime Minister, the cabinet and this government brought forward the Lobbyists Registration Act, for example, on the heels of the election after the first mandate in 1993. The Prime Minister and the cabinet brought forward the notion of the ethics counsellor. We did so knowing it was in keeping with the will of the people and knowing that we would be transparent and accountable in a manner consistent with what Canadians want and consistent with what I believe Canadians deserve.

We have maintained and held onto those high ethical standards, in keeping, then, with what parliamentary democracy is all about, in keeping with the constituents' wishes. We have ensured that we have the kinds of appointments and ethical considerations in place that keep us moving in a way that is consistent with what Canadians want us to do.

Why did we do it? When we took power in 1993, what a rogues' gallery there was under the Mulroney era. Need I remind the House that as a direct result of that, it was the ethics counsellor who brought forward the kinds of things that we now have in place because of what took place with the Tories prior to 1993. I could go through the list. There were Sinclair Stevens and the royal commission that concluded there were violations of 14 different conflicts of interest. I could talk about André Bissonnette, the Minister of Transport, who left cabinet as a result of flipping land that went from \$800,000 to \$3 million in 11 days. I could talk about Roch LaSalle and others. I could go on to Michel Coté and Senator Michel Cogger.

Earlier I wanted to ask the Conservatives something, because they were getting on their high horse too. They were going on about the kinds of clean and ethical things that they are capable of, yet we saw the rogues' gallery that preceded us in 1993. I want to know why Conservative Senator Eric Berntson is still sitting as a member

of their caucus. If they are on such high moral ground, they should be asking for his resignation. They should be booting him out.

Do we remember that corrupt government of Grant Devine and the kinds of things that were happening there? He is still sitting as a member of their caucus. If they are on such high moral ground, the first thing they should be doing is getting him out.

I find that at the end of the day this government has acted with honesty and integrity and continues to do so on behalf of the people of this great country. For the reformed Alliance people to bring in this kind of crass political motion and to do so in light of their pension flip-flop, in light of the \$800,000 that their leader has squandered on behalf of the taxpayers of Alberta, in light of paying \$50,000 for Jim Hart's seat, in light of point after point of questionable ethics and doing it with the holier than thou attitude that only those people opposite have, I can tell you this: the good folks in Waterloo—Wellington do not cut to that kind of chase. They see hypocrisy where it is every time and I can tell you that on this day in this parliament it resides on those benches.

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I really appreciate some of the examples that the member from Waterloo—Wellington gave about some of the incidents we could qualify as conflict of interest incidents or as unethical.

• (1725)

Does the member perchance have any other examples on the part of the official opposition party or perhaps on the part of the former government party, the Progressive Conservatives? I, as well as those in my riding, would be most interested.

Mr. Lynn Myers: Madam Speaker, I am interested in these kinds of matters. I find it interesting to do the research to get to the bottom of these kinds of issues.

I can tell the House that the Conservatives under Mr. Mulroney had a decade of arrogance and high-handedness when it came to the issue of conflict of interest and the unethical behaviour that took place. What happened was a crying shame. Members will note that under the leadership of the Prime Minister and this government that has not been the pattern.

I could go on at length about the reformed Alliance people, those holier than thou who sit on that side of the House and preach the gospel of always being on the moral high ground when in fact they are down in the gutter to the extent of \$800,000.

We have to think about the member for Edmonton North and her pension. I was playing the tape not so long ago and listening to the pig sounds. The snorting was incredible. The pigs were out on the front lawn of this great parliament and there were pig buttons, and all of a sudden that is all supposed to be forgotten. Those members ran a couple of elections on the fact that they would never buy into

pensions and now it is “oh, let us conveniently forget it”. The member for Medicine Hat said that it was hard to square with his constituents, but he wants back in. It is unbelievable.

The hypocrisy, the duplicity, the flip-flopping, the holier-than-thou-ism are unbelievable. It is so sacrosanct, and yet at the same time they are sucking and blowing whenever they think they can get away with it. I object and so do the people on this side of the House, as do my constituents of Waterloo—Wellington and most Canadians, because Canadians spot hypocrisy and duplicity every time, especially from those who always claim the moral high ground. That is when it galls the most and that is exactly what we are seeing here today.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John’s West, PC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member. There is no doubt that many of us here in the House would agree that there are certain basic rules and principles that we should adhere to.

The member, in his holier than thou attitude, basically set the parameters under which we should all operate. He looked at examples of the past and, perhaps rightly so, pointed out individuals and occasions about which none of us can hold our heads high and say that we agreed with what people did. In saying so, the member himself undoubtedly is saying he does not agree with this either.

Is the member then saying that because he does not agree with this underhanded work, the conflict of interest we have seen in the past, his leader, the Prime Minister, should meet his Waterloo—not to pun the member’s district—and perhaps step aside? He is in the same boat as many of the others the member was talking about.

Are you also saying that your leader is wrong? That is the impression you have given the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I remind the hon. members to address the Chair and not each other.

Mr. Lynn Myers: Madam Speaker, I can clear this up very quickly. That is not at all what I said.

What I was pointing out about the previous Tory administration is that between 1986 and 1988 there were no less than 14 incidents of conflict of interest. We had to clean up that mess. That is exactly what the Prime Minister, the cabinet and the government did. We cleaned up that mess. As a result, we now have good conflict of interest guidelines in place. There is a conflict of interest person who, under the ethics commission and counsellor, does what is required.

• (1730)

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the

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member for Prince Albert. As this is my first speech in the new 37th parliament, I will begin by thanking the people of Dewdney—Alouette for entrusting me with the honour to serve them for a second term.

I thank my wife Wendy and my four wonderful children for their continued love and support. I thank my entire family, my campaign team and my supporters who worked so hard for so long. I also thank my hard working staff, Tara, Randy and Mark, for their endless hours of support, encouragement and dedicated efforts, and give great thanks to God for his grace and guidance in my life.

The motion before the House today is one of significant importance. I believe the motion before us and the subsequent vote provides all members of parliament a landmark opportunity to debate and work together to achieve a very important change in the way the government conducts its business.

The action which we are championing with a non-partisan nature is one which could signal to Canadians that those of us who have been sent here to represent the people are willing to put aside bitter partisan bickering for the greater good of the nation.

In the recent election fewer people came out to vote than in any time in our country’s history. We can draw many conclusions from this. However I think it is obvious that our people are withdrawing. More and more of our citizens, particularly young people, are deciding that it simply does not matter what they do at the polls, that things in Ottawa will never change.

This is an attitude that more and more of our citizens are developing across regions, across age groups and in all cross-sections of Canadian society. The simple fact is that fewer people are involved in the political discourse of the country. As members of parliament this should be of great concern to all of us.

It is of great concern to me. On a personal level, I learned through my father’s experience as a veteran of the second world war the great price that was paid for our freedom, for our democracy, and for what we hold dear in this great country. I will never forget my father’s admonition to be involved and to take the opportunity to vote always. I have done that and I encourage others to do the same, to be involved.

As public figures we face the rigours of public scrutiny. We need to be held accountable for our actions, as all people do. We have been entrusted with a really great responsibility. People are looking for leaders who are willing to be transparent, honest and ethical. All successful organizations which stand the test of time are committed to these principles.

It is true that organizations could flourish for a time even though they may neglect these ethical principles, but ultimately the lack of

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principle would lead to that institution's eventual demise. That is why I believe that we can work together to pass a motion which was developed by the governing Liberals themselves.

We must give credit where credit is due. The motion to appoint an independent ethics counsellor who reports directly to parliament was promised to Canadians in red book one. We will allow the government to take credit for the initiative it brought forward.

I will take a minute to rebut some of the arguments by the government that I have heard today. There have been many attempts to deflect attention away from the motion by focusing on other issues. It is a staid old measure in the government members' arsenal to deflect attention about their own actions by attacking others. We are used to that. Canadians are tired of those kinds of tactics.

I will address specific points raised earlier in the House by the government House leader. On several occasions in debate he said that the current ethics counsellor reports to the House of Commons. He stated that the ethics counsellor reports on lobbyists activities and reports to parliamentary committees in regard to the estimates.

Let me be very clear and let Canadians understand the process under which the current ethics counsellor must operate. He is appointed by the Prime Minister, paid by the government and reports to the Prime Minister in regard to conflict issues involving himself and his ministers.

The Prime Minister will not release the guidelines that the ethics counsellor uses and he is under no obligation to release any of these reports. The ethics counsellor does not have investigative powers. In essence, he is bound from being able to do what really needs to be done in order to have an independent investigation.

The assertion made by the government House leader in regard to the independence of the ethics counsellor was simply inaccurate due to the current process that is in place. The government House leader went on to argue that if we did not have the current provisions in regard to the ethics counsellor in place brought in by the government, a future prime minister might say with regard to questionable activities "It is not my fault; ask the ethics counsellor". That was a point made by the government House leader.

● (1735)

I assert that this may not only happen in the future but it is exactly what is happening with regard to the current Prime Minister's Shawinigan circumstances. That is the current defence being offered by the Prime Minister in regard to the many police investigations into grants and loans in the Prime Minister's riding and in regard to his involvement with the Business Development Bank.

I submit to my colleagues that it is cold solace to any minister of the crown, or Prime Minister, to be cleared of any wrongdoing by a process that is so obviously flawed. Would it not be better to have an independent ethics counsellor who could delve into allegations with investigative powers to clear up all details having to do with a conflict case? That simply does not happen now under the current process.

Subsection 23(3) of the conflict of interest code states:

A public office holder shall not accord preferential treatment in relation to any official matter to family members or friends or to organizations in which they, family members or friends, have an interest—

It is a bit beyond all credibility for Canadians to accept the fact that the Prime Minister can pick up the phone for any of his constituents and call the president of the Business Development Bank of Canada and encourage him to grant a loan to a high risk file against the president's better judgment. That is simply too far of a stretch, but that is what the Prime Minister wants Canadians to believe in regard to the Duhaime case.

The Prime Minister called the president on behalf of Mr. Duhaime, a friend who had taken the Grand-Mère hotel off his hands. The most powerful elected official in the country intervened on behalf of a friend. Something is very wrong with this picture.

It has become clear through the course of debate today that the government is unlikely to support its own idea promised to Canadians in its own red book. The government, earlier today, attempted to pull some procedural tactics to change the entire intent of the Canadian Alliance motion, which I believe has the support of all opposition parties in the House. It is indeed a sad day when the government engages in these types of tactics in an attempt to extricate itself from a very difficult situation.

There is hope though. The Canadian Alliance will continue to work together with others in a non-partisan manner to bring forth suggestions, even suggestions presented by others, including the government, as is the case with the motion today.

Why are we willing to do that? The opportunity for change is before us now, today. Let us work together to make some concrete changes to restore the dignity of all members and the House of Commons. Let all of us together signal to Canadians that we are less concerned about being right and more concerned about doing what is right for our country.

I urge all members to support this positive motion, first suggested by the government itself, brought forward by the Canadian Alliance today, and supported by all opposition parties. If we do that today, make a change and move forward, I believe we will set a positive tone in this place and restore the dignity and honour accorded to all hon. members from all parties who have made a great sacrifice to be here on behalf of their constituents. If we are

able to do that today, I believe we can send an important message to all Canadians. Let us do that today and move forward on this initiative.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member for Dewdney—Alouette a direct question. I will resist taking a shot at him because of the ethics counsellor, the promises made, the level of debate in this place, the way we treat one another, the amount of respect we have for the House and the amount of respect we have for each other as parliamentarians.

I would like to ask the member a question that I was dying to ask the member for Waterloo—Wellington when he was up showing a complete lack of respect for this institution and the members who sit in this institution. I want to put forth to the member from Alouette a question on the behaviour of the Prime Minister.

• (1740)

This question was asked of the Prime Minister this morning, but we did not get an answer, so I will ask the member from Dewdney—Alouette. In January 1996 the Prime Minister confided to the ethics counsellor that he still had shares in the golf club adjacent to the Auberge Grand-Mère. Although he thought he got rid of his shares in 1993, he found out in 1996 that he actually still owned those shares, which he had never received payment for. We must understand that the value of these shares in the golf club adjacent to the Auberge Grand-Mère would be directly enhanced by any improvements made to the hotel.

How could anyone say there was not a conflict of interest? The Prime Minister, within 90 days, was lobbying the president of the Business Development Bank of Canada on behalf of the owner of the Auberge Grand-Mère. How can anyone say that did not directly influence and enhance the value of the shares in that golf club? I would like to hear an answer from the hon. member.

Mr. Grant McNally: Madam Speaker, my colleague makes a good summary of a lot of details having to do with what appears obvious to most Canadians, that is, there is a conflict here with the Prime Minister and the things that have been happening in his riding.

With regard to the issues he raises, I think it is obvious to many people that although the Prime Minister claimed to have been cleared by the ethics counsellor, that process is broken and does not entirely reflect the facts of the matter. If we were to get to the bottom of the facts and the details that are shrouded in a cloud of bureaucratic secrecy through the process the Prime Minister has established, I think it would be apparent to all that there is in fact a conflict in the situation.

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to put a question to the member opposite. There has been a lot of talk this day about

Supply

ministerial and MP accountability. Is it not true that the statement from the red book that forms the basis of the opposition motion under debate today makes no reference whatsoever to members of parliament or ministers?

In fact, I do believe what the statement says is “to advise both public officials and lobbyists”. Could the member explain if he does find anywhere in the motion reference to ministers and members of parliament?

Mr. Grant McNally: Madam Speaker, I believe the motion that we brought forward encapsulates the meaning directly from red book one. That is my understanding. We took some time to do that, because the Liberals, in bringing this item forward, had a very good idea.

That is why we would be surprised should the government choose to vote against such a motion, which it in fact introduced as a promise to Canadians in red book one. I invite my colleague and all colleagues to support the motion. It would be a positive step for now and for the future.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

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

* * *

[*English*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—ETHICS COUNSELLOR

The House resumed consideration of the motion and the amendment.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I have some preliminary comments on the matter.

• (1745)

I am a new member of the House. Many voters told me in the last election that I was wasting my time coming to the House. In their view, their members of parliament did not have an effective voice or say in the government of this country. Many of them did not believe they were on the bus. They were not in the back seat. They were on the outside looking in.

Many of our academic people today have examined our parliamentary system and know it very well. Basically, their conclusion is that we are creating a system of government which is presidential

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and does not really have any effective checks or balances built into it. Mr. Diefenbaker many years ago pointed out some of the things that were happening in the House.

I come to the House with an open mind. I come here with the idea that we, as members of parliament, can improve the system of government, and I will give it a fair trial. However, I come to the House with a lot of doubts in my mind. Some of the things I heard this afternoon only confirm some of my worst beliefs about this place.

The question that I would like to start off with is; can Mr. Wilson, the ethics counsellor, given the process established by the Prime Minister's office, truly carry out this mandate in an impartial, objective and independent manner? In no way do I question this individual's integrity in any way. I believe Mr. Wilson to be an honourable and decent individual. However, it has been my experience in life that a system dictates the results. Excellent systems create excellent results, average systems create mediocre results and bad systems produce poor results.

In my view the process that has been established to investigate and report on serious wrongdoings by the Prime Minister or the ministers is a flawed, poor system. People who work in a poor system are helpless to deal with that system and to affect the result.

I intend to point out some of the obvious defects with the system which have been created. First, the Prime Minister's office has established the code of conduct for the Prime Minister and the ministers. This is like asking the hockey coach to make up the rule book.

Second, the ethics commissioner is hired by the Prime Minister's office and in all apparent respects is placed in a position of master-servant with the Prime Minister being the master. Once the ethics counsellor is finished with the allegation, he reports directly to the boss, the master, who is the subject matter of the very investigation. The ethics counsellor is not directly accountable to the men and women who have been elected to the House to govern the country.

There is a very old saying in our justice system, and I am sure all members have heard it before; not only must justice be done, it must appear to be done. Because of a very flawed process, thousands upon thousands of Canadians do not believe in the integrity of the findings of the ethics commissioner. They simply do not believe that those are correct results or an accurate assessment of what has taken place.

• (1750)

Much has been said about Saskatchewan. I am a member from Saskatchewan. Anybody from Saskatchewan would realize, based on our experience, that we have to prevent these sorts of abuses of power from occurring again. That means fixing the system and

having a system in place that prevents those sorts of abuses of power.

In many respects the circumstances I heard in regard to this incident remind me of the sorts of incidents that occurred in Saskatchewan, but this is the Government of Canada. I think many people in Saskatchewan see many similarities in some of these circumstances. Everybody in the House should be concerned about those sorts of problems.

For this system to have the appearance of fairness and objectivity that people expect, the ethics counsellor must be dealing in a complete arm's length position, vis-à-vis the Prime Minister. It is fairly apparent that a person with that type of position should be very akin to a judge. He should have that sort of independence that we expect to find in our judiciary.

Those two points, as far as I am concerned, are not even close to being reality. I would encourage all members of the House to support this very worthy motion.

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I cannot resist a comment. I find it very difficult to sit in the House and hear a member who has arrived here for the first time condemning what I believe is one of the best parliaments in the world. It is also completely inappropriate and disrespectful of this place for him to make allusions to the problems that occurred in the legislature in Saskatchewan, which were of a deplorable and even criminal nature.

This is not the type of thing that we expect from a brand new member in the House. Maybe he should go back to his riding and consider that perhaps he has come to the wrong place for him.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Madam Speaker, I would remind the member of what I believe I said and that was that I was coming to the House with an open mind.

Where I come from the reality is a large number of people firmly believe that the House of Commons is irrelevant. The polls show that. I am here to try to make this place relevant. I want to see this federal system updated and reformed with a small *r* to make it relevant to people across the country so that everybody feels that they are part of it. Then we would have no need to talk about alienation or disgruntled people.

If the learned member on the other side of the House does not realize that this system has to be updated in Ottawa, then he is living in a world that is out of touch with reality. We have got to update our federal system and this is the time to do it.

Mr. Murray Calder (Dufferin—Peel—Wellington—Grey, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member across the way. Quite frankly, any time any one of us in this House has run for politics, we have always been trying to make Canada a

better place. We put forward our ideas to the voters. We take the chance and give the voters the opportunity to vote on whether or not they want us.

Would the member answer this question for me. I will go to the issue of the pension on his side of the House. The member for St. Albert had the fortitude to stand in front of his voters and say "I am going to go back into the pension". He put that up front so they could vote on it. The members for Edmonton North and Medicine Hat went in front of the voters and were not honest with them. They ran on the fact that they were not going to take the pension. Then, less than three months after the election they vest back into the pension. That is not fair.

• (1755)

That party across the way talks about recall. I would like the member to make a comment on whether or not he feels that these members should go back on recall to their voters and let their voters vote on whether or not they are going to take the pension.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I remember how that was such a charged issue in the early 1990s. Much of the public thought that was a sign that this place was irrelevant when these things were happening.

I believe the predecessor party had a major impact on effecting the regimes in every province. Alberta seriously reformed its gold plated pension plan. It was one of the first things Mr. Harris did in this province. In Saskatchewan Mr. Romanow reformed its pension plan.

The only place that really has not reformed its pension system in a meaningful way I would say is the House. The only way it is ever going to be changed is if people on this side of the House get more than 151 people on that side of the house.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for Prince Albert on his first speech.

I think that the hon. for member for Dufferin—Peel—Wellington—Grey is under the assumption that my colleague has been here for seven years. Perhaps he could be a little more observant. He is in the current pension plan but he does not have a pension because he has only been here for a couple of weeks.

On another matter, I would like to ask my colleague a question—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I am sorry the members time has expired.

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I sat through this debate for most of the afternoon and you will forgive me if I sound a little cross every now and then because one of the things that bothers me

Supply

deeply is the kind of debate we have in the House when the opposition, in their zeal to score points against the government, which is right and proper, but in their zeal it attacks parliament and the integrity of members of parliament rather than attacking the government and this is the case in point. They have it all mixed up and very seriously confused. They have mixed up the issue of public service accountability and the accountability of members of parliament.

The very pith of their motion is that they have gone to the Liberal red book of 1993 and brought out a paragraph that deals with the creation of an ethics counsellor. They have taken that paragraph and put it in their motion. The motion says that the House adopt the red book policy that says:

—A Liberal government will appoint an independent Ethics Counsellor to advise both public officials and lobbyists in the day-to-day application of the Code of Conduct for Public Officials.

It goes on to say that the ethics counsellor will be answerable to the House of Commons.

They are having a little problem in reading. That which I just stated makes no mention whatsoever of ministers or members of parliament. Yet the debate throughout the entire day, not just with one opposition party but with other opposition parties, has been primarily targeting in on ministerial responsibility and ministerial accountability. I might point out that the opposition members have very conveniently glossed over the question of MPs' accountability. They all should know that there is in fact no code of conduct for members of parliament.

Let us just consider that for a moment. If we want a code of conduct for members of parliament, to whom do those members of parliament answer to?

• (1800)

I think the key to this debate, to understanding what the real issue is or what the real issue is not, is the reply that the Canadian Alliance member for Edmonton Southwest made to my question earlier in the debate. I asked him whether he felt that MPs should be subject to a code of conduct and whether they should report to an external person such as an ethics commissioner who would be responsible for policing that code of conduct.

The member for Edmonton Southwest is a new member. Probably because he is a new member of the Canadian Alliance, he was capable of replying with more candour than is normal for the more veteran members of the Canadian Alliance. What he said in reply to my question was that in his view the best way to have control of parliamentarians was by the voters themselves and that we were directly responsible to the voters themselves as parliamentarians.

That raises an interesting issue because there are things that we might say as MPs. We might ask whether we are always ethical.

Supply

Certainly there are issues that affect us as MPs which raise ethical questions. Some of those ethical questions may pertain to how we deal with people who come to our riding offices and seek favours. Those are real problems sometimes.

Individual MPs sometimes have to search their conscience. They also have to ask themselves when they defend someone who comes to their riding for some government grant or another, they also have to search their conscience and ask whether they have done due diligence on that person. If they have not done due diligence and are supporting someone then theoretically they have made an ethical breach.

It is the same with other members. For instance, I know of one member no longer in the House, so I can probably safely make reference to him. He and other members too, in fairness, were inclined from time to time to take trips that were sponsored sometimes by foreign governments and in other instances by corporations. It is a very real question in some of our minds.

We do not all share the same opinion, but I can say as a former journalist that to take trips sponsored by a corporation or a foreign government was absolutely against the rules. As a former journalist with the *Toronto Star*, we had a code of ethics, a code of conduct in a thick book which governed everything from what kind of gifts we could accept, how expensive those gifts could be, and absolutely condemned taking favours from corporations and foreign governments or anything else like that.

This is a question that could be before individual MPs, but if we were to poll individual MPs I think we would find tremendous variation in approach to what is ethical and what is not in this very fine area of whether or not we should listen to our constituents and what pressures or what favours we should take from lobbyists. It is a serious problem.

The government did try to address it with the Lobbyist Registration Act. I was around when the Lobbyist Registration Act came forward in committee. It is due to come forward again. I am glad it is coming back for re-examination because I never liked it then; it was an inadequate piece of legislation. Even so legislation was directed wholly toward the activities of lobbyists vis-à-vis civil servants.

This is where we come back to the point that they are trying to make. Of course we have to have rules that govern the way lobbyists approach civil servants. It is a serious problem in all governments when special interest groups with money bypass the political process and reach directly into the bureaucracy. That was a dreadful problem under the Conservative regime prior to 1993. It was the subject of some books that would make one's hair curl.

• (1805)

The red book commitment was to bring public servants under a code of conduct and to advise public officials and lobbyists on

standards of behaviour. We did that. We came out with a conflict of interest and post-employment code. I have it here. I am not allowed to show things in front of the camera, but however I can assure people it is many pages long. It describes in exquisite detail the responsibility of public officials. However, it does not apply to members of parliament.

There is a fundamentally good reason why it does not apply to members of parliament. Members of parliament are here to be lobbied. We are here so that people will approach us. We are here to listen to the people. We are here to listen to our constituents. It is precisely the process of a democracy.

We then ask ourselves why not have a code of conduct for members of parliament? When this issue came up about five or six years ago, a joint House of Commons and Senate committee was struck to study the issue of a code of conduct for members of parliament. If it exists for journalists and public servants, why should it not exist for members of parliament?

That joint committee deliberated for many months and I would like to think it had on it some of the most powerful talent on the Hill. It concluded in the end that no code of conduct can apply to members of parliament because members are ultimately responsible to the voters. The voters measure the integrity of members of parliament.

The irony to that conclusion is it is precisely what the member for Edmonton Southwest said in reply to my question.

That is another thing that distresses me sometimes. I have been in the House for seven years. Whether there is or is not a code of for MPs, I am willing to assure everyone in Canada who is watching that this is one of the finest collection of individuals with the highest level of integrity one could find in any corner of the land.

That is why I was upset by the allusions made by the member for Prince Albert who suggested in this place that members are not working in the best interests of not only their constituents, but in the best interests of the nation. I have been here and have seen only people who work very hard. I have only seen people who always search their consciences to determine if they are doing the right thing.

It is sometimes difficult when a member is in his or her constituency office and people approach and ask for help or the mayor asks to get a company into the riding because if it does not go into the riding there will be unemployment. One has to balance these things.

I say in absolute honesty that I do not know of a single member of the House who has in any way done something that I would have felt breached fundamental ethics or morals. People have dilemmas. They are not always sure what to do and whether it is always right. I believe that the members of the House, and this is the strength of

the House, have always acted in good conscience and with good heart.

We now come back to the question of the ethics counsellor and the ministers and their relationship to the Prime Minister.

The reason why we cannot have the ethics counsellor accountable to parliament and speaking to parliament is for the same reason that we cannot have MPs reporting to an ethics counsellor who then reports to parliament.

• (1810)

We would have the ridiculous equation where MPs are reporting to a person who reports to MPs. Quite apart from that foolishness, the point is that ministers and the Prime Minister are members of parliament as well. They are accountable to the voters. In the end, the standards of ethics as perceived by the voters if disclosed in revelations by the opposition; if they have the goods on whatever ministers are doing then they disclose it in the House; and if the people feel that the behaviour of the ministers and indeed the behaviour of the Prime Minister is wanting then they have the opportunity to exercise the ultimate means of settling the matter. They can vote everyone out.

We are accountable; the Prime Minister is accountable and the ministers are accountable to the voters. It is the voters that determine the level of integrity in this place. We cannot conduct ourselves in a manner that is unacceptable to the voters and survive.

It was relevant in the debate today when allusions were made to the flip flops that had been done by the Canadian Alliance members with respect to the pensions that this is an ethical problem and it is an ethical problem that will be measured by the voters.

I could stand here for days and complain. After all the anger that was generated about fat pensions from the member for Edmonton Southwest and the member for Medicine Hat, do you know what happened in my riding, Madam Speaker, as a result of all that talk about gold plated pensions?

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At one of my fall fairs I had a table with my Canadian flags and my brochures to meet the public. The Canadian Alliance, the Reform at that time, set up a table directly opposite me in the laneway in the fall fair. They had pigs there, little pink pigs, and labels that said "Sheila Copps", "John Bryden" and "Bob Speller". Underneath the labels they had \$750,000 for me and \$1.5 million for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

It was the most embarrassing thing imaginable because some 60,000 people go through the Rockton International Fair on a weekend. There they were promoting hatred for members of parliament. If ever there was a case where members of parliament have committed an ethical breach, it is those former Reform Party members who, after criticizing the pension in such a vicious fashion, have turned around and bought back into it.

This is not a question for an ethics commissioner. This is not a question for an ethics counsellor. They keep on confusing those terms. This is not a question of a code of conduct. This is a question that is going to be settled by the voters in their ridings.

That is the issue we are looking at today. The motion that they have before us is about the accountability of public servants. The government acted on the motion. There is no reason to support the motion because it is already done, but they have used the opportunity of a motion that is a misdirection to attack the Prime Minister, to attack the integrity of all members of parliament. I think that the people who will ultimately decide the fate of those on the other side who would make such groundless charges will be the voters.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): It being 6.15 p.m., pursuant to the order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the business of supply are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, February 13, 2001, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

It being 6.15 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.15 p.m.)

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