



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 22, 2001

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 22, 2001

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*English*]

RIGHT HON. TONY BLAIR

Mr. Ovid Jackson (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today all of Canada's parliamentary representatives had the distinct pleasure and privilege of hearing the Right Hon. Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, deliver his address to the Canadian people.

Prime Minister Blair paid tribute to and talked about the deep links between our two countries, which he said went beyond economics and were deeper than commerce. We were very pleased with Prime Minister Blair's words about Canada's honourable reputation and how prominent Canadians are around the world.

Prime Minister Blair noted the development between Britain and Canada in the use of the human rights act. Prime Minister Blair astutely pointed out that our two countries continue to have a special relationship, with Canada being the country in North America closest to Europe and Britain being the country in Europe closest to North America.

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TAXATION

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in April 1999 the federal government started requiring Canadian residents to report their foreign assets.

This was a ham-fisted way of trying to reduce tax evasion. It has not worked. In fact, it has discouraged many immigrant investors and has done nothing for compliance. People are moving from

resident to non-resident status, thus paying no taxes at all. This threatens to take as much as \$1 billion out of the B.C. economy.

Therefore, tomorrow I will send a letter to the Ministers of Finance and National Revenue asking them to commission the auditor general to conduct a cost benefit analysis of the foreign asset disclosure rule.

I hope that the ministers and auditor general will respond quickly.

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ANTARCTICA

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year scores of young Canadians visited Antarctica with the Students on Ice Expedition.

Students and teachers from all across Canada participated in this remarkable experience. They included: Ben Whatley of PCVS, Justin Tighe of Norwood District High School, Aimie Elliot of Omemee, Virissa Lenters of Cobourg West Collegiate and Justin Standeven of Clarke High School. Most of these students are with the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board.

These students are now ambassadors for Antarctica in Canada. Their "Statement on Antarctica" calls on Canada to become a full member of the Antarctic treaty and to ratify the treaty's environmental protocol. To learn more about these students, visit www.studentsonice.com.

Let us take the advice of these wonderful young Canadians. As a great polar nation, we have a moral responsibility to participate fully in the protection and appropriate use of Antarctica.

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MEMBER FOR SYDNEY—VICTORIA

Mr. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure that I rise in the House today to thank my constituents of Sydney—Victoria, my family and my staff. It is an honour and privilege to be the member from one of the most beautiful parts of Canada, Cape Breton Island.

As a professional farmer I have worked on agricultural projects in my community and around the world, and I can tell members that there is no better place to live than in Canada.

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I have a very diverse riding, diverse in cultural backgrounds, styles of living and occupations. I have rural constituents and urban constituents. We have many challenges in our area. We have a downturn in our coal and steel industries and we have over 30% unemployed.

Cape Breton is a very diverse society. We have to communicate and work with all the various departments of this government. This gives me a great challenge. As a new MP I have to learn very quickly to make sure our concerns are heard. I also want to help other Canadians to keep this country the number one place in the world to live.

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HOCKEY

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are all well aware of the national institution called *Hockey Night in Canada*, brought to us every Saturday evening during our winters on CBC television and on Radio-Canada.

This coming Saturday, *Hockey Night in Canada* will celebrate the true spirit of the game with a 13 hour extravaganza, programming from coast to coast to coast. Canadians from Yellowknife, Sydney, Powell River, Fox Valley, Rankin Inlet, Glace Bay and many other communities will share their experience and love of the game. Through those stories we will share hockey's place in the hearts and heartland of Canada.

[*Translation*]

To draw attention to this celebration, I have the pleasure of proclaiming Saturday February 24 Hockey Day in Canada.

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[*English*]

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this government should be ashamed. It should be ashamed because it continues to fuel the flames of western alienation.

This past Friday a meeting was held in my hometown of Yorkton, where over 300 people joined together to discuss the idea of western separation. At the meeting it was stated over and over again that Ottawa ignores the west, and people had plenty of examples to back up their statements: the lack of attention to the farm crisis; the unaccountability of our Prime Minister; the lack of democracy in the House of Commons and Senate. The list goes on.

Unfortunately the government refuses to address any of these issues, which only adds fuel to the fire. We have been telling the Liberal government about the dissatisfaction of westerners for

years and we have been giving the government ample ways to deal with the problems, yet it refuses to listen.

The movement for western separation did not just pop up overnight. It is the result of years of Liberal neglect of western issues and a lack of democracy. Now the government wants to blame farmers for this movement. What the Liberals cannot seem to realize is that it is their fault this whole issue arose and it is really not Canada that—

• (1405)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Perth—Middlesex.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. John Richardson (Perth—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the last couple of months have been especially difficult for farmers. I certainly understand the difficulties farmers are going through, especially with poor prices and bad growing conditions this year.

This year will be no exception. Farmers are facing rising costs of production and an unfair playing field with the European Union and the United States when it comes to subsidies. Some grain and oilseed farmers in my riding, for example, cannot afford to buy their seeds.

I call upon the federal government to come forward with an assistance program that will deal with this financial hurt. This is a critical time for our farmers and their farms, especially with spring seeding just around the corner.

I want to reassure all farmers in my constituency that I have not forgotten their situation and that I will continue to voice their concerns.

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[*Translation*]

SAINT-PLACIDE FESTI-VENT SUR GLACE

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at Saint-Placide, on the shores of Lac des Deux-Montagnes, last Sunday marked the end of the third annual “festi-vent sur glace”, a celebration of kites on ice. This is the biggest kite-related event of its kind in Canada, and the second-largest winter event of its kind in the world.

This year, the theme of the festival was; “Let the child in you take wing and soar”. Once again it was a great success with an attendance of some 15,000 people.

I extend my congratulations to the municipal council of Saint-Placide, its mayor, the army of volunteers, all of its citizens, as well as the multitude of participants. Together, they made this third edition the great success it was.

The people of Saint-Placide, working together on a voluntary basis, have again shown the strength and spirit of leadership that characterize the Quebec people.

My wishes for a long life to the Saint-Placide festi-vent sur glace.

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GIRL GUIDE MOVEMENT

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Carleton—Gloucester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, Thursday February 22, is World Thinking Day for the Guiding movement. May I take this opportunity to salute the Franco-Canadian Girl Guide movement, Les Guides franco-canadiennes, of Ottawa District and across the country.

In Ottawa, this movement has more than 500 members, and has been active in the region for the past 50 years. The focus of the Guides franco-canadiennes is to educate francophone girls and women of Canada and help them to develop their full potential. Guides play a vital role in our communities and their devotion and contribution must be acknowledged.

The guides of the Ottawa District, and guides around the world, are remembering the founders of their movement on this World Thinking Day.

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[English]

WILLIAM E. MCKINNEY

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I pay tribute to Colonel William E. McKinney, who passed away in New Westminster on February 12, 2001. Born in Boissevain, Manitoba, on June 25, 1915, he is survived by his loving wife of 60 years, Beryl, four children and six grandchildren.

He arrived in New Westminster in 1937 and retired as vice-president of Johnson Terminals in 1980. He was president of the Lions, a school trustee, chair of the YWCA board, chair of the city crime prevention committee, director of the Kiwanis Care Centre, Citizen of the Year in 1985 and president of the Canadian Diabetes Association Vancouver, to name just a few.

He was awarded the Order of British Columbia and was made honorary chief constable of the city. He joined the army in 1940, was commissioned and served in the U.K. and Europe. Upon his return he joined the local militia and later commanded his Royal Westminster Regiment for two different terms and was later honorary colonel from 1980.

He left the community a better place than he found it. A man of action, strong opinions and a heart of gold, who showed us all how

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to live and never stop giving, my friend Bill was indeed a great Canadian.

* * *

[Translation]

VIETNAM

Mr. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently met with some of my constituents, including Dr. Lam Thu Van of the Vietnamese Canadian Federation, who expressed their concerns about the continuous violations of human rights in Vietnam.

They mentioned the following concerns: attacks on freedom of religion such as the arrest and detention of Catholics, Protestants and Buddhists; the repression against intellectuals, writers, democrat political leaders and protectors of human rights; the greater control of the state over the national and foreign press; and the decision to impose the death penalty for 29 different crimes, which led to the execution, in April 2000, of a Canadian citizen, Nguyen Thu Hiep.

While noting that Vietnam marked the 25th anniversary of its reunification by freeing over 20,000 prisoners in the year 2000, I join my voice to those of the Vietnamese in my riding, in Canada and elsewhere to call on Vietnam to end its continuous violations of human rights.

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[English]

CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from the day it was created 120 years ago, Canadian Pacific Railway has always lived off public largesse. Now we learn that it has been living off the backs of its employees as well.

● (1410)

Using access to information, CP pensioners in Moose Jaw have calculated that between 1937 and 1985 CP Rail collected more than \$700 million in employee pension contributions without paying one cent of interest to its employees.

It gets even worse. When employees were terminated and pension money was refunded, CP deducted 1% as a handling fee. Estimates indicate that the corporation and its shareholders benefited likely to the tune of about \$6 billion in what amounts to interest free loans over five decades. That is \$6 billion that should have gone to CP employees or their survivors.

Before this conglomerate is permitted to separate itself into five companies, it must first be required to pay the interest on this loan to CP pensioners and their families.

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[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last fall, the Prime Minister of Canada admitted that he made a mistake in imposing the new employment insurance program. Now, the government is back at it with Bill C-2, which only partially corrects the mistakes of the past.

In addition to the permanent perverse effects of the current program, the Minister of Human Resources Development penalized, in the whole Lower St. Lawrence, North Shore, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and Charlevoix region, the workers whose applications were submitted between July 9 and September 17, 2000, by requiring them to work 525 hours to qualify and by giving them only 21 weeks of benefits. All this to correct the injustice resulting from the minister's improvised review of the employment insurance regions. There is no reason justifying such discrimination.

The office of the Prime Minister was informed of the situation on December 22 and we are still waiting, like the unemployed concerned, the quick restoring of a fair treatment for seasonal workers in our region.

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[*English*]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the recipients of this year's Mathieu Da Costa Awards. The Mathieu Da Costa Awards program is the main vehicle in which the federal government celebrates Black History Month.

This year's nine winners, from six provinces, are: Celeste Milborne from Toronto, Ontario; Kristi Leavitt from Lethbridge, Alberta; Sandra Djivré from Sudbury, Ontario; Elliot Skierszkan from Kanata, Ontario; Amanda Merpaw from Nepean, Ontario; Ricky Green from Winnipeg, Manitoba; Kelly McMillan from Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; Laurie Du Temple-Quirion from Candiac, Quebec, the home of our deputy whip; and Charity Lloyd from Springfield, New Brunswick.

I call upon all of my colleagues to join me in congratulating these young people for their tremendous efforts.

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ANNICK GAGNON

Mr. Andy Savoy (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year's 13th annual East Coast Music Awards, held in

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, was once again a huge success. Held every year to honour east coast musical talent, the award show caps off a four day festival of singing, dancing, jamming and other raucous activities.

This year Annick Gagnon of Grand Falls, New Brunswick, won urban artist of the year for her self-entitled album. Annick is no stranger to ECMA, having won francophone album of the year in 1996.

Annick's stellar career started at the age of 10 when she began singing in her local church choir. With the quick realization of her musical talent, many appearances soon followed, such as opening for superstar Céline Dion and playing here on Parliament Hill during the 1994 Canada Day celebrations.

Currently pursuing both an educational and a musical career in Halifax, I would like to extend my congratulations to Annick on her musical success and wish her good fortune.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian government is being complicit with the government of Sudan in the perpetration of human rights abuses.

The government of Sudan has inflicted unrelenting misery on the people of Sudan. It bombs schools, hospitals and churches. It denies food aid to war affected populations. It incites slave raids.

This brutal regime is financing its genocidal war by partnering with the Canadian oil company, Talisman Energy. Some of the profits from that joint venture are supporting the Sudan government's genocide. The Liberal government acknowledged this to be true, as a result of the Harker report released by the government one year ago, but it took no action.

One year later, it is clear that the government's policy of constructive engagement has failed. Last month even Lloyd Axworthy acknowledged on CBC Radio that Talisman "has not lived up to its obligations at all" and called the company's behaviour deplorable.

It is time the Canadian government put an end to any Canadian commercial complicity in Sudan's genocidal war.

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MEMBER FOR CALGARY CENTRE

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, on February 23, 1976, the Progressive Conservative Party chose, as its new leader, a young Alberta MP, Mr. Joe Clark.

Oral Questions

• (1415)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member I think is referring to the right hon. member for Calgary Centre and he will want to continue to do that.

Mr. Greg Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 23, 1976 the Progressive Conservative Party chose, as its new leader, a young Alberta MP, Mr. Joe Clark.

The Speaker: They may have but I know that the member for New Brunswick Southwest means the hon. member for Calgary Centre and I invite him to continue to refer to him by his proper title.

Mr. Greg Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. It is the past tense, the member for Calgary Centre.

Our party, our country and our world have lived a lot of tumultuous history in the 25 years that have intervened. During much of that history, up to and including the present day, the right hon. member has played a leading and constructive part.

The young Albertan became one of Canada's most effective parliamentarians, an international statesman and an eloquent advocate of national unity. He has been elected to this House eight times, and is today the acclaimed leader of our party, respected by all Canadians for the passion and integrity he brings to our public life.

Long may he continue to make history. Long may his outstanding qualities of leadership continue to inspire his colleagues and fellow Canadians.

A former prime minister often referred to the right hon. member as a warrior, a description to which I am certain our present Prime Minister would agree.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, just this morning the Toronto stock market dropped below 8,000. We have not seen numbers that low since 1999. How much lower does the market have to drop before the Minister of Finance will table an up to date budget?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are going through a volatile period. Everyone understands that. Everyone understands what has happened in the United States. The simple question is why on the other hand is it that the Leader of the

Opposition will not point out the good things that are happening instead of trying to talk us into a recession as he has been doing?

Let me just tell the House that our housing starts, as an example, are up more than 20%. That is the highest in six years. Why does he not point that out?

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is the only person using the recession word in the House. I am not. And I was not talking to the market this morning when it fell below 8,000.

Falling markets do not just affect so-called rich people. It affects many Canadians: those who invest in union pensions, in RRSPs, and in the CPP. All of those investments have taken a hit. As a matter of fact, about half of all Canadians are invested in some way in the markets.

How much money will Canadians need to lose before the Minister of Finance brings in an up to date budget and shows that we have a plan to take us through these choppy economic times?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to take a look at the transcript of the press conference that he gave earlier in the week. He kept begging the press to ask him, to use his words, "Ask me about the recession. Ask me about the recession. Don't ask me about my litigation fees. Ask me about the recession".

That is exactly what he was saying. I would suggest to the Leader of the Opposition that what he might want to do is to go on a speaking tour of the United States and the litigation fees alone would turn the U.S. economy around.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that is about as on topic as me talking about him registering his ships in other places and avoiding taxes and having people in other countries build his ships when the shipbuilding industry here could use that business. Some of us cannot avoid those taxes.

A falling dollar means a weakened economy. It zaps the buying power of Canadians. It puts our economy at a disadvantage. He might be at an advantage by taking his business offshore but how much lower will the dollar have to go? It fell below 65 cents just a few minutes ago. That is not my fault. I did not talk it down.

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): The question, Mr. Speaker, is how much lower can the Leader of the Opposition stoop?

If the Leader of the Opposition wants a report on what is going on in the economy, let me give some examples. In addition to housing starts, let us look at our retail sales. In December our retail sales were the strongest they have been in the last three years. Our trade surplus is \$5.8 billion. That trade surplus is a record monthly surplus for this country.

Oral Questions

• (1420)

INDUSTRY CANADA

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, just last summer Industry Canada renegotiated a sweetheart loan for \$32 million to Buhler Industries in Winnipeg with no strings attached.

This week, after less than eight months, Buhler Industries announced the closure of their Winnipeg plant and its relocation to Fargo, North Dakota, guaranteeing the loss of over 200 jobs.

Would the industry minister explain to the House how creating jobs in North Dakota is a benefit to Canadian taxpayers?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, neither the Department of Industry nor the Government of Canada have any interest in creating jobs in North Dakota. Our interest is in creating jobs in Canada, and the member knows that.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, if that was the case, then why did the industry minister preside over such an occurrence? We have in fact transported jobs from Manitoba in Canada to Fargo in North Dakota. We have assured it happening by our taxpayers' \$32 million funding that transfer.

I ask the minister again to demonstrate he has some understanding of his own department as much as he has of many of the other members' departments in the House. The fact remains that Canadian taxpayers should not be fleeced to bolster the United States economy. The fact remains that \$32 million is a lot of cross border shopping.

I again ask the minister why it is that Canadian people should be paying taxes to create jobs in North Dakota?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that the dispute in question regarding this particular operation is a labour dispute.

If the member is suggesting that parliament should somehow intervene with respect to the rights of workers and/or the union or the rights of the company, then I wish he would tell us how he would suggest that we intervene at this time.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the latest election campaign, the Liberal candidates promised change to the employment insurance system. Some even made personal commitments. I am thinking of the Secretary of State for Amateur Sport and of the Minister of Public Works. Even

the Prime Minister acknowledged errors in the employment insurance plan.

Nothing in the minister's proposed bill honours the Liberal candidates' promises, especially with respect to seasonal workers.

I would ask the minister if she intends to amend her bill to honour election promises.

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have presented a balanced package of amendments for the House. The bill is now before committee. Witnesses are being heard. The committee will make up its own mind, and we respect that process.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the contents of the bill do not correspond to the promises made, particularly in the case of seasonal workers.

The Bloc has been saying this for a long time. For months, we have been asking questions. Ministers made commitments during the campaign, even one candidate, now an MP, said yesterday in committee "This is a cry from the heart. People are living in abject poverty. We cannot wait". These are the words of a Liberal.

The minister is waiting. Will she honour the promises? Will she break new ground and get the Liberals to honour their promise, for once?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our approach is to ensure that the bill makes its way through the normal legislative process. The hon. member's approach is to block the bill, to split the bill. Block and split is nothing new from that party.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Forestville, Gaston Tremblay, also reacted with shock when his region found itself facing the shutdown of a large multinational corporation.

This region has diversified its economy by creating numerous small businesses that rely on such natural resources as peat bogs, forestry, outfitting and the shell fishery, thus creating many seasonal jobs.

Does the minister realize that her bill is driving people out of the regions, and that the solution is an employment insurance plan which supports their economic activities and not one which destroys them?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the members on the other side of the House do not seem to realize is that employment insurance is but one tool that we use. It is a very important tool but it is there for Canadians who find themselves between jobs.

Another very important part of the formula is to build with economic development a diversified economy in the communities in Quebec and in New Brunswick. We are doing just that.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can the minister stubbornly maintain such a rigid and close-minded attitude when, year after year, she rakes in an EI fund surplus in the billions?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how can the hon. member be so stubborn as to say to his constituents that their only future is to rely on employment insurance? That is not a future at all. Benefits need to be there and they will be there.

However, it is about more than that. It is about working together with the provinces and with communities to diversify economies so everyone can benefit.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had hoped to address my question to the Prime Minister, but perhaps the Minister of National Defence could address it.

The Prime Minister insisted yesterday that Canada lacks sufficient information to take a position on the U.S. missile defence system. The Germans do not lack information. They have expressed grave reservations. The French do not lack information. The Italians do not lack information.

Would the defence minister acknowledge that it is not a lack of information but a lack of conviction and courage that prevents the Government of Canada from condemning the national missile defence proposal?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, quite the contrary. The United States has not yet said what kind of system it will employ in terms of national missile defence. It has not given the parameters of its project. It has not given the

timing of it. It has not asked Canada to participate because it has not made the decision itself on the parameters of its own program.

Meanwhile, we are monitoring the situation. We have brought to the attention of the United States our concerns about global security and the need to take into consideration those issues. We will continue to monitor it.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Italy, Germany and France do not seem to have a problem in understanding how dangerous this proposal is. The NMD proposal violates the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty. Canada used to enjoy a reputation for leadership in promoting disarmament treaties, but sadly, under this Prime Minister and under this government, that reputation is in peril.

Why will the government not live up to Canada's proud tradition? Why will the government not just show some leadership and condemn the NMD madness?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and this government have made it very clear that we are concerned with global security issues. We are concerned also with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We are watching this situation very carefully. We are in dialogue with the United States on the matter. We are in dialogue with our other allies, as is the United States.

We have made it very clear that the ABM treaty is an important treaty, that it is important to address it and that it is important to talk to the Russians, the Chinese and all our other allies.

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BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BANK OF CANADA

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

In June 1999 Michel Vennat and the BDC board stripped the bank president of his role in approving or rejecting loans just days after he had expressed his intention to call the Auberge Grand-Mère loan. In this letter the president wrote Mr. Vennat and said:

[Translation]

The authority to approve loans in the absence of the president . . . affects the arm's length relationship which exists between the bank and the government, and has the potential to create the perception of political interference.

[English]

Did the government approve of this stripping of the bank president's normal powers?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member wants me to use the House of Commons to interfere in a court proceeding now underway. I do not think this is the way to use the House of Commons. If the leader of the

Oral Questions

Conservative Party wants to do that, he has to bear the responsibility for this improper interference.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, let me remind the Deputy Prime Minister of the law. Under section 114(2) of the Financial Administration Act, a bylaw change like this must be brought to the appropriate ministry, the Minister of Industry, and to the Treasury Board of the Government of Canada.

Was that notice sent? Did the government support the change? Is there any other crown corporation in which the essential powers of the president have been stripped away? Why is there this special treatment of the Business Development Bank?

• (1430)

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I reject completely the unwarranted premise of the hon. member's question. He really has a lot of nerve lecturing me about the law. Which law school did he ever graduate from?

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FUNDRAISING

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the finance minister and the CIDA minister were offended when we made reference to their choice of dinner companions. Last spring they dined with FACT, an organization Department of Citizenship and Immigration lawyers have now identified as a fundraising front to the Tamil tigers terrorist group.

Will the government make it clear to all its ministers that attending fundraisers for FACT hurts Canada's interest and puts innocent lives in jeopardy.

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend is starting out with something which I do not think is correct. I am advised that this dinner, a social and cultural event involving the Tamil New Year, was not a fundraising dinner. It was also attended by some 25 elected people at the municipal and Ontario Conservative provincial levels, including the editor of the Toronto *Sun*.

Is he trying to smear them as well in saying they are knowingly attending a fundraising dinner for terrorism? That could not be accurate and what he is saying could not be accurate either.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this was a \$60 a plate fundraiser. Government ministers should have known. Their own security service was warning them at the time. There is absolutely no excuse for government members attending. The government has had every opportunity to condemn a group like FACT.

Is the minister now saying that the new anti-terrorism legislation will not outlaw giving money to a group like FACT?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know with regard to charity registrations—

Mr. Monte Solberg: I am not talking about that. I am talking about Lawrence's bill.

Hon. Martin Cauchon: Could I be allowed to answer, please. It is within the mandate of the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency. We have a fair process and we all know the process.

All the organizations that are registered as charity organizations have legitimate activities. If there are any that do not have legitimate activities like terrorist organizations, for example, the solicitor general and I are working on something to ensure that those organizations will not discredit those that are acting in a good manner.

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[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICING

Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for months now, the price of gas has been approaching record highs. Prices sometimes fluctuate by seven to ten cents a litre on the same day. All companies post the same price at any given time.

But we can rest easy. Today, we read in a study done for the government by the conference board that "Consumers across the country are well served by the current market system that determines gasoline prices".

My question is for the Minister of Industry. How can we trust this study, when some of the conference board's influential members include corporations such as Shell, Petro-Canada and Esso Imperial?

[English]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conference Board of Canada is recognized, or at least ought to be recognized, across the country as an independent organization, one that has substantial credibility in many communities.

The conference board has done a study, one of many. Studies have been done as well by many provincial governments over the years, all of which have come to the conclusion that gasoline prices in the country relative to the rest of the world are quite competitive.

That does not mean anyone likes paying more for gas, but we have to recognize the simple reality that there is no indication based on the work of this study that some kind of regulatory regime

being imposed by government at this time will improve the situation with respect to gas prices.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how does the Minister of Industry explain the conference board's astonishing conclusion that all is well in the petroleum industry, when the introduction to the same report says, and I quote: "Some issues, such as taxation and competition policy in Canada, are beyond the purview of the study".

[English]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very easy for any member on any matter of consumer pricing to get up and make a declaration or representation in the House. The fact of the matter is that is why we have organizations like the conference board to look at this issue. It is arm's length. It is independent. It is an expert.

• (1435)

The report is that gasoline prices in Canada relative to the rest of the world, be it Europe or elsewhere, are competitive. There is no indication or evidence that a regulation regime such as being proposed by the member would do any good at this time.

* * *

FUNDRAISING

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the government repeatedly defends giving money to FACT which is a terrorist front.

As of Monday, Britain has brought in new anti-terrorism legislation that forbids the type of fundraising supper that two of our senior cabinet ministers went to.

Canada signed an agreement back in 1999 that it would no longer allow this to happen. It is now the year 2001 and I would like to ask the minister a question. Will the new legislation, if in fact it ever shows up, allow ministers to attend these kinds of fundraising suppers? Yes or no.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. colleague is well aware that in this country CSIS does not indicate who it is watching and who it is not watching.

The legislation will protect our charitable organizations. I hope that when the legislation comes forward my hon. colleague and her party will support it.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, in fact members of the government had any number of warnings that FACT was a terrorist front. The Sri Lanka High Commission knows about it. The CIA and foreign affairs knew about it and gave warnings that these people should

not be going to this thing. It seems that everyone knows except the immigration minister herself.

Today her lawyers are in the supreme court saying that a small group called FACT is in fact a terrorist front. Does the minister agree with those documents that are in her name or not?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am looking at the language of the factum and the hon. member goes far beyond what the factum says. This is a matter being argued in court.

I suggest to her, because of the sensitive nature of the court case, that she be careful in her language and that she not try to stereotype or smear several hundred thousand good Canadians with her language.

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[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as we know, the European Commission has banned all exports of cattle, meat or milk from Great Britain until March 1, after 27 cases of foot and mouth disease were discovered in an abattoir in England.

My question is for the Minister of Agriculture. Can he tell us whether Canada imports these products from Great Britain and, if so, whether it intends to follow the lead of the European Commission?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we became aware of this, Canada suspended the issuance of import permits for semen, embryos, animals and animal products from the United Kingdom because of the confirmed outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Great Britain also acknowledges that it cannot identify the products it has exported to Canada.

Yesterday, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency indicated that there was no question of banning the use of animal meal in cattle food.

Can the minister tell us with certainty whether animal meal is still being imported into this country?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the fact that Canada has a very good tracing system. When products from the United Kingdom or anyplace in the European Union come to Canada, the tracing system of where they are and where they can be used is followed

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very thoroughly and monitored all the way to ensure that any risk material does not get into the food chain system in Canada.

* * *

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in 1995 Algerian refugee claimant Ahmed Ressay was arrested for breaking the law but he was allowed to stay in Canada. He was arrested again, this time for theft, but again he was not deported. Finally, he was deported in 1999 after trying to smuggle explosives into the United States.

Yesterday we learned in a French court that Mr. Ressay's Montreal apartment was being used during this time as headquarters for the world's most wanted terrorist, Osama bin Laden.

Could the immigration minister tell us why this dangerous terrorist was allowed to stay in Canada four years after he should have been deported?

• (1440)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fighting terrorism is a number one priority for the government. We have a security intelligence agency that is very capable and able to observe these people. Observance and co-operation with other governments around the world prevent disasters from happening like in this very situation.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I see the immigration minister is glued to her seat today. If combating terrorism is the top priority of the government, why was this twice arrested man who had broken the terms of his refugee claim allowed to stay in one of our largest cities for four years, using his apartment as headquarters for the most dangerous terrorist front in the world?

What kind of a safety protection plan is that for Canadians? Why was this man allowed to operate this terrorist organization for four years when he should have been deported?

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is not and will not be a country that permits, welcomes or allows criminals, terrorists or those who have committed crimes against humanity to remain in Canada. They are inadmissible to Canada and are removed as quickly as possible.

However, I reject the Canadian Alliance's suggestion and attempt to equate refugees with terrorists. I have to say that we look at cases individually. Everyone is entitled to due process but not everyone should be maligned.

PEACEKEEPING

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Oak Ridges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence. The creation of the United Nations buffer zone between Ethiopia and Eritrea should spell the end of a bitter border war.

There are clearly significant problems to overcome, including the demarcation of the border, the return of over 1,000 prisoners of war and the need to feed hundreds of thousands of refugees. Could the minister comment on Canada's peacekeeping role and his assessment of the present situation?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are indeed in Africa. We have been in a number of operations more recently in the Central African Republic, but we have observers in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Sierra Leone.

Our largest contingent in Africa at the moment is on the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia. We have some 450 troops there. They are doing a terrific job. They have the greatest piece of new equipment which is the envy of all of our allies. It is the armoured personnel carrier known as the LAV III, and they have great looking uniforms as well.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Soaring oil prices have resulted in record profits for big oil companies in the country. In fact, in the first three quarters of 2000, we had a profit increase in the energy sector of about \$4 billion or a 127% increase over 1999.

In light of that, would the minister consider bringing in a surtax on big oil companies in order to use that money to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and invest in alternative energy sources?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows full well, we have a corporate taxation system which applies to all industries. We do not want to be distorting investment decisions. The fact is that the energy industry does make a major contribution to the country's balance of payments. It makes a major contribution to employment.

The question of rising oil prices and gasoline prices is a matter of major concern to the government. We will continue to monitor the situation.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems the Minister of Finance is more concerned about protecting the big oil and gas companies.

By introducing this surtax that my friend has suggested, it would be cost effective and it could be used to develop environmentally sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels. Why will the minister not consider that at least as a possibility?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman should know that the Government of Canada is already making very substantial investments in energy efficiency, renewable energy alternatives and alternative forms of energy.

We are a major investor in the fuel cell technology, for example. We are a major investor in green power procurement, including in the province of the hon. gentleman from Regina—Qu'Appelle. We are a major investor in the ethanol industry. Our objective there is to triple Canadian capacity for producing ethanol.

Renewables, alternatives, energy efficiency, all of those are priorities for the Government of Canada. In that direction we are prepared to invest \$1.1 billion over the next five years.

* * *

• (1445)

LUMBER INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister for International Trade. Yesterday I quoted from a letter signed by four Atlantic premiers, asking that the government renew the softwood lumber agreement and especially the maritime accord.

The national chief of the Assembly of First Nations has now said that a new softwood agreement could be very beneficial for all. Major industries want a renewed agreement, but everybody is baffled because the government has not given any indication of its position.

My question is simple. Is the government attempting to renew the softwood lumber agreement. Yes or no.

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed I will be meeting on Monday with my counterpart, Bob Zoellick, the new United States trade representative. Of course softwood lumber will be a very important issue that we will raise.

I have had the opportunity of spending last week in China with the premiers of most of our provinces. I have had several discussions on softwood lumber issues with all provincial premiers. I have met a lot of people from industry. We are trying to reflect the consensus that exists in the country.

It is a difficult file, but we are all moving together on this particular front. I am looking forward to the discussion on Monday with Bob Zoellick.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, the October economic statement does not take into account red book three promises. Nor does it take into account the throne speech commitments. The estimated price tag for these commitments is approximately \$2 billion.

Why will the finance minister not bring in a new budget to authorize these commitments, or is it that the Liberals have no intention of keeping their red book promises yet again?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member ought to know that in the October statement we did provide the context for the red book spending. It has all been accounted for.

If I might simply add to that, given the importance of the House of Commons finance committee in terms of what is happening, the ups and downs of the global economy, I would like to congratulate the member for Kings—Hants on his appointment as vice-chairman of the finance committee. I am sure he will bring his valuable experience to bear on the issues of the day.

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CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, three families of murder victims are visiting with us today. They question the government's failure to properly incarcerate the murderers of their loved ones. The government appears more concerned with improving the comfort level of killers than it does with meaningful denunciation of their crimes.

How is it that individuals, only months after receiving a life sentence for brutal murders, are transferred to medium and even minimum security institutions? Has the solicitor general even bothered to consider the impact that these decisions have on the families of the victims. If he has, what will he do about it?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very difficult situation, in particular for the families. I am pleased to report that the commissioner has informed me that she will be revising the policy of Correctional Service Canada so that offenders convicted of first and second degree murder will serve a mandatory term of at least two years in a maximum security institution.

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his answer. It is about time we got some action on this file. How long will it take to implement it?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious situation. We have families here that are hurting. It is not a place to play politics.

[English]

The fact of the matter is that I have great sympathy for the families, I certainly do. I care, as most every member in the House does. The fact of the matter is Correctional Service Canada has reacted. I do not run Correctional Service Canada, but it will be implemented very shortly.

* * *

[Translation]

IRAQ

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, six days after the heavy Anglo-American bombing of Iraq, with a new and worrying incident just occurring, world opinion is becoming clear.

All of the European countries, Russia and China oppose it. The Arab countries are edgy. Canada alone has supported the bombing without reservation.

Is Canada prepared to review its support for military solutions in order to work actively toward a diplomatic solution?

Mr. Denis Paradis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we think it important that Canada support the preservation of the no fly zone in Iraq for the protection of the Kurds and the Shiites. This is why Canada supported the bombing of military installations near the demarcation line.

• (1450)

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, many countries are saying that these exclusion zones are illegal. They were not decreed by the UN to serve as areas for bombing at leisure.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade unanimously passed a motion to have the non-military embargo lifted and diplomatic solutions sought. Why does Canada continue to be drawn into a policy that impoverishes the people of Iraq, causes the death of thousands of children and, in the end, strengthens Saddam Hussein?

Mr. Denis Paradis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to maintain this no fly zone in order—and I repeat—to protect the Kurdish and Shiite populations. It is important to protect these people.

We can see how Saddam Hussein treats his people. As they die of starvation, he continues to build homes and castles. Canada must take the stand it is taking today and has taken in the past.

COAST GUARD

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, last Friday the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans disbanded the Sea Island dive team. He stated it was based on expert recommendations.

Yet in 1999, Ms. Lynn Peters, an HRDC technical inspector, did an audit and praised the diving team as an exemplary diving team. This year on January 26 the coast guard's own independent auditor, Darrel Skaalrud, praised the diving team for its expertise and for its skill. Why then did the minister disband this diving team?

Hon. Herb Dhaliwal (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome the hon. member for Richmond. I am a constituent of his so I will watch him closely.

With regard to search and rescue, I announced last year \$115 million to enhance our search and rescue. The Alliance Party voted against that in the last federal election. It was because of the government that we were able to invest \$14 million in state of the art hovercraft so we could take action.

With regard to the specific case, the hon. member knows that I have asked for a full review so that we could—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the minister speaks of a review, yet in the meantime lives are at risk.

Sadly a life was taken last week, as the minister knows. In the meantime will the minister today commit to the immediate reinstatement of the diving team so that no longer will a life be lost?

Hon. Herb Dhaliwal (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member should make sure that all the facts are there so we can review them. I think it is irresponsible for the hon. member not to look at the facts and move toward sleazy political points on the back of a family that is very hurt at this time. It is shameful for the member to stand without knowing all the facts.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Rick Laliberte (Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on a cold day like today we are able to observe the various emissions that are released into the atmosphere from our vehicles, industries and other sources. This makes us aware of the potential impact they have on our health. Therefore, it is appropriate to think about air quality and our responsibilities.

Oral Questions

On Monday the Minister of the Environment announced a major federal initiative to accelerate action on clean air. How will this help our country?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Monday I announced a \$120 million program spread over four years. This package includes strong action on vehicles and fuels that will reduce emissions, for example, of nitrous oxide by 90% on regular passenger vehicles, 77% on light trucks, and on SUVs and other similar vehicles, over a 95% reduction in such emissions.

• (1455)

In addition, there will be off road engine changes affecting power saws, quad tracks, lawnmowers and other small motors, which I might add are the cause of 20%.

* * *

LUMBER INDUSTRY

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, softwood lumber is Canada's largest net export. A U.S. coalition is trying to reduce market access for Canadian lumber by encouraging all U.S. producers to petition their government for tariffs on Canadian lumber imports.

A new United States law allows these companies a no risk profit by having the duties paid by Canadian companies passed on to them. This will give our U.S. competitors a huge advantage over Canadian companies.

What action is this minister taking to stop this gross violation of the trade agreements between our two countries?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed softwood lumber issues are always very complex and are extremely important. It is a top issue for our government. It will be the top issue that I will be raising with the new United States trade representative on Monday.

Indeed, as we all know, we are going toward free trade. This is what we want. No one in the country wants the sort of quota agreement that we had in the last five years. Now the matter is how we will live the transition toward free trade. We want to live it as well as possible as a united country. We will discuss it on Monday in Washington.

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this is a serious question, too serious for long discussions and negotiations.

Under this protectionist law American producers will share the duties collected. They are being told it costs nothing to petition but there are huge rewards if they win this tariff ruling.

This petition is an immediate provocation that will have serious consequences on our lumber industry. Even the WTO cannot take

immediate action in this crisis. The WTO is a long term solution, and the minister is talking about discussion. What action is he taking to respond to this provocation now?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have indicated quite clearly, I thought, in my answer that I will be raising the particular legislation with the United States trade representative on Monday. This is the way we deal with complex issues with the United States.

I am confident that we will be able to have a constructive dialogue on one of our most important exports to the United States. I want to reassure our colleagues from Atlantic Canada that we will take into account the point of view of every region on that very complex file.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, still on the softwood lumber issue, the Minister for International Trade, who will be meeting with the U.S. commerce secretary, Mr. Zoellick, just referred to a consensus.

Could the minister assure us that this consensus is about restoring free trade for softwood lumber, as he said in the House and as the Prime Minister confirmed to the House a few weeks ago?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe that there is indeed a consensus across the country that we should not restrict our softwood exports to please whoever on the American side.

People across the country hope that we are headed toward free trade, and we want to make sure that, through constructive dialogue with the United States, we will have a smooth transition to free trade.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Violent conflict between the Israeli and Palestinian people continues to escalate at an alarming rate in the Middle East.

Will the minister tell the House what initiatives the federal government is undertaking to promote an end to the violence and a renewal of the peace process in the Middle East that is so desperately needed today?

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Paradis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since violence erupted last fall, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs have continuously been in contact with Palestinian and Israeli regional

Business of the House

leaders to urge them to put an end to violence and return to the negotiating table.

Yesterday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs had a meeting with Palestine's Minister for International Co-operation, Dr. Nabil Sha'ath.

• (1500)

Dr. Sha'ath said it was urgent that Palestinians and Israelis take measures to end the violence, and that the parties should return to the negotiating table and, together, prepare peace, not war.

* * *

[English]

PENSIONS

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, over 140,000 British expatriate pensioners living in Canada are trying to get by on a pension that has been frozen since they left Britain. If these same people had moved to Israel, the United States or even Malta, their pensions would have been indexed, but because they live in Canada for some reason they pay the personal price.

The Prime Minister has promised to raise this issue with Mr. Blair during today's visit. Could the minister now tell the House following meetings with Mr. Blair that British expatriates living in Canada will now receive the indexed pensions that they deserve?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. It is one that has been raised with a number of us in our capacity as MPs by British subjects resident in Canada. I understand it is totally a matter for the British authorities.

The Prime Minister's discussions with Mr. Blair have not yet concluded. I hope to have a report for the House tomorrow. The hon. member has raised an important subject of interest to many of us on both sides of the House.

* * *

[Translation]

AMATEUR SPORT

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State for Amateur Sport recently described sports as the best vehicle for national unity, which is contrary to his avowed desire not to mix politics and sports. He has also been quoted as saying that the school system will be the basis of his strategy.

Are we to understand from these words of the secretary of state that he has changed his mind and intends to implement his national sport policy by interfering in the field of education?

Hon. Denis Coderre (Secretary of State (Amateur Sport), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my response to my hon. colleague, who has been sent to do the dirty work for the future premier of Quebec, is that here in this House we have decided to work on behalf of the population as a whole.

Even the people in charge of Sports-Québec are working with me, and Sports-Québec as a whole is behind me. The hon. member ought to send the message to the Quebec minister responsible for sports to work with the Government of Canada, because we have the interests of Quebec at heart.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, looking at the upcoming calendar, I would like to ask the government House leader what kind of business he has planned for the rest of the day and the rest of the week. Will he get some meaningful legislation passed before the business of supply is finished? It looks pretty shaky to me.

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope the opposition will co-operate to ensure that we pass all the meaningful legislation that we have. I will take the comments of the opposition House leader as representation to his own colleagues to do just that.

This afternoon we will debate second reading of Bill C-9, the administrative amendments to the Canada Elections Act brought by a decision of the courts.

On Friday it is my intention, following Bill C-9, to debate Bill S-2 respecting marine liability.

On Monday we would like to commence consideration of the very important and excellent piece of legislation Bill C-11, the immigration bill. This would be followed by Bill C-12, the Judges Act amendments and Bill C-5, the species at risk legislation which is equally important.

Thursday, March 1, shall be an allotted day.

I am presently discussing with counterparts in other parties a proposal to reaffirm the powers of the Speaker to select for debate amendments at report stage in a manner that is fair to members and in the manner that it was intended when that procedure was adopted. Subject to consultation, I hope to be able to ask the House to consider this proposition some time next week, possibly early next week.

PRIVILEGE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I raise my question of privilege in response to a letter dated February 16, 2001, from the member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot. This letter was distributed to members and to all media. It came to my attention yesterday, February 21. I believe this question meets the criteria as described in Standing Order 48, and Marleau and Montpetit, page 121.

• (1505)

The member's letter contains information discussed in camera among the members of the procedure and house affairs subcommittee on private members' business. This, in and of itself, has been found to constitute a *prima facie* matter of privilege, as noted in Marleau and Montpetit, page 838 which states:

Divulging any part of the proceedings of an *in camera* committee meeting has been ruled by the Speaker to constitute a *prima facie* matter of privilege.

The member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot's Bill C-234 was deemed non-votable by the committee, and he wrote in his letter that the bill "was ruled non-votable by the opposition members on the subcommittee for private members' business". He went on to say "crude partisanship has thus deprived all MPs of a debate". He also said "opposition MPs have been complaining about the lack of opportunity of backbench MPs and the relevance of parliament. Yet when given a chance to do something about it, they failed to take it".

I argue that the tone and content of the letter is inappropriate and that he has divulged in camera details of a subcommittee to other members and to the media. In doing so he has put both myself and all my colleagues in an untenable position of being unable to defend ourselves against such charges because to do so would force us to divulge information from an *in camera* meeting, which we will not do.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, it is a committee that works much differently than the sometimes more partisan parliamentary committees. I commend all my colleagues for their excellent work on the subcommittee for private members' business. The member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot may not be aware that the decisions as to which bills and motions are deemed votable are reached through a consensus process with representatives of all parties, including his own.

On the matter of privilege, Marleau and Montpetit, page 52 states:

—Members can only claim privilege insofar as any denial of their rights, or threat made to them, would impede the functioning of the House.

Privilege

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that my right to defend myself, and for all members to defend themselves against such accusations, have been denied by the member and his actions. His actions have impeded my ability to fulfil my function as a member on this committee.

Marleau and Montpetit point out "The unjust damaging of a member's good name might also be seen as constituting an obstruction". In ruling on a question of privilege, Speaker Fraser stated:

The privileges of a Member are violated by any action which might impede him or her in the fulfilment of his or her duties and functions. It is obvious that the unjust damaging of a reputation could constitute such an impediment.

I respectfully submit that the actions of the member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot have done just that and brought unjust damage to the reputation of all members of the subcommittee and, in fact, to the entire House of Commons. Members who sat on the subcommittee have worked together and given many hours of their time to hear submissions from their colleagues from all parties. Which member in his or her right mind would want to give of themselves for the benefit of their colleagues knowing that they may be faced with indefensible rebukes and the prospect of a damaged reputation from a colleague they have sought to assist?

Should you, Mr. Speaker, find that this is a *prima facie* matter of privilege, I would be prepared to move the appropriate motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the subcommittee on private members' business, I too received a copy of the letter from the member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot.

I agree fully with the very pertinent remarks just made by my colleague, the deputy whip of the Canadian Alliance Party. I think that we should not, as parliamentarians, allow such comments from a member whose bill was not selected to be disseminated throughout the media, because this might put additional pressure on the members of the subcommittee on private members' business.

I do not wish to delay the proceedings of the House, because we have an important bill, the act to amend the Canada Elections Act, to study, but I would just like to point out, as the Canadian Alliance deputy whip did earlier, the consensual nature of the discussions that took place in this committee.

• (1510)

In my opinion singling out or referring to members of the opposition in two places in this letter is, first, an insult to the members of the opposition but it is also an insult to the government member who chairs that committee, and who placed a heavy

Privilege

emphasis on the consensual character of these deliberations, and on their non-partisan nature.

The strongest proof that the composition of this subcommittee is not like other House committees is that the government is in the minority; there is only one Liberal MP, the chair. The four opposition parties are represented on it. This is a clear illustration of this parliament's desire for, and custom and tradition of, lending it a consensual and non-partisan character.

Therefore, I support what my colleague, the deputy whip of the Canadian Alliance, has said.

[*English*]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too spent the better part of two days on the subcommittee on private members' business and I want to concur in what the member for Dewdney—Alouette said. I do not want to repeat all his arguments. I want to confirm that this was a decision made by a consensus of all the committee members. There was no partisan nature to it whatsoever.

As a matter of fact, in our case there were eight New Democrats who presented motions to the committee and only one was chosen. There were no government motions. There was no Conservative motion. There were only two motions from the Alliance and four from the Bloc. This just shows there was a consensus. This time the Bloc had more motions chosen than anyone else. That was the result of a consensus by all members.

I can testify, after having spent two afternoons there, that no one on the committee was partisan in any sense, shape or form in terms of the selections that we made.

I think this is a genuine question of privilege. What the member across the way has done reflects on all of us who are on that committee. It really impugns all of our reputations as members of parliament who were trying to do a just and balanced job.

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am quite taken by surprise by this question of privilege and I certainly take it very, very seriously.

But let me begin in my own defence by saying that I only wish that I did have some of the information that was discussed in camera with respect to the private members' bills that were deemed votable or not votable.

As you are very well aware, Mr. Speaker, one of the awkward things about this subcommittee is it is dominated by the opposition members. It deliberates in camera. A report is tabled in the House and there is no opportunity at any time for the members affected by whether their bill is chosen to be votable or non-votable. There is

no opportunity at anytime to know the reason why the bill is deemed votable or not votable.

Now, if I may just go through my letter. I think I need to defend myself. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, you will agree that I have not said anything in my letter that besmirches the reputations of my colleagues opposite, nor in any sense, shall we say deviates from the information that I have fairly acquired.

First of all, the first paragraph said:

My Bill C-234 to amend the Supreme Court Act was ruled non-votable by the opposition members on the sub-committee for private members' business even though it met all the criteria for votability.

I invite you, Mr. Speaker, to examine my bill versus the known criteria for votability and you will find there is no argument. It met every one of those criteria for votability.

As far as my knowing that the opposition members voted against making my bill votable, I can assure the House that that arises from the fact that I had and still have great confidence that certainly the Liberal member on the subcommittee for private members' business would not have argued against his own colleague's bill. So by elimination, Mr. Speaker, it was very clear that the opposition members, now by their own admission, Mr. Speaker, in this Chamber, now the opposition members do admit that they did speak against my bill.

The second paragraph said:

The bill would have required the Supreme Court to consider the intent of parliament when considering Charter cases. It would also have prevented the government from broadly applying split-decisions like that of Marshall where the Micmac were given an aboriginal right to the fishery.

● (1515)

Mr. Speaker, you will agree that there is nothing contentious in that, which merits a point of privilege. It is a mere statement of the truth and a mere statement of what my bill would have done.

I think the third paragraph may have caused a little bit of awkwardness on the part of my colleagues opposite, where I say:

Crude partisanship has thus deprived all MPs of a debate on judicial activism and judge-made Charter law that most of us have been crying out for.

I submit, first and foremost that in this place of all places, to accuse another member of being partisan is one of the most normal things that could possibly occur here, because indeed more often than not, particularly during question period, we pride ourselves on being partisan.

Perhaps the adjective "crude" was a little offensive. But, Mr. Speaker, I would draw your attention to the fact that when items are selected for their votability, among the many items that come before the subcommittee, is that they have the option of selecting

10 items. In this instance they only selected seven. They could have selected three Liberal items.

I point out that it was not only me that had an item before the committee. The member for Davenport and the member for Lac-Saint-Louis, both Liberal members, also had items before the committee yet they were not chosen to be votable.

I can only conclude, as a member, that crude partisanship must have taken effect because all three of these Liberal items met all the criteria. If the people who were deliberating on this wanted to reject other opposition bills, that was perfectly fair. But I really do feel that there is no point of privilege here. As I stated:

Opposition MPs have been complaining about the lack of opportunity of backbench MPs and the irrelevance of Parliament. Yet when given a chance to do something about it, they failed to take it.

Mr. Speaker, I merely stated the truth.

The Speaker: We have had an extensive discussion on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Dewdney—Alouette. The Chair would like to thank all hon. members who participated in this discussion for their interventions.

It seems to me that at first glance it might appear that there was some basis for objection when one reads the first paragraph of the letter of the hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, from which he quoted extensively in the course of his remarks.

The Chair is of course very mindful of the privileges of the House and anxious to ensure that they are properly upheld.

[*Translation*]

However, I must say that a few years ago I was a member of this subcommittee and I took part in the discussions. The subcommittee operated exactly as has been described today.

[*English*]

I know that it proceeded by consensus then. We always strove to obtain that and avoid a vote. There was not a government majority on the subcommittee at that time. It was one where members worked together to choose the bills that were of interest to members of the House and were chosen for that purpose. It sounded to me, in the discussion today, as though the committee is carrying on exactly as it had before.

The letter sent by the hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot may have been somewhat indelicate but, having said that, I do not think that it has offended or breached the privileges of any hon. member. Some have clearly found it offensive. I can understand why that might be so, but partisanship is a fact of life in this Chamber. As the hon. member has pointed out, we do have it from time to time. Sometimes members make

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the mistake of sending partisan letters here and there. This one appears to have gone everywhere. It is one of those things that happens from time to time.

However, I think we have had an airing of the grievance. I think it is a grievance. I do not believe it is a question of privilege. Having had the airing, I believe we will let the matter settle there.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1520)

[*English*]

PETITIONS

POISON CONTROL

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I would like to present a petition that comes from a number of farmers and ranchers.

Mr. Speaker, you will know those little creatures technically called Richardson's ground squirrels. We call them gophers. Farmers and ranchers can no longer get poison that will kill them.

The petitioners ask that until Health Canada comes up with something that can really kill these varmints, to reintroduce the same formula of strychnine that they have had in the past.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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[*Translation*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved that Bill C-9, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

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He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to introduce the bill entitled an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

We have to make changes to reflect the Ontario Court of Appeal decision in *Figueroa* concerning the identification of political party affiliation on the ballot.

I trust that all hon. members will acknowledge the importance of re-examining certain provisions of the Canada Elections Act and that we will support this process.

[*English*]

Allow me to explain the reasons we are counting on the support of all hon. members for what I hope will be the expeditious passage of the bill.

Late August of last year the Ontario Court of Appeal rendered its decision in what has become known as the *Figueroa* case. In his argument, Mr. *Figueroa*, representing the Communist Party of Canada, challenged the constitutionality of the provisions of the Canada Elections Act relating to the official registration of political parties.

First, he argued that the requirements that a party nominate 50 candidates, which is the rule with which we are familiar, in order to be an official party violated section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Mr. *Figueroa* claimed that because they were deprived of official recognition, certain parties were not entitled to the same tax benefits as were provided for other official parties and were accordingly placed at a disadvantage in what he claimed to be a violation of guarantees under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

On this point, the Ontario Court of Appeals affirmed that the political parties play an important role in the electoral process. The court stressed that any political party aspiring to form a government or to play a significant role in the affairs of the state must at least offer a large enough number of candidates to allow for such a role. In other words, one person or two and so on is not a political party.

The court also noted that the principle of effective representation underlying section 3 of the charter is only given expression when a political party assumes a significant level of involvement.

In the court's view, the issue was therefore to determine a reasonable number of candidates to meet the criteria for the purpose of tax benefits, and a current limit of 50 appeared reasonable in every respect. We agree with that point and that provision will therefore remain unchanged. In other words, if one cannot round up 50 candidates, one does not get the tax benefits.

• (1525)

At the same time Mr. *Figueroa* challenged the minimal requirement of 50 candidates in order for the candidate's political affiliation to be included with his or her name on the ballot. This was ruled to be a separate and different point. Prior to that most of us had assumed that to be the same threshold.

His reasoning on this issue was that the identification of each candidate's political affiliation on the ballot made it easier for voters to choose. The Ontario Court of Appeal took careful note of Mr. *Figueroa's* statement in that regard.

[*Translation*]

For the moment, as I have said, the existing law does not provide for the identification of candidates, except when they belong to a duly registered political party. So, if the party is not duly registered, it is not recorded on the ballot. That means that they, here too, must run a minimum of 50 candidates to have the party name appear with the candidate's name on the ballot.

However, on this point, the Ontario court of appeal has recognized that, in certain instances, political affiliation can play a role in the choice of the electorate and that, therefore, it must be indicated clearly on the ballot.

In addition, the court held that, while the criteria set for official recognition of a political party are entirely justifiable for the purposes of granting financial assistance, this is not the case with the identification of the political affiliation on the ballot.

In addition, the court noted, just the political identification of a candidate on a ballot can cause the voter to choose one or another candidate. This would be particularly relevant in the case of two candidates from two different parties with the same name.

Thus, for all these reasons, the court recognized that candidates' identification and political affiliation on a ballot are justified and important enough for political parties to have greater access.

There again, we must have a minimum number of candidates to reasonably talk about political parties without misleading voters. It is critical that voters can make an educated choice. That, of course, automatically rules out individual candidates. In other words, a person is not a political party.

Our government is proposing to this House amendments that reflect the ruling issued by the Ontario Court of Appeal.

In 1991, the Lortie commission proposed a minimum of 15 candidates for the name of a party to appear on the ballots.

There is of course no magical number. In this House, a party must have a minimum of 12 elected members to be officially recognized. Therefore, we are proposing to set the number at 12. Twelve candidates could, in theory, when they are registered on ballots, form a political party in the House of Commons.

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Of course, in order to achieve that recognition, a party would have to get 100% of its candidates elected, which is unlikely. But still—

An hon. member: It is mathematically possible.

Hon. Don Boudria: It is mathematically possible, as the hon. member opposite said. In fact, it almost happened to my political party in Ontario. So, it is mathematically possible, and this is why we are proposing it.

[*English*]

The number 12 is found in various functions of our parliamentary system. It coincides, as I said a moment ago, with the number required for recognition in the House. If a party does not have 12 members in the House, it is not a political party or no longer a political party and so on. In this way small political parties could be identified on the ballot.

We propose that henceforth the name of a political institution comprising at least 12 candidates in an election be included along with the name of those candidates on the ballot. This does not give an automatic tax incentive for that group of people. In that regard the threshold would remain at 50.

We must never lose sight of the fact that the Canada Elections Act forms the very foundation of our democratic process. Its primary purpose is one of access, in the absolute respect of our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It must be open to Canadians to exercise their democratic right to promote new ideas in parliament.

• (1530)

Many of the modifications we made in the last parliament made it possible for a large number of Canadians to vote where they would have been prevented from doing so before. I am very proud of the fact that the House in the last parliament sought to widen the franchise as it did, allowing people who are out of the country to vote and so on.

We must welcome with enthusiasm and generosity the emergence of any political party capable of enriching and complementing our society. Indeed, two of the five parties represented in the House today did not even exist a decade ago, so obviously our present system has permitted the emergence of new political parties.

Since the new act entered into force in September 2000 its implementation has revealed a few anomalies that need to be rectified. I propose to do so at the same time with the bill.

The bill introduces amendments to the Canada Elections Act that are of a more technical nature. Sometimes the amendments are simply terminological changes to make English and French versions consistent. At other times there was a reference to a commit-

tee of the House when it should have referred to a committee of both houses, and I am correcting that as well.

In conclusion, I indicate to all hon. members that it is my intention in the future, following the presentation of the chief electoral officer to the parliamentary committee, to listen to the committee's advice and to propose substantive changes to the Canada Elections Act where there is a consensus to do so. I intend to do so quite openly, as I did in the last parliament, to incorporate ideas from all sides of the House.

That will happen at a time in the future, once we have listened to the report of the chief electoral officer and the important contribution made by the parliamentary committee. I want the House to know that I am quite open and quite willing to do that when the time comes.

That is not before us today. What is before us today is merely to respect the decision of the court to correct the law in a way that makes it possible to recognize the court's decision, to correct the legislation accordingly and to do so within the timeframe the court has given to us. That is why I hope we will pass the bill very quickly in the House.

At the same time I want to assure hon. members that this is not the only change I propose to make to the Canada Elections Act in this parliament. I am quite open to listening to the constructive advice of all hon. members, after the chief electoral officer appears before the committee, and to undertake further changes as will have been deemed necessary.

Meanwhile I ask all parliamentarians in the House to support these minor changes, changes which are important, because we have been instructed by the court to take care of them. I believe the changes we are undertaking today will improve the Canada Elections Act. The changes we will undertake after the chief electoral officer appears before the parliamentary committee, as well as the recommendations of the committee which is chaired by my own parliamentary secretary, will do so even more.

I thank hon. members for their co-operation in the matter. I hope the bill will go to committee in a timely manner so that we can respect fully the court's decision.

Mr. David Chatters: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been all party consultations and I request that you seek unanimous consent to allow our first speaker on Bill C-9, the member for Lanark—Carleton, to split his time with the member for Edmonton North.

The Speaker: Is there agreement to proceed as suggested by the hon. member for Athabasca?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Carleton, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. friend just noted, I will be dividing my time with the beautiful hon. member for Edmonton North.

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• (1535)

Tony Blair's speech today reminded us of the link between Britain and Canada. To listen to our Prime Minister one might have been forgiven for thinking that the chief link between Canada and Britain was that it was our number two investor, as if this place were not named after the House of Commons at Westminster, as if Canada and Britain did not share a head of state in Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, and as if we had not based our own constitution upon that of the United Kingdom.

The preamble to the British North America Act, our constitution, reads as follows:

Whereas the Provinces of Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have expressed their Desire to be federally united into One Dominion under the Crown of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, with a Constitution similar in Principle to that of the United Kingdom:

This then went on and dealt with substantive items.

The idea at the time was that we would benefit as Canadians from the liberties and ancient freedoms that Englishmen had enjoyed and that the unwritten British constitution guaranteed.

In 1868 the classic statement of those liberties was given in Walter Bagehot's famous book *The English Constitution*, a classic which is still read today by those who seek to understand both the British constitution and the unwritten aspects of our own constitution, many of which are still in place today.

Walter Bagehot stated something very interesting, which is of relevance to the debate today, on the legislation before the House. He stated that the United Kingdom, although nominally a kingdom, was not a tyranny like the monarchies of the European continent but rather that it was, in hidden or veiled form, a republic. He meant that it was a country with a mixed system of government; that is to say, with a monarch, with an aristocratic element in the form of the House of Lords and with a democratic element in the form of the House of Commons.

That was the ideal represented by Great Britain at the time. It was also the ideal that we had hoped to gel in Canada when we created our constitution. We wanted to set as our principle the goal of being, as much as we could be, a mirror image and a transcript of that country which was the freest country in all the world and a model for all the world. That was the ideal our laws were meant to represent up to the present day.

Sadly, Bill C-9 does not reflect any of that. It reflects instead our degraded constitutional status. I am speaking of the unwritten constitution in which the Queen and the Governor General are no longer permitted to bear the true pomp and dignity of their office. Much of that role has been taken over by an increasingly self-important and pompous prime ministerial office. The Senate is no longer the natural aristocracy it was meant to be but has become a body full of appointed political hacks.

Unfortunately, and the greatest tragedy of all, the Commons, the democratic wing of government, is no longer a parliamentary body but an electoral college in perpetual session whose role is to perpetually reaffirm the status of the Prime Minister as the elected monarch of the country. Canada is an elected monarchy today, and this is a great degradation from the original model that was set up and understood by the Fathers of Confederation.

The lone remaining aspect of our original republican constitution, republican in the original form, is the electoral process that takes place and allows this electoral college to be elected every four or five years or, in the case of this government, every three and a half years. That part of our constitution does still function somewhat.

However, I am afraid to say that a series of initiatives, culminating in this pernicious bill, seek to deprive us of the full measure of freedom our electoral system is meant to guarantee. The bill does this, regrettably, by depriving small parties of the full right to participate in elections on the same terms as major parties, such as the Liberal Party, my own party and all the parties represented in the House. It also deprives independent candidates of that equivalent right.

• (1540)

It is simply something that has no place in a democratic society, or in a society that seeks to be democratic and in which the people of the country seek to have at least a democratic element in their constitution.

It does this in the following manner. It seeks to do so by being part of a concerted strategy of squeezing the freedom out of free elections. We see the government taking action over and over again to put restrictions on third party advertising as its laws are struck down by the courts.

Laws are passed restricting third party advertising. They are taken to court, struck down, re-enacted with minor variations and will be struck down again. In the meantime third party advertising cannot take place. That is something of which we should all be ashamed.

In another matter related to the bill we saw the federal government's failure in June 1995 to permit the mandated review by law of the referendum act. We now see restrictions being placed on the rights of minor parties to participate on an equivalent or equal footing with the larger parties in federal elections.

I want to give a bit of historical background to explain exactly how the present situation has evolved. In May 1993 the previous Progressive Conservative government with all party support, except for the support of the hon. member for Beaver River who is now the member for Edmonton North, passed a law stating that any party which failed to field 50 candidates in a federal election would

have its assets confiscated. There would be a process by which the assets would be sold off. Its debts would be cleared and any remaining money would be turned over to the Receiver General for Canada or, more correctly, to the chief electoral officer.

As a result of the law being passed and the fact that the Communist Party of Canada failed to field 50 candidates in the 1993 election, the Communist Party of Canada was ordered to close up shop in the manner prescribed by the law. The Communist Party did so, but the leader of the Communist Party, Mr. Miguel Figueroa, took the electoral law to court and argued that the 50 candidate rule was unconstitutional.

It took a long time for him to work his way through the court system, but in a ruling on March 10, 1999, Madam Justice Anne Marie Malloy of the Ontario Court, General Division, ruled that the Canada Elections Act violated the charter of rights in a number of important ways and that therefore substantial chunks of the law would be struck down.

I will quote from Madam Justice Malloy's decision in order to make the point. She wrote the following:

Only parties which nominate at least 50 candidates in a federal election are entitled to be registered under the Act. This provision violates s. 3 of the Charter because it provides an advantage to candidates of larger parties while denying it to others—Further, the fifty-candidate threshold is not rationally connected to stated objectives of ensuring that only "serious" parties or parties with a broad base of support be entitled to register—There is a rational basis for restricting registration to parties which have at least two candidates as the act of running a slate of candidates under one party banner is the hallmark of a political party.

That is to distinguish parties from independents.

The appropriate remedy is to read into the relevant provisions the requirement of at least two candidates for registered status, rather than the current 50-candidate threshold.

She continued to say that the defendant, the government, conceded that the provision that only candidates of registered parties are entitled to have their party affiliation appear on the ballot infringes on freedom of expression contrary to subsection 2(b) of the charter. The government itself admitted that. She continued:

It also infringes the s. 3 rights of those candidates because the use of a party identifier is a benefit which should not be extended to any candidates if it is not extended on an equal basis to all.

• (1545)

She went on to say the following. The provision for automatic deletion from the register of a party which fails to nominate at least 50 candidates in any federal election, the effect of which is that the party is required to sell all of its assets, pay its debts and remit any positive balance to the government, has a devastating financial effect on political parties, as well as on voters, and limits the ability of a party to continue its support of its candidate. It violates the section 3 rights of both. Since the supporters of the party are less

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able in association with each other through their chosen party to express their political views to the public, the provision also infringes their right to freedom of expression and freedom of association contrary to sections 2(b) and 2(d) of the charter.

During this part of the speech, the minister has been offering some commentary about how parts of this decision were overruled by the Ontario court of appeal. He is quite correct as to the facts; there was some overruling of some parts of the bill. What he does not mention is that the court of appeal's ruling is itself at this point being appealed by Mr. Figueroa and we do not yet know whether those parts will be reinstated.

It would be my interpretation that in fact Madam Justice Malloy's interpretation was correct and the government lawyers were in fact quite unreasonable in their understanding of the relevant parts of the constitution.

In dealing with responding to the court's ruling, the court of appeal instructed the government to produce legislation to deal with the unconstitutionality of parts of the law within six months. It in fact complied, shy one day of six months, by producing this law, Bill C-9, which gives the narrowest conceivable interpretation to the court's decision and to the rights protected by the court.

As well, the government appears to have put in a number of very vindictive provisions designed to ensure that small parties—not its party, not my party, not the Bloc Québécois or the NDP or the Progressive Conservatives, but small parties and independents—will not have access to certain rights that are or should be extended to all parties on an equal footing.

I am thinking here of allowing the issuance of tax receipts between elections. I am thinking here of the right to a final voters list as opposed to merely a preliminary voters list, and that is a significant factor for a party contesting an election, for example, in my own riding, which is growing rapidly and where the preliminary voters list has unfortunately a very limited correspondence to reality by the time of an election.

I should also mention that free time political advertising is restricted for these small parties.

The government has reinstated, as best it can, the unconstitutional 50 candidate rule, which will of course be struck down on appeal eventually after a number of years go by, at great expense to these small parties and these private citizens. It will accomplish that temporarily. It will deprive these parties of their rights to freely contest elections. It will deprive people who want to get together in smaller groupings, for whatever reason, or who do not have the resources to create large groupings, such as the communists and some of the other small parties, some of whom contested the election in my riding against me.

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I may not agree with them ideologically, but I think they have the right to run against me. If they can convince the voters that they are better representatives of voter interests than I am, that is fair. I should not have an extra advantage. I certainly do not think that the 172 or 173 members on that side of the House, whatever the number is, should have any extra advantage over these small parties either.

If I had been told that one day I would be making common cause with the communists against Her Majesty's government, I do not think I would have believed it, but here we are. Today I am making common cause with members of all small parties in defence of an equal, equitable playing field, of fairness for all independents and for all people who wish to contest elections, and in defence of our constitutional rights.

• (1550)

I have only a paraphrase here, but Voltaire, speaking to someone with whom he disagreed profoundly, said "I disagree with everything you say but I would defend to the death your right to say it".

However, the government and this minister unfortunately seem to be saying something that is just about the opposite. It is saying it might actually agree with what one is saying, maybe even with most of it, but it will happily violate the constitution in any way it can think of in order to restrict one's right to say it. That is a shame. It should be stopped.

I will be opposing the bill. I encourage all members of all parties, including those who enjoy the benefits of this law, to fight against it and to ensure that it does not go through.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I apologize to the House for failing to give credit to the Alliance member for North Vancouver for producing the number of 12 MPs which I proposed today.

The Speaker: I am not sure that sounds quite like a point of order.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is my understanding that the member for North Vancouver did not in fact introduce the 50 number that is being used for all important rights under this law.

The Speaker: I think it is apparent that we seem to be in an argument rather than on a point of order, interesting as it may be. These are not uncommon in the Chamber.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, let me just say that a dozen is certainly a good, round number. I know that my colleague from North Vancouver proposed that, and in fact the government listened. The government House leader just said that it could have been 15, it could have been 12,

but I see that he took the expert and wonderful advice of one of my colleagues, my colleague from North Vancouver.

I would like to talk for a few minutes today about this particular bill. I am amazed, I suppose, but I probably should not be. The fact that this went to court and had to get resolved there is what forced the government to act. It just seems kind of pathetic. Surely if something is worthwhile changing, it is, and dear knows there were more things in the Canada Elections Act that the government could have changed other than this one thing, but the government always seems to be spurred on by a court decision. Everything is reactive in this government. It does not just think something is a wonderful idea and go ahead with it. The courts act in such and such a way and that triggers a reaction to something that the government needs to react to.

Bill C-9 wants to amend the Canada Elections Act. My colleague for Lanark—Carleton has talked about the numbers and how it is a consistent thing anyway.

When we look at the number of people that we need in the House for a party to be registered or acknowledged or recognized as an official party, I know something about it, as you know, Mr. Speaker. I sat here certainly as a proud member of a political party and with much machinery around the country, but I was treated as an independent here in the House of Commons. I know you were certainly kind to me and I do appreciate that. You did know the rules and regulations, as has obviously now been proven. You are sitting in the big chair, as it were. You provided me with a great deal of help. I remember Speaker John Fraser was very kind to me too because he said that after all I had won an election fairly and squarely.

So I have a vested interest certainly in speaking out on behalf of those who belong to smaller political parties. In fact, I remember that when the Reform Party fielded its first candidates in the 1988 election several of us ran. I think we fielded candidates in 72 out of the 88 western ridings. However, until we of course got to that magic number of 50, everyone was concerned because we were not able to act as if we were a full blown political party. I remember that there was great excitement when we got to that number and were able to say that we really could be recognized.

It seems passing strange to me that a government would react. That seems to be the substance of the government: only when pushed into something does it act.

However, let us look at some of the issues. Even though a party may field 12 candidates and be a registered party, is it registered? Not really. We could talk about it, but in fact it is just deemed to be a political party, not a registered party. If we look at the House of Commons now and at the precedent which has been set for some time that we need to have 12 members to be recognized, I would have loved to have had that changed when I was sitting as an

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“independent” member here, but the rules and the traditions were that a party needed a dozen members.

When we look at this law, we see that it moves to a dozen, which is a good first step, but the party is still not a “registered” political party. That means it cannot use all the tools that are available. It just seems most unfortunate. Even though they have 12 candidates they are not able to obtain a final list of electors.

• (1555)

It has not even been three months since we have come into the new parliament. The election was less than three months ago and when I look around at what all of us went through in the election campaign, I would like to tell the House a couple of tales from the trail.

This was in Edmonton North specifically, but I know that this happened not just there. In fact, when I think about this final list of electors, whereby we have gone to a permanent enumeration, what a nightmare that is for areas of the country such as the constituency I represent in Edmonton North, where there are new houses being built daily. Every time I go out door knocking there is an entire new subdivision there. I am not sure if it is the same in Kingston and the Islands, but I know things are hot in Edmonton North.

Our returning officer is Phyllis Basaraba, for whom I have an incredible amount of respect. I appreciated so much the work she did. However, she was not given the tools. We went into the Elections Canada office which she was trying like crazy to get up and running because the election came so quickly. My campaign team was going out into new areas of Bellerive and new housing developments which were being built so quickly, and they were drawing maps. Elections Canada had no idea of these new places. My guys were out door knocking and were drawing physical maps of where houses were and where lakes were. We would then take these maps over to the returning office and say “Guess what? There are 836 houses in this district”. They would say that they had absolutely no idea of these people on the electors list.

Something is wrong there. It is not just the smaller political parties that would not have access to final voters lists. Surely we need to get proper lists in place. That is a real deficiency I see in the Canada Elections Act and is surely something the government could have and should have come up with. Maybe it would have come up with it if it had been taken to court about it, but it always has to be reactive instead of proactive. This was something from this last election that was very difficult.

Obtaining free broadcast time is another difficulty. Having represented a smaller political party in days gone by, I know that there is always that battle about free advertising time in political broadcasting, which is certainly something that people should have the advantage of.

Also, there is the whole idea of issuing tax receipts to donors. Again, a legitimate party should be able to issue tax receipts at any time of year, not just during a writ period.

Mr. Speaker, someone whom you know and remember well, Elwin Hermanson, has left this place and is the leader of the Saskatchewan Party now. In fact, he is the leader of Her Majesty’s official opposition in Saskatchewan. You certainly know him and remember him well. He is a fellow who did a tremendous job in the House. There he is out in Saskatchewan now.

I know this may be provincial—it could be federal—but the bottom line is that his party was not able to issue tax receipts to anyone at any time, even during the writ. When those people ran in the last election about a year and a half ago, there were people of goodwill saying “Here is a hundred bucks because I believe in the cause”. I thought not being able to issue tax receipts at all was just scandalous. If these people are going to operate as a legitimate political party, they certainly should have the right to be able to get those tax receipts issued.

Of course the NDP in Saskatchewan, I am reminded, had a federal wing or cousin, if you will, so it was able to swap receipts back and forth or be registered as a provincial party under the federal one. Of course there was no corollary to the Saskatchewan Party at the federal level.

This seems ludicrous to me. Of course as we know the Saskatchewan Party gave the NDP a good run for its money, even without tax receipts, and Elwin is coming very close to being the premier of Saskatchewan. Dear only knows what will happen during the next election.

When I look at some of those things I think there really are some fundamental injustices. I am not going to leap to the defence of the Communist Party either, but if we do really believe in free speech we ought to believe in free speech when it is good for us and when it is not so good for us.

I certainly am not JoJo the psychic, but I do know that there is going to be court challenge. I will bet a loonie that these smaller political parties will win, because Figueroa did it and someone else is going to do it next. If it is not the Communist Party, it will be some other party.

Let me talk just for a moment again about the reimbursement of election expenses that was provided for under Bill C-2, which was a major revision of the Canada Elections Act. The government is making some small and tinkering amendments to it.

• (1600)

Here is one that maybe they should have paid a whole lot more attention to. Under this provision, only registered parties, those

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parties that run more than 50 candidates, or now more than 12, will be reimbursed for election expenses providing they obtain either 2% of the national vote or 5% of the aggregate vote in their riding in which they endorse candidates.

Although my party opposes election rebates, we do not believe it is fair that only registered parties should be able to do that. I agree with my colleague, who said it so well, if people are going to vote for those candidates they have every right to do that whether I agree with them or not. I do not think it is fair to punish people by not allowing them to be reimbursed for their election expenses.

When we talk about registered parties versus political parties, those parties that will not be able to get the benefits of full registered parties, I certainly think that sounds like two tier democracy. We all know this government hates to be thought of as endorsing two tier anything but we see proof of it all the time.

If we look at health care, it is just amazing that the government stands up and says that it is the champion and the saviour of universal health care. It is not universal. Many times across the country we see that diversity and a real serious problem with a government that says one thing and of course does another.

HRD grants, immigrant investor loans or something in the industry department are other examples where we see that there really is a two tier system alive and well with this government, and that is unfortunate.

Again today we see evidence that the government believes in two tier democracy. Obviously for members of the government, which has a majority and did fairly well in the last few elections, they are able to stand up and say that they are tier one. They get all the lists, the free broadcast time and the reimbursement of their election expenses. They can tell us that they are sorry for us folks but that we do not get reimbursed. That is two tier.

If we talk about democracy and the right to free speech, then it seems to me that it should be absolutely equivalent for everybody. Let the voters decide that, not the government.

It is important to make sure that the government is really concerned about this issue. It has to be proactive not just reactive, and not take the position that it knows best.

As the House knows, a party can be in government for a while, perhaps a little too long for some of us, but nonetheless, sooner or later it will be in opposition again. That is just as sure as God made little green apples. However, when a party is in government it is such an easy thing to assume that it knows everything, that it has all the answers and that it really does believe in fairness, but it then brings in legislation like this. It is a good little start but there are so many other things it could have done.

What could we do to the Canada Elections Act to make it better? How about enumeration? A little earlier in my remarks I talked about the fact that enumeration was just unbelievable. The returning officers across the country were about ready to tear their hair out during the last election.

First, we have a shorter writ period. When I think about the last election it amazes me how so many things happened and there were such frustrations regarding the enumeration. The whole idea of registered political parties is amazing.

Let me talk about advance voting. I would like to comment for just a few moments on some of the advanced polling horror stories. I have more tales from the trail.

I called into the 1-800 vote number. It took me some time because it seemed to me that no one was ever available there. In the last election I sent people directly to my returning office. That was far more successful and they got tremendous answers. Of course they could get through on the lines or else just drop in to the Northtown Mall where Phyllis Basaraba and her really good crew of people were working.

However, when I phoned the 1-800 number it was like phoning someone on a teenage line. It was almost impossible to get through. When I did get through, this is what happened. I said to the person on the line that my name was Deborah Grey and that I was calling from Edmonton North—Deborah being my first name, which is not exactly unrecognizable as a woman's name—and I was told not once but twice “Just a moment, sir.” This was Elections Canada talking to me, a candidate but also a member of parliament. I said my name was Deborah, not Chris, Terry, Pat or something like that. I said that it was Deborah Grey calling and I was told “Okay, Sir, I'll be right with you”. This made me nervous right off the bat, as one could guess, and I did not, I must confess, have 100% faith in the system as it were.

● (1605)

Well it went from bad to worse because the person asked me what riding I was calling from. I told the person I was calling from Edmonton North. I thought that was pretty simple and straightforward. The person then asked me what province I was in. This was a person from Elections Canada. This was the 1-800-VOTE where answers were to be given to all our problems. Susie Voter could phone in and ask these questions, not that I deserve special treatment, but I was the MP, the candidate phoning in and I was being asked what province Edmonton North was in.

If there is any way that is defensible, I would be really happy to hear it. To me this seems inexcusable from people who are supposed to have the answers. I recall saying that Edmonton is a little town out west and the capital of Alberta.

If I had still been in Beaver River, I could buy that they would have a difficult time because who knows where Beaver River is. Those of us who live in the area certainly know, but I could understand somebody at the other end of the country not having a sweet clue frankly of where Beaver River is, but Edmonton North is a bit of a hint that it could be the capital city of Alberta.

Holy smokes, there are just unbelievable problems in the system. It is no wonder Canadians get frustrated with the whole idea of whether the electoral system works or whether parliament works when the 1-800 number does not even work. How do we run the country?

There is something else I found difficult under the Canada Elections Act, particularly with the changes that were made under Bill C-2, and something I think the government should be addressing in Bill C-9. If it is going to address amendments to the Canada Elections Act under Bill C-9 then it should do it, do it once and do it right.

We have the Canadian citizenship idea where someone could ask a person if he or she is a Canadian citizen. Someone could respond by saying yes but we would not be able to ask for proof.

I just spent a couple of nice weeks in Mexico with my husband. When I was asked if I was a Canadian citizen I said, yes, but the authorities were not terribly impressed with my charming spirit and smile, and the fact that I had said yes, so they asked for my passport. They wanted proof and they had every right to ask for proof. I had my passport and I showed it to them. I knew I was a Canadian citizen. I knew I had proof and I was happy to provide it. However, here in Canada we are not allowed to do that.

If any substantive changes were going to be made to the Canada Elections Act that proof of citizenship should have been one of them for sure. I certainly think that it was high time for that but there is absolutely nothing in here. I have flipped through all these pages and it is just amazing.

When we look at the whole idea of democracy and the frustration of people we see that they really are kind of tired of voting. They do not think it will make a whole lot of difference anyway. I find it sad that we had the lowest voter turnout in a great while. Something has to stimulate the excitement of the Canadian public for them to believe that it really does matter that they participate in democracy. It is unfortunate when we see that democracy itself is pretty unhealthy right now with low voter turnout.

The chief electoral officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, says that maybe we should have mandatory voting. I do not know if that is the answer, although I do appreciate that people are at least asking the questions about what we can do to make sure that this place becomes a hair more relevant in people's lives, other than just in

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their chequebooks, pocketbooks and pay stubs. I really do think we need to make some serious changes in terms of making sure that democracy works better.

On page 83 of his book, *Straight from the Heart*, which was written in 1985, the Prime Minister, when he was treasury board president, said that in order to keep control the government made a lot of political judgments by itself and many decisions were reached in conversations in the corridors of parliament. He also wrote that he did not permit a lot of questions and that the system gave him a lot of clout. Is that not something to brag about, eh?

That is not democracy, that is pathetic. He went on to say on page 43 that in his judgment maybe no more than 50 MPs make a personal difference in the outcome of their elections. He also said that the rest tended to rely on the appeal of their leader and the luck of belonging to the winning party. He then said that the risk was that MPs would become more marginal, more expendable and at the mercy of the leadership.

• (1610)

He continues in the book to say that certainly fewer backbenchers will be prepared to give their leaders frank advice or tell them to go to hell if they know when they can be replaced. That was written by our present Prime Minister in 1985.

Just a couple of weeks ago in China the Prime Minister said "Ah, all the terra cotta statues. It is something like being home with my backbenchers". Is this something to brag about democracy? I hardly think so.

Being from the west I just could not let my speech wind down without this statement regarding the west which is on page 159 of the Prime Minister's book. He said that the lack of political representation was a problem, a vicious circle that we did not know how to break. He said that the less the west was represented the more alienated it felt, and the more alienated it felt the less it chose to vote Liberal and the less it was represented. There it is. Is the be all and end all to get seats in parliament to say one is in power for the sake of being in power? No.

Let us aim to be in power so that we can really make a difference, that we can have a vision for moving forward and that this place, parliament itself, becomes a little more relevant to people right across Canada. Canadians should be able to say that they voted and that they made a difference because Canada will be a better place.

When I see the timid changes that the government is attempting, I say that we have to go for it. Fix it once, fix it right and let us make sure that the Canada Elections Act does become a whole lot more relevant to all of us.

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[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, in the same spirit of co-operation we showed our Canadian Alliance colleagues, I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to split my time with the member for Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes have unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on Bill C-9, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

To begin with, we will be supporting this legislation. We will be doing so because it is consistent with the *Figueroa* decision handed down in Ontario. It ensures that we conform to the spirit of this decision. I will say, however, that we are not happy to be giving the bill our support, and I will explain why.

First of all, when one looks at the actual bill and reads it, it is clear that it is very brief. It contains only a few clauses. At first blush, it might appear that this is really a relatively minor or superficial bill. It is true that, in terms of content, it is brief. It will not go down in history for its length.

While the bill may seem fairly minor and innocuous, what is troubling to say the least is the government's attitude.

• (1615)

I believe that, by its very nature and by its very content, this bill reflects the arrogant and cynical attitude of this government, which feels that it embodies truth and innate knowledge.

We have before us today a bill which is evidence of all the haste with which the Elections Act reform was carried out during the last parliament. We proceeded precipitously. And why did we? Because the government waited until halfway through its mandate to bring in the amendments it intended to make to the Elections Act. The government was planning, anticipating, a rush election. It wanted to move as quickly as possible to pass new legislation, so that the chief electoral officer would have the time—we are talking six months or so—to implement the provisions of the new legislation before the election was called.

The fact is that, indeed, the provisions of the election legislation rushed through in 1999-2000, if I am not mistaken, took effect at

the very beginning of September 2000, so the government was in a position to call a snap election.

Speaking of haste, this bill is an illustration, a proof of the haste with which the government moved during the last parliament in order to get the Elections Act changed, with its bill number 2, Bill C-2.

First, Bill C-9, which is before the House today, contains provisions intended to ensure linguistic concordance, since it appears that the Elections Act, under which the most recent federal elections were held, contained linguistic concordance problems. In other words, some provisions did not say exactly the same thing in English and in French.

Had the government taken the time to properly study Bill C-2 and not rushed it through, perhaps we would have had the time to catch these little language errors and prevent them from having any effect during an election campaign on the interpretation of the law.

Happily—of course the matter is not over yet—it appears that the problems of interpretation in linguistic terms did not cause any catastrophes in the last election.

I will give an example. In the bill before us, clauses 18 and 19 are two provisions intended to bring the French text into line with the original English text with respect to the rules governing the allocation of free broadcasting time and the purchase of air time during the election campaign. The period during which air time is available to the political parties and candidates is defined as the period between the time the election was called and polling day. In French, the text reads “jusqu'à minuit le jour du scrutin”.

On closer examination of the English, we find “At midnight on the day before polling day”. They just forgot to say “À minuit, la veille du jour du scrutin”. That makes a fair difference. It is not a minor error. It is a detail, which could have made all the difference during the latest election campaign, in some ridings, even across Canada.

Here is another example. Clause 4 of Bill C-9 talks of the provisions concerning information to be contained in the register of electors.

• (1620)

It states that it shall contain:

—any other information that is provided under subsections 49(2), 194(7), 195(7), 223(2), 233(2) and 251(3).

It was simply not noticed that, in Bill C-2, the reference was to subsection 195(7) and not, as it was passed in the last parliament, to subsection 195(3). The wrong subsection was amended. The reference is to the wrong subsection. This is another example of haste and sloppy work.

Another example is when the bill refers to generally accepted accounting principles, concepts that the Bloc Québécois incorporated in Bill C-2, by the way.

As for the generally accepted accounting principles in clause 21, the government simply forgot to include these provisions in subparagraphs 403(b)(i) and (ii). Could this have made a difference? Of course it could have. This is another example of how Bill C-2 was rushed through, without the time being taken to do a proper job.

Why? Simply to satisfy the partisan goals of the government. This is completely and utterly unacceptable.

I was talking about party politics. Is there anything more vital to democracy than an electoral bill? It seems to me that such a bill must be acceptable to most if not all political parties taking part in the process. Everyone must agree with the process if it is to be accepted by civil society in general.

But, as I said earlier, in the reform of the Canada Elections Act during the last parliament, the government's approach was to brazenly put party politics and its political interests ahead of seeking a consensus with opposition parties.

We have seen this in several regards. The government's reform of the Canada Elections Act is essentially cosmetic and superficial. Naturally, it has been amended to be more readable and logical. Of course, some changes were made to comply with previous rulings.

This reminds me of the comment made earlier by the hon. member for Edmonton North, who said that this government is much more reactive than proactive. It is true. We proposed all sorts of ideas during the review of Bill C-2 to amend the Elections Act, so as to make it better for our fellow citizens and so that it would reflect more democratic and modern electoral procedures. But, as I just said, the government decided instead to make only some minor cosmetic changes.

Bill C-2 was not the result of a consensus. It was rammed down our throat by the government. Yet, when he launched the consultation process, the government House leader, the minister responsible for Canada's electoral reform, had said "I want to ensure that we can co-operate with federal political parties—as has traditionally been the case in Canada—so that this bill will reflect a consensus". Which consensus did this bill reflect? None. The government alone voted in favour of Bill C-2.

• (1625)

I would even go further. The government was so determined to ram this bill through and muzzle the opposition that it went so far as to see that, at third reading, only the government's spokesperson

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and one representative of the official opposition were allowed to speak to the bill.

Is there anything more despicable than to see the cornerstone of democracy, the elections act of a country, debated at third reading in the House, at the final stage, by only two political parties out of the five represented here in parliament?

The government's behaviour during consideration of Bill C-2 was absolutely outrageous.

The government pushed that bill through so fast that it had to come back to the House and say "Well, there are some minor changes we need to do, typos we need to correct. Would you be kind enough to let us correct these mistakes?"

The government is using the Figueroa ruling, which basically compels us to amend the elections act, to introduce a whole series of tiny minor changes, without of course embarking on an in depth reform of the legislation.

The government is saying "The system has served us well, let it be. We have been re-elected three times under the current election system, with three great majorities, do not change a thing".

Is this not the party led by the same man who promised, as Leader of the Opposition, that the first thing he would do as Prime Minister would be to include proportional representation into the system?

Well, he was elected and all he had managed to do by the end of his second term was to introduce some slight cosmetic changes to the Canadian election system, because the system has served him well and has worked to his advantage. The government is far from willing to propose any significant amendments to the current election legislation.

Let me briefly go over some of the provisions found in this bill. Among others, the bill amends the Canada Elections Act to give a greater role to the Senate. Previously, if he wanted to carry out a pilot project, for example to test an electronic voting process, the chief electoral officer had to obtain, under Bill C-2, the approval of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, that deals with electoral matters.

Believe it or not, under Bill C-9, the one before us today, not only will the approval of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be required, but also the approval of the Senate committee that normally considers electoral matters. It takes some nerve to give to a committee made up of unelected parliamentarians the power to say to the chief electoral officer, "No, you cannot carry out a study on a new way for people to exercise their right to vote in an election", or "Yes, you can go ahead, under this or that condition".

Is it not ironic to call upon a committee made up of unelected parliamentarians to debate the Canada Elections Act, which con-

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cerns each and everyone of us as representatives of our constituents? This is somewhat embarrassing.

The main purpose of Bill C-9 is to enable a political party that has at least 12 candidates to have its name listed on the ballots along with the name of its candidates. Members will remember that the number of candidates required used to be 50. This bill would reduce the number to 12.

Obviously the Figueroa decision does not specify the number of candidates that would be acceptable in constitutional terms.

• (1630)

So the government proposed the number 12. The rational argument, the logic behind this government proposal, is this. It takes 12 MPs in the House for a party to become a recognized political party. Let us use the same figure for recognition of a political party on the ballot, even if the number of 50 candidates on a slate is still valid for the party to be able to take advantage of the tax benefits offered by the Government of Canada. That said, from now on, the number of candidates required before the party name would be given on the ballot would be 12.

Hon. members might well ask “Why 12? Why not two, five, or ten?” The government, of course, says “Yes, but a rational argument is required, and the rational argument is the rule whereby it takes 12 members in the House for a party to become a recognized political party”.

During the briefing session, a most interesting point was raised by a colleague from the Canadian Alliance. He asked “And what if Prince Edward Island wanted to try an experiment like the Bloc Quebecois did?” There are only six ridings on P.E.I., so how could one imagine the Bloc P.E.I. on the ballot? It would not be possible with only six ridings.

I imagine that this will give rise to a lot of debate on the matter, but I find it unfortunate that the government did not want to take advantage of the work done on the previous bill, Bill C-2, or of consideration of this one, Bill C-9, in order to make more substantial amendments to the Elections Act.

On Tuesday, we debated the possibility of striking a special all-party committee to examine the merits of various models of proportional representation and other electoral reforms. The government clearly indicated its lack of interest.

Let us not be surprised afterward when the people of Quebec and of Canada show even less interest in federal politics, having seen the lack of interest the government has in bringing in any reform whatsoever. Let us not be surprised that the voter turnout is constantly dropping, constantly waning, election after election,

when we have a government with such a closed mind and such arrogance toward the public.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d’Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in turn to speak to Bill C-9 introduced by the government House leader and entitled an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

As my colleague, the member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes, pointed out so well and to avoid being redundant, I will try to raise new points regarding our disappointment following the introduction of this bill.

For the benefit of our viewers and our colleagues in the House, I would simply point out that the Elections Act has to be changed as the result of a decision by the Ontario court of appeal regarding the identification of political parties on the ballots, known as the Figueroa case. In the past, a party had to run 50 candidates in a general election in order to be recognized and, therefore, to have its name appear on the ballot.

The Ontario court of appeal and the legislation before us reduces this number to 12 candidates, which apparently has a direct link with the rule of law used by the Ontario court of appeal. This rule provides that, in order to be recognized in the House, a party must have 12 members there, the figure 12 being an acceptable measure in our system.

• (1635)

That having been said, our disappointment has to do with the fact that nothing in this bill addresses certain points that the Bloc Quebecois members consider essential.

I will try to rise above party politics by saying that I am sure that the issues that I will be raising during the time allotted to me were a problem for members of all five parties in the House during the election held on November 27, 2000.

That is why I think that the government should have taken advantage of this bill, which amends the Canada Elections Act, to introduce improvements in the electoral process.

When people get out to vote, they are doing nothing more or less than practising democracy. I am certain, Mr. Speaker, that the inhabitants of the lovely Cornwall area and of your riding are capable of expressing an opinion on an MP. That is the purpose of an election.

The purpose of an election is to say “Do we agree with the person who has been representing us for the past few years? Do we agree with the person seeking the right to run for office? Do we agree with this party’s platform? Do we agree with a whole range of things?”

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The action one takes in leaving one's home, setting out in one's car, heading for the polling station and, behind a screen, voting for someone, is an eminently democratic one.

What governs this democracy? In Canada, it is called the Canada Elections Act.

The Bloc Québécois would have expected the government to take advantage of this bill to amend certain features of the Canada Elections Act.

In any event, we know that, following an election, the chief electoral officer, Mr. Kingsley, will have to meet with members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to report on his work. Members of the Bloc Québécois will have certain concerns. In the short time left to me, I want to share just a few of them with the House.

One is that there are no provisions in this bill for more democratic electoral financing.

When we look at the figures released by Elections Canada on party financing, we can see that the six major banks in Canada—which have made record profits in 1999 and 2000—make contributions to election funds. These record profits made by major banks are often accumulated at the expense of ordinary people who experience financial difficulties and who tell themselves “I have financial problems, I can no longer make the payments on my house or on my car”.

When the time comes to pull the plug, the major banks do not hesitate to do so. Nor do they hesitate to pocket billions of dollars in profits.

The parallel I would like to draw with profits is the following. When we look at the contributions made to election funds, whether it is to the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party or the Canadian Alliance Party, we realize that these major banks make generous contributions. This is why, following an election, the government has no interest in changing the rules on public financing in the Elections Act. The government looks at who provides the money to fund an election campaign.

It is not in the government's interest to change the Elections Act. When we look at the figures released by Elections Canada, we realize that major banks have made generous contributions to the old parties, the traditional parties.

• (1640)

We really thought that, when the government introduced a bill to amend the elections act, it would have taken the opportunity to support the notion of funding by ordinary citizens.

We, in the Bloc Québécois, because of our public financing policy, have had to rely on \$2, \$5, \$10 and \$20 donations during the

last and all the previous election campaigns. But the day after an election, we are not beholden to any of the multinational companies who contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to our election campaigns. We are funded by ordinary citizens who tell us “We think you are doing a great job. Here is \$2 to carry on”. The day after the election, we are beholden only to ordinary citizens.

It would be in the interest of the government to agree to the motion put forward by one of the Bloc members on March 18, 1994. We in the Bloc are very consistent. The hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour brought forward Motion No. 150 which said:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should bring in legislation limiting solely to individuals the right to donate to a federal political party, and restricting such donations to a maximum of \$5,000 a year.

This is one change we expected to see in the bill.

I know my time is running out; *tempus fugit*, as would have said my latin teacher at the Séminaire de Chicoutimi.

Second, we expected something about the designation of returning officers. What we want and what the people we represent want is a democratic electoral process that is administered in a more transparent fashion. So, there should not be any apparent conflict of interest in the appointment of election officials.

The returning officer, who is the most important election official in each of our ridings, is appointed on the recommendation of the governor in council. In parliamentary terms, it means that cabinet members, the main players, the prime minister's henchmen, recommend individuals to act as returning officers. In most cases, if we could look closely at the 301 returning officers, if we had time for such an exercise, we could see a clear link to the government party. I think this will be a good exercise for my next filibuster in committee. We will look at the qualifications of the 301 returning officers in Canada.

Right now, they are all Liberal supporters, but I can assure the House that, under the Conservatives—and we saw it in the 1993 election—returning officers were friends of that party. That proves what we, in the Bloc Québécois, have always said: Liberals, Conservatives, it is all the same. That is very unfortunate.

Why not look at how things are done in the provinces? Quebec could be used as a model. I presume we do not only do bad things in Quebec. In Quebec, returning officers are appointed and confirmed following an open, transparent, competition in which their abilities may be made public, where people may be questioned. They are interviewed by representatives of all the political parties. Why could the appointment of returning officers not be a much more transparent process?

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In connection with the NDP motion earlier in the week, the government referred to the Lortie Commission, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing.

• (1645)

In the report of the Lortie Commission, at page 483, Commissioner Lortie concluded as follows:

A cornerstone of public confidence in any democratic system of representative government is an electoral process that is administered efficiently and an electoral law that is enforced impartially. Securing public trust requires that the election officials responsible for administration and enforcement be independent of the government of the day and not subject to partisan influence.

We can give examples of attitudes seen in the last election on November 27, 2000. Our memory has not been affected in this regard by the rigours of winter. Our wits are not dulled by temperatures reaching 27 below with the wind chill factor. It may be cold outside, but our heads are clear and we can recall the partisan decisions made by Liberal appointed returning officers in the last election. We could go on listing them until tomorrow morning.

I almost feel like asking for unanimous consent to continue my speech until I have finished listing all the acts or partisan action taken by returning officers in our ridings. There were—and I do not have enough time—the polling stations. In some instances they were located in tiny community centres where six or seven polling divisions were put together and the people were all packed in. They were voting just about beside each other. They could almost see who the person in the next booth was voting for.

Such things are totally unacceptable. Although there was a recreation centre nearby, people were sent five or six kilometres away from their community. I regret to inform hon. members that not everyone owns a car. Then there are the seniors. It was not exactly mid-July weather last November 27, hon. members will recall. There had been freezing rain. It was icy. Seniors were not able to exercise their right to vote.

Examples like these illustrate that there truly was partisanship as far as the returning officers were concerned.

Having spoken of physical locations, I could now go on to the last-minute additions to the voters' lists. At one point, only three days before the election, there were 7,000 or 8,000 new names on the list. These were people that had never been enumerated. No one knew where they came from. You can imagine Mr. Speaker—I hardly need say imagine, for you know, having yourself been elected in a riding—how that can complicate the election machinery to have to add 5,000 to 6,000 names three or four days before voting day.

I could also talk about the voting cards. Elections Canada provided people with a kind of voting card. In buildings with 64 apartments, voter information cards were left in the lobby, just like any ad-bag, newspaper or flyer from Canadian Tire or Pharmaprix. Some people were literally going to every apartment building picking up those cards. I have seen some people with 300 to 400 cards in their possession.

I am sorry, but I still feel very bitter about the last election. Many members on this side of the House, but also on the other side of the House—

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to direct the House's attention, if I could, to relevance. The hon. member has dealt with everything from freezing rain to voter cards. We are dealing with party recognition on a ballot.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: I believe this is more a point of debate than a point of order. Relevancy is not always obvious. In the little time they are given, members may put forward arguments to try to get their point across. In this case, I find the arguments still sufficiently relevant for us to continue with the debate.

• (1650)

Mr. Michel Guimond: I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your ruling. I know you made it not in my interest, but in the interest of fairness. At second reading, it is appropriate to address the principle of a bill, I believe.

I am almost tempted to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons what he is afraid of. Is he trying to hide something? Should we look a little deeper into what has been going on in his riding? I know it hurts. There are things we would rather not have to hear. But I was about to say that some of us on this side of the House were hurt by the work of some overly partisan returning officers.

Before the member interrupted me, I was going to say that I talked with some colleagues on the other side of the House who are not satisfied either with the application of the Canada Elections Act in the last general election.

I see the member for Hull—Aylmer is nodding in approval. This is not meant to be a partisan comment. I simply want to say that I am disappointed in the fact that the government did not take the opportunity provided by Bill C-9 to correct some problems in the Canada Elections Act, in the electoral process which is the democratic process through which people choose their representatives. That is the only message I want to convey.

Government Orders

I will say, in conclusion, that we will have the opportunity to come back to this issue when we hear the chief electoral officer before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We hope the government will agree to undertake a detailed, in-depth and non-partisan study of this bill and to hear, if need be, members from all parties in the House, not only those nasty members of the Bloc, but also members of all the other parties.

We talk to each other as parliamentarians. We may have different opinions, but we have the opportunity to exchange our views. I shall not reveal the nature of informal discussions I had with certain colleagues from other parties, but I can say that the Canada Elections Act was applied in a very twisted way in the last general election. We should look at it closely and think about amendments we could bring to ensure that democracy really exists in Canada and in Quebec.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Vancouver Island North, the Coast Guard.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say a few words in support of Bill C-9 which is before the House at second reading.

The bill, as my colleagues have said, comes out of an Ontario Court of Appeal ruling on March 10, 1999, almost two years ago. It suggested that parliament violated the charter of rights when it made a decision in the old elections act that before a name could be listed on the ballot, a party had to have at least 50 candidates. Now there has been a recommendation to change that from 50 candidates to 12 candidates, reflecting the ruling we have in the House of Commons that to be an official party of the House of Commons it must have 12 members in its caucus.

We certainly agree with that. We think it is the right way to go. In terms of the elections act, anything we can do to democratize the process, to make the process more inclusive and more empowering for as many Canadians as possible, is the right way to go. That is what this is doing in a very small way.

Before I go on I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I am splitting my time with my colleague from Palliser.

Regarding inclusiveness, one thing struck me about the debate today. I wonder if anyone from the Canadian Alliance wants to comment on this when I sit down. A few days ago in the House, one of its members introduced a private member's bill that would go in exactly the opposite direction. That was the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt. His private member's Bill C-273, would amend the Parliament of Canada Act in terms of recognizing official

parties in the House of Commons. The bill says: "This bill will provide that in order to receive official party status, a political party would at least have to have 10% of the seats in the House of Commons and members of parliament from at least three different provinces". In other words, the Alliance bill would not recognize the Bloc Quebecois as an official party.

• (1655)

I know my good friend from Vancouver is a very progressive member of the Alliance Party, so I am not surprised he opposes this private member's bill.

However, maybe the party could clarify its stance. This bill, sponsored by the member of the Alliance Party, would exclude the Bloc Quebecois as an official party of the House because it only has MPs from one particular province. It would exclude the NDP because it does not have 10% of the membership of the House. It would exclude the Conservative Party because it does not have 10% of the membership of the House. That means it would exclude 63 MPs, so we would have 63 independents. Is that democracy? Is that inclusiveness? The three parties together received the votes of roughly one-third of the Canadian people.

I know the minister for financial institutions is scandalized by this kind of lack of democracy across the way. I would like to have the Canadian Alliance clarify where it stands on this very exclusive bill that has been put forth by the member from Saskatoon.

The bill we have before us today goes in the opposite direction. It says we should recognize an official party's name on the ballot that has at least 12 candidates recognized by the chief electoral officer. That is the way to go.

The goal is to have an electoral system in our country that is more inclusive, that is more democratic, that is more transparent, that is more available and that is more egalitarian to each and every single citizen regardless of who we are and where we come from.

Again, it is very strange to hear the Alliance Party criticize the Canada Elections Act for being tough on so-called third party advertising. Third party advertising should be regulated. Political parties represent different points of view and have strict spending guidelines at the national and the local levels. We must adhere to those guidelines and stipulations.

However, we have the Alliance Party advocating a wide open season, depending on how deep one's pocketbook is for special interest and lobby groups that want to get out there and spend a lot of money in fighting various political parties and political campaigns. Once again, this shows that it is not really concerned about basic and fundamental democracy which is so important to the ordinary citizens.

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Mr. Chuck Cadman: Because you lost the support of the big unions.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, once again, I know the member from Vancouver who just interjected would not agree with his party on this. He is more progressive than most of the sort of Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble people who populate that particular caucus. That is an important issue. Some of them, not necessarily the ones who are there now, but some with cowboy hats sit right behind him during question period. That is the stance of that party. It pretends to be democratic and populist right across western Canada but it says and does exactly the opposite things when it comes to the House of Commons.

I would be very interested during questions and comments to hear whether or not the Alliance members will support the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt's private member's bill which would effectively deny the democratic rights of 63 members of parliament, representing one-third of the population, to be recognized as political parties. On the other hand, they get up in the House and say they would support this bill that would reduce the number of candidates needed to have one's name on a ballot from 50 to 12.

There are other items we have to deal with when it comes to elections. One is the whole question of the voters list. There were about a million people left off the voters list in the last campaign. Primarily, they were people from low income areas and younger people. We need legislation on that as soon as possible. We had a commitment on that from the government House leader, who was in charge of the Canada Elections Act in the House of Commons, about a week or so ago.

The final point I want to make is we should do what the Canada Elections Act says we can do. We should look at a different method of voting. If we look under clause 2 of the bill before us, it says:

The Chief Electoral Officer may carry out studies on voting, including studies respecting alternative voting means—

• (1700)

As we said on our opposition day on Tuesday, we should be striking an all party committee to look at incorporating some elements of proportional representation into our voting system like most countries in the world. Almost every country in the world with 8 million or 9 million people has some PR in the system.

This morning we heard from the prime minister of Great Britain, the mother of our parliamentary system. In the last few years Great Britain has incorporated some PR into the Scottish parliament and into the Welsh parliament. It elects all its members to the European community in Brussels through proportional representation.

According to the Jenkins commission, which was set up a few years ago to look at electoral reform, the British parliament will

probably adopt very soon a method of PR, if not in the next election, in the election that is coming in about five years time.

If the mother of parliaments can do that, we should be modernizing our system as well by moving toward a system of proportional representation that will allow the votes of every citizen to be treated as equal: all votes would be equal; all votes would carry weight; people could empower themselves; and there would no wasted votes.

The irony of the present system is that often Canadians do not vote for their first choice. Canadians often vote for one candidate to stop another. A good example is my friend, the right hon. member for Calgary Centre. Thousands of Liberals, New Democrats, Green Party supporters and progressive people voted for him to stop the Alliance in Calgary Centre. They did so because he was more progressive. Obviously he is more progressive. I recognize that fact. He is a very progressive member of parliament. He is a red Tory. He is a progressive Tory, a very progressive person.

If we had a system of proportional representation we would have a system where people could vote for their first choice, vote for their philosophy, vote for the ideology. If it were a German type of system they would have a vote for their local MP and then a vote for their party preference in terms of a parliamentary list provided by each of the political parties. They could be voting for their first choice. Their first choice and vision would be part of the Government of Canada and the Parliament of Canada.

We should be looking at this as one of the possibilities in terms of passing the bill. The chief electoral officer could look into various systems of voting, different alternatives of voting and strike a committee to do just that.

We support the bill at second reading. The other parts of the bill are largely technical. Part of it is just making sure that the English version coincides with the French version and vice versa. We will be looking at some of those in more detail in committee.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, I ask the member to refer back to the private member's bill of the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt of the Canadian Alliance Party. I have a copy of it and it says that the bill would prevent fringe parties, such as the Progressive Conservative Party and the NDP, from having seats in the Commons.

I do not think of us as a fringe party, either the NDP or the Conservative Party. We perform a valuable service. We represent thousands of people.

When I read that my immediate thought was that we should refer to the Alliance Party as the fringe benefit party. Its members ran on promises. If they were elected their leader would not move into Stornoway, for example. They would turn it into a bingo hall. If we

check who is living there now, we will find that the leader of the Alliance Party lives there.

They also said that they would not take a car for the leader. Their leader would not accept a car, and he has one now.

The ultimate flip-flop was the pension issue. I know candidates who ran in the 1993 election and lost their seats. They were hammered because righteous Alliance Party members said that they would never take a pension. Good candidates were defeated on that one issue.

Now they say they have families to look after. What about the families of the others that were misled, defeated and maligned? We should call it the fringe benefit party or the flip-flop party.

How does the hon. member think we could attract more people to vote? How could we re-establish credibility with the voters and the electorate? There was a very low turnout in the last election. It was shameful that so few people felt motivated to vote.

• (1705)

I would like the hon. member to address how we could present a better package, not as a party but as a group of politicians. How could we attract more voters?

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I think the best way of doing that is by practising what we preach, by being true to our word, true to our commitment, true to our principles and true to our promises in a campaign.

The member summed up the Alliance Party. Its members said they would never move into Stornoway and they did. They said they would never take a pension and they did. They said they would never eat in the parliamentary restaurant and they do. They said they would never travel business class on an airplane and they do.

They think all voters should be equal, all people should be equal and all provinces should be equal. Then they introduce a private member's bill in the House which says that parties should not be equal, that the Bloc, the NDP and the Conservatives should not be official parties. Those parties represent one-third of the Canadian people and 63 members of parliament.

The previous leader of the Alliance Party, the member from Calgary, used to go across the country talking ad nauseam about the equality of the provinces and the equality of people being a fundamental value. He said he believed in the fundamental equality of the Canadian people.

Yet when it comes to putting its preaching into practice in the House of Commons, the Alliance comes up with a private member's bill that does not treat the people equally. If people vote for the Bloc, the NDP or the Conservatives, they will not be treated the same as those who vote for the Liberals or the Alliance.

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How could we justify that? I have been challenging Alliance members to explain why they would breach their all important promise of equality for the people, but they are afraid to rise in the House to defend this private member's bill.

The people of Canada should realize what they said, that no party in the House should be recognized as official unless it has at least 10% of the seats. That would mean 31 seats for the NDP instead of 13, or 31 for the Conservatives instead of 12. They also said that the party should have members from three provinces. That would exclude the Bloc Quebecois, unless the Bloc elects somebody in Vancouver, Calgary and Yukon or somewhere else.

The Alliance Party is supposed to be a populist, grassroots party of the people where everyone is equal. That is the kind of party and vision its members said they had. That is one reason people are turned off by politics. They have another political party which, more than others, is old style and old fashioned. It practises old politics where it says one thing in the campaign and once elected does exactly the opposite. That is why people are cynical about the process. I want somebody from the Alliance Party to respond to my question.

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon. I have listened to the debate throughout and was intrigued by the comments of the government House leader indicating that they were relatively minor amendments. The member for Regina—Qu'Appelle has dealt with the suggestion of 12 candidates in order for a party to be considered official.

I was more intrigued by the commitment of the House leader that he would be open to much more significant changes to the Canada Elections Act following Jean-Pierre Kingsley's report to the appropriate parliamentary committee having an opportunity to discuss his findings regarding the recent election.

All members of the House of Commons would want to pay close attention to that report and to what Mr. Kingsley, the chief electoral officer, and Elections Canada find as a result of the November 2000 election.

I should like to associate myself with some of the remarks made by the member for Edmonton North. It was a difficult election campaign with the permanent voters list that has now come into play.

While the member for Edmonton North referred to brand new subdivisions that were springing up overnight and to the difficulty of keeping up in her riding, the situation experienced in the riding of Palliser was quite a bit different. We found that low income people and people who moved a lot, probably because they are low income people and students, were being discriminated against as a result of the national registration of voters.

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• (1710)

We used to have an enumeration prior to each election campaign. That system worked very well over many years, but it was changed. The last enumeration took place on the eve of the 1997 election and then in the November 2000 election we were into an update.

It was argued at the time that it would be much more effective to use computers, et cetera, so that people could be tracked. We are finding that a lot of the information is not available or not able to be placed into an updated voters list because of our privacy laws. This is why Mr. Kingsley's comments will be so important when they are made. I will give the House an example.

As I was door knocking in my riding I noticed Elections Canada flyers on certain doorsteps advising that one or more of the residents in the household had reached the age of 18 and was therefore eligible to cast a ballot if he or she would fill out a form.

It seems passing strange to me that those names are not placed automatically on the ballot, but apparently our privacy laws prohibit that. If the privacy laws are that strict, and there are good arguments not to change them, we really need to consider seriously going back to a system of enumeration.

As my colleague pointed out, one million people were left off the voters list in the last election. We had one of the lowest turnouts in history. In my riding of Palliser the vote was just over 62%. I make the point again that it was primarily low income people and people who tend to move around a lot.

One can get on the voters list. It is easier to get on the voters list on election day than it used to be, but one still requires identification or must be sworn in by a friend. A lot of times genuine low income people do not have an abundance of personal ID. It is difficult for them to find someone to go with them, hold their hand at the polling booth and say this is Jane Smith or whomever. I think we must look at the whole area, and I am pleased the government House leader has made a commitment on that.

At the same time I want to be critical of Mr. Kingsley for suggesting the answer to low voter turnout was compulsory voting. A lot of our problems have to do with the transition to the permanent voters list from the enumerated list. We need to tidy that up and make it more effective. If we cannot tidy it up we should revert to the enumeration system.

The member for Edmonton North also noted the situation in Saskatchewan, which has not had a political tax credit at the provincial level, and the need to remedy it. I suspect she knows a bill has already been passed but not yet proclaimed in that legislature. I have been given assurances the problem will be remedied in Saskatchewan's new session of parliament which probably begins in a month or so. Then there will be political tax

credits in all 10 provinces. We have had a federal tax credit in Canada since the mid-1970s. We look forward to that progressive change in Saskatchewan's legislation.

Another item which deserves to be raised and to which my colleague alluded was the question of third party advertising. I too very much support strict limits on third party advertising during election campaigns. The political parties that participate in campaigns have very rigid spending limits that must be followed. It would be patently unfair for people with deep pockets to be able to subvert or buy their way into the media to effect changes that the political parties do not have the budget to do.

• (1715)

We recognize, and I think the government recognizes, through the legislation it has endeavoured to bring in over the last number of years, that third parties should be able to advertise during election campaigns. However they should spend only a finite amount of money on advertising, less than what political parties are able to spend, because an election campaign is a contest between all the parties, big and small, and not the folks with the big bank accounts.

We align ourselves in the New Democratic Party very much with finite limits on third party advertising, unlike the lead spokesperson in the debate for the Canadian Alliance Party.

To conclude, I would encourage colleagues who are interested to look at a document entitled *The National Register of Electors*, which raises questions about the new approach to voter registration in Canada. It would take only about 10 or 15 minutes to read through the booklet. It was written before the results were tallied, so it says in effect that the November 27 election serves as the litmus test for the national registration of voters.

It wonders whether the move to a permanent voters list from the enumeration system was done as a cost saving venture. I hope that when Mr. Kingsley and the parliamentary committee studying the legislation looks at this fundamental change to the act, tough questions like that will be asked by the parliamentarians who serve on the committee.

I see my time is drawing to a close. I will conclude by saying that we in my party are supportive of the minor technical amendments in the bill. Far more importantly, however, we are interested in the fundamental changes that the government House leader alluded to when he led off the debate this afternoon.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to take part in the debate and to note that this is an important piece of legislation. It is, in essence, the rules of engagement that apply to those who seek public office.

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Although the bill has some rather particular aspects to it that are addressed in the overall scheme of things, I think it is timely, given that we have recently resumed this session of parliament and come through an election, that we look at how elections are conducted.

The bill, as has been noted, would amend the Canada Elections Act and the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. It is a bill that, as I indicated, deals substantially with two aspects that came out of a court case in the province of Ontario.

I begin my remarks by saying that it is good to see. I say with some sarcasm that the government has not changed the way it deals with legislation such as this in parliament. It is good to see that it has remained consistent and predictable. The government has treated this legislation, like many other pieces of legislation of this type, by not consulting. That is to say that it did not go to the effort of prior consultation with political parties in order to gain consensus, which was always the practice when it came to bills of this nature. It is disappointing and yet, as I indicated, it has become somewhat an expected attitude and approach on the part of the government.

The current Speaker, the member for Kingston and the Islands, served with great distinction on a special committee on electoral reform between 1991 and 1993 when he was a member of the opposition. A committee that was chaired by Mr. Jim Hawkes, the Progressive Conservative member from Calgary at that time, studied many of the same issues that we see before us.

That committee, in coming to its conclusions, stated quite emphatically that it would not report to the Chamber unless the recommendations were endorsed by all three political parties in existence at that time. There was an effort to recognize that consensus on issues such as this are extremely important. My, how times have changed.

● (1720)

However, in regard to this particular piece of legislation, the electoral act, changes have come before the Chamber since 1994 time and again without prior agreement, without consensus as to the content. That very much puts the government and this legislation, sadly, on shaky ground in terms of its legitimacy.

The last legislation of this type that came before parliament, Bill C-2 as it then was, was subjected to time allocation, which is of course again a practice that we have seen far too often in the past number of years. In fact, the trigger-happy government House leader has now used time allocation 69 times. Again, my, how times change. When the government House leader was a member of the opposition, it was so offensive to him and such an affront to democracy, yet a different attitude now prevails.

Turning back to the bill itself, I must admit that the changes now before us are reasonable in their content. They are changes that result from a court case that came out of the Ontario court of appeal. It bears noting that these changes will, I believe, enhance the current legislation, although I was hoping that in this parliament the first encounter we would have on a bill such as this, the first opportunity we would have to address this issue, would be met with perhaps a different attitude so that we would be able to deal with this problem of encountering each other in a different fashion. That does not appear to be the case.

One of the major problems, which was apparent to all Canadians and all parliamentarians, in the last election was the difficulty with the permanent voters list. We have heard a litany of stories of constituents who found that when they went to vote, to exercise their democratic right, a very important right and one that we all encourage in this legislation, their names were absent or there was some anomaly like not being listed at the appropriate polling station.

We all have to be very diligent. I hope this legislation in its final draft will address some of the problems surrounding the application of the permanent voters list. There is a huge frustration, as one can appreciate, whether it be a member of the voting public from Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough or from any constituency in the country, when individuals make that important statement of going to cast their ballot and arrive at a polling station only to find that for one reason or another their names are not listed.

I hope that when the bill goes to committee we will have an opportunity to delve into it in greater detail. That is not to say that this is not the proper forum to discuss some of the problems and some of the changes that could occur, but I hope that at that time in particular we will have an opportunity to pose questions to the chief electoral officer and his staff regarding some of these issues that arose during the last campaign.

From these problems and this experience, we might get some idea from Mr. Kingsley, the chief electoral officer, of the cost of creating this permanent electoral list, of the attempts that will of course follow to keep it up to date, and of the safeguards that ensure it is accurate, for this in and of itself has to be the fundamental purpose of having a permanent voters list, a list that reflects the eligible voters of the various constituencies around the country. It appears, in its current form at least, to be flawed. This is an opportunity to change that, to improve upon this permanent voters list and the efforts that were made to put this in place in the first place.

The overall amendments to the current legislation as compared to the last parliament's appear to be fairly straightforward in nature. Bill C-9 responds to the Ontario court of appeal case known as Figueroa. This case dealt with a submission on the part of the Communist Party of Canada, an argument that many of the provisions of the Canada Elections Act in its current form benefited

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larger political parties and therefore, by virtue of the same method, discriminated against the smaller political groupings.

• (1725)

With regard to the identification of candidates and political parties on the ballot, the court held that provisions of the Canada Elections Act limit identification of candidates' party affiliations on the ballot to candidates that were endorsed by organized political parties which supported 50 or more candidates in a general election.

It was found in the ruling by the majority on the court that this would infringe the charter. By virtue of its decision, the court did, as is often the case, give the Parliament of Canada an opportunity to address the issue, the anomaly, and to fix the problem.

The court felt that there was no justification, as it wrote in the ruling, for bringing the 50 candidates limit in relation to this matter or for having that in place. It discriminated against smaller political groups and was thus, in the court's opinion, not justifiable under the charter. It did not meet what has become known as the Oakes test.

This was a common sense judgment in my view, and the way in which it has been handled is the way that it should have been handled, that is, it is now back in the place where legislation is to be drafted and produced. It is back in our hands for us to do just that job.

The court put in place a time period to rewrite the applicable portion of that legislation. It set no particular guidelines in its findings with respect to the 50 candidates rule. It did not say it was too high but it did not set a bottom number either, so the current legislation produces the number of 15, which may be arbitrary. That is again something that will be examined by the committee. It is interesting to note that the number of 15 is that which was recommended by a royal commission on electoral reforms that was established after the 1988 general election.

The bill before us does in fact recommend that political parties can have their names printed under the name of the supported candidate if the nomination of 12 candidates of that party is confirmed by the chief electoral officer at the close of nominations.

At the committee I or a representative of the Progressive Conservative Party will look forward with great interest to listening to the reasons for picking this number and why it is that the government feels it is the particular number that would be defensible and charter proof in any future challenges. That is something we have to bear in mind when we put this final number in place.

I want to make a brief passing reference to the issue of Bill C-273, which was in my view quite meanspirited and a bit inflammatory in its reference to fringe parties in this Chamber. I think it is disrespectful and trivializing to introduce legislation of this sort and is purely political posturing. However, that said, I

think the hon. member for Saskatoon—Humboldt, with some humility, might consider withdrawing this particular bill because of its inflammatory nature, and I think that good faith on his part might be forthcoming.

I do look forward to dealing with this particular bill when it gets to the committee and looking at the possibility of fine tuning some of the amendments.

Some of the other particular amendments that come out of this legislation deal with the advertising blackout period, which is important because of the vastness of the country, because of the time change that occurs not only on election night but in the periods before the campaign. This is also an important consideration.

There is the adjustment of expense limits for candidates should there be differences in the total number of voters between the preliminary electoral list and the revised list.

These are important rules of engagement to be governed by the legislation.

In any event, the committee will have an opportunity to look at these matters in greater detail. The committee will have an opportunity to hear from the chief electoral officer. In fact, I am sure the government House leader, who has carriage of this bill, will be an able and apt participant in those discussions.

I see that the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader is present too, and I am very hopeful that the indication that the government is very forthcoming and forthright about electoral reform also applies to parliamentary reform. I want to refer briefly to an occasion where there was an opportunity to bring about some political reform too. That was to have—

• (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. When this matter is taken up before the House at the next opportunity, he will have approximately eight minutes remaining in his intervention.

It being 5.30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

AUTOMOTIVE POLLUTION REDUCTION ACT

Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.) moved that Bill C-254, an act to protect human health and the environment by oxygenating automotive fuels and eliminating the gasoline additive MMT, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

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He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce at second reading Bill C-254, which is an act to protect human health and the environment by oxygenating automobile fuels and eliminating the additive MMT.

I am sad to say that due to the constrictions of our system this so-called debate will end today in one hour and this bill has not been declared votable, which I am very sad about, considering that just yesterday the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the highest authority regarding climate change, stated that in this century there might be a climate change rise, that the seas might rise between one and even eight metres. Here we are in the House not being able to debate important issues such as transportation fuel, which accounts for 25% of greenhouse gases.

In fact, the objective of my bill is two-fold: first of all to oxygenate gasoline or diesel fuel by at least 2.7% in weight, which is roughly equivalent to 8% oxygenation by volume, and second, to phase out the additive MMT, which would then not be required, by July 2005, to give time for this to happen.

The principle behind oxygenation of gasoline or diesel fuel is very simple. The more oxygen you put in fuel, whether it is gasoline or diesel fuel, the less toxicity there is. I have a chart drawn by one of the foremost experts in fuel which shows there are several problems with gasoline or diesel fuel: carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, volatile organic compounds, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide. In addition, because we use unleaded gasoline and we are trying to phase out benzene, we have to further refine gasoline to the nth degree to permit these things to happen.

What we are trying to do instead of using piecemeal solutions to nitrous oxide or carbon monoxide or other problems with fuels is to use one holistic approach, because what we can do by oxygenating fuels is to use ethanol, which is a pure, natural substance. The more we refine gasoline or diesel, the more CO₂ and toxic carcinogens take place.

Ethanol has the highest octane, the highest oxygen and the highest CO₂ fighting properties of any alternative fuel available today. In addition to it being a natural fuel, it can be produced out of coal or biomass such as buffalo grass or trees. It can be produced out of sugar cane and it can even be produced out of solid waste from municipal dumps.

Being a natural substance, it produces a lot of oxygen. If we could use 100% ethanol in our automobiles it would be equal to 35% of oxygen within the fuel.

We are so far behind the United States, it is not funny. The United States started to talk about oxygenation of gasoline way back when in 1990, when it amended the U.S. clean air act to force oxygenation of gasoline in wintertime in certain targeted large cities which had a particular pollution problem.

• (1735)

Last year 28 states of the United States were legislating on oxygenation. This year it might be all the 50 states. My bill used the state of Minnesota as a model which legislated oxygenation four years ago. It now has 10 ethanol producing plants which produced 869 million litres of ethanol, three times what we are producing in the all of Canada.

In the Chicago area oxygenated gas or oxy-fuel is the only gasoline or diesel fuel one can buy. It produces 2.25 billion litres of ethanol. Here we are still in the dark ages because we do not want to debate the issue. We do not want to legislate it. We go by piecemeal solutions without legislation to back it up.

I wish to give an example of what is done in the United States. By the spring of 2001 there will be 1.2 million vehicles fuelled by what is known as E85, which is 85% ethanol. In Canada, we have 25 vehicles that are run by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Our buses run on 10% ethanol but our cars do not.

Why can we not legislate it? Why can we not be like the United States? Why can we not be like Sweden where ethanol is available from north to south and where the Scania buses run on 100% ethanol which is 35% oxygenated fuel?

We do not even want to discuss it here. My bill is non-votable because as private members we are not supposed to have smart ideas. We are not supposed to know. Meanwhile, 28 states of the United States debated legislation last year and perhaps up to 50 states will debate it this year.

Why should we also ban MMT? I know we have had debates on this subject where the Canadian Alliance and the Bloc Quebecois fought hard for the Ethyl Corporation. I ask for one good reason why we in Canada should be the silly guinea pigs, the only industrial nation on earth using MMT.

It is not used in Sweden, Norway, Finland, England or Germany. It is not even used in the United States, the home of the Ethyl Corporation, because it is manganese, a chemical that has toxifying properties.

Scientists not only in the United States but in Europe and elsewhere, and certainly the two leading scientists on manganese in Canada, Dr. Mergler at the University of Quebec in Montreal and Dr. Zayed at the University of Montreal, have shown in their studies a connection between manganese and motor impairment in human beings.

I know the studies are not conclusive. I know our health ministry is conducting another multi-year study. Surely we as a country should sign the real precautionary principle which says that if there

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is a threat perceived to human health and the environment then let us not use the substance.

My bill was designed to oxygenate gasoline and to phase out MMT by 2005 because it is not needed and it is a toxic agent. Unfortunately my bill will die in one hour at the date when we are supposed to be fighting climate change.

I must say in presenting this bill that I am at the same time saddened. I hope we will use these opportunities to reform our system, to give private members a chance to debate ideas whether they are right or they are wrong in front of all their peers, not in front of a little committee of five or six people that decides in secret whether it is good or it is bad.

• (1740)

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that was a very interesting presentation by the hon. member. As he suggested, we have been around and around this debate for many years in the House. He has not changed his mind and I have not changed my mind. Certainly the bitterness that he expresses over the length of time he gets to debate the issue, his grievance is not with the opposition, our party, but with his own government.

We came back to this place, presented proposals and advocated change to the parliamentary rules that govern this place. We presented proposals to change how this place works and how it could be more democratic so that members like himself could have more say in what goes on around here and have a better chance to debate ideas from the backbenches.

However, at the same time, I do not see the hon. member, who did the complaining a minute ago, standing and voting against his government to help that process change. It is disappointing that did not happen.

Aside from that, I will now go to the bill at hand. I have a problem with a couple of issues in the bill, one being the MMT issue and the other being oxygenation. I essentially agree with what the member said. If we could oxygenate to the levels he suggested, the octane enhancing additive would not be necessary. However, to do that it would require an enhanced refining process, thereby adding to the cost of refining a litre of gasoline.

We have not built any refineries for many years but the demand for gasoline has increased tremendously. We are at a point where the balance between demand and supply is very tight. If the demand rises much more, or we enhance the refining process and slow down the time it takes to put a barrel of crude oil through a refinery and the production of gasoline at the other end is extended, then we will have domestic shortages in supply of gasoline. That has to be a concern. The idea sounds viable and has merit but we have to look at the supply and demand side of the situation too.

On the whole issue of MMT, the member opposite and I have argued on this many times before. I do not necessarily disagree with his point of view that it would be a good thing to remove the additive MMT from gasoline because of the potential harm that manganese could do to human beings. I have a far greater concern with his position than to argue the merits of manganese in gasoline.

The point I argued when we had this debate before was that Health Canada researched the issue and reported back that the amounts of MMT or manganese that is added to gasoline to enhance octane has no harmful effect on human health. Yet he and other members of his caucus have argued that it is deadly dangerous stuff, that it is killing people or has the potential to kill people and that we should ban it.

We should ban it, of course, on the precautionary principle, but Health Canada said that it looked at it from the precautionary principle and that it rejected banning it simply because it could not see that it was harmful to human health.

If members of the government are saying that Health Canada is not protecting the health of Canadians, that it is not ruling wisely and using precautionary measures to ban this substance, as the members seem to be intimating, then I think we are in really big trouble. If Health Canada is not protecting the health of Canadians on this issue, how many other issues is it not protecting the health of Canadians on?

Let us not stand here and rave about the evils of MMT. Let us fix the system so that Health Canada will be able to do the job that everyone hopes it is doing in order to protect Canadians. When it does a study and reports that a product is not harmful to our health, then members, such as the one who just spoke, can have confidence and be comfortable that in fact is the case. I have to believe it is. I cannot stand here and think that Health Canada would endanger all of us, for whatever reason, from incompetence or influence by Ethyl Corporation or any of the other things that have been suggested.

• (1745)

The issue is much bigger than what the member suggests. He is a member of the government that has been in power now for some seven years. He had better work on his government to fix the problems, not only with how private members' bills are debated, but on how government agencies like Health Canada work to protect Canadians. Those are such important issues that he needs to argue with his ministries and his government, not with the opposition.

On the issue of ethanol, he indicated how other parts of the world, particularly the United States, were so far ahead of us in the use and production of ethanol. I do not argue that ethanol is a much

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cleaner burning fuel. It would be a good idea if we had more ethanol, but Canadians have to know that without an 8 cent excise subsidy on ethanol production it is not economical in Canada. Without the 8 cent subsidy, we simply would not have that industry.

I have real concerns because the Minister of Natural Resources suggested in the House today that the government's position is to greatly increase the production of ethanol and to enjoy all the benefits that come with it. Creating an industry that cannot exist without that level of subsidization is not good economic policy. Somewhere the house of cards will come crashing down and we will pay the price. Whether it is the government through the use of taxpayer dollars that pays the price or whether it is the consuming public at the pump, somebody has to pay the price and will do so.

In spite of all the rhetoric around climate change, the horror stories about what might or might not happen because of climate change around the world, Canadians generally have not shown a real willingness to pay the price.

A few moments ago I came from a briefing with the Conference Board of Canada where the government commissioned a study on the price of gasoline. There were some members of the government at the briefing. I have heard them a number of times raging about the rip-off in the gasoline market and in gasoline prices. There was huge outrage last summer when gasoline prices in parts of Canada were spiking at 90 cents a litre.

If the member is suggesting that Canadians are willing to pay the price, be it 8 cents a litre for more ethanol or be it for more intensive refining to reduce tailpipe emissions, the government has a big job ahead of it to convince Canadians that it needs to be done and they should be willing to do it.

As I listened in my riding and elsewhere all across the country, Canadians were outraged and members of the House seemed to be outraged at the level of gasoline prices last summer. If we do the things the member wants to do then we had better get used to those gasoline prices. We will again see even higher gasoline prices this summer than we saw last summer. Some would suggest that gas will spike at \$1.28 a litre when we hit the peak driving season this summer in some parts of Canada. Again we will hear that outcry from one side of the country to the other.

If we are really serious and if we think we should do what the member suggests then we have a big selling job. I do not have a big selling job. His party is the government. It has a big selling job to do in Canada. The government better get started on it right away if it is going to win that argument.

• (1750)

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to rise today and talk about this issue. I was a car dealer for 18 years prior to the career I have now. I was

very involved when the very first pollution devices came in. The environment became a subject that we talked about every day from the factory level to the dealer level.

This whole debate brings forth a lot of questions which have been raised by several members of the House. We raised questions about the process of how private members' bills work and how effective they are and could be. Questions have been raised about the confidence that people have in Health Canada. We had the actual issue raised by the member for Lac-Saint-Louis about helping the environment by removing MMT from gasoline and increasing the oxygenation.

I would like to compliment the hon. member for bringing this forth. It takes a great deal of effort, stamina, confidence and research to produce a bill like this and to see it through the procedure, which can be very discouraging. However, the hon. member has followed through and has shown his usual diligence and ability to overcome.

We are talking about this today, although not in the way he would like. He would like it to be a votable issue. He would like it to go to committee. That is what should have happened.

There are so many questions on so many aspects of this that we really have not had the chance to scrutinize the issue. We have not had a chance to do the homework on it. We have not had the examination on it or heard from witnesses. Now we never will because it was determined that it would not go to a vote. We lost that opportunity which would have helped a lot of us understand the issue better than we do, or at least better than I understand it now. We have missed an opportunity and I think it is a shame.

The member has certainly raised the bar on standards for environment and health. By bringing this forth he has shown initiative and courage. It is interesting that his government has not had an environmental piece of legislation of any consequence for the eight years it has been here. Yet the member brought forth this bill. We should move a motion to make him the minister, then I am sure we would have some really interesting environmental bills.

In any case, if MMT is poisonous or if it is a hazard to our health and the environment, it can do a great deal of damage. An incredible volume of gasoline, diesel and other fuels now use MMT. I honestly do not know whether MMT is a dangerous substance or not. I probably will not know now that we will not have a chance to take this to committee and hear from witness who do know and who are experts in the field. However, if it is as dangerous as he fears it is, then I we should be taking steps to do what he wants to do, which is to have research provided from other sources than Health Canada.

I agree with Health Canada and have a great deal of respect for it as well. However, there are still a lot of other bodies that question the potential damage that MMT can do. Health Canada is a

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respectable outfit but there are other respectable outfits that are just as respectable. They also say that MMT poses a serious health and environmental hazard.

We think it deserves more research, more debate in the House and more from experts. I hope the hon. member does not give up with the way the bill has gone through in a non-votable fashion. I hope he will keep on pressing the issue. I hope he will keep bringing it forth at committee or at every opportunity he has.

We agree with the concept and with the principle. However, I do not have the information to work with and I do not feel comfortable with the information that is available. It is kind of like the national missile defence system. The government said it would make a decision when it had the information. For me, I do not have the information at the level with which I feel comfortable. I probably will not get it now because it will not go to committee and we will not have the opportunity to get that information.

However, I do want to commend the hon. member for bringing it forth and for his diligence and determination.

• (1755)

Mr. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too, in following along with our last speaker, would like to congratulate the member for Lac-Saint-Louis for bringing this matter back to the House. I know that the member has a commitment to private members' business and to the environment. As a result of that he has brought this bill back. After having said all that, however, I could not support this bill if it were votable.

We have to remember a number of things in the House. I heard the critic from the fifth party refer to the science of this issue. We have to read the bill and go back to recent history, recent history being 1995, 1996 and 1997, when a debate was held in this place on this very topic, specifically with respect to MMT. At that time a lot of preposterous things were said about it.

First, it was said that MMT was not used in third world countries such as Colombia, Venezuela and all sorts of other places. That is very true because in those countries leaded gasoline is used.

Second, it was said that MMT was prohibited in the United States. That is absolutely false. This is the same as saying Canadian money is prohibited in the United States or vice versa or that we do not use American money in Canada and what is wrong with that. The real point is the Americans had a much different process of licensing additives. That process has worked in the United States. In 1995 or 1996 the American EPA licensed MMT and today it is used in about 30% of gasoline sold in that country.

Many things have been said around this topic, which I would characterize at the level of grade nine science, that are not correct.

Look at the bill and remember back in history as to what occurred in this very place under a government bill.

We talk about the environment, yet clause 4 of this bill issues a prohibition to import a product. How can we use an ostensibly environmental bill as a trade bill? The answer is quite simple. There is no evidence whatsoever that MMT is detrimental to the environment or one's health.

The argument was made before the American EPA that MMT brought a lot of positive attributes, one being it reduces NOx emissions. It lowers such things as sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide emissions in the refining process. MMT boosts the octane rating of gasoline so less crude oil is used. There are a number of positive attributes. Canada has been using it since 1977 and has reaped the benefits of MMT usage.

I will go back to recent history. In 1995 a great crusade started in this place to ban MMT importation. This is what clause 4 of Bill C-254 would do. However, we really do not have any reason for doing it. If I go back to 1997, that bill became law.

In June of 1997 an interprovincial trade tribunal ruled that the bill which was passed in this place, in the Senate and received royal assent, was in contravention of interprovincial trade. The environment officials, who so vehemently defended the bill before House and Senate committees and who said they were following the political lead of doing the right thing, were forced to do a 180 degree turn.

In June of 1997, just as the dog days of summer were about to begin, the then minister of industry and the minister of the environment issued a press release and attended a press conference at which time they did three things. First, they said mea culpa, they were wrong. They apologized to the manufacturer Ethyl Corporation.

• (1800)

Second, they said that law could be of no force or effect.

Third, they were required to issue a cheque to Ethyl Corporation for about \$18 million Canadian.

That is a pretty remarkable series of events done on the eve of summer. They had to do that because, first, what they did was wrong, and second, they would not listen. They would not listen to the science. It was Grade 9 science they were listening to. They would not listen to their provincial counterparts. Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Alberta objected to the bill. They thought it was a good product and did not want to be deprived of it.

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The end result of that little exercise was that the Canadian taxpayer forked out \$18 million and the Ministers of Industry and of the Environment said to Ethyl Corporation "We are sorry and we made a mistake and we will not do it again".

Here we are and we are doing it again.

On that basis I would like to apply what is called the prudence principle: that is, it is prudent not to do what we know is against laws, mainly laws of interprovincial trade and under NAFTA.

I have a couple of final points. We have heard a lot about the precautionary principle and we have heard reference to the Rio convention and all other international accords entered into by Canada. If one assumes that the precautionary principle is to be applied in the face of lack of any evidence—in fact the evidence is quite to the contrary, but at that time, of course, the government would not allow a third party scientific panel to get involved and do an assessment—I would make the same suggestion that we could probably outlaw Tim Horton's doughnuts because if we eat enough of them they are bad for us. If we eat bacon every morning, it will probably kill us. The precautionary principle in the absence of any scientific evidence is not what Rio intended.

I would like to make a couple of comments with respect to the addition into the argument of the use of ethanol. I would concur a great deal with what the member for Athabasca had to say about that point, and that is this: yes, in the United States ethanol is used extensively, however, we have to look at why that is the case. The case is that in the United States a number of highly populated cities were having problems with CO₂ emissions. The end result is that ethanol usage will decrease CO₂. Of course it ups the NOX, but it is a bit of a balance of both. The Americans decided that they would use ethanol to cut smog. There were 11 centres in the U.S. where ethanol was mandatory at 10%.

How do they do it? The senators in some of the midwestern states got about to subsidizing corn production in a big way. If we want to subsidize corn farmers, and I am not making an argument against that, let us just say so. Or as the member for Athabasca has said, let us explain to Canadians why the price of gasoline is going up. Part of it is the price of crude, absolutely, but a bigger factor in all of this is what occurs in places right here and in provincial capitals where, as we saw last year, sulphur requirements were imposed upon the industry without its co-operation: we are seeing that the price of gasoline will rise.

In summary, I say that this is once again bringing in something that ought not to be declared a law, and it is not likely to be under the circumstances. Second, we have to be a little more frank and open with people when we start going on crusades in this place about gasoline prices. There have been 12 federal inquiries and one provincial inquiry in Ontario and what did they prove? Absolutely nothing. They proved that we are a contributing factor to the high price of gasoline.

• (1805)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to echo some of the comments some of the other members have made with regard to the member for Lac-Saint-Louis. It is to his credit and his long term commitment to the environment that he has brought forth this bill today. It is unfortunate that it is a non-votable one. Perhaps as this draws more attention, the government may see its way clear to meeting some of the commitments it made over a period of time and dealing with some of the fiasco that has occurred around the use of the MMT.

I want to re-emphasize a number of points that have been made by the member for Lac-Saint-Louis. The reality is that most of the industrialized world does not use MMT in gasoline. It is banned in a number of states in the United States and, in fact, 85% of the U.S. refineries do not use MMT. I think everybody in this debate recognizes that there is a concern with regard to the use of the MMT in terms of a serious potential risk to human health and a risk to the environment.

Specifically with regard to the environment, there is no debate. The scientific evidence on this is clear: the use of the MMT does inhibit and in fact in a lot of cases renders useless emission control devices in automobiles, resulting in a number of toxins being released into the atmosphere.

MMT was initially banned in the U.S. because of concerns around hydrocarbon emissions, but there were further studies and there has been some reference made to them today. Again, there is no debate within the health and scientific communities that high concentrations of manganese can cause neurological damage. The debate is about at what level it is safe.

With regard to that and there being no evidence, as alleged by some of the other members in this House, I want to quote from a study that was done by the neurotoxicologist Donna Mergler at the University of Quebec. This was an EPA sponsored study of a 306 residents in Quebec. The results suggest that even low levels of manganese can have deleterious affects. She is quoted as saying:

In large concentrations, airborne manganese does pose a risk. What we don't know is at what level does it not pose a risk. . . We should know a lot more about it before we use it.

I want to spend a few minutes with regard to the whole farcical history of how MMT has been treated by the government, the embarrassment that Canada has been put to and, to some extent, the shame of having to pay that \$18 million plus to an American corporation when in fact in a number of states in the U.S. it is already banned.

However, because I think it is more important to deal with the health and environment issues and not so much with the trade component in this issue, let me go back a bit. In 1992 Canada

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committed to applying the precautionary principle. In fact we have not had a very good history of doing that. The NDP has strongly advocated that the federal government abide by this commitment and apply the precautionary principle. To my mind, this is one of the clearest cases where we should in fact be doing that.

Mr. David Chatters: Health Canada said they did.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Health Canada: I support your position that it really has to be looked at. Health Canada has a very high standard of tolerance for manganese. Dr. Mergler, I think, would clearly set a lower one.

• (1810)

It would be very nice if this matter could be referred to committee and if more evidence could be brought forth. The Mergler study was done in the middle part of 1998. I would suggest that more studies have been done since then wherein we might find more clear evidence in this regard.

Let me go back to the precautionary principle. In the bill, the member for Lac-Saint-Louis has specifically invoked it. I again want to commend him for that. The preamble states:

And Whereas on the basis of the precautionary principle, it is imperative for the Parliament of Canada to take immediate action to protect human health and the environment by banning these harmful or potentially harmful automotive fuels;

That is very much what the precautionary principle is all about, a principle that not only Canada but all the world has adopted. To suggest that we treat MMT in the same category as Tim Hortons doughnuts is ridiculous.

Let me conclude by encouraging the member for Lac-Saint-Louis to pursue his cause in this regard. We certainly intend to support him. Hopefully other members of the House, government members in particular, will see their way clear to in effect push this legislation through and ban MMT.

Mrs. Karen Redman (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to applaud the motivations of the member for Lac-Saint-Louis in bringing forward a bill that aims at improving the environmental performance of vehicles. The government, with the support of members like my hon. colleague, has taken and will continue to take strong action on air pollution.

The particulars of this bill, however, including some of the environmental as well as economic consequences, make it impossible for the government to support it. We are, however, moving forward with programs that have equivalent or even better environmental results than the ones intended in this bill.

On February 19 the minister announced a 10 year regulatory road map for cleaner vehicles and fuels which will give Canadians cleaner air to breathe and will better protect their health from airborne pollutants. These actions follow a significant clean air event of 2000, the negotiation of and the signature to the historic ozone annex to the 1991 Canada-U.S. air quality agreement.

The ozone annex is a major accomplishment in the transboundary field. Studies show that up to 90% of the smog we see during the summer months in central and Atlantic Canada comes from the United States. Clearly pollution does not need a passport.

The ozone annex contains commitments for action by both countries and will deliver clean air to up to 16 million Canadians in Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada and millions more in the 18 American states as they apply the commitment to reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds.

Reaching an agreement in 2000 on the ozone annex was an opportunity Canada did not want to miss. The government's implementation plan for the annex is a major step forward in capturing opportunities. The plan represents \$120 million of investment from the Government of Canada for cleaner, healthier air.

While the ozone annex commitments and benefits are targeted at Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada, the regulatory and other initiatives unveiled on February 19 will benefit all Canadians. Over 30 million Canadians will benefit. These are national benefits because, clearly, clean air is a national issue.

Science tells us that more than 5,000 Canadians die prematurely each year because of air pollution. Hundreds of thousands suffer from aggravated asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory illnesses. Now we are learning that air pollution affects our health at levels lower than we previously believed. The people most vulnerable are children and the elderly.

In our election platform and in the Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada promised opportunities for all. Opportunities come in all shapes and sizes. If a smog warning prevents a child with asthma from playing outside, that is a missed opportunity. If an elderly person becomes a virtual shut-in during a heat wave, that too is a lost opportunity.

• (1815)

This investment focuses on action in two key areas, transportation and industrial sectors, backed up by better air quality monitoring of air pollution and an improved and expanded reporting system so that Canadians can follow our progress.

Transportation is the biggest cause of air pollution in Canada. For that reason, our 10 year regulatory plan of action contains

stringent new low emission standards for passenger cars, light duty trucks, sport utility vehicles and new standards for the fuels that power them.

With this package, nitrogen oxide emissions, a key ingredient of smog, will be reduced by 90% for vehicles of the year 2004 and beyond. However there is more. The package of regulatory initiatives will also apply to the off road sector which includes diesel engines for construction vehicles and farm vehicles, and gasoline utility engines for snow blowers, lawnmowers and chain saws. These handy household recreational vehicles and tools account for approximately 20% of the transportation sector's smog inventory.

In addition we are also looking at new measures to reduce sulphur in residential and industrial fuel oils, as well as taking action on the gasoline additive MTBE.

It is understood that a major tenet of Bill C-254 is the support for clean, renewable, biomass based fuels such as ethanol. To this point the government has recently increased its support to ethanol production through the action plan 2000 to address climate change. We have committed an additional \$150 million in loan guarantees for construction of biomass to ethanol plants to be delivered through the Farm Credit Corporation.

It is expected there will be five additional world scale production facilities commissioned in Canada, producing approximately 750 million litres of ethanol per year as a direct result of the loan guarantee program. Additionally, \$3 million has been earmarked to support the promotion of ethanol blended gasoline and increase consumer demand for this environmentally friendlier gasoline. We will continue to support ethanol production through the excise tax relief program.

These actions are in keeping with the government's desire to see clean, renewable fuel ethanol expand and thrive upon solid footing in a response to normal market forces.

What the Minister of the Environment unveiled in the 10 year plan is a major step forward in bringing cleaner air to Canadians, but the federal government's job is far from finished. The government wants to engage more Canadians in direct actions that they can take and to empower them to hold governments to account to meet clean air commitments.

Our search for scientific understanding for the sources of air pollution and the solutions we take must continue. The 10 year plan for cleaner vehicles and fuels is another step along the road to cleaner air and healthier Canadians.

Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I see that my own government does not want my bill. In any case, the bill has died so the government must be quite happy. I listened to

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all this panoply of wonderful measures the government would take. I did not see anything that contradicted my bill.

I ask the government this. How come the 28 states of the United States produce ethanol? How come in Minnesota alone produces more ethanol than we would produce with our 10 year plan? It is because they have legislated oxygenation of fuel. It is that simple. If we oxygenate fuel and legislate it, then the oil companies are bound to do it. It sparks a tremendous production of oxygenated fuels in the land. In answer to the member from Prince George, I never said that MMT kills. I never said anything like that. I said a lot of studies show that it is an impairment on the motor systems of human beings. There is lot of evidence to support this.

• (1820)

My colleague from Sarnia disappointed me most of all. He is a loud speaker for the oil industry from Sarnia. He said we were comparing manganese with Tim Hortons doughnuts in applying a precautionary principle. He was not there when Rio was created. He was not there for the discussions about chemical toxins.

I will mention a number of experts who say manganese is a toxin and is dangerous to human health. Two famous scientists in Canada, Dr. John Donaldson and Dr. Frank Labella have done extensive studies. They have appeared before the Western Psychiatric Institute of the University of Pittsburgh, and the health and environment committee of the U.S. congress on this issue. They appeared before the U.S. house of representatives in 1990 which had extensive hearings on MMT.

There are also other doctors, Dr. Kimberley Treinen, Dr. Tim Gray of England, Dr. William Blazak, who was cited by my colleague from the NDP, Dr. Donna Mergler, who is carrying out a study for the U.S. EPA at the University of Montreal and Dr. Joseph Zayed, who showed that manganese was not good for us and that it affected the motor system of human beings.

The parliamentary secretary told us how the government is going to marvellously clean the air but it does not want to address the MMT issue. By legislating oxygenation of gasoline, we then force the oil companies to produce natural additives such as ethanol. It lessens the need for MMT. We are the only industrialized nation to use MMT.

My colleague from Sarnia mentioned Venezuela, as a developing nation, uses MMT. He is not correct. I never mentioned that. I said that industrialized nations that use unleaded gas today do not use MMT. We are the only guinea pigs in the world that do. He mentioned that MMT is not used in 30% of the gasoline in the United States. I got a letter from the U.S. EPA last year. It said that it used MMT in .002% of all gasoline in the United States. This officially came from the U.S. EPA.

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This is why my bill never contradicted all the various measures that the government has taken on clean air. On the contrary, we rejoice about more money being put into the environment. What is the contradiction between this and discussing a bill which will oxygenate gasoline and force it by legislation? I do not see any.

What is the contradiction between what the government is going to do and saying that by 2005 we will get rid of MMT. We had many debates in the past on MMT while the legislation was before us. The only reason it was thrown out was because of trade reasons. It was not thrown out because of environmental and health reasons.

It is true that in 1994 our health ministry decided that it was not harmful to human health when used as an additive. Now the health ministry has decided to recant itself. It has ordered Dr. Mergler and other famous scientists in Canada, who are specialists in manganese, to review the whole issue.

There is a multi-year study being carried out by Health Canada today on manganese. If it felt that the 1994 study was so conclusive, it would not have ordered this new study. It is because time after time scientists are saying "beware". I do not say that the proof is conclusive. At the time the battle over lead was going on, Ethyl Corporation, the purveyors of lead and the same purveyors of MMT, was telling us how good lead was for us. It was the same kind of debate. Lead is wonderful.

Now that we have banned lead in Canada, thank the Lord, what do they do with the lead? It is sold to developing nations and the poor. People who are using it in their gasoline are being poisoned by lead. It is the same people today who sell us MMT and tell us how great MMT is and how good manganese is for us.

Manganese is not doughnuts at Tim Hortons. It is far more serious.

• (1825)

I believe people like Drs. Mergler and Zayed before I believe my colleague from Sarnia. I believe the U.S. EPA as well. I do not know why the government thinks, because it has not thought of it, that this environmental legislation is not good enough for it.

I am terribly sorry that it is dying here and that we will not have a chance to debate it in committee, where I would have loved to have debated it with the parliamentary secretary.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hour provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. Since this is not a votable motion, this item is dropped from the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

COAST GUARD

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, last Friday during question period I asked a question of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. The question was taken by the Deputy Prime Minister. My question was in regard to maintaining the rescue diving capability of the Vancouver based coast guard rescue centre.

The possible cancellation of this program had been a news story on Vancouver television for five nights running. Yet the Deputy Prime Minister had to take the question under advisement.

The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans announced the end of the program that very same day and informed me by letter, because of the lack of response I had received during question period.

Then early Sunday morning Paul Sandhu ended upside down in his car in four feet of water in the Fraser River right across from the coast guard station. They were on the scene within a minute of being called. The coast guard crew were only allowed to provide lighting because the rescue diving program had been cancelled. The car containing the body of Mr. Sandhu was pulled out by the RCMP one half hour later.

Much has happened since then. The minister stated to me in the House of Commons on Tuesday that services would continue to be provided by the Department of National Defence. It is now clear that it will not work to drop the coast guard rescue diving in the Vancouver area and substitute DND from Comox or Esquimalt on Vancouver Island to do the rescue diving.

The Vancouver coast guard rescue diving program record over the last six years demonstrates that the vast majority of calls were responded to within 20 minutes. For example, mobilization and flight time for DND from Comox is one and a half hours and it is worse on nights and weekends.

The minister is saying that these are equivalent services when they are so obviously not. Then on Wednesday the minister issued a statement that his department would review all of the facts surrounding the response to the tragic accident that occurred on Sunday. Until this review is complete and a final decision is announced, the rescue diving pilot project will remain suspended.

Adjournment Debate

The decision to cancel the rescue divers has all the earmarks of bureaucratic bungling and bad advice to the minister. I have been here before with the coast guard initiative to de-staff all light stations on the B.C. coast. This was finally overturned.

The minister is now in a face saving posture. He must respond to public pressure to reinstate the rescue diver program. He does not want to alienate those few in his department who gave him the bad advice he used to authorize this ill-conceived decision. None of this is a valid enough reason to expose the public to further risk by maintaining suspension of service.

This brings me back full circle to where I was on Friday when I asked if the minister would stop this wrong headed, bureaucratic initiative now. While a review is under way, the common sense approach would be to reinstate coast guard rescue diver capability rather than leave the opportunity for another tragedy. Every day is important.

I would like an explanation as to why the minister will not reinstate the program immediately, even though the review is pending.

Mr. John O'Reilly (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question and his interest.

I am pleased to speak today about rescue diving. Before I continue I certainly wish to state that it is unfortunate that the automobile accident in Richmond, British Columbia, resulted in a death on February 18. My heartfelt sympathies go out to the victim's family and friends.

• (1830)

Some members today may recall the announcement in 1995 which preceded the commencement of a two year rescue diving pilot project at the coast guard hovercraft station at Sea Island in British Columbia. The pilot project was to determine the effectiveness of rescue diving as a complement to Canadian Coast Guard search and rescue.

In 1997, after two years of operating the pilot project, the project was extended so that more information could be collected by the coast guard to determine the effectiveness of providing a rescue diving capability.

In November 2000, after reviewing available information, the coast guard, primarily out of concern for the safety of the divers, engaged in the very high risk operations inherent with these activities, suspended the pilot project.

An evaluation of the pilot project has indicated that the risks inherent in diving activities were high and that the risks inherent in rescue diving were even greater. The rescue diving operations were usually conducted in poor to bad visibility, rough weather and involved a high degree of uncertainty and the presence of wreckage in the water.

An analysis of the dives during the six years of the pilot project indicated that approximately 2,000 dives took place. Of these, only about three dozen were actual rescue dives. The remainder of the dives were to conduct underwater hull inspections and to work on marine navigational buoys. As a result of the rescue dives two individuals were rescued alive. Tragically, one of them died of his injuries.

To return to the recent accident on February 18, it is currently too early and perhaps impossible to determine whether the life of the individual involved in this accident could indeed have been saved had the coast guard deployed divers.

As members are probably aware, the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has announced that he has personally asked his deputy minister and the commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard to review all the facts surrounding the response to the tragic accident that occurred on that Sunday in Richmond, British Columbia, as well as the rescue diving pilot project in Richmond.

The government's priority is to continue to work with its partners and with its own resources to provide efficient, safe maritime search and rescue services to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.32 p.m.)

APPENDIX

Address
of
The Right Honourable Tony Blair,
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of
Great Britain and Northern Ireland
to
both Houses of Parliament
in the
House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa
on
Thursday, February 22, 2001

• (1030)

[English]

APPENDIX

Address
of
The Right Honourable Tony Blair,
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of
Great Britain and Northern Ireland
to
both Houses of Parliament
in the
House of Commons Chamber, Ottawa
on
Thursday, February 22, 2001

The Right Honourable and Mrs. Tony Blair were welcomed by the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, Prime Minister of Canada, by the Honourable Dan Hays, Speaker of the Senate and by the Honourable Peter Milliken, Speaker of the House of Commons.

Hon. Peter Milliken (Speaker of the House of Commons): Order, please. I would like to call upon the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien, the Prime Minister of Canada, to now make his remarks.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, hon. senators, judges, members of parliament, ladies and gentlemen, it is my very great pleasure to introduce the Right Hon. Tony Blair.

Prime Minister, you are about to address the 37th Parliament of Canada, men and women of diverse backgrounds and sharp ideological differences, people who have a very hard time agreeing on anything, but you need not worry about our manners today.

I think I can speak for all of my colleagues when I say that any leader whose resumé includes winning the largest parliamentary majority in over 60 years can expect our undivided attention. Your historic 1997 election victory was, for many Canadians, their first introduction to Tony Blair, but it was really just the most spectacular result of the skilful leadership you have shown in remaking your party and in redefining the terms of political discourse in Great Britain and throughout the liberal western democracies.

In common with so many of us who have gone into politics, Mr. Blair trained to enter the law. And the law is in his family as well. Madam Cherie Blair, who is with us, is an accomplished barrister in her own right and, by the way, she is the only woman I can call *chérie* without my wife giving me that look.

Beginning with his election in 1993 as a Labour member of parliament, Mr. Blair has shown a keen commitment both to the welfare of his constituents and to addressing the broader issues that challenge government.

• (1035)

His considerable eloquence and his mastery of issues are widely known and respected. His ability to project the modern vitality of Britain on the world stage has become a personal trademark and his steadfast commitment to peace in Northern Ireland has earned him

international praise. It is a cause in which Canada has been pleased to play a role.

[Translation]

Prime Minister Blair also played a key role in the development of a political movement we know now as the third way, a way that is open to all progressive governments in the context of the new information—and knowledge-based global economy, a middle way between total confidence in market forces and heavy dependency on state interventions, a way that seeks to encourage the spirit of initiative and prosperity, while ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are shared and no one is left out.

The Prime Minister and I often share the same views in this area. I have presented to him what I call the Canadian way, and he in turn has explained to me how his government successfully creates truly made-in-Britain solutions to the challenges it faces. I am sure our dialogue and exchanges of views on this will continue during this visit.

[English]

This is just a 21st century example of the common ground that has long characterized the relationship between our nations, common ground embodied by this honourable place and our embrace of the Westminster tradition; by our willingness to shed blood together in the defence of freedom and justice; by our co-operation on so many issues at the UN, in NATO, at the WTO and in the Commonwealth; and by our resolve to renew and revitalize our transatlantic relationship.

Prime Minister, in addressing this special joint session, you join a distinguished company of British prime ministers of the modern era, a company that was led off by the Right Hon. Winston Churchill. If I could borrow from the master of words:

There are many in Canada who listen to the debates of this honourable House and wonder that so much could be said by so many but understood by so few.

Today, we welcome the opportunity for some well chosen words from a worthy successor.

Ladies and gentlemen, a dynamic leader, an accomplished statesman and a very great friend of Canada, I present the Right Hon. Tony Blair.

Applause

Right Hon. Tony Blair (Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker of the Senate, Mr. Prime Minister, hon. members of the Senate and members of the House of Commons, thank you so much for that kind reception. I can truthfully say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the only time I have ever been in a House of Commons and got a polite reception.

May I also say to my good friend and colleague, Jean Chrétien, thank you for that most generous, too generous introduction. If I can repay the compliment to you, you have been not just a good friend to my country but you are someone respected throughout the entire free world.

• (1040)

You mentioned my large election victory. Well, I think there are a few lessons people can learn from you as well, but that is the last comment of any sort I will make on elections today.

May I say too that it is a rare honour to be invited to address you here where the common bond between our two nations is symbolized.

Of course I think it is important to point out that ours is not a relationship built only on shared history and sentiment. I know that Canadian investment in Britain has grown by something like 50% in the last six years, making you the fourth largest investor in our country. Britain is the second largest investor in Canada. Last year alone, British companies committed more than \$13 billion Canadian here. The country Voltaire likened to “quelques arpents de neige” and Edward Gibbon to ancient Germany, is today for Britain, for us as we look at you, a high tech hub of the global economy.

You are deservedly world leaders now in the new economy, but of course there are ties deeper than commerce alone can ever be.

I have just seen the famous photograph of Sir Winston Churchill in Mr. Speaker's office and he resolved for me, incidentally, one of the great puzzles I have always had with that very famous photograph. I always wondered why Churchill looked so stern and why he was leaning forward in that way. He has resolved this difficulty for me. Apparently when Karsh was taking the photograph of him, Churchill was smoking a cigar and was not paying attention. He would not pay attention to what was happening around him and finally Karsh leaned forward and snatched the cigar out of his mouth, which is how he got the look of Churchill looking stern and disciplined.

It was almost 60 years ago that Churchill addressed this parliament in Europe's darkest hour. What shines through that speech is his absolute conviction that at that dark hour, Canada's support would be unwavering. It was not for nothing that Churchill called Canada the linchpin of the English speaking world. Some things change, but some things remain constantly with us.

I can pay Canada no greater compliment than this. All nations have their reputations. As Prime Minister I deal with many crises, often of an international nature, but I know, and I bet I speak for most of the prime ministers of my acquaintance in Britain and abroad, that when we are told the Canadians are in on the act, whatever the forum for decision, there is a sense of relief, the clouds part a little and the confidence grows. People know that your word is your bond and, what is more, what you do you do well. It is not a bad reputation to have. Well done. Keep it for always.

It was, I guess, the Atlantic that brought Britain and Canada together and gave us a maritime history. Trade was its common thread.

The story of our two nations began in 1497 when Henry VII funded an Italian adventurer to open a trade route to Asia by sailing west and instead he landed, as you know, in Newfoundland. The following centuries were a tale of exploration and new frontiers.

For Britons down the centuries, Canada has been and remains a great land of opportunity. By 1870 British Canadians accounted for 2.1 million out of a total population of 3.6 million. British engineers and investors helped build the canals and railways that helped link Canada east to west.

In 1867 the British North America Act brought Canada and Canadian provinces together in a Confederation: the first dominion and the first federal constitution in the British Empire. Britain and Canada still share a sovereign and the best traditions of parliamentary democracy. Our new human rights act, for example, echoes the charter of rights and freedoms that you, Jean, pioneered as Pierre Trudeau's justice minister, but perhaps it is our shared experience of defending our freedom and our way of life that forms the strongest bond.

• (1045)

The British will never forget that Canada stood by our side throughout both world wars. Nearly 10% of the total Canadian population served in the first world war: Ypres in 1915; the Somme, where the brave Newfoundlanders lost 730 out of 801 men in 30 minutes; and Vimy Ridge in 1917.

In the second world war Canada's record is no less crucial. Over a million Canadian men and women served in the armed forces on the frontline in the liberation of Italy, France and the Low Countries. Two Canadian battalions were lost in the defence of Hong Kong.

It is interesting that both Canada and then Britain, following your example, recently announced compensation schemes to honour our Far East Prisoners of War. Roosevelt and Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter on a warship in Newfoundland bay, and Mackenzie King hosted the two crucial Quebec conferences in 1943 and 1944 on the war and the shape of the peace.

The presence of Canadian and British forces in continental Europe helped win the cold war. They have served together in Korea, Cyprus, Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor and even Sierra Leone.

Yes, it took a Canadian general to win the confidence of both sides in Northern Ireland over the most sensitive issue of all, the issue of arms decommissioning. I would like, if I might, to pay tribute to General John de Chastelain for what he has done and what he and other Canadians, including your Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, continue to do for peace in Northern Ireland.

[Translation]

Since the days of the British Empire, Great Britain and Canada have changed. Canada has incorporated two great European civilizations into a bilingual country enriched by the contributions of other cultures, firstly, obviously, by those of its aboriginal nations.

Canada today is turning increasingly not only to the west but to the east as well, to the Pacific and to Asia, the origins of half of Canada's immigrants in the past decade. Great Britain too has diversified. Our democracies are changing and adapting, utilizing the tolerance characteristic of them to create multicultural and dynamic societies.

Shared objectives have arisen from the values we hold jointly. Yesterday, I read last month's Speech from the Throne and the reactions that followed it in the Commons. I was struck by the similarity of our political debates: technology in the age of information and education, the environment, increased growth and more jobs.

[English]

We share something else. You are that part of North America closest in values and traditions to Europe, and we are that part of Europe closest to North America. We both are part of and we strongly support the transatlantic alliance, Europe and North America together. I wish to speak about that to you.

I have a belief, formed in theory but now far more powerfully reinforced after four years' practical experience as Prime Minister, that where the two sides of the Atlantic stand together the world is a more secure, stable and prosperous planet. We have our disagreements, of course we do, but they simply evaporate in importance when put alongside our common interests and values.

We know that what binds us together is a common belief in the values of institutionalized democracy, the benefits of the rule of law, the primacy of the market as the engine for growth, the belief in a strong and inclusive society to correct the market's injustices, the creative power of individualism and the ultimate need to protect human rights.

• (1050)

This is the core package, if you like, of our political canon, what we believe in. What separates us from others is that we believe in the whole package. We do not believe that you can have the market without society, or human rights separated from the rule of law, or anything less than all the attributes of democracy. Our experience tells us too, does it not, that when people are given the opportunity freely to choose, this model of political organization is the one that they choose.

When we stand together, both sides of the Atlantic, either in situations of conflict, or of trade or in trying to regulate the vagaries of global finance or indeed in issues of human rights, we most often prevail and we do so on the basis of what is right and what is just.

Yet despite the evidence of history and our own present prosperity, some will question this.

I speak to you first and foremost as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. British, proud to be so, truly ambitious for Britain, determined to see its potential fulfilled.

I speak to you as a committed Atlanticist. I speak to you also as a European, unshakeable in my view that Britain's future is as a leading player in Europe, a powerful force for good and a force for reform inside the European Union.

There are those in my country who say it is not possible to be all those things. You can have Europe or you can have North America but you cannot have both. Britain has to choose.

It is an article of my political faith that I refuse point blank to do so. We will have the best of both worlds. We will give up neither relationship. We will make them both work, and we will make them work not just for Britain but for the sake of the transatlantic alliance itself. That alliance is of course most clear in defence and our commitment to NATO is fundamental.

We have had the good sense to adapt NATO to 21st century security tasks. The threat to our own territory may have all but disappeared. But the threats, as you know, to our interests persist, from turmoil within nations such as Yugoslavia, from terrorism, and from the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. NATO is our organization of choice for dealing with these threats. No organization is stronger, no military alliance more integrated. Nothing surpasses NATO's strength or its effectiveness.

Today Canadian and British peacekeepers work side by side in the Balkans, sometimes under a Canadian Commander and sometimes under a British one, within NATO.

It is NATO that reversed the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and set in train the events which led to Milosevic being ousted and has given the prospect of a decent peace accord. On our own, Europe could not have achieved that. It took the combination of Europe and North America, acting together in NATO, to deliver on that goal.

The initiative on European defence should be seen in that context. It is limited to crisis management, peacekeeping and humanitarian tasks. It requires the sovereign decision of each nation to participate in each operation, as indeed with the United Nations. It is not therefore a standing army. There will be no separate EU military planning structures, and it applies only where NATO has chosen not to act collectively.

• (1055)

It has, however, two potential benefits. First, it allows Europe, for example, in crises on or within Europe's border, to act where the U.S. does not wish to. Bosnia from 1992 to 1995 is such a case in point. Second, it puts pressure on Europe to increase its defence capability, something long desired by our allies in North America.

Done right it will strengthen NATO and NATO will remain the cornerstone of our collective security.

The other crucial area for the transatlantic alliance is trade. Around the world there is simultaneously the desire for greater local autonomy and nations coming together for their own common good. Those two things happen almost simultaneously. In the U.K., for example, we have found a way through devolution to create a new partnership for the U.K. between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Yet at the same time, as greater devolution occurs within nations, countries are voluntarily coming together to form regional groups. The EU may be the most integrated, but in North America you have NAFTA; in the South, Mercosur; and in Asia, ASEAN, APEC and so on.

In my view these two trends are healthy and go together: devolve where possible, integrate where necessary. The key, however, is to ensure that these regional blocs do not become inward looking or closed to other parts of the outside world. If we simply exchange the darker side of nationalism for conflict between regional blocs, we will have gained nothing.

The EU and NAFTA are the world's largest trading blocs and the world's biggest free traders. NAFTA is the European Union's most important trading partner. In 1999 EU exports to NAFTA were £137 billion and imports from NAFTA were £121 billion. Yet relations are not as they should be.

Proposals for a transatlantic free trade area in 1996 came to nothing. The Transatlantic Economic Partnership of 1998 has not been the success we all hoped for at the time. Despite ever closer economic links our trade relations, as you all well know, have become bedevilled by disputes over issues like beef and bananas, and damaged both our interests.

We now have an opportunity for a new start, however. The European Union is engaged in a radical program of economic reform, and not before time. We are committed to opening up markets, reducing the burden of regulation, and encouraging enterprise and new technologies. In March at the summit in Stockholm we will take this a step further forward. We want to work more closely with our partners on this side of the Atlantic, including the new U.S. Administration, to promote free trade.

I believe, therefore, that we need to take steps to improve greatly the EU-NAFTA relationship, and I propose the following. First, we should agree to an EU-NAFTA political declaration of intent on trade.

Ninety-eight per cent of our trade is trouble free. We cannot allow the remaining 2% to sour trading relations in the way it has. We should aim to break the logjam by the June EU summit in Gothenburg. We will pursue this as Britain with our partners and

the Commission, and we will discuss at Stockholm in March how we achieve this by that June summit.

This should then be reinforced by an EU-NAFTA commitment to go further within the WTO framework to break down non-tariff barriers as well. In areas like insurance and professional services, but also others, liberalization is massively, I believe, in our joint interests on both sides of the Atlantic.

At Gothenburg we should also agree to a statement of principles as the basis for launching a new WTO round at Doha in November. It is time that we move. We should agree to a joint commitment to remove trade barriers for the least developed countries. That means duty free and quota free access for everything but arms. It is frustrating, and it is wrong, that it is taking so long within the European Union to bring this excellent initiative to fruition. Those developing countries need our help and we should give it to them. We should consider how we improve radically the forum for solving future transatlantic trade problems before full blown WTO litigation sets in.

• (1100)

Finally on trade I just want to say this last point. It is time I think that we started to argue vigorously and clearly as to why free trade is right. It is the key to jobs for our people, to prosperity and actually to development in the poorest parts of the world. The case against it is misguided and, worse, unfair. However sincere the protests, they cannot be allowed to stand in the way of rational argument. We should start to make this case with force and determination.

[*Translation*]

In addition, the transatlantic link must not be limited to security and trade. There are other challenges: organized crime, terrorism, the environment, population movements. We are all affected by the issues, good or bad, that concern our planet. A more effective transatlantic alliance will help us find better solutions. It is up to us to see to it.

[*English*]

My friends, my apology for my French pronunciation. There is a story about that which is a bit naughty, so I suppose I had better not tell it to the Canadian parliament.

A Voice: We want to hear it.

Right Hon. Tony Blair: Well, okay. I invited Lionel Jospin, the French Prime Minister, to my constituency one time and we did a joint press conference live on television. I was asked the question in French whether I was envious of Lionel Jospin's success and policies. I meant to reply that I was very envious of the magnificent positions he had taken on different policy issues. Instead, I

informed the startled French public that I decidedly know Jospin in many different positions.

I think we will do most of our press conference in English, if that is all right. It was quite hard to recover my reputation in France after that.

The strength of our relationship, Britain and Canada, may originate with our history, but what I want to say to you from the depth of my heart is that it does not depend on our history.

There are present, real and substantial bonds of mutual interest and endeavour that unite our nations. If these bonds deepen still further, as I believe they should and could, it does not impact on us alone. It is greatly to the benefit of all. The world we live in today moves ever closer together. At least for the most developed nations, prosperity and opportunity have never been greater, but the global threats are also growing: nuclear proliferation, environmental degradation, fundamentalism and the potential for financial collapse in one continent to trigger collapse in another.

My message to you is very simple, and it is this. In that new world, more dangerous, moving closer together under the threats and also the possibilities of globalization and technology, both of us with the U.S., both of us with Europe, both of us in the Commonwealth, both of us also with the Pacific and Asia, occupy a special place.

• (1105)

As a result of that unusual network of relationships that our history has bequeathed to us, we should use that power and influence to further the transatlantic alliance. It is the rock, ultimately, on which our security and prosperity is based, and I believe the world's. It places a heavy responsibility on us. It is one that I believe we can justly discharge with pride.

Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister, and ladies and gentlemen, my most profound thanks to you for this invitation. It has genuinely been one of the proudest moments of my political life, and long live the friendship between our two nations. Thank you.

Applause

Hon. Dan Hays (Speaker of the Senate): Prime Minister Blair, Mrs. Blair, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Prime Minister and distinguished guests, in the name of the Senate and as well for all who have heard you today, I thank you, Prime Minister, for your address to the Parliament of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Your first official visit to Canada also perpetuates a tradition which was upheld by five of your predecessors and which began in 1941, when Prime Minister Winston Churchill addressed parliament, as the Prime Minister mentioned.

[*English*]

The visit recognizes and reinforces the remarkable bond that exists between our countries. Our relationship is a longstanding and particularly important one. The trust and understanding between our countries are supported and sustained, as you have observed, by our trade, family ties, culture and our common practice of democracy. In this context I observe that of special interest, in particular to many in the Senate, has been your government's initiative, as you mentioned, to devolve its power and to bring about changes in the House of Lords.

[*Translation*]

Our relations have always been marked by great mutual trust. And, particularly in the last century, during wars and through numerous diplomatic missions, we have supported each other.

[*English*]

Sometimes the bond between our countries is such that we need to remind ourselves not to take it for granted and to remember just how important it is.

As a representative of Alberta, I know well of our co-operation. The United Kingdom has been a source of investment needed to develop our natural resources, and in recent times the United Kingdom has in turn received Canadian investment and expertise in the development of its natural resources in the North Sea and on shore.

[*Translation*]

After the United States, the United Kingdom is our main source of direct investment abroad, the main destination for Canadian capital abroad and our largest market for tourism and trade services.

• (1110)

[*English*]

Great Britain's defence forces have been a part of military life in my home province, for example, by virtue of exchanges and training of soldiers at Canadian Forces Base Suffield. They are part of our tradition of co-operation such that Suffield is Britain's principal high intensity conflict training area. Over 800 Britons live at the base resulting in over 4,000 trainee visits each year.

The Great Britain of your time, with which we proudly share so many traditions and values, will we know continue to flourish. With the attention and care of those who serve in our parliaments, we will remain principal allies and trading partners.

Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for your contribution to renewing the close ties between our countries by your words and by your deeds.

Applause

Hon. Peter Milliken (Speaker of the House of Commons): Mr. Prime Minister, on behalf of the members of the House of Commons, I would like to thank you for having addressed us today.

Canadians across our country are delighted that you have come here. The members of the House of Commons and of the Senate, who have gathered in such large numbers to hear your speech today, are delighted that you have come. Your fellow Oxonians, both here in parliament and across the country, are very proud of you and very pleased that you have come, Sir.

[*Translation*]

Much has been said and written about the close relations between our two countries. There was a time when the history of Great Britain was our history, and many of your country's traditions are still maintained in Canada.

The model for all parliaments, Westminster, continues to make its presence felt among us today, not just in our procedural system, but more tangibly in the form of the Speaker's chair. This chair was a gift from Great Britain, a reproduction of the one in Westminster. Its dais, decorated with the Royal coat of arms, was sculpted from a single block of oak taken from the roof of Westminster Hall, which dates back to 1397.

[*English*]

While we are ever mindful of our shared history, I believe that the friendship between our two countries now rests on our shared present.

Although your address to parliament today was certainly a very special event, Prime Minister, it is but one of the myriad contacts taking place today between the United Kingdom and Canada. Not only are our nations regularly involved in formal economic, cultural, technological and parliamentary exchanges, we also like to stay in touch on a much more basic level.

We are constantly listening to each other's music, watching each other's television programs and visiting one another. Visits are less frequent in the winter. While I can only assume that "Cool Britannia", as I have heard today's United Kingdom dubbed, is more a cultural than climactic commentary, I must applaud your hardiness, Prime Minister, in visiting Ottawa in February.

[*Translation*]

As the former president of the Canada—United Kingdom Parliamentary Association, I often had the honour to visit Westminster, accompanied by many of my colleagues, in order to learn more about your parliamentary procedures. I hope that these exchanges will continue in the future.

[*English*]

In closing, please accept my thanks on behalf of all members of the House of Commons for having spoken to us today. We will long remember your presence here, and we hope that you will return soon for another Canadian visit. *Merci beaucoup.*

Applause

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