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(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 18, 2004

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 18, 2004

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. David Chatters (Battle River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the first report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. In accordance with its order of reference of Friday, October 8, 2004, the committee has considered votes 40 and 45 under Justice of the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2005, and reports the same.

* * *

•(1005)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-293, an act to amend the Criminal Code (theft of a motor vehicle).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to introduce my first private member's bill, an act to amend the Criminal Code, for theft of a motor vehicle. I would like to thank the hon. member for Blackstrap for seconding this motion.

Auto theft costs Canadians in excess of \$1 billion per year. The courts have considered auto theft a simple property crime. The fact is, tragically, that 25 to 35 people per year are killed in Canada and countless others seriously injured by auto thieves driving a stolen vehicle. Auto crime has become a serious epidemic in Canada, putting all Canadians at risk.

The bill provides for minimum sentencing to ensure that there will be a serious consequence for stealing a motor vehicle and that auto thieves will serve appropriate time for the crime.

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

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-294, an act to amend the Criminal Code (destruction or desecration of national flag).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce a private member's bill to amend the Criminal Code to create an offence related to the destruction or desecration of our national flag. I again thank the hon. member for Blackstrap for seconding this motion.

Canadians are proud of our flag and all that it represents. It symbolizes the strength of our nation and the freedom purchased by those who paid the ultimate price for our country. I believe that, as legislators, protecting our national symbol sends the message that as we stand at the crossroads of history we can make the right choices and lead the effort to preserve loyalty, pride and commitment to this great nation.

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

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HOLIDAYS ACT

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-295, an act to amend the Holidays Act (Remembrance Day).

He said: Mr. Speaker, first let me thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake for his support. It is a great honour to table this Remembrance Day legislation on behalf of the 34 branches of the Royal Canadian Legion in my riding of Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette.

Last week all members of this House were in their ridings taking part in Remembrance Day services, remembering all those who gave their lives to keep this great country free and remembering the veterans and the millions of Canadians who served in our armed forces. If this day, November 11, is such an important day in our history, why is it not a national holiday? Why does November 11 not have the same status as New Year's, Good Friday, Victoria Day, Canada Day, Labour Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas? When 8 out of 10 provinces already deem November 11 a public holiday, it is time that we change the status.

My bill would rectify that. My bill would amend the Holidays Act to make Remembrance Day a legal holiday and give it the same status as Canada Day. I ask all members for their support.

Supply

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

* * *

• (1010)

ELIMINATION OF RACIAL PROFILING ACT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-296, an act to eliminate racial profiling.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today and I thank my hon. colleague for seconding the motion. This is a very important bill because it would eliminate racial profiling and take a step forward to reaffirming the right of all Canadians to equal treatment under the law.

There is no question that we need a legally binding mechanism to ensure the accountability of our enforcement agencies and officials to all people of Canada, regardless of their race or religious beliefs. We have seen an increase in targeting based on ethnic background and colour. This has happened particularly since September 11. We need to have a bill which makes it clear that racial profiling is not allowed in this country. This bill would take steps to do that.

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

* * *

[Translation]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the 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.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY**OPPOSITION MOTION—HEALTH**

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the federal government should acknowledge processed trans fatty acids are harmful fats, which are significantly more likely to cause heart disease than saturated fats;

And that this House hasten the development of replacements to processed trans fats by urging the government to enact regulation, or if necessary legislation within one year, guided by the findings of a multi-stakeholder Task Force, including the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and following the consultation process with scientists and the industry currently underway;

Therefore, this House calls on the government to enact regulation, or if necessary present legislation that effectively eliminates processed trans fats, by limiting the processed trans fat content of any food product sold in Canada to the lowest level possible.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between all parties and I believe you would find consent for the following order: That at the conclusion of the present debate on today's opposition motion, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded

division deemed requested and deferred until the end of government orders on Tuesday, November 23, 2004.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I can say without any hesitation and without any fear of contradiction that banning trans fats will save lives. I do not come to this conclusion on my own. The scientific community is virtually unanimous in its view that hydrogenated vegetable oils of processed fats called trans fatty acids are in fact much more harmful than the saturated fats that they replaced over the years.

Trans fats are deadly manufactured fats that cause obesity, heart disease and diabetes, all of which are on the rise in Canada in very worrisome numbers. The real evil nature of trans fats is that they not only raise the levels of bad cholesterol in a person's system, they also interfere with the good cholesterol's natural role of cleansing one's circulatory system. As a result, these trans fats are actually a double whammy on a body's circulatory system.

The facts are really quite staggering. Just one gram of trans fats per day increases the risk of heart disease by 20%. These are not my figures. I am not asking anyone to believe me as a layperson. These are figures provided by the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The daily recommended intake of trans fats is zero, but Canadian adults eat between 8 and 10 grams per day and, staggeringly, youth between the ages of 15 and 25 eat an average of 38 grams per day. Surely, members will recognize this is a serious public health problem.

Most fast foods and processed foods are high in trans fats. Baby foods contain alarmingly high levels of trans fats. We have to ask ourselves, knowing these scientific facts and having had them verified and ratified by any number of scientific journals and experts in the field, why do we allow them in our food supply?

I compliment the federal government for recognizing that trans fats are in fact harmful and should be eliminated. Its policy to date in dealing with trans fats is to introduce mandatory labelling. The debate we need to have today is whether labelling is adequate or do we need to take stronger steps in order to truly eliminate trans fats, remove it out of our food supply and, therefore, out of our system altogether? I would ask the House to listen to what I believe is a case against labelling and for banning these harmful trans fatty acids.

We hear the argument sometimes that this type of issue has more to do with public education and personal freedom of choice. I do not accept that. Government has a legitimate role to play in making sure our food supply is safe. There are any number of precedents that we could point to.

In the matter of labelling, if we find that a drug is harmful and is killing up to 1,000 Canadians per year in a premature way as are trans fats, a label is not put on the drug simply saying it is a matter of personal choice not to use it. It is pulled off the market. This is a direct analogy that I think is absolutely fair.

The logic is that it is not okay to put poison in our food just because it is properly labelled. That is common sense. I do not use the word poison to invoke a reaction. Trans fats do in fact meet the scientific definition of toxic and poisonous because the body simply cannot tolerate them.

The argument about labelling is spurious. First of all, studies show that 70% of people do not read the labels for the food they eat. There are problems of literacy and problems of language. Kids, we know, certainly do not read labels when they go for a fast food snack. Restaurants would not be impacted by this at all. Restaurant food and french fries, and some of the popular food items are the ones that are highest in trans fats.

There is the added problem that even if a product does say it contains 3.6 grams of partially hydrogenated vegetable oil, there are no editorial comments allowed on the label because the only really valuable label in terms of trans fats would be, "This product contains trans fats. Do not eat it because it will kill you". We are not likely to see that type of labelling introduced.

• (1015)

We do not believe that labelling is an adequate way to significantly reduce the amount of trans fats eaten by Canadians. We believe the only logical thing to do is to take concrete steps to eliminate, to all but ban, trans fats in our food supply system.

The reason it cannot be an absolute ban is that there are some naturally occurring trans fats in ruminating animals. Cheese, milk and butter contain some naturally occurring trans fats, but at a level where if ingested sensibly are not a serious health risk. That is the argument why recommendations from our party will call for reducing trans fats to the lowest level possible and regulating trans fats to the point where any food product sold in Canada, not necessarily even manufactured in Canada, must meet strict guidelines which would limit the amount of trans fats to a range of 2% which we believe is an achievable goal.

One country in the world has done this. Denmark, as of 2003, introduced legislative steps to ban trans fats. We find that the experience has been that manufacturers reformulated their products to the allowable levels. We know that healthy and safe alternate products to trans fats are available. We should point out and recognize, and compliment those food manufacturers who have unilaterally and voluntarily taken those steps and made the changes to their products. One of them is Voortman Cookies Limited, a Canadian cookie manufacturer that has 120 product lines. Over a period of the last two or three years it reformulated every single one of its products without compromising quality or taste so that its products no longer contain trans fats. We can compliment Voortman Cookies for taking that step.

Another one, a fast food chain, is New York Fries. It has unilaterally and voluntarily changed the oil in which it produces its french fries so that they no longer contain trans fats. This is a wonderful move on its part and it should be rewarded.

However, we are concerned that if we leave the industry to voluntarily change the alternate oils they use, some manufacturers who do not fall in line will have an unfair competitive advantage because they will not have paid the extra cost of reformulating their

Supply

products. That is our argument why, to create a level playing field and to protect the public health of Canadians, this is a matter for government intervention where it should in fact regulate.

The scientific case is really difficult to challenge. Experts the world over agree that we can and should stop using trans fats. Dr. Walter Willett is the dean of health sciences at Harvard University. He calls hydrogenation, or trans fatty acids, "the biggest food processing disaster in history". The World Health Organization has directed nation states to take steps to take trans fats out of their food supplies.

We know there is an active lobby that believes this should be left up to industry without the intervention of the state. We argue that this is exactly the type of thing in which the Government of Canada should be directly involved.

The broad policy issue that I would like to point out in this debate is simply that this is what public health is all about and this is what our health strategy should be all about, creating a healthier population. So much of our time, energy and resources in the issue of health deals with managing illness. Here we have an opportunity to significantly impact the overall general health of millions of Canadians, including millions of Canadian children, in such a positive and proactive way. It really is hard to imagine that we would not go this route.

Just as an aside perhaps, many Canadian children are being impacted by this. I do not think we even realize that we have doctors telling us that they have 10 year old and 12 year old children coming to their offices with high cholesterol and clogged arteries. Surely, a child's circulatory system at that age should be completely clean and functioning perfectly.

• (1020)

However, children lose energy. Anyone with circulatory problems has less energy. They feel sluggish. They do not feel motivated. They find it hard to concentrate. Those are the symptoms of circulatory problems stemming from, to some degree at least, the use of trans fats.

I am hoping that we can count on broad support in the House of Commons. The NDP has very carefully worded this motion in such a way that it would be acceptable, we would hope, to all parties. On the general nature of the motion, we worked closely with the Heart and Stroke Foundation in the development of this language. We worked closely with other experts across the country who feel strongly about this issue.

The motion calls upon government, that within one year, which is a generous timeframe, to introduce regulations, or if necessary legislation, which would ultimately lead to the elimination of processed trans fats to the lowest level possible.

We are not talking about restrictive language. The regulations or legislation that government introduces may in fact have a phase-in period of three years. We do not know. We are going to leave that up to a task force of stakeholders which will have the expertise to make that ruling. That is not really up to the House of Commons or us as members of Parliament. We will leave that up to the experts in the field.

Supply

I also think that this is one case where there is justification for the government to play a role in helping industry to find alternate fats to use in terms of research and development grants. The National Research Council may want to undertake this project. If industry manufacturers are having difficulty in reformulating their products, certainly, the Government of Canada, Health Canada and Industry Canada could play a role in expediting this entire process.

I found that working on the trans fats project was very gratifying. I have been contacting people across the country and they in turn have been contacting me and our party with heartfelt passionate appeals to their legislators, to myself personally, and members of Parliament generally, to please do something about this pressing public health problem.

Perhaps throughout the day I can share with the House some of the comments of literally thousands of Canadians who have e-mailed, mailed, or contacted us personally saying that they are aware of the problem. There is an expectation that the House of Commons and members of Parliament should be aware of the problem and that we are willing to take concrete steps to change this issue.

There are some odd problems dealing with the elimination of trans fats. Canada must be the only country in the world that has margarine in its Constitution. We have two paragraphs in the Canadian Constitution dedicated specifically to margarine. I hope we are not going to let that stand in the way of common sense and reason. We can thank the Crosbie family and the Newfoundland Terms of Union for this oddity.

There is also the issue of international trade rules. We hope that is not why the federal government has, we believe, gone soft on this issue, but it is more than a coincidence that the labelling rules that the government has introduced match word for word what the Americans have done, even up to the date of implementation. We are rather suspect that it may have been the motivation for not taking a stronger stance, given the overwhelming scientific evidence that this material is in fact harmful.

We are urging the government to exert our sovereignty in this matter, listen to the scientists, and listen to the Canadian public and do what is right. If there are any obstacles due to trade barriers, we can deal with those. However, that should not stop us from taking concrete steps at the earliest opportunity to find a way to reduce and ultimately eliminate these toxic substances.

● (1025)

I have tried to go through some of the broad arguments as to why we feel this is necessary and why it should happen sooner rather than later. I have tried not to dwell on the technical, scientific details. I think any of the members can easily access that information.

I should mention that I do not believe our taking steps to eliminate trans fats will have an impact on the local oilseed producers. It is not the oil that we are critical of. It is the process the oil is subjected to, the hydrogenation process. I point out that some margarines are manufactured with pure canola oil and are 100% trans fat free. We should buy Beceel margarine, which is 100% trans fat free. It is manufactured with grown in Canada canola oil.

As people shift toward natural oils and fats, we believe it could be a boon to the dairy industry and to the oil seed growers and producers in western Canada who may have an increased market for their product, which is pure canola oil. As we know, partially hydrogenated canola oil changes the chemical structure of oil to something that people cannot digest and which clogs the arteries. It is a double whammy on the arteries. I point out again, we should be aware that trans fat, partially hydrogenated oils, are four to ten times more harmful than other saturated fats.

This is not a panacea. This does not mean we can get out and eat as much junk food as we want. We should be careful about our intake of fats generally, but we should be aware that hydrogenated fats are more harmful than the saturated fats.

There is a rather interesting historical irony to the introduction of trans fats. They were heralded as some kind of miracle product to try to wean Canadians off palm and tropical oils, which were in widespread use in the late sixties and early 1970s. Cardiologists and doctors cautioned us of this. However, it was a tragic mistake, and it was a disaster, according to Dr. Willet of Harvard University.

I am heartened in our struggle to eliminate trans fats. We have the support of two prominent members of the Senate of Canada, both prominent medical doctors. Dr. Yves Morin has worked with me on the development of the bill. He is a former Dean of Medicine at Laval University. I would like to recognize and pay tribute to the hard work he has done, meeting with industry officials and the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Dr. Wilbert Keon of the Heart Institute in Ottawa is a leading, world renowned cardiologist who is also meeting with us personally and in conference in developing the bill.

People a lot smarter than we in this room, and I mean that with all respect, are calling upon us to take concrete steps to eliminate trans fats from our food supply. Let us listen to Canadian scientists, let us listen to Canadians generally and take an important step toward true public health, not just managing illness, and eliminate trans fats.

I believe we can eliminate trans fats without compromising either quality or taste. I believe there are alternate fats in adequate quantities to replace the use of trans fats, or hydrogenated oils, in every aspect of processed food and restaurant food.

I am very pleased to have this opportunity today on behalf of the NDP caucus to do something that I believe will have a significant impact on the general public health of Canadians. I started by saying that I can honestly say banning trans fats will save lives. I end on that note, and I urge my colleagues in the House to please support the motion and get us on the first step to this important public health initiative.

● (1030)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the member and his party for bringing forward this important motion. It is timely for the House to discuss specific matters. Child obesity is something to which I think most Canadians can now relate. As there are many questioners, I will get right to my question.

Could the member indicate what would be the principal objection of business and industry that will be affected by this? If it is a matter of cost or whatever it might be, would it be recommended that there be an appropriate transition time to bring in fair and reasonable solutions?

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, these are two of the first issues with which we have had to deal. The industry has been slow to react. We believe it is only the public awareness recently that has triggered some companies to come on line.

I suppose it is the cost of reformulating products. I suppose there are some serious quality control issues. The thing about trans fats is it makes oil stable at room temperature and it adds to the shelf life. These are very tempting things for those who are producing processed food. The peanut butter we have to stir does not have any trans fats in it. Peanut butter that is solid at room temperature is loaded with trans fats. That is a marketing issue.

With regard to the phase in period, Denmark had to have consultations with industry as to what would be possible and realistic. It gave industry adequate time to meet these new guidelines. The country stopped short of saying it would be a voluntary compliance issue because it recognized that industry was not necessarily motivated unless pushed to do so.

The legislation that we contemplate coming from the motion today would have adequate time frames for industry to reformulate and to find an adequate supply of an alternate oil to use.

• (1035)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member from Winnipeg for bringing forward this motion. The motion is worthwhile and plays an important part in increasing the information and education of Canadians about this issue.

There are many hazards. For example, some members may have noticed that I have lost quite a bit of weight. One reason I did is, as of last March, I smartened up and stopped drinking one to two litres a day of my favourite cola drink and I have lost over 60 pounds.

Maybe we should ban all these soft drinks. There is a lot of evidence that they are really very dangerous and not good for people. Maybe we should kill all the junk foods that people are prone to eat. Maybe we should ban vans that people rent to help our kids move, so that they do not fall off the back of them and shatter their wrists. There are so many of these hazards.

What about motorcycles? It is very dangerous to travel on a motorcycle. I am one who happens to enjoy motorcycling. Perhaps we should ban them because they are much more dangerous than travelling by other vehicles.

Could the member tell me where he thinks we should draw the line about all of the things that should be disallowed in our society so people can be protected from all these dangers?

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, one of the arguments we have heard is the idea that we may be interfering with Canadians personal freedoms. We believe there is a legitimate role for government to interfere in certain things that are so obviously and clearly bad for people.

Supply

The hon. member, as an adult, may be able to make an informed choice. I do not think children always make the best choices. I think low income people often have less choices because it takes a fair amount of economic stability to eat a balanced diet and to get to a supermarket that has healthy foods to buy them. People in my low income riding of Winnipeg Centre often end up shopping at the local 7-Eleven where they buy a lot of processed foods.

We are not saying that we should ban hamburgers or french fries. We are saying that we should take out the poison in those products. Then try to eat them moderately because they still contain fats, sugars and salts that are bad for people. We do not need this added toxic substance that is clogging the arteries of 10 and 12 year old children and causing a thousand premature deaths per year.

I think the member would agree that the government has a role in ensuring that our food supply is safe. If people are lying to us about the safety of a food product, then Health Canada has a role to help Canadians and advocate on behalf of Canadians to ensure that the food supply is safe.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague and all hon. members in this House who, I hope, will vote in favour of the motion being presented by the New Democratic Party.

Hon. members know that I am very committed to sports. Current studies show that 47% of students between 7 and 14 are overweight and that is just children. The motion being tabled sets out to meet an extremely important objective. We must reduce or eliminate the trans fatty acids that exist in far too many products.

My question is for the member for Winnipeg Centre. How can the government go about informing the public that these trans fatty acids are extremely dangerous and that in the medium term—not the short term; we are talking about months and years—they can cause a considerable increase in the level of cholesterol in the blood, which can lead to heart attack and other related problems? Until this motion is passed, what can the government do to inform the public that this product is very dangerous?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, I believe the government does have an active role to play and I would say it has an obligation to play that role.

Given what we know and what bureaucrats in Health Canada know, Canadians have to be informed beyond simply labelling on the back of a processed food product some scientific language. They have to take active steps beyond labelling. They could make a valuable contribution by introducing firm regulations or, if necessary, by introducing legislation so that any food product sold in Canada can have no more than trace levels of trans fatty acid in it.

Supply

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Winnipeg Centre for bringing this important issue forward in the House.

Banning trans fats would save lives. There is a huge correlation between trans fats and obesity and heart disease. We need to do everything possible in the House to ensure that we either eliminate or reduce trans fat intake. Canada has a huge obesity problem. Children are more obese than ever before. It is no wonder when we have situations such as high levels of trans fat in baby food.

As a society we need to ensure that we do everything possible to make health a priority. We cannot just invest in health without also looking at other factors that cause obesity and heart disease. Trans fats is one of them.

Could the hon. member share with the House some examples of what Denmark is doing?

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, the Danish ambassador came as a witness to the Standing Committee on Health. Denmark has taken a bold step because it trades within the European Union. It had a choice to make. It had to face the very same choice that we are facing today, and that is whether simply labelling food would be adequate or take the bold step of virtually banning trans fats.

The ambassador told us that ultimately it was up to the head of state. He simply said that when it came to the choice between inconvenience to industry and saving the lives of Danish citizens, there was no debate. I am very proud of that country for the bold step it took. The decision has not interfered with its ability to function within the European Union to any significant degree.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of State (Public Health), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased for a number of reasons to have this opportunity to speak to the hon. members on the troublesome issue of trans fats.

First of all, this debate is one more means of raising Canadians' awareness of the ill effects of trans fats, since consciousness raising and education are an integral part of our mission to promote healthy eating.

Second, this offers me an opportunity to explain what the government is doing to reduce trans fat content in the food we eat and to confirm that there are already some encouraging results.

Finally, this subject goes far beyond diet alone. It is part of a far broader issue that is at the heart of my mandate as Minister of State for Public Health; the vital need to promote all aspects of health and healthy living.

[*English*]

I thank the NDP for initiating this extremely important debate because I know that all members share the goal of taking positive action to encourage Canadians to make healthier choices, including healthier food choices. I also know the member for Winnipeg Centre has taken a great interest in this matter.

I am happy to support the motion calling for the establishment of a multi-stakeholder task force to develop strategies for significantly reducing the level of trans fat in Canadian foods.

Accordingly, I would like to propose that the Standing Committee on Health should be consulted to the best possible composition of such a task force and its mandate. I will make myself available, as will officials of the department, so we can exchange ideas. I also suggest that the task force report to the Standing Committee on Health. This can become another example of how Canada's parliamentarians are an effective force for positive change when we work cooperatively.

I know there will a lot of views to be heard. Many people believe the simple answer would be to just ban trans fats but we know that effective long term solutions are complex. As Mencken said, "For every complex problem there's a neat, simple solution, and it is always wrong".

We must deal with the trans fat issue in a complex and thoughtful way so we do not end up actually worsening the health of Canadians through our decisions, which is a real possibility if we rush headlong into a ban.

As the Minister of Health and many other members have correctly stated, dietary trans fat is an important public health matter because we now have scientific evidence that consuming trans fat increases the risk of coronary heart disease. The evidence indicates that trans fat increases the blood levels of LDL cholesterol, the bad cholesterol. It also decreases the levels of HDL cholesterol, the good cholesterol.

It is because of those effects that the organization that establishes dietary reference intakes for the U.S. and Canada, for example, the Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine, recommended in 2002, "that trans fatty acid consumption be as low as possible while consuming a nutritionally adequate diet". Essentially the same recommendation was made for saturated fats, although saturated fats increase both LDL and HDL cholesterol levels and therefore have a lesser impact on the risk of heart disease.

The Institute of Medicine noted, however, that the trans fatty acids are unavoidable in non-vegan diets and that to attempt to reduce the levels to zero would mean the elimination of dairy products and meats and this could result in an inadequate intake of protein and certain micro nutrients.

I doubt that we will hear contrary views to that finding today. I am sure we will find that there is a consensus which will emerge fairly quickly in this debate that we need to reduce the consumption of dietary fat as part of achieving the best possible health for all Canadians. Where we will differ is in how best to respond.

Supply

On a gram for gram basis, trans fats have a more negative effect on heart health than saturated fats. It has been estimated that Canadians consume on average about eight grams of trans fats per day. However they also consume an average of 27 grams of saturated fat. The Canadian consumption of saturated fat is almost four times higher than our consumption of trans fat and is way higher than recommended. It is just as important from a health standpoint not to significantly increase saturated fat intake in our desire to reduce the consumption of trans fat.

As the member for Winnipeg Centre noted, Denmark did make the move of setting a maximum limit of 2% of trans fats in all fats and oils in food sold in that country. The Danish diet differs from the Canadian diet which contains greater amounts of animal fat and tropical oils. Since Denmark is a much smaller country and food production less centralized, products do not need as long a shelf life as they do in Canada. There is, therefore, the need for a stability provided occasionally by partially hydrogenated fats in some foods. Since these partially hydrogenated fats are the main source of trans fat, Denmark is in a position to restrict them without altering their diet.

The message here is that it would be wise and prudent to compare the circumstances and potential impacts in both countries before importing a measure that may work for one country but not for another. This will be an important job for the task force.

When reducing or eliminating trans fats in foods, it is extraordinarily important that we understand that we want the trans fats to be replaced by healthier alternatives. Setting this arbitrary limit on trans fats in foods without taking the time to identify appropriate alternatives runs the risk of substituting these highly saturated fats. It is important to ensure that the essential fatty acids, the omega 3 fatty acids, are there.

• (1050)

It is interesting to know that here in Canada canola oil is routine in many diets and is at a 3% level, which is 1% higher than the Danish level.

I think it will be extremely important for the task force to hear from all voices, including industry, to understand what would be the best practices and the best strategy to get to a healthy diet for all Canadians.

As a family physician, I helped my sick patients to get the best possible treatment, but I knew that my role was much greater than that. I also had the responsibility to counsel my patients on the choices that could promote and prevent diseases down the road.

Now, as the Minister of State for Public Health, I have a larger call to action. My goal is simply to keep as many Canadians healthy for as long as possible. My goal is to prevent injury and illness and to promote good health choices for the benefit of Canadians and for the sustainability of our health care system.

It was very gratifying, I think, for all Canadians to hear at the first minister's meeting in September the important plea by all the first ministers in terms of what it is going to take on health promotion, disease prevention.

It was impressive to hear them talk about trans fats, about the importance of immunization and about ways to prevent fractures in seniors. It is clear that they get it in terms of equating and keeping Canadians well as an imperative in terms of the sustainability of our health care system. We all know now that we must put the health back into health care.

Clearly, heart disease is a major chronic disease in Canada, therefore we must address its causes and tackle all the relevant determinants, including nutrition. Our thoughtful action on the trans fat issue is part of a much broader, complex strategy to foster health through healthy living.

I want to share with members some of the information about this strategy before reinforcing why I believe that a ban is not the best public approach to the dietary trans fat issue and why we think that the idea of a task force is extraordinarily important.

As is the case across our health agenda, the Government of Canada is committed to working with the provinces and territories and other stakeholders to improve the health of Canadians through attention to healthy living issues. The current basis for much of this work is in the integrated pan-Canadian healthy living strategy framework that the federal, provincial and territorial health ministers agreed to in 2002.

As part of this, the ministers agreed to work together on short, medium and long term pan-Canadian healthy living strategies that emphasize nutrition, physical activity and healthy weights. Our aim is to promote good health by reducing the risk factors and the underlying societal conditions associated with cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, diabetes and some cancers.

Within that, we have developed what we are calling Canada's healthy living strategy. That strategy identifies children and youth as a priority target population. It also identifies schools as one of the key settings for addressing health concerns. The agreement at the first minister's meeting toward a school health initiative I think was hugely important in that aim.

One way we will proceed in promoting healthy living and eating is by building on the already existing best practices. There is no shortage of great work going on through healthy living and healthy eating initiatives across the country. For example, in building the public health agency through my cross-country consultations I visited Prince George where I learned that Health Canada's \$300,000 in funding was pooled into a fabulous healthy eating, active living alliance. Through that, it has community gardens, community kitchens and activation programs. It has actually parlayed the \$300,000 into over \$1 million along with rotary clubs and local businesses. It only makes sense that we follow the lead of initiatives like this to help Canadians to become more active, make better food choices and enhance their health.

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We are promoting healthy living through collaboration among governments and other stakeholders and through action at the community level.

Solutions have to be multi-pronged and designed to achieve their intended results, which is what we have done on the trans fat issue.

In January 2003, Canada became the first country in the world to require the mandatory declaration of the trans fatty acid content of foods on the labels of prepackaged foods. I think that has gone a long way to helping the health literacy of Canadians on the whole issue of trans fats and what some have said, that Canadians are way ahead of us.

● (1055)

Most foods will be required to have this declaration by December 2005. These labels help consumers make healthy food choices and limit their intake of trans fat. Already this move is leading to many food companies in Canada lowering the trans fat content of their foods.

Why did we not impose a regulatory limit or a ban on trans fats? Because through our broader public health lens, we realized that forcing industry to eliminate trans fat content in the absence of widespread healthy alternatives could have health implications that are equal to or worse than those of trans fats. In short, a ban could result in the worsening of the risk of cardiovascular disease if the alternatives were not well articulated. Many of the current alternatives would reduce the amount of trans fatty acids but at the same time would increase the amount of saturated fatty acids, which are also a risk in coronary artery disease. I have to say that I cannot ban butter, eggs, and cream.

It is extraordinarily important, too, that the education, the health literacy and the civic literacy around these issues continue. Appropriate healthy alternatives to fats and oils high in trans fats are not yet readily available, so we are taking a smart and measured approach. Health Canada will monitor the trans fatty acid content of the major sources of trans fats in the diet to gauge the effectiveness of the nutrition labelling program and we will continue to help the industry find healthy alternatives. We will obviously await the work of the task force as well.

The department is also working with the food service industry to encourage reduction of trans fats in the food served by restaurants and other food service establishments. Of course, the department is continuing with many public education awareness initiatives to inform Canadians about the importance of reducing their intake of trans fats and we also know that today's debate is extraordinarily important to that as well.

Informed consumers demanding healthier food choices will provide much further impetus for food companies to reduce or eliminate their trans fats. We assume that the companies do not want to manufacture what Canadians do not want to buy. We are just beginning, but we are confident that our approach will pay off with healthier foods and healthier Canadians.

In the words of Elizabeth Blackwell:

We are not tinkers who merely patch and mend what is broken...We must be watchmen, guardians of the life and health of our generation, so that stronger and more able generations may come after.

This is our mission as guardians of public health: to make thoughtful and wise decisions today that will help Canadians enhance their health and their lives in the future. We cannot act in shortsighted ways that may produce ill health or disease tomorrow by unintended consequences. A ban on trans fat foods could produce these unintended negative results and we owe it to ourselves and future generations to make wise decisions that will enhance public health over the long term.

I eagerly await the work of the Standing Committee on Health and of the task force, and then the deliberations of the Standing Committee on Health after that.

● (1100)

[*Translation*]

As the guardians of public health, we need to make wise decisions today in order to help Canadians to improve their health and quality of life. We cannot allow ourselves to take a shortsighted approach, which is liable to be harmful in the long run.

Banning trans fats could have negative consequences. It is in our interest and that of coming generations to make informed decisions that will improve people's health in the years to come.

[*English*]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC):

Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague across the way, and she did allude to it in her speech, if the government approach or her recommended approach would be or could be that of a more voluntary approach rather than the mandated approach, which is setting the course here. Would that do the job as effectively as the outright ban that is being proposed? I see and understand the merits of that today, but would that not be a possibility as the compromise position for the mandate in making sure that labelling is clear and loud in every restaurant, fast food place and so on? Could that be an acceptable alternative or are we afraid that industry would not move on it, that there is not the motivation or the push to do it?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I think it is going to be very important. To me, as strategy, we want as little trans fat in people's diets as we can possibly have. I think it is going to be extraordinarily important that the task force look at all the alternatives and that there also be a strategy: what, by when and how. If in the advice of the task force, the "what" is for a ban and the task force decides that in Canada because we need canola oil it should be at 3% instead of the 2% in Denmark, or whatever that is, we then need in place the strategies to have industry and whatever on side, such that it would be timed in a way that would be practical, doable and ultimately in the best interest of Canadians.

I think the labelling was step one. Now we will look to the task force and the parliamentary committee to determine what this next step ought to be.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of State for Public Health for both the tone and the content of her remarks. I did notice some ambiguity, however, in her remarks and I seek additional clarification.

Supply

I would like to point out that in the motion we are debating today, the final paragraph could be seen as the “therefore be it resolved” paragraph. It states that the government should enact regulation or if necessary legislation which would effectively eliminate processed trans fats by reducing them to the lowest content possible.

I heard the minister dwelling for quite some time in her speech on how labelling may be adequate in certain ways. Could I have some clarification and her personal guarantee that if she votes for this motion it is with the understanding that we are seeking to eliminate or reduce to the lowest possible level and virtually eliminate trans fats in our food supply?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I think if there is any ambiguity it is along the lines of “why did we not ban it last year?”. I think what we are saying is that now we need the work of the task force to find out what is the right answer in terms of regulation or presenting legislation that would effectively eliminate to the lowest possible level.

I think we want the work of the task force and the parliamentary committee to help us with exactly what that would be. Some of what I was saying is that this is the reason we did not do it last week. We have been working to find out what really is the right answer on these things and also to put in place a strategy even if the industry had to find other products such that people are not immediately getting the lard out in order to fry their eggs.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of State for Public Health.

I will repeat to the minister that studies conducted in recent years by the department led by her colleague at sports, the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, show a steady increase in the number of youths between the ages of 7 and 14 who are obese. I will not get into what happens past 14, because the situation becomes practically irreversible: the individual remains obese and cannot get rid of the fat put on between the ages of 7 and 14. This means that we have a population of young Canadians, young Quebeckers and young people from other provinces who are increasingly fat.

I admit that I have tried to read the labels on various food, but the print is so small. I will not say that it is like trying to read the small print they flash for 10 seconds about interest rates in television ads for cars. We just cannot decipher the information on food labels.

I would like the minister to tell me whether her department could not launch an information campaign to explain what trans fats are and what medium and long term effects besides obesity they have on the human body? It would be particularly important to stress that there may be healthier alternatives.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I understand and I understand the hon. member's concerns about the obesity epidemic, especially among our young people.

[*English*]

I also think the labels are way too small. I am interested, as we move on this labelling, in looking at some of the things being done in other countries, such as red light, green light and amber light.

There may be some very serious ways that we can look at in explaining to people that this is a food that is decadent, this is a food that is healthier and this is a food that is really healthy, in a way that actually helps people make better choices.

I also am a bit obsessed myself about the idea that people might want to have the odd chocolate bar but just need to know that maybe they should run for 20 minutes if they eat it. I think there is the idea that maybe Canadians do not know what a calorie is and that we can do a much better job of explaining what are healthy choices as opposed to just banning everything. We want people to be able to make better choices.

As we look forward at not only a healthy living strategy in this country but at this fabulous new idea of sharing best practices in school health across this country, there is a consortium that the health ministers have agreed to. We are now working together with ministers of health and education and their deputies, who now have come together to look at what a school program would look like for Canada. They are looking at how, between the provinces and territories, we steal the good ideas that are working around the country so that we can actually move forward on this huge opportunity within our school system to teach kids how to make healthy choices.

• (1110)

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would first like to congratulate the member for Winnipeg Centre on his motion calling for effective elimination of trans fats and some cooperation with industry, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the food preparation industry and the agriculture industry. I think all of these are very important and it is important that we share the goal. I think where we might get a bit lost in language is how we achieve that goal. I congratulate the member for having negotiated and worked on wording that is acceptable to most parties.

I will ask this of the minister of state. Is it not true that if we went to immediate legislated elimination, we might eliminate some products that are healthy to humans, such as omega-3 or omega-6 fatty acids, or worse yet, we might move to the replacement of these trans fats by other products that might still be acceptable legally but might actually be worse for human consumption?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Indeed, Madam Speaker, what is evident is that we want to come together with a real strategy on what is practical, what is doable and what will not have unintended consequences. Then we want a timeframe, the “when”, that is doable and practical. Then we want the “how”, which means a real strategy to get the health literacy and civic literacy out there in terms of making choices.

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I agree with the member. What has been our concern is to not have those unintended consequences that the member spoke of and to allow the industry to be innovative and creative enough to come up with other choices within the guidelines the task force sets.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to share my time with the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin.

As some members may be aware, I am the senior health critic for the Conservative Party. Obviously the health care of Canadians is number one on my priority list, as it is for the Conservative Party of Canada.

I congratulate the member for Winnipeg Centre for bringing this motion before Parliament. He has helped increase public awareness about the harm that trans fats do to Canadians. Certainly I have learned a lot since this was brought to the fore.

It has been proven that trans fats are detrimental to human health. It is indisputable. With all the scientists I have come across it is not debated. Even much of the food industry does not debate the negative health effects that trans fats have on people. Many premature deaths could be averted by decreasing trans fats in the food system.

Therefore, I endorse the spirit of the motion. Although I may not agree with the proceedings afterward in the legislation, I think the intent of bringing together the stakeholders, including the Heart and Stroke Foundation, is important. We need to work as a government and as a people to reduce heart disease that trans fats cause. However, there are other diseases that trans fats lead to.

In other countries, such as Denmark, trans fats have essentially been banned. The United States of America has taken regulatory action against trans fats by limiting the upper and lower levels allowed in food products. People who consume products need to take some additional responsibility in how and what they consume.

Certainly the Conservative Party of Canada supports Canadians taking responsibility for their own health. We also recognize that sometimes the government has a role in providing a safe and healthy environment for the public.

Industry must also play a major role in developing new alternatives to the consumption of trans fats. It is very important that we include industry in the multi-stakeholder task force. After all, there could be some economic and practical implications if we are not responsible in the process by which we eliminate trans fats.

Some companies have been successful in this area. New York Fries has eliminated trans fats. Voortman cookies, Pepperidge Farm, High Liner Foods, Dare Foods and Kraft Foods have all endeavoured either to have trans fat free food or have declared their intention to become trans fat free in a reasonable amount of time.

There are products being developed or which apparently exist that can help eliminate trans fats. In the future we will have very minimal trans fats in the food supply. The question is how fast will this happen and how much of a role should government play?

Some people will argue that people have a choice and if they want to have trans fats, they should be able to have trans fats. This is

similar to alcohol and tobacco. There are obviously major health effects with those products. I would like to point out to members that those products are restricted to people over the age of 18. Trans fats are very easily accessible by our children. They are found everywhere. The onus is on parents and the government to ensure that children are protected, which is another reason I support the intention of this motion.

• (1115)

At the end of the day if we need to make a choice between the health of people or the shelf life of people versus the shelf life of doughnuts, the Conservative Party of Canada will always support the shelf life of people. That also goes to long term strategy.

The health minister talks about the sustainability of our health care system. It is only sustainable if we make proper decisions right now for the long term health of Canadians. Certainly by reducing trans fats I think there would be significant cost savings to the health care system in the future, combined with other preventive and proactive measures that we could undertake to make sure that the health care system will deal with things that are not preventable. Certainly trans fats cause a lot of existing diseases, and they could cause more diseases in the future.

The Conservative Party is supportive of the health of Canadians. Provided that the implementation of something of this nature is done with the consent of industry, members will be supportive of at least the intent. There is some ambiguity about what the legislation may hold and therefore there would be some reservations on that. Again it has to be done responsibly.

In conclusion, again I would like to thank the member for Winnipeg Centre. He and I worked quite closely on the wording of the motion. I am very thankful for the opportunity for members of parties who do not often see eye to eye to work together for the betterment of all Canadians.

I look forward to a day when I can eat my favourite foods without worrying about the trans fats in them. I should tell the House that I am guilty of eating a lot of trans fats, knowingly and unknowingly. The problem is that all too often we eat these things without knowing it. Proper labelling can help that but it does not exist in every case.

There are going to be diverse points of view in the House. We all want the same end but how do we get there? Should government play a role or should it not? The spirit of the motion is something which I can support. As long as the stakeholders include industry and Health Canada, and that their recommendations are taken seriously, we can all look forward to a healthier Canada as we move forward into the future.

• (1120)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be brief to allow others to pose questions.

I rise to thank the member and pay tribute to the contribution that the member for Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia made not only in the composition of the motion we are debating today, but on the broader issue of how to eliminate those harmful trans fats from our food supply. I can safely say that we did see the merits in most of the recommendations the hon. member made in the drafting of the motion and which were added to the motion. There was a very real recognition of the factor, which we very much appreciated at the front end, but we also recognize that there was a willingness to add to it and to not let partisan politics interfere with an issue as critical as the public health and well-being of a whole generation of children.

Having said that, I would like to nail him down a little bit on how his party plans on treating the motion. I understand his personal commitment to the issue, but could he tell us if the Conservative Party of Canada recognizes there is a legitimate role for the government to play in regulating food to make sure that the contents of food products are safe?

Could he also comment on labelling? Does he accept our point of view that labelling alone is probably not adequate to reduce in any quantifiable way the intake of trans fats by Canadian citizens?

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Madam Speaker, the government already plays a role in the safety of food, provincially and federally. There are inspections to make sure foods are prepared properly and to make sure we do not find arsenic in our water supply, things of that nature. The government does play a role, or has in the past, to ensure that products are safe for consumption.

Having said that, governments are the ones which allowed trans fats to be introduced in the first place, with good intentions I think. They wanted to get rid of the saturated fats and so on, but little did we know at the time the problems that trans fats would cause.

Governments, sometimes with the best intentions, screw things up. In many cases the marketplace is able to do a better job in regulating the industries which produce the products for the market. The product manufacturers that come up with trans fat free products will encounter significant advantages over their competition. That should not be overlooked. There is definitely a role for the government and industry to play in this debate and debates of a similar nature.

I can say that the Conservative Party supports healthy living for Canadians and that its MPs represent the views of their constituents. When the Conservative Party is approached with the vote next week, its members will carefully consider the views of their constituents and will vote according to the will of the people. We are here to represent the constituents in Ottawa, not represent Ottawa to the constituents.

• (1125)

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): We will have a very brief question and answer, there only being about 15 seconds left. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a hard time yawning in 15 seconds, however, I want to congratulate the member on his speech. I particularly liked the part where he talked about the shelf life of Canadians as opposed to doughnuts, favouring the

Supply

Canadians. I know him to be a man of strong moral values and know he will not be corrupted by the doughnut lobby.

I understand the member's point that he is not prepared to commit to the legislation, but that is the point of the motion, that we always look at any way we can resolve the issue and then look at what the remedies might be afterwards. Does the member agree?

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Madam Speaker, unlike other political parties, the Conservative Party believes that members are here because they were elected by the people and they should represent the people who elected them. The Conservative Party will do what is in the best interests of Canadians and ensure that Canadians remain healthy.

The goals are the same but how we get there is different. The market forces are very powerful and industry has to be sensitive to that. It will play a major role in how this issue is finally resolved. Labelling and other methods will help people in making their decision.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to debate something that is very crucial and very valuable for us as a society today. I appreciate the lead that our health critic has taken with regard to this matter, which is a very sensible and reasoned position.

As has already been stated, the Conservative Party of Canada, with reference to the member across the way who asked a question with respect to this, certainly supports Canadians taking responsibility for their own health but we recognize the role that government has in providing a safe and healthy environment for the public. It is getting those two things in appropriate balance in these kinds of matters before us today.

As has amply been pointed out by my colleague and others, trans fats have no known health benefits. It is as clear as that. Perhaps because of shelf life and those kinds of things, but in terms of health benefits there are none. No one has even argued or attempted to argue that kind of a case.

It is a fact as well that the consumption of trans fats in Canada surpasses anywhere else in the world. The consumption of trans fats in our country is among the highest in the world. That should be of concern. Why more so in our particular country?

People in science have made the argument that while saturated fats are a problem, we must be fair, honest and accurate about the facts. When compared on an equal intake basis dietary trans fatty acids are an even greater dietary risk for coronary heart disease than saturated fats.

To put this in its true perspective, each 5% energy intake in saturates increases the risk by 17%, whereas a 2% increase in energy from trans fatty acids increases the risk by 93%. Even small amounts of trans fats can be significantly harmful and hurtful in terms of the damage they do in terms of clogging our arteries and the damage it does to our hearts as well.

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What really annoys me, upsets me and gets me angry at points is when we have deception in terms of advertising. Some would say that it is unintentional, but at points I think it is very intentional. On some of the labelling and marketing today they talk in terms of cholesterol free and low in saturated fats, which is allowed by regulatory agencies. Therefore to the public this implies that these products have been deemed to be of benefit with respect to the prevention of heart disease, clogging our arteries and so on. When we read "cholesterol free, low in saturated fats" on a product label in the supermarket, people right away, at least through education at this point in the country, think that is better for them, when in fact what is not so clear is that there are trans fatty acids in that product, which is the stinger. Many of these products so marketed contain substantial levels of trans fatty acids which could potentially promote rather than prevent the development of heart disease and so on because of the very deleterious effects of the LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol and lipoprotein.

I object to that kind of advertising. I get rather upset when I see the kind of deception that goes on in terms of the labelling of products. People actually think they are doing something better for their health by consuming a product that is cholesterol free and low in saturated fat when in fact that product contains substantial amounts of trans fatty acids.

I think it is true that we must look at this very critical area. In an attempt to correct the health of consumers in all categories, but in particular our younger generation, those developing their tastes and appetites and training their taste buds, education is required.

A big part of this process actually is by way of the debate today and to engage in extensive debate in a committee study and so on. Even if the motion does not pass, at least we would know we had launched thorough discussion, that it has gone out to the public venue and that it is on the radar screen for the public.

However that is not the case presently. People know they should not consume too much saturated fat and so on, but on the matter of trans fatty acids it is not so well known and I think we would do well by the public if we were to get that debate and information going.

At present, Health Canada and the Food and Drug Administration are planning on instituting TFA labelling in the near future, as was heard in the remarks this morning. However the time for that is really long overdue. Such labelling is needed and I think it should be mandatory. I support in other realms, in justice and so on, truth in sentencing. I support in this area truth in labelling. It is dishonest not to give people the information they need.

• (1130)

We often talk about consent or choice, which is used often in debate, and possibly today by libertarian minded people, but choice and consent need to be based on information. It needs to be informed consent, which small children are not able to do. It is the parental responsibility but it can have an ill effect on children who are not fully informed. When they are alone at birthday parties or other places, they cannot make informed choices on their own.

When I served as an elected board member on the Saskatoon district health board in my fair province of Saskatchewan, we had a certain liability as board members. We were often concerned that

when individuals were to go through some kind of procedure there should be a proper video, proper printed material and proper information verbally relayed to them. That was very important because we would be legally responsible, liable or sued if we did not make that information available to someone who was undergoing some sort of procedure.

Just as a caveat, I have also been an advocate on the sanctity of life side of things and the abortion question where people need information to make informed choices. Information is needed not only in the area of food but also in the justice area.

When we talk truth in sentencing and truth in labeling, it is so people will have adequate information. If we had not allowed trans fatty acids into the food chain 30 years ago we would not be having this debate today. It is somewhat regrettable that we did not reject it at that point in time but maybe there was not as much evidence and scientific study done.

I find it interesting that groups, like the Vegetable Oil Industry of Canada, have made the concession or the admission that trans fat, on a gram for gram basis, may have a greater effect on heart health. They go on to say that saturated fat consumption should be kept as low as possible. This is true but people can avoid that. Saturated fats are literally there on the surface. This is something that is hidden. It is not as obvious.

I note that, in respect to saturated fat and the argument that we should be going after saturated fat, there has been a fair bit of information. Saturated fat in terms of food and food preparation is easier to avoid than trans fats in processed foods.

The Vegetable Oil Industry of Canada actually does say that it supports the eventual elimination of trans fats from the diet but that it wants to buy time. That is a fair comment. It says that it is producing new oil variants low in saturated fat, applications that do not result in the formation of trans fatty acids, but that it will take some time. I think it is making a somewhat reasonable plea for more time. It has also asked that the federal government might want to assist the industry in increasing the speed at which these oils will be available on the market at competitive prices. Buying additional time on the matter seems to be the company's major concern.

The Canola Council of Canada makes the point of an inference of agreement and it makes the comment in respect of highly saturated fats. It talks about growing a higher value type of canola called high oleic canola, developed specifically for the purpose of replacing partially hydrogenated vegetable oils. It is doing its work but it may want to speed it up. This may prompt them to speed it up and get moving on it quicker. Farmers are being paid a premium right now for that high oleic canola. They want a more cooperative approach.

In conclusion, I would simply make the point that the science against trans fat consumption is without doubt about processed trans fats. The party opposite might want to be aware that there may be a difficulty in terms of the one year deadline.

Supply

•(1135)

I will be supporting the motion tonight as I expect a number of my colleagues will be doing. The Conservative Party recognizes the fact that trans fats are detrimental to the health of Canadians and that government does have a role to play in helping Canadians live healthy and productive lives.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague's very good presentation. I would like to express my concern about something he said at the end of his speech and that was about whether or not this could happen within one year.

We all know the environment we are in here in the House. We would like to get a lot of legislation and regulations passed that would benefit Canadians. I would like assurances that we press for this within a one year timeframe.

Every year that we allow this to continue in the current context not only costs our health care system millions of dollars but also costs the lives of many. By moving forward on this assertively we would be encouraging those industrial pioneers that can change the products and formulas that are necessary for our foods to be bold. We could support them in that measure.

I want to ask for the hon. member's assurance that the Conservative Party will move forward very quickly along with everyone else to ensure that we deal with this issue within a year.

•(1140)

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Madam Speaker, I cannot speak on behalf of the Conservative Party of Canada at this juncture, but for my part we do need to have momentum on this issue. Members who have been around this place for a while, like the member opposite, well know that things take an interminably long time. The wheels turn slowly.

I concur that this is an important issue and we might need to light a fire under some individuals. Maybe the industry will move quicker as a result of this. That is how it works. That is how the dynamics play out.

We should consult and work cooperatively where possible. We need to send some pretty strong messages that this needs to be moved on. It is not a matter of dragging our feet. We need to move on high oleic canola quicker and get it growing in more fields across the country. Maybe further research needs to be done.

I would support the shorter timeline, but I am trying to be realistic. We need to press on with this issue. On this issue, I speak as an individual member at this point.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have been listening carefully to the debate today as it is of great interest to farmers in my area, many of whom are canola growers. They have raised some concerns with the fact that we may be moving too quickly if there is a one year timeline on this.

Research takes quite some time. It does not happen quickly. If we move with too much haste within the one year timeframe, we may actually create negative consequences and more problems than we are solving. I have been in the House for over 11 years and have found that sometimes something looks very good and if we move quickly on it, we regret it later on.

I think we should move very carefully. I do not think anybody here is taking issue with the intent of the motion, but it is the unintended consequences that we have to worry about.

Healthy alternatives may not be developed if we move too quickly and if we do not handle the issue carefully. At the present time we should be focusing on education. By raising this issue here in the House, we are starting to move in that direction. We are educating people as to the fact that trans fats are not good.

An article I read indicated that if trans fats were taken out of food and not done properly, there would be other negative, harmful substances entering our food that would have even more of a negative impact on our health than trans fats because of the shelf life of food.

I would also like to raise one other issue quickly. We may be increasing the price of food if we go in this direction too quickly and that may have a negative impact on the poor people in this country. That is possibly an unintended consequence. If we go too quickly in this direction, the people we are trying to help the most may be the most harmed by this. Let us get it right.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments and the concerns of the member. I did make the point that I think we need to work as much as we can, consultatively and collaboratively, so that this gets moving forward and we find those alternates and so on. As canola farmers point out, the oleic canola may in fact be one of those replacements for partially hydrogenated vegetable oils. That has all come about of course in response to the medical community and the food industry's concerns about trans fats.

Unless there is a push and it starts somewhere, then it never gets going, it never goes anywhere. We will serve the public well as members of every party, Conservative members here as well, in getting the debate going today and pressing it forward.

•(1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Simard (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Laval.

The NDP motion raises an extremely important and interesting issue. Personally, I would have preferred a slightly more limpid motion, not that it contains trans fats, but sometimes things that are well thought out merit being explained clearly. Then the words come easily.

I do not want to criticize to any extent—since we are totally in agreement with the motion—but I must point out that all motions include an educational component. While not wishing to give any lectures on writing or literature, it does seem to me that it might have been written in clearer and simpler terms.

Now, for the substance of the motion, it does raise an essential question about individual responsibility, the state's role in regularizing certain situations, and the right to information about what one eats.

Supply

To give my own situation as an example, I was recently surprised to learn at a routine doctor's appointment that I had become what my kids would call a tub of trans fat. I have a very high level of the bad cholesterol. I am not particularly chubby, however—I will let you be the judge of that, Madam Speaker—nor particularly unhealthy. I will soon turn 50, but it was a shock to learn that I will likely have to start taking pills, getting more exercise and eating responsibly.

That said, I do not eat chips or other junk food, as they call it. Like everyone else, I am responsible for what I eat and I do not deny that. Nobody should. But we have faith in the system. We have always had the impression, in the provinces of Canada and in Quebec, that there was a whole bunch of inspectors, specialists and doctors protecting us by carrying out studies before a new food was allowed on the market.

I believe, however, that some complacency has developed in this country as far as this is concerned. We saw that when certain Health Canada employees were not really able to get anywhere when they tried to act as whistleblowers about certain practices, about being pushed by lobbyists to allow certain harmful products and so on.

Is the system working to protect consumers? Consumers are faced with choices. In the case at hand, trans fats are mostly produced by an industrial process, hydrogenation, which turns oils to solids or semi-solids.

Take peanut butter for example. I think it has become a basic food for most students. I have overindulged in it myself, in my youth, but now I have to eat it in secret because my daughter is allergic. We can see that it is less attractive when the oil separates from the peanut solids. We are used to seeing foods that are presented in a more readily saleable version. Marketing has trumped public health and the health of our people, and we have not been informed of these effects.

There were no studies done before these foods were introduced into our diet in massive quantities 50 years ago.

We also realize that, according to the Heart Foundation's studies, our organisms were not designed to digest this kind of trans fats and are not able to eliminate them. There is some confusion in the ratings, depending on the study, but they appear to be more dangerous than saturated fats—which are bad for our health because we use too much of them.

In the case of trans fats, these products were imposed on us. I come from a large family that was not very rich. I remember that we used shortening or margarine instead of butter for our cooking, because they cost less than butter. We did not know we were damaging our health by doing so. We did it blithely, with no one telling us anything and with no safety system to protect us.

Avant-garde countries like Denmark, Sweden and all the Scandinavians have long been concerned with the composition of foods.

●(1150)

In this country, antibiotics are systematically added to finisher feed for pork. Collectively, these antibiotics do us harm when we really do need them to fight infections. The bacteria have grown stronger and, as a result, we are unable to fight off these infections

because our base level of antibiotics is too high and our systems have gotten used to the antibiotics. Again, we have a false sense of security.

We have also gotten a false sense of security from the system. For instance, because Canada is a major producer of GMOs, more effort has been put into listening to the industry than into protecting human health, to the point of not being able to read the labels.

As regards trans fats, one has to know that if they are listed at the top, there is more, and one has to really do the math, which is not easy, to figure out how much there is. If one has that kind of time while doing the groceries, one can subtract the saturated fats from the total amount of fats to know how much trans fats a product contains.

The motion the NDP has put forward is an extremely interesting and innovative one. It raises the question of whether we, in Canada and Quebec, can change and start paying closer attention, as some already do. We can no longer afford to assume that food is automatically safe because there are people looking after it, that water is automatically safe because there is lots of it, and that there is no need to protect either food nor water or to ensure they are safe for the public. At the end of the day, we realize that policies are largely determined by industry, and not by concern for public health.

What Denmark and Scandinavia are doing, and a growing number of countries will have to do, is look into applying the precautionary principle and prohibiting processed fats used for reasons of aesthetics, quick processing or preservation, which seems to be to a large extent what trans fats are used for.

There are alternative products. I know that the Leclerc cookie company and other companies have product lines without trans fat, although they are generally a little more expensive. If you do not have a lot of money then you get heart disease. However, if you have a little more money you can afford trans fat free cookies. There is a responsibility in there somewhere. There is certainly a concern about the cost of food, which the Conservative member has raised. We cannot ignore such things. However, the price of junk food is always too high.

Awareness needs to be raised and often good legislation helps to do that.

For example, when there were no laws governing blood alcohol levels, people drove—I did as well sometimes—after having had a little bit to drink. It is odd, but people became good citizens because they had to. If we have a law banning trans fats, which are not produced naturally in food processing, this will send a clear message that they are bad and that we have to change what we eat. This will sound an alarm and work out for the best.

We also have to change our behaviour and make it clear to this government, which is sometimes more sensitive to lobbies than to public health, that the presence of GMOs in products has to be indicated so that people can make informed choices. Nor should bovine hormones be put on the market just because a Canadian industry has developed them. The government needs to develop a sense of responsibility that it is currently lacking. Hopefully, the NDP's call to ban trans fats will be a signal to put public health first and the economy second. Although it is important to have a healthy economy, it should not come at the expense of public health.

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am glad to have an opportunity to compliment my colleague from the Bloc Québécois for his remarks and to recognize the fact that the Bloc seems to be sympathetic to this very serious public health issue.

Could he share with us his views of some of the remarks made by the Minister of State for Public Health when she led us to believe that perhaps labelling would be adequate at this early stage to help reduce the consumption of trans fats? Does he believe it is all right to put poison in our food as long as it is properly labelled?

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Simard: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. Under certain circumstances there are not always complete studies, for example for GMOs, even about labelling that would allow it. However, I agree completely with the hon. member that the situation is the same when it comes to protecting the environment. Just having a warning about a persistent toxic poison in the environment does not remove the risk of contracting cancer. Just because there is a label does not mean the danger is gone.

Thus, I believe we must go beyond labelling, because on a label there are so many ingredients, instructions and other things that people get confused.

Sometimes, too, we hear, "Everything is bad; everything is dangerous". After a while, people have heard it so often they no longer listen. Other times we hear that some foods are good and others are not so good. People no longer know whom to trust.

We are entitled to a responsible government. We have not had this opportunity very often, but we have the right to insist that a government be responsible and that it do the right thing when it is clearly needed. I think the studies are sufficiently conclusive in the case of trans fats.

There is a whole generation at risk. I said as a joke that my children call me a big load of trans fats, but I am worried that my children will also turn into big piles of trans fats and live shorter lives. We often say that we judge a society by the way it treats its children, how it feeds them, and how it takes care of them so that they will live long and well, enjoying full and complete lives. We cannot always prevent them from eating chips and candy and things like that. We must ensure—because they cannot always read and understand the labels—that there are no poisons in the foods they eat.

That said, there will always be a great need for education to transmit values, above and beyond the law.

Supply

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, one of the consequences of Denmark banning trans fats is the benefit it has had to the dairy industry in that country. I know the province of Quebec has a very strong agrifood industry. I have met with dairy farmers from the Deschambault area of Quebec and I know people are very concerned about their market and the impact of the aluminum smelter that was built nearby.

Does the member have any views on the possible positive benefit to the Quebec dairy industry if we eliminate trans fats from our food supply?

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Simard: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief.

Yes, there can be advantages. But we need to honestly admit that trans fats must not be replaced with saturated fats, which might not be any better.

In general, it must be admitted that we eat too much fat, whether trans or saturated. I think if we were to eat more of the unsaturated fats—omega 3 or omega 6—our health would really benefit.

We need to ensure that the primary purpose of this is not related to some industry. That is what concerns me about the situation with the Deschambault aluminum smelter and the neighbouring farms. I remember when it was built, and it became necessary to ensure the quality of dairy milk and all products in the food chain. That is important. Some degree of guidance is needed, and the real danger is that, at some point—

• (1200)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou, but the member for Laval now has the floor.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou for giving me this time to express my opinion on the motion put forward by our colleagues from the New Democratic Party.

Naturally, we all want to be in good health and to have a good quality of life. To that end, we have to make wise and healthy food choices. But these choices are neither obvious nor easy to make, as my hon. colleague said earlier.

When we go grocery shopping, we all do our best to select wisely, but we sometimes cannot understand what the labels say and do not always have a calculator handy to determine how much trans fatty acid there is in the food we are looking at.

A study has shown that adult Canadians consume approximately 8.4 grams of trans fat per day, as my hon. colleague indicated earlier, while younger people may consume up to 10 grams a day. As he also pointed out, the human body is not designed to digest these fats. Not only is it not designed to digest them, but it does not use them as a source of energy either.

Supply

This means that these fats we consume are not only harmful but they also get stored in our bodies, eventually making us obese. I must say that our young people are certainly likely to end up with arteries full of lipids by the age of 30 or 35, putting them at risk for coronary heart disease at an earlier age than our parents.

I must admit that I did not use to pay much attention to those things and, whenever my grandchildren came over to visit, we fed them what grandchildren like to eat, because we want them to be happy when they visit.

When I learned that, among the more than 4,000 processed foods containing such trans fats, there was french fries, chips, donuts, pizza crusts, cakes, muffins, TV dinners, crackers, cookies and granola bars, I wondered what I was going to give them to eat. This left very little on the list of their favourite foods. These were part of their regular diet when visiting grandma. Going to grandma's meant eating junk food. But I realize that this is not doing them any good.

Therefore, I am very pleased to see a motion proposed that would limit these fats in our food industry. If we look at Denmark's experience in 2003, we see it did not entirely eliminate trans fats, but permitted trans fats in oils to a limit of 2%, or 2 grams per 100 grams. I think that is very reasonable and would keep part of the taste our children want and would have a better effect on our cardiovascular health.

We must not be fooled; these trans fats cause a greater increase in the rate of bad cholesterol. I have it, too, so I know what my hon. friend was talking about. When my doctor told me that, I was not very happy either, but I do know the causes, I must admit.

Thus, not just one thing causes a reduction in good cholesterol. And I like it. This kind of cholesterol helps my nerves remain calm, because it helps in processing vitamin E which is very good for the nerves. So good cholesterol is very good for that.

According to the Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2,000 heart attacks per year could be prevented if trans fatty acids were banned and thus at least 1,000 human lives saved. I think that is very important.

The Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation has issued a number of recommendations on this issue, including that: accurate information about the nutritional value of foods and the health effects of lowering trans fat be made available to the public, to help consumers make informed and healthy choices; trans fat in processed foods be replaced as soon as possible and where feasible by healthy alternatives such as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats rather than with equal amounts of saturated fat; and Canadians consume a healthy, balanced diet that includes foods from the four food groups in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating.

I have to admit that this is very hard. In addition to not necessarily being aware of all the problems trans fats can cause, there is also the fact that some people are illiterate. When they do their shopping, in all good conscience they cannot even read the labels warning them about potential problems if they consume the ingredients in these foods.

We do not take the number of illiterate people into account often enough, not in Quebec and not in Canada.

● (1205)

We recently received little cards to send to our constituents who had learned to read. These people, who learn to read with great determination and effort, do not necessarily have the ability to understand the significance of the food described on food product labels.

This affects not just those of us who are used to these things, because we often talk about it, but it affects other people too. It affects children who go to the grocery store or to restaurants at lunch time. They do not know or understand what trans fats are. We have to do more to help them than just list these items on labels. It is a good idea, but it is not the ideal solution.

In early 2003, the Canadian agri-food industry was given three years to label the saturated fat content but not the quantity of trans fat in every product, while smaller companies had up to five years to comply with this new legislation. Five years means they have until December 2007. That is a long time.

Despite these deadlines, some responsible companies, such as Frito-Lay in Alberta, have not only complied, but have already announced they will eliminate trans fat from their ingredients. That means we can keep eating Doritos and Tostitos. My grandchildren will be very happy about that, but I have to stay away from such food.

On a more serious note, currently in North America roughly 50% of adults are overweight or obese. Cardiovascular disease is the primary cause of death in Canada and Quebec. People suffer from many diseases caused by factors we cannot control. However, when we can do something to fight the diseases that afflict our fellow citizens, I think we must do so diligently.

That is why we agree with the NPD motion. We will work together with all the other political parties in this House that want Canada to take a firm stand by limiting the quantity of trans fat allowed in food and follow the example of Denmark where the limit is 2g per 100g of fatty oil in food.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her fine speech. She and I are both on the Standing Committee on Health.

It is always difficult to find foods that are good for us. This morning, the chief Liberal Party whip told me that the test is very simple: smell and taste the food. If it smells good and tastes good, it is bad for you and should be spat out immediately or left untouched.

I think the hon. member for her speech and have a question I would like to ask. She speaks of following the recommendation, or the motion, and following Denmark's example in eliminating these trans fats. I can understand her point of view, but the plan is to use a process in conjunction with heart foundations, food and agriculture industries, and of course the department and the government in order to decide on the best steps to take. Perhaps Denmark is not the best example for Canada. Is she more in favour of using Denmark as our model, or of the motion as presented?

• (1210)

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I lean more toward the motion as presented than to the Danish example. This example is one of the things that has stirred up a great deal of comment from all countries, even one study. The European Commission has struck a European Food Safety Authority Scientific Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies and mandated it to produce an opinion on the presence of trans fats in foods for human consumption. This was done because the opinion of the EU member states on this differed from that of the Danish authorities.

The Danish government used public health as the basis of its argument to justify passage of this legislation. It claims there is a fairly clear connection between the consumption of trans fats and cardiovascular disease, stroke, certain types of cancer and type 2 diabetes. Yesterday we met some young people who have type 1 diabetes, but type 2 we know can be remedied. That is very important.

In my opinion, the NDP motion is both important and of great interest.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver East. I am pleased to do so and pleased to rise in the chamber to talk about the motion relating to the banning of trans fats.

It is important to identify a couple of things at the forefront. The first is that when we learn as legislators about a public policy issue related to our health and we know about the harm it is causing our citizens, there is a duty and an obligation for us to act. It is simply not enough to expect other forces out there to do the job that parliamentarians should be doing. That is why today we are discussing this issue. That is why I believe it is very important that we participate right now in the changing of a food additive that harms Canadians' lives and that we also provide the solutions necessary for our dietary health. That is what this motion does.

There has been some discussion about the issue not really being in the forefront of the radar screen of Canadians right now. They have heard some information about it on a regular basis or piecemeal through the media, but it is an issue that has been breaking ground in the health field for many years.

It is interesting that the member for Winnipeg Centre raised this in caucus over a year ago. I want to pay tribute to his hard work. It is his due diligence in the past year that has led to today's motion. I hope it will be supported by all parties. I hope we will actually see action on this to protect Canadians' health. I hope we will be at the

Supply

forefront in the world in making sure that our producers comply to better standards for trans fats, that our consumption as Canadians and our health are improved, and that we become world leaders like we can be and should be in many other fields.

The member for Winnipeg Centre did that by doing due diligence. He did a lot of research at the forefront. I will touch on the people he spoke to and the organizations he consulted, both for and against the concerns he was raising. He actually followed a process that is very complementary to the parliamentary process. It goes back to previous parliaments. On February 6, 2004, he introduced a private member's bill to look at banning trans fats. That was the point of pressure. It is very important to recognize that.

One of the reasons I am proud to be a New Democrat is that we have members who are not afraid to put their necks on the line to introduce discussion on a topic that is sometimes seen as being too difficult to raise. That is how we started on this file when there was very little public discourse about the effects individually as opposed to the banning aspect, which is seen as no solution. The member deserves credit for this, because that was the situation more than a year ago.

In response to the motion of the member for Winnipeg Centre, he was able to get the House of Commons health committee to do a study on the health effects of trans fats. He also pushed for expert witnesses and a review paper to provide testimony and also the discussion points that are so necessary to open the door to not only just the health aspects of this, but also to the industrial side effects in terms of the production and manufacturing of food products. He did that in a way that was very complementary and inclusive and I once again congratulate him on that.

The hon. member also did another important thing, and it is very important to recognize the hard work of his office. His office did a mail-back campaign to educate his constituents as well as those across the country. Speaking from the Windsor West perspective, I know that many of my constituents sent back the card to give solidarity to and support for us as parliamentarians to start talking about trans fats, their effects on human health, and how we can improve our products and the goods we are consuming, to have a healthier society for all of us.

That is important, because it recognizes the fact that right now in the system of the products we have available as food substances, individuals at the lower end of the income scale often cannot afford to purchase some of the healthier alternatives out there. There is a premium on natural foods. There is a premium on some of the foods with less additives. There is also an issue of access, as some individuals do not have the transportation or the time to get non-perishable and healthier alternatives. The member has been really diligent in expressing this concern that all Canadians need the opportunity to have a better selection of food sources and trans fats need to be addressed for all of us.

Supply

I note that the consultation process the hon. member undertook was extensive. I want to touch upon some of those organizations. In preliminary research, he looked at the World Health Organization, its suggestion about banning trans fats and the work done on the world front there. He consulted with the *New England Journal of Medicine*, looking at the research that had been done to ensure that the scientific background and merits were there before he actually launched into his work on this campaign.

• (1215)

From there, setting out the groundwork of the research, he then started to talk to groups and organizations that were very important and had great credibility in Canadian society, for example, the Heart and Stroke Foundation. What a great opportunity to get it involved in public policy. It is an organization that I support. My father has had bypass surgery and my grandfather prior to that. The Heart and Stroke Foundation has been leading the public charge on improving our cardiovascular health. I was very impressed to see that it was consulted right away.

He also went to universities and doctors, namely Dr. Bruce Holub from Guelph University, Dr. Ruth MacPherson from the University of Ottawa Heart Institute, Dr. Peter Jones from McGill University, Dr. Robert Issenman from McMaster University, and Dr. Sheila Innis from UBC. Those are just a few who have been consulted, although I know that there were others. It was an impressive view across Canada. He ensured that he spoke to people in different regions. He heard their concerns about what was happening in those regions.

Because of the scientific validation of this additive to our food, it is important to get the public to support the necessary transition. It is also important to get the government to act in a responsible way to ensure that we see changes, not just in words and emotion but to have a committee get things moving so that we meet that year timeline and get real progress. It will also be important for those industries to have the validation that we support their changes.

There also was consultation with the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association. The member was very concerned about how this would affect not only the daily lives of Canadians but also employment. He had discussions with the association about its concerns on the phase in approach so we could accommodate its special needs and ensure that restaurant industry would continue thrive. We are dealing with a bad decision to allow a substance in our food chain that is clearly threatening not only our current health but how we are bringing up youth. We also are dealing with the employment aspect so our restaurants are not going to be the victims of a transition to cleaner, safer food processing. That is why I was very impressed.

As the industry critic for our party and one who enjoys restaurants, I want to commend him for ensuring that we will see them as part of the process. Many students and single mothers work in the restaurant sector. They need protection. Therefore, it is important that any transition not affect their vulnerable status. Often they do not receive the wages and compensation they deserve, and it is very difficult work. The risk associated with individual businesses and restaurants is very high. We certainly do not want to impede the progress that individuals and chains can make.

I would also like to note that he met with the vice-president of McDonald's to hear the concerns of that company. In Denmark, McDonald's has moved to comply with the trans fats legislation. We have not seen Ronald McDonald running out of Denmark, which would probably be pretty hard in those big shoes. Nonetheless, McDonald's has stayed in Denmark. We hope to see the same thing happen in Canada. We do not want to be harshly punitive with any franchise. We want to work with them. New York Fries should be commended for being pioneers in this. That is very important.

I want to summarize by saying that Canada is not alone in this. Denmark has already moved in a progressive state. I again commend the member for Winnipeg Centre for meeting with the ambassador of Denmark. He also met with the ambassador of New Zealand. It also is interested in pursuing what Canada is doing now. We want to ensure that Canada is at the forefront of human health through banning a substance or, as a first step, reducing it from our diets. This would have terrific effects for our health, economy and our ability to proceed as a society

• (1220)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place among all parties and I believe that you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the 14th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be deemed tabled and concurred in on division.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—HEALTH

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Supply

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague gave the breadth and scope of the issue and how important it is to Canadians. He laid out very well the work that has been done by our member for Winnipeg Centre, and indeed by our caucus in canvassing this issue so thoroughly. By working with other organizations and by bringing it forward to particularly groups like the Heart and Stroke Foundation, it is now in a state that we can present it in the House. It has a lot of credibility and it is gathering support from all sides of the House. We are very glad to see that. We see this as a substantial public health policy decision.

Could the member comment on how he thinks this will impact the health of children? One concern is how we ensure that the decisions we make provide the most healthy environment for our children. As parents, we try to pay attention to what our kids eat and do. We try to ensure that they have good nutrition. However, that is not always possible. We live in a very consumer oriented world, a world where there are fashions and fads, and kids are caught up by TV advertising.

If this motion were to be approved and resulted in legislation and regulation, does the member believe that it would be of benefit to children in a broad sense?

• (1225)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I did not get a chance to discuss the human health factors on youth, which is my background previous to being here.

Right now we have 10 and 12 year olds who are being tested for high cholesterol, and that is wrong. That is the age at which they should have their hearts in the best of condition so they do not suffer consequences later on where they have to take medication for the rest of their lives. There is an expense on the medical side to that in terms of prescription drugs required. At the same time there is a human health expense from the cumulative effect of high cholesterol, and that is important.

As well, it is one of the reasons why I believe that only labelling as a formulation of protection of consumers is wrong. For example, labels on baby food do not provide protection. At the same time we are not providing the right choices for people to make.

We need to ensure that our kids have the proper choices in front of them. Sometimes they have busy lives, just like ourselves, and make the improper choices on the spur of the moment because there is little from which to choose. If trans fats in some of the fast foods are reduced, I believe this will help kids. It certainly will provide immediate benefits. The accumulative cycle of what we are doing now will be harmful to people as they age.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the mover of the motion, this is very good initiative in terms of getting it forward, increasing education and information and other things like that. However, I would like to point out to the member that one of the most hazardous intakes into human bodies is that of cigarettes. For example, we know that approximately 100 people every day die from heart and lung associated diseases that come from smoking. To me that is a much greater issue than this one. Perhaps the member's party will then soon put forward a motion to ban the smoking of cigarettes.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I remember when I had my private member's motion in front of the House of Commons in the last session relating to environmental contaminants that affected human health and the banning of that. At that time the member said that he could not support the motion because he felt that I was calling for skunks to be considered as an environmental contaminant, which was absolute nonsense.

When we have identifiable factors that are affecting human health, we need to take appropriate action. The first step I would argue for cigarettes is to have the Canada pension plan stop investing in tobacco companies. That is the first step we can do to prevent this situation.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to rise in the House and speak in support of the excellent motion put forward by the NDP. It is well crafted and it provides a lot of substance. It provides very good direction to the government to come back within a year with legislation, if necessary, or regulation to ensure that we effectively eliminate trans fats in our foods where they are not naturally occurring.

The first thing I would like to do is thank our caucus member, the member for Winnipeg Centre, for the incredible amount of work he has done to get us to this point. His work is a testament to what a good Parliament can be and what the role of a private member can be.

We can be a pretty cynical lot in this place and we can do a lot of fighting. People watch that on TV during question period. People think that Parliament is about 45 minutes a day when we are going at it. That is part of what we do. It is about holding the government to account.

However, there is so much other work that takes place in the House, in committees and through private members' business as well. Particularly in this minority Parliament, Canadians have very good and high expectations about what will happen in this place.

Therefore, I am very proud that our member for Winnipeg Centre and the NDP caucus as a whole and our leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, have worked on this issue to bring it forward. We want to be constructive. We want to ensure that we develop sound public policy. Anyone who does any research or investigation, even at a fairly superficial level, will know that the issue of trans fats is the single most important public health issue that we can address with no financial cost to Canadians.

How many hours have we debated and sometimes fought in the House over health care funding and the state of our health care system? How many times have we had debates and had differences over what we call the determinates of health, but more so around our health care system? Yet here is an issue where we can take some action, through public policy, to have a dramatic impact on the lives of all Canadians.

As has been said a number of times in the debate today, we are talking about saving the lives of approximately 1,000 Canadians who would otherwise die prematurely as a result of the prevalence of trans fats in our diet, in our consumer environment and in our society.

Supply

I would like to speak briefly about what this motion would do. It seeks to commit the government to introducing legislation to ban trans fats by November 2005. First, it has a time line. It says within one year. We think that is very important. We want to ensure that progress is made on this issue and that it does not sit gathering dust on some shelf somewhere. Then everyone will say, "That was a good job, but that is the end of it". We want to make progress on the issue.

The motion also commits the government to being guided by the Heart and Stroke Foundation findings, not the industry. It has done an incredible amount of work on the issue in a very objective scientific way, with consultations, including with industry and with other elements of the scientific community. We think the motion is very good because it builds on the work that has already been done.

The other thing the motion does is effectively bans processed or manufactured trans fats, not those that are naturally occurring.

We know, for example, that in Denmark trans fats have been limited to 2 grams of 100 grams of fat or of any oil or food product. The motion before us today effectively eliminates trans fats, except where they are naturally occurring. It is not possible for us to get to an absolute zero level because there are trans fats in things such as cheese and other products that are naturally occurring.

We want to aim at the processing that takes place, and that does not need to take place. Again, the member for Winnipeg Centre has given a very good history of how we got into trans fats in the first place and how it has taken years for there to be a public consciousness about what this stuff does to us and why it kills us.

I have a few facts about trans fats. There is no question that they are linked to health risks such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity.

• (1230)

Trans fats are in a wide range of food products, everything from cereal to baby food, cookies to french fries. Name it and trans fats appear to be there. They are the most prevalent in highly processed foods. The World Health Organization recommends that the daily intake of trans fats be zero, yet astoundingly they are found in 40% of the products on supermarket shelves. This is something I find to be really alarming. This really gets to the heart of the matter.

Issues have come up about choice. Why do we have to do anything? Does everybody not have a choice? Yes, theoretically we all have a choice about a whole bunch of things. However, the reality of daily life for most people, especially working families, and particularly people who live below the poverty line, people with low incomes who have very few economic choices, is they rely on convenience foods, processed and fast foods. People may not be aware of what it is they are actually ingesting.

Yes, there is stuff on labels, but has anyone ever tried to read those labels? People could spend double the time in the supermarket trying to read every jar, tin, plastic container and processed food. They could triple their time in supermarkets, the 7-Eleven or wherever trying to figure out from the tiny print on the labels what the heck it is they are buying. Even that may not be the full information because there is information to tell us that even when products indicate they are trans fat free, that may not necessarily be the case.

The issue of choice is an important argument to deal with. I would argue that the choice is there, but we have a responsibility as parliamentarians once we know that a very high risk exists to take some action based on sound scientific development and sound public policy. That is what the motion is about.

Living in this kind of consumer culture, more and more we are bombarded with messages and choices. How many different kinds of french fries or packaged food can people buy when they go to the supermarket? I actually believe that people want to make good choices. Parents do not want their kids to get sick. They do not want their kids to have high cholesterol. They want their kids to have a good diet.

In some communities people have very good choices. There may be organic food markets. The people who can pay what may be an extra cost at a local store like that have good choices before them, but that does not exist for everyone. We are talking about broad societal impacts and that is something we cannot ignore.

We should heed the work and recommendations of the World Health Organization which said earlier this year that governments should move to ban trans fats. That is exactly what we need to do. We need to show leadership in that area. Denmark has already done that and we need to do it as well to ensure that we are taking that kind of positive proactive action.

I hope the rest of the debate today is very positive and constructive. I hope that all members of the House will see that the motion is serious. It has real substance to it. It is about giving healthy choices to Canadians. It is about promoting the health of our families, which is something we should all support 100%.

• (1235)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately I will not be able to get on the speaker's list for today so if you will indulge me, I would like to make a couple of comments and then ask the member a question.

It is clear from the debate that there is a strong consensus with regard to addressing the issue raised by the hon. member. There is also consensus that action should be taken.

The member has also raised the aspect of labelling. Although that is not part of the motion proper, it does raise the whole question of how we take this as a starting point for other things.

It is simply impossible to legislate human behaviour. That is why we have to rely on public education.

The member talked about the labelling of food products. We certainly know, for instance, with regard to labelling of beverage alcohol in the United States where there are health warning labels, there always has been this problem that the print is very small and unreadable.

Health Canada engaged research firms to do a study. It was felt that the principal area of communication to the public with regard to good health and lifestyle choices was in doctors' offices. That is where the literature should be, as part of the examination, et cetera.

This should be viewed as a starting point but we should continue, as legislators, to look for other opportunities through other existing venues to promote good public education for healthy lifestyle choices.

● (1240)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, of course I would agree that legislation on its own is not enough to bring about a change in people's attitudes. We also have to have continual education. I think people are looking for that. People are yearning for information that is accessible to them so they can find out what the hell they are eating and what is going on with their kids.

I would add to the member's comment by saying that education needs to be focused at parents, but it also needs to be focused at kids. Surely the place to do that is in our schools. Many school boards struggle with the issue of whether to allow junk food in schools, or to try and provide healthy choices. Sometimes there are corporate sponsors and whatnot.

By approving this motion and by ensuring that there is education we would be assisting bodies such as school boards in providing a much better education platform.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the remarks of the member for Vancouver East. As usual, she has brought her passion for her constituents and all Canadians to the fore in making her comments.

I want to focus on the issue of choice. From the time I have been in the House this morning, it seems to me that those who are sympathetic but not quite there are thinking that maybe labelling is where we ought to go. The support for that is it would provide choice. It would leave the impression that choice is the be all and end all.

We recognize the world leadership role of the World Health Organization, and I think of SARS in particular. In light of that, we ought to be taking what the World Health Organization has said about this issue very seriously. I would ask the member to comment on and underscore the issue of choice and why labelling under the guise of choice is really not the answer, given the scientific evidence that is before us now.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, this is where we get into the details of the debate about what it is before us.

Labelling is not a bad thing, but it is a very minimal step. We do know that even under the government's requirements for mandatory labelling to be phased in by the end of 2007, some things would be exempt, for example, single serving fast food portions. Labelling just does not get us there and I think this is what the member was getting at. We want to go beyond labelling and we want to effectively eliminate trans fats.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in today's debate. Any time we can draw attention to the importance

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of healthy living for Canadians, we are making a contribution to the health of our citizens.

I am also pleased to support the motion put forward today and to note the cooperation shown by all parliamentarians. I congratulate the member for Winnipeg Centre for bringing it to our attention.

I want to assure members that the government is already taking action to reduce the risks posed by trans fats in Canadian foods. I will expand on this later. I want to underline the fact that good progress has been made on nutritional labelling and that the response from food companies and other stakeholders has been positive.

It is also important to view the trans fat issue from a larger health perspective. While we will reduce processed trans fats, we must also examine the larger question about healthy eating and healthy living for Canadians and in the Canadian context.

● (1245)

[*Translation*]

First, I would like to address the comparison that was made between Canada and Denmark. We know that, since June 1, 2003, Denmark has had regulations limiting to 2% the trans fatty acid content of shortenings and oils sold directly to consumers or used as ingredients in foods. I want to emphasize that nothing similar has been put in place anywhere else in the world, even in other countries of the European Union.

It has been suggested that we take a similar approach here, in Canada. We must, however, take into account the major differences between the two countries.

The Danish and Canadian diets are different in that the Danes make a much greater use of animal fat and tropical oils than we do. Denmark is also a much smaller country than Canada. Because food production is much less centralized, it is not necessary for products to have as long a shelf life as they do in Canada. The stability provided by partially hydrogenated fats, which are the main source of trans fats, is thus not as essential in Denmark as it is in Canada. The Danes may therefore limit the use of these fats without changing their eating habits.

[*English*]

On September 9 of this year the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada convened a group of scientific experts to discuss trans fats. That group expressed the same reservation that I just made. They made the point that a measure to limit trans fats in the way I just described may have been appropriate in Denmark but not necessarily in Canada. More than that, they expressed concern that with an imposed limit of 2% trans fat, as is the case in Denmark, man-made trans fat could simply be replaced by natural trans fat or by saturated fats in processed foods and thus there would be no improvement to health.

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These experts also agreed that there is no evidence to indicate that 2%, which is the level commonly cited by proponents of a ban and the one used in Denmark, is the level where health benefits are optimized. Their view was that it is essential that the healthiest alternatives be used as a substitute for fats and oils high in trans fatty acids. This means that the relative risk of trans versus saturated fats requires further consideration given the Canadian diet.

[Translation]

That is not the only work being done to explore the best way for dealing with trans fat, beyond relatively simple statements, in order to capture all the complex factors at stake.

I am happy to recognize the conscientious work being done on this issue by two members of the Senate, who, besides being senators, are also internationally renowned heart specialists Senators Yves Morin and Wilbert Keon.

Senators Morin and Keon have joined the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada in considering the best approach to dealing with the issue of trans fat in foods. They have consulted scientific experts and food industry representatives to get their views on the best way to proceed.

[English]

I am happy to recognize the suggestion put forward by the Minister of State for Public Health that the Standing Committee on Health could provide a forum for all parliamentarians to make their views known. I would also expect that the committee would receive representations from the food processing and service industries, health associations, government, academia and others.

I do want to underline that this debate needs to recognize that we are already seeing action on trans fats. I would like to reiterate that Health Canada is already working in partnership with the Heart and Stroke Foundation and other stakeholders. That work is taking place in a fashion that is collaborative in nature and scientific in orientation. It is an effort that we are happy to recognize and draw on.

[Translation]

I talked about implementing nutritional labelling that will also indicate the trans fat content. In anticipation of new labelling requirements, the food industry is already making an effort to reduce or eliminate the content of trans fat in food.

At least 13 major food product companies have announced they would reduce or eliminate trans fat from the food they produce. In fact, the major margarine brands, for the most part, are already trans fat free.

[English]

The agricultural processing sector is also responding to the increased awareness of the impact of trans fats among Canadians. Canadian industries have listened to the evidence. They know that our major vegetable oil, canola, is susceptible to the production of trans fats when it is processed into semi-solid fat that food producers use.

These producers have acted, on the encouragement of the federal government over many years, to adopt interesterification, which is an

alternative means of producing semi-solid fat without trans fats. The final point I want to make about healthy living and public health in general is that our state of health is the result of an interplay of many, many factors.

• (1250)

[Translation]

There is no simple solution for ensuring optimal health, but things such as abstaining from smoking, eating in moderation, having a balanced diet and exercising regularly have clear positive results.

[English]

I am pleased that, in building a new approach to public health through the new public health agency of Canada and with the appointment of the first chief public health officer of Canada, we will be able to focus on more effective efforts to prevent chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease, prevent injuries, and respond to public health emergencies and infectious disease outbreaks. All those are elements in helping Canadians to achieve the best possible health.

As part of this, we will build on the work that is already taking place by offering collaboration with the provinces and territories, and with many other partners to keep Canadians healthy, including the work on food and nutrition issues that are part of our debate today.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for his excellent presentation. It is obvious that he is well informed on this issue.

I think his overview of what the government has done to date on this was excellent. Perhaps he could suggest to us what the next steps to consider would be in connection with the initiative we are discussing today?

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his excellent question.

It is recognized that the best way to get results is through public pressure from the Canadian public for more information. The public will put pressure on the market and action will be forthcoming.

This cannot be the only approach, however. We have to see whether there are regulatory measures or arrangements that need to be taken, or whether the legislation needs to be changed. These matters need to be debated, both here in the House and in the Standing Committee on Health. As the motion states, we need to be guided by the findings of the task force, which includes Public Health, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, the agri-food industry and many others. We need to see what their recommendations will be.

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[English]

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the lull in time that people allowed me to make it into the House. I would like to indicate right off the bat that I was not eating trans fats in the lobby. It was purely a nutritional vegetable meal.

I am pleased that we have the opportunity in the House today to discuss the whole issue of trans fats in our food. I have listened to a number of the speeches this morning. My colleague from Winnipeg Centre did a fantastic job putting all the facts and figures out about trans fats and the impact they will have on the health of Canadians. He even talked about the impact that would not be felt within the industry. He indicated, and I am going to emphasize this as well, that the industry itself, the vegetable oil and canola industry, recognizes that trans fats are a problem.

I have the information that came from the canola growers and the vegetable oil producers in Canada. I want to read one of the sections that they have put out as information about this issue. The Vegetable Oil Industry of Canada states that it agrees with and supports the position of the World Health Organization and specifically its recommendation that saturated fats and trans fats be replaced by polyunsaturated vegetable oils to lower coronary heart disease.

There is no issue here. Everyone involved recognizes that trans fats are unhealthy. Quite frankly, I might say that trans fats are deadly. They really are. There is no question.

As a parent and now as a grandparent, I feel quite responsible for the fact that probably over the course of all of my children's lives that I put trans fats on their plates and risked their lives. It hits home when we see it in that sense. I can say now that it is rare that our grandchildren will get them. Those of us who know about trans fats will try to avoid them as much as possible, after this point in time when we have found out how bad trans fats are.

It is not always that easy to find out about trans fats or other things that are not healthy. I say that in response to one of my colleagues from the Conservatives who this morning suggested that people have to take responsibility for their own actions. He mentioned about drinking so much pop and that he gained weight and how much weight he had lost since he quit drinking pop. That is all well and good, if the member recognizes that what is happening to him is because of excesses and he tends not to care about his health and does not pay any attention.

However, for a lot of people in our country, it is a matter of not being able to have that choice. There are a number of people within my riding of Churchill who do not have access to healthy foods. Even if the healthy foods are there, they do not have the dollars to buy them. Many of them are in a situation where they are living off the shelf with the cheaper products that are not going to be hindered in the shipping process. Therefore, they are at risk.

I think it is imperative that we as parliamentarians put in place legislation that takes those trans fats right out of the system, as my colleague from Winnipeg Centre indicated and it is indicated within our motion, to as low a value as possible. We recognize there are some foods that have natural trans fats and we cannot deal with that.

I also want to note the fact that it really would be irresponsible for us to suggest that it is just up to individuals to make a decision. We

all recognize that children will not necessarily read the labels. I can tell the House that there are a lot of adults who cannot read the labels and not just because they cannot read. Some of the writing on the labels is very small and when people reach my age, and do not have their glasses on in the store, they do not have a fighting chance.

As my colleague from the Bloc mentioned earlier today, I for one have tried to do that because I, as well, have high cholesterol. I went through a process of how I was going to do my damndest not to support those brand name drug companies. I can boycott them and do whatever I can, but when it comes to one's health it is tough to do that. I was going to make every effort not to have to go on that medication to get my cholesterol down, so I faithfully went on a program of cutting my fats and cutting my cholesterol. I thought I was doing great until one day when I was at work my assistant said, "But are you looking at the trans fats?"

• (1255)

Then I started paying attention to the trans fats. I started finding out that all those wonderful things I had done to keep my levels down were shot because I was eating trans fats. Quite frankly, I was darn annoyed because I had really made an effort to do this.

In spite of what we might think sometimes, Canadians trust our system for the most part. Canadians think that everything out there is safe because it is being allowed in our system. Canadians have faith in our system. When there is something inside a product that really is poisonous and toxic to our system, we do not think it will be on our table. We do not think it will be on the shelves. In reality it is. That feeling of safety is there because people in Canada trust our system. Canadians trust the system to be safe. As a result of that trust, they tend not to read the labels. They think everything is good and it will not harm us.

It is unfair to say that people are irresponsible if they do not read the labels. They are trusting. They trust our system to be fair to them. They trust the system to keep them safe.

At this moment I want to indicate that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

I think it is extremely important that we take trans fats right out of the system. There has been some talk out there that the NDP really got an issue this time with trans fats and that no one even cares because we have all these serious issues out there.

This may not be that sexy an issue that they speak of. It is not missile defence. It is not out there gunning for the government's scandalous approaches and the lack of dollars, the misplaced dollars. Trans fats is not that issue; however, it is an issue that directly hits home to the health of Canadians and their safety. That is what makes it so important.

The NDP believes strongly in our health system. We believe in a sustainable health system. This is part of a sustainable health system. It hits at the foundation and where the problem is, and improving the health of Canadians to make our health system more sustainable.

Supply

It is crucially important that we support this legislation. I am hoping the motion will pass when it comes to a vote. When that happens, we will hold the government accountable to ensure that it follows through. That is what is crucially important. I encourage all Canadians who are listening to make a point of letting their representatives know that they want to see this motion passed, and that they want to see a bill put in place.

I also want to acknowledge the industry. I mentioned the vegetable oil producers. There is also the canola industry. I am originally from Saskatchewan and I must say that I am one of those people, a New Democrat to the heart, where if something is bad it will be boycotted. I faithfully do all of those things.

As a result, because much of the canola was being produced in Saskatchewan, I have faithfully used canola for years. Again, I was a little bit upset when I found out that hydrogenated products were being used and that they were probably killing me off over the years. However, I want to acknowledge that the canola industry has been working very hard for the last number of years to put in place different types of canola that are better.

I want to indicate that the canola industry supports the fact that trans fats are not good for people. It is working hard to put in place better types of canola.

I recognize the industry's concern that saturated fats might be used more than other types of fats now. If this motion were to pass, we would have to ensure that we have limits on saturated fats. We must continue the education to address the problem, as my colleague from the Conservative Party mentioned. Excesses of anything are no good for us. It does not matter whether we are drinking one bottle of Coke a day, if that bottle of Coke is hard on the person, or whether it is five bottles, and no offence to the Coke industry and let me just say cola, but none of that is good for us in excess.

Trans fats, even in the smallest amounts, are not good for us. That is why it is so crucial that we act responsibly and get them out of the Canadian food supply.

• (1300)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the fine speech we have just heard from the member for Churchill. I wish to pick up on one of the points that she made about the way that Canadians have an expectation that the health system and the food system combined are safe in this country.

In that regard, I would ask her about some of the criticisms that we have had as a party, as we have proposed this motion to deal with the substantial reduction, if not the outright ban of trans fats in our foods. One of the criticisms that has been levelled is that we should leave it to the industry and allow it to put in place voluntary regulations and controls.

Would the member feel that this would be a viable alternative for the country to follow?

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais: No, Mr. Speaker, I do not think it is and I will tell him why. We always see in a system that if people are allowed to put a product on the market at a lesser cost and not have to care about the health of Canadians, they are going to do it.

Again, quite frankly, I see lower income Canadians as the target of those types of companies. Those of us who are able to become educated about trans fats and can afford the extra dollars to buy a slightly more expensive brand are going to do that to get rid of the trans fats. People on low incomes or, in a lot of cases, people with no income living off just bare-bones social assistance, cannot do that. So I think it is important that we take the product right out of the system.

As well, we would level the playing field. We always hear that we do not want to make it unfair for certain businesses. This would level the playing field for all those involved and make it okay for companies to go ahead and do this. Maybe they are going to incur some initial costs, but it should be fair all around. Everybody has to get rid of it because it is unhealthy. That should be our defining factor: this is absolutely unhealthy and unsafe. That is what we should be doing.

• (1305)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the member for Churchill for a very good speech, but I too am thinking that there is a dilemma we face here, that is, if we are going to go down the road of banning substances that are harmful, the list is huge. There are many things on the list that I think are considerably more dangerous than the trans fats, although I am not arguing about that. I think there is some science to back this up. I would like to see more studies. I also think, however, that if we were to ban some things we may be introducing some other elements in terms of preserving food, et cetera, that might be even worse. There needs to be a good timeline granted for these studies to make sure that we do this thing right and do not have too many unintended consequences.

I am very concerned about this and also about the fact that there are many substances like this that we hear about from time to time. I will not bother mentioning them, because we all know what they are. It would be unfair for me to once again talk about the cola drinks to which I was addicted for many years. They are very, very bad, and young people suck in the advertising for these things.

How do we ever bring this to an end in terms of banning things that people are going to eat or drink and are harmful to themselves?

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises a very good point. He talked about the cola drinks that he was addicted to. I have to think that if there is a product out there which is that addictive and an industry preying on young people with that product, then I would say, using his terminology of addiction, that maybe we do have to look at some levels of it. It has to be done the same way we did with the use of tobacco products when we knew the industry was trying to get people addicted just to sell a product, with no consideration for the health of the individual or for the cost to the country involved.

I look at this in depth in the sense that a harmful product is one thing and one can make decisions based on whether a product is going to be harmful, but trans fats are deadly. They go beyond harmful. They are deadly. That is recognized. We do not need any more studies. There are enough studies out there. Even the canola industry and the vegetable oil industry recognize that. That is what is important. We recognize it. Let us do the right thing.

Supply

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for sharing her time with me this afternoon. In a number of ways we have some very similar views and I will be looking to expound upon those this afternoon

As some hon. members have mentioned, this breaks down to a principle of governance. Is there a role for government in stepping in on the food industry and starting to legislate things that the industry would rather direct itself? I will be making some arguments this afternoon that say yes, we absolutely do need to step in, because the self-regulatory environment is the environment that allows for industry to do as it will, over time having self-monitoring and allowing this process to go on. It is harmful and in fact is costing us lives and billions of dollars in our health care system.

I would like to talk about junk food, because in a sense that is what we are talking about here. We are talking about food that is junk, that we would consider garbage in some senses, because of its harmful effects on people every day, particularly young people. I stand here as both the environment critic for our party and the youth critic. I will mention this a little later on and speak about why I think this is both an environmental and a youth issue.

This is about economics. We will have a debate next week on the costs of health care, about how much to spend on health care, about promises of billions more, and about Canadians demanding more support for their health care services. Very little discourse is given over to preventive medicine, to preventive effects that we in the House, in this legislature, can make to actually positively affect our health care costs.

We seem to worry about Canadian citizens only when they end up in the emergency room. We seem to worry about them only when they end up on the operating table. Then we discuss how much money we have to spend on them, as opposed to taking simple, low cost initiatives like we have in front of us here in banning trans fats and making a statement to industry that this is no longer acceptable.

The decision on this should be easy. I agree with my colleague from Churchill that when a government does not know what to do about an issue, it decides to study it. It sends the issue to committee where it is studied some more in blue ribbon panels. But we have the studies. We have looked at trans fats. They are a very serious determinant of health. They have a very negative effect on health. My colleague is absolutely correct. Trans fats are not just bad for us; they will kill us. The science is in on it. This decision should be easy.

There is a question about exactly what we are waiting for. In fact, it seems to be a point of indecision about not wanting to make any bold moves. In this government, frankly, obviously due to the representation that we see in front of us here today, the concern over this issue is not very strong. The government would like to pass it along, perhaps to another study group, rather than take any bold initiative. Many of my colleagues on all sides of the House have been very frustrated with the lack of forward progress on any particular issue. Health care is another one. Simply throwing billions more at the issue is not the answer. Romanow talked about reform and here is the place to do it.

Industry will always balk at regulations. That is its job. That is the job the lobbyists perform at the little soirees we attend here. It is their

job to make sure that the regulations, the so-called red tape, are not in place so that the profit motive can remain ultimate. They always ensure that Canadian companies have the most profitability and that there are no regulations to prevent anything. That is simply wrong, of course, and that is the whole idea of having a legislative body.

There is a long and sordid history of industries resisting any form of legislation which they know to be right. A good example is that of the auto industry and seat belts. For many years the auto industry simply said that seat belts cost too much money to put into cars and that it would ruin the industry if any sort of legislation anywhere was ever implemented that forced automakers to put seat belts into cars.

I dare say that if any automakers came forward today and suggested that they would make a new model of car without seat belts, they would, first, not be able to sell any, and second, would not even be able to get the car out into the market, because it would be illegal. That is because at some point government stepped in and said that seat belts were a good idea, that self-regulation was no longer working. That technology existed for years.

Technologies do exist to replace trans fats. We have heard that from industry. I have some quotes, one from the Canadian Food and Consumer Products companies, which states that the companies share the ultimate objectives set out in this motion: to provide consumers with healthier alternatives to trans fats. They say that they understand the importance of identifying replacements for their trans fat foods as quickly as possible and their member companies are moving expeditiously to do so.

I would like to give them a little more encouragement. I would like the House to say that not only are they encouraged to do so, they are mandated to do so and they must do so in order to bring their products to market. This is not an anti-industry movement, as opposed to what any other member in the House might say.

Another example is asbestos, which was quite a contentious issue for many years because it was a debate on environment and health versus jobs. But at some point somewhere a government took leadership and said that asbestos was killing us, causing cancer, and killing our children in our schools. Yet the House is still faced with the challenges of asbestos in many of the walls of the House, again because of a lack of leadership, a lack of direction on something that we know kills us. Perhaps there is some motive in there, but I would rather not speculate.

Smoking is another example. It is clearly targeting the youth market. As youth critic, I understand how the smoking industry works and what it focuses toward. Trans fats almost can be lumped, so to speak, into that same issue and same focus.

Supply

•(1310)

Of course these foods taste great. Of course they are appealing, particularly to young people, and of course these foods are something they are going to demand in the marketplace. The marketplace goes after young people. When motivating families to buy certain foods, the marketplace does not go after parents. It goes after the children, who are much more susceptible and easy to manipulate.

Therefore, looking at simply taking trans fats out and replacing them with something that is much healthier would be far more important than simply saying that the industry will do this on its own.

The very last environmental example I would like to raise, which is another industry one, is that of CFCs. Just the other day I was reading over some documents about when governments around the world were looking to ban CFCs. We know they are harmful to the ozone and human health. Industry said then that the industries would collapse, that children would die because there would not be any refrigeration for vaccines, that it would be a travesty, thousands of jobs would be lost and it would not help the environment. Then it was again a government that took some leadership and said that this was important.

Years later, industry is doing fine. The reports we are getting back from industries now are that this has been a profitable piece of legislation for them. They have made tens of millions of dollars from this one piece of legislation to ban these things.

Again industry says there is no need to legislate, no need to ban and no need to make certain directions. I call to the attention of members the examples I have just given. Industry's mandate is not to serve the community. It is not to serve the country of Canada. Its mandate is to make profit for its shareholders. I have no problem with that. I ran a small business myself and I understood my mandate. My mandate was to make sure that I could keep my employees going and I did well by the community.

Our mandate here is different. Our mandate here is to ensure that we have a viable economy in Canada while ensuring the health of Canadians. Our mandate is also to try to control costs, which we expend all the time, costs such as those we are going through right now in the budgetary consultations.

To simply say that health care has enough money in it is wrong. To say that the answer is to throw more money at it is also wrong. We have to look at the ways that Romanow considered to absolutely reduce the costs and to, again, prevent people from ending up in hospitals in the first place.

Type 2 childhood diabetes is a serious concern in my riding. I have a very rural riding with a great native population. Native leaders are constantly coming to me saying that we have to do something about the epidemic of type 2 childhood diabetes. Clearly this act would push us toward doing something about that.

I will end my discussion here simply because this is a call for leadership from the government. After hearing some support from government, I am a little unsure if it is ready to go out and bring the big stick, as it were, toward industry. Again, there is a call on this

lack of leadership. For once, please, in the new House, in this conciliatory Parliament, in a Parliament where we actually consult with one another, let us do this.

We have done this. We have consulted with people in the health care industry and in the manufacturing industry and we know this can be done. Government needs to fulfill its role, which is to provide leadership for Canadians and protect Canadians.

•(1315)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by the hon. member and I agree that our mandate is to work hard for Canadians and to make sure that the food we provide in Canada is safe.

I believe the mandate is also to provide good decisions. Good decisions are based on the information we have.

I have a question for the hon. member. Why would the mover of the motion be opposed to having this referred back to committee to have all the information put on the table so that the decision the House makes is based on all the information? Why would we want to rush through this and make a decision that may turn out to be the wrong decision? Would the member support having this go back to committee to get all the information?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, in fact I would not recommend sending it back to committee. I understand that the hon. member is concerned. What I would ask him to do is consult with us, particularly the hon. member to my right, who has done a great deal of work and research on this. The research is in.

I will be perfectly frank with the House. I am new to this file. It has only been a week that this has been front and centre on my desk. I am learning as I go. Initially, similar to the hon. member for Churchill, I was not necessarily convinced that this was the most pressing thing. The more that I read on this particular issue, the more I am convinced that in this is a role and a place for government.

If we send it to committee and have it go around the block, my real concern in a minority government is when exactly a decision will come forward. Does the health committee have other concerns on its plate? Absolutely. There is a bunch more.

I would encourage the member to come across the floor some time for a brief visit, consult with us and find out what we have been finding out. In fact, the evidence is extremely strong. We are learning from the Heart and Stroke Foundation that this is a place where we can do strong work together.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Skeena region of northern B.C. for raising an issue that I do not think has had enough time dedicated to it so far and that is the disproportionate impact of this toxic, harmful food product on low income people and, in some cases, rural and aboriginal people.

It is my feeling that it takes a certain amount of economic stability to have a healthy diet for one's family these days. A real class issue is involved here as this particular public health hazard affects certain demographics and economic and social groups.

I wonder if my colleague would comment on that.

Supply

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague made an excellent point. Oftentimes security is associated with the ability to make choices. My riding is a rural riding and there is a great deal of poverty within it. It is made up of 30% to 35% of first nations. When I am at the supermarket or attending community festivals I see people who are not eating properly and that is based partly upon the fact that they do not have a choice. On our current salaries, we as members of Parliament can make good choices for ourselves in the supermarket. We can choose whether to acquire products that have trans fat or not.

Compared to 15 or 20 years ago, the increase in the so-called junk food industry has been huge. On a recent trip to the United States I noticed that not only was one aisle completely taken up with these types of products but there were not two because one was not enough. These foods are extraordinarily inexpensive, easy to use and can be packed into a kid's lunch. The industry's motive is to make its food accessible, easy to attain and as cheap as possible and as expedient as possible for families.

The difficulty is when families do not have a choice and are unable to make healthy choices for their families because their budgets are restricted. In rural communities like mine, people who do not have a lot of money do not get fresh fruits and vegetables in the wintertime.

The member is absolutely correct. This is an issue that impacts mostly on low and middle income families, particularly first nations.

• (1320)

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Niagara West—Glanbrook.

This is an important issue and one on which the nation is becoming fast aware that trans fats are in our foods and are causing a significant amount of damage.

In the last Parliament, when I was the senior critic for health, we had the opportunity to look at this issue in committee. It was under the labelling review that we had initiated last spring. At that time we had an opportunity to hear witnesses. We had three days on this issue talking to a number of experts behind this and in the industry to discern for sure if trans fats were indeed a problem in our diet. I was alarmed at some of the testimony of the witnesses who came forward and the conclusive evidence, I would say without refute, that trans fats are not good.

We are here today discussing a motion brought forward by the NDP. It is not often that I agree with members of the NDP on the intent of a motion but on the intent of this one I give them good marks. I do challenge them not to play politics with this issue. It is a very important issue and it is more important that we actually do something constructive than to get headline news on the evening channels.

When I discern what had happened in committee, we were to examine all of the information with regard to this and bring forward a report to Parliament, lay it in the House so that all members from across the country would have the information that was given to us at the health committee and be able to truly discern, with many more facts, what was actually behind the issue of trans fats in our diet. The

report was supposed to be done by September of this year but an election was called and nothing has taken place.

It is interesting to listen to hon. members from the NDP. They are so opposed to trans fats in the diet, which obviously are harmful to society, and yet as far as marijuana which is also very harmful to society, they want to legalize it. That is kind of like the pot calling the kettle black, but nonetheless, they will have to wrestle that through with their constituents as those issues come forward.

When it comes to this issue of trans fats in our diet, there are two issues: First, will we get rid of trans fats, which science and experience tells us is bad and harmful? Yes, I believe we should as a society and there is no argument there. Second, should we agree with the motion and does it actually achieve that goal in a way that is responsible? How will we achieve the goal that we want to eventually get to? That is where I have a considerable amount of concern.

We have to look back as to why trans fats are in our diet to begin with. It came forward in committee reports in the early 1970s that trans fats were not good for us and they should not be allowed in our diets. They have only been around for the last 30 to 35 years and only in our diets for 30 to 35 years. Should we allow them in? The report at that time said that we should not, nonetheless, a decision was made to allow them because we were having a significant amount of problems with saturated fats. The saturated fats in our diet are increasing and are very harmful to us. We knew that and in those days the ParticipACTION program was in full flight. We remember those ads on television where the 35 year old Canadian was not as fit as the 70 year old Swede.

In our attempt to do something good and healthy for society, we decided to replace saturated fats with trans fats, which is pushing hydrogen through them so they solidify at room temperature, which others have described. We made a decision to replace them with something that was even worse than we had originally. This is not to say that saturated fats are good because they certainly are not. All of the science is very clear on that. We need to reduce saturated fats and trans fats.

Unfortunately, we have a population that does not know the difference between saturated fats, trans fats, polyunsaturated fats and semi-hydrogenated fats. All of those and more are on the labels but we have a population that really does not understand them. I would suggest that most people in the House do not understand the difference and the nuances of those different fats and yet they are on our labels. Some people would argue that we should have choice. Yes, choice is important but if we do not know what the choices really are and we do not know what it means when we say there are a certain amount of trans fats or saturated fats in our diet, then what good does it do?

• (1325)

The issue then becomes whether we should legislate trans fats. I think my colleague just finished saying that was a role that perhaps the government should play. Perhaps it is.

Supply

We spoke to the NDP with regard to some of the amendments and were able to get some of them in there. However we wanted to finish the work the health committee had started, which was to file a report and give all the information to the House so members could, with good knowledge and with the support of the health committee that examined this from all sides, make an informed decision on the impact it would have on international trade, on the domestic competitiveness of different industries and its affect on the different industries. All of that, and more, could have been examined and we could have brought that information to the House.

We asked the NDP to change the motion to read, "Let us have that report by committee in this House before March 31, 2005", which is just a few months away. I believe that would have been a much more responsible way to have dealt with this motion, not to play politics looking for evening headlines but to actually move this agenda along in a much more progressive way so that we had all the facts before the House prior to making a decision on whether to bring forward regulation within a year and ban trans fats from our food shelves.

This issue could have repercussions in that we could make the same mistake today that we did back in the 1970s. We should lower saturated fats and trans fats in our diet but if we get rid of trans fats we could go back to perhaps palm oil, which is 50% saturated fat, which is industry's biggest fear. We would rather give our own industry, the canola industry, the opportunity to bring forward its new technology, which would allow 7% saturated fat, and replace it in a much more healthy way.

We have an opportunity to not only eliminate trans fats from our diet but to allow an industry in Canada to put its own hybrids of canola, which are much more healthy, on the shelves and solve the problem in a two win situation. We would win both by making it healthier and by producing an opportunity for industry within this country. Now, that is where we should be going.

One of the facts on trans fats and where we are at as a society is certainly the obesity problem. It is such a problem that it is estimated that it costs Canadians \$6.3 billion annually because of poor diet, and \$1.8 billion annually in indirect costs. Consumers, producers and the food chains are recognizing the need to change and the need to do something about this.

There is also trans fats in mothers' breast milk at average levels of 7.2% and high levels up to 17%. This is serious.

Just to get back to the canola industry, one of the new technologies, as I was saying, is this high oleic acid canola. I believe around a million acres of it was produced this last year. I am a canola grower myself, in my own riding, and I know quite a bit about the new technologies in canola. The industry is now putting out to contract at the present time for next year. This is a very low trans fat free canola. It is a tremendous opportunity for Canada and the Canadian industry.

The debate around this whole issue is twofold. The first is to get rid of it. I would agree with getting rid of trans fats from the Canadian diet. I think we should move as quickly as we can on that. However we should do it in the right way, with all the facts and knowing all the repercussions. We do not want to knee-jerk react like we did in the 1970s. We want to do something that would be

productive and would allow industry to conform to the new legislation and to the new opportunities, I would say, for them. New York Fries is a perfect example. It has eliminated trans fats from its menu as a marketing opportunity.

● (1330)

More marketing opportunities are needed. I think we can do that, but we should follow the right process. I do not know which way I am going to vote on the motion; I will decide when the vote comes up. I agree with the concept but I am a little nervous about how we are going to get there.

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I was speaking earlier I mentioned how much the industry had done to address this issue. The member mentioned the canola industry. Let us get the figures down as they have been put out in the release. Over the past three years canola farmers have begun to grow a higher value type of canola called high oleic canola. It will have less trans fat. It actually will not have trans fat. It will have a different type of fat at the 7% value. Farmers are being paid a premium to grow that type of canola. As much as 50% of the 12 million acres of canola grown each year has high oleic content. Therefore, the industry has recognized this is a serious problem.

I am finding it a bit hard to comprehend that we know that something can take lives. There is no question about it. This is not like some issues where one person says it is not bad for us or the industry is saying it is not bad for us. The industry recognizes it is bad for us.

We cannot allow this to be delayed any longer. We know what happens in the House. My colleague mentioned being at the health committee. It was at the health committee and what happened? We ended up in an election and all that work is gone. We want to get on this in a timely manner.

Part of our motion reads:

And that this House hasten the development of replacements to processed trans fats by urging the government to enact regulation, or if necessary legislation within one year, guided by the findings of a multi-stakeholder Task Force—

We are not saying we are going to do this without involving the industry or other people. We want them to be there:

—including the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and following the consultation process with scientists and the industry currently underway—

How can the member not support that motion?

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of ways I could not support it. I am trying to support it, but it is difficult.

The recommendation was to have the health committee look at this and actually file a report in the House by March 31. This was the negotiation I tried to make with the mover and yet he said no to that.

If members are looking for legislation or regulation within a year, I am talking about taking three or four months to go through a process that would have advanced it much faster and would have had the weight of an entire committee to present it before the House.

I am glad the member talked about the canola industry. The canola industry is actually moving very fast to deal with this. The industry hopes that within five to ten years 50% of the 12 million acres in Canada will be producing the low trans fat oil, but that is genetically modified. Therefore the member is saying that she agrees with genetic modification of those kinds of oils because they are much healthier and lower with respect to pesticide use and so on. This was another debate that we had on the side.

I am glad to hear the NDP is talking with reason in this area.

• (1335)

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take an opportunity to make a brief comment on this issue because I sat for a while on the health committee that dealt with this topic.

There is no doubt in my mind that we are talking about a substance that is highly toxic. There is no other way to describe it.

It is difficult for me and my constituents to understand why New York Fries, a small Canadian company, can make french fries that have no trans fatty acid, but that the world's largest restaurant chain, McDonald's, is not able to do it.

It is even more complicated when companies are able to do it in some Scandinavian countries and they are not able to do it spontaneously at the same time in Canada and in the United States. These things are very difficult for some of us. Is there speculation as to why these things seem to be so technologically able to proceed in some jurisdictions, yet they cannot at the same time by the same company in another jurisdiction?

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good comment. I was there at the committee and we asked those same questions. How can McDonald's do it in Denmark but it cannot do it here? Companies can do it here and we have to move them toward making that happen. The public is starting to demand it. The processors know that is the direction they are going. I told the Canola Council to be prepared because this is coming down. It is already ahead of the game.

We have to understand that New York Fries did it by starting to use canola oil in the oil base. It was a very simple thing to do in order to make it happen. That is what we should do right across the country.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again reiterate my support for the intent of the motion. As we move forward as a society and we find things that are harmful to us, it is important to take the time to debate the issues, to figure out what it is that we can do to make our food supply and those kinds of things safer. It is with that intent that I support the notion that as a government we should be looking at ways to reduce trans fats in some of the food products.

Where I have a bit of a challenge and where I see that the motion is a little vague on details is in terms of the implementation strategy. Even though I think that the motion makes some sense in terms of

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being able to discuss the awareness of trans fats and looking at ways we can reduce them, we need to look at how exactly we are going to do that. It is the details which sometimes cause us a challenge in terms of how that happens.

My colleague talked about saturated fats and trans fats. The motion talks about looking at trying to eliminate processed trans fats. It talks about how processed trans fats are harmful and more likely to cause heart disease than saturated fats. We could go back to what happened in the 1970s and 1980s with the whole issue of saturated fats. We ended up going with trans fats, and here we are some 15 to 20 years later talking about this issue and once again looking for a very quick resolution.

Finding the real answer to this problem of taking out trans fats is going to take some time. It is not going to happen overnight. There is going to be further research. As colleagues on both sides have said, that process is in place right now. People are looking at alternative forms, whether it be through canola or other fats. However, if we just rush from one thing to the next, we may be in the same situation 10 years from now, not having fully tested it and not having looked at ways to ensure that trans fats have been properly replaced with something more feasible.

Not only do we need to identify those products, but we need to make sure there is a sustainable supply. The member on the other side talked about New York Fries, one of the companies that has been able to successfully do this. The challenge with some of the larger companies is being able to find that sustainable supply for the kind of demand that they have across the border. Certainly New York Fries is a smaller company that has been able to harness some of the smaller products that are available.

If we are going to really make this happen in a meaningful way, we need to look at the long term effects and availability, and make sure that we are able to harvest this product in Canada. It is important to realize that when we replace these trans fats, we will have ended up just complicating the problem and not fixing it for a generation.

Trans fatty acids are like saturated fatty acids, or LDCs or bad cholesterol levels in the blood. Trans fatty acids, unlike saturated fatty acids, also reduce the blood levels of HDL, or the good cholesterol, further increasing the risk of coronary heart disease.

An opinion published by the scientific panel on dietetic products, nutrition and allergies, for the European Food Safety Authority in September 2004 concluded that at equivalent dietary levels, the effects of trans fatty acids on heart health may be greater than that of saturated fatty acids. However the current intakes of trans fatty acids are generally more than tenfold lower than those of saturated fatty acids whose intakes in many European countries exceeded the dietary recommendations. The opinion also reports that the available evidence does not provide a definitive answer to the question of whether TFAs have an effect on the LDLC different to a mixture of saturated fatty acids on a gram per gram basis.

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● (1340)

In the whole process of trans fats there is no evidence of a difference in the health impacts of an industrially produced trans fat and naturally occurring fats. In addition, according to the opinion published by the scientific panel on dietary products, nutrition and allergies for the European Food Safety Authority in September 2004, there are no methods of analysis applicable to the wide range of foods that can be distinguished between TFAs which are naturally present in foods, ruminant products, and those formed during the processing of fats, oils and foods.

What I am saying is that there are natural fats that occur in things as well as the trans fats and one of the challenges is trying to distinguish between the two. In order to effectively figure out how to reduce some of these things, one of the first steps is to make sure that we are able to measure that.

Members of the scientific panel of the Heart and Stroke Foundation also expressed concerns about the exclusion of natural trans fats in legislation since there is no feasible method to detect the differences between natural and man-made fats. Some felt the legislation would lack credibility if it did not include natural trans fats, that it would be unfair for some companies because it would create an uneven commercial playing field. It is very important to highlight the need to be able to distinguish between the two.

I cannot emphasize this enough. If we are going to look at changing what we are providing in our products, we need to look at the whole supply. I mentioned that before but I think it is critical.

We have talked about some other forums coming onside but we are not quite up to speed in terms of what we are able to transfer out at this point in time. We need to be mindful that we are not just looking at one industry but we are looking at all our supply. A whole range of suppliers needs to be in the loop as far as this goes.

I appreciate the intent of the motion in that it talks about a multi-stakeholder consultation process. That will be very important as we move this forward.

Members should understand that a huge number of stakeholders are involved, whether they be in the health sector or people involved in the food process. There are food service operators and food manufacturers who are working closely right now to develop these things. Some of the companies were mentioned earlier. We talked about some food manufacturers and food service companies that have made progress in the transition to trans free products, such as New York Fries which says it has removed all the trans from its fries. As well, Pizza Pizza has removed trans fats from its pizza dough.

We need to be mindful that finding a suitable replacement for oils that contain trans fats is a significant challenge. This is not something that can be done overnight. Also, we need to understand that in some cases alternative oils also present health risks, such as an increased polymerization of fat if the polyunsaturated oils are used for frying. Some replacement oils are only available in limited supply. I think we touched on that earlier.

Some TFA alternatives remain cost prohibitive while others cannot be easily substituted without changing the products, their taste, texture and shelf life. We need to realize that it does take time

to develop and test these new products. In addition to ensuring the alternative products provide the same flavour, texture, taste and structure characteristics, food companies and food service operators must be able to secure a reliable supply of the ingredient that is being substituted.

In conclusion, we support the intent of the motion but we need to be very mindful of the consequences on the whole food chain.

● (1345)

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the member's remarks. He seemed to be indicating favour and caution at the same time, and there is nothing wrong with that. We want to ensure that we make things better and never worse.

Where I have some difficulty, though, is where the hon. member expresses that he is of the opinion that we do not quite know the effects of things perhaps untested, and I am paraphrasing here and those were not exactly his words. However, given that Scandinavian countries are already doing a lot of this, surely we are talking about things that are at least in some regard tested. This is the first issue I want to raise with the hon. member.

My second issue is that I recognize, and I do not know if we want to call it micro amounts, that trace amounts occur naturally. If I remember the testimony before our committee, and I see the hon. member from Winnipeg is here, I think he will recall, as I do, that those trace amounts that occur naturally do not, and for reasons that I do not understand, produce the same side effects. In other words, they do not seem to produce the toxicity, if I can refer to it that way, as the product that we make into a trans fatty acid artificially, if that is the correct word for it. So there is that difference. I think that has been provided to us in testimony before.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, the first question he asked was in terms of this not been proven through technology and in other countries. I think once again we understand that this is happening. We have examples of where this is already happening in the industry right now.

I guess the concern that I would have would be the fact that although we do have this technology and we are able to see that it is happening in some companies so far, the real challenge that remains is that we do not have the ability all the way through to ensure we have the kind of supplies that we need for a whole industry.

The other concern I have is that we really need to look at studying the impacts, not only of our food processes or our end users here in Canada but at what kind of implications this will have as we do trade and as we look across the borders on some of these things.

I think once again the question was correct in saying we do have some of this available. Our challenge is trying to ensure that we have enough available at this point in time with such a short lead in timeframe.

Supply

•(1350)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's speech. One of the points he was making was that we do not want to cause a situation where food production companies have to compromise quality or taste in using an alternate oil product. The second point he made was that we need to ensure that there is an adequate amount of alternate oil product, so that they can reformulate their manufacturing process.

In the first instance, we now know that companies do not have to compromise either quality or taste to get away from trans fats and go to a healthier alternate oil. I use as an example the Voortman Cookie company, a Canadian cookie manufacturer with 120 product lines. It is still on the market. Its products are 100% trans fat free now because the company listened to Canadians and to the body of science that there is in fact a healthy alternate.

As far as the amount of product, this is why there is a lead in period contemplated, not only in this motion, but in any regulation that may stem from this motion. There would be a phase in period of one, three, five years, or whatever the stakeholders deem necessary.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with that. In terms of a phase in period, one of the things we want to be clear on is what type of timeframe we are talking about. I guess that is not what is a part of this motion. I want to ensure that we have enough time to consult, as the member for my party has mentioned, with all the key stakeholder groups.

They must have a chance to talk about all these issues, meaningful and otherwise, and ensure that there are enough products available. They must be able as well to distribute them and make them available all the way through the food process.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

I appreciate the opportunity to join in this debate today. A couple of my colleagues mentioned earlier that members of our caucus were not necessarily gung-ho that this should be one of our lead issues, particularly on an opposition day since we do not get that many of them. However, we have heard them say that after doing their own research and after talking to colleagues, particularly the member for Winnipeg Centre who has provided leadership on this issue within our caucus, they have become convinced of this issue's importance.

It is not usual that caucuses, particularly in the climate we are in these days where an election could be called at the drop of a hat, push key signature issues that they want to take into an election. Canadians decided they wanted a minority government and not a majority government, and our priority is to prove to Canadians that minority governments not only work, but in many ways work best for Canadians.

We want to take issues that make a difference in the lives of Canadians and move them forward. We want to get them into law. Our objective, and we make no bones about it during this minority government, is to take issues that matter to our constituents and to Canadians across the country and bring them forward. What could be more important than dealing with the health of Canadians, particularly our children?

Those who are still unsure have asked whether or not the science has been done? Do we need to do more studies? It would appear that science has reached its conclusion. We mentioned the fact that the World Health Organization, the leading organization on this planet for dealing with public health issues, crosses all party lines, national lines and continental lines, is concerned about the public health of citizens. It has said this ban is the right thing to do.

Is there a member in the House who would not consider supporting and being active in the Heart and Stroke Foundation in his or her riding? Does anybody here ever say anything negative about the Heart and Stroke Foundation, a motherhood organization? It is providing the lead on this. It is not doing it because it has a lack of issues to deal with. It is doing it because this is a priority health matter for Canadians, particularly children.

Dr. Walter Willet of the Harvard School of Public Health has said that the consumption of trans fats is a recipe for disaster. What is the Canadian context? One gram of trans fats a day increases the risk of heart disease by 20%. One of the leading causes of death in Canada is stroke. Canadians have the highest consumption of trans fats in the world. Canadians on average are ingesting about 10 grams a day. One gram increases the chance of a stroke by 20% and yet Canadians are ingesting 10 grams a day. If ever there was a health issue that required leadership, this is it.

My friend from Vancouver East raised the issue earlier about children in the context of choice and in responding to the issue of labelling. As long as there is a choice and the public is informed that is enough. In many cases it is enough.

•(1355)

We had this debate many years ago. This is not a new argument. When something is a poison for Canadians, we do not put a label on it and say, "Be careful, this is a poison". We say, "You can't sell that product in Canada". This is the same thing. Again, let us cast our minds forward. In 20 years this debate is going to seem so ancient and behind the times.

I would just mention that there are two senators, both a Conservative and a Liberal, who are cardiologists and are also trying to do something in that place on this issue. There is no question that we have an obligation to deal with this on behalf of all Canadians and in particular for the health of our children.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have a couple more minutes after question period to resume his debate and have questions and comments. Statements by members.

S. O. 31

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to thank the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food for taking the time to meet with farm leaders of Peterborough county. We particularly appreciated the minister's time within a week of the birth of his son, J.D. Our congratulation to J.D. and his parents.

The minister discussed the BSE issue and other matters with farmers representing the beef, dairy, sheep and bison sectors, all hard hit by the closing of the border. He was presented with a proposal for a regional abattoir and suggestions on designing help for BSE affected sectors in such a way that the sectors would be fully sustainable when the border problem is resolved. He received a brief on the CFIA. The minister was commended for his efforts to diversify markets for Canadian products, especially in Asia.

The BSE crisis is an ongoing tragedy which cannot be solved by Canada alone. We are glad we have a Minister of Agriculture who listens. We urge all parties to support him in his efforts on behalf of Canadian farmers.

* * *

●(1400)

THE SENATE

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a few days voters in Alberta will have the opportunity to vote for candidates running to be that province's next senator.

Prior to the election campaign, the Prime Minister made several statements indicating that he would work to end western alienation and bring about real Senate reform. However, like all his promises, they lasted only as long as the 36 day writ period. Just as his promise for 5¢ a litre to cities and municipalities and his promise to allow the Atlantic provinces to keep 100% of their offshore resources, his commitment to addressing the democratic deficit has evaporated.

Recent statements by his cabinet stating clearly that the government will not appoint the successful senatorial candidates is Liberal backpedalling at its finest. Far from being one of his dozens of top priorities for the Prime Minister, ending western alienation is clearly on the back burner. As long as the government does not trust Canadians to choose their own representation in the Senate, the democratic deficit will continue to grow and western Canadians will continue to be alienated from the Liberal Party.

* * *

[Translation]

ALIMENTS DE SANTÉ LAURIER

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as this is National Health Food Month, I would like to recognize an initiative by Aliments de santé Laurier to protect the environment.

Eager to help protect the environment, this business announced the introduction of a plastic bag that is completely biodegradable through bioassimilation. The material it is made of disintegrates

within six months to a year on exposure to heat, humidity or UV light.

In spite of the additional cost of using this type of bag, Aliments de santé Laurier decided to take the extra step to promote health by protecting the environment.

The Bloc Québécois congratulates the owners and staff of this business located in the riding of Louis-Hébert on this worthwhile initiative.

* * *

[English]

ELEANOR HUNTINGTON

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand in the House today and recognize the passing of a great Canadian.

Eleanor Huntington was born in 1904 in Huntington, Cape Breton along the shores of the Mira River. A graduate of the Nova Scotia Normal College, she taught at various schools throughout the province early in her career. She joined the staff of the *Cape Breton Post* in the early 1950s as a proof reader before moving into the editorial department, beginning a remarkable career in journalism.

At her 100th birthday this past summer, she shared with many friends the numerous highlights of her career, which included covering stories like the unveiling of the world famous Cape Breton Tartan as well as an interview with Olive Diefenbaker when then Prime Minister John Diefenbaker visited Cape Breton Island.

An avid researcher and genealogist, she authored a number of books on local and family history. A true role model for Canadian women, I ask this House to join me in remembering Eleanor Huntington on a long, full and productive life.

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THE GREATEST CANADIAN

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on the matter of the *The Greatest Canadian* contest being run by the CBC. While each of the nominees is certainly a great Canadian, to me the person most deserving of this title is Sir Frederick Banting.

Dr. Banting served Canada in World War I, and is responsible for one of the greatest discoveries in history, insulin. The discovery of insulin meant that millions of people around the world, who would have succumbed to diabetes, would be able to lead productive lives while managing the disease, a disease that before Dr. Banting's contribution meant a certain death sentence. To put the importance of Dr. Banting's discovery into perspective, it would be like discovering the cure for cancer today.

I want to thank the CBC for this initiative because it represents an exercise that unites Canadians from coast to coast. I want to encourage every Canadian to visit www.cbc.ca and vote, and remember the great contributions of Sir Frederick Banting.

S. O. 31

GOVERNOR GENERAL'S LITERARY AWARD

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I pay tribute to one of my constituents today, Ms. Mariam Toews, who was awarded the Governor General's Literary Award on Tuesday.

Her third published novel, *A Complicated Kindness*, follows a rebellious teenage girl as she copes with the disappearance of her mother and sister in a fictional Manitoba Mennonite town. Since its release in April, the novel has been a fixture atop the Canadian bestseller list.

A Complicated Kindness is receiving acclaim overseas as well. Ms. Toews has recently been awarded the British YoungMinds Book Award, and the movie rights for the novel have been sold to Channel 4 Films.

Ms. Toews' two previous novels have also received accolades: *Summer of my Amazing Luck* and *Boy of Good Breeding*, which won the McNally Robinson Book of the Year Award in 1998. In 1999 Ms. Toews won the National Magazine Award Gold Medal for Humour.

On behalf of all Manitobans, and indeed on behalf of all Canadians, I want to extend our heartfelt congratulations to Ms. Toews.

* * *

• (1405)

[Translation]

ENTRAIDE BOIS-DE-BOULOGNE

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Ahuntsic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of hosting today Claudie Ayas, the president of Entraide Bois-de-Boulogne, and the members of the organization who are visiting Ottawa today.

This organization located in Ahuntsic is celebrating this year 40 years of operation, that is, 40 years of facilitating the integration of new and former immigrants from the Middle East; 40 years of fostering dialogue between cultures and generations to ensure a smooth integration; 40 years of passing on cultural heritage and memory and developing projects that bring the community together.

[English]

On behalf of my constituents in the riding of Ahuntsic, I thank them for their work and devotion, and wish them all success in the years to come.

[Translation]

Congratulations and long life to l'Entraide Bois-de-Boulogne.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, because of the efforts of the Bloc Québécois, the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has adopted a motion that will enable the mayors of municipalities affected by the closure of an RCMP detachment to make their voices heard.

And so the file remains open. A reprieve has been granted, and perhaps we will be able to compel the government to halt the closures planned by the RCMP.

Despite the fact that the Liberal member for Brome—Missisquoi tried to take all the credit for this decision, the public realizes that this latest reprieve is the work of Bloc Québécois members who introduced the motion and worked hard to ensure its adoption.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL YOUTH SCHOLARSHIP

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the contribution of the MuchMusic aboriginal youth scholarship program and to congratulate Brent Wesley, a constituent from my riding, this year's aboriginal youth scholarship winner. The \$3,000 scholarship, created in partnership with the Aboriginal Youth Network, helps students with tuition for the school year at the institution of their choice.

This year's winner, Brent Wesley, won thanks to his letter that outlined his passion and devotion to first nation issues and desire to learn and work in the broadcast industry. He is 24 years old, of Cree and Abenaki descent, and a band member of Constance Lake First Nation near Hearst, Ontario in my riding. This kind of initiative is a positive force aimed at helping Canada's aboriginal youth.

I commend MuchMusic and the Aboriginal Youth Network for their efforts. I congratulate Brent Wesley on his win, and on behalf of all members, wish him the very best of luck in his new and blossoming career.

* * *

STREET RACING

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in August of this year the Ferguson family and the community of Kelowna lost a dearly loved and active member when Mary Lou Ferguson was killed by an alleged street racer.

Our community is not the only one to experience such a tragedy. In the last four years, more than 150 people in Canada have been killed in street racing crashes, some of them innocent victims, some of them young people, all of them unnecessary.

Bill C-230, introduced in the House on October 20 by the member for Surrey North, aims to change these statistics by taking a tough stance against street racing and allowing for tougher sentencing.

I ask all members of the House to support Bill C-230 to prevent street racing and to send a clear message that those who endanger the public will face long term consequences. Let us ensure that our streets are safe for all Canadians and not let Mary Lou Ferguson's death be in vain.

S. O. 31

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today's Supreme Court decision once again highlights the government's refusal to take leadership in matters of importance to our country. For decades now, the Canadian government has dragged its feet on settling first nations treaties that would provide clarity on the land base. Instead it has deferred to the Supreme Court time and again on important issues that it should be dealing with.

Now the Supreme Court has been clear. The government has a duty to consult and accommodate. This is not an opportunity for the Liberals' infamous lip service, but a call to get to the table and begin the hard work of negotiating settlements. No longer will it be acceptable for the Liberals to pretend to listen to the concerns of first nations while at the same time making deals with their corporate friends behind closed doors.

I call on the Prime Minister and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to take this decision very seriously, to understand that it calls for a dramatic shift in the government policy and to finally step up to the plate. The time to get serious is long past. It is time to get to work together, finally deciding justice for Canada's first peoples.

* * *

• (1410)

LATVIA

Hon. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today, November 18, to commemorate Latvian Independence Day. It is one of three Baltic countries with a sizeable community in my own riding of Parkdale—High Park and throughout other major urban centres in Canada. I am also proud to say that Latvia is the birthplace of my parents.

For Latvia, Independence Day has special meaning. Within living memory, citizens of Latvia fought two world wars and struggled for decades under the Soviet occupation, enduring persecution and the risk of being overwhelmed in their own country by Soviet resettlement.

Today Latvia is a member of the European Union and NATO. This country has rebuilt its democracy and economy and maintains strong ties with Canada where many of its expatriates live. In fact, Ms. Vaira Freibergs, a Toronto educated former Canadian citizen, is the current president of Latvia.

In commemorating the Latvian Independence Day, celebrated since 1918, I would like to celebrate with my fellow members of the Latvian community in Toronto and elsewhere. With a home country like Canada and a heritage country like Latvia, I am doubly blessed.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here are today's top ten ways to know that a person is a Liberal.

Number ten, the person thinks that the public purse is his or hers to match with his or her shoes.

Number nine, the person hears rumours of civilization outside Canada's major cities, but dismisses it as Conservative propaganda.

Number eight, the person knows the firearms registry is really just a ploy to supply our armed forces with registered guns confiscated from hunters.

Number seven, having the person's spokesman threaten only one province is that person's idea of asymmetrical federalism.

Number six, upon finding a wallet, the person removes half the cash as the government's share before returning it.

Number five, the person thinks moron, bastard and idiot are terms of endearment.

Number four, the person thinks the government's number one priority means every campaign promise.

Number three, a campaign promise is more of a theoretical concept than a commitment.

Number two, a person is surprised that the red book is in the fiction section of the parliamentary library.

The number one reason a person knows that he or she is a Liberal is when fast-tracking immigration claims, stripper tops his or her list of a skilled trade that Canada is desperately lacking.

* * *

[Translation]

JEAN LEMIEUX

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the Salon du livre in Paris, in March 2005, author Jean Lemieux will officially receive the Prix littéraire Association France-Québec/Philippe-Rossillon for his novel *On finit toujours par payer*, published in Québec by Les éditions de la courte échelle in 2003.

His novels for teens and his first two novels for adults, *La lune rouge* and *La marche du fou*, have been translated into a number of languages and won him high praise from both critics and the public. The author has sold the film rights for adaptations of both *La lune rouge* and *On finit toujours par payer*.

Mr. Lemieux is the seventh Quebecker to win this literary award. I want to salute his talents as a writer, which have also earned him the 2004 Arthur Ellis Award from the Crime Writers of Canada and a place on the 2003 short list for the Prix Saint-Pacôme for detective novels, also for the same novel.

Congratulations to Jean Lemieux, a proud ambassador of Quebec's culture and literature.

Oral questions

[English]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS**Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker,

Winter is coming, Christmas is near,
The anti-American carollers cheer,
Damning those Yankees with all that they've got,
Carolyn', carolin'; Perish the thought.

The carollers sing out the simplest of tunes,
All Yankees are brutish, warmongering loons
Never thinking that they're the best friends that we've got,
Carolyn', carolin'; Perish the thought.

Their soldiers, their firemen, had husbands and wives,
They stood up for freedom, they paid with their lives,
But the anti-Americans have already forgot,
Carolyn', carolin'; Perish the thought.

Canadian farmers cannot sell their beef,
Too much is their cattle, abundant their grief,
But the Liberal relief plan is let them smoke pot,
Carolyn', carolin'; Perish the thought.

What the carollers chant is unwise and untrue,
To quiet them a piece of duct tape would do.
But the Prime Minister needs all the friends that he's got,
Except carolin', carolin'; Perish the thought.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the Vermont environment commission has authorized the Coventry landfill expansion project and that it could even receive waste from other U.S. states.

The Coventry site is only metres away from the Black River, the largest tributary of Lake Memphremagog. This expansion raises great concern about the water quality of the lake. Hon. members must keep in mind that the drinking water of more than 150,000 people in Magog and Sherbrooke comes from that lake.

When it comes to the environment, we need to be extremely cautious, as future generations will have to live with what we do. This may be an American site, but it affects both sides of the border.

I therefore call for the matter to be referred to the International Joint Commission for its recommendations.

We must take no chances. There is too much at stake.

* * *

● (1415)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the summer months, the Val-Cartier base has 6,000 career military personnel, 1,500 civilian employees, 1,800 reservists and 2,550 cadets working there. The base therefore produces a major economic spinoff, including \$26 million in procurements and \$340 million in payroll.

Close to 1,800 military personnel stationed there have been deployed to Afghanistan, Bosnia or Haiti, where they have played an essential role in reconstruction or peace keeping in some of the most volatile places in the world. Today most of them are back home.

I wish to pay tribute to the men and women of the 430th Tactical Helicopter Squadron, the Reconnaissance Squadron Group and the 3rd battalion of the 22nd Regiment. Despite the dangers inherent in their work, they contributed to restoring stability to these regions so that present and future generations may live there in peace.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

ALFONSO GAGLIANO

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to a report in today's *New York Daily News*, the FBI has linked former Liberal minister Alfonso Gagliano with the Bonanno crime family. According to the report, he was a "made" member of this criminal organization in the 1990s.

My question is very simple. When did the government find out about this?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have not seen the report. That being said, these are very serious allegations. I think such allegations should not be repeated or accepted until the facts are known.

[English]

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree that we should gather the facts. The allegations are in the *New York Daily News*. According to FBI documents, they link former Liberal cabinet minister and ambassador Alfonso Gagliano to organized crime. The report claims that in the 1990s he was a "made" member of the Brooklyn based Bonanno crime family.

My question is simple. Since Mr. Gagliano was in cabinet and ambassador during this period, was the government aware of this information and when did it become aware of these allegations?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I have not seen the report and was not aware of the allegations until this morning in fact. Let me simply say that these are very serious allegations and everyone should be very careful about accepting or repeating such allegations.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me ask about a different set of allegations according to a report in the *Toronto Star* today. The Prime Minister's communications director has been aware for some time of the immigration minister's ethical lapses, including having dubious applicants for ministerial permits work on her election campaigns.

My question for the Prime Minister is simple. Given that there is obviously an ethical cloud here and this is under investigation, will the Prime Minister require the immigration minister to step aside until the investigation is completed?

Oral questions

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when my office hears of allegations or rumours that are being made, it is obviously its responsibility, in all due diligence, to make inquiries. That is exactly what was done. We received assurances that no improprieties had taken place.

I would simply point out that one of the reasons we in the House wanted to have an independent ethics commissioner was precisely to deal with these issues. The minister herself has referred this matter to the ethics commissioner and he should be allowed to conclude his inquiries.

* * *

ALFONSO GAGLIANO

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the New York *Daily News* obtained FBI documents that state that a Mafia capo turned informant has identified former Liberal cabinet minister Alfonso Gagliano as a “made” member of the Bonanno crime family. As well, the newspaper reports that top Bonanno gangsters travelled to Montreal in the 1990s where Mr. Gagliano was introduced as a “made” member of the family.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Has the RCMP ever raised questions at any time about Mr. Gagliano's appointment to cabinet in 1994?

• (1420)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has indicated, these are very serious allegations and I think we all need to be very careful in repeating those allegations. If the hon. member is asking about RCMP operational matters, as he is fully aware, we do not comment on the operations of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a very serious matter. In fact, the newspaper reports that Gagliano was identified as a long time soldier in the Bonanno crime family by Frank Lino, a former Mafia capo turned informer. Prior to his appointment as ambassador to Denmark, Mr. Gagliano filled a number of Liberal cabinet positions until the year 2002.

Again my question for the government, for the Prime Minister, for the minister responsible is, what steps did the Privy Council Office and the Department of the Solicitor General take to ensure that proper security clearances were obtained prior to Mr. Gagliano being admitted to cabinet?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, I have no intention of commenting on these allegations. If the hon. member is asking about the operational activities of the RCMP, I suggest that the hon. member more appropriately direct his question to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

* * *

[Translation]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec Aerospace Association, the FTQ, the Chamber of

Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal and the Conseil du Patronat du Québec are unanimous, saying “We do not have the luxury of timeto wait”. The federal government must act quickly on a national aerospace policy.

Does the Prime Minister realize that without an immediate plan, Bell Helicopter, Pratt & Whitney, Bombardier and the entire aerospace industry concentrated in Quebec will not be able to prosper and grow?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc must know that we have a successful aerospace industry because of this government's industrial policies.

I can assure him that it is our intention to continue. As we well know, this is a sector in which Canada is among the best in the world and it is the government's intention to maintain the structures and policies that will see it continue.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the lack of growth is due to the lack of plan at the moment. Moreover, there is a significant problem with Bombardier regarding the development of a new aircraft. Quebec has 5,000 jobs at stake.

Instead of waiting, could the government not say to Bombardier, “We will help you on condition that you invest in Quebec”? This is exactly the kind of deal the Liberals offered to Ford and GM in the middle of the election campaign, for renovations at their Oakville and Oshawa plants. The companies were told, “Here is \$500 million if you will invest here”. Let them do the same thing for Bombardier.

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that I met last night with representatives from the entire aerospace industry from across this country, including the president of Bombardier. They are very happy with the work we are doing. They are contributing to it. These hon. members are playing politics with the jobs of people in the aerospace industry.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I repeat, in the middle of the election campaign, the Liberal government made a quick deal in Ontario, putting on the table a specific offer for \$500 million in support for the automotive industry, including \$300 million for Ford and GM, provided they upgrade their facilities in Oakville and Oshawa.

Will the federal government do the same for Bombardier in Quebec and make a cash offer with specific conditions? Will it treat Bombardier, a Quebec based company, the same way as the American GM and Ford companies?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the automotive strategy and the aerospace strategy are going in tandem. They are both going at the same pace. We will be there. We will do it in the context of a national strategy. We will not do it in the context of playing politics with the local situation and the workers in Quebec.

Oral questions

• (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as stakeholders from Quebec indicated this morning, it is urgent that the federal government take the necessary steps to encourage Bombardier to develop its new aircraft in Quebec rather than in the United States, among other places.

Does the government not understand the concern in Quebec that Bombardier might decide to develop its new aircraft in the United States, given that even Onex, a firm very close to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Transport, has already indicated an interest in buying Boeing facilities in Wichita, Kansas?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, having been in the business sector, I can tell the House that nothing would send me packing my bags to the U.S. faster than a government made up of those people.

* * *

SECURITIES INDUSTRY

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this may shock the finance minister, but we know the United States has good ideas and bad ones. Ideas should be judged on merit, not on source. George Bush's star wars is bad. The United States has good housing programs, better than the Liberals and a good environmental record, better than the Liberals. Unlike the Liberals, the United States has toughened its corporate accounting program.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Years after the United States cracked down on corporate accounting—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member's time has expired, but I do not know how anybody can hear the question with all this noise. I see that the government House leader, who might want to respond to the question, could not hear a thing. There is too much noise in the House. The hon. member for Winnipeg North has the floor and I will give her another 15 seconds to finish her question, which will take away from someone else's question.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I was trying to say that George Bush and star wars is bad, but the United States corporate accounting practice is good, so I want to ask the Prime Minister this. Years after the United States crackdown on corporate accounting, why did the Liberals do nothing to protect people from Nortel's crooked books?

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government commissioned the Wise Persons' report, which report has been tabled and has been well accepted by the government and by the industry. We are at the present time working with the various provincial authorities to see whether in fact there can be a national securities regulator set up so that the very problems the hon. member identifies can in fact be addressed in a coherent way.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, years after the United States crackdown on corporate fraud, this government and these Liberals have done

nothing and Canadians are concerned. Many pension plans banked on Nortel and Liberals owe these people an apology.

Three years ago it was Enron. Two years ago it was WorldCom. Nortel was next. The Liberals did nothing. The throne speech two years running promised a national securities commission. It never happened.

Again, this time for the Prime Minister, three Liberal finance ministers, including himself, have done nothing on corporate accounting scams. Why?

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in addition to the Wise Persons' report and the work that has been done on that to date, the minister introduced Bill C-13 on September 15, which in fact deals with the very issues raised by the member, namely, corporate fraud. I am sure that we will therefore enjoy the hon. member's support as that bill proceeds through the House.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, information is leaking out that the Prime Minister and his office knew months ago that the immigration minister abused her power. The Prime Minister knew she had unfairly fast-tracked one of her campaign workers for citizenship. The Prime Minister knew her campaign staff let an admitted deportation dodger come and go without reporting him to police.

This is a serious matter and the Prime Minister must not be evasive. When did his office know about these improprieties? When?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, my office heard at some time during the summer months. Inquiries were made of the minister's office. Assurances were received that in fact these allegations were unfounded. Again, the reason we have an independent Ethics Commissioner is so these kinds of matters can be referred, and it is the minister herself who referred it to the Ethics Commissioner.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister must know that there are some very serious questions being asked about the actions of his minister, very serious questions, showing that her actions were in fact problematical. A lot of people are now questioning whether our system is fair or whether it is being abused by those in power.

I ask the Prime Minister, did he know about the questionable conduct of his minister before he reappointed her to cabinet?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand here as a very proud Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to defend all of my decisions. All of the decisions that I have done have been based on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

Oral questions

I have to say that it clearly saddens me to see members opposite basing their comments on pure hypocrisy and discrimination. How dare they judge a person's lifestyle and suggest that they are less worthy. Let me ask the hon. member the question. Would they be asking the same question if it was a doctor or a lawyer?

[Translation]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the time of the election, the Prime Minister's Office had concerns about suspicious operations in York West. Worrying information about the issuance of immigration permits reached the ears of a certain Scott Reid.

Did the Prime Minister know about this before or after confirming the appointment of minister?

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue of immigration in Canada is extremely important. It is fundamentally about human beings who want to come to Canada, who want to live in Canada and who want to help us build this great country. No matter who these people are, they all are deserving of humanitarian and compassionate consideration.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the immigration minister continues to be stripped of her credibility.

Yesterday she was asked a very specific question regarding her Ottawa political staff travelling to her riding and working on her election campaign. This staff person charged \$5,900 to the taxpayers for hotels, meals and travel. When asked if this person worked on her political campaign, the minister changed the subject.

I will ask the minister again. Did the political staffer from Ottawa work on her campaign, yes or no?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said this yesterday and I repeat it today. All of my expenses regarding anything from my office are under Treasury Board guidelines and we follow everything every inch of the way.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government should be ashamed of the way it is treating farmers who are currently going through a catastrophic situation. They are not only victims of a crisis that is not their fault, but they are at the mercy of the limited number of slaughterhouses that can set the price of beef as they wish.

In light of this growing problem, what is the government waiting for to increase its support for victims of the mad cow crisis?

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, specifically for the province that the hon. member represents we have been able to provide assistance from our business risk management envelope of some \$366 million. In addition to that, and the member points out quite rightly the need to create slaughter capacity, on September 10 we announced initiatives

that will assist in developing that slaughter capacity, including in the province of Quebec.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the problem is so serious that the rate of suicides among farmers is high, reportedly. Some are starving, while others have exhausted their life savings and are facing bankruptcy. Farmers are fed up with empty speeches. They are waiting for real solutions to this tragic situation.

What is the government waiting for to allocate part of its huge surplus to help the farmers?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, clearly the government is not waiting. That is why \$366 million has been advanced to producers in Quebec. It is why on September 10 we did announce a program to increase slaughter capacity.

As I have mentioned to the member on a number of occasions, and to others, we are continuing to work specifically on the issue of dairy and on the issue of cull cows and how we need to address that.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on September 23, the president of the UPA criticized the federal government's centralizing attitude in the mad cow situation. Laurent Pellerin said that the federal government's five aid packages are not geared to the reality in Quebec.

What is the minister waiting for to recognize the urgent need to help the dairy and cattle farmers in Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not entirely accurate, because there is a portion of the industry in Quebec, the cattle industry, that operates much like it does in the rest of the country. In that respect we provided assistance, and as I said, in the province of Quebec, some \$366 million.

In addition to that, though, there are issues that are in Quebec and in other provinces in terms of dairy. This is something that I have indicated we are working very closely on with a number of producer groups, including with the provinces, to deal specifically with that issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it was Mr. Pellerin who said that. So far the government has delivered five different aid packages to try to alleviate the impact of the crisis. The five packages do not reflect the reality in Quebec.

What is the minister waiting for to announce a package that properly covers all the farmers in Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that those programs do not ignore Quebec. Our CAIS program for 2003 was \$90 million. For 2004 it advances to \$102 million. For the cull animal program, it is almost \$18 million. Under the transitional industry support program, it is \$93 million, and that does not count the money we will be putting into new slaughter capacity.

As I suggested to the hon. member earlier, we are working with the industry on the issue of the dairy industry and the particular challenges it faces in respect of BSE.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the immigration minister understands how serious this situation is. We have asked some very straightforward questions about whether or not her ministerial staff did political work during the election campaign. She steadfastly refuses to answer straightforward questions, which perhaps speaks volumes.

Will the minister answer the question? Did her staff do political work during the campaign? If she will not answer, will she step aside until the ethics commissioner finishes his investigation?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, I asked the ethics commissioner to review the particulars of the case and report back. I will gladly share that report with the House when it is done.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is question period. We have a right to ask questions about things that are of vital interest to the Canadian public and the minister has an obligation to answer.

My question once again is, did the minister's ministerial staff do political work during the election campaign? This is a very simple question. Does she not feel any obligation to the Canadian public at all to tell them the honest truth about what happened in that situation?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated before, I conform with all of the Treasury Board guidelines, and I have to tell the House that I take great pride in the job that I do. I think all members on that side of the House know that when they turn around and ask for assistance I have always been able to help them on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, my question is for the immigration minister. Again the minister is not answering the question. Very simply, did the minister have a political staffer working on her campaign?

The minister refuses to answer questions and defers behind the ethics commissioner. By her own admission she has asked the ethics commissioner to rule only on whether she interfered with an immigration case, not on whether or not her political staffers worked on her campaign. Will the minister step aside until this question is answered in the House?

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister has made it very

Oral questions

clear that she complied with all of the Treasury Board guidelines, number one, and that is a responsibility of the minister. If the hon. members across the way do not accept that answer, then I suggest that it is a challenge the hon. members along the way will have to deal with themselves, because the hon. minister answered their questions on more than one occasion.

• (1440)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about appropriate guidelines, then, because yesterday in the House the immigration minister stood up and said that all of her chief of staff's expenses were within the appropriate guidelines.

Let us take a look at those expenses. On February 24, while on a trip to Toronto, the chief of staff claimed \$92 for a working dinner in Ottawa. On April 1, while on a trip to Washington, he claimed expenses for \$245, stating he was in Ottawa.

My question is for the immigration minister. Were these expenses really within the appropriate parliamentary guidelines or merely within the appropriate Liberal guidelines?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, clearly the member is new here. I can say we have enough controls in our systems that if it is not within the guidelines, and everything is audited, those expenses would never have been paid if they were not within Treasury Board guidelines.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Yesterday was lung disease day. In May 2003, the World Health Organization approved the framework convention on tobacco control. Why has Canada still not ratified that convention and when does it plan to do so?

[English]

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the framework convention on tobacco control is a very important convention that Canada signed on to last year. It is important that we ratify that convention. We are on our way to very quickly ratifying that convention. We believe in strong tobacco control because it damages the lives of Canadians.

* * *

PRIVACY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions I have risen in the House to ask questions about the U.S. patriot act and to warn the government that the FBI has access to Canadians' private information. Every time the President of Treasury Board has risen to answer, his answer has been in complete contradiction to the testimony given by the Privacy Commissioner yesterday.

Would the President of Treasury Board please tell the House why he is in contradiction?

Oral questions

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member that I am not in contradiction with the Privacy Commissioner. In fact, what I have said and what she has said is that the legislation we have in Canada is adequate to meet the needs of controlling information held in Canada. Laws in Canada do not protect information held in another jurisdiction, which is why we are changing the contracting policy to prevent information being held offshore.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, then why has the President of Treasury Board insisted in reference that our current legislation protects our privacy? That is not the case and not what the commissioner is testifying.

If he is not willing to do the job, call a privacy summit and implement legislation that protects Canadians, will he step aside and let somebody else do the job?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I will not do is respond to the analysis of that particular member.

The reality is that the legislation we have is new and it is one of the best in the world. The Privacy Commissioner, who is also one of the best privacy commissioners in the world, will tell him the same thing.

* * *

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past two years the member for Mississauga—Erindale has repeatedly jeopardized Canada's economic interests by expressing her hatred for American allies, calling them bastards, idiots and psychologically damaged. None of that resulted in her being disciplined or removed from the Liberal caucus.

Yesterday morning a tape was shown of her stomping on an image of the elected head of state of our closest trading partner. That did not result in her being disciplined until she attacked the Prime Minister and now she has been sent out the door.

Why is the message that someone can undermine Canada's economic interests but—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International Cooperation.

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have excellent relations with the United States. Just after the election, the Prime Minister called President Bush to congratulate him. My colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, called his counterpart as well. Together we are working for the future prosperity and security of this continent.

I might add that my relations as well as many of my colleagues with our American counterparts are incredibly positive. We look forward to working with them for all of the interests of this continent.

• (1445)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to see if the Prime Minister understands the problem here.

He has sent a message that it is perfectly acceptable to be a member of the government and express hatred for our American allies, to undermine our economic and trade interests, to do so repeatedly with mendacity, but the moment a member turns around and criticizes the Prime Minister or his PMO, the member is sent packing.

Why is it acceptable as a Liberal to express hatred for our allies and undermine our economy but it is not acceptable to question the Prime Minister?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member ought to know that our relationship with the United States is very strong. We are working together with the United States in Haiti. We are working with the United States in Afghanistan. The President of the United States is coming here to speak to Canadians.

I hope in the intervening weeks before the arrival of the President of the United States, that the leaders of the opposition will become a little more responsible in their comments, a little more understanding of the values that we share between our two countries and a little more visionary in terms of the kind of country that we want to build.

* * *

THE SENATE

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister said that he believes in Senate reform. Premier Klein has said publicly that before the federal election the Prime Minister told him he would look favourably upon appointing elected senators from Alberta. The Premier of Alberta and Albertans want him to keep his word.

Did the Prime Minister tell Premier Klein at the grey cup meeting a year ago that he would look favourably—

The Speaker: The hon. deputy House leader.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister and the government has said repeatedly is that we are quite open to Senate reform but that it will not be piecemeal reform. The whole Senate has to be addressed. Until there is a consensus to do that, that will not happen.

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is about keeping one's word and following through on one's commitments. Let us think about the consequences of this broken promise.

The Prime Minister has raised expectations that he refuses to meet. Alberta will spend \$3 million of taxpayer money to run this Senate election. Ten Albertans have put forward their names and are spending their hard-earned money to further democracy in the country.

To the Prime Minister, I will ask you again. Does the Prime Minister understand the consequences of—

Oral questions

The Speaker: Order, please. I remind all hon. members, and particularly the hon. member for Edmonton—Spruce Grove, that questions must be addressed to the Chair and so must answers. We have had a bit of slippage on that point today. I invite the hon. member to refrain from referring to other hon. members but to address her remarks to the Chair. Perhaps she will want to rephrase the last part of her question with that in mind.

Ms. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister understand the consequences of raising the expectations and breaking a promise? Will the Prime Minister keep his word or turn his back on the democratic will of Albertans?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been consistent. I have been consistent in what I have said on Senate reform here and what I have said on Senate reform in Alberta, which is that I support Senate reform. I have supported Senate reform right from the beginning.

However I do not believe that it should be done on a piecemeal basis. I believe there are a number of areas, including the number of senators to be appointed, the way in which they are appointed and the effectiveness of the Senate, that have to be looked at, but to do it on a piecemeal basis would only exacerbate tensions in the country.

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[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the dairy farmers of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean are at the end of their tether. Last week they held a general assembly at which they decided to increase their pressure tactics so someone will at last deign to heed their appeals. They are preparing to slaughter 600 cows and dump them all into a pit in order to gain broad media coverage and public exposure.

We must express disapproval of such action, but how far do the dairy farmers have to go before they get it across to this government that it has responsibilities toward them, as well as the financial means to help them out, and that the situation is more than urgent?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said in answer to a previous question, we provided some \$366 million to the province of Quebec. In addition to that, we announced on September 10 additional resources to help build slaughter capacity.

As I said to previous members, although we understand that some 85% of the income of dairy producers comes from milk, there is a significant portion of their income that does not. It is imperative that we work with producers to assist them with that portion and that difficulty that they face.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the aid package for Quebec is inadequate. In addition to an emergency package for the dairy farmers, the minister could do something else that would not cost the government a thing.

Why does the minister not cooperate with his provincial counterparts to establish a floor abattoir price for cull cattle? A measure such as this would rescue the dairy farmers from the clutches of the major abattoirs, which are exploiting them shamelessly at present and forcing them into bankruptcy.

[English]

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are working very closely with people in the province of Quebec. I met with the UPA this week and I meet on a regular basis with my provincial colleague.

Yes, that suggestion is one of many suggestions that have been brought forward that are worthy of consideration. We understand the need to deal with that specific part of dairy producers' income where they are having difficulty, that is true, in the province of Quebec. It is also true in other provinces right across the country and we are determined to do that.

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AIR TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the finance department released the audited statements for the air travellers security charge.

It shows the government made an incredible \$234 million profit on the backs of air travellers. The best part is that the finance department could not figure out how much security would cost. It certainly figured out how to make money. This is just another tax grab by the Liberal government.

Will the government immediately announce an end to this tax and start paying for our security out of the money the government has already over-collected from Canadians?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. Perhaps his colleague would like to listen to the answer. It is simple: we collected this tax, but not all the money was spent at the beginning, because the security system had to be created. Some equipment was not delivered the first year or in 2003 but the figures will even out over a five-year period. We do not want to do everything the first year. There are still many airports in Canada where things are being installed. So this money will be used for air security in Canada, one of the safest countries in the world. No one will make—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Niagara Falls.

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government said that the security tax would be revenue neutral but that was never the case. It was a tax grab from day one.

The Minister of Transport knows the Canadian airline industry is struggling to get back on its feet and this tax is one of the reasons passenger traffic is down.

Will the minister urge the finance minister to do the right thing, start helping the Canadian airline industry and scrap this tax?

Oral questions

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am convinced the hon. member wants the Canadian air sector to be the safest in the world. We simply want to be sure that passengers can travel in safety and feel secure with this means of transportation. Consequently, this tax will continue to be used to guarantee their security. We have high technology equipment being purchased and installed every day all across the country. Until that is all done we will, of course, continue to collect the tax. We have already reduced it in keeping with requirements. However, the work is not complete. We will not stop until—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Ajax—Pickering.

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[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was encouraged by the government's continued commitment to wind energy in the Speech from the Throne, and particularly the WPPI program, which has been a tremendous success.

Could the Minister of the Environment comment on the possibility of extending the WPPI program beyond 2007 so that wind turbine manufacturers can make long term decisions about locating in Canada?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right. We will improve our capacity to have wind power in Canada. Today it is 400 megawatts, which is astonishingly low, but it will be 4,000 megawatts in 2010. With what we will do with our initiatives, what the provinces will do, what the private sector will do, it is not impossible to have 10,000 megawatts for 2010.

* * *

● (1455)

[Translation]

WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-11 is cause for alarm. Using the sponsorship scandal as an example, the Information Commissioner told us this morning that this bill would allow a minister to hide for 20 years information on an issue disclosed by an honest whistleblower.

Will the President of the Treasury Board admit that he is preparing the biggest cover-up in parliamentary history?

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member to read the report that was put out. The recommendation that is in the legislation was drawn directly from the report of the expert committee. The trade-off is that the committee will have to decide between protecting the confidentiality of the employee who brings it forward, as the committee requested, and dealing with the responsibility of being transparent.

It is a value judgment that the committee will have to make, which is why the bill is at first reading. The member should read the report.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's Bill C-11 contains no new mechanisms for whistleblowers to report reprisals to their employers. It contains no punishment for employers who discipline whistleblowers. As a matter of fact it explicitly refuses to protect whistleblowers who go public. Yet it authorizes departments to hide disclosures of wrongdoing for up to 20 years. The bill is designed to protect a corrupt government, not whistleblowers.

When will the government stop using honest public servants as an excuse for a bill designed to hide corruption?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as this is an enormously important issue and an enormously important debate, it would help if the member would take the time to read the reports of the experts and the employees who have informed us of the kind of bill they want.

He has the bill at first reading. It is possible, frankly, for the committee to look at these issues, listen to employees and come to the decisions. The reality of a minority government is that the decisions it makes are real, and to use our employees as a political foil is unacceptable.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we estimate at approximately 300,000 the number of shells, of which nearly 8,000 are unexploded, lying at the bottom of Lake Saint-Pierre, a UNESCO declared world biosphere reserve. These shells represent an environmental threat, and the public is tired of waiting for a decision about their removal.

Does the Minister of National Defence not think that the time has come to act and proceed with the removal of the 300,000 shells laying at the bottom of Lake Saint-Pierre?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very aware of the danger posed by these war devices that have been laying there since World War II. Our department is making great efforts to resolve the problem. We are working with the local communities, Environment Canada and others. We will make every effort to reduce this danger. This is a problem, but we are in the process of resolving it.

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[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of the \$1.6 billion allocated for the Indian residential schools question, over \$285 million is earmarked for Department of Justice lawyers to fight these claims and resist them.

Would the government not see and be ready to admit how flawed the current resolution system is? Would it not agree today to take the AFN's recommendation of granting a settlement for these claimants in a fixed dollar amount to get this money into circulation rather than paying 90 Department of Justice lawyers hundreds of millions of dollars to oppose the claims?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned yesterday, I thank the AFN for its report. We are going to look very seriously at the recommendations. I do want to indicate to the hon. member, who has expressed a longstanding interest in this issue, that the reason we put forward an ADR process, an alternative dispute resolution process, was in fact to avoid lengthy, time consuming trials and to reduce the legal costs that would otherwise be borne by the Canadian taxpayer. In fact everything we are doing is hopefully expediting the resolution of these claims on behalf of the victims.

* * *

• (1500)

TEXTILE AND CLOTHING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I met with over 200 apparel workers in my riding of Cambridge last week. They were stressed out. Some were crying. Thousands of existing jobs are on the chopping block, unless the government does the right thing and implement the recommendations of the finance committee right away.

The clock is ticking. Canadians do not want more conversation. They want action. Will the minister extend the remission orders for the apparel industry to save these jobs, yes or no?

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact the finance committee has submitted a report with respect to this matter. At this point it is being considered by the finance minister.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked a question of the government concerning the decision by the Vermont Environmental Board to permit the doubling of the Coventry site's capacity. The answer was far from satisfactory.

Why did the government not take this issue to the International Joint Commission when we asked it to, and is it going to do so soon?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a very serious question. We are pleased that the RCM of Sherbrooke was given the right to intervene in this matter. Of course, the Government of Canada will be tackling this head on with my American counterpart, and the Prime Minister fully intends to raise the issue with President Bush.

Speaker's Ruling

[English]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I wish to make a statement to the House regarding private members' business.

Members will recall that on October 29, 2004, the House concurred in the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs concerning the provisional Standing Orders on private members' business. The effect of that report is to continue the provisional Standing Orders concerning private members' business until the last sitting day in June 2005.

[Translation]

The complete order of precedence for private members' business was published this morning in the Order Paper.

[English]

The provisional Standing Orders provide that private members' business will not operate on a sessional basis. That is to say that proceedings on private members' business originating in the House will not expire on prorogation, and that the order of precedence will continue from one session to the next.

It is therefore very important that members be clear on the workings of the provisional Standing Orders, as they may not have a second opportunity to present an item even should the House be prorogued. Members should also note that unless specifically designated as non-votable, all private members' business items will be votable.

I would like in particular to draw to the attention of members the possibility that a proposed private members' bill may require a royal recommendation or a ways and means motion.

[Translation]

First of all, I wish to address the royal recommendation. Any bill which authorizes the spending of public funds or effects an appropriation of public funds must be accompanied by a message from the Governor General, recommending the expenditure to the House. This message, known formally as the royal recommendation, can only be transmitted to the House by a minister of the crown.

[English]

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, page 710 states:

In 1994, the Standing Orders were again amended to remove the requirement that a royal recommendation had to be provided to the House before a bill could be introduced. The royal recommendation can now be provided after the bill has been introduced in the House, as long as it is done before the bill is read a third time and passed....The royal recommendation accompanying a bill must still be printed in the *Notice Paper*, printed in or annexed to the bill and recorded in the *Journals*.

With respect to private members' bills, it is stated on pages 711 and 712:

Business of the House

—since the rule change of 1994, private Members' bills involving the spending of public money have been allowed to be introduced and to proceed through the legislative process, on the assumption that a royal recommendation would be submitted by a Minister of the Crown before the bill was to be read a third time and passed. If a royal recommendation were not produced by the time the House was ready to decide on the motion for third reading of the bill, the Speaker would have to stop the proceedings and rule the bill out of order. The Speaker has the duty and responsibility to ensure that the Standing Orders on the royal recommendation as well as the constitutional requirements are upheld.

Where it seems likely that a bill may need a royal recommendation, the member who has requested to have it drafted will be informed of that fact by the legislative counsel responsible for drafting the bill. Members may wish to consult with legislative counsel or with Private Members' Business Office to obtain further advice with respect to individual cases.

● (1505)

[Translation]

It remains my duty as Speaker to make the final decision concerning the need for a royal recommendation. I remain open to hear the submissions of hon. members from both sides of the House who may wish to assist the Chair in reaching a decision on particular bills.

[English]

As the House has not yet begun to debate items of private members' business, I felt that it would be of assistance to alert hon. members to the important impact that the requirement for a royal recommendation may have on their bills. The Standing Orders leave no doubt that the House cannot be asked to decide on the motion for the third reading of a bill requiring the expenditure of public funds unless proper notice of a royal recommendation has been given. Should members have any concerns about the provisions of individual bills in this regard, it would be prudent for them to raise such concerns well before the third reading stage is reached.

With regard to ways and means, any bill which imposes or increases a tax on the public must be preceded by the adoption of a motion of ways and means. Such a motion can only be proposed by a minister of the Crown. As *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states at pages 758 and 759:

The House must first adopt a Ways and Means motion before a bill which imposes a tax or other charge on the taxpayer can be introduced...Before taxation legislation can be read a first time, a notice of a Ways and Means motion must first be tabled in the House by a Minister of the Crown—

[Translation]

Furthermore, it goes on, at page 898, to state:

With respect to the raising of revenue, a private member cannot introduce bills which impose taxes. The power to initiate taxation rests solely with the government and any legislation which seeks an increase in taxation must be preceded by a ways and means motion.

[English]

A member who has requested to have a bill drafted that proposes the imposition or increase of taxation will be so advised by the legislative counsel responsible for drafting the bill. Members may wish to consult with legislative counsel or with Private Members' Business Office to obtain further advice with respect to individual cases.

The Standing Orders are more restrictive with regard to ways and means bills. The Speaker will identify such bills at an early stage to prevent them from being placed on the order of precedence.

I have made this statement as part of my responsibility to ensure the orderly conduct of private members' business. If members should have specific questions on a particular item, I would invite them to contact the Private Members' Business Office.

I would like to inform the House that under the provisions of Standing Order 88, at least two weeks shall elapse between the first and second reading of private members' public bills.

The second reading of Bill C-333, standing as the first item on the order of precedence in the name of the hon. member for Durham, could only have been considered on or after Monday, November 29, 2004.

[Translation]

The debate at second reading of the bill can therefore not take place as scheduled tomorrow. Accordingly, I am directing the table officers to drop that item of business to the bottom of the order of precedence in the Order Paper.

[English]

Private members' hour will thus be cancelled and the House will proceed with the business before it prior to private members' hour tomorrow.

I understand the House leader for the official opposition has a question to ask.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, knowing how Hamiltonians feel about the Toronto Argonauts, I am sure the government House leader wants to wish the British Columbia Lions well on Sunday.

At the same time, he may want to tell us what is happening tomorrow and what the business is for the following week.

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the House that the Hamilton Tiger Cats are certainly looking forward to next year at the Grey Cup. We actually have a great contingent up here for the Sunday game.

This afternoon we will continue with the opposition motion.

Tomorrow the House will proceed with report stage and, if possible, third reading of Bill C-7 respecting parks. When this is complete, we will consider a motion to refer to committee before second reading Bill C-20, the first nations fiscal legislation. Should there be time left after that, we will return to Bill C-9, the Quebec economic development legislation.

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday we will start with Bill C-7 and Bill C-20, if they are not already complete. We will then proceed to consider reference before second reading of Bill C-21, the not for profit legislation. This will be followed by second reading of Bill C-23 respecting human resources, and Bill C-22 respecting social development. We will then return to any bills not yet completed.

On Tuesday evening, as all members know, the committee of the whole will consider the estimates of the Minister of Health.

Next Thursday shall be an allotted day.

* * *

• (1510)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In response to a question earlier from the member for Winnipeg North I inadvertently misled the House. I indicated that Bill C-13 was introduced on September 15 when in fact the regulations were proclaimed on September 15. I want to correct the record, if I may.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—HEALTH

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to finish off my remarks today. Then my colleague will pick up with the other 10 minutes.

In my remaining time, I would like to focus on the comments made by my colleague from Churchill, which are germane to this debate. She talked about the fact that for the most part Canadians, like people in many countries, are awfully confused about what was healthy and what was not healthy. For most of us, it seems that every other day there is a new study from somewhere pointing out that something that was once thought healthy, now is not or vice versa, or counter-arguing a report that came out a few weeks ago. I think many of us in Canada reach the point where we throw our arms in the air and say that we cannot keep track any more. Then we go ahead and follow what we think is common sense.

Common sense for Canadians, and this is the point that my friend from Churchill made, is if something is known scientifically to be harmful to our children in particular, their Parliament, this place, would be responsible enough to ensure that those products are not contained in anything that are lawfully sold on the shelves of stores across this nation. We, in the NDP caucus, believe we have reached that point with trans fatty acids.

The World Health Organization does not give out alarmist messages or lightly say that something should be banned. Yet it has very clearly said that it is important to deal with the public health in a way that is effective for people. That means labelling will not do it. It means it has to be banned. That is why we have taken this stand.

We long ago passed the point where we were not sure of the science, so we would go with a label to be on the safe side. That is not the safe side any more. The safe side says, "Ban it. Do not let our children ingest these foods". Other countries have now taken this stand.

Supply

There is the business side to this. Some of those very corporations and businesses that we might expect to hear say that this is a problem for them, that it will cost jobs or increase costs, all legitimate concerns, have already dealt with it. As has been pointed out, a number of major suppliers of the kinds of the food that have trans fats already have removed them. The entire country of Denmark has banned them. As has been pointed out, McDonald's has outlets there. There are no trans fats in the food at the McDonald's stores in Denmark. If it is good enough for the children of Denmark, does it not behoove us as Canadian parliamentarians to take the same steps to protect our children? That is what this is about. It is about public health. It is about protecting children. It is about doing the right thing.

• (1515)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the motion, after the preamble, reads:

—this House calls on the government to enact regulations, or if necessary present legislation that effectively eliminates processed trans fats, by limiting the processed trans fat content of any food product sold in Canada to the lowest level possible.

It does not say ban them, notwithstanding they may be in other jurisdictions. Even a speaker from the NDP indicated that there are many products which naturally contain trans fats. There also is the whole problem of how we coordinate this with the business and industry.

There is a question about whether we are talking about banning or whether we are talking about lowest level possible, notwithstanding that even the health authorities say a zero consumption is the recommended consumption of trans fats.

The question I have has to do with legislating behaviour. Clearly, we cannot do that. Public education will to be a big part of this. Would the member share with the House some of his thoughts on how we educate the public in the best possible fashion and how we deal with other jurisdictions, for instance, school boards that have to communicate with children and even take it home when they see them eating unhealthy foods?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, the member raised a number of things. First, he talked about the lowest possible levels. Yes, I shortened that to use the word "ban". If we read the material that has been provided, we see that the lowest possible level is de facto, a banning. Therefore, we are saying that we get as low as we possibly can. No one is trying to pass a law or regulation that is beyond the means of what can physically and practically be done.

If the member wishes to parse the words, the member is correct in recognizing that there are some minuscule amounts left at the end. That is why we have used the word "lowest" possible, but it is de facto in the material referred to as a ban, that it has the same effect.

The member talked about coordinating with business. That is why we have mentioned the fact that already major corporations have taken the steps necessary. I did not hear about any big massive job loss or any massive increase in costs. I have heard that corporations, to give them the benefit of the doubt, want to provide food that is as healthy as can be or at the very least does not contain known toxins. The whole issue of pushing this through law is to ensure that they actually go about it, because not everyone will do it voluntarily.

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The last thing is on education. Seat belts have to be worn by law. Helmets in Ontario have to be worn by law. Yes, let us educate, but let us make sure that law is there and let us bloody well enforce it.

Mr. Jeremy Harrison (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not even know where to start with the comments by the hon. member. If it were up to the NDP, people would be going to a safe injection site to inject heroine and be arrested on leaving for having a bag of potato chips in their pockets. This is utterly ridiculous. Perhaps we could get some comment on that from the hon. member.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that after the debates we have had here today, the hon. member stands up and hands out such gibberish. I truly do not understand the point the hon. member is trying to make.

If things were as straightforward and linear as he likes to make them, we would not need laws. We would not need all of us here. The member knows very well that the issues he raises have nothing to do with the matter before us right now.

If the member wants to debate what is going on in Vancouver in terms of harm reduction, by all means, bring it on. We in the NDP would love to have that debate, just like we love having this debate because it is about health, it is about children and it is about our responsibilities to them.

• (1520)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, food safety and security touches all of us. A growing body of research shows that trans fats contribute to health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity. I would like to talk about some of the other factors that impact on people's ability to have access to safe food.

One of the things that we know about is food insecurity. Food insecurity is defined as the inability to access nutritional food in sufficient quantities. This can be related to poverty, low income, neighbourhoods without supermarkets and lack of knowledge on how to prepare food. Food insecurity is significantly associated with poor health, chronic disease, obesity, major depression, stress and food allergies. Food insecurity directly ties into what is actually in the content of our food.

Some mothers reduce their food intake to ensure their children get better food. This compounds the problems of trans fatty acids in foods because these women eat them as a higher proportion of their diet. I have heard stories from mothers who talked about struggling to balance their desire to provide an adequate diet along with their inability to access a sufficient income to provide that safe food.

Lack of choice impacts on people's ability to eat safe food as well. The report, "The Cost of Eating in BC", 2003, states that a low income family would need to spend up to 44% of its disposable income on a nutritious diet. This compares to the average Canadian who spends only 17%. That is shameful in a country like ours that has access to adequate food and resources to adequately feed all of our population.

Pregnant women living alone on income assistance would be in the most desperate situations.

We know that at least 20% of women and children live in poverty in Canada today. These consumers end up buying food full of trans fat because they are the cheapest option. If the trans fat in those foods were replaced with a healthier fat, their overall health would improve.

Low incomes reduce choice in food buying decisions. Lower income neighbourhoods do not always have supermarkets or stores that provide healthier choices. We need to ensure that the food that is available for people in those lower income residential neighbourhoods is safe food to eat.

Lower literacy levels also remove choice from some consumers as they cannot read and understand or use the food label to make an informed choice. That is one reason that labelling, as a stand alone option, would be insufficient to protect our Canadian population from poor food choices.

Let me talk a bit about literacy. Low literacy limits opportunities, resources and the control which people have over their lives. As a result, people with low literacy have limited opportunities to make informed choices about their own lifestyle. The following information is from the paper on "How Does Literacy Affect the Health of Canadians?"

This is a fact. Twenty percent of Canadians have very low levels of literacy. These people with low literacy skills have limited access to health information, including both written and verbal. Much available information about health, both from health organizations and practitioners, as well as other sources such as the media, is in a written form and therefore very difficult or impossible for many people to understand. The printed word is not a preferred or credible source of information for many people who tend to obtain their information about health via word of mouth.

Health is also a gender issue. As the women's critic, I am pleased to be able to talk about how trans fat impacts on health and women.

Heart disease is the number one killer of women in Canada. We know that the use of trans fats directly contributes to heart disease in Canada. We also know that fat intake affects women differently than it does men. Research is beginning to look at health issues for women as opposed to health issues for men.

Research from the University of British Columbia shows trans fats pass through the placenta to the fetus. In Europe, another study has found that the higher trans fats in the diet of a pregnant woman, the more likely they are to give birth prematurely and have smaller babies. This is a serious lifetime health issue for women and children. I would urge us to take a look at legislation that protects children from being exposed to trans fats in the womb.

Once born, trans fats ingested by mothers is passed to their babies through breast milk. A study by Health Canada found that Canadian breast milk contained among the highest levels of trans fats reported, and that is a shameful statement to date.

In a nurses health study, women who consumed the greatest amount of trans fats in their diet had a 50% higher risk of heart attack compared to women who consumed the least amount of trans fatty acids.

• (1525)

Trans fats may increase the risk of type 2 diabetes in women as well. In a 2001 study, researchers found that when women replaced 2% of the trans fats that they ate with polyunsaturated fat, they dropped their risk of diabetes by 40%. This impacts in a major way on our health care system. A recent study showed that high levels of dietary trans fats doubled the risk of colon cancer in menopausal women not on hormone replacement therapy.

There is more. Trans fats have also been implicated in developing breast cancer. A Dutch study suggested an association between the amount of trans fats stored in the body and the risk of disease in women after menopause.

Dr. Walter Willett, a physician and chairman of the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health, was co-author of a 1993 report on 75,521 women who were tracked in the Harvard nurses study. Women with a high intake of trans fats were 1.5 times more likely to develop coronary disease than women with a low intake of these so-called foods. Data from a preliminary study suggested that diets high in trans fatty acids were associated with an increased risk of preeclampsia, which is induced hypertension and very dangerous for both mother and fetus.

The accumulated evidence on how trans fats affect women and children, and our population as a whole, is a really important issue before the House today. I would urge members to seriously consider supporting this motion. It is the age old story. When we invest in preventive care up front, we save money in the long run.

All of the evidence talks about the fact that as we continue to have trans fats in foods available to the Canadian population, we are actually increasing our health care costs over the long run as we need to continue to spend money on acute care dealing with things like diabetes, heart attacks and cancer. We are putting our health care system under undue pressure. It is really important that we support this motion to ban trans fats and look after our population as a whole.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the fledgling northern Ontario separatist party, I would welcome the city of Hamilton as a sister city in the new province of northern Ontario. I think it is a wonderful city and is always undermined by having been so close to Toronto. Even though my colleague from Hamilton Centre is not here, I would welcome him in the new northern Ontario caucus if he so chooses. I should not be speaking behind his back, but he is a bit of a curmudgeon. I do not think he would want to sit beside me, except that he has been forced to in the House. Needless to say, I am off topic.

I would like to ask the hon. member if she could perhaps enlighten us a little more about the devastating impacts of diabetes, particularly among the first nations communities in the region she represents?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely correct. First nations communities suffer from diabetes at a higher proportion than the population as a whole. Certainly, my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan has a significant number of first nations

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people living in the community. The impact of diabetes has been the subject of a number of studies in our communities and they are working very hard to combat that.

Trans fats is a significant factor in the diets of many people. I talked about low incomes and food security. We have a responsibility to ensure that our food sources are safe. Mandatory labelling will not do it. We really need to take a stand and say trans fats are unacceptable in our diets.

• (1530)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the NDP for taking on this initiative because there is no doubt that trans fats are a very major issue in our diets, in the health of our children, and our community.

However, I have some concern about this whole move toward a zero tolerance policy. I thought that we lived in a country where we have some freedom of choice. Healthy choices are part of that and we make decisions every day in our diets and in the foods we eat. I want to hear what the member's thoughts are on respecting people's choice, on educating them, and allowing them to make the choices for proper eating.

I have a concern that if we are going to have zero tolerance, why do we not have zero tolerance on cigarettes? Why do we not have a zero tolerance on alcohol or zero tolerance on marijuana possession? Let us just take it right out of the system. If we are going to really get serious about regulating the health of Canadians, then let us be consistent; however, if we are not, let us give people the right to choose and the right to look at these issues. Let us give them the education.

I also want to raise the issue that a lot of the foods we consume are imported. How are we going to police that and how do we do that without affecting our trading relationships?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues that the hon. member raised and part of it revolves around zero tolerance. There are historical precedents where we have indicated that certain substances will not be either in our food or in our environment.

It is incumbent upon us to act once we realize something like trans fats have such a serious adverse impact on health of Canadians. It would be irresponsible to not take the issue on and ban it. Education will also be necessary in terms of how people look at fats in their diet. A number of organizations like the Heart and Stroke Foundation are working very actively with the Canadian population to put forward an education program.

As to trading, Denmark is one country that has banned trans fats. I do not see the collapse of the Danish economy as a result of that. I would urge us to take a look at how Denmark has effectively implemented this and determine how that will affect how we deal with some of the imports that come into our country. Certainly, there are a number of imports that we would look at as not being safe and we would not engage in that behaviour.

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Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to stand in the House and support this motion. More than that, I would like to congratulate the New Democratic Party, particularly the member for Winnipeg Centre, for bringing this issue to the House.

This issue is of significant importance to me in large part because of my background as a past president of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia and a board member of the national Heart and Stroke Foundation. As well as congratulating my colleagues who have brought this forward, I would like to congratulate members of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, people like Mary Elizabeth Harriman and Jane Farquharson, who have done so much work both nationally and in my own province of Nova Scotia, and Sally Brown. It is also a time to honour some people who have done great work for the Heart and Stroke Foundation in Nova Scotia, people who were, like me, past presidents: Rollie Jamieson, Ross Backman, Rick Edwards, Neil Black, and many others who have done great work in bringing this motion forward.

I would like to talk a little bit about the health of Canadians in general. Not only are we concerned about the sustainability of our health care system in Canada, but emerging threats from new viruses like West Nile, SARS, and now the avian flu. They have raised questions and concerns about our capacity and readiness to respond, and prevent life threatening epidemics. Our recent experience with SARS demonstrates that only too well.

However, I want to talk about another crisis in Canada, one that captures fewer headlines, but currently kills more Canadians on a daily basis than the new and emerging communicable diseases combined. I am talking about the so-called silent epidemic of largely preventable chronic disease. Each year in Canada more than three-quarters of deaths result from four groups of chronic diseases. These disease groups, which are approaching epidemic proportions, are ones we are all familiar with: cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, certain cancers and type 2 diabetes.

I am from Atlantic Canada. It has the highest incidences of chronic disease in this country outside of our aboriginal communities. We have far too high an incidence of smoking, obesity, bad nutrition, stress, alcohol intake and all those risk factors that lead to high rates of chronic diseases. We simply have to, as a country, get serious about preventing these diseases.

I propose to give a flavour of the most recent data and trends with regard to the health of Canadians. The numbers are striking as are the costs and their implications. The total cost in Canada of illness, disability, and death from chronic diseases amounts to an estimated \$80 billion annually. The cost in terms of quality of life is immeasurable. As the population ages, the incidence of chronic diseases will continue to increase unless major steps are taken.

A recent report estimated that in 1999, about \$2.1 billion, or 2.5% of the total direct health care costs in Canada were attributable to physical inactivity. I have spoken in the House before about a study by the Heart and Stroke Foundation in Nova Scotia that backs it up in my own area. Some 21,000 lives were prematurely lost in 1995 because of physical inactivity.

Approximately 47% of adult Canadians aged 20 to 64 are either overweight or obese. It is reported that the prevalence of childhood overweight doubled and juvenile obesity tripled among children aged 7 to 13 between 1981 and 1996. In 1998 it was estimated that 63% of Canadians aged 12 or over were not active enough to benefit their health. More than half of children aged 5 to 17 were not active enough for optimal growth and development.

Studies tell us that over an estimated 1.7 million Canadians have diabetes. At present rates, this number is expected to grow to 3 million by the year 2010. Aboriginal peoples are particularly at risk. Prior to 1940, diabetes was virtually unknown in the aboriginal population, but in recent years rates have escalated to 15%. By 2015, a quarter of our aboriginal peoples will have diabetes. These disturbing numbers and the trends in both non-communicable and communicable diseases should concern all of us. A call has been sounded for a serious response from all levels of government.

The federal government has responded to this by establishing the Public Health Agency of Canada. The creation of the agency marks the beginning of a new approach to federal leadership and collaboration with provinces and territories on efforts to renew the public health system in Canada.

What is important to realize, and that I would like to highlight here, is that public health addresses both infectious and chronic diseases. Public health is about the promotion of good health, the prevention and control of disease, and the protection from existing and emerging health threats. We are not standing still on these issues.

•(1535)

The federal, provincial and territorial ministers of health announced in September 2002 their agreement to work together on a new initiative, the development of an integrated pan-Canadian healthy living strategy. The strategy will initially emphasize physical activity and healthy eating and their relationship to health and weight.

The aim of the healthy living strategy is to promote the health status and health outcomes of Canadians, reduce health disparities, and reduce the risk factors associated with type 2 diabetes, cancers and respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.

Federal, provincial and territorial health ministers directed officials to develop a strategy along with stakeholders. To this end, a thorough consultation process was undertaken with stakeholders from across Canada, including representatives from all levels of government, non-governmental and voluntary organizations, the private sector and aboriginal peoples.

At the September 2003 meeting of federal, provincial and territorial health ministers, a framework was endorsed, along with a series of recommended actions in the areas of partnerships, research, surveillance and best practices, community funding models, communications and health information, and further dialogue with aboriginal communities.

Federal officials, along with their provincial and territorial counterparts, are currently taking steps to develop and build on these ideas. For the average Canadian, what this means is that programs and initiatives will be put in place and tools provided for the public to make informed decisions and choices.

Having said this, let me say that the solution to preventing chronic disease is not simply a matter of individual responsibility or a matter for the health sector to address on its own. It is critically important that we all share responsibility for changing the conditions that influence health status and that have contributed to the rise of chronic disease.

We know that a number of key sectors strongly influence the environments that support healthy eating and physical activity. Education, transportation, recreation and sport, food and agriculture, environment, infrastructure, business and industry and all levels of government have a role to play in improving outcomes.

In response to direction from the FPT ministers of health, the Intersectoral Healthy Living Network has been established through a coordinating committee, bringing together representatives from governments, private and voluntary sectors, issue and population groups and others. The coordinating committee is an innovative and collaborative model currently developing global targets and indicators to guide the work of the network, establish an integrated research and surveillance agenda, and develop business plans for national public information and community relevant funding.

Complementing the work of the healthy living coordinating committee, the federal government has taken additional steps. A federal social marketing campaign is set for spring 2005, along with Sport Canada and INAC, which will focus on women and children.

In collaboration with other ministries of health and education, work is under way to establish the joint consortium on school health. An international symposium on school health was held in early November.

Combined physical activity and healthy eating guides are in the final stages of development. There is support for the physical activity benchmark program in collaboration with sport bodies and the provincial ministries.

The coordinating committee of the healthy living network has been asked to present a comprehensive pan-Canadian healthy living business plan to the federal provincial and territorial ministers of health in September 2005.

The Government of Canada has also been an active player on the international front. The World Health Organization has adopted a broad-ranging approach and has developed a global strategy on diet, physical activity and health, which was endorsed by the May 2004 World Health Assembly.

I would like to speak a little bit about the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, which have enabled non-profit organizations like the Heart and Stroke Foundation and other partners to do studies not only on biomedical and clinical research but on population health and health systems, so we can make a real attempt to keep people healthy rather than just treat them when they are sick.

I want to say something else. I do not believe we have done enough as a government or as a nation. I believe, and I have stated it in the House and in the health committee, that we need a complete, integrated national wellness strategy that recognizes the need for healthy living, rewards behaviours that lead to good health and

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provides an environment in our schools, in our communities and businesses that recognizes the need for healthy living.

I have a high school in my area, Dartmouth High School, that this year took the coke and the potato chips out of the school and replaced them with water and healthy snacks. The sad fact about it is that the school loses money, which is discretionary money for the school. That school did the right thing and it should not be penalized for making healthy choices for its students.

We need to recognize that much unhealthy living is the result of poverty. Government has a role to play in education, promotion, construction of required facilities, literacy programs, nutrition programs and affordable housing. They all play a role in the health of Canadians.

It is crucial that we continue to support this work at home as well as through our international relationships. The health and well-being of Canadians is the cornerstone of a healthy and productive society and economy. We cannot afford to be sidelined by the health threats that loom on the horizon.

● (1540)

Population health action, promotion, prevention and protection are urgently needed. I believe that this motion today is a step in that direction. It is one of the important steps we can take to safeguard the health of Canadians.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the member who just spoke, it is easily recognizable that they are obviously doing something different in the province he comes from. Are there any jurisdictions in his area that are doing an above average job in healthy living?

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia is in fact the only province now, I believe, that has a ministry of health promotion. I applaud Nova Scotia for that. I think it needs a lot more resources. Under Scott Logan, a very capable administrator who promotes healthy living and wellness and is also very involved in sport at the elite level, Nova Scotia has taken some very good steps. I commend Premier Hamm for the work that has been done.

I also think Nova Scotia goes back a little further. My father was the Mayor of Dartmouth and instituted a healthy communities policy back in 1985. Ministers of health like Jim Smith have promoted the importance of activity and the importance of spending money on our health care system, such that we prevent people from getting sick and do not just wait until they get sick.

I am sure there are other places in the country that are taking steps in the right direction and that I might not be aware of. I must say I am proud that Nova Scotia has developed a ministry of health promotion and I am not sure that it would not be a bad model for Canada. We have a new public health agency which includes population health, and I think it will do a great job, but I think perhaps it would be even better if we had a national ministry of health promotion.

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•(1545)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the remarks of the hon. member. I know that he has been very active with the Heart and Stroke Foundation. I found that out while speaking to him when we were riding over here on the little green bus to the debate this afternoon. I wonder if he could share with us some of his experiences in working for that organization, because I know that it has been doing excellent work on this issue and many other issues related to heart disease in Canada. Could he share with us some of his experience of that discussion within that organization?

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I am afraid that my colleagues at the Heart and Stroke Foundation would be disappointed to find out that I came up here on the bus and did not walk from the Confederation Building, but that had more to do with the lack of time today than anything else—

An hon. member: And the rain.

Mr. Michael Savage: —and the rain, let the record show, although it is much better here than it is in Nova Scotia.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation has been very active, but it is not just the Heart and Stroke Foundation that has been working. The Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Diabetes Association, the Lung Association and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada are all organizations that promote the health of Canadians.

I think that organizations like the Heart and Stroke Foundation and some of the other ones we have mentioned can take a very leading role in instituting some of these strategies. I know that the member who proposed the motion today would probably agree. I think that people like the folks who have been involved in the Heart and Stroke Foundation have done the work. We have done a great amount of work.

We know, for example, that we have made great strides in reducing the incidence of tobacco usage. It does mean that people are living longer but not necessarily better, because once we keep people well so they do not get sick we also have to do something once they do get sick and spend more money on things like home care and palliative care.

I think organizations like the Heart and Stroke Foundation have done a great job in bringing this issue and smoking, obesity and inactivity to the national agenda. I congratulate them and I am glad that they are cited in this motion today.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too want to thank the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for his remarks and his insights. I found both the tone and the content of his remarks easy to agree with.

I would like to press him on one specific point. Some members of his government and some opposition members feel that it is probably adequate to introduce a labelling program to reduce the intake of trans fats generally. I am of the view that labelling is not adequate. I believe there are literacy problems associated with labelling, and frankly, labelling of scientific data may not be understood even by those people who do read the label.

Would the member agree that labelling alone probably is not adequate to seriously limit or comprehensively reduce the intake of trans fats generally?

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I would support a motion that called for a ban on trans fats. That is not this motion, but I would have supported it had that been a motion before this House.

I have met with the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association about this issue because their members are affected by this. I do not take lightly standing up here and saying that I would support it, because it would have an impact on many of their businesses and unfortunately the smaller businesses as opposed to the larger chains, which have indicated in other jurisdictions that they can actually live with a ban on trans fats.

I would simply say to the member what I learned a long time ago in Nova Scotia politics: “Don't let perfect be the enemy of better”. I think this takes us to a better place.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

I am pleased to participate in the debate this afternoon on trans fatty acids on behalf of my constituents of Burnaby—Douglas.

I also want to pay tribute to the work of my colleague from Winnipeg Centre on this important issue. The member for Winnipeg Centre has led the charge on issues of trans fats in this Parliament and in the last Parliament. His work has raised the awareness of Canadians and members of the House to the dangers of these substances and has contributed significantly to our understanding of healthy eating, a healthy lifestyle and preventive health care.

Families in my riding and across the country are concerned about trans fats. This was clearly demonstrated to me in the last Parliament when, in light of the work done by the member for Winnipeg Centre, my predecessor sought the feedback of local residents on trans fats. Literally hundreds of folks from Burnaby—Douglas responded, supporting our efforts to see trans fats banned. I know this is an important issue in my riding and today I want to speak for those people.

I believe the House can work together to respond to the concerns of people in my riding and across the country by committing to ban and eliminate trans fats by November 2005, as the motion before us states.

Trans fat is made when manufacturers add hydrogen to vegetable oil, a process called hydrogenation. This is done to increase the shelf life and maintain the flavour of the foods to which they are added. Trans fats can be found in a wide variety of foods Canadians consume every day, such as vegetable shortenings, crackers, cookies, snack foods and many more can be made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils.

We know that trans fats are harmful to people and yet these hydrogenated oils are present in many of the processed foods that we eat. Trans fats cause significant and serious lowering of good cholesterol and a serious increase in bad cholesterol. They are added to food to increase the food's shelf life but consumption of them directly affects our lives and the lives of our children. The decrease in good cholesterol and the increase in bad cholesterol is often the double whammy effect.

I am concerned about the impact this unhealthy standard has on our children. Those children who start eating a steady diet of fast foods are at a higher risk for heart disease. It is even an issue in utero. Children as young as 8, 9 and 10 years of age are now having to be tested for their cholesterol levels.

How can we justify that? How can we justify having children as young as 8, 9 or 10 years old with high cholesterol? Are we putting children at risk of heart disease for the sake of convenience and for the corporate bottom line?

Lots of young people in Canada are showing real leadership on the issue of healthy eating. Last weekend, I and my other NDP colleagues from British Columbia, including the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, made a tour of the West Kootenay area of British Columbia where we met with many people in the communities of Castlegar, Rossland, Trail and Nelson.

One of the issues that I discussed with some activists from the community of Rossland was the whole issue of healthy eating. I met with some folks who were working on what is called the Waddell project, which is a preventive health project that has an anti-cancer and a very community-based focus. The specific project that they came to discuss with me was the healthy eating project in the local high school.

The high school in Rossland recently lost its cafeteria service due to budget cutbacks. The cafeteria was replaced with vending machines. Unfortunately, the kinds of foods that we normally get from vending machines are the ones that are most often associated with trans fats and with an unhealthy lifestyle.

In order to address that problem, the community, along with the teachers, the students, the parents and the people involved with the Waddell project, organized a food store where healthy food was sold during lunch hours as an alternative to what was available in the vending machine. It showed a real awareness of the issues of healthy eating and healthy food. It also showed the importance of those issues to the community in that they were willing to volunteer and put the hours in to organize something like that. We did not discuss specifically the issue of trans fats but the whole idea of the project was to make sure that students at the high school had access to healthy food. I want to pay tribute to some of the people I met with that afternoon last weekend.

The corporate bottom line should not be determining the health of our nation. Consumers must be able to have confidence in the food they have purchased and must be able to easily make good choices in that regard.

• (1550)

I do think the issue has a relationship to the overall well-being of our health care system. If our government thought ahead, planned

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and responded to emerging issues and adequately funded our health care institutions and professionals, we would not be battling the current health care crisis and the rapid increase in many acute care health issues and diseases.

A preventive health care approach is vital to the health of Canadians and to the ongoing viability of our health care system. I believe our government must do what it can to prevent disease before we treat it. Let us keep our people healthy by changing unhealthy lifestyles and ensuring healthy choices can be made.

The potential to produce better health by banning trans fats could offer a tremendous health care saving. It is a key part of a preventive health care strategy. This significant shift in focus requires strong leadership and the NDP is prepared to continue to show the way on this issue. We are responding to the needs of Canadian families.

As we are increasingly aware of the effects of the foods that we consume on our health, we must eliminate trans fats from our diets. There is no recommended daily intake of trans fatty acids. In fact, the daily recommended intake is zero. Just one gram a day increases the risk of heart disease by 20%. The Canadian average is 10 grams a day. Ten grams is the highest rate of intake in the world.

That is why we are calling for an outright ban on trans fats. Canadians deserve a chance at a healthy life.

We are on the verge of an epidemic in our country. In fact, in some ways we already are in the middle of a cancer epidemic. We have astounding levels of obesity and diabetes and these diseases can be directly related to trans fats.

Our government has an obligation to the people of Canada to ensure that the foods available to them are safe. Trans fatty acids are not safe.

Dr. Walter Willett of the Harvard School of Public Health says that the amount of trans fats we are consuming is "a recipe for a health disaster". Eliminating trans fats could prevent 2,000 heart attacks a year and save 1,000 lives per year in Canada.

Studies have shown too that people with lower incomes tend to eat more processed foods, as these foods are often cheap and easily accessible. The ability to prepare fresh foods is often more limited for low income folks. When income is an issue, people often eat more fast food as well. Making healthy choices should not be something limited to people who have higher incomes. We must do all we can to ensure that healthy food does not continue to be a class issue in Canada.

Healthy eating prevents health problems, such as obesity, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure and stroke. We should be doing whatever we can to deal with these silent killers.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation and the World Health Organization support a ban on trans fats and so does the NDP. The Heart and Stroke Foundation is working hard and doing excellent work on this issue because of the great danger these fats pose to the health of our hearts.

Supply

We must make every effort to prevent heart attacks and to save lives. This effort would take some pressure off our already overburdened health care system. We must do whatever possible to ensure that trans fat free becomes the standard. We simply cannot afford to put the lives of our families in jeopardy. We should not just label the toxins in our food. We should get rid of the toxins altogether.

I also have heard discussion this afternoon about requiring a labelling standard. That does not make much sense to me. Why label something when we know it should not be there in the first place? It makes sense just to get rid of it so that we know all the food that we consume is free of this terrible material.

I believe we are called in that regard to a higher standard. We need to make sure that when it comes to our food the bottom line is public health and public safety.

We have seen the horrible results of sacrificing standards when it comes to our drinking water in Canada. Few Canadians find it acceptable to put off any action that would ensure safe drinking water. Surely the situation is the same when it comes to our food supply.

The people of Burnaby—Douglas sent me here because they want government to work for them. They want government to look out for their best interests and to act when their interests are proven to be compromised. I and many of my constituents believe this is exactly one of those situations.

Trans fats clearly pose a danger to the health of Canadians. In that light, the responsible course is for us as parliamentarians to take action to ensure that trans fat is not consumed. That is why I am supporting a ban on trans fat in our food and that is why I will be voting in favour of the motion.

• (1555)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas for his very thoughtful remarks and for emphasizing in his speech one aspect of this whole debate over trans fats, which is the broader public policy debate around health care and the energy, resources and emphasis that we necessarily put toward the back end of health care, which is really managing illness once we are already sick, and the very low priority we seem to put at the front end of health care, which is trying to create a healthier community of people who are less likely to get sick.

Could the member perhaps expand on that broader public policy issue and on how this idea to ban trans fats is the very essence of public health issues, or perhaps public health care versus managing illness?

• (1600)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, when I was in Rossland, B.C. last week it really showed me how the trickle down effect of government policy affects people right at the cafeteria lunchroom table. We could not get any closer to a basic need or a basic activity in our society than having lunch at school with one's classmates and teachers. As a result of policy decisions, government cutbacks and funding cutbacks, which I would have to say started here in the House and worked their way across the country, the provincial governments did

not have the money needed for education funding in the province of British Columbia, which had an effect on the amount of money the school boards could provide which led to the school board having to make the decision to cut the cafeteria program at a local high school.

The perfect opportunity to ensure the health of those students was lost in that school because the opportunity to provide that service was gone. Instead, volunteers and students are picking up on that urgent need because they know how important it is. They do not want to see that opportunity slide and their health deteriorate because of those kinds of decisions.

Our health should not be a volunteer activity. I am glad volunteers are there to step into the fray when they are called upon and to do the job, but we need to make sure that our governments, which are here to organize society in a way that supports all of our citizens, do their jobs. They should not be leaving it up to the vagaries of a volunteer activity and the availability of people to take on extra responsibilities in their lives.

I salute those volunteers but at the same time I would rather put that project out of business by restoring the cafeteria in that school. Schools should have cafeterias because there are dieticians who help build the menus for the students so they get the healthy kinds of food that they will need to lead productive lives for many years into the future.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Burnaby—Douglas both for his comments and also for permitting me to share his time this afternoon on this important debate.

I compliment organizations that are active in my riding, including the New Westminster Food Bank, the South Burnaby Neighbourhood House and the Union Gospel Mission. When we talk about food and food supplies, there are many organizations in communities across the country that do valuable and important work to ensure that those Canadians, who are too poor to balance their budget and pay for food at the end of the month, still can get through those months.

I look forward to a day when food banks will no longer be necessary in this country. With the incredible surplus that we have, it should be a source of shame to all of us that so many of our citizens across the country are relying on food banks and Gospel Missions to make ends meet.

I would like to pay tribute to the member for Winnipeg Centre for his incredible work on this issue. He has been persistent and diligent in pushing this issue for so many months and we are now at the point where this motion is actually before us in the House of Commons. That should be a source of great pride to him as well as a source of respect from all members of the House for his persistence in bringing this issue forward.

We have the issue of trans fats that is closely related to two other issues that are extremely important in our country. The first is the issue of health care and health care cutbacks. I come from a community which lost one of its major hospitals earlier this year, St. Mary's Hospital in New Westminster. That loss, as a result of Liberal health care cuts, is a source of great shame and frustration in the community. The hospital was vitally needed, yet it is now closed.

Supply

The motion before us deals, in an indirect way, with the issue of health care costs. We know very well that the presence of trans fats means increased health care costs and increased pressure on the system. The estimate that comes forward is one of about \$100 million a year from the financial pressures on the health care system and the economy as a result of having trans fats in our system.

We also know that it is an issue of quality of life. The estimates range from 1,000 to 3,000 lives that could be saved annually in Canada if we were to deal adequately and effectively with the issue of trans fats. We know how quality of life issues in Canadian communities across the country have been affected in the last 10 to 20 years. We know the average Canadian family's debt load has grown by about one-third in the past 10 years. We know the average Canadian worker has suffered a loss in real wages of 60¢ an hour. We have seen health care cutbacks and the loss of hospitals in the major communities. We have seen post-secondary education cutbacks, which means more stress and more pressure on students, either to try to get the money to get through school, because of the outrageous costs of post-secondary education, or in so many cases, increased stress and pressure of trying to pay off debts that are in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 range.

Over the last 10 years of a Liberal government, we have seen a deterioration that is consistent and constant in the quality of life of Canadians. It is shameful. This measure is one that starts to address that quality of life issue in a very important way. It means we would have Canadians in a healthier state. It is a small part of what needs to be a very big agenda. That very big agenda is starting to have an impact on the quality of life of Canadians. It is extremely important, and that is why I am very happy to speak on the motion.

We know we are looking at potentially saving 1,000 to 3,000 lives a year. We know we are looking at savings in terms of our health care system, and that is important. We know we are contributing to advancing the quality of life of Canadians. These are all very important aspects.

We need to look at how other countries have treated the issue. The example that is most often cited is that of Denmark. We know Denmark started with the publication of a report by the Danish Nutritional Council in 1994 on the influence of trans fats. The report actually kick-started the whole process of the elimination of trans fats. One major step following the publication of that report in 1994 was achieved when an agreement was concluded with the Danish margarine industry to reduce the contents of such fats in margarine.

●(1605)

In 1994 the average daily intake of industrially produced trans fatty acids in Denmark was five grams per person. My colleague from Burnaby—Douglas just mentioned that the Canadian average is 10 grams per person, twice as much.

An hon. member: Highest in the world.

Mr. Peter Julian: Highest in the world and we obviously need to address as quickly as possible. Since the elimination of trans fats and primarily as a result of the reduction in the trans fatty acid content of table margarines produced in Denmark, the current average daily intake is estimated at a bit over one gram per person. In other words,

the Danish example to us is starting off at half the rate of grams per person consumption of trans fatty acids has since fallen to one-tenth, or a bit more, of what we now consume in Canada.

In the Danish example, the relevant executive order that was published, trans fats were limited to 2% of all oil or fats in industrially produced goods. In other words, the regulations in Denmark do not affect naturally occurring trans fats. This regulation came into effect on June 1, 2003. There was a six month period that allowed for 5% content of trans fatty acids.

In Denmark we have seen very clear results: first, from education and second, from the elimination of trans fats. What we see now in the Danish example is a per person consumption that is far below Canadian consumption of trans fatty acids. We know we have powerful allies on this issue. In fact, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada this very morning called for the elimination of trans fats. I will read just a brief excerpt of its press release. It states:

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada today expressed its support for the debate in the House of Commons on the important issue of effectively eliminating processed trans fats in the Canadian food supply. "The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada has taken a lead on this issue. We've brought together consultations with academics, scientists, different members of the food processing and food service sectors and government to find the solutions to getting processed trans fats out of our food", says Dr. Andreas Wielgosz, spokesperson for the Foundation. "The evidence linking trans fat consumption to increased risk of heart disease is clear, and we have to take action...."

In February of this year, as part of its annual report card on the health of Canadians, the Foundation called on government and the food industry, and other stakeholders, to work together to significantly reduce the amount of trans fat and saturated fat in our food supply. Since that time, the Foundation has been an active advocate for the removal of trans fats, appearing on this issue before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health last May.

"The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada is confident that a solution that is effective, affordable, and timely can be found with a committed effort from the government and other stakeholders".

●(1610)

[*Translation*]

Why should we ban trans fat and not just warn consumers of its danger? The first reason is the quantity and diversity of products containing trans fat that are imported from other countries. It is too difficult to regulate. It is simply more efficient to ban them.

Why allow products that are so harmful to the health of Canadians on the market? Banning them would force manufacturers to seek other safer and healthier alternatives. The fact that some major companies such as Kraft, for example, have already managed to remove these fats from some of their products—Oreo cookies is the most often talked about example—proves that it is indeed possible to make this change.

This would save money in our health care system, which is very important. Canadians would also have a better quality of life. It is only logical that we adopt this motion being presented today.

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also applaud the NDP for bringing forward the motion. It is important to educate people, and this does educate people on just how serious trans fats are.

Supply

I am concerned about trying to impose this upon our people so quickly. It is noted that one of Canada's largest business associations, with 17,500 members, representing restaurants, bars, caterers, hotels and other food service establishments has said that it could cost Canada's \$46 billion food service industry which employs more than one million people. How will we square that with the people who will have to deal with these regulations imposed on them very quickly?

Education would be very important first and the money should be put into that. The member, as well as the member who introduced the bill, have said that there have been all sorts of voluntary measures already. There have been some good things happening, everything from New York Fries to Oreos cookies.

If that does not educate the people, nothing will. When kids go to the shelf, they see it. If the mother says that it is there in colour, that the Oreo cookie is healthier for them than that one, then that is a form of education. I think the industry responds to that much more quickly than it does to being regulated.

If we spend a lot of money and effort trying to regulate, I think we might run into some difficulties, and it may not happen as quickly then.

• (1615)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I think there are two issues here. First, the motion before us talks about a consultation process that is underway with scientists and the industry. Therefore, industry is being consulted and that is extremely important. In the Danish example I cited earlier there were consultations with the industry.

The second element, again citing the Danish example, there was a period of adaptation. That is something obviously we would have to take into consideration. In the Danish case there was a six month of adaptation to the new legislation. Obviously, in Denmark there was broad education. People understood the issues. Industry moved in that direction as well. There were consultations with industry.

Within the realm of the motion that is before us today and given the notable example that Denmark has achieved a phenomenal reduction in the level of trans fats in its food, the member's concerns will be addressed.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member's comments were very in-depth. What I did not understand was the link he made between budget surplus and trans fatty acids. It left me a little confused.

However, I thank him for pointing out once again the great fiscal management by the government that led us to another \$9 billion again, the seventh consecutive surplus. We reduced the debt by some \$60 billion, leaving some \$4 billion available each and every year for services for Canadians, such as the health care accord of \$41 billion over 10 years. We increased equalization with the provinces that have less ability to have programs to aid the less fortunate. We have the child tax credit which gives money to the families who are more in need, reducing their necessity for food banks. We have the early childhood intervention, with a great deal of money to work with the provinces for education on nutrition for example. We have child care programs such as day care. There has been a reduction in

the use of drugs. We are working with Canadians in those areas. Also, the number of jobs have increased. Never have we had such growth rates in employment, which assist people in having less need for food banks.

The member has pointed out that all of those elements are good. We have to now look at how we remove these trans fatty acids in a reasonable way.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about trans fatty acids and the contribution that their elimination can make on the quality of life of Canadians. My point around the budget surplus was the fact that as this \$9 billion is being hoarded, the quality of life of Canadians across this country has been dramatically affected, for example, the closure of St. Mary's Hospital in my community due to federal budget cutbacks.

Homelessness has tripled in the communities in the lower mainland. There are now thousands of people without homes in the area of the lower mainland while there is this \$9 billion hoarded budgetary surplus. There are over 1,000 individuals this week that will be supported by the food bank locally in my community despite the fact that this money is being hoarded by the Liberal government.

We are seeing a dramatic fall in the quality of life of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. That is why 19 members of the New Democratic Party were elected to come to this Parliament and fight with other members in the four corners of this House to ensure that quality of life no longer deteriorates and that we finally address long-standing issues for a quality of life of—

• (1620)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I want to address the issue we are dealing with today as the official agri-food critic for the Bloc Québécois and as a farmer who has worked for many years on ensuring that what Quebecers consume is of the highest quality in terms of enjoyment and their health.

The agri-food industry is very important in Quebec. Society has been very demanding of farmers over the past few years. They are asked to produce food that is the best quality, the most diverse, sold at the best price, and to protect the environment and service Quebec's land for all of society.

Quebec farmers have met the challenge. The quality and diversity of their food production have increased and the price has remained low.

This is where I want to make a link between the Quebec model in agriculture and the NDP bill, since there are areas where Quebec and the rest of Canada can easily stand united.

Our farmers ensure that their products are of a very high quality, but the quality is ruined when the product is processed by the processing industry. How can we assure our consumers that the food they buy is of the same quality as the food from our processing sector producers?

Today, on this NDP opposition day, we are debating a proposal by this party to urge the government to enact legislation limiting the content of trans fats to the lowest possible level in all food products sold in Quebec and Canada. The motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the federal government should acknowledge processed transfatty acids are harmful fats, which are significantly more likely to cause heart disease than saturated fats;

And that this House hasten the development of replacements to processed trans fats by urging the government to enact regulation, or if necessary legislation within one year, guided by the findings of a multi-stakeholder Task Force, including the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and following the consultation process with scientists and the industry currently underway;

Therefore, this House calls on the government to enact regulation, or if necessary present legislation that effectively eliminates processed trans fats, by limiting the processed trans fat content of any food product sold in Canada to the lowest level possible.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of this motion.

It is estimated that every Canadian consumes 10 grams of trans fats daily, one of the highest levels in the entire world. The World Health Organization recommends we follow Denmark's example, as the Danes did away with trans fats in 2003, all the more important because 1 gram of such fat is apparently 10 times more dangerous for the cardiovascular system than one gram of saturated fat. The *New England Journal of Medicine* tells us that consuming 1 gram daily increases the risk of heart disease by 20%.

Getting back to the Danish legislation. It was passed in March 2003 and came into effect on December 31 that same year. It bans trans fats in food. This was the first country to enact such a law and this was not without impact. The European Commission mandated the European Food Safety Authority Scientific Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies to give an opinion on the presence of trans fats in foods for human consumption.

This panel was mandated because some member states of the European Union differed with the Danish authorities on this issue. The Government of Denmark used the public health argument to justify passage of this legislation. In fact, it is claimed that the links between the consumption of trans fats and cardiovascular disease, certain kinds of cancer, type 2 diabetes and strokes are clear enough to justify creating such legislation. Our friends in the New Democratic Party are relying on much the same argument to justify Bill C-220.

Let us now look at the effects on health. Consumption of trans fatty acids increases blood cholesterol levels. The disadvantage of trans fats, compared to saturated fats, is that in addition to increasing levels of bad cholesterol, they also lower the levels of HDL, the good cholesterol. The more trans fats and hydrogenated fats we consume, the higher our blood cholesterol goes. Epidemiological studies have also shown that people who consumed diets high in trans fats were two to three times more at risk of heart attack or other heart disease five to ten years later.

Supply

Saturated fatty acids raise the level of bad cholesterol by interfering with the elimination of cholesterol from the blood, due to their inhibiting action on the receptors for bad cholesterol. Trans fatty acids can also cause an increase in bad cholesterol levels in blood, but usually not in the same proportions as saturated fatty acids.

•(1625)

Medical science has not yet discovered the mechanism whereby trans fats raise the level of cholesterol in the blood.

We will recall that, in the last few centuries, our farmers produced food of excellent quality, as they do today, and that this food reached the consumer without undergoing major processing, and with fewer health risks. The consumer enjoyed healthy food, and the risks of disease associated with the new processing practices were much lower. But in the last 50 years, trans fats have become a part of our diet.

It is therefore still difficult today to assess all the consequences of increased or long term consumption. In addition, the Food and Drugs Act requires merchants to list the quantity of saturated fats, but not the quantity of trans fats, on labels, making it even more difficult for consumers to control their intake. It might interest people to know that there are 4,000 processed products on the market containing trans fats.

But more important still, according to certain experts, including those with the Fédération belge contre le cancer, because this type of fat was introduced into our diet barely 50 years ago, the human organism lacks the capacity to process large amounts of these fatty structures. It may therefore well cause more damage than other types of fat. Saturated fats have always been part of our diet, in products of animal origin, while trans fats are not present in large quantities in nature.

Here are the recommendations of the Heart and Stroke Foundation concerning the consumption of trans fatty acids. For starters, the foundation recognizes that reducing trans and saturated fats in our diet would help lower the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Its recommendations are therefore along these lines: provide the public with accurate information about the nutritional value of foods and the health effects of lowering trans fats in order to help consumers make informed and healthy choices; replace as soon as possible and where feasible the trans fats in processed foods by healthy alternatives, such as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, rather than with equal amounts of saturated fat; get Canadians to adopt a balanced diet that includes items from the four food groups in *Canada's Food Guide*; of 20% to 35% of daily calories as fat, that is 45 to 75 grams for women and 60 to 105 grams for men; increased consumption of polyunsaturates and monounsaturates and decreased consumption of trans and saturated fats.

As for the Health Canada recommendations, the following is given on its web site:

Supply

Intakes of saturated fatty acids, trans fatty acids and dietary cholesterol have each been independently and positively associated with recognized blood lipid biomarkers of heart disease risk. Any increase in the intake of these types of fat increases the risk of coronary heart disease in a linear fashion. However, it is neither possible nor advisable to achieve zero percent of energy from either saturated fatty acids or trans fatty acids in typical whole-food diets. The extraordinary dietary adjustments required to achieve zero per cent of energy from these types of fat may introduce undesirable effects, such as inadequate intakes of micronutrients, and unknown and unquantifiable health risks. Nonetheless, by making judicious dietary choices it is possible to have a nutritionally adequate diet that is low in saturated fatty acids, trans fatty acids and dietary cholesterol.

So Health Canada is therefore recommending reducing the consumption of these types of fats to a minimum, while ensuring that one does not end up with an inadequate intake of micronutrients.

The Bloc Québécois supports this motion. The Bloc Québécois pledges to work together with the other political parties represented in Ottawa to ensure that Canada takes resolute action by limiting the trans fat content of foods. Industrially produced trans fatty acids must be eliminated. In that respect, Denmark is a positive example to follow. Recent studies on the subject show that industrially produced trans fatty acids adversely affect health. The consumption of trans fats increases the risk of heart disease, among other things. That is why the Bloc Québécois believes that action to protect consumers ought to be taken as soon as possible.

Members of this House have mentioned the principle of freedom of choice, raising the issue of individual rights as opposed to collective rights and duties and suggesting that society as a whole should financially support, through our health system, the bad habits of individuals.

• (1630)

We are not opposed to individual rights, but we believe that the government has an important role to play in improving the health of individuals, in proactive ways that emphasize prevention.

The government has a mandate to protect the public, and the current legislation is inadequate. Obviously the Food and Drugs Act sets standards for labelling and advertising, but nothing currently requires merchants to reveal the quantity of trans fatty acids in the food they sell.

There will, however, be new Nutrition Facts tables on food labels in Canada by December 2005 for large food companies, and by December 2007 for smaller food companies. These tables will help everyone identify and limit their intake of products high in trans fat.

The government has an increased responsibility in this matter because the law has been inadequate for a long time. Labelling of trans fats will not be obligatory before December 2005. The public really will not have the knowledge it needs to choose its food well until that date arrives. Thus, the public is unable to protect itself and to choose foods without trans fats.

In view of studies that demonstrate increasingly that the consumption of trans fatty acids has a serious impact on heart health, the Bloc Québécois supports the New Democratic Party in its action to improve the health of Canadians and Quebecers. Need we remind the House that cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Canada and Quebec?

Nevertheless, this initiative should not compromise the government's prevention policies so that people to take charge of their own health and choose a healthy lifestyle. And it must not be imagined that such state intervention removes the individual citizen's responsibility with respect to food and lifestyle choices.

In conclusion, if the products that are added to our food were as good as the produce from Quebec's farms, the health of all our citizens would be much better.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today in the House, as it is always an honour for me to rise here and speak. It is a particularly great honour to speak on a motion such as this one brought forward by my colleague, because I really do feel that as legislators we are called upon to be forward thinking and to look for policies that benefit Canadian citizens not just here but in the long run.

I would like to begin by telling the story of my fledgling career as a chicken farmer. My dear wife was always very strong on the fact that we should eat better foods, more natural foods, and she had the idea that we would raise meat birds and feed our children better quality foods.

It fell to me to be the one to develop a relationship with these creatures and I have to say I never did form any kind of deep affection for chickens. I found them rather loathsome. I had to go out and clean up after them. I honestly tried to develop dialogue with chickens, but I found it quite impossible. In fact, a farmer once told me he deeply objected to even raising chickens because he felt it was an affront to spend energy on an animal that had an IQ lower than a rutabaga.

But one thing I noticed about chickens was that they seem to eat anything. They will eat egg cartons. They will eat the styrofoam off the walls. They will eat the leftover mashed potatoes. The one thing they would not eat was white bread. They would leave it. At first I wondered if maybe there was something wrong with the chickens, if maybe they were not feeling well, but I noticed on a number of occasions that they did not eat white bread. That struck me. What was so terrible in this bread that even chickens would not eat it?

Mr. Speaker, I should have said that I am splitting my time with the hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Returning to this gripping tale of the chickens and trying to understand what was wrong with white bread, I noticed at my daughter's school that all the children were eating white bread lunches and I thought that if chickens would rather eat styrofoam than white bread, there must be something wrong with it.

Supply

Not to belabour the point about white bread, I will tell members a great thing they can use white bread for. I had a job as a plumber for a very short period of time and we carried white bread in our toolboxes, because no matter how long we kept it in a toolbox it would never harden, which is a strange thing for bread. One would think bread would harden and form a crust, but it never crusted over. In fact, we would carry it in our toolboxes because when we had to solder joints and we had a real hard problem, we would stuff the pipe with white bread, it would absorb all the water and we could finish our soldering. I think it has an industrial use; I just think it is very scary to be feeding it to children.

That being said, I would like to keep my comments to four areas today and break this down. As agriculture critic, one of my issues is that when we bring forward legislation that changes how things are done it affects people. We know there are concerns in the canola industry. Back home in my region we have a number of canola farmers. I have been speaking with the canola groups. I have talked to a number of agricultural groups about what these impending changes would bring. One thing that I feel very confident about is the wording of this motion. What we are trying to do is open a dialogue and move forward. I have a great confidence in the producers across Canada and the food industry in Canada that we can move forward on this.

One of the things I have really noticed in the agricultural district I am from is that farmers are very much aware of the changes in a 21st century food economy. Throughout our region we have producers who are now moving into niche markets. They are starting to create what some call organic foods, or specialty foods, and the consumer is looking for that. We can now buy organic peanut butter at the local grocery store. That shocked me when I returned home this past weekend.

What I am seeing across the region among farmers and food producers is the sense of new opportunities, of responding to changing consumer patterns, so when we talk about the fear of losing jobs—and that is a real fear—we need to also be looking at the possibilities that are coming forward.

I share a region with my colleagues from Abitibi—Témiscamingue and Nipissing—Timiskaming. We share a common agricultural region and the producers are coming together. They have a wonderful event in Ville-Marie called la Foire gourmande, where food producers from across northern Quebec and northern Ontario come together. The marketing of these products is a real sign of the sense of where we are going in the 21st century economy.

• (1635)

Now in our region we are seeing the return to small bakeries and small butcher shops. People want products with quality. They want to know what is in their food. I think this motion is really speaking to a yearning that does exist in Canadians, a yearning for better quality foods.

That said, I will go to the second point in my speech tonight, which is that there is a growing disparity in terms of food choices in Canada and across North America. It is a growing chasm, I would say, between people who are perhaps economically and socially able to make these choices and a growing deskilling that we are seeing

throughout what used to be perhaps a working class and even in the middle class and throughout the lower class.

I see it in my own community with young mothers who have never learned to cook, with families who have never had meals together. To me it is a shocking thing, because when I look back on growing up I would say that in my town of Timmins perhaps every single family ate dinner together every night. The central theme of our week was Sunday dinner in the Moneta district with my grandparents.

When we see this change into a culture that no longer knows how to feed itself, a culture where people no longer have the skills to eat—

An hon. member: Their fathers don't know how to cook?

Mr. Charlie Angus: The hon. member has obviously never had the cooking of my father, otherwise she would refrain from making such comments. In fact, if the hon. member talked to my daughters she could hear the disparaging things they say about me bringing home food in a bag on Fridays, food that has already been cooked. But I digress, and I wish I had not been not thrown off my topic.

What I would like to say, though, is that we are seeing a deskilling throughout our communities. It is a terrible deskilling because children going to school are bringing processed foods with them every day. They are drinking Coke for breakfast. We see it even in rural communities where one would think that the old traditions of the daily meals would stand. Instead what we are seeing is a continual reliance on these kinds of manufactured foods and it is having a devastating health impact. It is affecting our children.

I think it speaks to a major cultural shift, because we think of food as a central part of our culture. It is not just health. It is who we are. It is the history of where we are as a people.

If we look through the Bible we see that meals are the central focus of so many of the important events, from the Passover to the feeding of the 5,000. Where we would be in the western world if the apostles had the last supper in a drive-through at Tim Hortons because they were late trying to get to Jerusalem? We would be left without.

I am saying this in dead seriousness, because on top of the deskilling we are seeing in our culture, we are seeing an increasing speed in our culture, so there is the inability to get home and cook because people are working longer hours or people are away. I know myself, because I pretty much live in my car these days, that when it is my turn to cook I am more inclined to buy something that has been precooked, which is not necessarily a good thing.

What we are seeing is that families do not eat properly. Especially we are seeing that children do not eat properly. I think when we talk about food choice we have to think about children because they are the ones who are being affected. I would like to talk a little about these health effects.

Supply

Are you signalling that I am down to one minute? Oh, Mr. Speaker, I was just getting started. I will skip over most of what I had to say here.

I think that the issue of where we are going is very important. I share the concerns of our members across the floor about choice, about how if we bring in this rule does it mean we are going to bring in that rule? I do personally share that concern, because I have a problem wearing a helmet when I ride a bicycle. That is probably why I do not ride bicycles.

But what I do see is that we have had major changes. When we had the discussions about getting rid of lead in gasoline, people said all kinds of jobs would be lost, but we got rid of it. We got rid of CFCs and aerosol sprays and we were better for it. We got rid of red dye number two. There are certain times when as legislators we are called to move forward and say, "Yes, this is in the interests of the general health and this in the interests of our children".

I think that together we will be able to bring this forward without unduly impacting the industry and agriculture of our districts.

• (1640)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the NDP bringing this motion forward. From my standpoint, I am not sure yet how I am going to vote on this issue. Our party is the only party allowing a free vote on this issue I believe.

I understand there are health risks because of trans fatty acids. I absolutely believe they are harmful to one's health, but my concern is that this might be the start of a slippery slope. If we start banning everything that the government deems harmful to one's health, where does it end?

I completely understand what is being said. I hope the marketplace adjusts so that it reduces or eliminates trans fatty acids in foods. Education and labelling is absolutely paramount and necessary in this case. I am not sure if I can make the full leap, as the member opposite has, to actually ban something that is in the marketplace because it is deemed to be harmful. I agree it is harmful, but I really think this is the start of a slippery slope.

If consumers are aware of the health risks and the dangers, the marketplace will adjust. Product manufacturers who are currently using trans fatty acids in their food products will adjust quicker than any legislation because they will understand, through the decrease in their product's sales, that there is a need to adjust. What are my colleague's thoughts on that?

• (1645)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the member's comments spoke to where we are going with this motion. It was not the NDP that deemed trans fatty acids dangerous to health. It was the scientific community of North America, the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the World Health Organization.

As legislators, we recognize that this is a serious issue. The job of lawmakers is to decide at what point to intervene and at what point

not to. Surely we all agree about intervening when it comes to increasing laws against drunk driving or speeding. I like to drive fast, but I drive at the speed limit. It is important to have seat belt laws, but some people say that it is an infringement on choice. Many times I have left my driveway only to stop, put my seat belt on, and start again because legislators have said it is important.

There are many isolated reserves in the area I come from that do not have grocery stores or fresh food. Children are being raised on trans fatty foods. They have a high rate of diabetes. This is having a big effect right throughout our health system. It is incumbent upon us as legislators to take this forward and discuss it, which is what we are doing today, and take it to a legislative review so that we can see how to bring this forward in the best way possible.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member for his presentation. It was very entertaining.

As an agriculture producer, I can see two sides of this story. There is no doubt that trans fat is a terrible food item that we must eliminate and hopefully eliminate it by market driven pressures, and by voluntary changes in the industry. There is also the other side of the story. Canola can replace a lot of the trans fats that are in food products right now. There is a great opportunity in the agriculture industry to benefit from it here in Canada.

Unfortunately, we have made the argument that trans fats are bad. We all know they are bad and we have to do something about it, but at the same time there are also saturated fats. A comment was made earlier today that saturated fats are just about as dangerous as trans fats in some ways and that we need to reduce them from our diet as well.

How does the member want to deal with that since it is a natural occurring fat that is found in almost all food products?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, those are very good points, although I am not sure who made the comment about saturated fats being the same as trans fats in terms of impact. There is a 4 to 10 times greater impact from trans fats.

In terms of the agriculture industry, I share the hon. member's concern. I am very concerned about where we are going to go with canola because it is a Canadian success story. A lot of our agriculture producers are seeing great opportunities not just in Canada but internationally. That is why I feel that the motion we have on the floor is a good one because we are discussing this issue with the canola producers now and they are seeing ways of moving forward with this.

That is how we have to do this. We cannot just say that we are not going to look at that and jump without looking. We have to work with our agriculture producers.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake, Agriculture; the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul, Revenue Canada; the hon. member for Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, Fisheries.

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make my contribution to this very important debate that profoundly affects the health of Canadians. I have a text which I have labelled “Ten facts and a conclusion”. I will go through the facts. I am claiming they are facts, not arguments. It is evidence in each case beyond which I think there is no dispute.

First, trans fats are technically speaking and scientifically defined as poison. They have been linked to heart disease, diabetes, obesity and other diseases.

Second, they are found in all processed foods, baby food, cookies, cereals, most hamburgers, and hot dogs. In fact, they are found in most of the food that people eat every day. In total, 40% of the products in supermarkets have trans fats in them.

Third, Canadians, regrettably, eat more trans fats than anyone else in the world, averaging over 10 grams a day. What is the reason for that? I do not know. That we should be dealing with it is another question.

Fourth, one in three Canadian children is overweight. A good part of the reason for this is the trans fats in our diet which children disproportionately consume.

Fifth, poor families eat more trans fats than others. This means we have a higher incidence of bad health in poor families, poor kids, and as has been mentioned many times, not only by my colleagues in this debate but by members of other parties on both sides of the House, many families, particularly low income families, have no choice in their neighbourhoods except to buy food with trans fats in them.

Sixth, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the World Health Organization, and leading doctors and scientists all over the world have all condemned trans fats. They have all said we have to get trans fats out of our diets.

Seventh, there are substitutes available for trans fats, so those producers that already are including trans fats in their products have alternatives available to them. In terms of the timing of this motion, there would be a phase in period in which the transition could be made.

Eighth, a number of responsible companies have acted and recognized the problem with trans fats. They have taken the correct decision. Oreo cookies, Becel margarine, New York Fries, and there have been a number of others that have been mentioned in this debate.

We do not normally wait for volunteerism to deal with other important social responsibility issues. We do not wait for people to voluntarily drive on the right side of the road. It would be a rather bizarre incident in society if we did. We pass laws to ensure that all of us, most of the time at least, drive on the right side of the road.

Ninth, Canadians want healthy food and they want regulations to ensure that we have healthy food. They do not want to have to read the small print, and often for lay people to make impossible calculations as to whether or not the food that they are eating is healthy or not. They expect governments and legislators to protect the food supply, whether it is right at the farm gate or whether it is

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food that they buy at the supermarket. That is a political obligation to ensure Canadians that they get healthy food.

Finally, fact number ten, we as parliamentarians in the House of Commons today can do something about it. Most Canadians in most parts of this country cannot do anything about it immediately, but we can. We can make a decision here today that will profoundly affect the lives of all Canadians.

My conclusion as has been put forward by other members of my party today in supporting this important motion is that we should act. This is no time for specious debate or specious forms of volunteerism. We as parliamentarians have the responsibility to take the health of all Canadians seriously. We should recognize that this is a practical matter. It is a necessary matter and let us get on with it and do it now.

• (1650)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I used this example earlier today, but I see there are different players on the stage now, so I would like to use the same example again.

The member has reiterated the stand of his party in putting this motion today that we ought to legislate against those things which are harmful to our citizens. That is the basic premise.

I would like to point out to him and to others present that it just so happens that we lose between 35,000 and 40,000 people every year due to illnesses and lung diseases that come from cigarette smoking. That is about 100 people a day. If there was a certain model of airplane that went down and killed 100 people and if that happened three days in a row, we would shut that thing down. Yet we are totally ignoring cigarettes. They are still legal and the government still taxes them and collects the revenue and there is no outrage about that at all.

Meanwhile we are going after this one. I think it is very inconsistent. Perhaps what the government is doing is starting at one of the lower items of danger to us. If we are to get into this whole thing of legislating against all of these things which are dangerous, where will it ever end? I am really concerned about that. I would like the hon. member's comments in response to that.

• (1655)

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, first of all I would say that we do have laws now that protect children from tobacco. Tobacco products cannot be sold directly to children. That is one point. The kids, by the way, have to eat and in many circumstances they have to buy food from stores that have nothing available except foods containing trans fats. That is a rather important distinction between cigarettes and food, it seems to me.

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Second, I take quite seriously the kinds of concerns that have been raised about tobacco. It is the case that many thousands of Canadians die from the poison that comes from tobacco every year. However, one of the things we have to do when we talk about legislating is to be practical. In this case we are obviously taking into account a society, not just Canada, but virtually every country around the world. The fact is that people have become addicted to cigarettes and that is a serious problem. In fact, it is one of the most serious addictions, compared to other substances, as has been widely recognized by experts and lay people alike.

We cannot just abolish tobacco products overnight. We can have education programs. We can stop advertising. We could stop tobacco products from being sold directly to kids, but it would be a serious social mistake to ban cigarettes outright. It is a practical decision and I think so far our society has made the right one on that by not banning them.

Here we have something that we can get rid of and there is a ready substitute for it. It can be put in the marketplace. By acting we protect not only children, but we protect adults. There is virtually no downside to taking the course of action that the motion puts in place.

I want to emphasize that in terms of its application it is a phased in action over a few years. There will be time for markets to adjust, for companies to adjust, for parts of the agriculture community to adjust. Incidentally, there will be positive benefits, as my colleagues have pointed out, to the agricultural sector as well.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the premise that is being put forth here is where it will end.

The hon. member has many more years of experience as a legislator than I do. If we look at the concept of voluntarily removing urea formaldehyde, of allowing people the choice whether or not they want to use CFCs and aerosol spray cans and perhaps the idea that people should be able to choose whether or not they will continue to use leaded gasoline, we made decisions as legislators throughout the past. I would ask the hon. member, did he see some terrifying decrease in personal freedoms as a result of those decisions?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, let me take what I think is a parallel. Market forces are something to be taken seriously. There are pressures on companies. One of the effects of this is that they do not readily respond on a voluntary basis if profits are to be more readily made in another way or markets dictate other tastes.

The perfect example is in my hometown of Oshawa. The automotive industry in recent years did not act on a single major reform, whether it was on auto safety or pollution control, without being legislated into such action. Notably the state of California years ago took such steps and as a consequence we have much safer automobiles and cars that produce less pollution.

The final point I would make, Mr. Speaker, before you get up is that the good companies that have already made the decision to get rid of trans fats are being punished because the other ones do not have to. We should make it a uniform—

• (1700)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Burlington.

Hon. Paddy Torsney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of young people in the audience today and I am hoping that some of them are learning to make better choices and better meals.

It is true, in terms of my colleague from Timmins—James Bay, that there seems to be a diminishing skills capacity among a number of people in Canada and it is certainly a challenge. It is very difficult to make meals for families at the best of times, because of our busy lives. It is certainly more difficult if a person has never had the skills passed down through the generations or has never had a chance to take a home economics course.

I want to caution that the member for Timmins—James Bay had said inadvertently that mothers do not know how to make meals. That is why I had suggested to him that maybe we could go with the term parents. Some of the teenagers with us today are probably preparing meals for their families.

We need to ensure that there is a greater interest in what we consume. I think young people today are certainly getting the message about making choices about healthy lifestyles. They are learning not to smoke and to make better consumer choices.

People have very busy lifestyles and they need packaged food items. I am sure most members in the House consume more packaged food than they ever anticipated. Stability and ensuring products are safe is absolutely imperative.

I am actually pulling out my BlackBerry, which I think is within the rules. I had a chance to visit the Voortman cookies website. That company is in my riding. It is the first company to adapt, to use information and make the transition to ensure that their fresh, great tasting cookies and wafers are made with only quality ingredients, all at an affordable price. It has made sure that its products have zero trans fats. Mr. Voortman's daughter said there was an opportunity and a market advantage in getting ahead of this.

The attention placed on this issue by the House, the present Minister of Health and the previous minister of health is pushing companies to do more. As well the companies themselves are realizing there is a market advantage.

Last Christmas I was staying with some very good friends. They had spent an extra hour at the grocery store looking at all the labels to figure out what cookies they could buy for their children out of concern that their kids were getting the best products. For the few times I am in the grocery store, I actually do look at the different products and try to make better selections.

The debate today is an opportunity for people to think about that. For the people who are watching this debate on TV or who are in the gallery today, it is a chance to learn more.

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I read the member's motion and it is hard to disagree with any of it. It is worded in a way that suggests if people do not get with the program, of course they are going to be legislated in a timely fashion. The minister has already identified regulations in terms of packaging to make sure that we are giving people better choices.

I think it was the member for Timmins—James Bay who, in an exchange with the member for Ottawa Centre, equated these products with changes we made regarding CFCs in aerosol cans and urea formaldehyde. Again there was a process of transition for those products. People were regulated and legislated and that is what we are doing here. The packaged goods companies are getting ahead of the game, certainly the smart ones are.

Obviously there is the opportunity to legislate, but we also have to think about why this is happening in a country like Canada. Canada has a great food supply and farmers who work really hard to make sure that Canadians have the best and safest products.

It was interesting to read on the Voortman website that the *Supermarket News* on December 22 ranked trans fats as the third highest food safety concern in North America, right behind E. coli and salmonella and that a Harvard doctor has called trans fats the biggest food processing disaster in history.

We have to recognize that trans fats are there for a reason. Fats obviously are in products. There were some stability issues and also to make sure that foods had longer shelf lives. I believe that was part of the reason they were introduced in the first place.

● (1705)

We are all working to make sure that the latest health information is implemented. We have colleagues in the other place from two different political parties, Senator Morin and Senator Keon, who have been working with the heart and stroke institute and with the scientists to get the best information available, to drive this issue forward and that is creating some of the change that is being discussed today.

Perhaps as we are aging in this chamber we may have much more knowledge of incidents of heart health issues in Canada. Certainly heart health in Canada is much better than it has been. We are making progress. People are making better lifestyle choices, although around this place it is hard to get the exercise and proper nutrition that I think people should be getting.

Partially hydrogenated vegetable oils are important to the food industry but we are working to get some viable alternatives. Companies like Voortman deserve a lot of credit. Colleagues have mentioned New York Fries and other places that are moving forward. I have been in that food court and have wondered about those french fries, as has the member for Calgary Southeast, I am sure.

Scientists have developed a number of canola and soybean varieties that could be used to produce oils with no or low levels of trans fatty acids. These varieties are being made available to growers. Our scientists and health professionals are continuing to do research to find healthy alternatives. We have to keep in mind that it is a process, that it is affecting the farmers across the country and that we need to make sure that there is a process of transition because

Lord knows those farmers have suffered enough right across the country.

The canola and soybean varieties are at various stages of development in terms of bringing them to market which will reduce the levels of trans fats. As I mentioned, Canadian food companies have been able to use the oils from these new varieties to lower or eliminate the use of trans fats in food products.

It is not an easy task. We are making some big changes. We got into this situation a number of years ago. We are going to have to deal with the arising costs, changes in production and perhaps the distribution of some of these foods to make sure they are produced closer to their client market.

We have to make sure that whatever is created as a replacement is healthier as well. The alternative oils do not resolve all of the stability, processing and product quality issues. There are limited quantities of the alternative oils. To expect food processors to turn to those exclusively would create significant challenges in the processing industry. I am not saying they cannot get over it, but they do need a bit of time.

I think in the way the motion is worded that there is great support for making that change. At the end of the day we always have the legislative power to drive it further if there is any suggestion that they are reluctant to make the changes.

A lot of good work is being done and needs to continue to be done. I certainly hope that my colleagues from the party that proposed the motion have their householders going out to their constituents to make sure that they have the information to make better food choices. I for one as an MP have tried to see if there are ways that we can set up more opportunities for people. There is the issue of lower income Canadians, and people who either do not possess the skill set, do not have the time, or are not able to purchase the core ingredients. It is nice to say that we will stop buying processed pizza or packaged goods and that we will go home to make all these items. That is great if one has the skill set and the money to purchase all the core ingredients.

We could do more in terms of setting up community kitchens or opportunities for people to share meals. Those kinds of opportunities are being created in various communities, particularly in urban communities. We need to find ways to share food and to make sure that people are getting access to good quality food.

Trans fats labelling will become mandatory in Canada on December 12, 2005 and a couple of weeks later in the United States. Canadian consumers are getting more information. Again we have talked about the market forces. Look at what members of the public can do when they get together, write letters or make calls.

● (1710)

I think almost every packaged good in Canada now has a 1-800 number that consumers can call if they need action, but they need to support that action once the companies make the change. It is a bit of a two-way street there. I am sure everyone will be buying Voortman cookies. Politics is local and we need to ensure that people realize that Voortman cookies are distributed right across the country. Voortman, which makes very good cookies, was a leader in this.

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The situation in North America in comparison to the EU is also important because food and food production is an international issue now. Labelling of trans fats is not mandatory in the EU unless a specific claim is made. Canada is moving much further with colleagues in the other place to work with the various scientists and researchers in making changes to get alternative oils.

The Danish example was mentioned earlier in the House where it has established that less than 2 grams of trans fats per 100 grams of fat is an appropriate level. Let us determine if that is the safe level for Canadians and, if so, proceed, but if it is not, then we must find out the safe level.

We need to have the appropriate timeframe to implement the regulations. I know packaged goods companies are always updating their labels and making sure they are appealing from a marketing perspective. Therefore I encourage them to get that new shipment of labels as soon as possible so people do have the information.

We also have to deal with the enforcement issues. Food inspection and food safety are very important to all Canadians. We must ensure consumer awareness. They need to know what to look for and what choices they can make, and that they support the progress that the companies are making with those purchases so that there is the incentive to the industry to reduce the levels.

Meetings between government, non-government and industry organizations are ongoing and they will continue throughout the early part of next year to work on the action plan and to ensure we are gathering the research in these areas.

Reducing trans fats from processed foods is, I think, a universal goal of the House. I cannot imagine anyone who is in favour of increasing it and certainly even maintaining it. We know it is not necessarily healthy for people and that we need to find alternatives.

This is an example of people working together, government and business, and saying that we need to get there. The motion today is perhaps about getting there a little faster and in different ways, but I think everyone understands the need to get there and to make sure Canadians are making healthy choices.

The House can perform the important function of ensuring consumers have the information they need to make the best choices. However we need to do more in terms of investing. People need to understand their lifestyle choices and, in terms of heart health, to do more cardiovascular activities. People need more opportunities for exercise, which we are supporting through our school systems, serious exercise among young people and giving them the opportunity to make better choices.

The food for thought program in my constituency ensures that kids start off the day with breakfast. It is funny talking to some constituents in my area. As people in the House know, Burlington is a very successful part of Canada. We are very fortunate. They are surprised sometimes with how many kids in our community are showing up without breakfast, either because they cannot afford it or because of other challenges within their families.

By setting up a program that distributes food to all the kids and all the kids have an opportunity to purchase healthy snacks, it makes it easier for moms and dads. The kids all share in the food, which, as

someone mentioned, is part of the basis of our culture. Food is the centrepiece of most of our holidays, religious and otherwise. Food is a very important part of Canadians' lives and as a major world food producer we should be providing people with the best possible information so they can make more healthy choices in the foods they eat.

• (1715)

When I was first elected to the House, for the new members who may not realize, we actually had the incredibly wonderful Ottawa Heart Institute come and test members of Parliament on various things, such as cholesterol, lifestyle and food habits. Sadly, many of our colleagues were one step away from a heart attack and it was quite shocking. They produced a four part graph and everyone was passing around where they were on the charts and too many of the people in this chamber were banging up against the wall of being at risk.

Ironically, of course, the meal for those of us who were on duty that day had been produced. It was french fries and pizza, so the heart institution started at the very core of the organization, which was the kitchens. I am happy to say that the whips have worked hard to make sure that those of us who are eating here are making better choices. Our very own dining room has made sure that there are healthier alternatives. I am still trying to get them to make sandwiches with real chicken and real turkey. I would ask members to join me in that.

However people do need the opportunity to make healthy choices. Our lifestyles mean that we do incorporate, perhaps more than we would like to, packaged foods, but with a little more education and perhaps a little more time in our busy days that could change.

I am glad members of the NDP have put this motion forward for debate. I hope the attention this debate has garnered will ensure that more people are going to the grocery store and making better choices, that companies are paying attention and are pushing the research a little faster within their organizations and are going to respond to what I hope is a growing consumer demand as well.

We hope our colleagues who work at the Department of Health and the many wonderful civil servants who work for the ministry of health will continue to push to make sure that we get there. Ultimately, we always have that tool of regulation at the end of the day. It is our obligation and it is our opportunity to make a difference.

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member made a fine contribution to this debate. I have learned more about Voortman's in 20 minutes than I ever thought I would. I benefit from that. I am pleased she mentioned the company, even if it is in her own constituency, quite appropriate, that has done the right thing by getting rid of trans fats.

Supply

I want to ask the member to respond to the point that some people on the other side of the House have made about letting market forces resolve this entirely for us. It seems to me that the market forces are good for resolving a number of things but when it comes to health and safety, we as legislators have an obligation to intervene at some point.

I do not want this to be simply a rhetorical question but to be a serious question. By relying simply on competitive forces, does this not put at a disadvantage, in a number of instances, companies that are doing the right thing, in terms of their production costs, if they get rid of trans fats, notwithstanding that there may be a market niche for that, for that minority of people who consciously go out and look for it, but picking up on the point the member herself made, that trans fats were put in there for good market reasons of making higher profits by having the foods last longer?

If we rely on market forces does this not mean that the good guys, so to speak, will be paying higher costs and have a disadvantage compared to the companies that do not do the right thing?

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Mr. Speaker, I will agree and disagree with the member for Ottawa Centre.

I am not sure that the only reason trans fats were used to prolong shelf life and to make products last longer was to improve profitability. The cookies on the shelf in my home last a long time and I want to know that they will last and still be safe to eat when I get to them. It is not just about profitability for the company. It is also in my interest that the product last longer.

It is our right to legislate what goes into foods. We have an obligation to make sure that food is safe in Canada. We have a whole series of regulations around product labelling. The former minister of health went a long way to making sure Canadians will be getting much more information to make informed choices. Sometimes our choices are not perfect. All of us have been on planes where we grab whatever snack food is offered. We have the ability to compare two snack foods on a flight and, while neither one of them is great, at least we can decide which one has fewer calories or less fat. We can make choices appropriate to our diets. That is one benefit alone of the information that we will get.

If members were to read the nutrition action letter, they would see that it has a lot of information about food and is helping to educate people. People are saying that Canada's labeling, vis-à-vis the United States, is much better. It took us longer maybe to get those little information boxes with the percentages of our vitamins, fat and protein quotients, but we are in fact getting better information than the U.S.

We have an obligation and a right to demand and legislate the information, and we have an opportunity as well to encourage. In terms of the regulation on packaging, a lot of companies are unhappy at having to change their packaging but they have to do that. It is our obligation and right to tell them what to do. I do not think everything is about leaving it up to market forces. I think market forces can push and get people a lot further along, but we need people to not just say they want these products but to actually purchase the products. There does have to be a level playing field to make sure that we are all working with the same information and that all the companies are

working. We do that in a whole series of products that we regulate as a country, and so it makes perfect sense.

The question of course is the timing and the right levels. The whole issue of 2% per 100, maybe that is not the right measurement, so let us work with the science, advance the science, invest in the science, encourage it and make sure we are getting the right information. Maybe it is zero, in which case we have to get rid of it completely.

• (1720)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the speech and I would like to commend the member.

I note that on cigarettes it is now required that a warning label be attached to it. There are all sorts of different things. Some of them include pictures and some of them are pretty graphic. Basically it says that we can buy this product but if we actually use it for the purpose for which it is intended, it will probably kill us. They are required to put that label on the product.

I wonder whether the member would favour doing that with products that contain trans fats. Maybe we should just put the label on it stating that it contains trans fats and that if used over a long period of time it will greatly increase the probability of having heart problems, clogged arteries and things like that. Maybe that would be a solution.

My second question to the member is a little tongue-in-cheek. In as much as she did quite a bit of advertising for Voortman's, and in our new environment here of ethical cleansing that we are undergoing within this Parliament, I wonder whether she would like to declare whether she actually owns shares in Voortman's.

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Mr. Speaker, I thought the first question was tongue-in-cheek as well, just showing the spirit of this good House. No, I do not own shares in Voortman's. I believe it is a private company. I have a lot of constituents who work there, and it is a fine company. Speculaas are my favourite cookies. Only in Canada would the child of Irish immigrants love the favourite Dutch cookie. I occasionally buy a box of cookies for our public consultation meetings. If members are having a community events, they might consider buying them.

The more important issue is, does the shock factor work? As somebody who graduated from business school, in marketing particularly, I am convinced that this is the way to communicate with people. There are a lot of challenges as to whether shock works. We can get good strong information. We can encourage people to understand the information that we give them. There are a lot of steps before we get to "This will kill you". I am not sure that has a diminished value over time. Everything will kill us with too much of it. Even too much good healthy Canadian water could be bad for a person.

I am not sure that kind of labelling would be the first step at this point in time, but I am open to seeing the research.

Supply

●(1725)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on that note, I have always believed in the motto of Julia Child. She just died at 94 years of age after having eating marvellous rich French food of all her life. Her motto was: Moderation in all things, including moderation. I ascribe to that.

The member has pointed out that the market has been responding of its own volition to the health challenge posed by trans fats. She mentioned the commendable example of Voortman's bakeries in her own constituency. Other members have talked about restaurants which have introduced healthier oils.

For instance, Hostess bakeries, the producer of all those marvellous treats, recently went out of business. Why? Because we do not give consumers enough credit. They are informed. They know that trans fats are bad. When they look at products that are loaded with trans fats, they avoid them, and those companies either change or die. They do that because of market incentives.

Would the member not agree that it is preferable to allow the market to respond to the growing consumer demand for healthier products and healthier oils than to force a policy through which would have unintended consequences where not all the producers would be in a position to replace the trans fats with healthier oils?

Hon. Paddy Torsney: Mr. Speaker, we commend the member for Calgary South for getting his own regime in order. He is the poster boy for getting one's health situation organized.

Even in the case of the labelling information, we did set a target. It will be imposed across the board on everybody. A lot of companies are rushing to get ahead of that target. Ultimately, some companies will only do it because that December 12 date is coming. Wish that it was just about market forces or that it was everybody wanting to do the right thing. There are always a few people who need a little legislative push. We have the tools and we need to use them.

The member for Ottawa Centre also talked about leveling the playing field in terms of the cost issues and ensuring that people had access. Right now the science is working to ensure that we have the products they can use. However, some of them are probably a little more expensive, and there are some supply issues.

We are working on it, but legislation and regulation are very appropriate uses in a situation like this, with lots of consumer push to get ahead of it.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to participate in this discussion on the NDP motion that deals with trans fats.

As we round out debate and close off discussions for today, it would be only appropriate to comment on the positive discussion that has taken place in this chamber, just how constructive the House can be at times like this. I am very grateful that we have had today to seriously share ideas and find some common ground to push forward on a very important issue for Canadians.

Perhaps one could say that it is clearly something that seems to be unique to this Parliament, presumably to the fact that we have a minority situation. This is living testimony to all those Canadians who believed, when they voted on June 28, that a minority

government would be a healthy outcome for Canadians. They believed we could accomplish so much together by sharing ideas and sometimes being less partisan and working together for the common good.

I hope the outcome of today will be a resounding vote of support for this motion. It is a very important issue that affects the health and well-being of many Canadians. I know it is too early to determine exactly how individual members will vote on this very important issue. However, it seems to me, from the discussion which has occurred over the course of today, that members of Parliament from all parties are looking very seriously at the issue, thinking about it, asking very good questions and making a very deliberate effort at firming up their position.

Today has been wonderful. In that context I also want to thank my colleague from Winnipeg Centre who, as we all know, started championing this issue over a year ago when he first learned about the issue through some very indepth and positive media reports around trans fats. He took up the issue and brought it to his caucus. He pursued it by way of a private member's initiative. He has continued to raise it over the course of the year to the point where we are here today as an NDP caucus fully supportive of his work and of the need to find a resolution to the problem that he and so many others have identified. My thanks to my colleague who represents the seat next to mine in Winnipeg.

I listened to the member who just spoke about the role of government and when government gets involved and when the private sector rules the day. I think that is a good place to start in terms of my input on this matter.

We on this side of the House at least understand the role of government to be one of helping to ensure that the health and safety of Canadians is protected. We believe that government has a responsibility to ensure that the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breath, the products we use and the medical devices that are put in our bodies are safe beyond a reasonable doubt. That is part of our Food and Drugs Act.

We have legislation that requires our government to ensure that it is proactive and takes all precautionary effort to protect Canadians from any deleterious effects of food, water and medical devices. I see this motion as something that flows from the spirit of that legislation. In fact, it has in it criminal sanctions when the act is breached and when efforts are not taken to protect Canadians in the event of toxic substances or other life threatening issues entering our food, water or air systems.

●(1730)

If we are trying to understand this motion in that context, vis-à-vis the role of the marketplace, as some of the members on the Conservative side of the House have tried to raise, I hope I can convince them and make this case. On something so fundamental as life sustaining food, water and air, government has an ultimate absolute responsibility to be involved in ensuring that products are safe beyond a reasonable doubt and that we apply the precautionary principle, or the do no harm principle, that says the onus is on the industry to prove that products are safe.

The onus is on government to require the business sector, the private sector, the corporations involved in any of these areas to prove that products are safe beyond a reasonable doubt. That to me is the fundamental role and responsibility of government.

Health protection is at the heart of such an approach and that means putting everything behind it in terms of the force of the law. It does not mean a risk management model. It does not mean saying that we should take our chances and require industry to put in place its own systems to check against any ill effects or adverse reactions, then see what happens. We know what happens when we take that market driven approach.

The private sector, businesses and free enterprise are not doing the work they do because of the goodness of their hearts. They are in it to make a profit. They are in it to make a living and no one is going to quarrel with that. That is quite separate from the role of government to ensure that certain standards are met to ensure that no shortcuts are taken and no problems are created as a result of the profit motive or the interests of trying to survive in the business world.

I see the two issues as absolutely compatible: business trying to provide for Canadians by turning the natural resources of this land into products for all of us to eat, to use and to have as part of our quality of life and the government's role to help ensure a regulatory system is in place to protect us from any ill effects.

I could go through a long list of issues we have tried to raise in the House that fall in the category of trans fats. I could talk about Prepulsid and the death of Vanessa Young a few years back because we did not take that kind of proactive regulatory approach to ensure that when we knew there were adverse reactions to a particular drug, we halted the drug's production and distribution and ensured that no one was put in that susceptible position.

We said the same with respect to the studies that came out suggesting that mercury in fish was very harmful to young people and expectant mothers. We said that the government had a responsibility to try to regulate in the area so that fish with a high level of mercury would not be available on the market so people would not be in danger of buying something that they were not sure about in terms of long term effects on health and well-being.

We said the same thing when it came to the issue of disposable medical devices when evidence came forward suggesting that great harm and possibly even death could happen as a result of medical devices being re-used when they were in fact disposable. We said that was something that had to be stopped and that government had a role to ensure that it was.

We talked in the past about toxic chemicals and plastics and the fact that babies and small children chewing on plastics with high levels of lead could suffer very serious brain damage. We have talked about arsenic. We have talked about synthetic insulin. We have talked about tainted raisins. We have talked about Dursban, a problematic pesticide. The list goes on and on. They were all issues that begged for government intervention and for active regulation.

• (1735)

In some cases we have made some progress. We will continue to fight for government to take an active role in such areas. Today we

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may be on the verge of seeing that kind of approach adopted by Parliament in a very significant and substantive way. That of course has to do with the serious issue of trans fats.

Over the course of today we have heard from many individuals who have studied this issue in depth and have told us about the serious implications for Canadians who consume food that is very high in trans fats. We have heard about the number of lives that could be saved every year. We have heard about the money that could be saved every year if in fact we took firm action with respect to trying to rid our marketplace of products that are high in trans fats and can create serious problems for our health and well-being.

I do not need to repeat the science and go over those statistics, but I would like to convey a few of the sentiments that have been passed along to us in the course of our preparation for this debate and as a result of the work of my colleague, the member for Winnipeg Centre. We have received communications and letters from people all over the country who are delighted that we are taking this stand and hope that the outcome is positive.

Everybody knows it is not going to be easy in terms of ridding our store shelves of some products that our kids love or that we love. That is a challenge for all of us, but there is a general recognition that there is a real responsibility on the part of government to ensure that we do just that, try to ban products that are very detrimental to the health of our children and the health of all Canadians.

I want to read a few letters from folks who have given us their support on this issue. A woman from Ottawa writes:

I've been gradually cleaning out my cupboards from products with this ingredient, but it is only recently that I discovered it was also in cheese that I had been eating for years, without knowing it contained this deadly fat. The government should take the lead and do an educational campaign. Of course this might go against corporate Canada, which are partly controlling some of the ruling Liberals.

One comes from a health professional in Victoria, B.C., who says:

It's about time that someone high profile and with some influence took on this project, as we have known for 15 years with no uncertainty that hydrogenated oils are more harmful than saturated fats. As you know, research has directly linked trans fats to higher risk of and incidence of heart attacks, cancer, and other obesity related diseases such as diabetes. As a health professional, it is important to me to do what I can to help raise community awareness of trans fats as well.

One is from Toronto, Ontario. This person says:

Not all consumers check what is in their foods, which they should, but no one should be selling something that has a poison in it if they can avoid it by changing their ingredients. I personally check everything. My husband finds it annoying but I feel it is very important. I will be starting a family soon and I will make sure to avoid buying anything with hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils.

Another one from Toronto, Ontario, says:

I fully support your motion that trans fats are a harmful and downright toxic substance that has no business being in our food. I have personally been aware of the harm caused by hydrogenated oils in food for several years and have watched with great anxiety and frustration as more and more products are using such oils. It is for this reason that I ask you to please never give up the fight. As a consumer and health care professional, I find this issue of utmost importance.

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• (1740)

That is the message that has spurred us on. These kinds of letters and messages from people all across Canada, asking us not to give up the fight, has kept my colleague from Winnipeg Centre, and everyone else on this side of the House and I am sure from all quarters of the chamber, involved in this issue with a great deal of passion, vigour and determination.

What we sense from these letters is that people are willing to do their part, but sometimes it is not always easy to tell from the labels what we are eating. Sometimes we do not have access to the educational information to be able to differentiate between the impact of different ingredients on the body and on one's physical health and well-being. Sometimes it is hard for kids to resist the pressure when they see something advertised on TV. Sometimes it is hard to overcome that huge food industry with all of the money it spends on advertising and try to accomplish something that is so important for health and wellness.

The message from all of these folks is to help them, and to join with them and form a partnership. Government can do its part by taking a hard look at the products that we are talking about, trans fats and hydrogenated oils, and make the link that they are hazardous in our foods and impact on our health. We must make a determination that they are just too deadly to let the marketplace rule and let consumers choose.

We do that on many fronts and maybe we should do it more. I think for example about our work on trying to convince people not to smoke. Perhaps we should be looking at whether we should ban cigarettes entirely. We are making progress by continuing to press forward to educate folks in terms of the dangers of smoking and we are ensuring that Canadians are fully aware of the deadly substances in cigarettes.

Each day we take another step. Today we are hopefully at the point of convincing the government that it is wrong to take Canadians' pension savings and invest them in tobacco companies. It is wrong for the CPP investment board to be a partner with tobacco companies who are refusing to have better labels on cigarette packages or are unwilling to restrict the sale of their products to young people. Every day we make progress on that front. Some day we will eliminate this deadly product.

• (1745)

However, today we have a real opportunity to actually take the information that is so clear and so focused in terms of what must be done. I hope we can take this decisive action today and actually ban in a period of time these deadly products, these hydrogenated oils from our food, so that we as consumers do not have to be worried every day about what we are eating and what kind of harm we are bringing to our children. We will have the knowledge that we are working in partnership with a government that cares about our health and our children's health, and is working with us to move toward a healthy diet which ensures longevity and quality of life for all our citizens no matter what age and where they live.

• (1750)

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened for some period of time now to the general

direction of the policies of this particular party. I find it extremely ironic to be listening to this rhetoric in relation to banning trans fats.

It is obvious that trans fats can cause harm and may cause harm to some Canadians. However, I find it extremely ironic that on one hand that party intends to take a position to decriminalize marijuana, which is obviously extremely harmful and dangerous to our society and its members, yet on the other hand, it wants to eliminate something that is less harmful or is not shown to be harmful to all Canadians.

When this particular member speaks of the responsibility of government to ensure that citizens do not come to harm and that it must ensure that the goods that Canadians eat cause no harm, how can she justify this basis in general on the track that her party takes for this and other matters? There seems to be no specific direction that her party takes. I would like to hear her comments on that.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I think the problem in terms of consistency rests with the member opposite and not with those of us who are concerned about banning trans fats from our food products.

I could turn that around quite easily and ask why the member feels so strongly about banning marijuana and yet is prepared to let the market rule on a product where we have clear scientific evidence of death and ill-health, where the facts are unequivocal, and where there is not a single bit of doubt about the serious ramifications of having trans fats in our food supply?

For example, I cite the Harvard School of Public Health which states that trans fats are responsible for at least 30,000 premature heart disease deaths each year. That is equal to one death from trans fats every 15 minutes, making trans fats worse than a crazed serial killer in terms of murders per minute.

Our position has always been that when we have scientific evidence proving without any doubt that something is harmful to human health, then we must take action. We do not sit back and let the market rule. If the marketplace were so committed to the health and well-being of Canadians, we would not have these products on the shelves right now. They would not be there because they are deadly and harmful.

We take that approach in every instance, whatever we are talking about. The member may not realize this, being a new member, but we have had numerous debates in the House around genetically modified organisms. That is a good illustration of what needs to be done each and every step of the way.

What we have said in this caucus is that we should ensure that the research is done before we open the floodgates to products for which we are not certain are entirely safe. We should do our research, do our homework, and then move forward. If there is any doubt about safety, if there is any question that a product may be harmful to an individual, then we should practise the precautionary principle of do no harm. That is the essence of a proactive government. That is at the heart of this great institution of ours. That is the principle that must be respected each and every step of the way. We are so close to accomplishing that with this debate on deadly trans fats.

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Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt about the sincere intentions of the member and her colleagues, which I indeed endorse and support, but the problem I have with this effort is that it will undoubtedly lead to unintended consequences.

Her colleague, the sponsor of the motion, said that the only people who could possibly oppose this would be libertarians who do not want the government telling them what they cannot eat.

I would have to be included in that number, because I believe that when we as politicians, who are not really scientists, start to make scientific findings that we are really not competent to do, then that leads to dangerous places.

The NDP motion says:

That, in the opinion of this House, the federal government should acknowledge processed trans fatty acids are harmful fats, which are significantly more likely to cause heart disease than saturated fats;

Everything I have seen does not support that contention that these fats are significantly more harmful than saturated fats. Let me be clear. If we rush to eliminate trans fats, food producers will replace those trans fats with saturated fats, which was the case 10 or 15 years ago before consumers had their concern about saturated fats.

Here is what the Scientific Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies of the European Food Safety Authority said in September of this year:

—at equivalent dietary levels, the effect of trans fatty acids on heart health may be greater than that of saturated fatty acids. However, the current intakes of trans fatty acids are generally more than 10-fold lower than those of saturated fatty acids whose intakes in many European countries exceed dietary recommendations.

The same European report said:

The available evidence does not provide a definitive answer to the question of whether trans fatty acids have an effect on [cholesterol] different to a mixture of [saturated fatty acid] on a gram-for-gram basis.

Furthermore, the U.S. dietary guidelines advisory committee said:

Saturated fat consumption should be kept as low as possible. Dietary intake of saturated fat is much higher than that of trans fat and cholesterol. Intakes of all three fats should be decreased, however, decreasing intake of saturated fat is most beneficial because it is consumed in greater amounts.

While trans fats on a gram per gram basis have been proven to have a greater effect on heart health, trans fats are the smallest part of the diet, just 2% to 3% of total calories, while saturated fats represent 15% to 20% of the total diet.

I do not want to break caucus confidentiality, but I think I can say that in our caucus debate on this matter, Canada's leading heart surgeon, Senator Dr. William Keon, said that he was very sympathetic to the motion, as am I, but he was concerned as well about the health consequences of replacing these bad trans fats with deadly saturated fats.

Would the member consider amending the first section of the motion? Because frankly, all the science I see contests the assertion that trans fatty acids “are significantly more likely to cause heart disease”. That is being contested by scientific authorities outside Canada.

• (1755)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the question and the expertise of the member, but first let me say that as I understand it, Dr. Keon, who is a world renowned specialist in terms of the heart, has heartily endorsed this motion. He has not just expressed sympathy for the motion, but he has worked with my colleague and has actively supported it.

He supports it because, like so many other professionals and medical experts in the field, he knows the dangers of trans fats and knows the cost to human health and the cost to our health care system.

It seems to me that while the member can point to perhaps one study that puts into question 99% of those studies, we have to err on the side of where the evidence is. The evidence is clearly saying overwhelmingly that there is a direct link between ill health and trans fats.

I have heard this sort of logic before from the Conservative members when it comes to addressing the issue of climate change. Every time we try to talk about targets for Kyoto, members from that quarter of the House suggest that there is no scientific reason for us to work to control greenhouse gas emissions.

As my colleague from Windsor has just said, it seems to smack of the flat earth theory. We wish that members in the Conservative Party—not all of them, because some I think are with us on this—would study all the evidence and then say, “On the basis of where the evidence now lies overwhelmingly in terms of recognizing the health consequences of trans fats, let us act. Let us not sit and wait. Let us not bide our time when we know the impact. Let us do something”.

I think it is fair to say to the member, who seems to think that a voluntary approach would work or that the marketplace will do its job, that such has not been the case. I cannot think of many examples in society where in fact that has been the case. There is nothing wrong with that. That is the job of government: to gather the evidence, to make the connections and then to take the action through regulations and legislation.

The member will know that the science is there. I think he has to grapple with the role of government in that context. Despite our ideological differences, despite the fact that he is a Conservative and I am a New Democrat, despite the fact that we have different notions of the state and when the state should be involved, I hope that at least on this issue, when we are talking about kids' health, the serious impact on pregnant women and the damage to the fetus, and the direct correlation between heart attacks and trans fats, he can see the importance of getting this government involved and putting forth regulations that will see a ban on all trans fats within a year.

• (1800)

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to speak on the concerns raised by this opposition day motion, which has as its intent to effectively ban trans fats in foods.

[*Translation*]

First I want to say that it will be my pleasure to vote in favour of this motion.

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Allow me to digress for just a moment. This motion is especially significant to me partially because of its content, but also because barely a month ago I was going through the unique experience of having my gallbladder removed. I can tell you that it was in large part because of my diet, which contained far too much trans fat. This experience certainly made me more aware of the whole issue of food quality and it has led me to realize the importance of such a motion for the public health of Canadians.

However, it must be noted that this motion will not necessarily achieve the desired result of reducing the risk of heart disease in Canadians. We depend on solid and semi-solid fat for several food applications, and the most readily accessible equivalents to trans fat ingredients for these applications are high in saturated fat.

Unfortunately, these also have harmful effects on cholesterolemia and increase the risk of heart disease. The availability of vegetable oil tub margarine high in the desired polyunsaturated fat with low or moderate levels of saturated and trans fat will be threatened by the proposed change.

The Government of Canada supports the goal of decreasing trans fat available in food in Canada and is saying that a commitment to reduce the availability of trans fat in food in Canada is appropriate.

In fact, in January 2003 Canada became the first country in the world to impose mandatory labelling of trans fat content in order to encourage the food industry to adopt this approach. These new labelling regulations will come into effect in late 2005, and will require most pre-packaged goods, with the exception of those produced by companies with less than \$1 million in annual sales, to be so labelled. Those companies will have until 2007 to comply with the new regulations.

The new regulations have already had a considerable impact. The food industry is already working very hard to reduce or eliminate trans fats from food. At least 13 major manufacturers have announced that they will be reducing trans fat content before the end of the grace period. In Canada, the major margarine brands have all virtually eliminated trans fats. As hon. members can see, food labelling is a clear incentive to reduce trans fat content in food.

• (1805)

[*English*]

Because its focus is on health, Health Canada is also actively encouraging the food industry to develop healthy alternatives to partially hydrogenated fats. The department will ensure that advice on how best to reformulate foods is disseminated to the industry, including the food service industry, which is not subject to the same nutrition labelling requirements.

[*Translation*]

Health Canada is also assessing the impact of these measures. It now has a program in place to monitor progress in the reduction of trans fat levels in food by analyzing trans fat content in foods sold in Canada.

Those behind this motion may be of the opinion that mandatory food labelling and the efforts by the food processing industry and the food service industry to find equivalents to the trans fat content of some fats are not enough.

In particular, I have noticed the eagerness to follow the example of Denmark, where regulations have been adopted to limit trans fatty acids to 2% in fats and oils sold directly to consumers or used in food products. I also note that it is the only country to have done this.

Looking at this example, we should also look at the Danish context. It is important to remember that Danes use more butter and tropical oils, such as palm and coconut oil, which are highly saturated. It is also very possible that their diet contains entirely different foods than the ones usually consumed in Canada, and that products for which the manufacturing process and shelf-life require additional solid and semi-solid fats are not as common.

Before importing a measure that may have worked in one other country, it would be wise and prudent to compare the circumstances surrounding this decision in each of the countries. Scientific experts were convened by the Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation on September 9, 2004, in order to discuss trans fats. I will just take a moment to recognize the wonderful research work of the foundation in this field. In my riding, for example, in the Outaouais, we have a very active foundation taking a serious look at the issue of trans fats. These experts expressed concern that if a 2% ceiling on trans fats were imposed, artificial trans fats might be replaced in processed foods by natural trans fats or saturated fats.

Natural trans fat in animal products is not substantially different from man-made trans fat. A large number of food items that Canadians are used to, such as many bakery products, cannot be made satisfactorily without using a solid or semi-solid fat. If we imposed a 2% ceiling on trans fatty acids, these food products would have to be significantly changed, which change could increase the amount of saturated fatty acid either through the use of hydrogenated vegetable oil or tropical oil, butter or other animal fat that, as I already mentioned earlier, increases LDL cholesterol, the bad cholesterol, in the blood.

These experts agreed there was no evidence to suggest that a 2% ceiling would optimize health benefits, but rather that it is essential to use healthier equivalents to fat and oil high in saturated fatty acids. This means that the relative risk of trans fat in comparison to that of saturated fat requires a more in-depth study of the Canadian diet.

As noted earlier, the impending mandatory labelling of prepackaged food containing saturated or trans fat has already had a major impact on the food industry in Canada. The industry is committed to actively seeking suitable alternatives to fat high in trans and saturated fat.

Because of the public's increased awareness of this issue, businesses are inclined to make statements to the effect that their products are free of trans fats, or at least low in trans fats. It is important to note that, in Canada, such statements can only be made if the foods in question have a low saturated fat content. The information provided to consumers must cover all factors contributing to health, not only trans fats.

Allow me to stress the importance of considering the potential impact of imposing the proposed ceiling on the trans fat content of foods. It will be important to consult scientific experts and representatives of the food industry to hear what they have to say about the practicality of the motion, which would eliminate virtually all processed trans fats.

Health Canada is exploring the possibility of setting up a multi-stakeholder task force to develop recommendations on the practical steps to reducing trans fats in the foods that Canadians eat, including the identification of appropriate oil and fat alternatives for use in reformulating products.

• (1810)

Several potential solutions are already being pursued. For instance, the leading brands of margarine are already essentially free of trans fats. But it is not a matter of simply applying to other foods, such as crackers, cookies or donuts, the solutions successfully applied to the manufacturing of margarine.

We can foresee that, in their desire to take advantage of a potential market, those businesses who are working with the government and the academic community will find ways to overcome the technical challenges inherent to the use of fats with different functional properties. It will take some time to acquire the knowledge and disseminate it within the market.

Once again, the many stakeholders must be given sufficient time to work together in tackling major challenges, which does not prevent the government from showing strong leadership to stimulate the required research and development effort. That is the approach this government has taken so far.

I could just add this, because I heard some speakers from the official opposition questioning the effectiveness of labelling. The example of cigarettes kept coming up. As an ex-smoker, I can report that at the time—and it was not very long ago that I stopped; I am still using Nicorette gum—the mandatory labelling and the absolutely horrendous messages on cigarette packages had an absolutely incredible and devastating effect. It got so bad that—and I was not the only one, for I have talked to others like me—we reused our old packages from before these warnings appeared. That shows what an absolutely fundamental effect it had on peoples' psyches. That is something that must continue.

For sure, the official opposition will once again comment that we are regulating for the sake of regulating and taking choice away from people. However, that too is part of our responsibilities for public health, and it is good for the economy. The fact is that, if we are healthier, if the population is healthier, if young people eat better and healthier foods, this will have an impact on their health, which in turn will reduce the needs for health care. This will mean that people will stay home instead of going to a hospital or to a medical clinic,

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for instance. In this sense, it is very good for the economy. It will reduce the demands on the health care system, and the costs will go down.

But, this is like with the environment. Had recycling not been encouraged and certain steps not been taken, the public would still be throwing any old thing in the garbage. Eventually, Canada would have become a huge garbage dump.

Sometimes in life decisions have to be made, and that is what this motion seeks to do, as I indicated. That is why I will support it, because we cannot say no to a good thing. It is very good for Canadians, Quebecers and the people of Gatineau.

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my main concern with this motion, and I am often concerned with anything that comes from the socialist party, is the idea that the government is here to be every Canadian's nanny, from cradle to grave, helping Canadians along the way with every decision in their lives. We do not trust them to make decisions on what they eat, and this is another example of that.

The hon. member made some comments that the market is incapable of responding to the desires of Canadians for healthy lifestyle choices.

It did not take an order in council for fast food chains to provide a healthy alternative from burgers and fries to subs and other types of meals. It did not take a government order to get soft drink companies to provide low carb alternatives. It is clear that Canadians are quite capable of effecting change in the nutritional industry by sheer market force, by demanding a change.

It is very important for all members in this House to realize that government has a scope.

Does the hon. member agree that there is a natural scope of government, that it is not here to be the nanny for every Canadian from the time he or she is born to the time he or she dies, in all elements of his or her life?

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to the order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion are deemed put, and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, November 23, 2004, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

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[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a follow-up question to my question on October 15 regarding slaughter capacity due to border closure because of the BSE crisis. That question was specific to Farm Credit Canada's venture investment fund and the new loan loss program. This follow-up question is still focused on the slaughter capacity issue.

The government has set a goal of trying to reach 96,000 head per week slaughter capacity. Staff from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada admit that this number does not account for cull cows or the still rapidly increasing cow herd. Provincially inspected plants have a role and we have a need for a domestic meat regulation standard to enable interprovincial trade between these provincial packing plants versus the current guideline of having only federally inspected packing plants that can trade interprovincially. The federal guidelines are really there for export purposes and are not necessarily for domestic needs.

Often the government has been quoted as saying that 95% of our current capacity is inside these federal plants. There is a problem with this in that these federal plants are very big, very successful and also are focusing their entire attention on animals that are 30 months and under. The youthful animals may even have that downgraded to 20 months and under because of some things that are happening over in Asia. This does not at all address our backlog of mature animals.

The Minister of Agriculture has some new tools at his disposal. There is the loan loss program that was recently announced. There is also the Farm Credit Canada venture investment fund which could be used to direct money into the investment of new start-up plants that are trying to get going across the country. The government could also develop a national domestic meat inspection regulation. The government could play a leadership role.

I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, will he use those tools to specifically increase capacity for mature animals and address the regional disparity that we have across the country?

Hon. Wayne Easter (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food (Rural Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in terms of slaughter domestically within the provinces, the question would really be better put to the provinces because our responsibilities certainly are for federal inspections and guidelines through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

I want to come back to the question on the loan loss reserve program, because the way the member originally phrased the question was by saying if the loan loss reserve program does not work.

On this side of the House when we introduce programs, we expect them to work. We are a proactive government and the minister has shown clearly with his September 10 statement that we are being proactive through the feeder set-aside program and the fed cattle set-aside program, trying to increase slaughter capacity through the loan loss reserve, continuing to put the pressure on the U.S. to open the border and, since that time, trying to ease the difficult situation that farmers find themselves in by an advance in CAIS.

The fact of the matter is that we do expect the program announced on September 10 to work. At the Canadian Federation of Agriculture symposium I was at, several speakers, including those from the beef industry, felt that with the current expansions that are on deck now, by early 2006 we should be in a position to be able to match the supply to slaughter capacity.

I think it is important to recognize that substantial private investment is already under way, therefore, to increase slaughter capacity. However, we recognize that this investment by itself may not be sufficient. We recognize that there are some small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as start-ups, that are having more difficulty arranging financing than the larger established entities.

The loan loss reserve program is therefore intended to help bring the domestic slaughter capacity and the supply of ruminants, cattle in particular, into balance. The actual increase in domestic slaughter capacity will effectively be determined by the private sector, including slaughter enterprises, financial institutions, investors and ruminant producers.

It avoids the question and the problems caused by direct government financing determining exactly how much slaughter capacity should be added and where it should be located. The bottom line is that under the loan loss reserve program, loans will be made on commercial terms. The decision on whether or not to extend credit will remain with the lender, based on a sound business plan put forward by the applicant. The loan loss reserve is there to assist the expansion of capacity as long as there is a business plan that shows this increased capacity is sustainable and makes good business sense.

I think that clearly shows that as a government, through the minister, we are being proactive on a number of fronts. Our whole strategy is to increase that slaughter capacity through the lending community and the program we have added to it so that we balance up the ability for the packing industry and the slaughter plants to be able to handle all of the Canadian supply that is out there in terms of ruminants.

● (1820)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I want to return to the national guidelines for meat quality inspection. The federal government does have a role in interprovincial trade of products. To rely completely on the provinces to come to an agreement on interprovincial trade has been long in coming. It is something we have been talking about for over 10 years. We are at the point now that the federal government, in a desperate situation, needs to take the leadership and develop a two-tiered national standard, one for export and one for domestic trade. All I am asking the government to do is take a hard look at developing that, crediting some of these provincial plans for interprovincial trade on a different level than the current federal inspection.

Adjournment Proceedings

The loan loss program is out and running, but it took far too long from the announcement that it was available to actually get going. One of the problems that has been brought to my attention with the loan loss program is that some of these packing plant projects that are under way are using some provincial financing through their credit agencies. My understanding is that the loan loss program is not available to those projects because of provincial government involvement and their financing.

My concern is that by not having the program available it is going to stall some of these current expansions, especially because these expansions, these smaller projects, are addressing the need of dealing with mature animals. As the hon. member realizes, we have a situation where mature cattle and mature bison are not finding a place to be slaughtered because all the expansion has taken place on the youthful animals, by far the most lucrative market.

• (1825)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his comments and indeed for his suggestion. I believe a similar suggestion was made today before the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food when the minister was there. This minister has certainly shown a willingness to look at all sensible options. I think he suggested to the member at the time that we would indeed look into that to see if it is in any way feasible.

The bottom line is that as a government through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency we have put additional resources to the CFIA so that it can get these plants wherever they may be up and running according to federal standards, because we certainly need to assure countries we export to that we are meeting the federal standards and guidelines that have been established internationally, and we are doing that.

REVENUE CANADA

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our charter of rights guarantees every Canadian citizen freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

This year the Prime Minister, through his tax collectors, actually threatened to remove tax free status for Roman Catholic and evangelical organizations because Calgary Bishop Fred Henry sent a letter to his congregation that the Prime Minister did not agree with.

On June 6, 2004, Bishop Fred Henry sent a letter to all his parishes in the diocese of Calgary for inclusion in the Sunday church bulletins. Bishop Fred Henry wanted to support his beliefs and the work in his church, and give spiritual direction to his congregation. That is what any pastor, bishop, rabbi or any other clergyman has the legal right and spiritual responsibility to do under the charter of rights.

Only this time there was something different. Someone in the federal government got wind of what was going on and Revenue Canada was sent to visit the good bishop, not for spiritual counselling but for intimidation purposes to ensure that the good bishop got on the side of government policy.

Is it not surprising that the good bishop was the recipient of this kind of strong-arm tactics? Is there not supposed to be a separation of church and state in this country? Do we not have the right to worship where we want? Do we not have the right to express our

opinions freely? Do we not have the right to believe in whatever we choose to believe and to express those beliefs publicly?

It is true that charitable organizations have a legal responsibility to maintain political neutrality. However, our government also has a responsibility to uphold the rights of its citizens. Bishop Henry simply expressed his views as the spiritual leader of his community about the comments of a man who sought election to be our Prime Minister, a man he differed with and the direction in which this man intended to take our country.

Is it any coincidence that just today the member for Mississauga—Erindale was dismissed after having publicly criticized the Prime Minister? This member should have been dismissed long ago for her inflammatory and damaging remarks about our neighbours to the south, which no doubt cost Canadians dearly. It was not until she chose to criticize the Prime Minister that she was removed from caucus.

The Prime Minister must make a choice. Would he like to be Prime Minister or merely the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada? Every citizen has the right and responsibility as a Canadian citizen to question the Prime Minister.

Bishop Fred Henry did not pick a political party. He stood up and spoke out on an issue according to his religion and his beliefs. He did not attack the Liberal Party. He questioned the man who sought to be Prime Minister.

Today, as member of Parliament for Kildonan—St. Paul in Winnipeg, Manitoba, I am asking the Minister of National Revenue to explain to all members and all Canadians, why was the charitable organization tax free status threatened by this government because a single bishop questioned the direction his government was taking him?

• (1830)

Hon. Mark Eyking (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade (Emerging Markets), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand here this evening to put some facts straight on the matter.

The hon. member has requested this debate to discuss the issue of the separation of church and state. The hon. member has asked about specific taxpayers. I will not violate the confidentiality of any taxpayer by discussing their affairs in the House. However I can discuss with the member opposite the role of the Canada Revenue Agency in monitoring registered charities on an ongoing basis.

This is not an issue about the separation of church and state. It is a matter of applying the Income Tax Act rules to charities registered under the act. To qualify for registration an organization's mandate must be charitable at law. Once registered, regulatory oversight is warranted given that the registered charities enjoy significant tax advantages and are supported by the public moneys.

The CRA carries out broad based outreach and education activities to ensure that registered charities understand the law. When the CRA identifies a trend toward partisan political activity, our outreach activities can include proactively contacting these organizations to ensure that they understand the law and will comply.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Income Tax Act allows registered charities to engage in limited, non-partisan political activities. Charities can speak out on issues related to their mandate, including controversial issues. They are free to engage in public debate and to conduct public awareness campaigns. To be acceptable under these rules, these activities must be linked to the charity's purposes and remain incidental to its charitable programs.

Partisan political activity is not permitted at any time. I would like to repeat that because I believe it is the crux of the issue. Partisan political activity by registered charities is not acceptable under the law.

These rules are applied evenly and fairly to all registered charities. The CRA's application of these rules are not based on which side of a debate or issue a charity supports. If the CRA acts against a registered charity, it does so because of the actions of that charity, not on what that charity is or who it represents.

The CRA receives complaints about organizations that engage the public on a specific political issue, including environmental groups, rights advocates and faith based organizations.

These organizations may be deeply committed to their causes and may be conducting allowable political activities, but if they are engaged in partisan political activity, they have contravened the Income Tax Act rules governing charities.

When the CRA believes that a charity's activities may be contravening the rules, its staff step in to inform and educate the charity about its obligations under the Income Tax Act. Revoking charitable status is our last option, after our efforts to educate, guide and provide advice have not been successful.

Not heavy-handed, our goal is voluntary compliance and that starts with education. Among the services CRA offers to charities are guidance, advice and education in understanding and complying with tax law. The vast majority of charities want to comply with the law and appreciate the outreach that CRA undertakes to help them understand and abide by the rules.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, Bishop Fred Henry is not an organization. He is a bishop, a person who cares about his parishioners. He did not send out political pamphlets in favour of one party or the other party. What he did was attempt to spiritually lead his parishioners.

What is at risk is the rights of pastors, bishops, rabbis, spiritual leaders to be able to make a strong voice in terms of what they believe.

The fact is that Bishop Henry did not talk about a political party. He talked about a Roman Catholic. He talked about a person who was about to lead the country and he had a concern because this good bishop did not agree with the direction in which the country was going.

This is not about charities. The Catholic Church and, indeed, Bishop Henry, I am sure, has done much to help the current government out in terms of good charity works that happen from his particular diocese.

The issue is about freedom of rights, freedom of religion. The issue is about what we as Canadians hold dear.

● (1835)

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, everyone reads a book a different way I guess. For almost 20 years, the Income Tax Act has clearly stated that charities cannot "directly" or "indirectly" support or oppose a candidate for public office or a political party and the hon. member should know that.

The CRA has developed publicly available guidelines to establish with greater certainty how the law can be applied and administered in a consistent, fair and reasonable manner. Anyone can access these guidelines through the web page.

Registered charities want to comply with the rules, and the CRA works with them to ensure that they understand these rules and that they are followed. Our goal is voluntary compliance, and to achieve that, we are involved in education, advice and guidance for charities in meeting their regulatory requirements.

This law is for all members of the House and all people who want to run for public office or are already in public office. It is intended to that.

FISHERIES

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise again the issue of the sockeye salmon disaster on the Fraser River, which runs through my riding. The minister claims to be a big believer in empirical facts, as he should be, so here they are in the simplest terms.

Of a total sockeye salmon run of about 4.3 million, only 250,000 made it to the spawning grounds. The recorded catch was about two and a quarter million fish, leaving about 1.8 million fish unaccounted. Because the fish are on a four year cycle, this will mean no fishing on the river in four years, eight years, and at best, reduced fishing beyond that. This will cause severe hardship to commercial fishers, sport fishers, and perhaps greatest of all, to first nations that rely on the resource for food.

We are left with at least two questions. What happened to the fish? How do we find out what happened to the fish?

The DFO has trotted out its communication plan that it developed for the 1992 and 1994 failures: warm water. One would think it could get a little more creative than that. When in doubt, blame it on an act of God. It does not seem to matter that warm water, or high water or low water, were rejected as primary causes for the missing fish in those years.

The department has also adopted the same backup plan that it used in 1992 and 1994: miscounting at the Mission sonar station. That too was rejected as a principal cause in 1992 and 1994.

Others have offered different answers to the question of what happened to the fish. What we can agree on, and I heard the minister say this today in committee so I know he agrees with me, is that we need to find out for sure what happened.

Adjournment Proceedings

To achieve this, the minister has set up a panel to conduct a post-season review. He calls the panel independent, but that is certainly arguable. It is not the independence of the panel that worries the stakeholders to whom I talk. It is the impotence. Will it have the power to subpoena witnesses to testify, including department officials? Will it have the power to place witnesses under oath? Will its recommendations be binding in any way? If the answer to these questions is no, then we should all be pessimistic about the outcomes.

Instead, why does the minister not ask the standing committee to travel to B.C. as soon as possible to conduct an immediate review of the sockeye fishery? That will help in the short term for next season and it has some power. In terms of a long term solution, the stakeholders I talk to believe, as I do, that the best way to get to the truth is to conduct a judicial inquiry that will have all of the powers that are required.

What if the same thing happens next year or the year after that? What is to keep the Pacific salmon from going the way of the Atlantic cod?

Will the minister commit to these more effective measures?

• (1840)

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question on an issue that greatly concerns British Columbians and the minister.

I will go through some of the answers to the question of where the fish are, but let me preface my comments by saying that the minister takes the situation very seriously. In a matter of weeks he will release the wild salmon policy for public consultation. If the member knows of groups that would find a value with this process of acquiring information, then he should ensure that they provide effective input into the wild salmon policy which will be up for public consultation.

The management of the fisheries in 2004 was particularly difficult for environmental reasons. Some fish were in abundance while other salmon species were small in numbers. This made it very difficult to provide adequate harvesting procedures.

To answer the hon. member's question as to the review process, I want to share with him which groups will be involved. Essentially the ones that will be involved will be the first nations, the commercial fishery, the recreational fishery, and the environmentalists. All four groups will have a part in the salmon review.

The mandate of this particular review will be the following. A committee will be responsible for reviewing the conduct of all fisheries included in the 2004 southern salmon integrated fisheries management plan. It will involve multiple questions. In fact all of the questions that can possibly be asked to get to the bottom of this problem will be asked and will be investigated by a group that has the capability and the knowledge to find the answer.

If there are groups or individuals that the member feels would have significant input in getting to the bottom of the problem, then he should make sure that they get in contact with the minister's office and that they provide the written documentation. We want to ensure

that we have a longstanding, stable fishery on the west coast and that the salmon stocks are preserved in perpetuity.

I can assure the member that the minister and the government are very concerned and very interested in getting to the bottom of this problem. That is why the minister has asked for this review. That is why the minister has involved a very specialized group of people in this area. That is why the minister is very interested in input from the member and from groups that the member feels could provide adequate input into this problem.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, the wild salmon policy that is supposedly the answer to everyone's dreams was supposed to be released in 2001 and we have not seen it yet. Who knows what it says. I do not see it reflected in any way in the main estimates, so I do not know what will be in there and how it will be implemented. It certainly will not solve the problem on the Fraser River in time for next season.

I wonder if the minister understands the lack of credibility that the DFO has in B.C. If the government really wants to tackle the problem of western alienation, here is a good place to start. He should start responding. The problem has never been the lack of recommendations; it is the lack of responses.

The problem with the panel that is being set up is not that it will not come up with some answers, it is what people will do with the answers. It is what the department will do with the answers. We on this side of the House are not the only ones who feel this way.

When the Commissioner of the Environment spoke to the committee on November 2, she said, "We found the progress made by Fisheries and Oceans Canada in response to our observations and recommendations made in 1997, 1999 and 2000 simply unsatisfactory. That is unacceptable.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, if the member wants to see identifiable proof of the commitment the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has with respect to this problem, then he simply has to look at his own notes and the two solutions that have been put forth.

He is quite right in that solutions put forth without implementation are not useful. However, we have to have solutions based on fact. That is why the wild salmon policy review will be released in a matter of weeks.

On looking back at 2004, to answer the questions that the member quite legitimately posed, the review will be there to ensure that the best solutions can be applied, to put together a package of solutions to deal with the issues. We want to ensure that we have a sustainable catch and that quotas are there in a sustainable fashion, to ensure that habitat will be protected and that we can reclaim habitat. We want to ensure that we have a Fisheries and Oceans policy that is sensitive to what happens not only on the west coast, but also on the east coast.

An effective salmon policy for the people of this country is the objective of the minister and the department. We welcome the member's input on solutions to that end.

Adjournment Proceedings

●(1845)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a. m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:45 p.m.)

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