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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 6, 2005

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 6, 2005

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1355)

[*English*]

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

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents of Don Valley East, I rise in this House to pay tribute to the extraordinary life of Pope John Paul II.

The Pope reached out and touched the lives of millions of people, not only as the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church for 26 years but as a simple human being who lived through remarkable times. In his youth, the Pope challenged Nazi fascism during the occupation of his beloved homeland of Poland, and later he played a key role in the fall of communism in that country with his support for the Solidarity movement.

In Toronto the Pope inspired the ecumenical work of the Scarborough Mission to reach out to people of all faiths and cultures. As one of those involved in the ecumenical work of the mission, I can attest to the fact that these efforts of the Pope have been quite successful locally.

I am certain that all members of the House, along with all Canadians, wish to extend our condolences to the Vatican, to Catholics and to people all over the world.

* * *

• (1405)

JUSTICE

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at a time when Parliament should be looking at ways to get people off drugs and crack down on drug dealers and drug producers, the

government is pushing ahead with legislation that will lead to more drug use and an increase in drug related crime.

I am referring to the Liberal government's Bill C-17 to decriminalize the possession of up to 30 grams of marijuana or roughly 45 to 60 joints. The intent of this legislation obviously is to decriminalize the occasional use of marijuana. I do not know what the government is smoking but 30 grams of marijuana is a little more than occasional use.

Decriminalization sends the wrong message to young people; that is, marijuana is not so bad and it is okay to experiment with this so-called soft drug.

I am afraid that if the bill passes it will lead to both an increase in demand and production of marijuana and criminal activity. If grow ops are a problem now, just wait and see what happens if Bill C-17 becomes law, assuming of course the government lasts long enough to bring the bill to a final vote.

* * *

WORLD AMPUTEE OLYMPIC GAMES 2006

Mr. Andy Savoy (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to tell the House about a young man from my riding of Tobique—Mactaquac, a young man who overcame tremendous odds to represent his country at the sport he loves.

Two years ago, Eric Watson of Debec was in a horrific snowmobile accident late at night. He spent that night, one of the coldest of the year, outdoors, and suffered severe frostbite and hypothermia as a result.

Doctors questioned whether he would survive. He did not just survive, he thrived.

The road to survival was not easy. Mr. Watson, an avid hockey player, had to have his right leg amputated at 10 inches below the knee. Even as he recovered in the hospital, he told doctors he would play hockey again.

He is not just playing hockey, he is excelling at hockey. Mr. Watson recently earned a spot on Canada's National Amputee men's hockey team and will travel with Team Canada to Italy for the World Amputee Olympic Games in 2006.

I want to congratulate Eric Watson for turning a tragic event into a great achievement for himself and our country.

S. O. 31

[*Translation*]

YVON PARÉ

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the community of Warwick and the Bois-Francis region was immensely saddened to learn of the passing of Yvon Paré, a man who was very involved in his community.

During nearly 30 years, he worked for the sports service at the CEGEP in Victoriaville. This former football player with a heart of gold was an icon on the local sports scene.

He was committed to the development of young people and wanted as many student athletes as possible to be able to pursue their sports dreams.

Mr. Paré was also active in the union of non teaching professionals at the Victoriaville CEGEP.

Retired for a mere 18 months, he had continued his community involvement with many groups, including the Vulkins and Vicas football teams, the Warwick golf club, the recreation issue table of the Arthabaska RCM and the sports and recreation regional unit for the Centre-du-Québec region, to name but a few.

The Bloc Québécois extends its deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Yvon Paré. Goodbye and thank you, Yvon.

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[*English*]

QARMARTALIK SCHOOL

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Tuesday, April 5, I had the pleasure of meeting with a group of students from Qarmartalik School of Resolute Bay who were down here on an exchange trip with Akwesasne Reserve students.

These students from my riding of Nunavut travelled thousands of miles from above the Arctic Circle to visit southern Canada.

The students from both communities were thrilled by the Parliament Hill tour, and I appreciated the opportunity to showcase to them the wonderful building and institution in which I have the honour to work.

Student exchange programs are important tools for students to learn about Canada and about each other's culture. We northerners love to share the beautiful part of the country in which we live.

The students of Akwesasne will soon go up to Resolute Bay to learn first-hand about Inuit and a chance to be in the Land of the Midnight Sun.

This exchange is an experience of a lifetime for both groups and I know they will treasure the memories for the rest of their lives.

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CANADIAN REAL ESTATE ASSOCIATION

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he entered the real estate business in 1977 in northern British Columbia. In 1979 he became a director of the Northwest B.C. Real Estate Board. In 1992 he became the director of the

Cariboo Real Estate Association and president in 1995. He became president of the B.C. Real Estate Association in 1998 and honoured as Realtor of the Year in the year 2000.

I am talking about my constituent and friend, Gerry Thiessen of Vanderhoof, B.C., a small town of just 4,000 people in the riding of Cariboo—Prince George.

On Saturday, April 9, Gerry Thiessen will become the new president of the Canadian Real Estate Association.

Congratulations, Gerry. His hard work, honesty, dedication and integrity has been recognized by his peers and I know he will serve them very well in his new role as president of the Canadian Real Estate Association.

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● (1410)

CANADA-ISRAEL INTERPARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP GROUP

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that the Canada-Israel Interparliamentary Friendship Group recently elected a new executive, including the members from Thornhill, Nanaimo—Alberni and Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles as vice-chairs and myself as chair.

This unique forum allows parliamentarians of all parties to join together in their common support for Israel, a fellow democracy and the strongest Canadian ally in the region.

[*Translation*]

Our purpose is to foster better relations between Canada and Israel by focussing on our shared values, our common interests and the undeniable benefits gained from sharing and cooperating together.

[*English*]

We are working together as a group to build an exciting agenda for this coming year, and I invite all members of the House and the other House to participate in our activities. I welcome all members to join this non-partisan group, the Canada-Israel Interparliamentary Friendship Group.

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[*Translation*]

QUEBEC ADULT LEARNERS WEEK

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this week has been designated Adult Learners Week in Quebec. This is the third edition of this event designed to instill in Quebecers a love for lifelong learning and to develop learning opportunities for them.

Extensive activities are scheduled as part of this week of recognition, the success of which will be ensured by 17 regional issue tables bringing together hundreds of partners.

In Quebec, 1.5 million adults are striving to pursue continuous training or working on furthering their education. The importance of the Quebec Adult Learners Week rests in acknowledging their efforts.

In the current context of plant closures, manpower retraining is paramount, and Quebec wants the emphasis to be on continuous training.

Let us now hope that the federal government will follow suit by moving forward with the transfer to the provinces for manpower training.

* * *

LAZARE GIONET

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to pay tribute in the House today to Lazare Gionet, who passed away last Friday, just four months short of his 109th birthday.

Mr. Gionet was born in St. Paul, Middle Caraquet, New Brunswick. He followed in his father's footsteps, farming and fishing until he joined the army at the age of 20. After the war, Mr. Gionet married Lauza Hébert, with whom he had nine children. One of them, Armand, was killed during the second world war.

Remembrance Day was always extremely important to Mr. Gionet, who attended the ceremonies each November 11 until he turned 101. In 1998, he also took part in a trip to mark the 80th anniversary of the war to end all wars.

On behalf of all the hon. members and all Canadians, I extend my sincere condolences, in this Year of the Veteran, to the family and friends of Mr. Gionet. He will not be forgotten.

* * *

[English]

VOLUNTEERISM

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 9 a team of 11 people from the Collingwood Church of God went to a small village in Paraguay to put the finishing touches on an orphanage that they helped build over the past year.

The team leader, Dan Miller, has led a number of these trips to help those in need in very impoverished areas. The team of five adults and six teenage girls raised the funds for their trip and were very involved in all aspects of the construction.

In addition to helping to build the orphanage, the team helped replace the roof on a local church and ran a one day youth camp for the local children.

While their trip lasted 14 days, the efforts made in Paraguay will have a lasting impression on the orphans for the rest of their lives.

It is with great pride that I recognize Dan Miller, Jason and Sarah Burt, Nathan and Amanda Westendorp, Alexandra Foster, Erica Jones, Jillian Grant, Amanda Cramer, Erin Wiley and Laura McGill for making such a tremendous difference.

It is incredible to see our youth with such a healthy approach to serving the community both locally and globally.

● (1415)

FORUM FOR YOUNG CANADIANS

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to acknowledge five exceptional students from my riding of Brant.

Throughout March and April, high school students from across Canada will participate in the Forum for Young Canadians. It is with admiration that I acknowledge those selected from Brant.

The event, which takes place on Parliament Hill, is an excellent opportunity for senior high school students from across Canada to study firsthand the roles and processes of government in Canada. The event is also an outstanding opportunity for younger Canadians to socialize with their peers and gain knowledge of the unique and varied aspects of Canada.

I would like to ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating all those involved in this educational and meaningful event.

* * *

WORLD HEALTH DAY

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is World Health Day. The theme this year is "Make Every Mother and Child Count".

The global reality for women and children is that issues concerning their health are a low priority and Canada's Liberal government is no exception.

In a recent UNICEF report on child poverty, Canada ranked a shameful 19 out of 26. This confirmed what we already know; that the government has completely failed to live up to its 15-year-old commitment to eliminate child poverty.

Another report by the United Nations reveals that in the past decade the number of women living in poverty continues to increase.

Poverty is the number one determinate of ill health. If mothers are living in poverty then their children are living in poverty. It is that simple.

We call on the Liberal government to bring forward progressive legislation that will make a real difference in the lives of the thousands of mothers and their children who are now living in poverty. Let us get on with it.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL AID

Ms. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University and John McArthur of the United Nations will share their views on eliminating global poverty with the foreign affairs committee.

This is a timely opportunity to remind the government of the commitment made over 25 years ago to achieving the level of 0.7% of Canada's gross national income on development assistance.

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Canadians proved once again that they are ahead of government when responding to the tsunami crisis both in compassion and in generosity. Canadians would want their government to be showing moral global leadership in the face of 1.1 billion fellow human beings living in extreme poverty.

Tony Blair has shown that leadership pressed by the British people. Germany is expected to announce soon a commitment to reach 0.7%.

The government wastes enough money in its operations to be able to afford this and development assistance has now evolved to be very effective and accountable.

The government should honour its commitment to 0.7% now with a set timetable.

* * *

[Translation]

DAFFODIL MONTH

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, over the years, the daffodil has become the symbol of the Canadian Cancer Society's cancer awareness campaign. This flower, symbolizing life and hope, will be on sale during the month of April to raise funds to fight cancer.

In addition to helping fund cancer prevention activities, the money raised will help fund important research for all types of cancer, provide comprehensive information about cancer care and treatment, support people living with cancer and their families, provide training and education for volunteers and promote healthy lifestyles and strategies for preventing this terrible disease.

If we all work together, cancer can be beaten.

* * *

[English]

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the man of the century, my hero, a man who will no doubt come to be known in our lifetime as St. John Paul the Great.

We are moved to see how even in death this man of God can evoke such an outpouring of love. During the 26 years of his pontificate, he attracted the largest crowds in human history and was encountered by more people than any man or woman who has ever lived. He did so because he was an icon of self-giving love and a constant and courageous voice of moral clarity.

In every field of human endeavour, in every language and on every continent, he preached and lived the fundamental Christian truth about the human person: that every human life, from the moment of conception to natural death, is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore possesses an inviolable dignity.

He preached this truth in the face of the inhuman ideologies of what he called the century of tears. In the face of the terror of Communism and Nazism, he relentlessly defended the freedoms of conscience and religion.

He was a man whose memory we will always hold dearly. Requiescat in pace.

* * *

● (1420)

[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party are playing a dangerous game threatening Canadians with another election. The two parties are making their disdain for public opinion quite clear.

The Conservatives, by joining with the Bloc, are de facto supporting the cause of sovereignty, and the Bloc is supporting the reactionary policies of a party that has no respect for official languages or human rights.

The stranglehold on virtue is weakening. How does the leader of the Conservative Party justify his support for Quebec's separation? How can the leader of the Bloc Québécois call himself the apostle of transparency, knowing full well that the mother house in Quebec received some one hundred thousand dollars from Groupaction, the company of Jean Brault? Given his ambition to head the Parti Québécois, will he demand an inquiry into the awarding of these sums as he did for the Liberals?

The new slogan of the unCanadian alliance should be—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona has the floor.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at a time when so many other issues dominate the domestic and Canada-U.S. political scene, I rise to ask the House to focus for a moment on the fact that an entire Canadian ecosystem is in imminent danger because of the Liberal government's failure to get the American government to refer the Devils Lake diversion project to the International Joint Commission on Boundary Waters.

Premier Gary Doer has been working all out on this issue but he needs a federal counterpart who is fully focused on this issue.

The Prime Minister came back from Texas empty-handed. Time is short. Lake Winnipeg, our sixth great lake, is in danger of being permanently contaminated and soon.

I urge all MPs to join in the campaign to save Manitoba from this disaster. It is not a regional issue. It is an issue of national environmental integrity. Security is a two-way street. Violating Canada's environmental security by trans-boundary water pollution is not an example of what good neighbours do to each other.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD***[English]***SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM**

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after Jean Chrétien testified and showed his complete contempt at the Gomery inquiry, the Prime Minister met with his caucus, punched his fists wildly in the air and told them that Chrétien did, “a tremendous job for Canada and for the Liberal Party”.

Since I do not hear any applause for that today, does the Prime Minister still stand by that statement?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not remember the hon. member being at the caucus. I am not quite sure how he would be able to describe that, but if he would like to join us and become a bit more progressive, I am sure he could. After all, we too in our caucus have chairs that can be kicked.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am afraid that is all we will have on that answer.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Prime Minister that I do not want to be under investigation.

It has now come to light that hundreds of thousands of tax dollars may have been funnelled through the Liberal sponsorship program to the Parti Québécois. I guess the keystone crooks stole the money and gave it to the wrong people.

Could the Prime Minister stand in his place and guarantee Canadian taxpayers that not one red cent of their money went to the separatist cause in Quebec in the name of national unity?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say that I am delighted, after so many months of an attempted co-habitation, that the Leader of the Opposition has finally recognized the threat of the separatist cause and the problems that he has in working with them hand in hand.

* * *

●(1425)

THE BUDGET

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the Gomery commission will show is that the best friend of the separatist cause in Quebec is the Liberal Party of Canada.

Yesterday the Prime Minister refused to split the Atlantic accords from the budget bill. He told the House, falsely he will have to admit, that the health accord was part of the budget bill. It is not. It is Bill C-39. The Conservative Party will agree today to pass this bill through all stages this afternoon.

If the Prime Minister is serious about passing the bill, will he agree to this proposal?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is absolute nonsense. The Leader of the Opposition, the Conservative Party, and the NDP had absolutely nothing to do with

the successful signings of the Atlantic accord for Newfoundland and Labrador and for Nova Scotia.

I want to say that it was the members of the Newfoundland and Labrador caucus and the members of the Nova Scotia caucus who pushed for it. The opposition members were 100% absent from the file. They did not support the government. They were not there and it is ridiculous for them to stand up now and try to take any credit.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a pile of unadulterated bull and the Prime Minister knows it.

The Prime Minister also knows that it would take 15 minutes on a word processor to prepare a new bill that would cause revenues to flow to Newfoundland and Nova Scotia immediately.

He is using the longest possible route to approval. Last year's budget implementation bill is still with the Liberal controlled Senate. If the Prime Minister can split Bill C-43 for Kyoto, why can you not do it for Atlantic Canadians?

The Speaker: The hon. member knows that I am not in the business of splitting bills.

The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor and the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl will address the Chair.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only did the official opposition have nothing to do with the successful signing of the Atlantic accords, but let me say that in the case of Nova Scotia, the Leader of the Opposition during the election campaign, and confirmed in the Conservative Party's recent convention, brought forth a suggestion that would have deprived Nova Scotia not only of the Atlantic accord, but would have reduced its equalization. The member for Central Nova once again got suckered by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when is the Prime Minister going to stop playing games with the Atlantic accord and stop playing games with the lives of people in Newfoundland and Labrador and the people in Nova Scotia?

The government has already agreed to change the implementation bill by agreeing to take out Kyoto. In view of the fact that Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador are losing \$1 million a day, why is the government delaying implementation of its commitment to these provinces by preventing the quick passage of this deal under stand-alone legislation?

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition said that he will support this government's Atlantic accord in this House. We just heard it. He also said that he will not defeat the government over the budget.

The Atlantic accord is contained in the budget implementation bill. I am prepared to move at all stages that bill, if he will support it and keep his word to Canadians not to defeat the government over the budget implementation bill and give Atlantic Canadians the Atlantic accord.

Oral Questions

● (1430)

*[Translation]***SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 12, 2004, the Prime Minister referred to political direction behind the sponsorship scandal. On Monday, he added to this by stating that “a few individuals” controlled everything—a parallel group. He has always refused to say who was behind the political direction.

Could he tell the public today who those Liberals are who were pulling the strings of the sponsorship scandal? Who are these individuals? Who makes up that parallel group?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already answered that. Moreover, one of the Bloc members has already submitted all kinds of names.

I would, however, like to ask the leader of the Bloc a question. Since he is seriously interested in becoming the leader of the Parti Québécois, I would like to know whether he intends to call for an inquiry into the \$100,000 the Parti Québécois received from Groupaction.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister is so anxious to ask questions, he will soon have an opportunity to do so, when he is in the opposition.

The Liberals—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Perhaps we should begin again, but without that sentence.

The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[English]

The Speaker: Order. We are making very slow progress in question period today. There are going to be a lot of disappointed members at the end of this.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie now has the floor. We must have a bit of order. If people want to have other discussions, there are plenty of places they can do so.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are panicking. They ought to calm down and listen to what Justice Gomery said on Monday “To date, no one has alleged or in any way suggested that money from the sponsorship program went to the Bloc Québécois in any way.”

Let us move on to something more serious, and hear no more from Ali Baba's noisy band.

The Liberals have some nerve to talk about a “parallel group”. Does the Prime Minister, with all his connections—

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but the Right Hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

[English]

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I cannot think of a better example—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order, please. The time for the question is up. There are lots of other opportunities for discussions of this type. The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

[English]

Right Hon. Paul Martin: Mr. Speaker, I hope Canadians had a chance to see that picture. The Leader of the Opposition talks about the separatist threat and then there they were, all standing hand in hand, the separatists and the Conservatives. That is where they are coming from. That is what it is all about.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have some nerve to talk about a parallel group.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: That's enough from Ali Baba's band.

Can the Prime Minister, with his insider knowledge of the Liberal Party, tell us whether Chrétien, Pelletier, Carle, Gagliano, Bard, Corbeil, Morseli, Corriveau, Pichette, Ouellet and Lefrançois were part of this “parallel group”, magically integrated into the Liberal structure, some members of which are panicking and yelling to prevent others from speaking? They are like Ali Baba's band.

● (1435)

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the potential leader of the Parti Québécois likes to answer questions, perhaps I could ask him a second one. Can he confirm to the House that all the Groupaction gifts to PQ members were in accordance with the electoral laws of Quebec?

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Parti Québécois has answered that question.

An hon. member: Contrary to what went on in Ottawa, the answer is yes.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: The Bloc, in fact, refused money from Groupaction. We were not interested in getting our hands on dirty money, like they did.

An hon. member: We did not award contracts either. We never awarded any contracts to our friends.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: The Liberals are the ones who awarded contracts, here in Ottawa. They are the ones yelling so nobody can be heard and who are anxious to ask questions because they are going to end up in the opposition. It is time they told us who was behind all this. Which friends of Ali Baba are part of this “parallel group”?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, is the leader of the Bloc, potential leader of the Parti Québécois, able to tell us whether the money the Parti Québécois transferred to the Bloc was not money—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Yesterday, a Liberal minister said that good federalists should ignore corruption. It seems to me that, a few moments ago, the Prime Minister made a very similar statement.

Is this “we are the state” attitude at the root of this corruption scandal? I think so.

This is unbelievable, and all the more so when we hear allegations implicating the Parti Québécois.

So, does the Prime Minister think that opposing corruption jeopardizes federalism?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure I understand the question of the NDP leader. However, I can say that my party and I set up the Gomery commission to investigate the issue. We did so because Canadians deserve to get answers and because we want Canada's politics to be as honest as possible. That is why we took this initiative and it is us who will shed light on the whole situation. We want the Gomery commission to have time to provide answers.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to repeat my question because it is about time the Liberals realized that people care more about Canada than they do about Liberals.

Yesterday a Liberal minister said that federalists should not attack Liberal corruption, as if this is some kind of a Canadian scandal instead of a Liberal scandal. This is incredible, and even more incredible when we hear the latest allegations regarding the Parti Québécois.

I ask again, does the Prime Minister agree with the position of one of his ministers that to oppose Liberal corruption is to undermine federalism, yes or no?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member said is that we should wait for the Gomery report.

The Gomery commission was put in place to determine what the facts are. Mr. Justice Gomery will bring down his decision and at that point we will have them and at that point the government can act.

To act on the basis of allegations, on the basis of statements made in the middle of the commission makes absolutely no sense. I would simply say to the opposition, I would say to the NDP and I would say to the Bloc, for heaven's sake let Mr. Justice Gomery get on with the job and let him complete his report.

• (1440)

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is interesting advice, except if my ears heard correctly, I heard the Prime Minister bragging to the leader of the Bloc Québécois that they may have received sponsorship money. Is this

the best defence the Liberal Party has to offer, that the separatists are just as big crooks as the Liberals?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Anybody who used the unity crisis to achieve personal financial gain will be punished, because we are getting to the bottom of this issue.

It is very interesting hearing the leader of the Conservative Party talk about national unity because in 1994 on the eve of the 1995 referendum in the province of Quebec, when federalists of various stripes and when federalists of the Liberal Party were working hard to keep the country together, he was giving speeches saying he did not care whether Canada ended up with one national capital or four national capitals. He did not care then and he does not care now.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just witnessed the entire Liberal Party standing and applauding the fact that sponsorship money may have gone to the Parti Québécois.

I am going to ask the Prime Minister again, can the Prime Minister assure Canadians, all federalists, that his government did not give sponsorship money to the separatists?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois very much would like to have an election based on allegations. It is in their interest to do that because they do not want Justice Gomery to submit his report. They do not want Canadians to have the truth. They do not want the government or the Liberal Party to be able to respond in a substantive way to that substantive report.

I understand the Bloc members because they are separatists. They want to destroy the country, but I cannot understand for the life of me why the Conservatives support the Bloc in commenting on testimony and wanting to have an election based on testimony, not on the facts, not on Gomery's report.

We want to get to the bottom of this. That is why we support the work of Justice Gomery.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we want is a simple answer to a very straightforward question.

The Liberals still brag about the sponsorship program as though it was some master stroke of national unity, but Alain Renaud has admitted that Groupaction donated to the Liberal Party and to the separatists after having received money from the sponsorship program.

Taxpayers want to know why taxpayer dollars that were supposed to be for this program, that the Liberals say was for national unity, end up in the pockets of the separatists?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, any guilty party, whatever their stripe, will face the full extent of the law. The reason is that this Prime Minister took action. He eliminated the sponsorship program. He established the Gomery commission. He supports the Gomery commission because we are not afraid of the truth.

Oral Questions

The fact is that he is commenting on an allegation from one individual. It is not a fact; it is not a truth. We will have the facts. We will have the truth when Justice Gomery provides us with his report.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not an allegation. It is an admission.

Groupaction got money from taxpayers, gave money to separatists, gave money to the Liberal Party, and this Liberal Party now will not answer a simple question. Why did taxpayer dollars go from a program that was supposed to be for national unity to people who are hellbent on destroying Canada?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, if the hon. member really wants to act based on fact, he ought to wait for Justice Gomery's report.

If he finally realizes that the Bloc and the separatists are hellbent on destroying Canada, perhaps he should reconsider his party's support of the Bloc's daily commentary on allegations before Gomery.

In fact, perhaps if he really realizes that the Bloc is hellbent on destroying the country, he ought to support federalists in the province of Quebec and support this government as we get to the bottom of this issue, so that we can defend the reputations of all Quebec federalists.

* * *

•(1445)

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Trade is negotiating a free trade agreement with South Korea and is contemplating similar agreements with India and various Central American countries.

Does the minister not think it is time to ensure that, when such treaties are signed, contracting states pledge to comply with certain obligations, so that the products that we import are not the product of child labour, forced labour, or plants that do not respect human rights?

[English]

Hon. Mark Eyking (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade (Emerging Markets), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that the minister is in India on a very important trade delegation leading over 65 companies. These are emerging markets. We will be making deals with other countries, so that we increase our trade because we are a trading nation.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the same issue, a number of groups, including Amnesty International, are asking that the name of the manufacturing plant, and not just that of the country of origin, be indicated on the label, so that consumers can make an educated choice by knowing what is going on in terms of human rights.

Does the government intend to follow up on this request, which would help improve working conditions here and abroad?

[English]

Hon. Mark Eyking (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade (Emerging Markets), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a tremendous record on human rights. Whenever we travel outside the country making deals, like the Prime Minister did when he was in China, we bring up the way we deal with human rights and we expect these other countries to follow suit.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government just entered into a timid voluntary agreement with the automotive industry, whereby this industry is making a moral commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles by 5.3 megatons by the year 2010. What was agreed to with the manufacturers was not to reduce pollution, but only to curb its growth.

Will the minister admit that it is not with an agreement like this one, which does not place any obligations on the manufacturers, that Canada will succeed in meeting its Kyoto commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

[English]

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing that the Bloc Québécois disagrees with the voluntary agreement so much that it would make such statements. The Sierra Club Washington, D.C. based environmental group praised this agreement as a breakthrough because it would both cut global warming emissions in Canada and set the stage for a similar reduction in the United States.

John Bennett, the Sierra Club advisor to Canada, said:

—Canadian reductions are similar to the 2001 California Clean Car Bill, which requires auto makers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from their vehicles by 30% between 2009 and 2016.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister read only half the article, because Greenpeace and the Québec vert Kyoto coalition have described the agreement as disappointing and timid.

In February, the Minister of the Environment came back enthused from his trip to California, where automobile pollution policies are much more restrictive. That was the way to go, he suggested at the time.

Will he admit that his agreement with the automotive industry is a personal failure and that the government showed no backbone, seeing as the major manufacturers have imposed their own terms on the government?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is mistaken. In fact, the agreement we have just signed with the Canadian auto industry is more demanding and will produce results more quickly than what the Californians hope to get by regulating.

I must remind him that California tried first to reach an agreement. Only when it failed to get this agreement did it turn to regulation. We would have done so too, but we are very happy to have an agreement with the Canadian automakers that will mean a 5.3 megaton reduction for Canada by 2010.

* * *

[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note the Prime Minister, who is sitting next to the founder of the Bloc Québécois, was the finance minister during the entire time that the sponsorship program was operating.

We know from the testimony and from the admission of Alain Renaud that \$100,000 went through Groupaction to the Parti Québécois. That happened on his watch as finance minister. Did he approve of that transaction of money that went to the separatists?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, members of the Conservative Party, like the members in its sister party, the Bloc Québécois, are commenting on allegations not facts. For a party that is opposed to same sex marriage, I am surprised that its leader would be so quick to jump in the bed of the leader of the Bloc Québécois on an issue of national unity.

* * *

• (1450)

PASSPORTS

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note the public works minister is not quoting from the *National Post* today.

Yesterday the Auditor General was scathing in her condemnation of the security practices at the Passport Office. She said it is struggling to meet security expectations and demands for service. This is not the first time this has been mentioned by the Auditor General. American officials are also concerned. Witness yesterday's announcement that they are now requiring Canadians to carry passports when they enter the U.S.

It has been four years since 9/11. Why the delay in action and what assurances are being given to the Americans that all necessary security measures will be completed prior to the issuance of any passport?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the American demand of a passport is on its own citizens and not specifically on Canadian citizens. The Americans will treat Canadian citizens as they treat American citizens. It has nothing to do with yesterday's Auditor General's report, who has acknowledged that our Passport Office, and I quote from her very report:

The Passport Office has improved its recording and sharing of information on lost and stolen passports...The Passport Office has made significant progress.

I have another quote and I could go on because there are lots, but I can tell the House that we have done our work and the Auditor General—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: The hon. member for Medicine Hat.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's dishonesty with money seems to know no bounds. Yesterday, thanks to the finance committee initiative, four independent experts revealed that the government once again lowballed the size of this year's surplus announced in the budget just six weeks ago by over \$3 billion.

Why does the government persist in attempting to mislead the public about the size of the surplus? Why the habitual dishonesty over there?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Medicine Hat knows that suggesting that members are dishonest is not in accordance with the practice in the House. He may have skated on thin ice the first time because he referred to the government, but now he is saying "over there". If he was pointing in a particular direction, and I am afraid I did not get to see which direction he was pointing in, it appears it was at someone in the House. It may have been heavenward, but I cannot imagine that the hon. member for Medicine Hat would go that far. I feel that perhaps he will want to withdraw the word dishonest at the end of question period.

In the meantime, if the Minister of Finance wishes to reply to the question he can do so.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as usual, the various forecasters that comment on projections with respect to the economy and the fiscal situation offer a broad range of views, some of them very conservative, some of them quite aggressive.

The end result is we can, if we like, like the opposition, pick a favourite economist and go to one extreme or the other. Or we can develop a consensus view that averages all of those points of view and come up with a reasonable position in the middle. That approach has produced for Canada the best fiscal position in the G-7 and the best fiscal record since 1867.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker,—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I said we would deal with it after question period. The hon. member for Medicine Hat has the floor.

Mr. Monte Solberg: Mr. Speaker, that approach has allowed the government to mislead Canadians about the size of surpluses to the tune of \$80 billion. That is the level of this government's dishonesty. What an incredible—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question that does not accuse people. It is designed to make Canada better.

Oral Questions

I want to ask the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food about Canadian milk producers who want better controls on imports of dairy ingredients.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Don Boudria: I notice the Conservatives are not interested about agriculture.

Two weeks ago the Canadian International Trade Tribunal reclassified milk protein products from tariff rate quotas to tariff free and that threatens the Canadian dairy industry.

Will the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tell the House how the Government of Canada intends to support supply management in the face of what has now happened as a result of the action of the Canadian International Trade Tribunal?

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada and the Liberal Party very much supports the supply managed system. It is a very effective system. It gives a fair return to producers and provides consumers with an assurance of supply and a quality of supply.

That is why, through the WTO negotiations, we are insisting that there has to be an appreciation and a recognition of sensitive products. Individual countries must have the flexibility to deal with those products in the ways that makes most sense for individual countries.

* * *

• (1455)

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. I need to get something clear. All of us in this country need to get something clear.

The Minister of Public Works just said a moment ago that if we are attacking Liberal corruption, we are undermining federalism. We need to know from the Prime Minister whether he is able to separate the understanding of the Liberal Party from the country?

Does the Prime Minister understand that public money is not Liberal money? Will he dissociate himself from the position of the Minister of Public Works and do it now?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would urge the leader of the NDP to check *Hansard*. In fact, what I said and what I stand by is that the Bloc, by commenting on allegations as opposed to waiting for Justice Gomery to report, is actually damaging federalist prospects in the province of Quebec.

What the leader of the NDP should do, as someone who I still believe believes in Canada, is to wait until we have a report and not play the separatist game by commenting on daily testimony. He should instead wait for a report that will give Canadians the truth that they desire and that this government and this party stands for.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this Liberal Party is trying to drape itself in the Canadian flag once again. We have seen what happened with that one before. The Liberals need to understand—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth has the floor. We will have a little order so I can hear the question.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Will he stop playing games with this country and allow us to get to the bottom of corruption? Fighting corruption is not about fighting. It is about fighting for Canada. It is not about dealing with separatists. Will the Prime Minister stand up and dissociate himself from those remarks?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear that anyone who used the unity crisis to achieve personal gain will be punished to the full extent of the law. The reason is that this party, this government, and this Prime Minister is ensuring that Justice Gomery does his work.

We support Justice Gomery. We will support Justice Gomery until we receive his report. We will respond both as a government and as a party very seriously to his recommendations.

If the hon. member wants to talk about playing games with national unity, that is exactly what he is doing when he supports the Bloc Québécois tendency to comment on daily testimony that is damaging to federalists and does not reflect the truth.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two years ago we asked the government to abandon its discredited policy of playing softball with the dictatorship in Iran.

We asked the government to demand that the remains of Zahra Kazemi be returned to her son and that there be a new inquiry and a new trial with a Canadian presence.

If the government is serious about getting justice for a Canadian woman who was tortured and murdered, why will it not bring our ambassador home until the demands are met instead of sending him back there to resume normal relations?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have in the past withdrawn the ambassador and that has led nowhere. We need to articulate our case in Iran at the highest level and very strongly.

Yesterday when I spoke to the Iranian foreign minister I asked him when the appeal will take place. The family has asked for an appeal. The family is committed to having an appeal. The Iranian government has not yet announced that date. This is another request on top of the autopsy request we made yesterday, and we need to pursue our case all the time at the highest possible level.

• (1500)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government promised harsh measures for the murderers of Zahra Kazemi. Yesterday, this same government tried to organize a training session in Montreal on maintaining good relations with Iran. Only after we criticized this decision did the government change its mind and cancel the training session.

Oral Questions

Why does this government wait until the official opposition criticizes its contradictory actions instead of simply making decisions based on clear principles?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have made many decisions on the basis of clear principles. We went to the UN general assembly with our colleagues from the international community. We criticized them wherever the opportunity presented itself. We deal with them each time so that we can get the information we need from them. We want justice.

The opposition wakes up each time a piece appears in the media. But we have been working on this matter week in and week out, month in and month out, without waiting for the media to focus on it.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Gordon O'Connor (Carleton—Mississippi Mills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister told the defence committee that Norad would have died had Canada not agreed to provide radar information to the U.S. missile defence system.

The minister's delineation between presence and participation in missile defence is spin-doctoring. He thinks that just because Canada does not push the button, it is absolved of meaningful participation. This is simply false.

The Prime Minister has said we are not in missile defence, but the minister has confirmed we are. Who are Canadians to believe?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope Canadians will believe the accurate reporting of what I actually said before the committee. What I said was that we are participating with our American colleagues in providing information about what is going on around space and around Canada and the United States because we are their partners in the defence of North America and that is a natural thing for Norad to do.

That does not make us participants in the ballistic missile delivery system. What it makes us is participants in the defence of North America as a great colleague with the United States. We are building stronger ties every day and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor (Carleton—Mississippi Mills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is obscuring the facts: we are in missile defence.

Yesterday the minister said that "at the moment we've decided not to" participate in missile defence. Does this mean that the Liberal government will reconsider Canada's participation in the future?

Was the Prime Minister's recent decision merely a ploy to ensure that he would receive a favourable vote on his leadership at the Liberal convention?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government and this Prime Minister take policy decisions for the good of Canadians and for the good of Canada. Our government is committed to providing the correct defence posture for our country.

We will work with our American colleagues in defending North America, but we will work with them in our way, under our

conditions, with our priorities, under the direction of our Prime Minister.

* * *

[Translation]

PASSPORTS

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in paragraph 3.46 of her report, the Auditor General expresses surprise that the Passport Office does not always possess the information it needs to refuse to issue a passport to individuals who are not entitled to one.

How does the government justify the fact that the Passport Office is so ill-equipped, even though crown prosecutors always have access to such information, and have had for quite a while, by the time a defendant appears in court within 24 hours after arrest?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP and the Passport Office share information and are in further discussions to ensure that all information presently found in CPIC and relevant to the Passport Office's activities is shared in real time.

In addition, on March 31 of this year, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Passport Office and the Correctional Service of Canada to ensure for any of those in the corrections system at any stage, including parole, that information is provided to the Passport Office so that it can act upon it accordingly.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is not what the Auditor General said. The information does not seem to be used in a timely manner.

Not only is security control lacking when passports are issued but, furthermore, we learn in paragraph 3.94 that the government has acted illegally by not revealing how it is using the fees collected.

How does the government explain that as it was increasing passport fees by over 40%, it was drastically lowering its service standards?

• (1505)

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Passport Office finances its own operations from the fees it collects for passports. This has been the practice for a number of years. So, this agency finances its own operations with the revenues from passports.

I want to add that what the Deputy Prime Minister said is quite appropriate. We have already signed a memorandum of understanding with the RCMP to improve the exchange of information.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Mr. George Chuvalo, former Canadian heavyweight boxing champion and recipient of the Order of Canada in recognition of his dedication to Canada's youth.

I invite all hon. members to a reception to meet Mr. Chuvalo, following the votes, which I believe are imminent.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during question period the Speaker ruled that perhaps I should withdraw the comments I made because I might have unfairly impugned members on the other side. I guess we will leave that to the people of Canada and Judge Gomery to decide, but I do believe that my words were unparliamentary so therefore I withdraw.

ATLANTIC ACCORD

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a consequence of discussion in question period today, I wonder if there might not be unanimous consent for the following motion, seconded by the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth, the leader of the NDP: “That, notwithstanding the Standing Orders or usual practices of the House, a minister of the Crown be permitted to table a bill without notice that implements the Atlantic accord; when such a bill is called for debate it be deemed read the second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage, deemed read a third time and passed”.

This would certainly clear up any problem and we could all get our wish to have this accord passed immediately.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to indicate the support of the New Democratic Party for this proposal. This will move the long awaited aspirations of Atlantic Canada into being. We call on all members to support the motion today.

The Speaker: Does the House give its consent to the motion proposed by the Leader of the Opposition?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Tony Valeri: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. With the unanimous consent of the House, I would ask that we move to Bill C-43, move it at all stages, vote on it, approve it, and get it through the House. This would ensure that Atlantic Canadians get the Atlantic accord that they deserve.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The House resumed from April 5 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:10 p.m. the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of concurrence in the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in the name of the hon. member for Red Deer.

Call in the members.

● (1520)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 53)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	André
Asselin	Bachand
Batters	Bellavance
Benoit	Bergeron
Bezan	Bigras
Blaikie	Blais
Boire	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boulianne
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Broadbent	Brunelle
Cardin	Carrie
Carrier	Casey
Casson	Chong
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Davies
Day	Demers
Desjarlais	Desrochers
Devolin	Doyle
Duceppe	Duncan
Epp	Faillie
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Fletcher	Forseth
Gagnon (Québec)	Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain)
Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma)	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godin
Goldring	Goodyear
Gouk	Grewal (Newton—North Delta)
Guay	Guergis
Guimond	Hanger
Harris	Harrison
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jean	Johnston
Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kotto	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise	Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse)
Lauzon	Lavallée
Lessard	Loubier
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Marceau
Mark	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
McDonough	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merrifield

Private Members' Business

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT**

The House resumed from April 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-278, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (improvement of the employment insurance system), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-278 under private members' business.

● (1535)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 54)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Asselin
Bellavance
Bigras
Blais
Bonsant
Boulianne
Broadbent
Cardin
Carrier
Christopherson
Comartin
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Demers
Desrochers
Faille
Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain)
Galloway
Gauthier
Goldring
Guay
Harris
Kotto
Laframboise
Lavallée
Loubier
Mark
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Matthews
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Minna
Perron
Plamondon
Roy
Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul)
Stoffer
Basques)
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Watson — 77

André
Bachand
Bergeron
Blaikie
Boire
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brunelle
Carrie
Casey
Cleary
Côté
Crowder
Davies
Desjarlais
Duceppe
Gagnon (Québec)
Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma)
Gaudet
Godin
Grewal (Newton—North Delta)
Guimond
Julian
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse)
Lessard
Marceau
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
McDonough
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Paquette
Picard (Drummond)
Poirier-Rivard
Sauvageau
St-Hilaire
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Vincent

Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
Pallister
Penson
Picard (Drummond)
Poilievre
Prentice
Rajotte
Ritz
Sauvageau
Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul)
Sorenson
Stoffer
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Vincent
Watson
Yelich — 143

Mills
O'Connor
Paquette
Perron
Plamondon
Poirier-Rivard
Preston
Reid
Roy
Scheer
Skelton
Solberg
St-Hilaire
Stronach
Tilson
Trost
Van Loan
Warawa
Williams

NAYS

Members

Adams
Bagnell
Bakopanos
Bélanger
Bennett
Blondin-Andrew
Bonin
Boudria
Brisson
Cannis
Carroll
Coderre
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Dion
Dryden
Emerson
Folco
Galloway
Godfrey
Graham
Holland
Ianno
Kadis
Karygiannis
Lapierre (Outremont)
LeBlanc
Longfield
Macklin
Maloney
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McCallum
McGuire
McLellan
Minna
Murphy
Neville
Owen
Patry
Phinney
Powers
Ratansi
Regan
Rodriguez
Saada
Savoy
Scott
Simard (Saint Boniface)
St. Amand
Steckle
Thibault (West Nova)
Ur
Valley
Wilfert

Augustine
Bains
Barnes
Bell
Bevilacqua
Boivin
Boshcoff
Bradshaw
Brown (Oakville)
Carr
Chamberlain
Cotler
Cuzner
DeVillers
Drouin
Efford
Eyking
Frulla
Godbout
Goodale
Guarnieri
Hubbard
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Khan
Lastewka
Lee
MacAulay
Malhi
Marleau
Matthews
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague
Mitchell
Myers
O'Brien
Pacetti
Pettigrew
Pickard (Chatham-Kent—Essex)
Proulx
Redman
Robillard
Rota
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Smith (Pontiac)
St. Denis
Szabo
Tonks
Valeri
Volpe
Wrzesnewskyj — 108

Private Members' Business

NAYS

Members

Adams
Ambrose
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Bagnell
Bakopanos
Batters
Bell
Benoit
Bezan
Boivin
Boshcoff
Bradshaw
Brisson
Cannis
Carroll
Chamberlain
Cotler
Cuzner
Day
Devolin
Doyle
Dryden
Efford
Epp
Finley
Fletcher
Frulla
Godfrey
Goodyear
Guarnieri
Hanger
Hearn
Hill
Holland
Ianno
Jennings
Kadis
Karetak-Lindell
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Lastewka
LeBlanc
Longfield
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Macklin
Maloney
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague
Miller
Mitchell
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Myers
Nicholson
O'Connor
Pacetti
Patry
Pettigrew
Pickard (Chatham-Kent—Essex)
Powers
Preston
Rajotte
Redman
Reid
Robillard
Rota
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Sgro
Skelton
Solberg
St. Amand
Steckle
Szabo
Tilson
Tonks
Tweed

Allison
Anders
Augustine
Bains
Barnes
Bélangier
Bennett
Bevilacqua
Blondin-Andrew
Bonin
Boudria
Breitkreuz
Brown (Oakville)
Carr
Casson
Chong
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
DeVillers
Dion
Drouin
Duncan
Emerson
Eyking
Fitzpatrick
Folco
Godbout
Goodale
Graham
Guergis
Harrison
Hiebert
Hinton
Hubbard
Jean
Johnston
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Lapierre (Outremont)
Lauzon
Lee
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Malhi
Marleau
McCallum
McGuire
McLellan
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Murphy
Neville
O'Brien
Owen
Pallister
Penson
Phinney
Poilievre
Prentice
Proulx
Ratansi
Regan
Ritz
Rodriguez
Saada
Savoy
Scheer
Scott
Simard (Saint Boniface)
Smith (Pontiac)
Sorenson
St. Denis
Stronach
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Toews
Trout
Ur

Valeri
Van Loan
Wappel
Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj

Valley
Volpe
Warawa
Williams
Yelich— 170

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

* * *

[English]

FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT WAR VETERANS

The House resumed from April 5 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Tuesday, April 5, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion No. 193 under private members' business.

● (1545)

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

(Division No. 55)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Ambrose
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Asselin
Batters
Benoit
Bezan
Blaikie
Boire
Bonsant
Boulianne
Breitkreuz
Brunelle
Carrie
Casey
Chong
Cleary
Côté
Crowder
Davies
Demers
Desrochers
Doyle
Epp
Finley
Fletcher
Gagnon (Québec)
Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma)
Gauthier
Goldring
Gouk
Guay
Guimond
Harris
Hearn
Hill
Jean
Julian
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kilgour
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse)
Lavallée
Loubier
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Marceau

Allison
Anders
André
Bachand
Bellavance
Bergeron
Bigras
Blais
Bonin
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Broadbent
Cardin
Carrier
Casson
Christopherson
Comartin
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Day
Desjarlais
Devolin
Duncan
Faille
Fitzpatrick
Forsyth
Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain)
Gaudet
Godin
Goodyear
Grewal (Newton—North Delta)
Guergis
Hanger
Harrison
Hiebert
Hinton
Johnston
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kotto
Laframboise
Lauzon
Lessard
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Mark

Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Fundy Royal)
O'Connor
Paquette
Perron
Plamondon
Poirier-Rivard
Preston
Reid
Roy
Scheer
Skelton
Solberg
St-Hilaire
Stronach
Basques)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Van Loan
Warawa
Williams

Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
McDonough
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
Pallister
Penson
Picard (Drummond)
Poilievre
Prentice
Rajotte
Ritz
Sauvageau
Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul)
Sorenson
Stoffer
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Vincent
Watson
Yelich— 144

NAYS

Members

Adams
Bagnell
Bakopanos
Bélangier
Bennett
Blondin-Andrew
Boudria
Brison
Cannis
Carroll
Coderre
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Drouin
Efford
Eyking
Frulla
Godbout
Goodale
Guamieri
Hubbard
Jennings
Karygiannis
Lapierre (Outremont)
LeBlanc
Longfield
Malhi
Marleau
McCallum
McGuire
McLellan
Minna
Murphy
O'Brien
Pacetti
Pettigrew
Pickard (Chatham-Kent—Essex)
Proulx
Redman
Robillard
Rota
Savage
Scott
Simard (Saint Boniface)
St. Amand
Steckle
Tonks
Valeri
Volpe
Wilfert

Augustine
Bains
Barnes
Bell
Bevilacqua
Boivin
Bradshaw
Brown (Oakville)
Carr
Chamberlain
Cotler
Cuzner
Dion
Dryden
Emerson
Folco
Galloway
Godfrey
Graham
Holland
Ianno
Kadis
Khan
Lastewka
Lee
Macklin
Maloney
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague
Mitchell
Myers
Owen
Patry
Phinney
Powers
Ratansi
Regan
Rodriguez
Saada
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Smith (Pontiac)
St. Denis
Szabo
Ur
Valley
Wappel
Wrzesniewski— 100

PAIRED

Nil

Routine Proceedings

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, government orders will be extended by 36 minutes.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place among all parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the House shall not sit on Friday, April 8, 2005; and

That, during the consideration of government orders on April 7, 2005, the Chair shall not receive any quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent to propose a motion and, if a division is requested on any substantive motion, the said division shall be deferred to the end of the time provided for government orders on April 12, 2005.

The Speaker: Does the hon. chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, regarding Bill C-25, an act governing the operation of remote sensing space systems, with amendment.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts regarding the Main Estimates, 2005-06, vote 20 under finance, referred to the committee on Friday, February 25, 2005.

[English]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, with all the noise following question period and the circulation in the chamber, I was not able under tabling of documents to present the government's response to five petitions. Perhaps you could ask for unanimous consent to revert to tabling of documents so I could do that.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert to tabling of documents?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

●(1550)

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I am tabling, in both official languages, the government's response to five petitions.

* * *

HERITAGE LIGHTHOUSE PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): moved that Bill S-14, an act to protect heritage lighthouses, be read the first time.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

PETITIONS**MARRIAGE**

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a series of petitions with a total of 1,112 names of petitioners not only from my riding but also from other parts of this great country of ours.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to use all possible legislative and administrative measures, including invoking section 33 of the charter, the notwithstanding clause, if necessary, to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as between one man and one woman.

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have four petitions to present today. The first two petitions relate to the subject of marriage.

The petitioners note that the traditional definition of marriage in this country has been changed by certain lower courts but not by the Supreme Court of Canada. The petitioners call on Parliament to define in law marriage as being the lifelong union of one man and one woman.

The other two petitions that I have also relate to the subject of marriage. The petitioners note that marriage has traditionally been defined as the union of one man and one woman in Canada and throughout all civilizations across many cultures and different religious heritages. The petitioners call on Parliament to use all possible legislative steps to protect the current definition of marriage.

I am very pleased to present these petitions. I fully agree with them of course.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am proud to present this petition on behalf of constituents on the very important issue of marriage.

The petitioners call on Parliament to maintain the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. They recognize that marriage is the foundation for families and for raising children and they want it to stay that way.

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I present a petition in which the petitioners call upon Parliament to support the historic definition of marriage.

The petitioners would like to express their views that marriage should be protected as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wish to present a series of petitions signed by 875 constituents of my riding of Dufferin—Caledon.

The petitioners wish to preserve the definition of marriage by having Parliament affirm legislation recognizing the institution of marriage in federal law as being the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have six petitions to present. Five of my petitions are on the traditional definition of marriage.

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to protect the traditional definition of marriage as being in their opinion the lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

I would like to identify these five petitions by area. They are from a wide ranging area in my constituency. Most of them are from Fredericton Junction and Tracy. There is another group that has been signed by people in that same area of Tracy, Fredericton Junction and Hoyt. Another one is from the Grand Bay, Westfield, Nerepis area. There is another group of people from Grand Manan Island, an island of 3,600 people in the Bay of Fundy. Many of those citizens have signed this petition. There is another one from the area of Fredericton Junction, New Brunswick and Mazerolle Settlement.

●(1555)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, there is one more petition and which is a very important one. I have risen many times in this House on this petition. This petition is completely different from the ones I have just tabled.

The petition is on the proposed LNG terminal in Eastport, Maine. This is a very controversial proposal to build an LNG terminal in Eastport, Pleasant Point, Maine.

Members may ask why would petitioners be petitioning the Parliament of Canada on a proposal in the United States. The reason is that this proposal to build this plant has been turned down in the United States in a number of areas up and down the New England coast. They have now identified an area in Maine which can only be accessed, believe it or not, by going through Canadian waters. These waters are very dangerous and include the very narrow Head Harbour Passage.

The petitioners want the Government of Canada to say no to the transport of LNG tankers through that passage simply because of the dangers that Canada would be exposed to.

The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to do the very same thing it did approximately 30 years ago when it said no to the passage of tankers through Head Harbour Passage for at that time the construction of an oil terminal.

The petitioners ask the Government of Canada to say no to the passage of LNG tankers through—

Routine Proceedings

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The hon. member for Yukon.

MARRIAGE

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order, 36 I am presenting a petition signed by 42 people who live in Whitehorse. The petitioners call upon Parliament to pass legislation to recognize the institution of marriage in federal law as being the lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions from the constituents of Brandon—Souris. The petitioners request that Parliament define marriage in federal law as being the lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, many petitions seem to be on the same subject and I hope it will work. We as parliamentarians should listen to what the people have to say.

I would like to present two petitions both on the subject of marriage with different aspects and which have been signed by a number of Canadians, including from my riding of Mississauga South.

Under the first petition, which has to do with the definition of marriage, the petitioners want to raise for the attention of the House that the institution of marriage is between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others and it is the exclusive jurisdiction of Parliament. They ask Parliament to pass legislation to recognize the institution in federal law as being the lifelong union of one man and one woman because there is no definition in current federal law.

The second petition has to do with the notwithstanding clause and is signed by a number of constituents. The petitioners want to draw to the attention of the House that the majority of Canadians believe that the fundamental matters of social policy should be decided by elected members of Parliament and not by an unelected judiciary and that it is the duty of Parliament to ensure that marriage is defined in Canada as Canadians wish.

They, therefore, call upon Parliament to take all legislative measures possible, including the invocation of section 33, known as the notwithstanding clause, to ensure that marriage is preserved and is defined as one man—

• (1600)

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The hon. member for Wild Rose.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Madam Speaker, I too am pleased to rise today to present a petition on behalf of several hundred constituents in the Coaldale area of Alberta to be added to the list of probably millions of names that have already been signed to petitions. The petitioners call upon the government to recognize the institution of marriage as being that between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others and to invoke section 33 of the charter, if necessary, to preserve that definition.

Now is the time to listen to the people's voice.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have four petitions to present today.

The first, like others we have heard, is on the subject of marriage. Multiple pages of it come from communities in my riding such as Nanaimo, Parksville, Qualicum Beach and Nanoose areas. The petitioners call upon Parliament to recognize that marriage is, has and always should be known as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

They call upon Parliament to do whatever it takes to see that this remains the case.

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is on the issue of age of consent and is signed by about 225 folks from my riding. The petitioners are very concerned about the exploitation of young people. They call for a raising of the age of consent from 14 to 18 years of age in order to protect young people from exploitation by sexual predators.

AUTISM

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third petition is on autism, a very serious issue, and is signed by 150 folks in my riding. The petitioners call upon the government to ensure that applied behaviour analysis is available to help parents who are suffering with children with this affliction.

They call upon the government to take whatever steps are necessary, both to see that they are treated properly so they can advance and also to find a solution to what is causing this plague.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Madam Speaker, the final petition is on freedom of religion. The petitioners from my riding are very concerned about infringement of rights of freedom of religion and conscience related to Bill C-250 on hate crimes, which was recently adopted. The bill would inhibit free speech on behalf of people sincerely following their religious beliefs and being able to communicate their religion to their children, to people of their own faith and to those in need of the advice that their religion offers. They are asking for that protection for freedom of religion.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to present four petitions on behalf of some of the constituents from Oxford county. They are from members of the Cornerstone Baptist Church in Woodstock, supporters of Rehoboth Christian School in Norwich, members of the Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Canada and members of Hi-Way Pentecostal Church in Ingersoll.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have two sets of petitions. The first one is from the Canadian Coalition for Democracies. This organization wishes to draw the attention of Parliament that we, as Canadians, need to respect and support peace, liberty and democracy around the world.

Government Orders

MARRIAGE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions both calling for Parliament to use whatever legislation is necessary, including invoking section 33 of the charter, if necessary, to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Madam Speaker, the petition I present today again has to do with the issue of marriage and the definition to be retained as the union of one man and one woman. The petitioners, mostly from my riding but also from adjacent areas, have drawn another important point, which is it is the duty of Parliament to ensure that marriage is defined as Canadians wish it to be defined. That is a role of Parliament, according to this petition, and I am very honoured to present it in the House today.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if Question No. 96 could be made an order for return, the return would be tabled immediately.

• (1605)

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 96—**Mr. John Williams:**

With regard to the rubric “Losses of Public Property Due to an Offence or Other Illegal Act” for the Department of National Defence as listed on page 3.25 of Volume III of the Public Accounts of Canada 2003-2004, and the 4,611 cases of “theft of combat clothing/kit” totalling \$234,074, the 13 cases of “theft of transportation equipment” totalling \$13,848; the eight cases of “theft of machinery” totalling \$2,319, the 16 cases of “theft of telecommunication equipment” totalling \$4,097, the 39 cases of “theft of electrical equipment” totalling \$32,733, the 36 cases of “theft of technical equipment” totalling \$18,778, the 97 cases of “theft of tools” totalling \$11,444, the 82 cases of “theft of weapons and accessories” totalling \$4,228, the 471 cases of “theft of military specific equipment” totalling \$21,683 and the 76 cases of “theft of non-military specific equipment” totalling \$27,239: (a) what was stolen in each individual case; (b) what was the value of each individual item; (c) where was the location of the theft; and (d) were there any charges laid in any of the individual cases, and if so, which ones?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I ask, Madam Speaker, that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I ask that all Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CIVIL MARRIAGE ACT

The House resumed from April 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-38, an act respecting certain aspects of legal capacity for marriage for civil purposes, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As there has not been any members rise to resume debate, I assume the question will be put and deferred until next week, as per the order previously approved by the House. Since there is a little time here, I want to ask the Chair to respond to what I believe is a problem with the bill. Clause 3 states:

It is recognized that officials of religious groups are free to refuse to perform marriages that are not in accordance with their religious beliefs.

The authorization to solemnize marriage is a matter of provincial jurisdiction. This is implying that somehow it is a federal responsibility. I am asking whether this clause should be in the bill. I would like to receive a response from the Chair whether in fact the clause is out of order.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The member is getting into a point of debate. There will be opportunities in committee to raise his point of order.

Pursuant to order made on Thursday, March 24 the question to dispose of the amendment to the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-38 is deemed put and a recorded division is deemed demanded and deferred until Tuesday, April 12 at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

* * *

[Translation]

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (on behalf of the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons) moved that Bill C-30, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act, the Salaries Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me today to speak to Bill C-30 on compensation for parliamentarians.

Bill C-30 fulfills a commitment by the Prime Minister to delink compensation for parliamentarians and judges and to allow parliamentarians to receive salary increases in line with those of Canadians in the private sector.

Government Orders

• (1610)

[*English*]

Parliamentarians, under the proposed legislation, Bill C-30, would receive salary increases adjusted yearly according to what is called the major wage settlement index. This is a highly respected index used by governments, businesses and unions. It is published annually and measures the annual salary increases negotiated by collective bargaining for private sector units with 500 or more employees. Accordingly this index represents more than 800,000 private sector employees in Canada.

As members will have noted during report stage of this legislation, our colleague from Prince George—Peace River indicated that the official opposition supported the bill because future salary increases would be tied to those in the private sector. He called this initiative commendable. I thank him and his party for their support of the legislation.

Similarly, the member for Timmins—James Bay told the House that his party, the New Democratic Party, found the index fair and supported the bill as well. I also thank them for their support of what we believe to be fair and reasonable legislation.

The bill has been recognized as a fair and reasonable way to deal with the salaries of parliamentarians. I believe that when we vote on this legislation, we will find it receives the very broad support of members of the House.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary noted in his brief remarks a moment ago, I have indicated that the official opposition will be supporting Bill C-30 and, I might add, we have always maintained that we should not place ourselves in an ongoing conflict of interest by having to debate and decide our own remuneration. Indeed, this bill's predecessor, which linked us to the judges' remuneration, was actually the reason that the House went down that road before. This is a fairer way to go about setting our remuneration and I indicated that during my remarks at report stage as well.

As was indicated, Bill C-30 proposes to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and the Salaries Act to establish a new method of indexation of salaries and allowances for members of Parliament and ministers. It will come into effect from April 1, 2004. Salaries and allowances will no longer be adjusted by reference to the increase in the annual salary of the chief justices of the Supreme Court of Canada, but rather in accordance with the index of the average percentage increase and base rate wages for each and every calendar year resulting from major settlements negotiated with bargaining units of 500 or more employees in the private sector in Canada, as published by the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development.

The original objective for linking compensation for members of Parliament to that of the chief justices, which is determined by the Judicial Salary and Benefits Commission, was to discontinue the practice whereby members themselves legislate their own compensation. However when the commission recommended an 11% increase in pay, an unjustified increase I might add, the government changed its position that compensation for MPs should not be linked to judges.

On that point, I think the general public will recall the debate that took place just before and during last spring's election campaign. We and others raised the issue of the impending judges' increase which would have the ripple effect on our remuneration as well. To the government's credit, at that point in time it agreed with us and said that an increase of that amount would be unacceptable. Therefore last fall it brought in Bill C-30.

When the bill was introduced it created a public issue regarding compensation for judges as well. While the government has indicated that amendments regarding compensation for judges is forthcoming, we believe, and I have stated it repeatedly, that the government ought to have accompanied Bill C-30 with that, since it was the 11% pay hike proposed for judges that triggered the need for a new method to determine compensation for members of Parliament.

The link between compensation for judges and compensation for members of Parliament and the excessive pay hike proposed for judges led to the need for legislative change. Bill C-30 solves only half the problem by establishing a new mechanism for MPs only, leaving judges with a process that provides them, potentially, at least at this point, with that 11% pay hike, which is almost four times the Canadian average increase in wages.

Therefore the Conservative Party calls upon the government, as we have in the past, to forgo the 11% pay hike for judges and immediately introduce legislation to establish a new mechanism for compensating judges similar to what has been proposed for members of Parliament in Bill C-30. That would ensure that significant salary compensation adjustments would only occur when it can be demonstrated that responsibilities have changed accordingly.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would begin by saying that my colleague, the hon. parliamentary leader of the Bloc Québécois and member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean had indicated that our party would be voting against this bill, for a number of reasons which I would like to explain in the few minutes available to me.

We know that the compensation of parliamentarians is the perfect subject when it comes to grandstanding. We have had proof of that here in the comments made on this by the Prime Minister of Canada, which once again reflected his attitude.

I have just heard the Conservative House Leader say that it is not right for MPs to determine their own remuneration. That is true, and that is why a committee on the modernization of Parliament, which was struck in January 2001 and made up of the parliamentary leaders, reached the following conclusion: we should stop discussing whether MPs ought to vote on their own salary increases. After that came the idea of linking increases to those given to judges.

If it is decided in an independent committee that judges get a salary increase, by that very fact, due to their linking, the MPs also get an automatic increase under this legislation, not because they have taken any action themselves. We cannot decide to raise our pay 25% or 30% simply because we have had no increase for the past seven or eight years. That is totally unacceptable.

Government Orders

I want this to be clear: the Bloc Québécois is opposed to Bill C-30, as it is to any increase in MPs' salaries. We want to retain the status quo. We want to continue to receive the fair and proper salary we are currently receiving. This is where the hypocrisy lies in the mechanics of Bill C-30, which disengages us from the judges' salary increases, although this has been settled since June 2001.

The underlying principles behind the linking with judges' remuneration were as follows: Is it normal and acceptable for the Prime Minister to earn the same amount as the highest official he appoints? Is it normal and acceptable for an elected representative to earn less than a public servant? Take the example of a minister, who is earning less than a deputy minister. Is that acceptable? No it is not.

The first principle was established by the House leaders of all the parties, the leader of the Conservatives, the hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country; the former Liberal House leader, the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell; the NDP House leader, the then hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona; and my colleague, the Bloc Québécois House leader. The basic principle was that the Prime Minister should earn the same salary as the highest ranking official he appoints, not a penny more, not a penny less. Who is the highest ranking official appointed by the Prime Minister? It is the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, a position currently held by a woman. That was the first principle.

• (1620)

Second, do we agree that a minister should earn a certain percentage less than the Prime Minister? The answer is yes.

Third, is it normal for an MP with no ministerial responsibility to earn half the Prime Minister's salary? It was established that, yes, this is normal and the ministers' salaries should be somewhere between the two.

So that we do not discuss our own salary increases, there is an independent committee in charge of reviewing judges' salaries. As an aside, I do not want anyone watching to think that the Bloc Québécois wants to be mean to the judiciary. The Bloc Québécois is a party of law. It has enormous respect for the courts, judges and their decisions. People should not think the Bloc Québécois wants to be mean to judges. On the contrary, we think that instead of elected representatives voting on their own salary increases, those increases should be tied to salary increases for judges.

So we have Bill C-30 and the Prime Minister takes a cheap shot at parliamentarians. I am going to make a non-partisan comment on that unfortunate remark. I think that, basically, we parliamentarians take our jobs to heart. We take it to heart that we need to properly represent those who trusted us enough to elect us.

I would ask each of the 135 Liberal members over there whether they think they earn their salaries, whether they are doing their jobs and deserve what they are paid? We have had some informal discussions and many of the members of the Liberal caucus do not agree with the comment, the mean-spirited, partisan and vengeful comment, made by the Prime Minister, who is incidentally a millionaire. He owned a shipping company and some of its ships were under foreign registration in order to escape having to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes. It is easy for the Prime Minister to make comments like that.

These are the reasons that we in the Bloc Québécois cannot agree with this bill. It delinks MPs' salaries from judges' salaries, yet that question was settled back in January 2001.

Why reconsider that decision in Bill C-30, when it was made with the unanimity of all the parliamentary leaders? Does denying work that has been done correct the democratic deficit? Does it mean that all consensual decisions reached by the parliamentary leaders before this PM was here no longer count?

Does parliamentary consensus only date from the arrival of this Prime Minister? I regret to say this, but we do not need any lectures on morality from this PM. I am certain, I repeat, that many of the 135 Liberal caucus members across the way agree with me. I even know that they told their caucus that this was not right.

I may seem to be repeating myself, but it is to be sure there is no ambiguity. The Bloc Québécois does not want to be mean to judges, nor to the workers who will serve as reference points for this new legislation if it is passed. That is why we are saying that, if they want to delink us from the judges, they ought to maintain the salary. If the present salary is not maintained, then the link ought to be.

Do you know what lies behind this? The independent committee on judges' remuneration has set the increase for the next four years at approximately 10.8%.

• (1625)

The aim was to avoid having to respond to those who might say: "That makes no sense. The MPs have just voted and given themselves 10.8% over four years based on the cost of living index." If we do not think this 10.8% makes sense, we need only say: "It is true it makes no sense. While it may make no sense for parliamentarians, it makes no more sense for judges."

There is a saying that a woman cannot be just a little pregnant. Either she is pregnant or she is not. The government should clue in. If it makes no sense for parliamentarians to be paid this—the government has an obligation to be consistent—the government should set the same criterion for the judges. If a 10.8% increase makes no sense for parliamentarians, it does not make any more sense for judges.

So, logically speaking, as parliamentarians—this is what the Bloc would like, and we made our position very clear on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, where we opposed all government amendments to this bill—we should just reject Bill C-30 and have a policy of no salary increase.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member, but I have heard this argument before. I think it is important that the public also understand where we are right now. Maybe the member would like to comment.

He is quite right that the increase according to the former bill linked to judges would have been around 10% plus over four years, which is 2.5%. But the proposed increase linking it to an industrial wage index is already giving us about 2% for the current year and presumably will be 2% and 2% plus over the four years, which will almost be 10% if the level of inflation stays the same.

The differential between the link to the judges' salaries and what is being proposed is actually quite small. It is not 10%. It is the difference between the average industrial index over the next four years compared to 10%. Perhaps the member would like to comment.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Mississauga South for his question.

In January 2001, when we adopted the principle of linking the salaries of MPs and judges, the consensus was that the Prime Minister should earn as much as the highest official he appoints, namely the chief justice.

I do not want to get into mathematical formulae because, first, math is not my strong suit and second, I do not want to confuse the public. However, if, based on the industrial index that will serve as the reference for Bill C-30, this results in a maximum increase of 8% for the next four years instead of 10.8% spread over the same period, this means that at the end of that four-year period, starting in 2005-06, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada will earn more than the Prime Minister.

This violates the principle. This means that, ultimately, the Prime Minister will earn less than the highest official he appoints. I am not defending the Prime Minister and his salary increases. He has no need of his salary. With all the perks he gets, he does not need his salary.

However, this is about the principle and we fight for principles. After four years, the chief justice will earn more than the Prime Minister and that makes no sense.

[English]

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question is quite simple. It relates to my very brief remarks on third reading of Bill C-30 today.

The main contention that my hon. colleague from the Bloc has, for which there is some argument to be made, is that the Prime Minister should not be making less than the people he appoints, especially the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.

In my remarks, I put forward an idea that I believe would certainly be supported by the majority of people in Canada, and not only the majority of people in Canada but also the majority of people in Quebec. That idea is that members of Parliament should not be in a

position where they get what I think would widely be viewed as an exorbitant raise.

If there is no increase in our responsibilities, why should we be getting 2% per year, or 10% per year, or 10% over four years, or 11% or whatever it is, if people out in the real world are getting substantially less? That is the whole point of tying our future salary increases to this index of the average increase that Canadians will be getting in what I refer to as the real world outside this place.

Having said that, my contention is that the government should have brought in amendments to the Judges Act to ensure that the judges would likewise be tied to that same index. I still believe the government should bring forward those amendments to do away with the commission that sets the salary and compensation for judges and should likewise tie the judges in Canada to this same index that Canadians in the real world face.

Would that not solve the problem? I know that my hon. colleague is really anxious to get up and have his say on this, but why that would not solve the problem? Instead of raising our compensation, our remuneration, up to the 11% that it is rumoured we would get if it goes ahead and stays the same way, why not bring judges down to the same salary increase that real Canadians out in the real world get?

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Speaker, the reply I have in mind is going to displease the hon. parliamentary leader of the Conservative Party with whom I sit on various committees and for whom I have a great deal of respect.

I said that it is a perfect bill for grandstanding. We will be marching here on Wellington Street holding signs that say, "Do you think MPs earn too much?" We will take a poll of the people who sit in the galleries. We will hand out sheets asking, "Do you think MPs earn too much? They should work for nothing." It sets the stage for grandstanding.

I will bring up some bad memories for the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River. When the members of the Reform Party were sitting here, Preston Manning sent out a memo objecting to the large number of Christmas lights on Parliament Hill. He said it was costing the taxpayers too much in electricity. Of course, that was popular.

When the Bloc Québécois was the official opposition, he said that Stornoway should be transformed into a bingo hall. But as soon as they became the official opposition, they jumped on Stornoway. Preston Manning once said that the free lunches, which make us fat—look what it has done to me, with the lunches we eat in the lobby—cost the taxpayers too much. But when the lunch comes, the Conservatives eat it. We could say that is not logical because it is the taxpayers who pay.

Once again, I say it is a fine bill for grandstanding, and I say with respect that my colleague from Prince George—Peace River has done just that.

Government Orders

•(1635)

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is not the first time that I have been involved in a debate on members' salaries. I was a member of the Quebec National Assembly and, before Mr. Lévesque—who was the premier at the time—found a formula, the issue would come up every year. As the hon. member said, this issue always leads to some grandstanding. We can have anyone say just about anything on MPs' salaries.

I agree with the hon. member. At some point, we have to find a basic principle, so that we stop talking about our salary. This does not make sense. In my view, the act that was passed made sense to some extent, because it was based on the principles that my colleague just mentioned.

I want to ask him if he thinks this is simply some kind of political pettiness.

It is easy to deal with a journalist's question by saying "This 10.8% increase over four years does not make sense. We will cancel it". However, a Liberal member just said that we will get the equivalent, or some 2% annually, but that is grandstanding. I wonder if my colleague could comment on this way of managing things.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. I will try not to get too passionate in replying to my colleague, but I am just as passionate whether the questions come from one side or from the other side. I simply want to answer the question of the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain.

This is why I said at the beginning that this was a perfect issue for grandstanding. I want to go back to my colleague and to the Conservative member and ask them this question: What will be the position of each of the parties in this House when we will deal with the 10.8% salary increase for judges? If 10.8% is too much for MPs, it is probably too much for judges also.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among all parties and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding the extension of government orders due to the recorded divisions taken earlier today, private members' business shall begin at 5:30.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1640)

[English]

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-30, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and the Salaries Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Call in the members.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, discussions were held earlier among the parties and I think if you were to seek it you would receive unanimous consent that the vote on Bill C-30 be deferred to the end of government orders on Tuesday, April 12.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The vote stands deferred until Monday, April 12.

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, Border Security.

* * *

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT ACT

The House resumed from March 23 consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, an act to establish the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development and to amend and repeal certain related acts, be read the third time and passed.

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Madam Speaker, this bill is a worthy symbol of the Liberal government. The Department of Human Resources and the Department of Skills Development were separated a year and a half ago and Parliament is being asked to approve it only now. So much for treating Parliament with more respect and solving the democratic deficit.

We support the bill simply because there is little point in opposing it, but let us consider what is missing. At a time when students are struggling with rising debt and Canada's economic competitiveness is lagging, the bill ignores the real issues while focusing instead on changing names on letterhead and reorganizing bureaucratic organization charts.

The bill ignores the priorities that should be the focus of the government's attention in HRDC or, as it is to become, HRSDC. Perhaps it already has become that because the government, it seems, even if we were to oppose it, would declare, as it did with the foreign affairs and international trade departments, that it does not matter what this House says, it will divide it anyhow.

While the government is focusing on that kind of bureaucratic shuffling as the matter for us to attend to, there are other issues that should be attended to that are not. Our economic competitiveness is suffering while Canada's training strategy is woefully lacking. Students are increasingly in debt. Employment insurance is still not resolved as an issue. Skills training, critical to economic growth and prosperity, is lagging and is ignored.

Canadians have dreams for a better Canada, to have brighter futures through education, to enjoy the fruits of their labour through lower taxes, to live in a country that is free from corruption, to have a competitive economy and to have the opportunity to improve their quality of life through advancement and improvement.

However where are we under the government? Canada now ranks 15th in the world economic forum's global competitiveness rankings. Canada used to be ranked 4th, back when the Prime Minister was finance minister. From the 4th spot to the 15th spot in competitiveness is the track record of the government while it is focusing on bureaucratic shuffles.

In that same report from the world economic forum, Canada dropped on the technology index from 2nd place to 13th place and dropped to 15th place in the business competitive index in 2004.

A few years ago Canada was fifth on Transparency International's clean government index. That is an index that measures perceptions of how corrupt a government is in a country.

Today Canada has plummeted from 5th spot to 12th spot on that clean government index, and that was even before the Gomery commission started doing its work and hearing evidence. I do not think that this year's ratings are something to look forward to for Canadians. Perhaps in training the government might think of having a little more training in ethics.

Declining support for education and productivity is affecting our quality of life. In 1993, when Brian Mulroney retired as Prime Minister, the United Nations human development index ranked Canada the number one country in the world to live. By 2003, Canada had fallen to eighth place on that index. Simply put, taxes

are too high in Canada. They are killing the incentive to be productive and they are making it difficult for hard-working families to invest in their futures.

As well, Canada has the fifth highest income tax as a percentage of GDP of all the OECD countries. Since taking office, the amount of income tax revenue that the government takes in has almost doubled, increasing by 80%.

Since 1993, Canada has been tied for the lowest productivity growth in the G-7 and Canada's productivity has fallen to 84% of that of our American neighbours.

What is Bill C-23 doing to handle this competitiveness gap, this productivity gap that's emerging, the declining standard of living? What is it doing to really help Canadians acquire better skills so we have a more educated and better equipped workforce to compete in the world? Nothing. Nothing in the bill addresses any of those priorities, which are the real priorities of Canadians and should be the real priorities of this government and the human resources department.

In skills training, what has the government done? Direct funding to colleges has been cut to the tune of 80% since the Liberals took office. Colleges are the best proven providers of workforce training. In fact, of those who graduate from the community college system, over 90% end up in jobs where they are contributing right after graduation. This is a 90% success rate.

●(1645)

However, when we look at the training programs in the human resources department, the evidence given by the minister at committee on estimates showed that less than 50% of those who graduated from the human resources EI training programs found work.

The community colleges have a 90% success rate and the government cuts their funding by 80%. The EI training program has a 50% or less success rate and the government begins to funnel money into it.

It is clear to me that the way of approaching training in this country is very poorly equipped for the challenges of our current economy. It is one that does not recognize success and one that in fact recognizes and reinforces failure.

There is no focus in the bill on what is needed to stimulate economic growth and productivity through skills training, which leads me to post-secondary education. What has been the case for post-secondary education in Canada? Under the present government we have not seen a serious effort to recognize that post-secondary education is critical to the success of our economy and to our workforce to helping young people achieve their dreams for a brighter future.

Interest rates on student loans, loans that are given to people who are trying to advance themselves and improve themselves, things we should be encouraging people to do, are at prime plus 2.5% to prime plus 5%. That is what the government is charging people who have taken out student loans.

Government Orders

Even bad risk lenders get around prime plus 1% from a bank or prime plus 2%. Why is the government running the student loan program as a profit making centre? Clearly there is no interest in being serious about support for post-secondary education.

In addition, we still do not have a dedicated transfer for post-secondary education even after the Liberal government cut program funding to colleges and universities in half since taking office.

What have we seen on employment insurance? Only thanks to the fact that this is a minority Parliament have we seen any action at all. It was only by attaching an amendment to the throne speech to deal with the flaws in employment insurance that the opposition parties finally forced a reluctant Liberal government to act on the matter.

What action have we seen? Sadly, very little. Currently, EI has a \$46 billion surplus that has been effectively stolen from workers and diverted into other priorities, other than what they had contributed to. This is \$46 billion of workers' and employers' premiums that have been taken away from them. It is another regressive tax by the government applied to things that do not do anything for economic growth and prosperity, that do not help workers and employers and that do not create jobs. It is a tax that is slowing the economy and creating a drag.

What do we get? We get a government that says it is doing something but it is still dithering. Virtually no changes have been made to the employment insurance system. In everything the government does it simply goes through the motions and dithers.

The government is not taking action and through the bill what is it doing? It is simply reorganizing organization charts, printing new letterhead and sending out for new business cards because we are changing the name of the department.

Meanwhile the real priorities are ignored by the Liberal government. It is unable to stop overtaxing through its unreasonable employment insurance premiums. It is unwilling to make training relevant, to create a competitive economy and to increase productivity. It is unaware of the need to lower ridiculously high student loan interest rates. It is unremitting in its refusal to establish a dedicated transfer for post-secondary education.

Unfortunately, the bill does nothing for Canadians other than create a bureaucratic shuffle to support a cabinet shuffle in an effort to shuffle the scandal ridden HRDC name into the past.

Why is the bill even on the table? It is very simple. It is because the government wants to get rid of the odour of the HRDC scandal. That is what prompted the name change in the first place. That was an example of how the government could not manage the people's tax dollars and, in fact, took those tax dollars and diverted them to other improper, inappropriate partisan purposes. Does that sound familiar?

The bill does nothing to benefit Canadians from the actual changes in the operation of government. It is only a public relations exercise to get rid of that HRDC name that is now so scandal tainted.

However it will not work because the one thing we can count on in the Liberal government is that as one scandal gets left behind, do not worry, there is another one coming along pretty soon to take its place.

• (1650)

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague for his support. I do not look forward to the occasion when he will oppose us on some legislation.

We can all use statistics and I think constructive criticism is what this place is all about. I do not want to go through the various items that he put forward in great detail. I would point out however that the expression "brain drain" here in Canada, which only a very few years ago was a very common expression, brought great fear that we were losing talent from this country far more than we were bringing it in. We do not hear it anymore and I believe one of the reasons for that is the action taken in several of the areas that my colleague talked about.

The other is with regard to post-secondary education. I think if he did the calculation, he would discover that the moneys being spent now by the federal government are getting into the order of magnitude of the amount of money being spent by all the provinces combined in the area of post-secondary education which is traditionally viewed as an area of provincial jurisdiction.

I have greatly regretted, and I must be very careful how far I go on this, the fact that on a number of occasions, when the federal government has done something positive in the area of post-secondary education, various provinces have clawed back and have not followed-through. So, I have some empathy with at least one of the things that he said.

I would like the member to comment on the origins of the legislation. First, it is true that it sounds like a bureaucratic exercise, but in fact, it is an attempt to deliver better, and they should be delivered better, the sorts of services and programs that he has such great concern about.

I believe that the new streamlined department will do that more effectively for years to come. However, the idea did not come from the government. It came from a standing committee of the House which unanimously recommended that the old department be divided. The House and members of all parties supported the recommendation. It was not something that the government initiated. It was something that the House of Commons recommended and is being followed-through on by the government.

Does he think that he should have gone against the views of his party in committee and in the House of Commons at the time when this recommendation first appeared in this place?

• (1655)

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Madam Speaker, unlike my friend from Peterborough, I am handicapped by not having been here when the parliamentary committee dealt with that matter.

However, having been a concerned Canadian like so many others, I recall what happened to the HRDC department. I recall the scandal, the concern, and the conclusions that people drew, that it was a department that was out of control, that could not be managed, that was behaving entirely not in the best interests of Canadians, and that something had to be brought to bear.

Government Orders

To me, the fact that there would be a unanimous decision of a Commons committee that a department, so discredited by a scandal, required reform and change is not surprising at all. In fact, I can understand entirely that there was a serious need for reform. I hope that reform is taking hold and that it spreads to other parts of the government.

We have seen ample evidence that perhaps that kind of reform in cleaning up of departments is not as contagious as we might like it to be in the government, but to me, it is not at all surprising. I indicated that our party supports the legislation. We do not oppose it.

It is just that when we have so many things that are crying out to be addressed in this country to make our economy more productive, to improve our skills training, to make us more competitive, and to give us a workforce that can really compete where people really can advance themselves, where they can really live richer lives, that we spend our time on these kinds of questions, and these kind of basically bureaucratic internal department reorganization questions instead of focussing on those real priorities of Canadians. That is what troubles me so much right now.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on this important issue: the creation of a new department called the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development. Obviously, the legislation creating this new department will ultimately split the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development into two departments. One of them will be called the Department of Social Development.

In the coming weeks, this new legislation to create a new department will be discussed and debated, as will the legislation before us today, called the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Act, minus a portion of its budget and some of its responsibilities, which have been transferred to the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development.

The Bloc Québécois believes that the creation of this department will result in greater infringements in other areas of jurisdiction, not because of the creation of this department but because of the second part, which will be called the Department of Social Development Act.

That department will truly interfere in areas under provincial jurisdiction relating to social affairs. Also, the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development has failed to respond to criticism from Bloc Québécois about issues such as the power of the employment insurance commission. Furthermore, the Bloc's calls for changes to employment insurance have been ignored.

This department will continue to administer the employment insurance fund. It is well known that this fund has a \$46 billion surplus, which the government used to eliminate its deficit. So, instead of going to the unemployed, this fund went to fattening up the government, which is now flush. It is flush for other reasons too. I am referring to the fiscal imbalance. There is more than one surplus in the Liberal government's coffers.

For all these reasons, we do not believe in the spectacle we are seeing today. I know this department wants to project the image of a

government concerned with the quality of life of its citizens and interested in helping them more on a daily basis.

I will explain why the government wants to pass this new Human Resources and Skills Development legislation.

On December 12, 2003, when the Prime Minister was being sworn in and introducing his new cabinet, he divided the former Human Resources Development Canada into two departments—as I was saying earlier—the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development and the Department of Social Development.

As my colleague from the Conservative Party was saying earlier, these departments already exist and today's bill is merely a formality. These departments have been operating for a year now.

The press release issued by the PMO on December 12, 2003, included reasons justifying this division, the purpose of which, according to the government, was to strengthen our social foundations.

In support of the government's social goals, a number of changes are being made. A stronger focus on social policy through:

Splitting the former department of Human Resources Development Canada into two separate organizations in order to facilitate better policy results and improved administration.

Creating a new Human Resources and Skills Development department whose mandate will be promoting well-functioning labour market and lifelong learning systems, including student assistance, and which will work with Citizenship and Immigration Canada on the critical issue of foreign credentials accreditation.

• (1700)

Thus:

Mandating the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development to engage the private sector, non-governmental organizations—

—persons with disabilities, families, and children, and which will provide integrated policy development and program delivery.

That same day, December 12, 2003, with the announcement of the creation of these two new departments, the office of the leader of the official opposition in Quebec issued a press release stating that the official opposition was unreservedly opposed to the establishment of a new Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, a Department of Social Development and a cities secretariat. These structures are useless to Quebec. They reflect the federal government's interference in Quebec's jurisdictions.

This new department created by the Prime Minister on December 12, 2003, includes more than 14,000 public servants responsible for managing \$20 billion to strengthen the social foundations of Canada, build a 21st century economy and ensure Canada's role in the world.

The Department of Human Resources and Skills Development no longer comes under the former Human Resources Development Canada, but is its own department, which also coordinates the activities of the Minister of Labour and Housing, and the Minister of State Human Resources Development.

Government Orders

From this, it is clear to us that the government intends, in fact, to manage all social development issues, to better manage our social foundations and better support the population. Finally, in the last election, this government did not understand the impact of its interfering attitude and encroachment in fields of jurisdiction. Quebec elected a strong majority of Bloc Québécois members in the latest election. Since 1993, this government has still not understood that the time has come to stop its practice of strangling the provinces as they try to cope with serious responsibilities for providing people with services they are entitled to expect.

In Quebec, students recently went on strike. They were demanding the right to continue receiving bursaries. We can easily see that Quebec's educational institutions are under-financed as well and that, since 1993-94, the federal government has been totally stingy in its transfer payments to provinces. It cut off funding to the provinces and solved the deficit problem here, in the federal government. However, it reaped the surpluses from the employment insurance fund, with the fiscal imbalance and the propensity to grab funds that rightfully should go to the provinces.

The Department of Human Resources and Skills Development says that:

HRSDC's vision is a country where individuals have the opportunity to learn and to contribute to Canada's success by participating fully in a well-functioning and efficient labour market.

Once again we see that, if the government really knew what the labour market needed, it would not be writing such hollow phrases that mean nothing, with goals that will not be met.

We are now studying the EI employment programs. We are well aware that there are serious shortcomings in the implementation of these programs in Ontario and British Columbia. They are not suited to the needs of those who want to return to the labour market. We are well aware that the funding is often inadequate. There is no continuity in the federal government's commitment.

We therefore have serious questions to raise. We know that all kinds of dirty tricks are being used to get us to understand better suited strategies, but still, they must meet the needs of the institutions and agencies working to get people back into the labour force.

• (1705)

With this bill, it is clear that the federal government's attitude is contrary to what has been requested. Very early on, in 1993, we could see that the Bloc Québécois was the one demanding that provincial jurisdictions be respected, so that the provinces could better provide for their people. Now, public discontent is high in the other provinces.

With respect to the federal government's arrogance and how it distributes this money, it is as if it owned the money, as if the government were generating and printing it. One would think the government was doing the people favours. Instead, it should respect the fact that, through their taxes, the taxpayers are allowing it to redistribute the money among the people.

We will therefore oppose this bill because it falls short of our expectations in terms of improvements to the overall EI system. Again, it is clear that the quotes I read, which are from the

Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, are nothing but hollow words.

The Bloc Québécois asked that \$1.9 billion be reinvested in support for workers who lose their jobs, to improve employment insurance fund eligibility coverage. This would allow coverage to rise from 55% to 60% of salary, at an increased cost of \$1.2 billion to the EI fund. Everyone is affected. There is only 55% coverage, and it has dwindled over the years. That is how this extravagant \$46 billion surplus came to be.

We would have liked the eligibility threshold to be brought down to 360 hours, from the current 910 or 700 hours. We would have liked a return to a threshold that is much more flexible and suited to the reality of the labour market in certain regions. It is clear that, unless confronted with job loss, there is no feeling of sensitivity from this government. We are talking about 90,000 unemployed people who are affected by the high threshold for eligibility to benefits.

We would have liked the benefit rates to be based on the 12 best weeks. Again, improved EI benefits could have been provided to 470,000 unemployed persons, at a cost of \$320 million to the fund.

In addition, we would have asked for a maximum of 45 to 50 weeks of total EI benefit coverage, amounting to \$11 million, and an increase in the maximum insurable amount from \$39,000 to \$41,000. That is an additional \$245 million.

I have added these amounts up for a total of \$1.9 million. Did the government have the means to pay this money out to those who had lost their jobs, to provide insurance for these people who had contributed to the employment insurance fund, in order to get better benefits for a longer period?

Clearly these expectations were not met, because the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development proposed a mere \$360 million in reforms, below the expectations of the Bloc Québécois. We know full well that \$46 billion is there. This money accumulates year after year in the employment insurance fund. The government puts billions of dollars annually back into the employment insurance fund.

• (1710)

This is the federal government's little stash.

Rather than meet these expectations, the government could have repaid the debt to those who have contributed to the employment insurance fund. The federal Liberal government seems to have forgotten that this debt is outstanding.

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It could have begun repayment gradually. Of course, no one expects the government to put the \$46 billion back in the employment insurance fund and to increase benefits overnight. Still, the return of \$10 billion in annual payments of \$1 billion might have been a possibility, employment insurance benefits might have been improved.

The rate of contribution to the employment insurance fund currently at \$1.95 could be increased by 3 cents. That way half of the \$1 million could have been used to meet expectations.

The Bloc has not proposed all these improvements to the employment insurance fund to improve its image. We have been in touch with the people. We have tabled 12 bills on this in the House. Since 1993, the Bloc Québécois has been calling on the government to improve the employment insurance fund, which is a public disgrace. People are now much more aware of the impact of an arrogant federal government.

The provinces are on their knees before the federal government to get more in transfer payments. The same thing happened with equalization payments. We are waiting for the government to move. It moves at its own pace, but arrogantly. For example, when a province is on its knees begging from the federal government, often some slight concessions are made to ease things.

What they want is to create a new department, a department with a social mandate, but such a department will not meet the expectations of the most disadvantaged members of society, the most vulnerable, the ones who are losing their jobs. It is not true that there is a job for everyone today. It is time to stop playing ostrich; some regions do not have economic activity 52 weeks a year. Adjustments have to be made.

There is mention of the desire to adapt to the labour market. Employment insurance must be properly administered. It is a program paid into by its contributors, with not one cent in the EI fund coming from the federal government. We know there is a surplus. I can understand that they want to keep some money in reserve in case there is a deficit in the EI fund. That is understandable.

However, considering that the employment insurance fund generated surpluses in excess of \$46 billion, one wonders about the federal government's will to adequately support workers. They are the ones who need this insurance money to meet the needs of their families.

This also has a huge impact on regional economies. Indeed, these people and their families spend increasingly less in their communities, because they do not have the money to meet all their needs, whether it is food or housing needs.

Affordable housing is another issue which I did not raise. During the election campaign, the federal government promised to invest an additional \$1.5 billion to help those who cannot find adequate and safe housing. There again, the Liberal government did not meet expectations.

So, the government is creating a social development department. We will discuss this at some other time. Today, I wanted to deal strictly with the employment insurance account. However, I am

aware that there are other areas where the government boasts about wanting to meet public needs. But in fact, it does just the opposite. The government would rather use that money to increase its visibility in the provinces. The federal government also wants to establish contacts with community networks to show that it is the one, and not the provinces, that has the money. This raises the whole issue of fiscal imbalance.

The federal government denies the following.

● (1715)

In fact, 71% of Quebeckers and 65% of Canadians now understand what the fiscal imbalance is all about. The fiscal imbalance is created by a situation where the federal government has too much money in terms of its responsibilities, while the provinces have less money because their taxation rate is greater than their responsibilities.

I thank hon. members for listening to my comments. I will get back to the establishment of the new department of social development.

[English]

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate my colleague's remarks. I do appreciate the time she puts into our committee work, both in connection with Bill C-23 and in other matters, many of which she discussed.

We are debating Bill C-23, legislation which redesigns a federal government department. The member from the official opposition who spoke made the point that it was a bureaucratic exercise. I do agree that it is, but I disagree with him in that I think it is a very important bureaucratic exercise, one which will ensure that all Canadians get better services from the newly designed department. I can give one simple example. The privacy provisions in the legislation which replace four or five different privacy codes and which protect Canadians who are involved in employment insurance, Canada student loans or whatever it is, are better.

I have to say to my colleague from the Bloc that in Bill C-23 we are discussing the redesign of a department. I would repeat that the standing committee recommended this some years ago, and the House of Commons unanimously supported the report of the committee to redesign this particular department, and the Bloc supported that. We are carrying through with something the Bloc wanted.

It is a bureaucratic exercise. For example, my colleague mentioned provincial jurisdiction. There is no change in provincial jurisdiction. We have divided one department and created two more. The legislation does not affect the relationship between the federal government and the provincial governments at all. It is simply the same jurisdiction, the same services, but delivered in a different way.

I do not think through Bill C-23 that there is any impingement on provincial jurisdiction. It is simply better delivery of the same services in the same way as before. That is very important, in part because unanimously the House, including the Bloc, supported it.

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The hon. member mentioned EI. I know she is passionate about EI, but under the Standing Orders when a committee is given a bill to study, such as Bill C-23, it cannot increase expenditures associated with that legislation. It simply cannot. It cannot say that it will change the department, it will redesign the department, and by the way, it will add a billion dollars to EI or whatever it is. I know my colleague knows this, but I want her to comment on that. It is not possible through our process to change the things she was describing through Bill C-23.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I listened to what my colleague from the Liberal Party said. When one does not have the will, one surely cannot do anything.

If there were a deficit in the employment insurance fund, I might understand that the government did not have the means. However, it has \$46 billion, which was taken from the employment insurance fund. Moreover, less than 50% of the unemployed draw EI benefits. Consequently, the government could have made an extra effort. This is a futile exercise that was presented by the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development in terms of the assistance that people had every right to expect.

When they do not get assistance from the employment insurance fund, where do you think that people get assistance? When their head is in the sand, they get assistance from the provinces through welfare. When people want to receive welfare benefits, they must be at the end of their tether. Consequently, they must have no money in their pockets or in the bank. At that time, they can go on welfare. This is putting people up against the wall.

Now, why are we opposed to this bill? Because this is a very different situation: the splitting of a department in two. The second department will be called the Department of Social Development. One of our reasons for opposing the present bill is that we are against the establishment of such a department. Our expectations with respect to the employment insurance fund were not met. We know full well that the Canada Employment Insurance Commission is another small group. It will be continued and shall consist of four commissioners to be appointed by the governor in council. The four commissioners shall be the deputy minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, who shall be the chairperson of the commission; an associate deputy minister, who shall be the vice-chairperson; a person appointed after consultations with organizations representative of workers and another person after consultations with organizations representative of employers.

The Bloc Québécois was calling for something else, to better reflect the reality. We asked that the commission in question be comprised of the following members: the chairperson of the commission, the two deputy ministers or associate deputy ministers from Human Resources. Where it differs is that we called for seven employer and employee representatives.

We wanted a more open commission, one that is not internally managed and that is more transparent. In fact, upon taking office, the prime minister himself said he wanted more transparency and that he would be more responsive. Again, the government showed bad faith

and, true to itself, it is continuing to do so with arrogance, claiming all powers.

We cannot give our support this time, because this is a very different situation from the one when the other bill was passed.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate my colleague from Québec for her excellent speech on this bill.

I would also like her to remind us that, apparently, some negotiations went on concerning this human resources department. However, we must never forget that the departmental concept that is proposed, particularly the Employment Insurance Commission, is the same as the one that was managing the former Department of Human Resources, where, believe it or not, \$1 billion disappeared. That was the human resources scandal, because this money has not been found. This is the reality. The government was unable to find the billion dollars and is proposing the same structure to manage the employment insurance fund, that is, the structure that lost \$1 billion.

Today, the government is trying to lead us to believe that it is effectively dividing the department and that, consequently, everything will be better. No, it will not be better. This is why the Bloc Québécois opposes the bill.

I would just like my colleague to explain to us quite gently and calmly what the Bloc wants: the money that must go to the provinces should go to the provinces and the rest should go to the unemployed and be managed by employers and employees sitting on one committee. This is quite simple.

• (1725)

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I believe I was sufficiently clear. We want employees and employers to sit on this commission too. I do not understand this government's refusal to allow the contributors to sit on the commission. I cannot understand this business-as-usual attitude. This government has not learned a single lesson, even after the unemployed came here to testify.

The Bloc Québécois shook things up with regard to the EI fund. The Bloc Québécois did the work in an effort to improve the fund, and we said they had the means. However, all that time, the Liberal Party denied having several billion dollars—\$46 billion—in surplus funds. That is astronomical. They are clearly arrogant since they have continued to say, year after year, that they had the money.

I remember the former Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, saying in the House, "We will show the provinces that we can maintain the social programs". I understand why he was able to say that, given the fiscal imbalance, slashed transfer payments to the provinces and, later, the employment insurance fund. I can understand why the federal government, which is swimming in surpluses, can be so arrogant and can force the provinces to their knees. More than ever, we demand that the EI fund be opened up to its contributors and that the government stop considering itself the beneficiary of this fund, which belongs to those who contribute to it.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the time remaining to me will only permit me to get a start on what I want to say. I can, however, take the time to congratulate my colleague from Québec on her excellent and instructive speech. It is important to keep in mind just how inefficient the government over there is, and how lacking in imagination and honesty. It was very kind of her to give the figure for the EI surplus as \$45 or \$46 billion, but in fact it has reached \$54 billion.

This government is taking possession of money that does not belong to it, and doing it with a smile. If the man next door to me did that, he would end up in jail. Yet they are doing it with a smile. Over the last ten years, the government has also pocketed \$3 billion belonging to seniors. They want retroactivity, and are told it is not possible. Retroactivity is possible when the government is owed money, but when the government is the one owing, there is no retroactivity.

It goes into the fund, but that is not the right word for it—since, according to some, the fund does not exist—but it does go somewhere, under some government budget heading. They brag about it, calling it good administration. I find it incredible that departments and structures are being created rather than helping those who are suffering from poverty and giving money back to those who are entitled to it. There have been 49,000 new jobs created in the federal government over the past five years. If you assume the value of one job and all the employee benefits to average out at \$100,000 a year, we can imagine that this is money that was not used to help people who are living in poverty and suffering, or given back to the unemployed or the elderly.

I will continue with this subject later.

• (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier this day, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

The House resumed from February 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-236, an act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act (student loan), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise on behalf of my colleague and the NDP with respect to this important bill on students loans and bankruptcy, Bill C-236.

Specifically, I would like to start with a few shocking numbers. In the House we have heard a number of times the current government of the day talk about how well it has done on behalf of students, particularly post-secondary students. The reality in terms of the numbers is otherwise.

Since the Liberals took power, we have watched \$4 billion cut out of core funding for post-secondary institutions and the average increase in student debt over that period rise by 110%. The average

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debt for students leaving with bachelor degrees is now at \$25,000. For students obtaining more than bachelor degrees, it is close to \$100,000.

These numbers tell me there is a situation of dire need for university students leaving and entering post-secondary institutions. I use this strong language of dire need because these people often represent the greatest hope for our country in terms of their ability and capacity to formulate part of our economy, the investment the country needs to make consistently for Canada to become the world leader, as the government would pretend us to be.

When it comes to post-secondary institution funding, the numbers speak for themselves. Taking \$4 billion out of core funding over the period the Liberals have been in office and then calling it a success story is an absolute embarrassment. It is a shame that the bill is even necessary.

The Liberals have now introduced legislation that suggests the way students can get out of bankruptcy is if they die. It is most commendable on their part, but they should not be congratulated at all for their cynicism and approach in dealing with student debt and poverty.

They refuse to invest in education. The numbers will roll out and the Liberals will talk about how wonderful they have been contrary to the real and anecdotal evidence we see by the number of students leaving university or being barred from them. It is representative of a lack of courage on behalf of the government to tie any investments they have made in post-secondary institutions. The money is passed to the provinces and in some cases they have been able to defer their contributions, leaving universities in the same dire strait. That has caused tuitions to go up.

When the NDP government in British Columbia left office, the Liberal government that took over immediately lifted the freeze on university tuitions. This caused tuition fees to escalate and put them beyond the reach of many ordinary Canadians and their families.

We want to be leaders in the world and we use that language often in the House. Yet by not investing soundly in post-secondary education, it leaves us behind the rest of the world, a world which knows that advanced technology and education will be the coming economies.

I look at the numbers presented to me in terms of the debt load of students who are leaving university. These moneys go to our financial institutions, primarily the large banks, rather than go to where the economy needs that investment. The banks have been reporting record profit quarter after quarter. They are doing exceptionally well.

I am not sure a lot of tears need to be shed for the banking institutions. They have done well and no one should condemn them too much, given what they have produced in economic joys for their shareholders. With regard to investing, the question becomes this. Is the money better placed in the private banks and taken out of the hands of students so when they leave post-secondary education, they are required to pay these loans, which students are exceptional at doing?

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● (1735)

When we compare it to the corporate sector's ability to pay back and not default on loans, students have been consistently reported as good risks, if we can use that term. These students are no longer able to invest, put a down payment on a home, or purchase a car, when they are leaving their student life with a crippling debt. In the past 13 years the average student debt has gone up by \$1,000 per year, every year.

Certainly, if such a similar increase and rapid expansion in debt were placed on our business community, the cries would be loud and far-flung across the House, but because it is students, there seems to be some notion that we can tolerate something like a 110% increase in tuition fees during the life of a government.

I went to college, as many members of the House did. I had an excellent experience which afforded me better opportunities to seek good, sound, and well paid employment, yet I left with a burden of student debt that inhibited my ability to contribute more to the economy. It held me off for a number of years before I could start up my own private business and take an incurred debt and risk that is needed for just about every business venture.

Many people ask why we should change the Bankruptcy Act when most Canadians, particularly most students, that enter into a loan arrangement with a bank have all the intention of paying that loan back in good faith. Students will often do whatever they can by just about any means necessary to pay these back. We need, in this House, to dispel the myths that students are bad investments or that they are at great risk of defaulting on loans when the numbers are absolutely showing the opposite.

We need to recognize the contribution that universities make across this country to their local communities and that those students make to the local communities as well. We must truly see them in terms of an investment, no different than the investments that we consistently find room to make in terms of the auto sector, large industries, or border security. All of these investments that we seem to come to the conclusion are sound investments for the prosperity of this country, yet, the government continues to dither on promise after promise made to the people of Windsor to improve their border situation.

It seems to me that the government and the Prime Minister, and the former finance minister, understand the principle of investment. The Prime Minister understands that lowering the costs for business that he previously ran by moving it offshore was a sound and wise move for the profitability of his business.

Yet, when we talk about the investment needed for students in this country, the House stalls and stutters, and pretends to pat itself on the back for issuing such ideas as small investment in students that may be born today that will achieve a \$5,000 perhaps \$7,000 grant available to them 18 years from now. At the current rate of increase in tuition, putting it out of the hands of most ordinary Canadians, what will that look like 15 or 20 years from now? What will the proposal that the Liberals have brought forward actually do for students? I hesitate to think that it may get them through their first semester, if that.

In 1998 the Liberals changed the act to say that Canadians cannot receive bankruptcy protection for student loans until 10 years after they complete their studies. This is unfair. This special treatment of students is the absolute opposite of the message that this government should be sending to our young people. Our message should be that we trust them, that we believe in them, and that we are willing to invest in them. Surplus after surplus has shown up for the Liberal Party because of its miscalculations on the budget. The Liberals are exceptionally skilled at missing the mark over and over again, regardless of how many economists they bring on board.

However, in all of these surpluses and particularly this surplus year, the Canadian Federation of Students, and other advocacy groups for students, found the budget not only wanting and lacking but an absolute failure when it came to investing in students. Even in the face of a huge surplus beyond everyone's expectations and combined with all the rhetoric that we heard during the last election, and consistently in the House about the need to support students, there is still a continued cynical lack of support for students by the government.

I appreciate this bill. It is a strong bill. We look for the bill to be supported throughout the House.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Boire (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to rise in this House to speak to the bill to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, a bill that is very dear to my heart.

First, I must say that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill C-236. It is thus in favour of reducing from ten to two years the period of time during which a former student cannot be released, through bankruptcy, from the reimbursement of his debts relating to student loans.

This legislative change will specifically assist the least fortunate among former Quebec and Canadian students and will restore a balance between the moral duty to reimburse the state for the loans and the right to be released from their debts through bankruptcy.

The Bloc Québécois considers that the ten year period, which affects only former students, is too long and is thus a discriminatory measure that is uncalled for.

The Bloc Québécois is aware that bankruptcy must not become an easy way for students to be released from their debts. However, it is unfair to deny this relief to former students who are really in need.

It is because of the fiscal imbalance created by the federal government that Quebec and the provinces now have to increase tuition and change the bursary and loans programs. These measures have a direct impact on the level of student debt.

Allowing former students to clear their student debt by declaring bankruptcy does help the least fortunate Quebecers and Canadians, but does not provide a sustainable funding solution for the post-secondary education system.

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The federal government's lack of vision and willingness to significantly increase education transfers is a clear indication of how much it prefers visibility measures such as the millennium scholarships over truly beneficial measures.

Reducing the timeframe in which a former student cannot declare bankruptcy to clear their debt would help reduce the financial pressure on the poorest in our society, people who, upon finishing school, do not find gainful enough employment to pay back their loans.

Although in Quebec—by virtue of a social choice that distinguishes us from the other Canadian provinces—the average student debt is less than in the other provinces, this does not change the fact that some students are burdened by debt they are unable to pay off. The proposed measure would allow students to benefit, with a very reasonable limit, from the same right as other people, and that is to clear their debt by declaring bankruptcy.

The two-year period proposed in Bill C-236 is short enough so as not to hurt lower income former students. There does need to be a certain period where the student must try to make arrangements to fulfill their financial obligations.

I also want to point out that student debt is a major contributing factor to the drop in Quebec's birth rate. Debt overload discourages thousands of Quebec students from starting a family.

The bill has two major flaws. First, it does not include any measure to hold students responsible for fulfilling their financial obligations and using their loans appropriately. Obviously, students are not irresponsible and there is no reason to believe they do not manage their money as well as other individuals.

However, measures to raise student awareness of the use of loans and of repayment terms would have added value to what Bill C-236 proposes.

Second, the bill is not providing any real answers to the underfunding problem of post-secondary education systems. The fiscal imbalance that is continuing to choke Quebec and the provinces is the primary reason why students get into debt. A substantial increase in direct transfers to Quebec and the provinces is the best way to curb student debt and ensure quality education.

Since the 1990s, federal transfers for post-secondary education have dropped dramatically. Even the Canadian Association of University Teachers came to the conclusion that the weakening of the provinces' ability to fund post-secondary education is primarily due to the reduction in federal transfer payments.

When the member for LaSalle—Émard became Minister of Finance, Ottawa paid 1.7¢ on every dollar of revenue into the transfers for education and social services. When he left his position, nine years later, Ottawa was paying only 1¢ on every dollar of revenue. This represents a 40% decrease.

The federal contribution to total expenditures in education and social programs is now less than 12%.

● (1745)

The Bloc Québécois wants the issue of fiscal imbalance resolved, which would mean a substantial increase in funding available to post-secondary education.

In keeping with the consensus of the provincial premiers, the Bloc Québécois wants federal funding to be 25% of the total expenditure on education and health care by 2009-2010.

Currently, the Quebec system of education is short of resources as the result of cuts in transfer payments, a lack of funding, a shortage of teachers and so, despite the monumental efforts of the Government of Quebec with the meagre resources at its disposal.

The Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec, the FEUQ, and the Canadian Federation of Students are also critical of the federal government's refusal to increase transfer payments for post-secondary education by \$4 billion to offset the cuts during the 1990s. This money would have allowed Quebec to expand its manoeuvring room in order to reinvest in universities, and the rest of Canada to reduce tuition.

In closing, I want to reiterate the Bloc Québécois's support for this bill so students can start their working life in a respectable fashion, and I invite the other parties to support it.

[English]

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-236 proposes a substantial change to the existing rules respecting the treatment of student loans in bankruptcy. It is therefore essential that we do a thorough assessment of the proposals that are being made to make a proper determination.

The present rule is that an individual who goes bankrupt cannot have his or her student loan debt discharged unless at least 10 years have passed since he or she was last enrolled. This is in sharp contrast to the rule applicable to the debts which are typically discharged nine months after assessment in bankruptcy has been filed.

The 10-year rule was introduced in 1998 following a period in which losses to the Canada student loans program through personal bankruptcies had risen greatly. Many of these bankruptcies were occurring shortly after the individual left school. This type of behaviour represented a risk to the viability of the Canada student loans program. Indeed for the 1995-96 year alone, the fiscal cost of bankruptcies involving student loans totalled more than \$100 million.

Since then the cost of bankruptcies has been reduced dramatically. In 2000-01, the last year where complete data is available, the cost of bankruptcies to the Canada student loans program was only \$5.8 million.

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While curbing the potential scope of abuses under the bankruptcy system, the government proceeded with vast improvements to the financial assistance to a student under the Canadian opportunities strategy, including improved access to the Canadian studies grant program, the investment of \$2.5 billion in Canada millennium scholarships, a tax credit on student loan repayments, extension of interest relief periods, and the introduction of the debt reduction in repayment measure. These measures have been designed to provide students in financial need with viable alternatives to declaring bankruptcy.

Under the interest relief program it is now possible to go five years after leaving school without being required to make a payment on a student loan. During that time the Government of Canada bears the cost of interest on that loan. In 2001-02 over 140,000 Canadians took advantage of these generous provisions at a cost of \$77 million.

Moreover, for borrowers who still experience financial difficulties after interest relief measures have been used up, there is then an actual debt reduction mechanism available allowing the borrowers to permanently dispose of over \$26,000 in student loan debt.

I would also stress that the government has stayed on top of this issue. It has responded to the concerns regarding these support measures. In the last three years alone the budgets have contained measures to extend relief or to make relief measures more accessible to people experiencing hardships.

While some may argue that students are unfairly singled out, it is clear from these details that the Canada student loans program is quite generous to those legitimately facing financial problems.

We must also respect the fact that student loans are made available based upon a drastically different basis than a consumer loan. There is no examination of credit worthiness of the borrower. No collateral is required. The loans are interest free during the study periods. The schedule of repayment is flexible and accounts for the financial situation of individuals.

With these mechanisms available, there is some question as to the need for further relief through the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. It is reasonable to assume that any provisions for discharge of student loans must show coordination between the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the provisions of the Canada student loans program.

Bill C-236 creates unnecessary overlap between the relief provisions of the Canada student loans program and the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act.

The point is that there are relief measures available short of bankruptcy. Should those not be used as the first step?

Unfortunately, the bill therefore does not reflect existing relief measures, preferring rather to simply dismiss the debt when other options exist. This poses a very real risk to many students who take a few years to truly develop their full earning potential. It is at that point that their ability to pay becomes more certain and a fuller assessment of the appropriate relief can be made. The bill before us would bypass the measures in place to assist borrowers in favour of walking away from the debt entirely.

●(1750)

Bill C-236 would result in substantial financial cost to the government. In addition to loans financed directly, there are risk shared loans which could affect a large number of people as well. These risk shared loans are funded directly by financial institutions with a risk sharing mechanism which brings in government. The change proposed would likely require contractual agreements and additional compensation to those lenders.

This is the effect only at the federal level. Provincial student loans programs are also captured by the present rules so any change would result in any further levelling of costs there.

I am pleased to tell members of the House that in keeping with the ongoing improvements that have been made to this program, we are reviewing the bankruptcy discharge provisions in the existing legislation. This follows on consultations across the country held by Industry Canada with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders, including student representatives, as well as a more recent report on solvency law issues by the Senate Standing Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce. That report recommended a reduction in the discharge period to five years and perhaps less in cases of hardship.

Building on this input, officials of both Industry Canada and HRSDC are now examining the many comments and the existing provisions to ensure the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Canada student loans program are properly integrated and reflect a fair and reasonable standard of discharge for student loans.

In conclusion, the government wants to stress that the period of discharge of student loans must properly take into account measures under the Canada student loans program, the relief available, the continued Liberal access to loans and the costs associated with bankruptcies.

On the face of it, Bill C-236 does not do that. As a result, it fails to provide a fair and reasonable alternative to current provisions of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act pertaining to student loans. The government cannot support Bill C-236.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the representative of the governing party, I must say that I am surprised that the Liberals are going to further study the issue. What else is new? The government cannot make a decision on it so it will study it and somewhere down the road it will make a decision.

That is not good enough. Despite what the member says, despite the minuscule changes that have been made to assist students, many students in the country are coming out of post-secondary education institutions with a millstone around their necks, with extremely high debt loads which they just cannot handle.

The answer certainly is not bankruptcy. In very few cases students have to resort to declaring bankruptcy; I understand it is somewhere in the range of 2%. To hear people talk one would think that if we allowed students to declare bankruptcy, there would be a lineup, that they would get a student loan, get an education and declare bankruptcy.

Students get an education. They understand the implications of declaring bankruptcy. They understand the onus on them to repay their loans. Consequently, the only time we see bankruptcy happen is when there is severe strain on the student.

I understand the member is willing to move to two years to five years. If that is the case we certainly have no problems agreeing with that piece of legislation and will support it. The student could then assess his chances in the future. Some people who have a post-secondary education do have a hard time finding worthwhile employment. Sometimes it depends on the geography.

This great country of ours is rich in resources and has tremendous potential. The government should realize that in order to develop this potential and turn the economy of the country around, we need people to do it. We need people with an education.

Education is not cheap. I hear too many people say that tuition is not that bad. It varies from province to province. Tuition in my province probably is one of the cheapest, fortunately.

Those of us whose children are in post-secondary education, or have been recently, know that education in this country is not cheap. It is not just the tuition.

Some students live near the university or the post-secondary institution and can walk to school, come home for dinner and stay under their parents' roof where mom and dad pay the bills. Those students have the family car to go to after hours activities. In those cases the cost to a degree is borne by the parents. In those cases the students would not have a heavy debt load, but the costs of books and tuition are heavy enough.

Students from the rural areas have to come in to the university or post-secondary centres. They need to get an apartment, which has to be furnished. They need to buy food, to arrange travel not only back and forth to the institution, but also back and forth to home. Throw in all the other costs besides and it more than doubles the cost of their education.

I challenge anybody to add up the costs of educating an individual who comes from an outside area. If that person can be sent to university for less than \$15,000 a year, that student is eating a lot of Kraft dinner.

Education is not free; it is not even cheap. What are we doing? The government has done absolutely nothing to improve the accessibility to education. It turns people away from getting an education.

● (1755)

Coming out of post-secondary education with a debt load is one thing as long as the student gets a good job, and most people who come out of post-secondary institutions usually do get good jobs. They will eventually surface, but students come out with a millstone around their neck. Their hands are tied for years. That house, that car, all the things that young people need and would love to have, need to be put aside because of their debt load.

The sorrowful thing, the worst part of it all, is the young person who looks at the cost of education, whose family perhaps cannot assist their children because of the cost of education and because of

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the economy in many of our rural areas. This also applies to many urban families. He or she knows that even if they borrow the maximum student loan, it does not cut it. There is a gap. If that gap cannot be filled there is one option and that option is for them not to go to school at all.

Many of our young people, realizing the burden they will put on their families, realizing the debt load they will face themselves when they get out, or realizing that in most cases halfway through they will have to call it quits, realizing all of this, they do not go.

Let us look at the investment we as a country have to make in people who cannot find long term employment. Let us look at the social costs, the unemployment insurance costs, the social welfare costs and the social housing costs. Let us look at the other related problems. Sometimes when people get frustrated their mental and physical health deteriorate so there are health care costs as well. I could go on.

I challenge anybody to compare two young people, one who gets an education, even with some debt load, and one who does not get an education. The individual with the education contributes for the rest of his or her life by paying taxes, buying furniture, buying houses and buying cars, which in turn creates more employment and pours more money into the government as a result of their taxes. That individual is contributing to society, while society, in most cases, has to look after the person who does not get an education. It is a no-brainer. We invest a little up front to help a student get an education or we pay a heavy price down the road.

It is time for the government to wake up. Instead of making excuses on an issue like this, on helping a student get out from under this cloud of bankruptcy, the government should be putting its money where its mouth is. If a modification were made to the bill to move it to five years as a test for now to see how that would work, that would be quite reasonable and it is something we could support.

● (1800)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today on Bill C-236. The member for Halifax should be commended for once again championing a cause that I think often gets lost in the wilderness, as it has with this government in particular.

This is related to fairness, equity and justice. That is what we are talking about here. We are talking about students being treated differently from other segments of society. The member for Halifax has eloquently pointed that out in her bill.

I want to read the preamble to the bill so that people understand both what we are talking about here and also the modest changes we are looking at, which are so important. The summary of the bill states:

This enactment amends the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to reduce, from ten to two years after a bankrupt leaves school, the period of time during which an order of discharge does not release the bankrupt from the reimbursement of his or her student loan.

The member for Halifax essentially summarizes it with the following statement, which is very good. This is what the member said in the chamber:

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It is a tragic irony and it is heartbreaking. It is so important for the discrimination that now exists in our insolvency legislation to end as it relates to students. That is what we are talking about today. Others who become bankrupt, whose circumstances beyond their control have driven them into the situation of financial disaster where bankruptcy is an option, are eligible to apply for bankruptcy protection after two years. However, the government has removed that protection from the student population who have indebted themselves because of the inadequacy of the student aid programs in the country and particularly because of the withdrawal of any meaningful support from the federal government. They are in the position where they are not eligible for such bankruptcy protection for 10 years.

What we are talking about here is allowing a fairness to re-emerge that was taken away and stripped from students. It was stripped from them by this government. The government has chosen other options on where to put the money of this country, money that could have gone to education and thus avoided a bill of this nature coming forward.

I would point out that there are 18 other OECD countries that have free post-secondary education and tuition. I do not know whether Canada will eventually get there, but certainly right now we do not have to continue to throw the entire debt for education onto young people, especially in a free market system that makes it difficult for them to actually get sustainable employment to pay off that investment and also start a family, live in dignity and save for their future retirement.

Let me tell members that when I first came here in 2002, after being elected in a byelection, a reporter came to my house and interviewed me about a number of different things. The reporter asked me what I was going to do with all the money I was going to be making. I said that the first thing I would do is pay off my student loan. That is what we did over the next couple of years.

My wife and I are a typical family. We have two children and we were late in our thirties when we paid off our student debt. We delayed having a family because we wanted to feel some type of economic security. We slowly fixed up our house, but at the same time we paid incredibly high interest rates.

It is also important to note that the interest rates this government takes off the backs of students are terribly high and unacceptable. It is predatory behaviour and the government should be ashamed of it. Let us think about the fact that people can get a car loan for zero per cent and furniture loans for zero per cent while this government charges prime plus 5%. It is scandalous.

Here is what happens to those who have invested in their education, those who are trying to pay back their loans responsibly and do not want to go into bankruptcy. The previous speaker touched on a very important point, that is, as educated people they do not want to leave the victory of post-secondary education and obtaining a degree and then have to capitulate to a very humbling and troubling chapter in one's life, that of declaring bankruptcy.

Nobody wants that. Nobody wants that on their credit rating. Nobody wants to go to their family and say that they cannot pay back their loan, that they borrowed money to be successful. They do not want that. People want to be able to reasonably pay back the investment, not only for themselves but for their country and the investment it made in them, so that we can all be successful. This predatory interest rate leads to the bankruptcy issues and puts people into desperate situations. It is unacceptable.

● (1805)

It also hurts our economy. It is great for the banks and great for the government. They make out all right. There is no problem there. But in my hometown, for example, an auto industry town, this debt load delays purchases of new vehicles. The auto workers pay a lot of money in taxes. They put a lot of money into the United Way. They put it into sending their kids back to school. They contribute to the community.

Also, ironically, it is this government that wants to do a voluntary emission standard for the auto industry. One of the most important things we can do right now is get some of the oldest vehicles off the road and the newer ones on the road. That will lower Kyoto emissions. It will do both: create jobs and lower Kyoto emissions.

What does the government do? It hacks away at students because it can. The government continues to treat them as serfs instead of valuing what they have done and helping them contribute into a formula that means success for all of us.

It is unbelievable that a person can get a house loan at a rate that is lower than that for paying back a student loan. Where is the responsibility of the government to take action where it can, with the stroke of a pen? This is unacceptable.

I recently had a meeting at our local college. College students are funded at a level that is different from the level for university students. It was interesting, because the message from the minister of community and social services, a Liberal in Ontario, was that the colleges had better talk to the federal government because it has the surpluses and Ontario has less money. Ontario has a \$23 billion deficit in terms of transfer payments. That was Ontario's solution at the time: to send it back here.

What did the federal government do in the last budget? It had almost \$5 billion in corporate tax cuts. It was no problem at all to do that. The government found the money. The Prime Minister said during the last election that he would address post-secondary education and that gap. What has he done instead? A vote? No, they are Liberals, they say they are closer to the New Democrats and scared of the Conservatives, but what did he do when he got here? There was another corporate tax cut.

Another corporate tax cut, but what do students get? If a student is deceased, the government will no longer let the collection agencies go after the deceased. It will forgive the debt at that point. If a student is deceased and owes money, he or she will not have to pay back the student loan. Congratulations, I say, what a significant achievement for post-secondary education. I am sure it matches election rhetoric. Promise made and promise broken.

What we are doing to our young population is unacceptable, especially when they need more education than ever before and there is a changing market in front of them. They often have to return to school before they can even pay off the investment on their original education. They are expected to pay for that, not their companies or anybody else, when they have to go back to get those re-qualification credentials for changing standards because of downloading or other governments adding different layers of responsibility for employment through legislation. They have to pay for that.

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What ends up happening is that people come out of school later. They have a higher debt load. They marry later. They have kids later. They defer buying a home until later. What will be really critical later on for the young people of today is that they will have less pensionable earnings and savings because they cannot get by as it is.

They are stopped from buying a house earlier. They are stopped from putting money into their retirement savings plans. They are less likely than ever before to find a company to be with for a good portion of their lives and thus have pensions that will be sustainable. It is a real problem. We are deferring all of that until tomorrow. We are putting it on the backs of today's youth because this government cannot make modest changes.

Moving the bill forward in the House of Commons today would deal with the more desperate cases. We could say to young people that they could start their lives over again. Nobody wants to go through the personal humiliation of admitting that they have to start over in what they want to do with their lives and they cannot pay back what has been given to them. They do not want to do that.

That is why I encourage all members of the House to support the bill, because it is the one thing we can do to give young people something to get them back on track. They can be great contributors to Canada, put their education to better use and be more productive citizens for the long haul.

• (1810)

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act is one of Canada's key marketplace framework laws promoting both economic and social stability. Indeed, it is unique in its dual economic and social orientation encouraging commerce and entrepreneurship while ensuring that vulnerable individuals have a means of dealing with unmanageable debt. The statute has been crafted to reflect the balance between these orientations.

The Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act balances the risk between creditors and debtors in determining how shortfalls will be allocated and setting out the circumstances under which a fresh start is warranted. It encourages the payment of debts while allowing well-intentioned but unfortunate debtors a means of eliminating their debt loads.

It has been argued in the House that former students face crushing debt loads without the recourse to bankruptcy offered to other debtors. It is argued that individuals with student debts are unfairly hampered by the bankruptcy system, forced to live with debt levels that would otherwise qualify for bankruptcy protection.

I suggest that these arguments present only half the picture. It is true that student loans are not easily discharged under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act but bankruptcy is a last option, not a first option.

Before condemning the rules and changing them, we must understand the rationale for their creation. The Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act was amended in 1998 after careful consideration by Parliament to stem the increasing option of declaring bankruptcy rather than paying student loans.

In the years leading up to the amendments, losses to the Canadian student loans program due to bankruptcies were becoming unsustainable. For the fiscal year 1995-96 alone the cost of losses due to bankruptcy was more than \$100 million. Losses of that magnitude threatened the viability and the continued existence of that program.

A look at the statistics suggest that bankruptcy was being treated as a first option by student loan holders. Many of the bankruptcies were filed shortly after the former student left the school and before any effort was made to repay the loans. Bill C-236 would encourage a return to this sort of behaviour.

The Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act was changed in 1998 to discourage students from taking the plunge into bankruptcy but it does not work in a vacuum. It works in tandem with the Canadian student loans program which is constantly being improved. For example, in the recent budget the government announced plans to improve the debt forgiveness provisions applicable to students who face the most serious hardships, including those who suffer permanent disabilities, while repaying their loans.

The Canada student loans program has evolved to ensure the mechanisms are in place to help individuals in financial distress, including interest free periods and debt forgiveness. Student loan debtors do not have to resort to bankruptcy. They can look to the student loans program and seek relief there.

Bankruptcy is still available for people in need. Individuals with student debt can opt to seek bankruptcy protection and have their non-student loans forgiven. This combined with the interest relief and debt forgiveness provisions of the Canada student loans program is sufficient to allow most students with debt troubles to become financially stable and capable of paying their loans.

If someone suffers from continued hardship and remains unable to pay his or her loans, the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act allows a person to obtain a discharge on hardship grounds. To obtain such a discharge, the person must have demonstrated good faith in dealing with the loans and that the financial hardship will likely continue over the foreseeable future.

To be certain, obtaining a hardship discharge is not easy but it should not be easily obtained. Student debt holders must not be encouraged to opt for bankruptcy until the option for bankruptcy is the only possible route. They should take advantage of the protective measures offered by the student loan program and attempt to pay their debts.

This is economically responsible behaviour and it is socially responsible behaviour. It is economically responsible because it ensures that those who benefit from the loans make reasonable efforts to pay them back and socially responsible because paying one's debts back is a good thing.

Governments ensure easy access to loans in order to allow people to pursue a goal of education but we must not forget the taxpayers ultimately pay the cost of losses due to bankruptcy. Student loans are funded through tax dollars. Allowing easy access to bankruptcy and making that option more attractive than repaying loans unfairly increases the burden on the taxpayer.

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•(1815)

Easier access to bankruptcy, as contemplated by Bill C-236, also poses a threat to future students. We have seen what easier access to bankruptcy did in the past, leading to massive losses to the student loans program and threatening its continued existence. The program is an essential one, designed to benefit Canadians today and in the future. If people are allowed to abuse the system, taking money out of it without any repayment, the system will not likely be sustainable.

Is it fair to allow former students to take the easy way out at the expense of taxpayers? No, it is not. Allowing students to pursue bankruptcy as an option only two years removed from school is an unsound prospect. It does not encourage former students to pay their debts or to use the debt repayment portion of the Canadian student loans program. It does not provide sufficient time to assess whether the individual will be able to capitalize on his or her education and earn a good living, nor does it provide time to accurately assess whether the individual will be able to pay back the money borrowed from the taxpayers.

Education is not free. It is a valuable resource and one that must be worked for and respected. Loans are provided for prospective students with the understanding that they will be repaid. The student loans program provides people with the time to start their post-study lives and build their careers before requiring them to pay the interest or repay their loans. We should encourage people to use these methods rather than opting for bankruptcy.

Change to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act should not happen in a vacuum. It should be handled as part of a comprehensive reform that is capable of ensuring continued balance within the statute and its relationship to other statutes. Changing this provision would throw off the balance and create disharmony between it and the Canada student loans program.

The government is currently reviewing the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and is preparing legislative reform options. The issue of student loans is being carefully considered and should be handled in the context of a comprehensive reform rather than a stand alone item. The government cannot support Bill C-236.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to make closing remarks, but I was wondering, in view of the fact that there are five more minutes, if I could ask the hon. member who just spoke a couple of questions. Would that be in order?

The Deputy Speaker: The member could ask for unanimous consent for that but it is not in the normal order of things. Would the hon. member for Halifax like to make a motion to that effect?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, I am not trying to get around the rules. I am just saying that if nobody else wants to ask the previous speaker any questions, I would like to do so and then move to wrap up if I have the consent of the House to do that.

•(1820)

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Halifax have the unanimous consent of the House to have a question and comment period?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, I find it disappointing in the extreme that if no government member was prepared to enter the debate further and time was available that they would not be willing to allow some questions and comments.

The question I would have asked the member from Kenora who just presented his comments is why he insists upon viewing the problem that our students face, with crippling debt and skyrocketing tuitions, as a problem that should be characterized, as he did, as students who borrow from the taxpayer and then do not adequately honour their debts.

That absolutely sums up what is so utterly and totally bankrupt, both financially and morally, about the Liberal government's approach to post-secondary education funding, in particular to supporting students and making it possible for them to pay their tuition.

Any modern industrial society that does not understand that post-secondary education is an investment in the future is doomed to be a society that lives up to its potential, never mind being able to compete with all the other industrial nations that do invest. In fact most OECD countries have tuition free post-secondary education systems because they understand the value. They understand the difference between a loan from the taxpayers and an investment.

I want to thank all members who participated in the debate. I do not have time to review all of the comments but I want to thank my colleagues, the member for Skeena and the member for Windsor West who, I think, are the two youngest members of our caucus, but am not sure about that. They understand perhaps better than some of us who have been around a little longer how really serious this problem is for their generation and the students coming along behind. They are at that stage in their life when they are busy getting on with it and when they see others coming along behind them who find that they are crippled with debt, they understand what it means.

Students are forced to drop out of school or are not able to attend a college and university in the first place. If they do get there, the quality of their educational experience is eroded because they have to struggle with part time jobs in order to put food on the table. In this day and age, imagine what a commentary this is on how pathetic the government's commitment is to post-secondary education funding when students have to spend time organizing food banks on college and university campuses these days.

It was disappointing, after listening carefully, to hear the comments made by government members.

Before I get into that, I also appreciate the fact that both of the other opposition parties definitely understood the severity and the magnitude of the problem that faces today's post-secondary education students. I welcomed their indication that they were prepared to vote to see that this bill goes before committee.

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I want to use my final moment to plead with government members to say that this is not a bill that pretends to solve all the problems. It does not propose a comprehensive solution to what has been 13 years of problems created by the government by the systematic erosion of funding and the failure, even in the most recent budget, to return post-secondary core funding to the level that it was in 1993 when the Liberals came to office.

Of course the bill would not solve all the problems. It deals with a very narrow particular problem, a problem of last resort for students who say that they do not know what else to do but to declare bankruptcy under the terrible financial circumstances they find themselves in.

• (1825)

They turn to that and find they are actively and aggressively discriminated against by a perverse change in the law introduced by the government in 1998 because it said that students were going bankrupt left, right and centre. Would one not think that would have been the canary in the mine syndrome to tell the government it should stop heaping the debt on students, which causes them to have to contemplate bankruptcy.

I know my time is up, but I plead with government members to send this to committee so we can improve upon it. It is not cast in stone. We have indicated that we are prepared to look at some flexibility, not to say it is absolutely two years or nothing. We can look—

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the division stands deferred until Wednesday, April 13 immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rose in the House a few weeks ago to ask the Deputy Prime Minister a serious question about border security. I

asked her to explain the government's plan to deal with the problem of people running the border into Canada in their cars and even on foot.

The question itself was not critical of the government. It was not overtly partisan. It is a question that concerns MPs from all four parties, including the governing party, whose ridings lie along the U.S. border. It addressed an issue that has been frequently reported on in the newspapers for months. I posed the question with the safety and security of border guards as my paramount concern. Of course the integrity of the border is also a national security issue and, therefore, of major concern.

I should note in addition that as co-chair of the all party border caucus, my goal is to contribute to the work of the Canadian administration on border issues, not to bash the administration.

As a clear gesture of goodwill and to elicit a helpful response, I sent the Deputy Prime Minister advance notice of the question so she would have an opportunity to inform the House as to how this obvious and alarming problem would be dealt with in the coming weeks and months. I believe anyone who heard the Deputy Prime Minister's answer would say that she did not get to the heart of the matter. She was unable to explain what specifically was being done to crack down on those running the border.

In fairness, the minister was unable to provide her full reply in the House at that time. Her assistant was gracious enough to provide the balance to me, and I would like to quote the relevant portion of that response for the record. She stated: "The CBSA (Canadian Border Services Agency) takes any allegation of potential breach of security very seriously and investigates all allegations. We have also invested \$125 million in federal funding to establish RCMP-led Integrated Border Enforcement Teams along the Canada-U.S. border to harmonize border security efforts of Canadian and U.S. law enforcement".

At this point, let me be clear that the RCMP integrated border enforcement teams are a long overdue and necessary element of border security. I do not think anyone questions that. However, those teams are not operating full time at numerous border crossings right across Canada, where people are running borders in their cars. They are not operating full time at the Peace Arch crossing in my riding where people are simply walking across the border within sight of the border posts.

I do not fault the integrated enforcement teams for that. That is simply not their mandate. Who is supposed to deal with these violations? The border services guards cannot. They have no authority to apprehend anyone more than 100 feet away from their posts. They are also unarmed. Protocol requires that border services call in the RCMP to apprehend the border runners. However, even if the police can respond within minutes, the runner is often long gone.

The claim that the CBSA investigates all such allegations may be true, but what can it do about the problem? What good is an investigation if there will never be a resolution to the problem?

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Again, I ask my question. We have a growing problem. What specifically is the minister planning to do about border runners? At this point, the government has four minutes to respond, and I would hope the minister will take this opportunity to share what plans there are to deal with this growing problem.

• (1830)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to answer the question raised by the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale.

As the Deputy Prime Minister already indicated in the House, there are actually two components to the member's question. The first deals with the safety of the Canada Border Services Agency's officers on the front lines and the second is about port runners.

I want to assure members that the government is committed to the safety of our front line officers. Their safety and security are our highest priority. A positive and safe work environment protects employees and leads to enhanced security measures and service delivery. To that end we have completed risk assessments in all customs locations. The "Job Hazard Analysis - Working Alone Strategy" was commissioned in part to look at ways in which the agency could improve working conditions for its employees and improve security.

I cannot discuss the specific criteria used to determine the level of risk for each site because it would compromise the safety of employees and the security of the agency's operations. I can assure members that the agency's front line officers have all the training and the tools they need for their safety and security.

The job hazard analysis strategy is a work in progress and has been in development for some time. The agency is working on this matter with the union at the local and national levels and has shared the strategy with them through the national health and safety policy committee.

[*Translation*]

As mentioned in the recent budget, considerable funding has been allocated to matters of security. The additional funding will make it possible to provide training and protective tools and to take other steps to reduce risks for officers working alone.

[*English*]

In fact in budget 2005, \$433 million was allocated to the Canada Border Services Agency over five years to build capacity and further enhance the safe and efficient movement of goods and people across our borders.

I should mention that over the past four years the government has spent over \$9 billion on enhancing the security of Canada.

Significant investments have been made to facilitate the flow of goods and people across the Canada-U.S. border while keeping it closed to criminals and terrorists. The Canada Border Services Agency has worked closely with the United States and our law enforcement partners to ensure that the border remains secure.

We have also invested \$125 million in federal funding to establish RCMP led integrated border enforcement teams along the

Canada-U.S. border to harmonize border security efforts of Canadian and U.S. law enforcement.

I would like to address the second issue, that of border runners, to which the hon. member referred in his question.

Ensuring the security of our borders is the CBSA's number one priority. We share the longest undefended border in the world. The Canada Border Services Agency works closely with its counterparts in the United States to make sure that the border remains secure.

All persons wishing to enter Canada are obligated to stop and report to the CBSA. Anyone who does not is liable to a fine and/or imprisonment under the Customs Act.

Last year approximately 71 million persons were processed by the agency at land border ports of entry. The vast majority of people and businesses comply with the law and we work hard to facilitate compliance.

The agency works hard with local law enforcement. We continue to see this as a priority area.

• (1835)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, I will try not to be too partisan here, but I have to express my disappointment with the response we were just given. Clearly the responder did not hear the specific questions that I asked because he repeated points that I had already made in my speech.

He commented on the fact that the border enforcement teams are operating. I just pointed out that they are there but they cannot do anything about the problem of people running the border.

What I heard is that the government is pouring a lot of money into this but there is no plan to solve the problem. That is the nub of it. There is a real problem and nothing actually is being done.

I heard the member talk about risk assessments and job evaluations, but the government is not doing anything about the problem.

He commented on the RCMP being called in to deal with the situation. I have spoken with officers on a regular basis. They are frustrated because they cannot get there in time to deal with the situation.

In a nutshell, I am disappointed with the answer. I hope that next time the member will provide more substance.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I guess the member realizes that we have a border of some 8,000 kilometres between Canada and the United States. I suppose the member's solution would be to have customs officials or RCMP every few hundred yards or so. He realizes that is not feasible, possible or realistic.

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However, as I mentioned, in the recent budget the Government of Canada announced an investment of \$433 million over five years in additional funding to support the Canada Border Services Agency's operations. The funding will enhance the agency's capacity to manage the access of people and goods to and from Canada, and to ensure the safety and economic prosperity of all Canadians.

The health and safety of the Canada Border Services Agency officers continue to be of paramount importance to the agency and to the Government of Canada.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House has 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 6:37 p.m.)

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