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(Part A)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 10, 2006

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

● (1100)

[*English*]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from April 7 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, and of the amendment as amended.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first opportunity to speak in this new session of Parliament, I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to my constituents of Don Valley East for re-electing me as their federal representative in Ottawa. I also ask my volunteers to please accept my heartfelt thanks for their hard work and dedication. I would also like to thank the hon. leader of the official opposition for placing his confidence in my abilities in asking me to serve as the official critic for National Revenue.

I also congratulate you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the members of the House have expressed their confidence in you to preside over this Parliament. I also offer my congratulations to all returning parliamentarians and new parliamentarians.

As an opposition critic, I intend to do my best to keep the government accountable and to make this a productive Parliament regardless of however long this minority government survives.

It has been noted that this is one of the shortest throne speeches on record. It is a remarkably thin document that is equally short of new ideas. It does in fact address five narrow objectives identified by the Conservatives and yet it is what the speech does not mention that makes this speech truly remarkable.

Let me cite a few examples. The speech says nothing about protecting the environment and the Kyoto agreement. It is silent about funding for citizen communities. It ignores students and access to post-secondary education. It makes no mention of honouring the groundbreaking Kelowna accord reached last year between the government and Canada's aboriginal peoples. For those Canadians

looking for affordable housing, they have no prospect of any form of help from the federal government.

There are, however, some things to talk about regarding the five narrow objectives outlined in the throne speech and how they match up in reality. An accountability package, crime and punishment, family allowances instead of early childhood development, personal tax increases to pay for a cut in the GST and a health care guarantee.

In terms of accountability, let us review what has happened in the first few weeks of the Conservative government in office. Throughout his career, the newly elected Prime Minister has claimed strongly to support an elected Senate. As a Reform member of Parliament, this was his mantra for years and yet his very first act as Prime Minister was to give a Senate appointment to his personal friend and campaign manager. That puts accountability down the drain. To add insult to injury, his second act was then to make the same person the unelected Minister of Public Works, one of the largest departments at the federal level responsible for government procurement. The public works minister is not a member of the House and therefore is not subject to the daily question period. Canadians are asking what kind of accountability that is.

Does the Prime Minister believe he is above accountability? The Prime Minister talked about restricting lobbyists and yet he turned around and immediately appointed a lobbyist as his Minister of National Defence. We are talking about someone who has listed over 40 top defence companies as his clients. Talk about putting the fox in charge of the hen house.

On top of that, we have since learned that Conservative staffers who worked for current cabinet ministers suddenly jumped into the private sector and are now registered lobbyists.

The Prime Minister talks about turning a new leaf. Well, he is certainly turning a new leaf. Do members remember the Mulroney era on the take? Here we find the Prime Minister's idea of accountability involves rewarding his closest friends.

Let us move on to crime and punishment. My constituents of Don Valley East are deeply concerned about gun violence on the streets of Toronto. In the last Parliament the Liberal government had prepared a comprehensive legislative package to combat crime on a number of levels.

The Address

•(1105)

Bill C-82 would have created minimum penalties for smuggling, trafficking and possession of firearms and other weapons. It would have created new offences specifically aimed at breaking and entering to steal guns and would have offered protection for those witnessing a crime involving firearms.

What happened to that bill? The Conservatives effectively killed the legislation when Parliament was dissolved last November. This was a bill that my constituents wanted to become law but it became an unfortunate victim of political brinkmanship.

What about guns? The Liberal Party pledged to ban all handguns and get them off the streets and out of the hands of criminals. What is the Conservatives' response? They plan to gut the firearms registry that is being used by police which would make it easier for criminals to obtain unregistered weapons.

There are so many things to talk about. Let us talk about child care. For the first time in Canadian history the federal government had finally reached an agreement with all 10 provinces and the territories to provide affordable, accessible and quality child care for all Canadians. In the throne speech, the Conservatives have promised to simply tear up these agreements, kill the early learning and child care strategy and replace it with nothing more than what amounts to an old-fashioned family allowance which, after tax, will do little or nothing to assist families.

An Alberta politician once offered a \$25 cheque to each voter if he were successfully elected. That politician was none other than William Aberhart, Premier of Alberta in the 1930s and well remembered in history for his elaborate vote-buying scheme. Let us fast-forward to the 21st century and we have a Prime Minister using the very same method of flaunting taxpayer dollars to buy his way into office.

On the subject of taxes, let us take a closer look at the Tories' proposed 1% cut to the GST. The Liberal Party firmly believes that the first target for income tax reduction should be income taxes, not consumption taxes. It is far better to return more money to the taxpayer at source than to simply reduce sales taxes.

In order to pay for the so-called tax cuts, the Conservatives are going to wipe out the \$50 billion tax reduction plan started by the Liberal government and make history by being the first federal government to raise personal taxes since the Mulroney government.

The Prime Minister is planning to raise the basic personal amount that Canadians can earn tax-free; roll back reductions of tax rates in the first three brackets, which would have benefited low and middle income families; and eliminate a proposed working income tax credit to help low income people move away from social assistance which would have resulted in putting thousands of low income seniors back on the tax rolls after they were removed in the Liberal budget last year.

Why is the recently elected government punishing low and middle income families while, at the same time, rewarding its wealthy friends with tax cuts?

The Conservative government has traditionally blamed the Liberals for leaving the country in bad financial shape. This time

the Tories have no excuse. As my colleague, the hon. member for Wascana, recently noted, no other incoming government in Canadian history has inherited a better fiscal situation.

As an incoming government, it has inherited a strong economy, eight consecutive surpluses, world-leading reductions in federal debt, low interest rates and low inflation, a AAA credit rating and unemployment at a 30 year low.

I therefore challenge the government to live up to the expectations that people have developed over the past 12 years and to work with members on all sides of this House to make this country better for all Canadians.

•(1110)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment to the chair. We are very proud of the fact that you have been selected.

I would like to respond to one of the things the hon. member opposite said. She said something about the government inheriting such a fine fiscal position from the previous government. I wonder whether she has ever stopped to consider the reasons the previous Liberal government was able to balance the books. There were a number of reasons. One of them was that the Conservatives howled about it until finally the government was pressured into doing it, but it was also the policies of free trade, which bring about \$1.5 billion everyday into this country. That was what the Liberal Party campaigned against and that is what has given it to a great extent the fiscal gift which has permitted it to balance the budget and stop the interminable borrowing.

I would also like to point out the GST, which the Liberals said they would eliminate in their campaign. I remember Mr. Chrétien saying during an election campaign that it would be gone. That GST brought in billions of dollars and using that money the Liberals were able to balance the budget. I think also of the \$30 billion that they took out of the civil service employees pension fund, who were entitled to half of that. Half of it belonged to the employees. I think about the \$50 billion they took out of the EI fund.

The ways in which they balanced the budget and gave us presumed fiscal health is questionable at best. Let us not forget that in fact the amount of debt that the Liberals left the Conservatives when we took office on January 23 is pretty well the same as the debt that they had in 1993. I think they should probably be a little more sensitive to where all this money came from. I would appreciate the comments of the hon. member on these things.

The Address

•(1115)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal government took power, it inherited a bankrupt country because, in good fiscal times, the Conservatives did not know how to manage the economy. People were desperate. Interest rates were at their highest. There were 20% interest rates and unemployment was high. People wanted hope and, therefore, the federal government was very careful in how it balanced fiscal responsibility and social responsibility.

We now have the best economy and we are the envy of the G-20 countries. We have a record. We hope that the Conservatives do not have another spending spree as the one they did under the Mulroney government and bring back another deficit.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to remind my colleague that, as I said last week, any slight improvement in the economy under the Liberal government is attributable to the Conservative government's introduction of the GST and free trade, which the previous government opposed.

I would also like to defend the Minister of National Defence's reputation. He is a competent man. Unlike his Liberal counterparts of the past 13 years, he has no intention of leaving the merchant and military fleets in their current advanced state of deterioration.

Why did the previous government leave the military fleet in such a state? We cannot even provide adequate transportation for our troops to accomplish humanitarian missions or missions like the one we have undertaken in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate that when a country is bankrupt, it has to look at what is important for the people. The social welfare of the people is extremely important. The Liberals inherited a bankrupt country. The World Bank and everyone else said that we were a third world economic basket case. In order to get our house in order, we had to look at the priorities.

No matter how much the Conservatives talk about the free trade agreement, they are ones who signed such an agreement that left us with so many problems. Uncle Sam has decided that he will be the one to decide whether the free trade agreement is acceptable or not and I do not think the Conservatives should take so much credit for it.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for British Columbia Southern Interior.

I rise today in the House for the first time and I do so with a great sense of humility and of course enthusiasm about the possibility that always accompanies change. Clearly, a significant change was exactly what the people of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek voted for on January 23. I remain sincerely grateful for the confidence and trust shown in me and I will not let them down.

Short days ago, as I took my place for the first time in this great chamber, I was struck by the fact that within our great democracy working people like myself, originally from a small community like Plaster Rock, New Brunswick, as part of life's journey can still make their way through the halls of our national Parliament.

I wish to thank my wife, Barbara, who is in the gallery, and my family and my friends who have believed in and supported me over the years as we follow the trail leading to this place. To the good people of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, my office is now open. My staff and I are available to work with everyone to make our community stronger, to address the needs and questions around federal programs and services, and to fight for the change that Canadians voted for in the past election. Constituents now have a representative who will take their concerns to the government instead of bringing the government's message to them.

In regard to the throne speech, I am encouraged to see some NDP priorities referred to, but we have heard promises of such things as child care over the past 12 years only to be disappointed. Action, not words, creates change. Before this new government becomes too self-assured, I would remind it that more than 60% of Canadians did not vote for its vision, its so-called five point plan. More than 60% of Canadians did not vote for its vision of child care.

Approximately 16% of Hamilton families live in poverty and \$1,200 will simply not begin to either meet the needs of those families if there are no affordable, accessible child care spaces. We need ongoing sustainable funding for a publicly administered child care program, not another tax credit or moneys given only to be clawed back. The NDP will stand firm in its commitment to public, not-for-profit child care.

The Conservative plan to give \$1,200 to each family for each child under six, and cancelling the first agreement in years that would have made public, not-for-profit spaces, is shortsighted to say the least. If the Conservatives were serious about helping Canadian families, why not do both? Why not help parents pay for the child care they choose while also ensuring that there are quality, affordable, not-for-profit spaces being built?

Parents in Hamilton were excited about the best start program, excited about this much needed program that was working with parents and the community to create more spaces, better care, and a more integrated approach to families, schools and the community to improve early childhood education in our community. Best start was also supposed to ensure that all parents, regardless of economic and social circumstances, had access to quality child care options.

Instead of promoting this worthwhile program in communities like Hamilton across Ontario, the government is cancelling \$1.4 billion of the \$1.9 billion in federal money promised that made best start possible.

The Address

I must echo the words of my leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, when I remind the House, it is the will of Canadians and the majority of the House to build a truly national child care program. I call on the government to build upon the current agreements instead of cancelling them. Working together we can achieve more for child care in the next 12 months than the previous government did in 12 years.

One in five Hamiltonians live below the poverty line. Child poverty is still epidemic in the country. In my riding, the highest incidence of low income is with new Canadians, recent immigrants to our country. Yet in its throne speech, the government did not talk about poverty once, or what we need to do to address social and economic causes of poverty. It was a shameful omission. There is much to be done.

• (1120)

I will stand firm in this House to ensure that the little progress that has been made by the Government of Canada over the last few years is not rolled back and that we do more to fight poverty in our country. While the throne speech did mention working families, it is the NDP that has promised a working families first agenda in this Parliament. This is good news for the people of my community. They have seen significant restructuring of major industries.

Many people who live in my riding, particularly in the Stoney Creek area, work in manufacturing and steel industries. They live in fear of not only losing their jobs to globalization but because of poorly crafted trade agreements that the last Conservative government put into place. They also now face the fear of not having a company pension when they reach retirement age.

New Democrats have long called for sectoral strategies for our important manufacturing industries such as steel and auto parts. Corporate welfare, handouts and more tax cuts do not encourage businesses to change their behaviour.

When industries are deciding whether to invest in making innovative products that often have higher price tags, perhaps those that would clean our air, they need to know consumers will buy them. For example, consumers who want to buy green cars must have access to rebates and other incentives to afford these newer, more environmentally friendly cars. Broader support to workers in these sectors to ensure that they have the skills to participate in these industries through EI reform is essential.

While the government did talk about working families in its Speech from the Throne, there is nothing new or substantial there for them. As millions of baby boomers prepare to retire, pension protection has never been more important. In the last Parliament, we won protection for workers wages. In this Parliament, we will fight for the pension security that workers deserve.

New Democrats will continue to fight to protect workers basic rights and better assistance for new Canadians and their families, so they can take the productive place in society that they came to Canada to provide.

The NDP is putting working families in Hamilton and all across Canada first. We want to talk about pocketbook issues beyond the simplistic approach of a GST cut. We want to talk about accountability and cleaning up corruption beyond government. We

want to talk about ensuring that Canadians can afford the prescription drugs they need, get adequate dental, vision and health care, and have access to better EI programs.

The Conservative government talked only about innovation in health care in its throne speech. It did not talk about the need to invest in innovations instead of squandering our money on GST or corporate tax cuts.

We are failing our parents and grandparents, the people who built our country because too many of them cannot get the basic care they need. That is why I am so pleased to join my caucus colleagues to fight in this Parliament to enact the principles in the NDP's senior charter.

We will give working families the tools they need to support their parents and grandparents, so that seniors have access to good quality, long term care, so that seniors and people with disabilities get the home care they need, and so that no senior is ever forced to choose between buying medicine that they need or buying groceries. Seniors have waited long enough. Working families have waited long enough.

The Speech from the Throne promised more support to Canadian core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights around the world. The Prime Minister has pledged that this would be achieved through a bigger diplomatic role, a stronger military and a more effective use of aid money.

As the NDP advocate for human rights, both domestic and international, I intend to hold Mr. Harper and this government to those promises made last week. Promoting human rights at home or abroad is a big part of what makes us Canadian.

Canadian values must be reflected in our actions overseas and we must continue to ensure that we address human rights issues at home. I and my NDP colleagues will not waver in our determination to ensure that Canada's foreign policies reflect our values.

Before my election, I was a member of the Strengthening Hamilton Community Initiative, begun after the events of September 11, to respond to an increase in racially motivated hate crimes in our community. The initiative's goals have been to bring civic and community representatives together to come up with collaborative solutions to ensure that prejudice and exclusion had no place in our community.

The Address

Building diversity and inclusive communities needs support and action from all levels of government. I hope that we will see more of this from this government as it promotes diversity. Canadians sent all of us to Parliament to work. People said they wanted change and they wanted the NDP to balance that change and ensure that there are no rollbacks where progress has been made.

I am looking forward to the challenges and opportunities to represent the people of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

• (1125)

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We have a new member in the chamber who just finished his speech, but perhaps a little reminder that we cannot use the names of members of Parliament in this chamber.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I appreciate the point of order by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville. I would also appreciate if other members, especially those who are of the class of 2006 with me, would take note of this advice.

We will now go to questions and comments. I would like to remind the House that this is to last five minutes. There seems to be a great deal of interest, so we will try to fit in as many as possible. The hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment to the chair. It is a great opportunity for you and I know you will do a super job.

In the speech of my new colleague from the NDP, he ranted on at length about being totally against corporate tax cuts and that this was the worst thing that could possibly happen in a country. We see tax cuts for everyone, including big business that creates a lot of jobs, as economic empowerment.

His country cousins in Saskatchewan, where I am from, brought down their budget last week. The largest item, which was the foundation and cornerstone of that budget, was \$95 million in tax cuts to big business. We see this as a great thing for Saskatchewan, but the member still rants and raves about that. I see the former finance minister, who is also from Saskatchewan, is in agreement with me, that there seems to be quite a disconnect between the NDP in Ottawa and the NDP in Saskatchewan, which has finally got around to doing the right thing.

• (1130)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, in response to the questions and comments, when I rant, I am a lot louder than what the member heard today.

The reality is there always has to be a balance, fiscally. If we give corporate tax breaks when we cannot afford to and when we make our programs pay, as Mike Harris did in Ontario, it is a terrible price for our citizens to pay. Very simply, there is a balance that needs to be struck. We want to see more investment in Canada, not corporate tax cuts.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his speech the member referred to child poverty and some of the economic solutions that we might present. Is the member aware that 15% of all families in Canada are lone parent families, but they

account for 55% of all children living in poverty? This is a significant spike in terms of demographics.

Does the member have any suggestions on how we address the breakdown of the Canadian family to address poverty?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, the very first thing the government can do is stop the intended clawback around the \$1,200 tax credit. Other than that, we have to reinvest in our community in those areas which will address poverty and get to the root causes of it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his first speech in this House. I share his concerns about poverty. I would like to thank his party for supporting the Bloc Québécois' proposed subamendment concerning a program for older workers. I know that similar situations have arisen in the Maritimes.

Should the government not have included in its Speech from the Throne a clear position on establishing an independent employment insurance fund? Such a fund would enable the government to provide better services and to ensure that all of the money paid into employment insurance by employees and employers is reserved for the EI program, not used to fund other government programs. I would like to hear my colleague's opinion on this question.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I recall that some years ago 85% of the folks who applied for EI got it. With changes that were put together by the Liberal government around 1995, it started robbing the EI fund. Today about 27% of the people who apply get EI.

From my perspective, this is insurance for workers. It belongs to workers and should not be used for any other purposes.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour for me to be here. As a school teacher, when I studied government with my students, I emphasized the fact that politics was indeed an honourable profession. All of us are here because we want to serve our country. In my case, I became involved in politics because I am concerned about the future of my country.

My parents came to Canada as political refugees, fleeing the horrors of the Russian revolution and civil war. They were very thankful that Canada gave them a home where they could raise their family in peace.

My father spent 38 years working in a lumber mill. As a youth going to school, I was also able to work there, earning a union wage at that time of \$1.92 an hour.

The Address

Thanks to my union job and relatively low tuition fees, I was able to finish university basically debt free. This is no longer the case. It is harder for students to get well-paying jobs as our industry is hit by the negative effects of NAFTA and the ideological pressure to contract out jobs.

Many students work in various fast food outlets trying to make ends meet and are faced with increasing tuition fees. It is not uncommon for university graduates to have a debt load of from \$20,000 to \$60,000 upon finishing.

•(1135)

[*Translation*]

Our government wants to reduce the GST when there is apparently not enough money available for post-secondary education. I think things would be fairer for ordinary families if education were more affordable.

[*English*]

It is an honour and a privilege to represent those in B.C. Southern Interior. I will do everything I can to represent their interests, just as our previous MP and his staff have done. I thank him for his hard work and wish him all the best in his retirement as he hits the golf trail and prepares gourmet meals for his wife, Ann.

The past few years have been perhaps the most enriching ones of my life. The energy and time put in by all the volunteers, in addition to their individual financial contribution that kept coming in, was truly amazing.

I am happy to announce today that four of these amazing people Ann Harvey, Laurel Walton, Gina Petrakos and Jayme Hadikin have accepted positions as my assistants. Together with an amazing Hill veteran, Jennifer Ratz, I believe we have a team second to none.

In addition to our Castlegar office, it is my pleasure to announce that, as of June 1, I will have part time offices both in Oliver and in Princeton to better serve the western part of my riding.

It is difficult to name all those dedicated and committed people who have stood beside me over the past years, but a special thanks should be said to my wife. In spite of the fact that she said "I think you're crazy" when I said I was thinking of running for office, she is still right here with me in Ottawa.

The three others who encouraged me right from the beginning are our former MLA, Ed Conroy, his wife, Katrina Conroy, who is now our MLA, and Lily Popoff, our riding president at that time.

Before moving on to talk about some issues facing our riding, I would like to pay tribute to some old-timers who not only supported me in the campaign, but who have spent their entire lives, or most of their lives, in the pursuit of social justice. My old friend Albin Carlson from Oliver, a long-time social democrat from Sweden, who will be 100 years old this year; Marshall and Isabella Johnson of Princeton, who will be celebrating their 70th wedding anniversary this year; Agnes and Hugh Herbison of Argenta, with roots in the Quaker community, who have been fighting for peace and justice for many years; and finally, what would I have done without Harold and Phyllis Funk when we blitzed Grand Forks with leaflets last September?

Many diverse ethnic groups make their home in our riding. It was indeed a pleasure for me on New Year's Day to be present at the Sikh temple in Oliver, as it was to have met some members of the Portuguese community in Osoyoos prior to the last campaign. I have also had the privilege of attending a couple of dinners at the Columbo Lodge in Trail, one of the gathering points for the Italian community.

One of the main reasons my wife and I moved to Castlegar 12 and a half years ago was because of the Russian presence in that area. It is possible to go downtown in Castlegar and Grand Forks and hear Russian spoken in restaurants and on the streets.

[*Translation*]

The Doukhobors came to Canada at the turn of the 20th century because of religious persecution in Russia. They are pacifists, who have worked for peace and justice since the community was established.

[*English*]

Over the years they have made contributions to the cooperative work ethic of toil and peaceful life. They have built railroads, developed farms, flour mills, sawmills and jam factories.

One of their trademarks is choral singing. Their beautiful acapela choirs have performed at the United Nations and in Europe. I invite everyone to come to Castlegar in the May long weekend to attend the Doukhobor Youth Festival and get a taste of Doukhobor culture, especially the delicious food.

Two members of this community have been helping to build bridges between Canada and Russia by undertaking projects in that country. Mike Kanigan has been helping people in Rostov-on-Don to set up a door and window manufacturing business, while Alex Jmaeff has spent a number of years in Yasnaya Polyana spearheading a bakery and restaurant project.

[*Translation*]

In the Kootenay Boundary region, many people, including members of the Doukhobor community, are working for peace and justice. They want Canada to work with the United Nations to promote peace throughout the world and they are concerned about the role our country appears to be setting for itself these days and especially our military commitment.

[*English*]

I would like to thank my friends, members of the Kootenay Regional United Nations Association and others for their tireless pursuit of world peace. They, along with many in our riding, welcome the debate on Afghanistan, which will take place this evening.

At this time I would like to recognize Private Will Salikin of Grand Forks for his contribution and service to our country. On behalf of all Canadians, I wish him well as he recovers from injuries sustained while serving in Afghanistan.

The Address

A young woman from Castlegar, Mireille Evans, is currently preparing for a dangerous mission in Colombia as a volunteer with the Fellowship of Reconciliation. She will be spending time in the peace community of San Jose de Apartado to help discourage, by her presence, the abduction and killing of community members by illegal paramilitary groups. I fear for her well-being and I salute her courage.

The throne speech talks about reducing wait times in our hospitals. One way of ensuring that patients receive timely care is to target federal funding for long term senior care spaces. This would open up more acute beds in our hospitals, which would in turn decrease surgical wait times.

As members can see, there are many concrete and positive alternatives to cutting the GST by 1%.

Our rural communities are facing difficulties. We have heard over the past week what farmers are telling us. Unless there is some immediate help and a long term agricultural policy, the family farm, along with the thousands of towns and villages in rural Canada, will be a thing of the past. In my riding of British Columbia Southern Interior, our cattle industry needs some flexibility to be able to access locally owned and approved slaughter facilities. It is a disgrace that we allow Washington State to dump their apples in B.C. while our primary producers in the Okanagan are fighting to survive.

It is my hope that there will soon be an end to the softwood lumber dispute. I urge our government to demand an immediate return of the \$5 billion-plus which was literally stolen from our communities. I urge the Prime Minister to remind the U.S. President that this is not a way to treat our friends.

I am encouraged to see there will be a review of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. We in B.C. Southern Interior live in a pristine place. It is important that we preserve our wilderness areas and species that inhabit them, such as the mountain caribou.

Finally, the survival of our rural way of life depends in part on a fair and just federal infrastructure program. Our communities need continued assistance and more flexibility in deciding their local priorities. A common thread uniting the citizens from Manning Park to Kaslo, Salmo and New Denver is a desire to live in sustainable and prosperous rural communities.

I urge all members of all political parties to work together to truly represent the interests of rural Canada.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my congratulations on your new duties.

[*English*]

I want to thank the member for his speech and welcome him to the House of Commons, and also his colleague, who spoke earlier and who, like me, is a maritimer. It is nice to have a band of maritimers here even if we ended up having to come to Ottawa for what we consider gainful employment but what others would say is a little more dubious.

The member spoke about the question of child care, which we also support and which we advanced in the last Parliament, with funding for it negotiated with the provinces. We advanced an agreement for developing an early childhood program as well as assisting lower and moderate income families through tax breaks, through tax reductions and the increase in the tax exemption, both of which the Conservatives took a completely different tack on. Their tack in fact assists higher income earners, people who can afford having only one member of the family working outside the home with the other working at home. In this situation, only the lower income is taxed. If both family members are working at \$30,000 or \$40,000, they are fully taxed and there is very little revenue.

The same is true with the GST and low income families. Most of the expenditures of low income families are not taxable items, but if someone is earning \$100,000 plus, the GST reduction is a substantial rebate. It is fitting that the Conservatives would reduce the GST because, after all, it was their party that introduced it. Neither our party nor theirs would oppose that type of economic approach.

Perhaps the member could explain to me why his leader would have de facto supported the Conservatives in the last election, knowing exactly what their agenda was, knowing that these were the items they were promoting. The Conservatives were straightforward in saying that there would be a financial transfer to families with children under six, not considering that it still costs a lot of money for education, maintenance and care for children above six.

They were also straightforward in saying they would provide a slight reduction in the GST but that at the same time this would be paid for by an increase in tax exemptions and personal taxes for lower and moderate income families. Could he explain why his leader would de facto have supported that type of government?

• (1145)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, it is not that we have supported the government. First of all, I agree with the member with regard to the child care program. What we want is to have this program sustainable for many years, not just for one year. It is important to distinguish child care as opposed to babysitting. We believe there should be qualified professionals in the field to look after young people, especially to assist those single parent families and others who need this very worthwhile service.

As far as supporting the government is concerned, we must understand that the Liberals were in power for 12 years and those 12 years were 12 years of promises. They promised to do this and they promised other programs.

It is the Canadian people who decided this, not our party.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first off, allow me to congratulate you on your election and accession to the position of Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole House.

The Address

I would also congratulate my colleague who has just spoken. I would like to ask him a question. Quebec has established a day care system that has proven to be the best in Canada. The government is proposing to provide \$1,200 annually per child under six, that is, a preschool child. Quebec has created the best system, which costs it between \$1.2 billion and \$1.3 billion. If the current government proposal were adopted, Quebec would lose \$800 million.

Could my hon. colleague explain to the House his vision of the day care system he and his government would establish if they were in office? Does he see a Canada wide system or a system that would allow the provinces to decide themselves how the money would be distributed in the matter of day care centres?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question.

What can I say? We could use the Quebec model in the rest of Canada. That system works well. We could set up a similar system in Canada. It would be the best thing to do for our country.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a privilege and a pleasure to rise in the House today and speak to the throne speech.

I would like to advise you at the beginning of my 10 minutes that I will be splitting my time with the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park.

I would like to begin by thanking the constituents of Battlefords—Lloydminster for sending me back to this place to continue many of the arguments and debates we have been having for the past nine years I have been here, and for a couple of years before that when I served as a constituency coordinator for Elwin Hermanson, who went on the lead the Saskatchewan Party and of course has done great things in the province and will continue to do so.

It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to the throne speech, that document of the vision and the accountability we are bringing to the House. It is based on everything we campaigned on, on our five major planks. There was a lot of discussion by the Liberals and some of the media that there was a hidden agenda, but I am here to say there was no hidden agenda. Everything we said during the election campaign is underscored in the throne speech, in this document of focused vision, which would be the best way to describe it.

We are hearing a lot of nitpicking from the other side about how we are building on the great economic stability that the Liberals built up during their 13 years in power. The member for Don Valley East was going on earlier about that great economic period and so on, but agriculture did not benefit from that economic period. If anything, primary producers, the farmers and ranchers in this country, are in worse shape now than they were 13 years ago.

In those 13 years, we have not seen any sort of direction, vision or program stability that would speak to this issue. In the nine years I have been here, I have seen group after group come forward and say that this program does not address what they need and this program does not develop into what they thought it would, and then a real reticence about the fact that the federal government shows leadership in a lot of the agricultural files. The formula for the disaster in business risk is 60-40 with the provinces. There has been a lot of

discussion on that formula and I think that is a good thing. We need to discuss that and do a lot of work on the equalization formula as well, but those come in a little later on.

Having started with agriculture, let me drop back to the other five units in the throne speech. With regard to accountability, we campaigned hard on the lack of accountability and on the lack of measures to trigger an audit, whether it is for first nations bands, which themselves are calling for better and more timely audits, or others. This plan would allow the Auditor General to do that. Someone who does not have an axe to grind, so to speak, will be able to go in, have a look at those books, say what is going well and what is not, come back with an action plan, and give it to the department, saying, "Act on this. Let us see something change". I think that is a great thing.

I know that for a lot of the nine reserves and the urban component in my riding, with some 15% of the population in the riding being Cree, the rank and file are excited about this. When we talk to the chiefs and councils, and of course the national leaders, we hear them saying that they do not want this, that they do not want anyone looking over their shoulders. That is unfortunate, because this will actually bring in more stability. If they are looking to long term vision and some constructive steps to build a better relationship with the people in the constituency they represent, this is an excellent tool for them to take advantage of. I hope they will.

Through access to information, it is also going to allow folks to have greater input into the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Canadian Wheat Board. A lot of departments like that are arm's-length crown corporations that really have no accountability to the taxpayers who are asked to pony up and keep them alive at times, and of course in the case of the Wheat Board, the producers who support it and would like to have better access and more timely reports and so on. That is a whole other debate in and of itself.

Regarding tax cuts, tremendous discussions went on before we put forward our platform, Mr. Speaker, and I know you took part in that as well. Everyone seemed to realize that the GST cut would affect everyone. I hear a lot of naysayers from the Liberals and the NDP saying that it only helps the rich. Let me tell members something. Everyone in my riding, regardless of income, pays GST. It is a hidden tax. We pay for it at the gas pumps, in our rent, or in the payment we make on a house when we buy it. We pay it when we pay our power bill, our telephone bill or our heating bill. It is in there. Having the GST go down a point is going to be significant for everybody at every level, whether they rent or own, whether they are a senior or a high level income earner. It is all based on how it is going to be good for everyone.

The Liberals are saying their tax cuts were bigger than our tax cuts. I have tried to figure that out, but I cannot for the life of me figure out if those cuts actually even passed. That was part of the economic statement last fall, leading up to the election. They were all flying out, with \$750 million for farmers and so on, which we have delivered. We went ahead and did that, warts and all. We made sure that money to producers was expedited. They needed it this spring.

The Address

•(1150)

As for all these tax cuts the Liberals talk about that were part of their agenda and so on, I cannot for the life of me figure out where they went. Our GST cut is certainly going to be more beneficial to people than a pledge or a promise that was never really implemented.

We also are doing a lot of work on the criminal justice system. This is one of the issues that really dragged me into this place 10 ago and got me started in politics in a way that was much bigger than just handing out pamphlets and putting up signs. The firearms registry was the thing that drove me into this place.

We have been working diligently. We were never deterred from the idea that we were going to get rid of the long gun registry. It serves absolutely no purpose in the criminal justice system, other than to deflect what is now over \$2 billion away from real policing, real court work and real criminal justice systems to a system against duck hunters and farmers. It serves absolutely no purpose at all. We are working diligently to unwrap that horrendous package the Liberals put together. Some 132 orders in council have isolated and insulated the nub of the long gun registry. We are going to tear that sucker down. It is going to take time, but we are going to get there.

With regard to child care, there has been a lot of discussion here as to whether that \$1,200 per year is adequate. It is light years ahead of whatever was offered under the Liberals or any of the NDP provincial governments. They gave us zero: no dollars and no child care spaces. This \$1,200 speaks to \$100 a month per child under six so that parents can make the decision about whether they go to the institutionalized system or have Aunt Fannie do it. They would have the money to make those choices.

We think that is the right thing to do. It just makes common sense. People elected us because of this. They voted for change. They saw that change in our election platform. People said that the Liberals talked about this for 13 years. The NDP, just before the election, went on and on about how the Liberals had not done a thing about it and they were absolutely right in that instance. The Liberals did not do a thing.

What the Liberals were proposing was based on the Quebec model. They had agreements for one year out of five. We are going to honour that one year. The five year commitments that the Liberals talked about could and would cost some \$10 billion a year. Let us do the economics. They pledged \$5 billion for five years. That would not create anywhere near what is required. Our program creates 125,000 spaces over five years, plus that \$100 a month per child that is to go to the lowest income earner of the family. It is money that people are going to be able to do things with and they voted for us because of it.

The whole health care debate has been driven by everybody but people needing health care. We have a whole basis for health care in this country that is based on politics and administration, not on actual health care. People cannot get any work done without seeing three or four specialists; they have to run back and forth and do all these things. In rural Canada, that is compounded by the long distances we have to travel. In my riding, people can get in to see a doctor in our small town if they are lucky—if there is one left. Then they get referred into the larger community, and from there, into

Saskatoon or Regina or even Edmonton, outside the province, because that is where people have to go to have any kind of MRI or CAT scan or any of those types of things done. We are seeing people absorbing that travel cost. It is horrendous for them to have to travel those distances and of course absorb the overnight stay costs and all those types of things and still not be able to get the results they want.

We are looking at working with the people out there and with the parties in this House to better the quality of life for all Canadians coast to coast to coast on a myriad of issues. The five that we highlight in the throne speech merely tell Canadians that we are following through on the pledges and promises we made during the election.

I started by talking about agriculture. That is the biggest issue in my riding. I am here to tell the House that we are going to continue that fight. We are going to work with producers to come up with situations that are common sense, producer friendly and producer driven.

•(1155)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations in your new role. You are doing an excellent job.

I would also like to say that I am glad to see the member back. However, I was absolutely amazed that he would even mention the aboriginal people in his riding. I am glad that he has some and recognizes them, but I would love to know if any of them voted for him after the dismal record of this government in the last Parliament in its continual voting against land claims and, as the terrible situation of aboriginal people in Canada was gradually being lifted, that party also voted against the increased funds we put in for the programs for aboriginal people.

I want to know if, inside his caucus—certainly, behind closed doors is fine—he is going to fight for the maintenance of the Kelowna agreement and the residential schools agreement as they stand. They are two historic agreements. They were not written overnight. It took a lot of negotiating. It was very difficult and it took a long time to finally come to an agreement on something that was so historic and so heartfelt. There were tears at the residential school signing. It meant so much to heal that long rift in Canada. This cannot be undone. This cannot be tinkered with, not without great jeopardy.

I want to know if he is going to fight for these great initiatives that have so much support, I am sure, from the aboriginal people in his riding and the people across the country. They certainly will not solve all the problems, but they are historic. I want to know if this member will fight for keeping those agreements intact and keeping the \$5.1 billion that we have already paid for the Kelowna agreement and the \$2.2 billion for the residential schools agreement.

The Address

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, certainly there is a lot of work to be done on both the residential schools file and the Kelowna agreement. The devil is always in the details. That is always what we saw with the Liberals. They would have ad hoc meetings behind closed doors and do a lot of the political spin and so on. They have always had the leadership in their pockets. What I hear ordinary aboriginals say in my riding is, "What does this really come down to? What does this really mean to us?" They do not know and I cannot tell them that yet either because there are still a couple of court order hoops and hurdles to be followed through with on the residential file.

As for the Kelowna agreement, as I said before, the devil is in the details. We really do not know what all that encompasses and how long term that is going to be. I have always had a concern and the concern of most aboriginals in my riding is when is it going to be over and when will we finally see some resolution.

The Liberal government in its political wisdom went ahead with a consultation period on the residential schools. Eighty per cent of the money went to lawyers and consultants and 20% went to the so-called victims of the residential schools fiasco. We do not need to take any lessons from the former Liberal government on what to do about the aboriginal file. We will look at it case by case, detail by detail and move forward, not sit still or move backward like the Liberals did.

• (1200)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment.

I want to ask my colleague a question with regard to child care and poverty. It was noted that many provinces have not even signed onto the agreement. There does not seem to be genuine acknowledgement. The province of Manitoba, with an NDP government, has put substantial money toward child care spaces and also wants to progress with that file. That agreement was signed. The Manitoba government was very active in making sure that was a priority. It is something the provincial government wants to deliver in its province very significantly to affect the issue of child poverty.

A member in the House crossed the floor. He moved from the Liberals to the Conservatives. What happened is important to note. Under the Liberals, that individual, now the Minister of International Trade, had promised for years, and on two occasions specifically in front of committee, that he would bring forward a national auto policy, something the Liberal government never delivered.

Now that the Conservatives have the Minister for International Trade, and like his ideas, his background and thoughts, will they now finally deliver on a national auto policy, or will they abandon that and all the manufacturing jobs across this country?

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I have time to get through all of the member's questions.

On child care, certainly there is a great debate across this country as to who can best deliver and how it should be delivered. With respect to the Liberal program I think there was agreement by three provinces that actually signed on. The year is almost up. That was last year's—

An hon. member: They all signed on.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: I mean in the actual funding and how it was going to be done. They had agreements. It was supposed to be a five year program. They were talking about \$1 billion a year over five years. Anybody will say that was a drop in the bucket. That would not reverberate any more than the \$750 million to farmers did.

It is going to take a lot more than that to put in the institutionalized day care that the NDP is crying for. The NDP knows it cannot be done for the dollars that are out there. It would drive us back into deficits if we were to fund that to the tune of \$10 billion a year. I do not think it would be financially expedient for any government to follow through with the pie in the sky ideals that the Liberals set. We know that just cannot be done.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my first speech in this Parliament by acknowledging and thanking the wonderful people of Edmonton—Sherwood Park for sending me back here again. It is indeed an honour. I feel particularly privileged, but also I feel the burden of responsibility to represent them well.

I had the opportunity this past weekend to stand at the Sherwood Park Trade Fair. I do not know whether other members do things like that, but it was my 15th year that I have had a booth at the fair.

On Friday I was there but I was interrupted because I had to go to a funeral of a friend. I was standing at the booth for about six hours, and on Saturday it was close to 11 hours. My knees complained at the end of the day, but my brain and my heart got a lot because there were hundreds of people who came by. I hardly had a chance to sit down. They were telling me how happy they were that the Conservatives have formed the government. The main theme that I heard from them was that finally we have an end to the mismanagement of the money by the Liberals. That was a constant theme.

A number of people asked about the gun registry and how soon we would be able to scrap it. I told them that we have a minority government and on the parts of it that will require legislative approval we expect that the other parties will finally come to their senses and support some real measures in addressing the question of crime and not waste it, as our leader and the Prime Minister said, targeting duck hunters. They are not the ones who perform criminal acts. It is the criminals who do, and it is those very criminals of course who have access to guns and will not register them.

The main issue was the corruption that was unearthed by the independent Auditor General of Canada and also the independent Judge Gomery and the fact that under the previous administration money was literally stolen from Canadian taxpayers.

Consequently, those are the issues they had. At the end of two gruelling days of standing there, I felt elated because I listened to my constituents and they almost unanimously expressed great support and gratitude that we were now on this side of the House.

The Address

With it of course comes added responsibility, and I believe that I and my colleagues bear that honourably. We want to do what is best for our constituents, for our individual provinces and for our country as a whole.

I am very pleased that the throne speech addressed the major issues. Instead of making 85 promises and hoping to deliver on one or two of them, we focused on just five primary issues. They have been iterated a number of times here, so I will not repeat them individually. I will simply say they are the issues that resonate with Canadians. These are the things they want done. We are committed to do our very best to get those things through Parliament and have them enacted.

During the short time I have today, I would like to speak primarily about families and child care. It is no secret that over the years I have been a strong advocate for strong families. The members who were here before this Parliament and have heard me speak noticed when I was on the opposition side that whenever issues of the family came up, I made strong statements. I have always done that.

As a matter of fact, I am quite convinced that the viability, the strengths, the very character of our country is based not on all of the other issues which sometimes we look at, but rather on strong, vibrant families. In my view, both from my own experience as a youngster growing up, which now is a long time ago, and also in the raising of our own children, I realize more than ever the importance of a strong family bond.

• (1205)

I remember reading not very long ago that if a father wants to have the best influence on his children, the best thing he can do is to love their mother. I thought how significant that is, because it shows the basic unit of the family, the marriage of a man and a woman, and the children, and their care for the children.

I am very pleased that in our throne speech and in our election platform we were careful to put in measures that strengthen the family. I do not know whether I should give too many personal anecdotes; I think I will probably limit it to two or three.

We decided that when our children were born my wife would be a full time mom. I had a fairly above average paying job as a professional math instructor at NAIT, the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. With the high taxes and all of the expenses, we had difficulty making ends meet and so I took on the additional job of teaching night classes. Besides the additional income that I earned, I also enjoyed those adult night students who were there to further their careers.

I brought home a little extra income. This was many years ago. I remember saying that Tuesday nights I worked for Trudeau and Thursday nights I worked for my family because even back then, about half of our income went to taxes. It is very important that families be given a tax regime that will allow them to look after the needs of their families.

To a great extent I was an absentee father. I was also involved in volunteer work and worked two nights a week there and came home usually after the children were in bed. I am really grateful to my wife who did the major role of raising our children. I am so glad that she was there for them. She was there in the morning to send them off to

school. She was there with them before they ever went to school. She was there for them when they came home from school. I think it helped to add to the character building in our children's lives.

Then I think of our own children. Our daughter, Beverley, has two children, Dallas and Kayla. She, too, was a full time mom. Her husband is a farmer. Often the parenting went on in the truck while they were sitting waiting for the combine to bring another load of grain or wherever. There was a lot of good bonding time. It was an excellent opportunity for the parents to influence and to build character into the children.

Our son, Brent, and his wife, Susie, have three children, our wonderful grandchildren, Noah, Hannah and Micah. They are so beautiful. We just love all of five of them. That is why I mention their names here. I am so happy that Susie also is able to be a full time mom. But that is not without sacrifice. We must recognize that every family that makes that decision makes it at a considerable financial sacrifice. They forgo one income in order to do that but it is so valuable. I wish that more Canadians could do that.

I recognize there are some families where it simply is not possible. The economic demands are great. In far too many cases, there are single parents who have been left with the responsibility of raising their children and child care is needed. But I am absolutely adamant that it is the parents' decision as to what care they use.

After our children grew up, my wife took on the job of being a full time nanny for neighbours of ours. She was not a registered government sponsored day care but I can say that those children in the Schaufele residence got the absolute best personal care they could in the absence of their mother. She looked after them and we have grown to love that family as if it were our own. In fact, we have often said that we have become their surrogate grandparents, even though they have grandparents of their own.

The plan we have for child care is absolutely the best. I support it. I urge all members of the House to support the measures we are taking to strengthen families and to strengthen child care.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your new position.

[*English*]

The previous two speakers for the Conservative Party began with the warm and fuzzy topic of gun control and then got into secondary subjects such as family and how important it is. However since they chose to talk about the long gun registry, I personally take some offence as a Liberal, as a duck hunter and as an outdoorsman in always being castigated as the people who are not in favour of cracking down on crime and on the misuse of guns.

The Address

Under the heading, Tackling Crime, on page 6 of the brief document entitled the Speech from the Throne, which is what we are talking about here, there is no specific mention of getting rid of the long gun registry. Yes, it was not administered the way it was supposed to have been and there was waste. However measures were put into place to bring it under control and to bring it into the harmony that the police chiefs across this country were calling for. The harm guns can do is only mentioned two or three times.

If gun control was the priority of the two members who spoke in reply to the Speech from the Throne why was it not specifically in the Speech from the Throne?

• (1215)

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite asked why this or that is not in the throne speech. Our leader and our government chose to have a throne speech that was very direct and focused on the primary issues. When it comes to gun control and addressing the issues of crime, the gun registry is but one part of it. I think we ought to remember that.

With respect to the criminal use of guns, it is well recognized that criminals do not register their guns. I cannot imagine two guys on their way to rob a bank and Joe saying to Bill, “Hey, Bill, our guns aren't registered”. And Bill says, “Well, why don't we stop by at the police station and register them and then we'll carry on”. Let us give our head a shake. It will not happen.

When we address the issues of crime we need to ensure we have enough police on the streets and in service so they can find, arrest and charge the criminals. Then we need to enable our courts with proper laws, including minimum sentences, so that those who are accused and found guilty receive a penalty that is befitting the crime. That is the issue and that is why it was stated that way.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is about agriculture. We know that agriculture was not selected as one of the five priorities. This has created quite a bit of heat in terms of the farming community demonstrating on Parliament Hill.

In my area around Windsor, Ontario, Essex is one of the strongest agricultural producing communities in Canada. Agriculture is a significant issue. Farmers are looking at not planting this season because of the conditions and the terms that are there. On Friday in the debate in this chamber a number of Conservative members called agriculture the sixth priority.

Is the Prime Minister correct in terms of having five priorities or is it his colleagues who are correct in saying there are now six priorities? When will Canadians see the deliverance of that sixth priority in the form of actual programs that farmers can implement this year?

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, agriculture is a tremendously important issue. After almost 13 years of Liberal dithering on this file, farmers have struggled and suffered. There is no doubt that there has to be a major shift in the kinds of policies that we have affecting the agriculture and the agrifood community.

The member asked why agriculture was not in the throne speech. I would like to point out the fact that there is a whole paragraph on

agriculture in the throne speech, which is about 150 times as much as there was in the last throne speech delivered by the Liberals.

I think that under the Conservative government there will be a major shift and improvement for the agriculture community. I look forward to the fact that our new and energetic agriculture minister will actually deliver. We have already done that, as is known. The Liberals thrived on announcements. They would announce and announce and re-announce but never deliver. In our first few weeks of office our agriculture minister actually—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with the hon. member for St. Paul's.

I would like to begin today by thanking my constituents from Kings—Hants who have given me the honour and privilege of being their representative now through four elections.

[*Translation*]

I was elected for the first time in 1997. It has always been a great pleasure for me to represent the electors of Kings—Hants.

[*English*]

Coming from Kings—Hants, which is, by the way, one of the most beautiful ridings anywhere in this beautiful country, gives me a special concern particularly for environmental issues. I live in a little community called Cheverie on the shores of the Minas basin, where we have the highest tides in the world. Climate change is not an esoteric concern when one lives on the shores of the Bay of Fundy or the Minas basin in Nova Scotia.

The people of Kings—Hants and the people of Canada are justifiably concerned about the environment. What are Canadians to make of what has been the most environmentally unambitious throne speech in the history of Canada?

At a time when Canadians are united in their concern for action on the environment, this is a government that is silent, that lacks ambition and that lacks vision to build a cleaner, greener Canada. At a time when Canada's Minister of the Environment takes over as president of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the government has no plan to meet its commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. At a time when accountability and transparency are supposedly the hallmarks of the government's *modus operandi*, more than 100 federally funded climate change programs have been secretly eliminated.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Protecting the environment is a top priority for Canadians—usually one of their top three priorities. Our government responded to the priorities of Canadians by taking action to ensure a better future. Since 1999, the Liberal government had invested over \$10 billion to address the environmental priorities of Canadians.

*The Address**[English]*

What was among the first actions of the new government? It was to cut and destroy many of those actions, cutting hundreds of millions of dollars from climate change programs. Included in this radical amputation was the community-based one tonne challenge, a program which supported communities in their efforts to identify and address local climate challenges.

Less than a month ago, the environment minister said in a CBC interview that the one tonne challenge was a “really good example of the kinds of things that we want to focus on”. However one week ago, on the day that the Sierra Club is now calling “Black Friday”, she ended funding for groups across Canada that were engaged in the one tonne challenge. Three weeks ago she said that the one tonne challenge was the kind of idea that the government believed in and a week ago she cancelled the funding. There is no consistency with the government's efforts on the environment.

[Translation]

Our government adopted strategic measure to meet these objectives in the short and long terms. By balancing the need to protect the environment and the need to increase our productivity, we created a vision focussed on sustainable development. We consulted every level of government and our strategy for the future is reflected in the programs we developed.

[English]

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and provincial governments have been important partners with us. We worked with municipalities across Canada building green infrastructure through the \$675 million green municipal fund, a program created by the Liberal government in 2000. To date more than 450 projects have been approved with an investment of \$275 million leveraged to an additional \$1.8 billion.

Climate change is a major challenge. It requires all governments to work cooperatively with the private sector. The fact is that the Liberal government understood that the impact of global climate change would have significant impacts, not only on issues of the environment but in terms of issues of health care, in terms of issues of quality of life and on an ongoing basis the very principles that we value in Canada in terms of being in a country with one of the most pristine and beautiful environments anywhere in the world. Citizens who have made a difference in Canada and engaged with their governments could be making more of a difference. The one tonne challenge was important because we were engaging Canadians from coast to coast to coast with the efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Our government demonstrated leadership by greening government operations. As minister of public works, I reformed our federal fleet management to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Today 40% of the federal vehicle fleet operates on alternative fuels. This is not only important in terms of a reduction in greenhouse gases from a direct perspective, it is a strategic step in helping to stimulate demand for alternative fuel vehicles, alternative fuel infrastructure and associated green technologies, such as biofuels.

In taking a leadership role, our government was not only reducing its own emissions but actually helping to increase the options

available to Canadians for making sustainable development part of their ongoing life, part of their purchasing pattern and providing a solid platform for emissions reductions across the transportation sector, in fact building a market for these kinds of products.

Our record on greening government extends beyond fleet management to how we manage our buildings, how we use our purchasing power to actually create demand to actually go to market on an ongoing basis. In fact, in our building management we reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 24% and saved, at the same time, Canadians \$16 million. This was not only good economic policy in terms of what we were saving the taxpayer, it was good environmental policy. Environmental policy has to be integrated into economic policy on an ongoing basis.

● (1225)

[Translation]

As far as energy is concerned, our government expanded the potential market for renewable energy.

We proposed a minimum standard by which 5% of the energy used by the federal government must come from renewable sources.

[English]

We took action in the budget of 2005, a budget that the Sierra Club called the greenest budget in the history of Canada, to ensure that our government operations would be greened and we would play a leadership role with the private sector and other levels of government within Canada on that.

[Translation]

I believe that environmental policies must be used to create economic opportunities.

Canada could be the world leader in environmental technologies such as green energy. To do so, the government must invest in research and development. Generous tax credits must be implemented for investment in this area. With that approach we could attract the capital and the talent. This would give young people the opportunity to earn a living while being innovative.

In this vision, Canada would play a more important role in making the world greener.

[English]

Our leadership, internationally, is important. Canada has a history of respecting her international treaties. We have signed on to and support the principles of Kyoto. The fact is that it represents not only an environmental responsibility or an important leadership role in terms of multilateralism, it also represents an economic opportunity for us not only to respect our international treaties, to respect the Kyoto accord, to maintain within Canada the kinds of policies that we had implemented as a government previously, which could help us meet those targets, but to create economic opportunities within Canada in what will be the fastest growing area of the 21st century, and that is the area of environmental technologies, particularly on renewable and clean energy.

The Address

We have an opportunity to move ahead as a country, to embrace environmental technologies, to embrace the economic opportunities inherent in environmental technologies and renewable energy and to create economic opportunity out of environmental policy.

I would propose that the government needs to see environmental policy for what it is, not only in terms of its imperative and of building a cleaner, greener Canada, but also in terms of its opportunity of building the kind of economic opportunities where young Canadians can not only have an opportunity to make a living in Canada but can make a difference in the world.

I would propose: that the Minister of the Environment issue a clear and unequivocal statement regarding its priorities on sustainable development; that funding be restored to all climate change programs that have been cut by the government, including the one tonne challenge; that the government pledge to conduct an open and transparent decision making process when sustainable development programs are under review as opposed to cutting them by stealth; that the Minister of the Environment move forward on climate change by implementing strategies and programs announced in the April 2005 project green; that the government commit to maintaining and expanding sustainable development research capacity which enables Canadians, communities, public and private sector decision makers to make informed decisions; and that the government continues funding research and development and in fact expands it for clean technologies that can help create economic opportunity and build a cleaner, greener Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for speaking on the environment. It is a topic we will return to in the weeks to come, for it represents a national concern and an important issue for our future.

My colleague referred to black Friday. In response to that, I would like to point out the 13 black years under the Liberal government, in terms of environmental performance. I have before me an excerpt from a magazine published by Équiterre that states, “the increase in greenhouse gases in Canada now appears completely out of control, surpassing the 1990 levels by 24%”.

I understand my colleague's wish to speak on the environment. During the 13 years under the Liberal government, greenhouse gas emissions increased exponentially. What was the result? Environmental specialists suggested that precious time had been lost due to proposals for relatively costly and rather inefficient measures that produced no tangible, concrete results on a global scale.

The Speech from the Throne proposes measures aimed at reducing greenhouse gases. Of course, the throne speech does not contain 50 pages of such environmental measures, but it proposes concrete action, nonetheless. The time for discussion about the environment has passed and we must now take action.

My colleague spoke at length about the environment. Why does he have so much to say now when we have seen nothing concrete in this regard for the past 13 years?

• (1230)

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's question. In fact, it is very important to consider the challenges. In

the traditional economy, it was difficult to combine economic growth with reduced greenhouse gas emissions. It is possible to do so, but it is very difficult, with the growth of the oil industry in the traditional economy.

[English]

There is a disproportionate level of emissions produced by the natural resource sector, particularly in the oil and gas sector.

[Translation]

Most of our economic growth was in these sectors. Consequently, it is a challenge to reduce emissions and, at the same time, have economic growth in traditional sectors such as natural resources.

However, it is possible to have economic growth and reduce emissions for the future. This takes fundamental changes in our economy and our environmental policy. We put in place significant changes to reduce emissions.

Project Green will be a good approach, and I am confident that it will reduce emissions. However, the Conservative government has decided to cut funding for these programs.

In my opinion, this is dangerous for the environment and does not bode well for our future economy.

[English]

It is possible to have economic growth and at the same time reduce emissions if we have a plan. We put in place a plan that is being dismantled by the Conservative government. It does not believe in the idea that in reducing emissions, environmental policy can coexist with economic growth. The Conservatives are old thinking. What we did reflects new thinking, which is why the Sierra Club referred to our plan and our 2005 budget as the greenest budget in the history of Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we know, the Liberal Party set limits on emissions of greenhouse gases, namely CO₂. Permits will be issued, or at least penalties will be imposed for emissions. The Liberal Party set the cost of these emissions at \$15 per tonne. While we have guaranteed the industry that it will pay no more than \$15 per tonne of emissions, on the world market the cost is estimated at 47 euros or approximately \$70.

So if we want to promote greater awareness and lower emission levels, why did the Liberal Party cap the cost at \$15 rather than letting the market determine the cost?

• (1235)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): I very much appreciate the question from my colleague on this matter.

The Address

[English]

His question about the cost on a per tonne basis is an interesting one. The Conservative's plan to provide a transit pass benefit or a tax credit for public transit utilization is the most inefficient economic approach to this. In fact their plan reflects absolutely no positive approach in terms of cost benefit analysis if we look at the actual cost per tonne.

I would urge the member, if he wants to get into those arguments of how we use tax dollars to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on a per tonne basis, to look at his own party's plan which has been roundly recognized—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for St. Paul's.

[Translation]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the social development critic for my party, I am very pleased to stand today to respond to the throne speech.

[English]

First, I want to thank the truly engaged citizens of St. Paul's for sending me back to this place. It is truly humbling. The citizens of St. Paul's represent the best of Canadian democracy, a democracy between elections that insists upon two-way accountability between citizens and their elected representatives.

[Translation]

As a family doctor, I understand the importance of the social determinants of health. Proper management of such determinants as poverty, violence, housing, equity, training and particularly early childhood development, is the real solution for the sustainability of the health system and a key factor in our economy.

As a doctor, I am also obsessed with the importance of accountability of results for all government projects and programs.

[English]

Today we watched the first blow to the accountability of the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development and to the whole government when the minister acknowledged to the *Toronto Star* that the planned tax incentives for early learning and child care would not work. It did not work in Ontario or New Brunswick and it did not help in any of the communities, in terms of not for profit, to create one more space of early learning and child care.

It is quite clear the government has no plan, not one more child care space. This is going to be the real accountability for the government. It will be the real results that we will be watching. We need policies that are based on evidence, not ideology. The tax system cannot fix everything. As my friend the hon. member for Kings—Hants and I are often known to say H.L. Mencken's quote, "For every complex human problem there is a neat and simple answer that is wrong...". Unfortunately, crime will not be fixed by more cops and the tax system will not fix all the problems. We cannot go backward on early learning and child care just because of an ideology.

In 1981 when my older son Jack was born, I had been in practice as a family physician for over five years. I had delivered hundreds of

babies, but as a mother I was a total rookie. I was insecure and highly conscious of how much I did not know. My husband and I eagerly sought the advice of more experienced parents, early childhood educators, public health professionals and both sets of grandparents, who, happily, lived close by.

If there is one thing I am thankful for, and there is certainly more than one, it is that I was surrounded by people and resources who could help us with this monumental responsibility, that is parenthood. I was lucky and I knew it. It is the toughest job any of us have ever done.

Many of my patients were very much alone as they tried to raise their children. Parents were far away, there was no partner, they were living on social assistance, hoping for a better future for their children, a better neighbourhood, a backyard instead of a balcony. They thought about going back to school or about getting jobs, but there were barriers, the biggest one being the lack of affordable quality child care.

Without exaggeration, in my 20 years as a family doctor not one week went by that I did not hear mothers or fathers expressing anxiety about who was looking after their children or their ability to find quality child care that they could afford. Now we have wait lists that demonstrate my anecdotal evidence for the thousands of families whose children are on those wait lists now. That is why I believe the Speech from the Throne should have confirmed the early learning child care agreement signed by each of the provinces and demand that the Conservative government stand by those agreements as well. It really does take a village to raise a child.

Critics of the former Liberal government's program have attempted to turn the debate into a question of whether parents or paid professionals are better at raising children. This is a gross oversimplification of the issue, misses the mark and ill-serves Canadians. We acknowledge that staying at home is a choice that must be honoured and respected.

What the government does not understand or chooses to ignore is that all families, urban or rural, single or double income, one parent or two, day job or shift work, can benefit from the ready availability of a broad range of quality care and early learning services, such as prenatal classes, parent-child drop-ins, licensed child care, early learning activities and after school programs. These services can make the lives of parents easier and ensure that they can make the choices that are right for their families, while ensuring the best possible start in life for their children.

However, one cannot choose what does not exist. Too many of these services are unavailable to meet the needs of those who want them and where they are available, the cost is often prohibitive. Stephen Harper, the Prime Minister, and the government is offering—

The Address

•(1240)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Since the hon. member is experienced, she will know that we do not refer to other hon. members by their name but by their title or riding.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, the government is offering \$100 a month while the cost of full time child care can reach \$90 a day. A few more dollars in people's pockets does nothing to create new spaces. This is not a choice; it is only an illusion of choice.

Meanwhile, the move to cancel the agreement that the provinces negotiated in good faith and signed with the Government of Canada is already taking choices away from Canadians. There will be no choice for the single mother who thinks she is going back to school this fall if the spaces that were going to be created are not.

The waiting lists are just getting longer and longer. There will be no choice for the child care worker in Alberta to attend a course in order to earn an early child care educator certificate if the jobs are not there after she earns it. There will be no choice for the Saskatchewan nurse who decides to stay home until her child is in school if the proposed program for all four year olds in that province is cancelled. That nurse will not be in the workforce this fall.

That is the real, personal, and immediate impact on Canadians, economic and social, as a result of the cancellation of the early learning and child care agreement. It is long term social and economic costs. We know that if we do not invest in our children, we pay dearly down the road in health care costs, special education and corrections. When parents who need help do not get it, we all lose. We lose money.

For every public dollar we invest in preschool children, we save \$2 later. We save \$7 later for the children from our most vulnerable families in corrections, special education, and mental health. We lose when at risk children grow up to become dangerous to themselves and to society.

I am not alone. The majority of Canadians want this program. All 10 provincial governments have made their choice as demonstrated through agreements they have signed. Parents and advocacy groups have been clear.

In January nearly 63% of Canadians voted for a party that supports a national system of early learning and child care. These parents know that such a program will give all of our children the opportunity to thrive while giving them as individuals the peace of mind that they need to be full participants in the workforce if they so choose.

[*Translation*]

Almost all Canadians are aware of the importance of child care services in early childhood development. Ninety-four per cent believe that the first six years of life are the most important for brain development. Eighty-nine per cent believe that poor child care services hinder development regardless of family history. Seventy-nine per cent feel that well-trained child care workers provide better service.

Child care services have overcome significant obstacles in the public eye. Two-thirds of the population now feel that these services

foster child development. Only 17% perceive them as "child-minding" services.

Child care services are also viewed as an essential service.

[*English*]

We are now paying horribly in Toronto for the ideologically driven cuts that Mike Harris made to homework clubs and family counselling. That has resulted in a problem with guns and gangs. Those kids felt, after joining a gang, that it was the first time they ever belonged. The first time they had ever been told they were good at something was when they were found to be good at shoplifting.

I have talked to those kids. They know that had there been a homework club, had there been family counselling, and had there been the kinds of interventions in the community, their lives would have been very different. I believe the government must stick to the facts and must do what is evidence based. Trying to pit parents against child care workers as though it is either/or, is absolutely unacceptable.

I encourage the minister, the Prime Minister and the entire caucus to go to an early learning centre and talk to the moms and dads there who want more resources like that for their families. Every day they are grateful and every day they want the government to do the right thing and honour the agreements. This government will be accountable for the results, socially and economically, the number of child care spaces, and the readiness to learn measurements as the children hit school.

•(1245)

[*Translation*]

Cancelling agreements with the provinces has major social and economic consequences.

[*English*]

I want the government to be put on notice that we are watching for the results.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for her vigorous defence of children in Canada who are in day care. I think we can all agree and come to a consensus that children are among the most vulnerable of individuals in our society.

However, the member may not be aware of the fact that only five days ago, on April 5, Statistics Canada issued a report highlighting a number of surprising statistics. First, only 16.2% of Canadian children between the ages of six months to five years are enrolled in day care centres and second, Canadian parents, given the choice, prefer other forms of child care by a margin of 4.5 to 1.

The Liberal one size fits all solution does not work for most Canadians. There is an even more astounding study that was completed by the University of Guelph in 2000 that showed that nationally 54% of day care centres report having vacancies with 30% reporting vacancies in excess of 10%. Given these statistics, I have a question for the member. Why is her party intent on preserving vacant day care spaces when the government has a plan which allows for parental choice, pays \$1,200 per year, per child under six, and creates 125,000 day care spaces that will actually be full?

The Address

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I think the member has used some liberty in interpreting the Statistics Canada results in regard to the idea that people would prefer a choice which is not a choice for them.

The fact that some of the people have been unable to find affordable child care spaces has meant they have had to choose a different family kind of approach for their children. According to that same report, 54% of children are in some form of child care. The problem is that the parents are not comfortable with the quality of the choices they have made because of the lack of choices in terms of licensed spaces where they know the quality of the people looking after those children.

I am appalled that in Toronto we actually end up with companies selling spyware in teddy bears, so that people actually know what is happening to their child during the day. If we had more licensed spaces that were actually dealt with by quality people, those people would be able to relax and not worry what happens to those children. This is of severe economic and social consequence to both the parents and children.

It is extraordinarily ridiculous for the member to suggest that there is an oversupply of child care spaces in the country. There are wait lists. That is not what Statistics Canada said. The member has misinterpreted the results. The results are there because the choices were not there for those parents or they could not afford—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): We will now revert to questions and comments. The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

• (1250)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to let the member know that we certainly share her concern where child care is concerned.

The NDP caucus has a passion for child care that was shown very clearly in the last Parliament when we worked so hard to get a national child care program that was framed in legislation, committed to a not for profit delivery system that would be available to every family across the country.

I would like to ask the member though, why did it take her party 13 years to get to what Tom Axworthy referred to as a death bed repentance on child care? Why should we believe that the passion that we hear from the member now is any more real than the words that we heard from the Liberal Party and caucus over the last 13 years in the House?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, as the House will recall, the original commitment of the Liberal government had presumed that there would be a partnership with the provinces. While Mike Harris was in Ontario, there was no possible partnership with Ontario and therefore it made the whole program grind to a halt.

As soon as Prime Minister Martin became the prime minister, our platform became clear that we would do this in a unilateral way by putting \$5 billion on the table. We were then able to immediately find partnerships with all 10 provinces. All signed on to this historic agreement but with the flexibility they wanted, such as finding a small centre for francophone families in an anglophone town or finding small centres for children with disabilities. This agreement enabled Alberta to use the money for education of early childhood

workers and for Saskatchewan to fund a universal program for four year olds. That is what the effect of the 10 deals has been.

I believe that is the reason the government must honour these agreements because it shows the best of this country in terms of the flexibility that we have shown to each of the provinces.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Saint-Lambert.

Because this is the first time I have spoken in the House since the election on January 23 of this year, you will permit me to thank the people of the riding of Joliette. For the third time, the voters have again expressed their confidence in me. I will always be grateful to them for this. I can assure them that I will do everything in my power to represent the interests of the region of Lanaudière and Joliette, and the interests of Quebec.

I will now address my remarks to the Speech from the Throne. I would like to come back to the meaning of the Bloc Québécois vote on that speech. I think that we have to be careful not to interpret it incorrectly. I have on occasion heard some rather loony interpretations of the Bloc Québécois' support from representatives of the new government.

The Speech from the Throne seems acceptable to us, essentially because of three factors. First—this is probably the clearest thing in the speech—the present Prime Minister, unlike the Prime Minister in the former Liberal government, has recognized that he is the leader of a minority government. He had no choice but to do so, first because of the reality of the House, in which his government does not have a majority of the seats, but also because of the wishes of the people. In Quebec, for example, 70% of the people who voted did not vote for the Conservative Party. The great majority of them voted for the Bloc Québécois. The fact that the Prime Minister has recognized this is, in our opinion, an indication of openness to the opposition, and also to the democratic choice that Canadians and Quebecers made on January 23.

Second, because the Prime Minister has recognized that he is the leader of a minority government and that he needs the opposition in order to govern, he has obviously included some of the opposition's concerns in the Speech from the Throne. I will identify some that the Bloc Québécois has been expressing in this House for many years.

The first one that comes to mind is the fiscal imbalance. The former government and the former Prime Minister created quite a dramatic moment for us all when, a few hours after the Speech from the Throne, they had to give in to the opposition parties. Those parties were calling for logical amendments to the throne speech, including an amendment to recognize the fiscal imbalance. We reached a compromise because the Bloc Québécois is, first and foremost, a constructive and responsible opposition party. The drama concluded with finely tuned wording stating that the government recognized the existence of financial pressures some call the “fiscal imbalance”.

The Address

At no time during the last term or during the election campaign were the Liberals able to acknowledge this. At only one point during the debate did the member for LaSalle—Émard let slip the words “fiscal imbalance”, but he pulled himself together immediately.

Simply acknowledging the fiscal imbalance in the Speech from the Throne is proof that this government is more willing to address the issue. However, I must note that the wording used—fiscal arrangements—allows the government to buy time. This does not fool us at all. As my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot stated this week, it is clear that the fiscal imbalance cannot be corrected without transferring tax points or GST revenues to the provinces. The Speech from the Throne could have mentioned this measure, which would not require extensive study given that the subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Finance already made very similar recommendations.

Recognition of the special cultural responsibilities of the Quebec government is also a good sign. Giving Quebec a seat at UNESCO, like it has as a member of the Francophonie, shows a willingness to recognize the distinct nature of Quebec culture. Of course, this does not go far enough. The government should also recognize the national character of Quebec culture and the existence of many nations within the Canadian political sphere, including Quebec and Acadia, first nations, and of course, Canadians. The government is taking steps toward this, but they are just baby steps.

In the Speech from the Throne, the government backed away from its campaign promises. I will not go on at length about this, as I am sure my colleague from Saint-Lambert can do a better and more detailed job of it than I. All the same, this is a beginning.

• (1255)

There is room for cooperation. It may be possible to find avenues for ensuring that Quebec has access to the international stage not only in culture and education, but also in all of its fields of jurisdiction. The Bloc Québécois will be working on this in the weeks and months ahead and, I hope, over the coming year.

The third element among the Bloc’s concerns has to do with the international treaties that will be submitted when they are important. We realize that many treaties are signed by Canada and its partners. However, some are more important than others. In the past, in fact, the former government and former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien felt it important to submit the Kyoto protocol to the vote of this chamber.

We are told that this procedure will be applied more often. The Bloc Québécois warmly welcomes this new openness. You will remember that our colleague, the hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, had tabled a bill in this chamber precisely to this effect and which was defeated by a lack of support from the Liberals. Now that they are in opposition, we can only hope that their behaviour will be governed by common sense again.

First, the Prime Minister acknowledged that he is leading a minority government. Next, he incorporated the opposition’s concerns in the throne speech, in particular certain concerns of the Bloc Québécois. Finally, the third element is the inclusion of the subamendment tabled in this House by the Bloc. That subamendment asked the House to recognize there was no reason for the lack

of a strategy to help older workers who lose their jobs. And yet, this is a reality.

Again this week, in my riding, 50 persons unfortunately were laid off because of the competition from China. Many of those people are over age 55 and will have difficulty finding other employment.

The Bloc Québécois believes it is important to help out older workers who lose their jobs. Among other things, this strategy should provide for income support measures or avoid a decrease in anticipated early learning and child care spaces in Canada

These three elements make the Speech from the Throne acceptable to the Bloc Québécois. But the speech is still extremely vague as to how the government intends to give tangible form to this new openness. As we have indicated, on issue after issue, the Bloc Québécois will be exerting the necessary pressure to come up with results that meet the concerns and needs of Quebec and Quebecers.

Some issues, however, get no mention whatsoever in the throne speech. I have to point that out. As concerns what is going on in my riding of Joliette, for example, there has been no mention of reopening the RCMP detachments. As we know, the detachment in Saint-Charles-Borromée, in Lanaudière, was closed by the RCMP as were nine other detachments.

In this region, as my colleague from Repentigny will testify, there is a huge problem of squatting where farmland is used for the illegal production of marijuana. Since the RCMP closed its detachment in Joliette, we have noticed a significant increase in the production and trafficking of marijuana and other illegal drugs, especially around schools. Parents are concerned, educators are concerned and elected representatives are concerned. They are all calling for the reopening of the detachment at Saint-Charles-Borromée. Obviously, what goes for the Lanaudière region goes for the other regions of Quebec as well.

The first nations were also given lip service. The federal government must assume its responsibilities in the day to day matters of the first nations. In my region, Lanaudière, there is a major safety issue. Over 40 people have died in recent years on an extremely dangerous stretch of road. Together the federal government and the provincial government have a responsibility to make the road between Saint-Michel-des-Saints and Manouane safer.

In conclusion, I will mention two other issues. One is a firm commitment to make no concessions at the WTO on supply management and the other is an immediate emergency plan to help the softwood lumber sector, where businesses are going into bankruptcy one after the other. In recent years, there have been huge job losses in this sector. In the last Parliament, the Conservatives supported the Bloc in this regard.

We have a lot of work ahead of us. We will work constructively to come up with solutions in response to the concerns of Canadians and Quebecers.

The Address

•(1300)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a valid point. So why does he not agree with the journalist, André Pratte, who admitted that a fiscal imbalance may have existed in the past, but stated that the Liberal government had dealt with it through new health care and day care accords, and new accords with municipal governments?

If a fiscal imbalance existed in the past, it is now clear to everyone, including André Pratte, that it no longer exists because our government, the Liberal government, dealt with it.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his comments. I would like to remind him that, fortunately, his party is no longer in power. We may now have the opportunity to find solutions to the fiscal imbalance.

I must call attention to this stubborn refusal to acknowledge the existence of a fiscal imbalance. Only the Liberal Party, and perhaps André Pratte, refuse to recognize its existence throughout Canada. I could quote some statistics for him.

I would remind the hon. member that the health care accord constituted investments that reduced the fiscal imbalance by only \$800 million. However, the former finance minister went ahead with a unilateral reform of equalization, which meant a tremendous financial loss for Quebec. The shortfall in Quebec still totals at least \$2.5 billion annually.

We could do so much more with that money. We want to sort out the fiscal imbalance so that we can strengthen Quebec's position.

Once Quebecers are ready to assume their sovereignty, the transition will be easier.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, perhaps he more than anyone, being from the Bloc Québécois, would agree with me that it was the culture of secrecy among the Liberals that allowed corruption to flourish, especially in their operations of the sponsorship scandal in Quebec. Even though the Speech from the Throne spoke a great deal about accountability and transparency, in actual fact the Conservative government has pulled the access to information reform components out of its accountability act.

How would the member react, as a member of Parliament from Quebec, to this idea that access to information laws will not be part of the accountability act? They will be relegated to a committee where they will probably die a natural death and the culture of secrecy will continue.

•(1305)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question, as it will allow me to complete my allotted 10 minutes. We are sometimes unable to say everything we would like in the short time we have.

I would remind my colleague that the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie stated that our party wants the Access to Information Act to be strengthened and the government to demonstrate real accountability.

The Prime Minister's attitude toward the media during his first few weeks in office was disturbing, to say the least. He tried to avoid the press. In my opinion, this is out of step with the exercise in transparency that he has invited us to take part in and that the Bloc Québécois will play a constructive role in. The hon. member is quite right: we have reason to be concerned.

As I mentioned, we have a minority government. I hope that the opposition parties will take common stands. I know that my colleague from Repentigny will work to make sure that we truly achieve the accountability and transparency that are needed to strengthen democracy.

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in speaking today I would first of all like to reiterate my thanks to the constituents of my riding of Saint-Lambert who re-elected me. I will do my very best on their behalf.

Many of my constituents are concerned about the future of culture in Quebec and in Canada under a Conservative government. Some of them even believe that the term "culture" is not part of the Conservative vocabulary owing to the absence of any significant vision for culture in the throne speech. I would like to believe that this is a misunderstanding.

At this time I must point out the importance of culture. What is culture? It is that which enables humankind to create a framework for itself and for its development. It helps us to think for ourselves. It enables us to understand the world and to contribute to changing it for the better.

In Quebec, many of us believe that culture is key to having a sense of belonging to a community. It represents the essential fibre of a people, influencing its thoughts, words, actions and daily life and enabling the development of individual members of the community. For Quebec culture, this reality is intertwined with the exceptional need to affirm itself and to encourage the expression of its originality in North America.

Pursuing this affirmation, modernity and international influence is, for the only francophone state in the Americas, both a major cultural challenge and a top collective choice. Cultural Quebec is ready for sovereignty. As an exceptionally creative society, in a context of globalization and the burst of new technologies, it is important from now on for us to consider the challenges of communications and telecommunications, of creating and experiencing the arts, of accessing public institutions, cultural industries and heritage.

One of the main duties of the Bloc Québécois is to defend this reality to the Conservative government, which threatens to destroy any chance of a normal existence. In light of the Speech from the Throne, we anticipate the upcoming Conservative budget to be completely out of touch.

Rabelais said, "Science without a conscience will lead to the destruction of the soul". Is the end of culture in Quebec and Canada nigh? With the Conservative government, that is the question.

The Address

Is the Conservative government against culture? Is the Conservative government against the arts? Is the Conservative government against artists and artisans? Is the Conservative government against renewal?

Silence on the issue of culture—I repeat—leads us to anticipate a slow death of culture by destruction of the arts, artists, the next generation in Quebec, of Quebec's identity, by the liquidation of our cultural sovereignty. This destruction will strike a major blow to Quebec's humanist and progressive culture, which has resisted standardization and cultural uniformity and which, during the Quiet Revolution, became formal policy, in the public service in particular. Public service and progressive culture are inextricably linked.

• (1310)

Would the silence concerning culture in the Speech from the Throne be hiding rather the temptation of a massive intrusion by the private sector, with its alienating financial power, into arts and culture?

Are we going to witness the dismantling of the museums? Are we going to witness the end of the transmission of knowledge in schools? Are we headed towards U.S.-style homogenization? Will we eventually undergo the unilateral, impoverishing ideological marking of content in the publishing media? Are we going to witness the accelerated deterioration of our public television and radio services, followed fatally by privatizations and moronic ratings races to sell available brain time to consumerism?

Life teaches us. To consume is to be consumed, but to cultivate is to create, to sow in the hope of reaping, to protect in order to receive.

A society makes its mark in history and in the hearts of the living only with its culture.

So, I beg you, support arts and culture; do not destroy them.

If by chance they do so, we would be curious to know one last thing first. Could it be the orchestration of the WTO directives devoid of any reference to the common good by being weaned on neo-liberalism that will inspire the destruction of our arts and culture? The question is relevant, since this type of destruction is already taking place symphonically in countries with neo-liberal government ideologies.

Quebec is not asleep. An infraspectacular resistance is building. The political maturity of the people of Quebec is reinforced in proportion to the predictable assaults of challenges to what makes the common good. It will withstand this civilized-seeming barbarity.

We will stand firm for culture!

In closing, here is a quotation from André Malraux, who said it in 1968.

Culture is what provides a foundation for man—I would add woman—when he no longer has the foundation of God.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for what he had to say about culture.

Our new road map does talk about culture. I would like to remind my colleague that we have a culture of accountability here in Ottawa. In my view, the highest priority of this Speech from the Throne was

to re-establish confidence in our members of Parliament and elected officials and the confidence of people in their government.

This culture of accountability can be seen particularly in the fact that the throne speech was not a laundry list of priorities that head off in all directions but never reach any of their goals. I would like to reassure my colleague. Culture is important for Canadian and Quebec society. We know how much the great federal institutions have done to support and sustain French, English and Quebec culture.

Let us take, for example, the role played by the CBC. Again last night, there were some broadcasts that had very high ratings, which reached large audiences and helped specifically to advance culture.

In his address, my colleague covered a lot of points. But I did not hear any specific recommendations or suggestions regarding measures that could be included in a budget to support culture and continue doing so through federal institutions.

If he has some specific suggestions, therefore, I would encourage him to let us know. I would also like to know if, when a budget is introduced by our government in the course of our work in the House and there are measures to support culture, will my colleague be in favour of them?

• (1315)

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Speaker, the very first basic recommendation is to have a cultural policy vision. We were surprised in the throne speech at the lack of any sign of a cultural policy at all. That is the starting point.

Recently I questioned the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Status of Women in this House, to highlight the idea advocated by the Bloc Québécois for almost four years now of increasing the Canada Council's budget from \$151 million to \$300 million. This is a request that keeps coming up and that is made in Quebec and the rest of Canada for the sole purpose of enabling more than half of our artists and craftspeople to have at least a decent standard of living.

The government may pride itself on being an international leader in cultural diversity and agree to sign and ratify conventions on diversity, but it must to look to its own house to see whether enough has been done to support culture through supporting creators, writers and craftspeople. It appears that this work has not been done.

Successive governments as well as this one—I would not want to prejudice; I will wait to see the facts—have not responded favourably to the expectations of the cultural community. If there was any hint in the Speech from the Throne of responding positively to the request from Canada and Quebec about the Canada Council budget, I think that someone would have mentioned it. This absence is of great concern to us, and that is why I spoke out today.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his remarks.

The Address

Is he, like me, afraid that the present government will act on remarks it has made in the past about privatizing the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation? Does he think that it could abolish certain agencies, such as Telefilm Canada? Does he think that it could refuse to increase funding to the Canada Council, which needs a bigger increase and stable funding over several years in order to carry out projects throughout Canada?

Canadian Heritage was asked to increase funding to museums. We know the state of museums across the country. This investment is vital if we are to protect our heritage and our culture from sea to sea.

Does the hon. member fear as I do that, as with day care, tax credits are being proposed as a sort of panacea? The Fox network in Canada can produce all the films they want in Canada without having to draw on individual or corporate investment through the government.

Does my hon. colleague share my concerns?

• (1320)

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I had put a lot of hope in the former Canadian Heritage minister, who had vision.

Unfortunately, after 13 years of dickerings, few strong signals were sent to reassure the cultural community. We are talking today about the Conservative government. Clearly the lack of any significant reference in the throne speech is worrisome.

We have heard nothing about changes in the rules regarding foreign ownership. Whoever has control over creation and distribution will have control over content, hence—and I am looking down the road as I say this and not making any accusations—the possibility of consciously or unconsciously selling out cultural sovereignty. It is fundamental.

We have concerns with regard to all the points the member mentioned, which, unfortunately, his government did not defend, as we had hoped it would.

On this matter, the present government worries me more.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Wetaskiwin.

It gives me great pleasure to rise on this occasion as a member of the new Conservative government in Ottawa. The people of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke have my sincere gratitude for giving me the honour and the privilege of being their representative in the 39th Parliament of Canada. Now that the Conservative Party is the government of our nation, I pledge that I will not forget the people who made this possible. They can be assured that I will continue to fight for the issues they tell me are important. I am their servant.

There are many, many individuals to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude for the confidence they placed in me, for their hard work and the selfless hours they put in, to build on the winning streak that has marked the re-emergence of democracy in Canada. The Ottawa Valley became the eastern beachhead of democracy in 2000 and marked the beginning of change as together we entered the 21st

century. I extend my heartfelt thanks to our entire campaign team and to the many hundreds of other volunteers who demonstrated what a truly grassroots campaign Ottawa Valley style is really all about.

If anything demonstrates the difference between the new Conservative government and the old regime, it is in the treatment of families and children. During the recent federal election I campaigned on the promise to support parents' child care choices through direct assistance and by creating more day care spaces in the workplace. Anticipating a July 1 start, our plan would see every family with a child under the age of six receive an annual child benefit of \$1,200 per child to choose the day care arrangements that best suit their needs. Our plan gives choice to parents to make their own decisions about their family in a way that best suits their needs.

What is not clear is whether or not the Liberal Party of Ontario plans to claw back this child care allowance the way it claws back the national child benefit from the neediest children in our province, those whose parents are on social assistance.

The Liberal Party oversaw a deal in 1997 which resulted in the clawback of the national child benefit supplement from the pockets of some of our neediest children. As a new program in 1997 to assist Canadian families with children, it replaced what many Canadians called the baby bonus. It was introduced as the Canada child tax benefit, the CCTB. It included a basic benefit and a supplement, the national child benefit supplement, the NCBS.

The NCBS program was supposed to reduce poverty among low income families with children. Negotiations between the federal and provincial governments around the implementation of the NCBS resulted in most provinces, Ontario included, deducting the NCBS amount from the benefits received by families who were on social assistance. This is what is commonly known as the NCBS clawback. Many provinces justify the clawback on the basis of fiscal imbalance.

In my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, social programs such as housing, welfare and child care have been downloaded to the second tier municipality, which in our case is the county, by the province without the funds and little say in the rules to run these programs. I note that in the county of Renfrew some of the 80¢ dollars that are provided by the province for child care were returned unused. Out of every dollar the province of Ontario received from the federal government, it was taking a 20% cut with the expectation that the 20% would be squeezed out of parents already overtaxed through their local rate paying from a property tax base that is already stretched to the maximum.

• (1325)

The net effect of the child care program being pushed by the opposition would see increases in property taxes facing taxpayers, particularly those on fixed incomes and forcing them out of their homes. It would make the dream of home ownership unaffordable to millions of Canadians who would not be able to afford a mortgage and crippling high property taxes.

The Address

Both parents are forced to pay household debts and work outside the home. This in turn drives up the need for even more day care which in turn raises taxes. This is a vicious cycle that conveniently forgets the people whom this discussion is all about, the children.

It has been recognized, even by the defeated Liberals, that the problem of allocating billions and billions of dollars for a day care program with no control on how that money is eventually spent is the greatest weakness in the top down approach to government programs. So much for providing benefits directly to the children. The drive to provide Soviet style institutionalized day care is being pushed from the top down, not the other way around that has been suggested by the opponents of giving parents choice in child care.

I mention this specific example to illustrate that for the previous 13 years, Canadians had been saddled with an interventionist government that without a doubt has been anti-family. The worldwide trend away from Soviet style institutionalized day care has been very pronounced in those countries that were formerly part of the old Soviet empire and are now democracies. Our plan to provide benefits directly to families is in tune with the experience of other democratic countries.

On a positive note, our new Prime Minister has recognized the fiscal imbalance as a national concern. The current Ontario government campaigned on the promise to stop the clawback, a promise it promptly forgot once it became elected. While I am encouraged by the support of the provincial NDP in Ontario to defend the \$1,200 per child benefit for children under six, I look forward to the fourth party in the House making a similar declaration of support. Even child poverty activists in their own party acknowledge that the best way to help families in modest circumstances is to provide direct assistance, not another government program filtered through many fingers with little time left at the end of the day for the supposed intended recipients.

Canadians are paying attention to this debate about choice in child care. Carolee Slote from Pembroke called to ask me to tell our new Prime Minister and all members of Parliament to "stay the course" on our campaign pledge on child care. Carolee asked me to give this message, "I am a stay at home mom. My children are just as important as the children of parents who work outside the home". That message is one I have been hearing from my constituents on a continual and regular basis.

This weekend past, community leader Del O'Brien stated that it could not be emphasized enough how the Conservative child care plan will help children in rural areas, whereas the other did not. He is pleased overall to see how rural Canada is finally receiving the attention it deserves under the new Conservative government.

Our country has many resources, but none are more precious than our children. They represent the hopes and the dreams of families, communities and the entire nation. They are our future. I am pleased to be a member of a government that cares about supporting our most vulnerable members of society.

• (1330)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member is taking good care of my mother who lives in her riding.

I have three questions for the member.

I am delighted she brought up the national child benefit, which we brought in, and which is said to be the greatest social program since medicare. We gave parents the choice to stay at home and would have given a larger amount to parents than the new Conservative plan.

I am glad she mentioned the clawback. Her party is the last party in the House to come onside and agree that the clawback on poor people is bad. What is her party going to do to stop that clawback? What is her party going to do to stop the clawback on its own program because it is taxable and people will not get the \$1,200?

Finally, she is giving the choice to a mother to support her family by going to work and maybe making \$80 or \$100 a day or choosing to stay home and get \$2 a day from her party's program. If she were a mother at home, how would she spend that \$2 a day?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the clawback is not a federal clawback. It is a provincial clawback. I know that the Conservatives in Ontario are working very hard to stop that clawback.

The choice the member opposite mentioned between x number of dollars a day versus \$2 a day is not the choice we are discussing. We are discussing a choice as to whether or not a parent can stay at home and provide the enriching and nourishing atmosphere that a mother or father or other relative can provide in caring for the child in the home versus having to take the child outside the home.

When parents stay home to take care of their children, they are not doing so with the expectation of receiving money for it. They are making the sacrifice. The Government of Canada recognizes that their children are important and therefore provides a benefit in the amount of \$1,200 per year per child age six and under.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about \$1,200 less tax.

I was listening to the member's remarks in English because I am trying to practise my English, and I want to be sure I misunderstood. I would therefore ask my colleague to explain again what she meant when she said that the Conservative government wants to give families a real choice because it does not want Canada to have a system like the one in the former Soviet Union, where child care was state-run.

Does my colleague think that the child care system in Quebec can be likened to the system in the former USSR? Is that her government's position?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the choice in child care is a choice between having a parent or a family member stay at home versus a state run institution.

The Address

●(1335)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your appointment to the Chair.

It is interesting the criticism level, which I think is fair, to the McGuinty government on clawbacks that affect children. The fact of the matter is it was actually the Harris regime that clawed back the national child care benefit that hurt so many Ontario children. Now the member actually sits in the same caucus as some of those members. I would like her to reconcile that position. How can she sit with a government that instituted this practice which hurt so many Ontario children?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member that the current provincial government campaigned on many promises of not raising taxes, and also on the promise to stop the clawback. That is just one of a litany of promises that have been broken.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker. I look forward to working closely with you.

As this is my first speech in the House of Commons, I would like to begin by thanking the people of the great constituency of Wetaskiwin for the resounding endorsement they gave me on January 23. I would like to invite you, Mr. Speaker, and all of my colleagues to come to Wetaskiwin to experience our renowned western hospitality.

On the July 1 weekend, the town of Ponoka will host the 70th annual Ponoka stampede, the largest six day professional rodeo in Canada.

History abounds at the old Wetaskiwin Courthouse, which was built in 1907, and the Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site, which dates back to 1799. In Lacombe, visitors are welcome at the flat iron building, one of the few buildings in Canada with this unique and distinctive architecture that has been recently transformed into a visitor interpretive centre.

At this time, I would also like to thank those who were so instrumental in getting me here today. I would like to thank my wife, Barbara, and our children, Eryk, Kasandra and Krystian, who have supported me so much and provide me with the strength I need to work so very far from home; my parents, Gordon and Beverly, and my brother and sister for the strong family ties they have provided for me; and my campaign team and all those who have supported me and the Conservative Party in this most recent election and all past elections.

I would also like to thank Dale Johnston, the former member for Wetaskiwin, for his nearly 13 years of tireless and dedicated service to the constituents of Wetaskiwin. I hope he and his wife, Dianne, enjoy a well earned retirement.

I would like to congratulate the Prime Minister for bringing forward a focused agenda that aligns the government's priorities with the priorities of Canadians.

The five priorities that we campaigned on will be implemented by the government. Canadians voted for change because they were tired of empty promises. They wanted accountability. They wanted a

government that lived up to its billing and politicians who worked for them, not for themselves. The government will do that and more.

Despite the fact that agriculture accounts for roughly one in eight jobs and 8.3% of the total gross domestic product, it was virtually neglected during 13 years of Liberal governments.

Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector is a key contributor to our quality of life. In the constituency of Wetaskiwin, agriculture is at the heart of our local economy. Our farming roots run long and deep.

Last week, my father, who has farmed in the Lacombe area for over 40 years, celebrated a birthday. While he is younger than many of today's farmers, it is not an occupation that can be pursued forever.

Even though we have the best, most fertile soil in Alberta, young people are leaving the family farm in droves. Like me, they have found employment and careers away from the uncertainties and struggles that are part and parcel of the business of farming.

Drought, BSE, grasshoppers, subsidies and trade irritants have contributed to the loss of many family farms and have left the farm industry struggling to cope. Farmers and cattle producers are a resilient lot, but when they are in dire straits they, and all the communities that rely on their success, should be able to count on their government to help them fight for their livelihoods.

No one works harder than our agricultural producers, something the new government knows well. Rural Canada is important to the government and we will work hard to help them retain their livelihoods.

The Conservative government believes that agriculture is a key strategic economic sector, so the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food acted immediately after his first cabinet meeting and announced payment of the \$755 million, under the grains and oil seeds payment program, would be sent out immediately. Already, more than 73,000 cheques totalling nearly \$400 million have been distributed to producers. Then, he travelled across the country and listened to hundreds of producers tell him about the difficult financial situation they are facing and their desire to continue farming.

The government also recognizes that the CAIS program does not meet the needs of producers. Changes will be made to the program to make it simpler and more responsive to the needs of producers. We are urging the provinces to get on board and help us develop a program that really works for farmers.

●(1340)

During the last election campaign the Conservative Party promised an extra \$2.5 billion investment in agriculture over five years. We will demonstrate our commitment to farmers by creating an economic climate that rewards hard work and innovation.

The Address

It is hard work and innovation that characterizes the people of the Wetaskiwin constituency. They have invested in technology that allows them to diversify and branch out into new value added products. An example of this is the proposed environmental gasification plant in Rimbey, which would use agricultural byproducts as the key feedstock component. This innovative plant would allow the community to continue to diversify, create jobs, and still maintain its strong agricultural base and complement our thriving oil and gas sector.

We have always been innovators in central Alberta and we have not looked back since the discovery of oil in 1947. The petrochemical industry has added a new and exciting dimension to life in Alberta. Thanks to black gold, new industries are locating throughout the constituency of Wetaskiwin in towns like Lacombe, Rocky Mountain House, Blackfalds, Ponoka and Calmar. Thanks to the spirit of the local people, this remains a great place to live, raise a family and conduct business.

Ours is a family oriented society, home to independent parents who want their government to treat them fairly. They want to feel safe and secure in their communities. They want our government to stand up for safe streets by tackling gun, gang and drug violence and keeping criminals off the streets. They want choice in child care. The one size fits all approach pursued by previous governments does not work in areas like Wetaskiwin. By providing parents with \$1,200 a year for each child under six, it allows them to find the best solution for their family, be it public or private day care, a relative or a neighbour.

Families in the constituency of Wetaskiwin work hard to pay their taxes and they want to see the hard-earned dollars they send to Ottawa used prudently. They want to keep more of their income to pay for the necessities of life. The government believes that Canadians pay too much tax and so the Prime Minister developed a tax plan that over time will reduce the tax burden on all Canadian families.

The reduction in GST will bring a tangible savings to young families, so they can buy their first house or perhaps move to a larger one. It will make big ticket items like a new car or appliance a little more affordable and it will leave more money in parents' pockets to save for their children's education and for everyday goods and services they acquire from their local businesses.

Lower taxes will encourage job growth and give parents secure, steady employment. We value our way of life and look forward to real change and results. We in Wetaskiwin finally have a government that will deliver real change as outlined in the throne speech.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his election. In his speech he talked about his community. I am from a rural area as well, as is the member, and it is true that people do not necessarily have the same choices in family assistance. For example, when looking for child care in a rural area or an urban area choices are important. The member mentioned that and I support him.

Would he not agree that perhaps there should be a compromise in the position put forward by the Conservative government in the Speech from the Throne? In its campaign and in the program that had been put forward by the former Liberal government in

cooperation with all provinces there would be a real evolution and development of child care across the country. There would be reasonable salaries for people working in those facilities, with the evolution and development of good facilities in early childhood intervention, as well as some direct assistance to the families.

I would prefer that direct assistance to families be in the form of increased child tax credits, so that they would provide more assistance to lower income Canadians, those who need it the most, rather than just a per capita transfer to families of \$1,200 per child under the age of six. I would also prefer to assist children over the age of six because early childhood intervention or education costs continue.

Does he see a compromise through negotiation or discussion between the vision put forward in the Speech from the Throne by the Conservatives and the vision shared by 70% of the population in this country?

● (1345)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, one of the first doors I knocked upon during my campaign was in a small community called Alhambra, which might have maybe 40 houses, and a young lady carrying a baby was visiting her parents. As she came down the stairs she almost jumped for joy at the concept that she would have the ability to get \$1,200 per year for her child because she had made the choice to be a stay at home mother, much like my wife and my family have done. I think that the \$1,200 choice is a compromise for the benefit of all Canadian families and is more aptly directed that way.

When it comes to past the age of six, the Conservative platform did campaign on things like \$500 tax credits for young people involved in sports and so on. We do have a comprehensive plan that will not just address the early childhood years of parenting, but will address many things that are common to all families as they raise their children. That is what I would leave with the hon. member.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is the second time I have tried to get an answer. I have listened to the speeches by my colleague and the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, who preceded him. With an offer of \$3 a day, she said she wanted to offer families a real choice, at \$3 a day, between staying home and going to work, at \$3 a day, I repeat for the third time.

Does the member who just spoke agree with his predecessor, the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, who suggested that the child care system in Quebec is comparable to the system in the former Soviet Union? Does he agree with his colleague's comment? Is that his government's position?

The Address

[English]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I am the member for Wetaskiwin. I will let the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke answer the question when she has the opportunity to do so.

However, I would point out to my colleague from the Bloc Québécois that right now there are about 370,000 children in the province of Quebec who would qualify for the \$1,200 a year payment which would result in payments to Quebec in the order of \$444 million per year. That is substantially more than the \$1.2 billion over five years promised by the previous Liberal government. I would just throw that back at the member and suggest that perhaps this plan is better for the people of Quebec and it will put more money in the hands of the parents to make the choices they need to make for their children and families.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Yukon.

I am pleased to have the opportunity today to rise in the House and highlight some of the concerns that I have with the government's agenda outlined in the Speech from the Throne, called "Turning a New Leaf".

I appreciate the opportunity to continue in this House as a representative for the constituents of Kitchener Centre. I would like to thank the citizens of Kitchener for the confidence they have placed in me and for their continued support.

One would think that after 13 years in opposition the new government would have made constructive use of that time and would be in a position to articulate a clear, comprehensive vision for the future of Canada. Unfortunately, in the government's blueprint for the future, we see no evidence of the appreciation for the complex and wide-ranging issues that face Canada.

The government has the opportunity, indeed the privilege, to lead a nation that is economically sound and in the best fiscal position of any country in the G-7. This is a time to share economic success with Canadians and provide meaningful investments in important Canadian priorities. The government's agenda falls short in many respects and it is causing concern right across Canada.

The Speech from the Throne echoes five priorities. These are the priorities that formed the cornerstone of the Conservative election campaign. They seem to be a single focus for the government.

The GST cut is a priority, despite constant criticism from economists right across the country that it presents benefits for higher income families while offering relatively little tax relief to low income Canadians.

The plan also includes a commitment to crack down on crime, with stiffer penalties, contrary to the research that shows crime prevention programs, not stiffer penalties, are what bring crime rates down.

A wait time guarantee alone is not a cure-all for health care. We must work in cooperation and consultation with health care partners to restore confidence in our universal public health care system.

The principles of the Prime Minister's accountability act were also outlined in the throne speech. We all learned very important lessons on accountability from the report of the Gomery commission. It is not enough simply to talk about transparency, talk about openness and talk about accountability if our actions demonstrate the opposite. The public takes politics seriously and they have high expectations of their elected officials. They deserve nothing less.

The last item on the government's agenda includes cancelling the child care funding agreements with the provinces and providing a small baby bonus for families with young children. As the parent of any busy young child will tell us, this is not child care. This is not providing opportunity.

The holes in this agenda are massive and they are shocking. As a representative of Kitchener Centre, a diverse and multi-faceted urban centre, I am very disappointed that cities and communities are ignored in the government as it takes its vision forward. We depend upon strong communities and strong cities for our prosperity. The link between healthy cities, productivity and competitiveness is well established.

I am proud of Kitchener. It is a great city to live in and a terrific place to do business. It is an inclusive community. Kitchener has become an attractive destination for new Canadians. Over the years, Kitchener has grown and it has diversified to meet the challenging and evolving needs of a modern society. The federal government needs to be a partner in supporting and inspiring the kind of growth that we have seen in Kitchener and, as a matter of fact, the kind of growth that we see right across Canada. Cities need federal support and partnership to ensure continued growth.

Good policy is good policy, regardless of the partisan stripes under which it is conceived. I encourage the government to engage municipalities in collaborative activities such as those initiated by the Liberal government in its new deal for cities. Our cities need updated infrastructure, effective public transit and affordable housing. Homelessness continues to be a tremendous challenge in communities such as mine, right across Canada.

● (1350)

The supporting communities partnership initiative program, as part of the national homelessness initiative, has supported local initiatives that address local housing needs in urban centres. We cannot simply abandon the progress that has been made on this important federal issue. I believe everyone in this House believes that all Canadians should have access to affordable housing. Let us ensure that our future policies reflect that belief.

When I look at my own city, I am amazed at the various opportunities there are to enjoy Canada's art and culture. Our nation is home to a wealth of talent, enabling us to share and celebrate our culture through music, arts and theatre. In our museums, we discover and share the heritage that has provided the foundation for our continued growth. The Canadian identity is rich in its diversity and continues to evolve with our changing cultural landscape. Continued funding for the arts, the support of the CBC and museums is absolutely essential in preserving and sharing our culture and our identity.

Statements by Members

I believe our nation is only as good as the air we breathe. Canadians know that our health and the health of our children, the quality of our communities, and our continued economic prosperity depend on a healthy environment.

The problem of climate change is creating new health and environmental risks. We cannot look into the future without a solid commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address the challenge of climate change. For the health of this generation and for those who come after us, the government must define an environmental strategy.

There is no doubt that Canadians chose change on January 23. We respect that. I look forward to working in opposition to hold the government to account for the commitments it has made.

However, I have to say that my greater concern lies in what is missing from the Speech from the Throne. We live in a complex, demanding, diverse nation. We must govern for today, tomorrow and beyond. We must be both responsible and ambitious, focused and flexible, to ensure that Canada continues to prosper through the leadership in this 39th Parliament.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1355)

[*English*]

HOCKEYVILLE

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today and talk about Kingston's bid to become Hockeyville, as part of the nationwide competition being sponsored by the CBC, the NHL and Kraft Canada.

Our region of southeastern Ontario has sent more than 70 players to the NHL and the Olympics, including my hometown of Gananoque's Alyn McCauley and Kingston favourites Don Cherry, Doug Gilmour, Kirk Muller and gold medallist Jayna Hefford.

The Hockeyville competition is bringing out the best in people. In a wonderful gesture, our friends to the south in Kingston, Massachusetts, have officially given their endorsement to Kingston's bid. The Kingston selectmen passed an order of council publicly declaring Kingston, Ontario, as the spiritual birthplace of hockey. This letter was sent to Kingston's mayor, Harvey Rosen, and copies were sent to U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy, U.S. Senator John Kerry, and David Wilkins, the U.S. Ambassador to Canada.

Congratulations and best wishes go out to the Kingston organizing committee, called the Friends of the Great Frozen Game, and to the local economic development agency, which is providing support for this great Canadian initiative.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, April 6, I was present to listen to the take note debate on agriculture. There was much talk about getting cash into the hands of farmers. Based on comments from producers in my riding, one of the

reasons we have cash issues is a CAIS program that fails to deliver timely payments to producers.

Daily, I get calls from producers frustrated by the complexity and bureaucracy. Many must seek help from accountants to assist with the completion of their forms. This adds one more outlay of cash, which cuts into already thin margins.

It is obvious that a program that could have supported some of this spring's cash shortfall is not working for everyone. We need a program built with producers, for producers, that delivers results.

I encourage the minister to implement an immediate review of the current administrative processes to reduce the time it takes to process individual CAIS files.

* * *

PHILIPPINE CANADIAN COMMUNITY

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Philippine community contributes significantly to the quality of life and vibrancy of my riding of Thornhill and our country. It reaches out when others are in need. Now this community needs our help.

On February 17, we were all very shocked when an entire mountainside collapsed in Leyte province in the Philippines. This disaster left scores dead and horrible devastation in its wake. As always, the Philippine Canadian community wants to help families back home.

Erlinda Insigne, president of the Filipino-Canadian Association of Vaughan, Pempe Saavedra Jr., president of the Leyteno Association of Ontario, and Yolanda Ladines, president of the Markham Federation of Filipino Canadians, and others have worked tirelessly to raise funds and bring attention to this terrible tragedy.

I strongly support their initiatives and ask the public to give generously. Today I am calling on the government to follow the leadership of the Philippine community by increasing its small contribution and matching the funds raised.

* * *

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

OLYMPIC GAMES IN TURIN

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois salutes all of the athletes who participated in the Olympic Games in Turin, particularly athletes from Quebec.

These men and women brought the nation of Quebec great joy as they stood on the podium, great disappointment as they came so close, and great pain, both emotional and physical, when bad luck struck, as it did skaters Dubreuil and Lauzon. They deserve our admiration.

Statements by Members

I would like to congratulate the following medal winners: Éric Bédard, Danielle Goyette, Jonathan Guilmette, Charles Hamelin, Jennifer Heil, Clara Hugues, Gina Kingsbury, Charline Labonté, Anouk Leblanc-Boucher, Dominique Maltais, Caroline Ouellette, Amanda Overland, Kalyna Roberge, Kim St-Pierre, Mathieu Turcotte, François-Louis Tremblay, Sarah Vaillancourt and Tania Vicent. Their exceptional achievements are a source of inspiration and motivation for Quebec youth.

* * *

[English]

FORESTRY

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, University of B.C. researchers found a link between sawmill workers who experienced more periods of unemployment and the incidence of their children attempting suicide.

Analyzing data collected in rural B.C. over the period of 1985 to 2001, the report states that “male children of fathers with low duration of employment at a study sawmill while their children were less than age 16 had a greater odds of attempting suicide than children of fathers with high duration of employment”.

Steelworker president Rick Wangler, Local 1-363, based in Courtenay, wrote in a recent letter, “People’s lives have been turned upside down, communities have been devastated, and forest industry workers suffer fatalities, injury and suicide at alarming rates”.

Softwood lumber tariffs close mills. With mills closed, raw logs are approved for export under federal law. Workers and their families watch as truckload after truckload of our logs leaves to create work in mills across the border.

Something must be done for resource communities before more studies find more drastic and deadly consequences.

* * *

FARM FAMILIES

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have the opportunity to speak in the House for the first time since my election. I would like to thank the constituents of Peace River who have bestowed on me the responsibility and the privilege of representing their vision for the future.

This week many farmers in my community will begin field work in preparation for spring seeding. I want to take this time to acknowledge and commend their strength and the resilience of each farmer who again this year will commit his or her full resources to plant the fields of our nation. Despite the ongoing uncertainty within the industry, farmers, both young and old, are showing great leadership as they press forward with this year’s planting.

Over the next number of months the House will have the opportunity to stand with our farmers by supporting initiatives, such as choice in child care, a cut in the GST, our replacement for the CAIS program and other supportive measures. I ask that all would stand together with our government as we support our farm families.

POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 325 delegates of the Evangelical Fellowship’s Roundtable on Poverty and Homelessness published the Ottawa Manifesto last Monday.

Among other things, it said:

We encourage Christian groups to support and partner, wherever possible, with government initiatives aimed at the substantial reduction of homelessness, poverty, and their root causes.

We believe that homelessness will be a priority for policy makers concerned with justice and mercy.

Throughout western history, when governments and the church have put care of such people at the centre of their agendas, both have flourished.

Those are all legitimate points.

The Liberal government funded Supporting Communities Partnerships Initiative, commonly known as SCIPI, and affordable housing. I just wish that I saw something in the Speech from the Throne that gave me faith that this is, one, a priority with the government, and two, that such funding will continue.

* * *

● (1405)

ALBERTA CENTENNIAL MEDAL

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my constituents in Calgary Northeast for their vote of confidence for allowing me to continue to serve them in the House.

As part of Alberta’s centennial celebrations, I presented an Alberta centennial medal to Bruce Howe for his outstanding community service. Bruce is a father, an upstanding member of the community and someone whose life was shattered when his daughter Kelly was killed by her partner in 1995, a victim of domestic violence.

Since then, Bruce has raised over \$100,000 for five Calgary women’s shelters and he has given of himself to save others from the tragedy that he and his wife have been forced to deal with.

After 11 years, Bruce has announced that he will not be able to continue his annual Kelly Howe Star of Hope Campaign. After so much effort, Bruce deserves a rest and he deserves our thanks and gratitude.

His dedication and work have helped those affected by domestic violence and his selfless sacrifice will ensure that Kelly’s star will continue to shine bright in the hearts and minds of so many people.

* * *

[Translation]

HATLEY INN

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on March 27, 2006, fire destroyed a historic gem in the Eastern Townships: the Auberge Hatley. This has left a tremendous void for North Hatley and all of its residents.

The inn was one of the only five-star establishments in Quebec.

Statements by Members

As a leader in hospitality and gastronomy—not only in the riding of Compton—Stanstead but in all of Quebec—the inn had gained worldwide recognition. Jacques Chirac, the president of France, even chose to vacation there in 2003.

From a heritage standpoint, the loss is immeasurable. The century-old building converted to an inn in 1947 possessed a character all its own which was a constant reminder of North Hatley's thriving past.

My heart goes out to the owners and 60 employees of the inn, and the citizens of North Hatley and surrounding area, who must have felt a part of themselves go up in smoke.

I wish them all the best for a speedy reconstruction of this renowned inn.

* * *

[English]

ESSEX SCOTTISH REGIMENT

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on August 19, 1942, 32 officers and 521 soldiers of the Essex Scottish Regiment joined 5,000 other Canadian and allied personnel on Operation Jubilee, an assault across the English Channel on German positions in Dieppe, France. After five and a half hours of fierce fighting, only 2 officers and 49 soldiers of the regiment were left to return to England.

The Windsor-Essex region re-built its regiment which landed at Normandy on D-Day and carried the fight on the long left flank through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany.

Today our region has rallied again to commemorate the regiment. The Dieppe Memorial Project has drawn support from business, union, civic and political leaders in our region. As a member of the Regiment's Delta Company, our goal is simple: to storm the beaches this summer with our remaining veterans and place a new monument to the courage of the men of Essex in Dieppe.

I call on members of the House to play a role in helping our veterans make this historic trip to Dieppe. Let it be our way of saying thanks to our veterans.

* * *

THE KHALSA

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, Sikhs around the world are celebrating the 307th anniversary of the birthday of the Sikh nation and Sikh faith, the Khalsa.

I would like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and other members of Parliament for attending the 13th Vaisakhi celebration this morning.

Over a quarter of a million Sikhs live as peaceful and full participants in Canadian society and have made important contributions in every sphere of Canadian life. Today Sikhs are a full and active component of Canadian society.

As the first Sikh member of the Canadian Parliament, I join with my colleagues in House of Commons in congratulating all the members of the Sikh community on this historic occasion. Vaisakhi

promotes harmony and goodwill in Canada, a country where tolerance and compassion abound.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for CFB Petawawa, “the home of the warriors”, it gives me great pride to acknowledge the men and women based there and all our military members in the role they are playing in bringing peace and security to the people of Afghanistan.

Members of Canada's armed forces have our gratitude and encouragement as they represent our nation overseas in difficult situations. Our policy of steady and consistent support, firm but unprovocative resistance to those in this world who challenge our way of life, is a direction from which we must not veer.

Canadians can take pride in the fact that we are supporting humanitarian projects in Afghanistan. Girls are going to school, Canadian doctors are treating the sick and democracy is taking root. Canada's foreign policy has been determined by circumstances we did not create and some of which we cannot alter.

If we are strong, united and resolute at home we will keep the respect of the nations with which we cooperate internationally.

* * *

● (1410)

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it took a leaked document from Geneva to tip off Canadians to this government's secret negotiations to strip away Canada's sovereignty in broadcast and telecom services.

The GATS negotiations on telecom and audio visual services run counter to present Canadian broadcast laws, would strip our domestic policies and render any commitments we made at UNESCO meaningless.

The government is sneaking around Geneva trading away Canadian jobs and cultural policy. Let us shine a light and who do we see? We see the hon. trade minister who just happened to be the lead Liberal on the file.

I think it is pretty clear that he did not have to cross very far on the ideological floor to finish off what the Liberals began, which is the selling off of Canadian sovereignty.

[Translation]

The GATS negotiations are not consistent with our UNESCO commitments. Why should Quebec be offered a seat at UNESCO when the Conservatives have already taken away our cultural diversity?

Statements by Members

[English]

NUNAVUT PROJECT

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Thomas Berger's final report, "The Nunavut Project", for the Government of Canada and Nunavut and the Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. states that my unique territory drastically needs to increase Inuit employment and provide an effective Inuktitut-English bilingual education system.

Seventy-six percent of Inuit youth drop out of school compared to a national average of 25%. Without a basic education and competency in Inuktitut or English, Inuit youth are not reaching their potential. That results in high unemployment, while bringing in other workers costs taxpayers tens of millions of dollars per year.

Instead of spending millions on Arctic defence, surely it should be spent on Inuit employment and bilingual education.

As Inuit become more involved in their own governance and territorial development, Canada's sovereignty is asserted.

It is imperative that the Kelowna accord plus Mr. Berger's essential recommendations for Nunavut be implemented without hesitation.

* * *

[Translation]

DOMINIQUE MALTAIS

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, born in Petite-Rivière-Saint-François, in Charlevoix, Dominique Maltais grew up on the shore of the St. Lawrence River with the Massif de Petite-Rivière-Saint-François in her backyard. Dominique began snowboarding on the mountain at age 11. She was born for this sport. At 5 feet 11 inches tall, and with her strong build, she can be physical in a sport where victory is closely contested.

She recently became the snowboard cross world champion by winning the snowboard cross competition at the last Snowboard World Cup competitions in Furano, Japan, clinching the Crystal Globe.

It has been a dream season for this athlete from my riding. After winning the bronze at the Olympic Games in Turin, she has sealed her position as one of the greats of her sport with the Crystal Globe.

To top it all, the Massif has named one of its trails after this fine athlete.

Dominique, the people of Petite-Rivière-Saint-François, Charlevoix, and all of Quebec are proud of you.

* * *

[English]

RED RIVER FLOODWAY

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg are once again bracing for the possibility of a major flood.

All members in the House and, indeed, all Canadians will remember the devastation of the 1997 Red River flood, the human tragedy and the hundreds of millions of dollars in damage. This flood tested the Red River floodway to its maximum capacity and Winnipeg was literally spared from being another New Orleans.

The previous Liberal government had committed to funding 50% of the first phase of the floodway expansion and had indicated it would be there to support the final phase of the floodway as well. When asked if that commitment was still there the new Conservative regional minister from Manitoba indicated that it would be up to the Prime Minister to decide.

Although the Minister of Canadian Heritage indicated last week in the House that no Liberal commitments would be honoured, I am sure all Canadians would expect their government to protect its citizens and honour this commitment.

* * *

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 23, Canadians turned over a new leaf. No longer did they want a government that made promises and then sat back and did nothing.

In 1993 the Liberal Party campaigned to scrap the GST. After much time, much talk and even recommendations from the member for Malpeque to lower the GST by at least one point, the Liberal Party did nothing.

Thirty-two per cent of Canadians do not pay income tax and would not save a dime from the Liberal income tax plan. A Conservative government has promised a tax cut that will benefit every Canadian. Every member of our family will see the benefit of the reduction of the GST from 7% to 6% and eventually to 5%. We will leave more money in Canadians' pockets every day.

What a novel idea, a government that says what it will do in a campaign and then actually delivers. Reducing the GST from 7% to 6% to 5% is something Canadians can take to the bank.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

PHOTOGRAPHY MUSEUM

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention that the Musée populaire de la photographie officially opened in Drummondville in February. Jean Lauzon is the founder of this little museum with big ambitions, as he so aptly puts it.

The Musée populaire de la photographie traces the history of photography through displays of a large collection of original and reconstructed cameras and historical and contemporary photographs.

The museum is intended to serve as a public research and teaching institution devoted to the preservation, study, appreciation and recognition of the history of photography.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***CHILD CARE**

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week we challenged the Prime Minister's claim that tax breaks to corporations would create child care spaces. This weekend the minister responsible admitted that such tax credits fail to create child care spaces.

The provinces want the government to continue with the Liberal child care agreements. Parents want the government to continue with that funding. The municipal council in the minister's own riding wants the Liberal child care funding restored.

Will the Prime Minister now admit he was wrong or does he plan to push ahead with a plan that his own minister admits will not work?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made a commitment to Canadians to do two things. One is to provide every Canadian family with a child care allowance. We have also made a commitment to bring forward a program that will create child care spaces. The Minister of Human Resources has indicated that we are flexible on how the program is put together in a way that will create spaces.

Let me be clear that when we bring in our program next year it will have space creation targets, something that was missing in the previous government's program.

[Translation]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the child care network in Quebec is a model for Canada and the entire world. In Quebec there is reason to be proud. They have a program that most Canadians need. Yet, the Prime Minister will not budge. He claims that these tax benefits will be equivalent to a national child care program.

Will he now promise to respect the agreements that the Liberal government reached with the provinces on child care?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the opposition is suggesting that some provinces, especially Quebec, are capable of managing their own child care system. We respect that.

We intend to provide an allowance to every family for child care. That way families will have a choice and have a program that can create new child care spaces. That is what this government will do.

[English]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ultimately what the Prime Minister's plan will involve is slashing almost \$4 billion from child care funding in the country. In Ontario alone, cancelling the child care agreements will cancel 11,000 spaces. What does the government offer in return? Less than \$4 taxable a day.

In Ontario, under the Harris government, we saw federal payments to low income families clawed back. Will the Prime Minister assure the House that the provinces will not claw back the money that he will give to low income families in our country so

they can have the same child care advantages that other people in the country—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition speaks pejoratively about the amount of money we will be spending on child care.

Let me quote Premier Binns of Prince Edward Island. He notes:

We've got 8,000 kids on P.E.I....That works out to 9.6 million that would be new money coming to P.E.I. on an annual basis. That's substantially more money that would be coming than what would have come under the Liberal plan.

That is true for every province in the country.

* * *

● (1420)

*[Translation]***LOBBYING**

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last November the leader of the Conservative Party told us that he ordered his political staff to leave immediately if they wanted to do any lobbying.

Six months later, 45 of them are lobbyists representing 200 companies.

Why did the Prime Minister promise one thing and allow another?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will be presenting in this House our bill on federal accountability. With this bill, and with the cooperation of the opposition parties, we will be keeping our promises.

The hon. member who just spoke is from Quebec. Last weekend I noticed that the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence and the hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore were opposed to our efforts to include Quebec in UNESCO.

Is that the position of that hon. member from Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the Prime Minister's rhetoric, we see people like Goldy Hyder and Tim Powers acting as Conservative government spin doctors every day. Yet they are registered and paid lobbyists who have no official position in the Conservative government.

Will the Prime Minister tell the House which government officials are briefing them and will he ban this practice in his so-called accountability act?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is right in noting that these particular individuals have no role in the Conservative government. They are invited, as Conservative Party members, from time to time to speak to the media. That is a decision the media will make.

I renew my question whether that Quebec member supports the efforts of the government, in the interests of national unity, in creating a role for Quebec for UNESCO, yes or no?

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the town of Lebel-sur-Quévillon is seriously affected by the softwood lumber crisis. In November, the Domtar paper mill closed down. More than 700 workers might lose their jobs. It is all well and good for the Prime Minister to resume talks with the U.S. government, but that will not resolve the lot of the softwood lumber industry workers here and now.

Will the Prime Minister finally grant the loan guarantees to cover what Washington has confiscated from the softwood lumber industry, namely \$5 billion, as he promised in the election campaign?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, President Bush indicated his desire to resolve the softwood lumber issue. I have asked our officials to hold consultations to see whether it is possible to resolve this in the near future.

Nonetheless, if we are not successful with the United States and do not get such an agreement, this government intends to support our softwood lumber industry.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to talk about the future with President Bush, but the future of the softwood lumber workers and industry is playing out today. Money is needed today.

During his campaign, the Prime Minister promised up to \$5 billion in loan guarantees. It is in the Conservative program and was said during the debates.

For President Bush to realize what is going on, does the Prime Minister realize that along with his discussions with President Bush he needs to have concrete measures such as loan guarantees for the softwood lumber industry right now?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying earlier, I told President Bush that if we do not reach an agreement on softwood lumber, this government would have a loan guarantee program to help our forestry industry.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, another NAFTA decision was made in favour of Canadian and Quebec softwood lumber industries.

In the wake of the summit in Cancun and of the remarks by the Prime Minister, can he provide a formal guarantee that compliance with NAFTA is a prerequisite to resumption of negotiations with the Americans in the softwood lumber dispute?

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear. If we go forward and find a resolution to softwood lumber, it will be vitally important for Canada and for North America that NAFTA and decisions of NAFTA are in fact respected.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the

Oral Questions

Conservatives promised loan guarantees to the softwood lumber industry. Bob Jones, a senior official with Industry Canada, announced in *Les Affaires* on April 1 that all plans, including the loan guarantees were now on hold.

Will the Prime Minister tell us whether or not he intends to implement his plan for assistance so urgently required by the softwood lumber industry?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is my first intervention in the House. I am very happy and want to thank the people of Beauce for the trust they have placed in me. I will be their worthy and proud representative.

As regards the question by the hon. member of the opposition, I would add what this government said during the election campaign and what it is preparing to do. Unlike the opposition parties, we have an election platform and we will honour it.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it takes months of preparation to deploy our troops. Given that our obligations in Afghanistan will end in 10 months, Parliament should soon debate and vote on a new deployment.

Can the Prime Minister tell us when the government will inform the House of its intentions concerning our troops in Afghanistan after February 2007? What is the timetable?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government will soon be considering its options with respect to the participation of our troops in Afghanistan. The Parliament of Canada sent our troops to Afghanistan for a long-term mandate. We support our troops' mission.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government ran on a promise to Canadians that there would be a vote on deployment of our troops. Our engagement in Afghanistan finishes in February of 2007, and I will ask the Prime Minister a simple question.

Will he keep his promise to Canadians to ensure that there will be a vote on any further deployments, following February 2007, in Afghanistan?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our troops are already deployed in Afghanistan, have been deployed for some time and, as we know, will be there in some form in the next few years.

The Canadian government supports our troops. I know the governing party does and I believe the official opposition, other members of the House and Canadians do. I would urge the NDP to get behind our troops in Afghanistan.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Prime Minister expressed concern over his then defence critic's recent lobbying activities on behalf of at least 28 military supply firms. He said that he was concerned about conflict of interest on procurement.

My question is for the Prime Minister. What is the status of the airlift procurement and why is the Prime Minister no longer concerned over the blatant conflict of interest his minister represents on this very file?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, the hon. member obviously was not here Friday and did not hear my response about conflict of interest. I have no conflicts.

As for airlift, it is a high priority for the defence department, and I am waiting for the recommendation from staff.

• (1430)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a new standard. Just because the minister says there is no conflict, there ought to be no conflict.

As the Polaris Institute noted, the defence minister's "rap sheet on working for the arms industry is as long as your arm". What is worse, the Conservative platform looks like a tailored wish list for most of his former clients.

Now we see Airbus running a huge advertising campaign since his appointment to that portfolio.

Why is the Prime Minister not concerned that defence procurement may turn into a concession stand for his minister's former clients?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the House before, the Minister of National Defence, who was a member of the armed forces himself and is very knowledgeable on the defence industry, has complied and will comply with all conflict of interest regulations.

However, let me be clear. The spending plans of the government for national defence are there to ensure that our men and women in uniform have the best equipment possible.

* * *

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board has now admitted that key provisions to improve the access to information law are being pulled from the so-called accountability act.

Could the Prime Minister explain to the House why this key provision and clear election promise is not being honoured?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I learned with great interest, by the comments of the member opposite, that all of a sudden now, after 13 long years in government, he has a real interest in accountability.

Let me confirm that the government will be announcing tomorrow that we will be proceeding with all the campaign commitments we

made with respect to accountability and we made to clean up the ethical mess left by the previous Liberal government.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we look forward to seeing that tomorrow. I hope the Prime Minister will be assuring us that he will honour his clear election commitment and legislate or introduce the provisions to improve the access to information law, which was recommended by the Information Commissioner and endorsed by the House committee last fall.

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the one thing that has been absent on the debate about the federal accountability act is the absence of a call of support from the official opposition. I hope tomorrow they will be announcing that they will be standing up and supporting our federal accountability act.

I read with great interest in the *Ottawa Citizen* this morning that one person who thinks we have gone too far with our proposals is the commissioner himself. It said, "Don't give me too much power, info czar says. Reid says Tories' proposals far more 'radical' than he requested".

We will move forward with real reform to the Access to Information Act.

* * *

[Translation]

OLDER WORKERS

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, among the urgent problems that require solutions, the massive layoffs of workers aged 55 and older take top priority. There is a solution and the government knows what it is.

The government has supported the Bloc Québécois subamendment to the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne concerning the need to establish measures to help older workers. Can the government now restore hope among workers aged 55 and older, including those in Lebel-sur-Quévillon, and announce the implementation of such a program in the next few weeks?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that this is an issue. If there are any recommendations or reports as to how to proceed with this, I would like to have the opportunity to review them. The issue does have broad implications, so that could take a little while.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we will help the minister. The entire manufacturing sector is concerned about the problem facing workers aged 55 and older who are the victims of mass layoffs. On June 14, 2005, the current government supported the Bloc Québécois motion for measures to assist older workers. Last week, in the debate on the Speech from the Throne, it also supported the Bloc Québécois subamendment concerning this same issue.

Why does the government not act quickly? This is an urgent problem that must be resolved immediately.

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, I would be happy to review any recommendations that the hon. member would like to make. We take that in the context of what is happening right across this country.

* * *

[Translation]

UNESCO

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his speech in Quebec City last December 19, the Prime Minister promised that Quebec would have a seat at UNESCO, along the lines of the francophone summit.

Will the Prime Minister admit that in making that promise he misled the public, as he ought to know that only sovereign countries may vote at UNESCO?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after his election, our Prime Minister met with Premier Charest, on March 8. They agreed that they would assign their respective ministers to work toward ensuring that Quebec has its voice heard at UNESCO.

We want to work with Quebec. Hon. members will see the right outcome.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne says that Canada speaks "with one voice", but that he intends to collaborate with the provinces in a manner respectful of their jurisdictions.

Are we to understand from this that if there is disagreement between the positions of Canada and Quebec, Canada will abstain?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last election campaign we committed ourselves to consulting with the provinces with a view to creating a formal mechanism to ensure their participation in international negotiations and forums affecting their jurisdictions.

I have invited the Council of the Federation to submit ideas to us on this subject. I am eagerly awaiting those ideas.

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[English]

MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was planning to direct this question to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, but unfortunately, the Senate is not sitting this week.

The Minister of Public Works and Government Services is responsible for a department that spends \$13 billion annually. Given the fact that before accepting his appointment to the cabinet the

Oral Questions

Minister of Public Works raised funds for the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party, how does this not put him in a conflict of interest in discharging his ministerial responsibility?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, to all members of the House, the government is proud to have Michael Fortier as part of its government.

Second, this government and the Prime Minister will meet all the ethical standards that we have set for this country and for the government. I look forward to the opposition's support for our federal accountability act.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know for a fact that the Minister of Public Works and Government Services accepted donations on behalf of the Conservative Party during the recent election campaign. The minister now has the ability to single-handedly award contracts of up to \$40 million. For the sake of transparency and accountability, can the Prime Minister show to the House that the minister will disclose all the individuals and organizations that he accepted donations from?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has complied and will comply with the Senate ethics code, with the ministerial ethics code, and with the new conflict of interest code that this government will be introducing in this House.

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[Translation]

FOREST INDUSTRY

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago, the Prime Minister told the forest industry, the forest workers and the designated communities that their fate was ultimately in the hands of President Bush. But that is not what he was saying on December 17 and other times, when he promised loan guarantees and assistance for the workers and communities.

People are suffering and are already affected. Must they also wait for President Bush to get help?

• (1440)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to reply to my hon. colleague's question.

Regarding the loan guarantees and all the programs to support the forest industry, we are going to work with our colleagues. In due time, the opposition will know what is happening with these programs.

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not an answer. At this very time, British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick and recently Quebec have delivered the goods, supported the forest industry.

But the minister asks us to wait until the cows come home. What kind of government is this?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the forest industry waited 13 years for results from the opposition and for 13 years there were none.

Oral Questions

We are going to act to support the forest industry and work to ensure that it is as competitive as possible. Insofar as relations with the Americans are concerned, we are a government that has confidence in its relations. Together with our friends, we will negotiate something in due course.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians from coast to coast sent a message on January 23 that they wanted an end to the 12 and one-half long years of Liberal waste and mismanagement.

The Conservative Party has promised to implement the federal accountability act to end the Liberal culture of entitlement.

Would the President of the Treasury Board tell the House if the government will meet its campaign commitments on accountability, and when can we expect the government to act?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm to the member that the Prime Minister and this government will keep its faith, will keep its commitment and deliver the federal accountability act as its first piece of legislation when we table it tomorrow.

The bill that will be tabled in this place tomorrow will be the toughest piece of anti-corruption legislation ever tabled in Canadian history and will clean up the ethical mess left to us by the previous government.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if it is true that freedom of information is the oxygen that democracy breathes, I think we are having another smog day here in Ottawa. Even though the Conservatives ran on open government, they seem to be running away from meaningful access to information reform. Access to information was supposed to be the cornerstone of their accountability act.

I want to know from the President of the Treasury Board, who was it who got to him? Was it the PCO? Was it his own senior party people? Was it the crowns? Who was it who got him to change the principles on which he was elected about open government?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm to the House that this government will proceed with all the commitments that we made in the last election campaign. We will be presenting a bill tomorrow with more than 250 sections, one that meets all 13 of the broader commitments we made with respect to cleaning up the mess left to us by the previous government. We will move forward with substantial and meaningful changes to the Access to Information Act, something that should have happened over the last 13 years.

I would note again with great interest that some people, including the access to information commissioner, think we are far too radical and going too far.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am not calling the President of the Treasury Board a liar, but I sure do not want anybody here to think I believe him when he says that sending

that stuff to committee was anything more than a stall and delaying tactic.

It was the culture of secrecy that allowed corruption to flourish when the Liberals ran things around here. The only way to stem that culture of secrecy is by access to information law reform. All the rest of the accountability act pales in comparison to that meaningful thing.

I would like to ask the President of the Treasury Board if he would consider a trade. I will trade him meaningful reform to access to information for all of the other tinkering that is—

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it appears that my colleague from the New Democratic Party has some capacity of clairvoyance to be able to anticipate what is in the bill.

The bill will bring in major reforms with respect to access to information, including opening up many large crown corporations, finally allowing access to information in the billion dollar secret foundations established by the previous government. It will also bring in major reforms to bring in a corruption watchdog to protect whistleblowers against bullying by the Liberals. It will end the revolving door between lobbying firms and ministers' offices and will clean up government once and for all.

* * *

● (1445)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage has said that she will not honour any commitments made by the Liberal government, yet the former Liberal government had reached an urgent and historic agreement with the survivors of Indian residential schools.

Why will the Minister of Canadian Heritage not allow early payments to be made to the elderly and sick survivors of Indian residential schools?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have previously indicated to the House, the residential school agreement of November 20, 2005 was an agreement in principle. The final agreement contemplated two further steps, neither of which has happened at this point. The negotiations remain confidential. However, I think it only fair to advise the House that a party other than this government is currently dragging its feet in complying with the agreement in principle.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is simply unacceptable that the government will not allow payments to be made to elderly and sick survivors. Every single day of delay by the government means another four people die without seeing their just compensation.

Will the minister commit today to issue the compensation cheques immediately?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the risk of repeating what I have already said, there are two preconditions to the agreement of November: court approval and the preparation of a final agreement. There is no final agreement. There is no basis upon which to make interim payments. A party other than this government is dragging its feet. I will continue to keep the House advised.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government's commitment to double the funds of the Canada Council for the Arts by 2008 was the result of two years of widespread consultations with Canada's cultural community.

Last week the Minister of Canadian Heritage said her government had no intention of honouring any commitments made by the previous government. Does that include the Liberal government's commitment to defend cultural diversity, or to strengthen Canada's linguistic duality, or in support of aboriginal languages? Is the minister preparing to abandon all of these commitments, or just the one to the Canada Council for the Arts?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government intends to meet its commitment to the cultural community and to the artistic community. We will meet every commitment that is good for the creators, good for Canadians and good for our country. We will be able to move forward on our commitment to the arts and culture community once we look at the needs that are going to be required by the community. I am meeting with the Canada Council to determine those. We unfortunately were not able to find within the fiscal framework any financial commitment by the previous government.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that commitment was in the fiscal framework. I am sure her colleague the Minister of Finance will help her find it.

[Translation]

Last month, the government announced it was cutting financial support for the Canadian Unity Council. By cutting these funds, it is putting an organization at risk, namely Encounters with Canada, a wonderful student exchange program. We know that the government is currently looking at this matter and we encourage it to do so. However, time is passing.

Is it the government's intention to continue to fund Encounters with Canada and, if so, will it confirm its contribution by the end of the month?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the Liberals have their facts incorrect.

In fact, I spoke directly to the member opposite and assured him that the Encounters with Canada program would be continued and that no students or no youth would be deprived of their participation in a very good program that benefits all Canadians.

*[Translation]***QUEBEC ZOO**

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the last election, the present Conservative member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles promised \$22 million in assistance for the Quebec zoo, and the mayor of Quebec said that the zoo could only be kept going with federal funding.

Does the government intend to honour the commitment made by its member and commit funding for the Quebec zoo?

● (1450)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will point out that the Government of Quebec is the funding agent for the Quebec zoo. That government, which is not just anybody, made the decision not to request assistance from our government.

Given that these are the wishes of the government of Quebec, you will understand that we are respecting the jurisdiction of the Government of Quebec.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Speaker, one might ask why they talked about it during the election campaign. The Minister of Economic and Regional Development is claiming that no request was made. He is relying on a refusal letter from the previous government to justify his inaction.

A request was indeed made to the previous government, the mayor of Quebec City made another request last week, and the people of the city are behind it, in the streets, to save their zoo. What more does the minister want in order to act? What more does he want?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that in 2001, the Liberal government proposed \$17.8 million in assistance for the Quebec zoo and aquarium. The member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, who is on her side, made an issue of the flag. Because he did not want to fly the flag, the \$17.8 million was refused, in 2001.

And yet when it comes to getting their paycheque, people do not worry about whether there is a maple leaf on it. They collect the money, when it is theirs.

* * *

*[English]***HUMAN RESOURCES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite a severe shortage of skilled workers, there is a deafening silence from the government when it comes to skills training. This is a priority for Canadians. We committed \$3.5 billion for new labour market agreements. Last week, the heritage minister said her party would not honour any Liberal commitments.

Does the government plan to abandon Canadian workers or will the minister honour our skills training initiatives?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new government is very proud of the skills development programs it is offering. First of all, through the campaign, we promised our apprenticeship program, where employers will receive incentives to hire new apprentices and where the apprentices themselves will receive grants as well as assistance with their tools and their tax books. We are going to be working hard to get skilled workers out there, where they are needed and when they are needed.

* * *

TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIPS CANADA

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for 10 years the Liberals mismanaged Technology Partnerships Canada to the point that the program was mired in scandal and controversy. They kept day to day operations of the program secret. No one ever knew if money borrowed by the private sector had been repaid and lobbyists like David Dingwall collected millions of dollars in securing grants for their clients.

Audits were done on the TPC program. Could the industry minister provide this House with an update on these audits and if companies are compliant?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

When I became Minister of Industry, I immediately asked my officials for a detailed accounting of the Technology Partnerships Canada program. I can assure you that we have launched an unprecedented initiative to apply the principles of accountability and transparency to this program.

We issued a public report on March 24 with all the facts and figures, and our government is convinced that our partnerships with the private sector must be governed by transparency and accountability. Canadian taxpayers have the right to know how their money is being managed.

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Prime Minister, on the matter of border issues with the United States, said: "However, this is a law passed by Congress. President Bush must respect it".

In 2001, this Parliament passed a new immigration act which included a provision for a fact-based appeal for refugees through a refugee appeal division. Will the Minister of Immigration and the government do what the Liberal government refused to do and respect the law passed by this Parliament, and immediately implement the refugee appeal division?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have discussed this. I take the hon. member's concerns very seriously, but I point out that under the current provisions, people who are refugee claimants have many avenues of appeal and some of them take years to go through the

process. We have one of the most generous acceptance rates in the world. We will consider what the member is saying, but right now people do have many avenues of appeal and often they are successful.

• (1455)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, concerns have also been raised by the Portuguese, Pakistani and Caribbean communities about deportations of undocumented workers. It is estimated that up to 200,000 work in our economy and have families who have integrated into our communities. They are among the most exploited workers in Canada.

Will the Minister of Immigration stop deportations and regularize these workers with an in-Canada program, based on successful employment and health and security checks? Will he ensure that their important contribution to Canada is not lost?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member makes a good point. These people should come to Canada through regular channels. We want to see them protected by our laws, but I point out that the previous government took the same position. In fact, in a letter from August of last year to the member for Davenport, the previous minister said:

However, the granting of a blanket amnesty to undocumented foreign workers would send the message that there is a reward for those who remain in Canada without the proper authorization. This would further increase the pull factor for illegal entry to Canada, encouraging illicit activities such as people smuggling, marriages of convenience, and exploitation or abuse of persons without status.

That is the previous government's position.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 26, a Canadian citizen, Mr. Celil, was detained in Uzbekistan and is facing extradition to China where he has been sentenced to death in absentia for defending the human rights of Turkish Muslims in Xinjiang province. Access to Mr. Celil has also been denied to his family and Canadian consular officials.

Will the government listen to the pleas of his family and take all possible legal and diplomatic steps to defend Mr. Celil's basic human rights, and to save him from inevitable torture and certain death?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand my colleague's concern. It has been expressed to us on previous occasions. The department continues to make regular contact with the family as we will commit to doing, of course. We will take all diplomatic measures possible and necessary to intervene in this particular case, and as the member can appreciate, we cannot comment publicly on some of the privacy matters that affect this individual.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, agriculture is the main industry in a number of regions of Quebec and Canada. Many of these regions depend on supply management.

Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food explain to the House the government's position on supply management?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

Our government's position was very clear. Last week, during the special debate on agriculture, the Prime Minister was very clear. We supported the supply management system during the federal campaign, and we are going to support it during the WTO negotiations.

* * *

CANADA—U.S. BORDER

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first we had the Ontario tourism minister accusing the Prime Minister of giving in to President Bush on the mandatory passport issue. Now we have Jean Charest, Premier of Quebec, challenging the Prime Minister's position of quietly accepting an American law that would make it mandatory for Canadians and Quebecers to carry passports to cross the border.

Given the fallout of such a measure for the economy and tourism, will the government take up this issue again and demand that the Americans find a solution other than using passports at the border?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I saw the Prime Minister in Cancun, I was proud that he had reopened this subject and that he had made it a priority for the Government of Canada.

We are going to be taking this situation in hand. We will be in a solid position to explain that this is a serious matter for Canada as well as for the United States.

Once again, I am proud of the Prime Minister for making a strong case for the importance of this issue. We will resolve the problem.

* * *

●(1500)

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the hon. Dr. Marie Bountroggianni, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal for Ontario.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-217, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (definition of "Gaspé Peninsula").

He said: Mr. Speaker, the aim of this bill is to correct an unacceptable situation. Half of the riding I represent is eligible for the investment tax credit applicable to eastern Quebec and eastern Canada, while the other half of the riding is not. So, farmers living in Kamouraska are eligible to a tax credit when, for example, they buy a tractor to improve their productivity, whereas people in Montmagny and L'Islet are not eligible. The situation is the same for manufacturers.

The aim of this bill is to correct the situation so that the entire population, all my electors, are eligible for the tax credit in order to eliminate this discrimination against what may be described as federal resource regions.

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

* * *

[English]

**AGRICULTURAL SUPPLY MANAGEMENT
RECOGNITION AND PROMOTION ACT**

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-218, An Act for the recognition and promotion of agricultural supply management.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it does indeed give me pleasure to bring forward this bill. The intent of this bill is to further support our successful supply management sector and to ensure that the support, which all political parties in the House agree with, is provided for within a legal framework.

There has been some confusion on whether the government really does support supply management. This gives the members of the government the opportunity to show support in this House through a piece of legislation indicating that all parties do indeed support this successful system of marketing.

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

* * *

●(1505)

INCOME TAX ACT

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-219, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deduction for volunteer emergency service).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill would provide for a deduction to volunteer emergency workers of \$1,000 if they perform at least 100 hours but less than 200 hours of volunteer service as an emergency worker, and \$2,000 if they provide 200 hours or more of service. In other words, it would provide equity to all those who volunteer in their communities to assist their neighbours in a time of emergency. It would also give recognition to firefighters.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-220, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (elimination of statutory release) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

He said: Mr. Speaker, today many criminals are released early without any willing participation in rehabilitation programs or without demonstrating any intent not to reoffend.

With the intent of replacing statutory release with earned parole, I am honoured to introduce a bill today entitled, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (elimination of statutory release) and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

This enactment would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to eliminate the notion of statutory release. It would provide for the repeal of section 127, which creates the entitlement to statutory release, and sections 129 to 132.

I believe members of all parties in the House would agree to support and see a most speedy passage of the bill.

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

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES SUPERANNUATION ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-221, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act (elimination of deduction from annuity).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a repeat of a bill I introduced in 2004. The bill would stop the clawback of the pensions of those military and RCMP officers, who serve our country so well, at age 65. As the House knows, when those people reach the age of 65 their Canada pension is clawed back from their superannuation. As well, those who become disabled have their CPP disability clawed back from their superannuation.

We think that is wrong. These people serve our country with gallantry and with great effort and we think it is time that we left a little more money in their pockets when they retire at 65.

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

* * *

HERITAGE HUNTING, TRAPPING AND FISHING PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-222, An Act to recognize and protect Canada's hunting, trapping and fishing heritage.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to reintroduce this bill. In the last Parliament it was Bill C-391. It is an act to recognize and protect Canada's hunting, fishing and trapping heritage.

Canadians know that hunting, fishing and trapping have long been part of Canada's history, both for the aboriginal community as well

as the pioneers, and today it also plays a big economical role in the country.

Therefore I ask the House to support the bill because it is in all of our interests, both economically and on the heritage side.

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

* * *

● (1510)

AN ACT FOR THE RECOGNITION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-223, An Act to amend An Act for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and to amend the Constitution Act, 1867.

He said: Mr. Speaker, property rights need strengthening in federal law because they were intentionally left out of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. My bill would make up for this grave omission by strengthening the property rights provisions in the Canadian Bill of Rights.

Last year the Canadian Real Estate Association commissioned an extensive survey involving almost 10,000 respondents. Ninety-two per cent of telephone respondents thought it was important that the government fairly compensate property owners if their property was expropriated and 88% thought it was important for the government to fairly compensate property owners if restrictions were imposed on how their property was used.

In addition to strengthening property rights protection in the Canadian Bill of Rights, my bill would also require a two-thirds majority vote of the House whenever the government passes laws that override fundamental property rights.

Court case after court case have proven that Canadians have no protection whatsoever to the arbitrary taking of property by the federal government. It is time to correct that injustice.

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

Mr. Inky Mark: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would ask that you seek the consent of the House to assign the same number to my private member's bill as it was in the last session of the House, which is C-391.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to number the bill introduced by the hon. member a few moments ago Bill C-391?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

AMENDMENT

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent among the parties for the following motion. I move:

That, in relation to the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne today, and notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the debate on the amendment continue until no later than 6:15 p.m. and at the conclusion of the debate, the question be deemed put and the amendment be deemed adopted.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

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)

* * *

PETITIONS

UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour, for the third time, to present a petition signed by many Canadians from across the country. The petition indicates that many undocumented workers are living in Canada with their families. Many of them have children who were born here and who would be unjustly upset if their parents were deported.

The petitions therefore call upon Parliament to suspend the deportation of undocumented workers and find a humane and logical solution to their situation.

[*English*]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions primarily signed by hard-working people from my riding of Oxford.

The first petition asks that Parliament amend the Income Tax Act in order to permit a pension from a registered pension fund to be split between spouses.

•(1515)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): The second petition, Mr. Speaker, asks that Parliament retain section 241 of the Criminal Code without changes in order that Parliament not sanction or allow the counselling, aiding or abetting of suicide, whether by personal action or the Internet.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of presenting a petition today from people in my riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour who are concerned about the government's plans to offer child care and

The Address

specifically to rescind the agreement on early learning and child care. It says, among other things, that 84% of parents with children are both in the workforce, 70% of women with children under the age of six are employed, that a taxable \$100 a month allowance amounts to a child benefit, and a meagre one at that, and will not establish new child care spaces.

As child care is an everyday necessity, they call upon the Prime Minister to honour the early learning and child care agreement in principle and to commit to fund it for five full years.

HUNTING AND FISHING

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting two petitions signed by people from across Canada.

First, I want to thank the people of Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette for sending me back to the House for a fourth time.

The first petition calls upon the House of Commons to enact the act which I tabled today to protect Canada's hunting and fishing heritage and to ensure the rights of present and future Canadians who enjoy these activities are protected in law.

FUEL TAXES

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my second petition calls upon the House of Commons to enact legislation to eliminate the federal excise tax on diesel fuel, the gasoline used in farming operations and commercial fisheries, cap the amount of tax it collects on gasoline and eliminate the practice of applying GST to provincial fuel tax and federal excise tax, the practice of charging tax on top of tax.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[*English*]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

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

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question for the member involves the issue of child care. The Conservative plan is to provide a process for creating new child care spaces and, second, to provide to the parents of each child under six the sum of \$1,200 per year.

The Address

The Liberal plan was to enter into agreements with each of the provinces and to provide certain funding to those provinces for the purpose of child care. As I understand the process, a bureaucracy would be set up for each province to receive the money. There would then be another bureaucracy to distribute the money, generally to municipalities. We are now talking about three different bureaucracies to dispose of the money under the Liberal plan.

Does the member not believe that is a waste of money when that funding could be used by the children and parents?

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the mother of four children and as somebody who was president of seven child care centres when I was a public school trustee, I know this area intimately.

The money was to be used by existing structures to give parents choice. What we have to recognize is that the Liberal government used the child tax benefit to flow money to families.

If the Conservative government feels that it is very wise to give \$1,200 to families with children under six, I say go ahead but call it what it is. Call it a family benefit and then invest in child care for the existing structure, such as in my riding in Waterloo region where it is used for capacity building. A single nurse who works on night shift should be able to take her child to an in-home child care provider who is regulated by the region and receive the same kind of flexibility that a working parent needs. A parent staying home should be able to send his or her child to a best start program so the child can have the kind of interaction with other children in the playgroup.

We looked at Manitoba where it is capacity building and raising the kind of salaries that ECE people get who do this very important job. It was a very broad range of a smorgasbord that parents, no matter how they were choosing to raise their child, would have choice.

The people in my riding who are familiar with child care have said to me, quite simply, that the Liberal government had it right. We were putting the money where it needed to go and we were providing good options for parents. It is something I absolutely do not see in the Conservative government's plan.

• (1520)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in reality, however, the fact is that the previous Liberal government did not create one solitary child care space. The Liberals have stood up in the House of Commons and have accused us of taking spaces away but we cannot take away that which does not exist. Thirteen years; zero child care spaces; billions of dollars spent; no results achieved.

We have endeavoured, before the House and before the Canadian people, to invest in a plan that puts dollars directly in the pockets of parents and then they can decide if they want to use the schemes of which that member spoke. They can take those child care dollars and put them to work in the various child care options that may exist in her riding.

If they choose to stay at home, they will still get the money. If they choose to have a family member take care of a child, they will still

get the money. We are giving parents that choice instead of having government rob them of their options.

I will conclude on one note. If the Liberal government had continued with its plan, which we intend very proudly to cancel, that money would have been enough to perhaps provide a child care space for maybe 1 in 20 or 1 in 25 children. Our plan flows money to every single child. Why is the hon. member against a universal system that gives money to every child?

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I really do appreciate the sentiments of my young colleague across the floor, and I would have to say that had the government provided substantial money instead of what really amounts to bus fare, because anyone who has had a child in child care realizes that this amount of money—

The Speaker: The member for Nepean—Carleton is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, we have very clear provisions in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms that prohibit discrimination on the basis of age. I note that the member made very specific reference to one of my personal qualities being—

The Speaker: I do not think that reference to a member's age, including the ancient age of the Speaker, is somehow discrimination. The hon. member for Kitchener Centre is making her point. Certainly she is free to mention the relative age of other members, at certain risk, of course, to herself, but this is a risk we all take in the House. The hon. member for Kitchener Centre has the floor.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I take my colleague's point. However, what I would like to continue saying is that the government has provided bus fare, not child care. The reality is that anyone who has had children in the child care system or anyone who has raised a child realizes that \$1,200 does not go very far. In order to provide parents with true options, it has to be a comprehensive plan.

I would also point out to my friend across the way that provinces provide the child care. It was in partnership with provinces, in recognition of the proper, appropriate role of provinces and territories, which is why the minister of the day in the Liberal government went across Canada signing undertakings and agreements that reflected the needs articulated by provinces and communities. It was not a one size fits all approach, because, as we all know, Quebec has some wonderful examples that the rest of Canada can learn from.

It was a whole list, a comprehensive approach to early learning and nurturing of young children, not just child care, that we as a Liberal government were undertaking. It saddens me to hear my colleague across the way talk about being proud to cancel something that could have been so meaningful to so many members of the community.

• (1525)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a throne speech is supposed to be a vision of a government for the country. As critic for northern affairs, it is my job to share with members that I have a vision for the north and to criticize any government that falls short on its vision of the north.

The Address

The Liberals have a great vision of the north as an integral part of a great nation. There is the territory of Nunavut, a land of snow and shrimp and seals and unlimited potential in mining and oil and gas. It is a land of polar bears, a magnificent animal endangered by climate change. Most important, it is a land of indomitable Inuit people who have survived in that harsh climate for thousands of years.

There is the NWT, the Northwest Territories, with its own unique first nations and aboriginal people: the Inuvialuit, the Sahtu, the Gwich'in, the Deh Cho, the Dene, the Métis, the Tlicho and others. It has one of its greatest economic projects on the horizon, which we have not heard of from the government, the Mackenzie Valley pipeline. Remarkably, it is a territory that has brought Canada to third in the world in one of the most famous commodities in the world: diamonds.

Then, of course, there is Yukon, with the world famous gold rush, Canada's highest mountains and the largest icefields outside the polar caps, and 14 unique first nations of its own.

Our vision of Canada is part of a nation from sea to sea, remembering that the northern coastline is the largest of any of those three coastlines. We have a vision that understands the vast unexplored resources of our great nation in the north, but we also understand that these must be developed responsibly because of a very delicate and fragile northern ecosystem.

We understand and we have a vision of northern aboriginal peoples in which our government has negotiated unique arrangements of government to government to government to government; unique in the world. We have a vision where we put in the largest environmental program in the history of Canada to protect the northern contaminated sites, the federal contaminated sites in the north.

We have a vision that understands the dramatic changes of climate change. Although some opposite may not agree that it is even occurring or that it is man made, it is not in the future: it is already there in the north. We have had the most rapid change of any part of the world, where our species have changed dramatically, the ice roads our economy depends on are melting, and our buildings are shifting on the permafrost.

We have a vision of the north that understands the extra costs of northern health care, where it can cost more than \$10,000 just to get a person to the hospital. That is before we even start the health care costs they have in the provinces.

We understand in our vision of the north that land claims agreements, although they are historic and tremendous achievements, must not only be signed but must have the proper resources and spirit put into them to keep them going and make them work.

We understand in our vision of the north that it is a harsh land where, as Robert Service said, life just hangs by a hair, so we committed for the first time in history to put four search and rescue planes in the north. I hope that for the sake of the lives of northerners the Conservative government follows through on that promise of this nation to the people of the north.

Because there is such a high percentage of aboriginal people in the north, our vision understands the historic importance of the Kelowna

agreement and the residential schools agreement. These were negotiated with the priorities of first nations people, not the priorities of government. It was a very delicate balance, with many groups involved. After months of negotiation, there finally was a deal that cannot be taken apart piecemeal. It has come together and put in \$5.5 billion for the Kelowna agreement, which would have such a great effect on the north, and the residential schools agreement, which is an agreement for the ages, as I think the Grand Chief said. One could see the tears at the ceremony. We have a vision that will stand by those agreements and fight for them.

We have a vision of the north that we need to protect its sovereignty as much as the rest of Canada's, which is why we put in the UAVs, the most northern and longest patrols in recent memory, with underwater surveillance, first time ever satellite coverage in the north and the first ever full military exercise in the north.

● (1530)

We have a vision of the north that understands the economic development opportunities and challenges, and we created the northern economic development fund. I am certainly going to fight to make sure that is maintained by the new government. We had a vision that realized the special costs of running the northern territories and therefore gave the northern territorial governments the largest transfer payments increases in their history.

We have a vision of the north that understands the harsh reality of trying to create infrastructure in a harsh climate where there is permafrost, where the pipes and the roads keep shifting, and we understand trying to finance that when there are very few taxpayers spread over huge areas. We put in special northern infrastructure base funding in the three territories.

We have a vision of the north that understands the importance of investing in innovation and in research and development specifically in the north, which is why we put in \$150 million for international polar year, which I certainly hope the government will follow up on.

Finally, we provided unparalleled attention, vision and strategy on the north with the announcement and implementation of the northern strategy. I still remember that day, when more cabinet ministers than were ever seen at a press release put the attention of the entire government and its departments on the north, with the three northern premiers all heralding what was probably the greatest announcement of the year on the northern strategy.

Why would anyone, in a 10 minute speech, spend nine and a half minutes talking about previous Liberal throne speeches and budgets rather than discussing what this throne speech we are debating now had to say about the north and the Arctic?

Because, shamefully, this throne speech made absolutely no mention of the north or the Arctic.

The Address

There was no mention of bilingual education funds and Inuit hiring in Nunavut. There was no mention of international polar year or very important administration or cultural buildings for CYFN, for the Kaska and for Kwanlin Dun. There was no mention of Labrador and its Inuit, Innu and Métis.

There was no mention of the northern aboriginal health costs, northern infrastructure, the northern climate change centre whose funding was cut, the northern research rescue planes or northern contaminated sites cleanup.

There was no mention of housing crises in Nunavut or a northern vision and strategy. There was no mention of the needs of the Association franco-yukonnaise or the other the francophone groups of the north. There was no mention of protecting the Arctic environment or the Arctic national wildlife refuge, which was promised during the campaign.

The previous prime minister saw great promise and had a great vision and a great belief in the north. I am going to stand up and fight for all those things even though they were not mentioned in the vision of this country by the government in its Speech from the Throne.

At the turn of the century, Chief Jim Boss wrote to the government and said he needed land for his people because the animals were disappearing and they could not survive. Chief Isaac, near Dawson City, made sure, with his colleagues, that the signs and the culture of his first nation were moved out of the area so they would not be lost in the huge influx and effects of the gold rush migration. Elijah Smith led a delegation to Ottawa to meet with Prime Minister Trudeau to set up one of the most unique arrangements in the world with aboriginal people in their land claim and self-government agreement.

All these people had vision.

This throne speech that does not include the northern half of Canada, that did not have the words "north" or "Arctic" in it even once, is absolutely shameful.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the presentation of my hon. colleague from Yukon I noted with some interest some of the issues he has raised in terms of the development of a northern strategy. This strategy was put forward to the territorial leaders and to the people of the territory as an answer, as a vision. In my territory, it then turned into a sum of money, some \$40 million.

That sum of money was then turned over to the territorial government. It did not find an answer for it either. It simply turned the money over to the communities to do with as they saw fit, so the Liberal support for the north and for a strategy there was somewhat limited. I would hope that in this Parliament we can put together a strategy for the north that will work, that will have some impact on the many serious issues facing the north, issues that really and truly need the attention of the House and Canada.

• (1535)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member on his election in the north. I would also like to pay tribute to our colleague, Ethel Blondin-Andrews, who was in the House for 17 years and gave tremendous service to the people of the Northwest Territories.

With regard to his comments, I am sorry to disagree with him. He wants Parliament to design a strategy for the north. Our vision was the same as it was with the Kelowna accord, which was designed by the leaders of the aboriginal people. Our vision for the strategy was designed by northerners, not by Parliament. There were hearings and conferences across the north. The northern people developed that strategy, and it was close to being released.

The member, coming from the north, should surely know that it was on a website and that all northerners had a chance to input. The strategy was developed because of what northerners felt they needed. It was not Parliament. I will not support him in suggesting that Parliament develop a vision because our vision was that the people of the north develop their own vision.

It is true that at the very opening we gave an advance payment of \$40 million to each territory so they could, in their own way, promote their part of a northern strategy. I was looking forward to this northern vision, which had been designed by the people of the north, coming out. I certainly hope the opposition, in good faith, will carry through that process which was coming to the end.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue of economic regional development is extremely important and it is absent in the throne speech. I recall that there was an important debate in this place about some of the emerging segments, particularly mining in the north and developing that base industry. Therefore, we are talking about support for this regional economic development instead of handouts.

Could the member update the House on exactly what has been happening and how we can better invest in the north to ensure the people can take their place in earning the lives that they deserve?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, congratulations to you too on your new position and the excellent role I know you play as the grandfather of the House, if that is the term.

I am delighted the member brought up economic development. There was nothing in the throne speech not only for the north but for the whole country. The cabinet of the Government of Canada traditionally has been split in half, in the committees, on the economic and social sides. It is not surprising there were no social programs in the throne speech, but on the other side, what was there for economic development for anyone in the country?

The Address

There was nothing for the two biggest northern sectors: mining, as the member said, and the many provisions that we put in related to taxation, et cetera, it, and tourism. There was nothing for small business, big business, the fisheries, which are important in the north, and nothing for forestry. We had that very large program, I think it was \$900 million, announced for the forestry industry. There was nothing for oil and gas, which is very big in the north. As I mentioned, there was no reference to the two biggest projects coming for Canada, the two pipelines in the north.

The member is absolutely right. There was nothing for the north or indeed for the rest of Canada. There was nothing for innovation and competitiveness in this modern economy. We will be falling behind the rest of the world. There was nothing for the dramatic shortage of tradespeople and apprentices at this time, like our \$3.5 billion program.

I am glad the member asked about regional development. We had a hard-fought battle the last time to get the northern economic development fund. The governing party, when it was in opposition, talked time and time again against regional development. I hope it will not follow up with what it said while in opposition and cancel ACOA, western diversification and our hard-fought northern economic development fund.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate you on your well deserved position. It is good to see a Manitoban in that particular place as well.

Before I begin, I wish to inform you, Mr. Speaker, that I will be splitting my time with the Minister of Public Safety and member for Okanagan—Coquihalla.

It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak about our new government's Speech from the Throne.

First though, I would like to take a few moments to thank the constituents of Provencher in Manitoba for choosing me once again to be their representative in Parliament. Since my first election to this place in 2000, it has been my great honour to serve them first as a member of the opposition and now as the Minister of Justice. Many of my constituents are facing a particularly difficult time right now, faced with flooding on the Red River and the Red River Valley. Representing their concerns in Ottawa is always my first priority.

I listened with interest to the member for Yukon. He talked about dramatic shortages and crises. It reminds Canadians, once again, of the state in which the past government left the country. These crises and shortages were never addressed over the 13 years that the member and his government were in power.

My constituents and ordinary hard-working Canadians from coast to coast said it was time for a change on January 23. The Speech from the Throne indicates very clearly what change they will see. Our new government truly will turn over a new leaf.

I have had the opportunity to talk with ordinary Canadians from all walks of life, both during the election and since. I can tell the House that there is a real appetite for a government that has focus, direction and knows what it wants to achieve. To many Canadians, our new government's five key priorities are a welcome change from

the previous 13 years of a Liberal government that had clearly lost its way.

We will clean up Ottawa by passing the federal accountability bill. We will lower taxes for every single Canadian by reducing the tax that we all pay, the GST. We will give parents real choice in child care by giving a \$1,200 annual payment for each child under six and help to create more child care spaces, 125,000, as the Prime Minister has stated. We will work with provincial and territorial governments to establish a patient wait times guarantee. We will ensure safer streets in communities by cracking down on crime. As Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, it is on that key priority that I will focus my remarks today.

When it comes to reforming our criminal justice system, the Conservative Party has a strong history. Others are more recent converts. Take for example that during the election campaign we heard the Liberal Party campaigning on the same mandatory minimum prison sentences that it claimed only months before were ineffective and draconian. We also saw the NDP get onboard and support putting violent criminals behind bars, reversing years of opposition to tougher crime measures. On this side of the House, we have been clear. Our party fought for tougher criminal justice when we were in opposition. We campaigned on tougher criminal justice during the election. We will deliver tougher criminal justice in government.

I was pleased to join the Prime Minister last week in speaking with the Canadian Professional Police Association. We both had the chance to discuss what our new government would be doing to create safer communities by cracking down on crime. I will elaborate on the message we delivered to Canada's police a little later. For now, I would like to speak to why improving the justice system is such an important aspect of our new government's agenda.

In the Speech from the Throne, Her Excellency the Governor General said:

Canadians have always taken pride in our low crime rates. Safe streets have long characterized Canada's communities—from villages to towns to cities. Safe communities allow families and businesses to prosper.

● (1540)

There is the impression that somehow Canada has a lower crime rate than say, for example, the United States. We know now that Vancouver has the highest property crime rate in Canada and the United States and Winnipeg is in second place. In terms of violent crime, the most recent statistics that I have read is there were approximately 950 incidents per 100,000 residents in Canada compared to 450 in the United States. We have nothing of which to be proud both in respect of our property crime rates or our violent crime rates.

The Address

The passage that I quoted from the Governor General's speech makes its clear. Our priority of cracking down on crime is rooted in Canadian values. It is a priority for our new government because it is a priority for every Canadian. People rely on safe communities as they go about their daily business, no matter where they live. In fact, it concerns me that in too many Canadian communities safe streets are no longer simply a given. Instead, citizens are anxious and more fearful that criminals could harm them or their families, perhaps for no reason at all.

Have we taken our safety and security for granted? I do not think that is the case. I do believe, however, that the previous government neglected the issue for years and now we are seeing the results.

It was under the previous Liberal government that the numbers of police on our streets dwindled, while billions of dollars were spent on a useless gun registry that was putting resources toward tracking duck hunters and farmers. It was the Liberals who kept house arrest available for violent and repeat offenders when in fact they promised the House in 1996 that house arrest would never be used for violent or repeat offenders. It was the Liberals, who as I indicated, refused to put in place effective mandatory minimum penalties for serious crimes.

Under the Liberal watch, we saw the problem of guns, gangs and drugs grow not only in our cities, but in smaller communities and suburban areas all over the country. The Liberals allowed the sense of safety and security, which Canadians have in their homes and communities, to be undermined. What the previous administration did not seem to grasp was that for any government there was no more important task than the protection of its citizens. Canadians understand this. They are fed up with watching their local evening news provide a steady stream of gun violence and criminality.

Police and prosecutors are growing frustrated, as well. I mentioned that the Prime Minister and I both spoke with representatives of front line police very recently. As the first line of defence against guns, gangs and drugs, I heard their concerns loudly and clearly, that our laws seemed more focused on the rights of criminals than on the rights of law-abiding citizens. I met with this group frequently in the past as well, in my previous role as opposition justice critic and in my various provincial roles. I was struck by how their concerns today were the same concerns they were bringing up for years.

We will also prevent crime with strong social programs and effective economic policies. These programs will help end the cycle of violence that can lead to broken communities and broken lives. We will work with provinces, territories and other partners to support solutions that will help young people resist the lure of guns, gangs and drugs.

The new government has a mandate to deliver these changes. They are exactly the types of changes that Canadians have been crying out for because they have felt less secure in their homes and their communities. We intend to deliver.

I believe there is broad support from my colleagues on both sides of the House for the change that we will bring to the justice system. I certainly look forward to working with all of them and particularly

with my colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, to tackle crime and to keep Canadians safe.

● (1545)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member across talked about the five key priorities, but he did not mention the first priority of the Prime Minister, and that was to appoint his campaign co-chair to the Senate and then put him in charge of the public works ministry. He is responsible for about \$40 million each and every day.

This is totally foreign to the House. The House of Commons is supposed to be an institution of accountability. Never before has a person been given charge of a portfolio like this in time of peace.

The member opposite is a member of the executive of government. Tomorrow the government is going to introduce the accountability act. Could the minister assure the House and Canadians that this issue will be dealt with in the act and put an end to this sad spectacle sooner rather than later?

● (1550)

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, without wanting to correct the historical errors in those statements made by my colleague across the way, I will simply state that this government is committed to righting the problems that the former government created over the last 13 years.

There have been huge issues relating to ethics and the issue of trust that people have in respect of the expenditure of money. We will move forward on the commitments that we have made.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's speech. He had a lot to say about safety and making our communities safer. Towards the end, he slipped in a few words about the fight against poverty. In fact, this fight is important to helping us face reality and eliminate problems at the source.

Does my colleague not find it odd that in the Speech from the Throne, not a single word was said about employment insurance? While he was in opposition, his party supported the Bloc Québécois' motion to create an independent employment insurance fund. Is that not an important weapon in the fight against poverty? In particular, this would make it easier for young people to obtain employment insurance. It would also support measures now being piloted in regions with high unemployment.

Can we expect the government to extend these agreements to maintain the special consideration given to regions struggling with high unemployment? Do these measures not constitute important weapons in the fight against poverty and violence by eliminating problems at the source rather than resorting to the correctional system after the fact and filling up our prisons?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, in fact I share the concerns of the member that we do have to address certain basic economic and social problems in our society in order to assist in breaking the cycle of violence and crime.

The Address

I want to make it very clear that it does not matter how much money we put into social programs, educational programs and other very worthwhile government objectives which I support. It does not help to put in all that money if we leave the drug dealers and the gunmen on the street.

I look forward to my colleague's cooperation as we move forward in creating strong social policies for this country to assist the poor and the underprivileged. I expect that he will also support us in our efforts to get rid of gangs, drugs and guns that control so many of our streets. I look forward to his cooperation.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick comment on the statistics that the Minister of Justice threw out so casually on the comparison of crime rates. We looked at them last year and he knows there are some fundamental flaws with them. I caution the minister in spouting them across the country because there are serious doubts about their accuracy.

The minister made some comments about the NDP during the campaign and supporting some of our positions. The reality is that we had done that and I had personally done it in the justice committee along with the justice minister in the spring and fall of last year.

For the first time in the throne speech I saw that the Prime Minister was speaking out in favour of social programs and of funding social programs, which was a key part of the NDP platform around controlling crime in this country. Would the minister agree with me that that was a late conversion on the part of his government to support the NDP position on how best to deal with crime in Canada?

• (1555)

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to approach the issue of crime from many aspects. I think that has been the traditional Conservative approach.

We do believe in strong social programs, but we want effective programs that deliver results for Canadians. My concern is that if we do not tackle the issue of the drug dealers, the gunmen and the gangs on the streets, those social programs will not work. Canadian taxpayers' money will not be put to the best use.

If I have in any way misinterpreted my colleague's position on mandatory minimum sentences and he is now supporting mandatory minimum prison sentences for gun crimes, drug dealers, and repeat offenders, I welcome his support. We will work together on that issue so that we can create the environment in all of our communities, large cities, small communities, rural areas, where social programs will actually be effective in stopping the cycle of violence.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Speaker on his successful election. He will once again rule over us as the referee here in the House of Commons. I want the Speaker to know, and I am going to say this very openly even though it was a secret ballot, I voted for him. With the new government accountability act it will be very difficult for politicians to try to get some kind of kickback or favour for what they do, and we support that, but maybe in one of those moments when I have gone too long in response to a question in question period, as the Speaker rises to cut me off on that 35 second

time limit, maybe he will remember that I voted for him and will be just a little more gentle with me.

I will also say that I voted for him for good reasons. Mr. Speaker has ruled judiciously over this House. He is very fair-minded. He has a good combination of humour yet seriousness at those moments and I think he is moving us along the path to decorum in this House, and so I congratulate him.

I also want to thank my constituents who have elected me and asked me to serve them and to speak for them. My heart goes out to my constituents because in six years they have had to show up to vote for me four times: in a byelection in 2000, and in elections in 2000, 2004 and again in 2006. I thank them for their diligence. I also thank them for the increase in the percentage this time. I know why there was an increase in my vote. My wife accompanied me so much during the campaign, as she usually does, that my constituents thought it was my wife Valerie who was running, and therefore, I got an increase in the vote. I want to acknowledge her for that.

I listened to members across in their criticism of the Speech from the Throne. It is the job of opposition members to criticize, but I heard members saying there was nothing in the speech for Canadians. Having spent a few years in the trenches in opposition, I know it is an arduous task and we did not enjoy our time there, but maybe I could give them a word of advice to assist their credibility. Every now and then when the government does something good, if they give a bit of credit for that, they in the same process will actually garner credibility for themselves. There is always something good in a throne speech. I used to regularly give credit to the federal Liberal government, although not extended credit, for positive things that I was able to find, albeit with a magnifying glass, in the throne speeches. May I suggest that the Liberals could do the same.

Once I saw a speech given on a proposal and there was nothing good in it, yet I still stood and said that at least the printing was nice. Trying to find something good to say, as my mother would say, adds to one's credibility.

There were five priorities in the Speech from the Throne, one of the shortest throne speeches in history. This shows that our purpose is not to smother Canadians with overarching layers of government, but in fact that we respect Canadians. We think that Canadians who have the ability to act on their hopes and dreams can achieve them. It is our job to clear the way, clear the clutter and help them do that.

I went door knocking during the campaign from one end of my constituency to the other, and I look forward to door knocking again this week in my constituency. I continued to hear these five priorities reflected from one end of the constituency to another.

It was down in Okanagan Falls in a mobile home park as I was going door to door that a lady with not much in the way of financial resources was bemoaning the fact that it seemed that elected people and their friends were able to get so much for themselves and there seemed to be a lack of accountability for that. There she was in that mobile home park asking that we change things and make things open and more accountable, to at least give her some peace of mind that we were caring for the few tax dollars that she was paying. Government accountability is going to do that and I am excited about it.

The Address

While door knocking in Peachland during the election, a woman told me how she had to wait for a long period of time for some very serious operations. In fact, she wound up going somewhere else and paying. She was not a wealthy woman, but she paid for those operations that should have been provided to her in a short period of time. That is why I support in the Speech from the Throne that this government will put in place health guarantees, wait line guarantees that will ensure that people will get the kind of health care they need when they need it and where they need it. I heard that right through my constituency.

● (1600)

On the aspect of the GST and lowering taxes, in the northwestern reach of my constituency there is a beautiful town and wonderful community called Logan Lake. It is a quiet but thriving community with wonderful hard-working people and others who worked their whole lives and now have retired there.

Some of the seniors in that area told me that income tax reductions and these other reductions are all good, but for those who do not pay taxes, where is there something for them? They wanted to know when they were going to see a reduction in the GST, that promise that was made by the Liberals as far back as 1993. It still rings in my ears that the Liberals were going to scrap, abolish and kill the GST. It never happened. A senior in Logan Lake said to me, "Why do you not start to reduce the GST?" I am so thankful that our Prime Minister saw that as a priority.

On the issue of choice in child care, there I was on a cold afternoon, I can well remember, door knocking with some of our volunteers. A woman came to the door. I do not like guessing ages because sometimes one can guess too high or too low and lose a vote or win a vote. I would guess that she was in her late 30s. She said, "I have voted Liberal all my life but I am going to be voting Conservative this time". She said there were two reasons. She said, "Finally it looks like the government is going to give me some choice in child care. I have raised my kids at home, plus worked part time and finally, that is being recognized by the government". She was not begrudging her neighbour who had some type of institutional care and was receiving some support, but she said, "Finally we are getting this kind of support". She also said, and if my volunteers were here they could vouch for this, "The more I see that Stephen Harper guy, the more I like him". Is that not true, that the more our Prime Minister—

An hon. member: Order.

Hon. Stockwell Day: I was just quoting. I am allowed to quote from other sources.

The more people see our Prime Minister the more support that we seem to be gaining. People see that this government is focused on the priorities of people, not the priorities of government.

The final and fifth important area has to do with crime. From one end of my constituency to the other I heard the concern about crime and security. In the beautiful community of Kaleden in the southern reaches of the constituency, people are very concerned that there are not enough officers being supplied to the Penticton area detachment to be in their community enough to help with some of the serious crime that is going on in that wonderful community.

I am delighted that we are able to make a commitment of 1,000 more RCMP officers from one end of the country to the other, and also the commitment of another 2,500 officers in municipalities right across the country.

I heard it in the town of Merritt where just before the election a sexual offender with 42 prior convictions was released early into the community with no warning to the RCMP and no warning to the community. There were some provisions written on his release. One of them was that he was not allowed to contact or be in a relationship with somebody under 14.

The Liberals previously resisted our request to raise the age of consent from 14 at least to 16 to help policing and to help officers deal with those who would be predators and would prey on our kids, not just on the streets but on the Internet.

I am very honoured to have this portfolio, the minister responsible for public safety and emergency preparedness. I want to say a word about the 52,000 employees across the country in a variety of agencies, the RCMP, our border agency, CSIS, our intelligence agencies, our corrections services, and in so many other areas. I hope I have not left any out.

I have been able to travel to border crossings, to different ports, to policing detachments to see the work they are doing. These people every day, every night are going to their jobs with a sense that what they do is important, because it is. The safety and security of a people should be the first priority of every government. I am glad that is the case with this government.

There are five priorities, which are the five priorities that I heard continually throughout the election. There are five areas of commitment that we are going to keep. Yes, we are addressing other areas also that are important, just as agriculture was so powerfully addressed here last week. That is going to benefit orchardists in my area, those who operate and grow the vineyards, those who are out in the fields.

We are there with Canadians on these five priorities. I am proud of that. I am going to be working with my constituents to see that we achieve in these areas.

● (1605)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, having worked with you in committee and in the House for years, let me take this opportunity to congratulate you. I can think of no other person more deserving to hold this position than yourself.

The hon. member said opposition members have not complimented the throne speech and that is wrong. Just the other day I was on my feet and on four occasions complimented the government and actually thanked it for outlining the fact that we are the number one country in the world and have achieved tremendous success. Canadians are proud of our accomplishments. I am glad the government put this in the throne speech because it is acknowledging the accomplishments of past years. I greatly respect the hon. member and have worked with him before. My question ties in to the responsibilities of the Minister of Justice as well.

The Address

During the campaign all the candidates were making different promises. My opponent in Scarborough Centre, Roxanne James, said publicly in her brochure, which I have right here, that “We will repeal the gun registry”. That statement was made on behalf of that party. The Minister of Public Safety said the other day that it will be harder than the Tories expected to dismantle the registry because it will require a legislative vote in Parliament. Of course it is going to require a vote in Parliament.

Were the candidates such as Roxanne James lying or is that party going to keep the gun registry? The government should put it to a vote. I see the member for Yorkton—Melville, who has been an advocate of getting rid of the gun legislation, sitting in the House. Is the government going to keep that promise? Why does the government not put this to a vote? Is the government going to keep its word and put it to a vote? Of course it is going to take a vote. Will the repeal of the gun legislation be put to a vote as promised, yes or no?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, we are going to keep all of our commitments and especially those related to the gun registry.

I acknowledge the fact that the member opposite and I have worked together on a number of issues and I respect his diligence in this regard. When we bring in the legislative elements of the gun registry, I will look for him to be rising in his place and voting with us to dispense with a long gun registry that the Auditor General has pointed out cost in the area of \$1 billion.

I remind my colleagues that when the long gun registry was first brought forward, we were told it was going to be a money maker. I want to acknowledge the incredible work the member for Yorkton—Melville has done in this whole area. His work has been absolutely unparalleled. He has worked harder on this than anybody in this place. We were told this registry was going to make money and then after the first year or two when it started sliding downward, we were told it was going to break even. A couple of years later we were told it was only going to cost a couple of million dollars. For a long gun registry that simply does not work, the cost is now going to be somewhere in the area of \$1 billion.

That is why I can assure the member opposite that the hand gun registry, as we said, is going to stay in place. Other provisions, such as the required safety course, will stay in place. The list of prohibited weapons will still be maintained. We are going to move those resources of \$1 billion out to the streets and communities and put more officers on the streets, provide programs for youth at risk, and provide programs dealing with gang activity.

My colleague, the Minister of Justice, will be bringing in mandatory sentences related to those individuals who commit crimes with firearms. Some of this is going to be legislative and some may not. We are going to bring the legislative side into the House. I look forward to good support from my colleagues across the way.

• (1610)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my first question is with respect to the western hemisphere travel initiative, and I thank the minister for his interest in this file. My concern comes from the response I received from the Prime Minister. We know this initiative is going to have a tremendous impact on our tourism industry. Government studies and independent studies have

shown so as well. Does the minister support my call to bring the Minister of Industry into this file? Does he support a call for a national tourism strategy to deal with the WHTI?

The United States and Canada have altered a treaty on the Great Lakes, the longest unarmed border in terms of the water system. United States coast guard vessels are going to be armed and will be able to fire 600 bullets per minute. This has been granted by the Canadian government. Why is it necessary for that kind of fire power on our Great Lakes system?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge discussions I have already had with the member for Windsor West. He is concerned about a number of the issues and he has obviously raised them today and has brought forward some solutions that we in fact are looking at.

On the western hemisphere travel initiative, for those who may not be familiar with it, an act was passed in Congress a couple of years ago that is going to require anybody entering into the United States to have a passport or an acceptable equivalent that will be acceptable to the United States government. It was actually our party, while in opposition, and the New Democrats, who continued to raise this as a concern of the last two years. The federal Liberals were not dealing with it at all.

We could see the impact coming. It is going to hit most severely those Americans who do not have passports. As a matter of fact, only about 22% of them do. Polling shows that they are reluctant to get passports. That means that they have another reason to stay at home rather than to cross the border into Canada, either on a short term trip or for longer business interests if they do not have a passport. That is going to have a negative effect on our economy.

The Conference Board of Canada has estimated some \$7.7 million a day will be lost from coast to coast just because of that initiative. I was pleased to see the Prime Minister make this a priority in Cancun. It was one of the first announcements that came out when he met with the President. The President of course has to deal with the fact that Congress voted on this, but he is supportive of a solution.

I have been charged with working with the secretary of homeland security in the United States in terms of working on a solution. We want to come up with a solution and will work hard for it. The member for Windsor West mentioned a couple of different groups or individuals who could be brought into the equation and I say to him, by all means. To him and to others here in the House, the more people we can bring around the table to look at how we are going to solve this, the better.

He also mentioned the issue of the U.S. coast guard. The U.S. makes its own view in terms of how it is going to arm its vessels. We have been very clear with the United States that armed vessels are not allowed to cross into Canadian territory. The Americans are certainly going to be able to patrol their own particular areas, but that is not something that we in fact are doing on the Great Lakes with our marine capability there. We have made that also very clear to the Americans.

The Address

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Québec.

Permit me to begin my first speech in the House of Commons by thanking my fellow citizens in the riding of Papineau for the trust they have placed in me and the enormous honour they have done me by allowing me to represent them here, as a Bloc Québécois member. As others before me have said, an election campaign is not the work of a single person. An electoral victory cannot be the result of the work done only by a candidate. It is thanks to the hard work and extraordinary devotion of hundreds of activists that I am in this House today. I want to express my loud and clear thanks to them.

As they have asked me to do, I will ensure that my work contributes to representing their interests and to enabling Quebec to progress toward long-awaited sovereignty.

The Speech from the Throne was brief and a number of concerns were not mentioned: no mention of issues of concern to women, the unemployed, artists; no mention either, generally speaking, of issues affecting the poor and disadvantaged. I would hope, however, that that speech, which lays out the new government's priorities, does not sum up all of the government's concerns, and that in fact we must look elsewhere to find the other important aspects of what the government will be doing in future. On that point, the subamendment moved by the Bloc Québécois that will help older workers to get better support from the government, which passed unanimously, is evidence of the openness of this House to widening the field for what this 39th Parliament will do.

We should understand from that openness that beyond the Conservative Party's five priorities, which I acknowledge are legitimate, we can tackle other issues that require our attention and that are just as much a priority. As well, the francophone and Acadian communities of Canada were given short shrift in the Speech from the Throne, a scarce few lines, as follows:

I have met with people from our two great linguistic communities and I can attest that our linguistic duality is a tremendous asset for the country.

You will agree with me that it is a little short and that it is understandable that the francophone and Acadian communities are disappointed. Still, we can interpret this sentence in the light of the statements made by the Prime Minister during the last election campaign. During the leaders' debate on December 15, 2005, the Prime Minister said:

French is an essential fact in this country. It is the reason why I have been working for a long time to be able to speak my country's second language. It is also the reason why the new Conservative Party is supporting the two official languages and their equal status in all the institutions of Parliament. We are also in favour of support for linguistic minorities and assistance for second-language education...a Conservative government intends to create a unique francophone secretariat within Canadian Heritage to recognize French across Canada.

He also stated, the next day, in St. John, New Brunswick:

Clearly we intend to continue supporting the minority communities and second-language training for Canadians...I think that we are ready to continue this work

Then, in Quebec City, on December 19, 2005, he made this declaration:

We must never forget that Canada was founded in Quebec City, by francophones. This is why I say that Quebec is the heart of Canada, and that French is an undeniable

element of the identity of all Canadians, even though some of us do not speak it as well as we should.

Of these three public statements, what must be retained is the Prime Minister's will to support the French fact throughout Canada.

The French fact in Canada is in urgent need of such support. During the last campaign, the leader of the Conservative Party did not limit himself to making statements of belief on behalf of the French language in Canada, he also signed a solemn commitment on behalf of the communities, which reads as follows:

● (1615)

By placing my signature at the bottom of this statement of commitment, I acknowledge that linguistic duality is one of the foundations of Canadian society and that the official language communities, and more particularly, the francophone and Acadian communities, are one of the pillars of this duality and consequently of Canada. By doing so, I agree to take every means necessary for the Government of Canada to promote their continued development.

The Speech from the Throne does not—we must admit—reflect the commitments made by the Prime Minister during the last campaign. We must be concerned.

La Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, in a press release on April 6, 2006, reacted thus:

La Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada is expressing its deep disappointment and concern regarding a Speech from the Throne that has left almost no room for linguistic duality or the francophonie in minority settings.

In the Speech from the Throne, the notion of linguistic duality is found in the preamble by the Governor General, but not in the government program, and this is upsetting

commented the federation's, Jean-Guy Rioux.

He added:

We must also lament the fact that, in the list of our country's fundamental values, the speech mentions neither linguistic duality nor diversity.

La Fédération culturelle canadienne-française was of a similar opinion:

—this government's Speech from the Throne is a complete disaster for the artistic and cultural sectors of Canadian francophonie and the francophone and Acadian communities in which they work. The concerns of these two sectors, with the arrival of the Conservatives in government, are gaining ground.

René Cormier, president of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française, said:

I must admit, we are deeply disappointed. Except for the Governor General's preamble, there was no mention of the arts and culture in the Speech from the Throne, nor was there anything about linguistic duality. The message we get from the Speech from the Throne is quite clear. Arts and culture in Canadian francophonie have been eradicated from the vision of Canadian society as the Conservative party sees it. The Conservative party wants to build a strong, united, independent and free Canada, but it is an aberration to think they can do so without culture, without the arts and without cultural diversity. We cannot accept this and we are particularly perplexed and concerned about what will happen next.

These reactions show us that there is a clear disparity between what the Prime Minister said during the campaign and what was said in the Speech from the Throne.

In this context, what should happen next?

We believe that the government should correct this omission and prove that he is concerned about the francophone and Acadian communities.

The Address

In 2001, excluding Quebec there were more than a million Canadians whose mother tongue was French. However, the number of those who use French at home keeps decreasing. It went from 671,000 in 1971 to 613,000 in 2001. The challenge for many of these communities is one of survival and not development. The risk many of these communities face is that of assimilation.

Veritable little French bastions, stubborn and determined to exist, these French ramparts in North America, as the president of the Fédération canadienne-française et acadienne calls them, need our support. Not the symbolic support found in election campaign rhetoric, but solid support found here, in this House.

• (1620)

Francophone and Acadian communities can count on Quebeckers. They can count on the Bloc Québécois, which deeply admires their courage, creativity and determination to preserve their language, culture and identity.

As such, I urge the government to offer tangible support to these communities by increasing the budget for Canada-community agreements from \$24 to \$42 million dollars in the next budget.

I would also urge the government to provide a clearer definition of its rather vague "French language secretariat" and to give it the means to provide adequate support to communities. Finally, I urge the federal government to offer services in French everywhere in Canada.

The Bloc Québécois will work very hard for these communities. As the critic for la Francophonie and Official Languages, I make a commitment to this issue. I will take this commitment as seriously as the Prime Minister will, I hope, take his.

I believe that this House can bring about tangible improvements for Canada's francophones and Acadians. I sincerely do.

• (1625)

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I apologize to you for my previous reference. I found out that the word is "dean". You are in such an important position that I would want to give highest praise to the dean of the House. It is a well deserved position.

I thank the member for bringing forward some omissions in the throne speech. In fact, I would like to use this time to apologize to the government. The press asked me if I saw something good in the throne speech and I said that I saw aboriginal entrepreneurs, women who felt their voices were not heard and women who were victims of violence as being good and that showed up in the newspaper. I did not realize, however, that the Governor General had written that and not the government. I apologize.

Aboriginal people, the environment, immigrants and seniors are very important to the fabric of Canada but there was no reference to those except as an afterthought in the conclusion. Would the member and her party agree with me that those are important fabrics of Canada and that there should have been more mention of aboriginal people, the environment, immigrants and seniors other than an afterthought? We put in programs to help millions of people in those areas.

If the member agrees that the omissions she talked about and the ones I talked about are so important, why is the Bloc Québécois being so easy on the government in this debate?

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: It is well known that the Bloc Québécois strongly supports the cause of aboriginal peoples. We have proven it in the past. As citizens of Quebec, we have set an example for Canadian society in terms of the plight of aboriginal peoples and how to ease it.

I believe that my colleague is aware of the advances that have been made in Quebec.

Let us look at the Bloc's position.

[English]

The word in English is "soft" on government. I think the Liberal Party should thank us for that. Since it is in such a bad position, I do not think it would be very happy if we pushed too hard on the government right now.

The Bloc and Mr. Duceppe have said that we will work with the government as we did before as long as we take into account Quebec's interests and the Bloc Québécois' interests, which is what we intend to do.

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind members that we should not refer to members of the House of Commons by their names.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, just because people do not want an election does not mean we cannot stand up for our principles and fight for things that are not in the throne speech, such as capital gains. It contains nothing for communities, for cities, for the disabled, for the Doha round to help farmers, nothing on drug abuse, education, students, fisheries, forestry, the historic Kelowna accord, homelessness, infrastructure, low income people, mining, a northern strategy, oil and gas, the Pacific gateway, regional development, research, rural people, small business, big business, social programs, tourism, trades and volunteerism, contaminated sites cleanup and International Polar Year.

We are going to stand up and fight for those things regardless of the situation in Parliament. We are not doing it just because we are politically ready or not for an election.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Speaker, certainly there are a lot of things that were not in that document. That is why we have pointed a few of them out.

As well, we have tried to see, from previous statements by the Prime Minister, how we could expand the points of interest on which the government should take action, because these are promises the government has made us. I would encourage my hon. friend to do the same thing.

The Address

Given the very many topics that were left out, we would surely achieve more if other people on this side of the House wanted to do the same thing and paid attention to the government's promises, to ensure that they were honoured.

• (1630)

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. President, this is the first time I have spoken in the House, except for this afternoon during question period, and I take this opportunity to thank my fellow citizens in the riding of Québec who have elected me for the fifth time. I will live up to the expectations of the people of my riding. As usual, I will work hard and with integrity.

Let us now look at some of the things left out of the Speech from the Throne, although we cannot draw any broad conclusions from that speech about this government's actual intentions in several areas. Certainly, there are a few general priorities, but I think there are also several omissions in relation to a number of areas and facts of life that all Quebecers and Canadians are familiar with.

And so there is talk about open federalism, respecting jurisdictions, and, among other things, the place of Quebec in international forums, where areas under those jurisdictions are being discussed. There is talk about a place similar to Quebec's status within La Francophonie. There is a desire to limit federal spending and to part company with the previous government, which was very paternalistic and, most importantly, centralist.

The Bloc Québécois cannot oppose that. We do in fact see some openness.

In any event, no one can criticize the approach taken and choices made in the Speech from the Throne, which was rather brief and quite succinct. It is not a cause for concern for us, in any event, in terms of the first steps taken on the path that this new government will follow.

Seven out of ten electors did not vote for a Conservative government in Quebec, and six out of ten in the rest of Canada. This is a minority government. We would hope that the Conservatives will acknowledge the facts of life in a minority government, and will be able to work with the various opposition parties, so that we can achieve a number of things in several areas that were not mentioned in the speech from the Throne.

When the time comes to take sides on measures that will probably be part of the budget, we will undoubtedly see whether the budget meets a number of expectations, in this instance the expectations of everyone in Quebec.

We therefore feel some concern about certain of the government's intentions. In terms of its desire to apply national plans and national strategies, we do not know where that will lead. We are therefore somewhat concerned, because we criticized the former Liberal government quite a bit, in particular for its proposal to impose national strategies and plans. Great care will have to be taken, and it is to be hoped that the new government will do things differently from the previous one.

They also say they want to resolve the fiscal imbalance. Again, this is not entirely clear. Within the government, the Prime Minister says that this will not be done in the coming budget, but will be part

of the next one. So we will have to be patient, because this may come later, in a future budget, we don't know when. But a minority government has to demonstrate that it intends to take quick action to show the people that it wants to effect a change.

We know that this government's finance minister somewhat contradicted his Prime Minister when he said that this budget would be dealing with the fiscal imbalance. He created hopes that we could have a debate and come up with some alignments, try to determine how far we can go to resolve this fiscal imbalance.

We will have to continue to be very alert, very cautious, and give the public the true situation as to the real intentions of this government.

During the election campaign, they also promised \$1,200 to families with young children under six. This indicates another attempt to interfere in fields of provincial jurisdiction, with no regard for the agreement that had been reached, an agreement I worked on with my NDP colleague from Sault-Sainte-Marie. It took a long time to discuss that agreement, a lot of time.

• (1635)

People were waiting for the end result of that agreement. These agreements were discussed in each of the provinces. They were signed, and now there is to be no more of them. They represented \$800 million for Quebec.

We would propose a new method, one that would not penalize families, something of which we are very much aware. We have been very clever. We propose instead a refundable tax credit. That would be less of a penalty for many families. We know that \$1,200 is not in fact the net amount that will end up in the pockets of the persons receiving this allowance.

What we heard was not what could have been expected from this government.

The disadvantaged and underprivileged are among those who have been most forgotten in the Speech from the Throne. Also left on the scrap heap has been the POWA, the program to support workers aged 55 and over who lose their jobs, for example when factories close down. There are now new players on the international market who produce at less cost goods intended for the population of Canada and other countries. So we are seeing factories close because their operating costs are too high.

In Charlesbourg, a company called Chaussures Régence lost 200 jobs on December 31, 2005. They just shut the doors. These new unemployed people came to see me in my office. Some of them have formed a coalition to make a claim under POWA. These people worked in a company for 35 years and then overnight found themselves with no income because they did not have employment protection and insurance.

We are anxious to see what the government's position will be. It displayed a certain amount of sensitivity before the elections. I hope that it will remember the compassion that it said it had.

The Address

The same is true of social housing. They roundly denounced the billions of dollars accumulated by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. We do not know either what the government's position in this area will be.

The parliamentary secretary to the health minister is very aware of the mental health issue. Not only is this an area in which something should be done, but mental health involves several goals that need to be achieved at the same time, including better living and working conditions and adequate social housing. We need an entire system. To do this, we should help the provinces meet the needs of their people instead of intervening in place of them.

The government also presented a national plan to reduce waiting lists. It is not acting any differently than its predecessor would have. They would like to establish provincial plans and be able to give their approval to Quebec's. We are very sensitive in this regard. There is a commission underway in Quebec, on which all the stakeholders in the health question have a seat. This commission is dealing with the accessibility of health care. The Chaoulli decision gave a green light in Quebec to reform health care or at least to improving its availability.

We will not be in favour of the establishment of a public health agency. I do not know what the new government's stand will be on this. It must be remembered that health is a provincial matter. It would be much better advised to invest the money in the Canada health and social transfer and in education. The provinces will be able to meet the needs of their citizens. In my view, this is the winning approach and one that is well suited to meet Quebec's expectations.

That is all the time I have for this. I would have liked another 10 minutes. I have not finished, but that will be for another time.

• (1640)

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Quebec. I would like to congratulate her on her re-election.

In her speech, she said she supports the integration of Quebec into international institutions, probably based on the model of the Francophonie. In fact, Quebec and New Brunswick can act on their own behalf during Francophonie summits and at other international events.

My question concerns UNESCO. As we all know, this is a UN body in which only countries have the right to vote. What solution does the hon. member propose to help our government, so that Quebec may be fully recognized at UNESCO?

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is sovereignty, for then we would be a country.

Personally, I wonder about the Conservative Party's promise. I would draw two conclusions. First, that the government, and specifically the Prime Minister, was wrong to hold out such a promise to Quebec during the election campaign, knowing that only a country can officially sit at UNESCO. The mistake seems to have just been discovered. The Belgian model has been suggested to him. If he had thought carefully about it, he might have answered differently and he would not have given Quebecers false hope. During an election is no time to play word games because, once

someone is elected, words must be put into action. Maybe he did not think he would be the one in power. However, now that he is, he must keep his promises. Clearly, he has reached a dead end.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her remarks and congratulate her on being elected to Parliament again and having the trust of her constituents.

It was said that the Conservative government's first throne speech neglected to mention several things. But it is Canadians and Quebecers who were truly neglected for the past 13 years. Previous throne speeches did not focus on priorities. They were shopping lists that tried to please everybody. They were litanies of promises that were not kept.

It is easy to seduce voters. It is not so easy to keep and honour our constituents' trust.

The throne speech, which proposes measures for Canadians, is geared to Canadians' needs. It includes the reduction in the GST, the child care allowance, improved access to health care and measures designed to change the attitude toward the provinces.

This throne speech also shows that the government can be flexible. Take, for example, the amendment that addresses older workers. In my own riding, there are shipyard workers who were also neglected for the past 13 years. I hope they will have a support program and that, thanks to the Conservative government, they can have sustainable jobs. No support program can do that. As we say in Quebec, we are in business when private industry can create jobs.

Lastly, I would like to come back to something that previous speakers said: Quebec is a vital part of Canada. Not only Mr. Harper said it, but the leader of the NDP did as well. I think that my Bloc Québécois colleagues were there. I hope that we can work together to get things done in this House in the interest of Canadians.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. member for Quebec, I would remind the hon. member and other hon. members, because it has happened a couple of times this afternoon, not to refer to members of the House by their surnames. The hon. member referred to Mr. Harper. Earlier someone referred to Mr. Duceppe. This is out of order.

The hon. member for Quebec.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I find it somewhat difficult to answer my new colleague from the South Shore because there really is no question for the Bloc Québécois. I think perhaps he is criticizing the former government. However, now that they are in power, we should respond to what is on the table. I find his answer somewhat lacking. He states that there are no major omissions, but what about social housing, employment insurance, the independent fund, and the POWA program. He spoke about the 1% GST reduction. How people spend their money will determine if they pay less tax. I believe families will receive \$200 per year at the most. We cannot say that it is not a good thing, but it is not an exceptional measure, although it seems that this is what the member believes.

The Address

I would prefer that the Conservative Party ask real questions rather than condemn the former government. That has already been done and it is no longer in power. It is now up to them to deliver the goods.

•(1645)

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I could note first, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for South Shore—St. Margaret's.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak here today, Mr. Speaker. As this is my maiden speech in the House of Commons, I would like to thank the citizens of Barrie for giving me the honour to serve and fight for their concerns in this historic chamber of democracy.

I must admit that the first time I walked into these chambers, I got goosebumps. I did so because of the respect I have for this chamber.

I truly believe that politics can be a noble cause as long as we remain committed to the debate of ideas and public policy. Today I believe that debate needs to focus on law and order.

In Barrie we take a great sense of pride in our traditionally low rates of crime. However, even our peaceful community of Barrie is unnerved and shaken by the growing rates of crime.

[Translation]

Even in Barrie, a fairly quiet and peaceful community north of Toronto, my constituents are concerned by the apparent increase in violent crime. I promised them that this new Conservative government would be taking a new approach to the treatment of criminals and I am proud that our government is keeping its promises right from the start.

[English]

Prior to my election as a member of Parliament, I served on our local council and was a lawyer with a general practice. One thing that sticks with me is that in my municipal ward during my second year at council, there was a beating of a young individual in Tall Trees park. This shocked individuals in the north end of Barrie. It shook their confidence and their sense of security. Those residents in northern Barrie deserve better. They do not deserve to have their safety shattered.

Just this past weekend I was involved in a park clean up in the downtown Allendale subdivision of Barrie, where just a few weeks ago a 14 year old was stabbed to death by a 16 year old. This is in Lackie's Bush in Barrie. These tragic incidents are not simply the exception, but they are becoming increasingly common in Canada. Canadians deserve to feel safe within the confines of their own communities. This is not too much to ask. This is the least we can do for Canadians.

Over the last 13 years we have seen a Criminal Code and a Youth Criminal Justice Act that have become increasingly liberalized. How do we deter young offenders when there is no real punishment for their peers who commit crimes? How do we deter drug offenders when they get a slap on the wrist, a conditional sentence to go watch TV in their own house? How do we deter gun crimes when the offenders get told to take a time out in the corner? I would tell all criminal offenders that if they do not respect their neighbours, their

community and their place in the community, then how can they expect their community to respect them, their rights and their place in that community? It is for this reason that I am so proud to serve as a member of the government under the leadership of the current Prime Minister. Canadians are tired of talk. They want action and they want it now. That is what Canada's new government is going to do, take action.

The government will set mandatory minimum sentences for serious violent and repeat crimes. We are going to hold the criminals to account. This means making sure that sentences match the severity of crimes and getting violent criminals off the street so they cannot reoffend. The government will send a strong message to criminals that if they commit a serious crime, they will do serious time. That is why during our mandate we will take the following actions.

We will introduce mandatory minimum prison sentences for drug traffickers, weapons offences, repeat offenders and crimes committed while on parole. We will end conditional sentences for serious crimes, or appeal the faint hope clause. We will replace statutory release with earned parole. Parole is a privilege and it has to be earned.

Holding criminals to account will require more police. Having served as a councillor, I can appreciate how the previous federal government left police forces cash strapped with pie in the sky legislation focused on rhetoric and not good, sound public policy, without any means to implement those necessary changes.

That is why we are also going to work with our partners in other levels of government to make sure there are more police officers on the streets. This is of vital importance, because many of our police forces are currently underfunded and under siege. This situation carries dire consequences for public safety.

The lack of police patrols inevitably leads to more crime. I mentioned two parks in Barrie, Tall Trees park and Lackie's Bush. If a crime occurs, the citizens deserve to have some police presence. Our communities deserve the right to have a police force that has the financial resources and capacity to respond with all the severity of the law.

I do not want to put the police chief in Barrie, Wayne Frechette, in a position where he must choose which criminal acts he can respond to and which ones he cannot. If we have laws in the country, they must be enforced. We need to give our police forces the tools to act.

The federal government is going to act. We will establish a new cost shared program with provincial and municipal governments to hire new police officers, to reinvest savings from the long gun registry into front line enforcement and invest new federal money into criminal justice priorities, including youth at risk programs.

The Address

During the winter campaign I had the opportunity to be part of two town halls. The first one involved our Minister of Finance, and the second the Minister of Justice. Both sessions had participation from every key police department, the OPP and the Barrie police, along with contributions by Mayor Rob Hamilton and the chief of police who hosted one of the meetings for us.

• (1650)

The underlying theme of these discussions was that the criminal justice system had become a revolving door. Our police chief would bring criminals into court and see them let out that same day or shortly thereafter.

The residents of Barrie and our police force believe we need to get tough on crime. We need to foster a greater level of tangible deterrents in sentencing and an enhanced sense of personal accountability for those who break our collective trust.

This government believes that enough is enough. We deserve to feel safe within the confines of our neighbourhoods. The Prime Minister will make a difference. This government will act. We will not coddle criminals. We will not waver in our convictions.

I look forward to going back to Barrie and being able to say to my constituents that we will create a Criminal Code that will hold fully accountable those among us who do not respect the rule of law and the dignity of human life.

In conclusion, I would simply like to thank this Prime Minister and our current Minister of Justice for pursuing an agenda of accountability and justice, which has been long overdue in Canada.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the debate has often addressed the issue of crime and putting serious criminals away. I do not think there is anyone in this place who would disagree that those who have committed violent and serious gun crimes should have penalties which are commensurate with the seriousness of the crime.

I am not sure if the member is aware, but in this place one of the things that we found out is that half of the people in Canada's jails today suffer from fetal alcohol syndrome and other alcohol related birth defects. Many of these people also have been the perpetrators of serious crimes. The member probably will know that there is no rehabilitation for someone who suffers from mental illness due to prenatal consumption of alcohol by the mother.

Maybe the member would agree that we need a comprehensive approach to crime. We have to have a balance between prevention and, as he also mentioned, resources. The policing authorities are not the jurisdiction of the Government of Canada. The police cannot even have enough resources to address the marijuana grow house problems. How is it that we are going to get the resources into the hands of the provinces without encroaching on provincial jurisdiction and indeed without taking over those responsibilities which constitutionally belong to the provinces?

• (1655)

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, it is certainly amusing to hear that we cannot get involved in areas that are not our responsibility when the previous government continually talked about a new deal for municipalities. Municipalities are not within the domain of the federal government. Certainly if we work with the provinces and the

municipalities, as I mentioned, it is one of our platform goals to hire more police officers by giving the resources to those who deal directly with this.

In the last government, mention was made that there were 1,059 vacant RCMP spots. That is unacceptable. This government not only wants to hire officers for those positions and provide the resources to do so, but to work with municipalities to hire 2,500 police officers across this country. As much as we may want to talk about reasons why the status quo is acceptable, which I do not believe is the case, if we look at the statistics for 2004, homicides went up 12%. Last year everyone in the House would have been mortified with some of the tragic incidents that happened.

I find it unacceptable to simply accept the status quo of the current Criminal Code. It does not offer adequate deterrents. To make up excuses why we cannot act would not do justice for the people who have fallen to tragic deaths over the last year. This government needs to act. The Prime Minister will act. It is an honour to be part of this government.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I offer my congratulations to you on your ascendancy to a seat that befits your long service in this place, your wisdom and your stature.

I ask the member, where in this vision would he put the very important activities of prevention and treatment? In my own community we had a treatment centre for people who ended up in trouble with the law. It was doing excellent work, particularly where drug addiction is concerned. The centre was returning people to the streets in better shape than when they had arrived at the centre. In fact, people went on to live constructive lives and made some contribution to society because of the centre.

That treatment centre was shut down by the previous government. It was actually set up by the government before that. It would be an excellent vehicle if it was looked at again and revamped and resourced again, so that it could become a treatment centre that would deal with some of the challenges that we see out there as people struggle, both victims and perpetrators, to better themselves and create safer streets for all of us.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, I believe this debate needs to centre not only on how to help a criminal not repeat, but also the victims.

We need to start focusing on sentencing. One statistic that I find surprising is that in 2003 Nathalie Quann in the Justice Canada report "Drug Use and Offending" made note that the average sentence for a drug trafficker was only 87 days.

Perhaps it is about time we looked at the sentences that are being given. We do not need drug traffickers watching TV on a conditional sentence. Let us give real deterrents for real criminals.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Barrie on a good speech. It was well delivered. I am sure the constituents of Barrie will be well represented in this and in future Parliaments. I also take a moment to congratulate you in your office as Deputy Speaker.

The Address

During my remarks on the throne speech, I will speak to a number of things that some parliamentarians, especially the opposition parties, have overlooked. We are talking about change here, not just a change in government but a change in the direction of government. Our primary focus of the throne speech, and I expect the primary focus of the upcoming budget, will be on change.

If we look at the Liberal record of broken promises, of the sponsorship program in Quebec and across Canada and the broken promises to the military, it would be my hope that there will never be a political party of any political stripe that will break its bond with the Canadian public the way the Liberal government did.

We have stated that we will clean up Ottawa by introducing and passing the federal accountability act. We will lower taxes for all Canadians by cutting the GST from 7% to 6%. We will ensure safe communities by cracking down on gun, gang and drug crimes. We will give parents a real choice in child care, with a \$1,200 annual payment for each child under six. We will work with the provinces and territories to establish a wait time guarantees.

Those are five clear priorities. That does not mean there are not other priorities. That does not mean we will not look at other issues that face Canadians, their families and the regions of Canada. It does mean we are a government with a direction and a plan, and we will address specific issues in a fundamental way that has not occurred in the country for 13 years.

I would like to address two specific issues in my remarks today. Unfortunately, we do not have unlimited time. There is a lot that needs to be said and we do not have time to say it all. I would like to speak a little about the military and the fundamental, disgraceful Liberal record of supporting the military. I also would like to speak a little about child care and the way the numbers are stacking up. Every time I read an article or listen to someone else talk about child care, I get a different set of numbers, but when we actually analyze those numbers they are quite remarkable.

Let us talk about cleaning up government. Let us talk about delivering our election promises to the Canadian people. Specifically, let us take a look at the Conservative plan to support the military versus what happened under the Liberals. Everything was promised under the Liberals. Nothing, quite frankly, was delivered.

We can take a look at what happened when we put our troops in Afghanistan. There was a spending spree by the Liberal government because they did not have the tools to do the job in Afghanistan. In particular, they did not have armoured personnel vehicles. To ensure that our troops were properly equipped and trained, they had to go out at the eleventh hour and spend a tremendous amount of taxpayer money on giving our men and women in Afghanistan the tools to do the job. That was in 2001.

In 2001 we had 2,769 medium logistic vehicles, or wheeled vehicles. They were already 20 years old, the wheel rims were cracked and they had no spare parts. All of a sudden the government found itself not just on a peacekeeping mission, but in a very serious war zone. It decided that it would cost \$3,500 per vehicle to fix these things up. The government was willing to spend the money because it looked bad, and we had men and women in harm's way. Then the government decided it really could not do that, so maybe it would

buy new armoured personnel carriers. This became a \$1.2 billion project. It included 1,500 military vehicles, a large number with armoured cabs, 800 commercial trucks and 300 trailers

• (1700)

Fourteen months later this project, which was announced, then re-announced and then announced again by the Liberal government on how it was looking after our troops in Afghanistan, remains unfunded. There was never a dime put into it.

Surely this is not acceptable. Surely we have to change the way we are doing business in Ottawa, specifically in the House. The idea that we can make promises and not keep them is absolutely unacceptable in this place.

Specifically on child care, we have come up with a plan that puts money in the pockets of all Canadians. The largest portion of it will go directly to the poorest Canadians, Canadians of very limited income. There will be equality in child care for the first time.

The Liberals got elected in 1993 promising a child care program. Not one full time space was created. There were a few part time spaces, but no full time spaces. There was no choice.

Rural Canadians and Canadians living in remote locations were totally left out of any child care plan. There was no spending analysis done. There were no predictions on how this could be paid for in the future. There was no plan. There was never any intention of them keeping their word on it to begin with. It was all smoke and mirrors.

Let us take a look at the Liberal spin, how that has affected the media and how that has affected the information sources to which ordinary taxpayers are listening. I was reading the newspapers and some of the reporting on it. I picked up an article by Terry Weber of the *Globe and Mail*. I encourage members to read it. It states:

According to the government agency, about 54 per cent of children aged six months to five years were in child care in 2002-2003, compared with 42 per cent in 1994-1995.

We see that child care has gone up. It goes on to state:

In the most recent period, three forms of child care—daycare centres, child care outside the home by a non relative and care by a relative inside or outside the home—each accounted for about 30 per cent of all care

My question is this. What is he saying? Are 30% of Canadian children in child care? When we read it, it is not what he is saying. He is saying roughly one-third, 33.3%, are in child care of the 54% who are actually in child care. That is very misleading.

The Address

If we get the statistics from Statistics Canada and take a long hard look at what the Liberals have been talking about in child care, a little investigation tells us that of all children in child care, and remember that is 54% of all children in Canada, 25% were enrolled in a day care centre as the main care arrangement. Twenty-five percent of 54% is 11% of the population that is in some type of an accessible day care situation that does not include a family.

When we hear the Liberals' rhetoric on child care and what they have done for children in this country, it is patently false.

It is very encouraging to see a government willing to lay out priorities, willing to stick to those priorities and actually deliver those priorities.

• (1705)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, talking about rhetoric, the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's talked about our military. I chaired the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs, of which the hon. member was not a member. He never sat on that committee so he really cannot speak from experience.

The hon. member is being intellectually dishonest when he said that we did not have the equipment and we had no money. He should reflect on the last two budgets alone. I will not go to the last three or four budgets.

Senior military staff came before our committee, one after the other, praising the Liberal government for the investments. They were so happy with what we had done, they applauded us.

Let me clarify this for the hon. member because he talks about procurement and equipment. Today, we are talking about buying heavy lift airplanes. They do not even exist. They are not even on the assembly line. The earliest we could possibly receive them, if we placed an order today, is maybe seven or eight years down the road. We do not just snap our fingers and say that we want airplanes, or that we want jeeps, et cetera. That just simply does not happen.

Maybe in his world or in the world of the a minority government they think they can take an order paper to Grand and Toy and say that they want to order airplanes. That is just not the case.

The hon. member has not got a clue what the military has been saying.

• (1710)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the rhetoric from the hon. member opposite, and he is right. I certainly not sit on the defence committee, but my father was a veteran and my grandfather was a veteran of both world wars. They fought with bolt action rifles, which are better than some of the equipment our military has today.

He does not have to lecture me about the military or my stance or my defence of it because I will look out for the military first and foremost every time.

Look at the Liberal record of helicopters that were promised and taken away. Look at the lack of equipment. Look at the troops coming home from peacekeeping missions, taking their helmets off and giving them to the troops going on duty, even to the point of

taking their boots off and giving them to the replacement offers. It is absolutely shameful.

What I have said is very clear. There was a promise of armoured personnel carriers. Not one armoured personnel carrier that was promised was delivered. The only ones delivered were already en route.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in recent years I served with my colleague on the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, where we tackled the issue of infrastructure.

Unfortunately, the Speech from the Throne says absolutely nothing about federal infrastructures. In our regions, the majority of infrastructures are in an appalling state, having been abandoned years ago. The federal government is responsible for looking after its own infrastructures and ensuring that they are usable.

There is nothing in the throne speech to indicate that the newly elected government intends to take responsibility again for these infrastructures, and for repairing and appropriately maintaining them.

Like me, my colleague comes from a maritime region and, in his riding as well, there are infrastructures in terrible shape. I am referring in particular to small craft harbours that are the responsibility of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The situation is not much better on the Transport Canada side.

The throne speech said absolutely nothing about managing the resource and the fishery. There was but one small word, the word "ocean". That is all I saw. There was nothing in the throne speech to indicate a new approach to managing the resource and our oceans.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I sat on the fisheries committee together for a number of years. I have always enjoyed my hon. colleague's interventions. He has always approached the fisheries committee with a team approach and certainly has been a steadfast proponent for small craft harbours throughout Canada, not just in Quebec but throughout the entire country. I very much appreciate that.

The difficulty here is that this is a throne speech and we are not detailing every single issue we are going to deal with. There are serious needs in the maritime community. There are serious needs because of a lack of funding and a lack of spending over 13 years of neglect by the Liberal government. There have been 13 years of neglect for our small craft harbours. Certainly there has been a serious rationalization in the number of docks and wharves that could actually be supported and paid for by government. I understand the previous government had to do that. That had to be rationalized. Most of that has occurred. Hopefully we will not see that trend continue.

The Address

We have a new Minister of Transport and a new Minister of Fisheries and I expect they will be looking at these issues in a very serious manner, understanding the unique dovetailing between the maritime community and this infrastructure that is very much needed, the same way that highways are needed for the rest of the country. This is something we will want to look at in the future. The member should not be too disheartened that it is not mentioned in the throne speech. There are clear priorities there. Those are priorities that are needed and priorities that we are going to deal with.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

Since this is my first opportunity to address the House in this new Parliament I want to express my gratitude to the people of Pierrefonds—Dollard who gave me their confidence for the fifth time by renewing my mandate. I promise to continue to defend and serve their interests to the fullest. I also want to commend the hon. members from all the parties who were re-elected and those who are sitting here for the first time. Public service is a noble commitment that requires the best of one's self. I want to assure my colleagues of my full cooperation in any matter promoting the general interest of our fellow citizens.

The Conservative government delivered a Speech from the Throne last week that, unfortunately, is sorely lacking in concrete measures to adopt to improve the lives of the citizens of our country. It is nothing but empty words, a list of platitudes—there is absolutely nothing tangible in it. I find it highly regrettable, since Canadians could have expected a lot more from a brand new government that got elected by promising a lot more.

There is nothing new in this throne speech about accountability, for example. It was the Liberal government that took the initiative to issue very clear guidelines to protect federal public servants who blow the whistle on misappropriations and those who commit them. It was also the Liberal government that took the first step to adopt stricter measures for lobbyists who have previously worked in government. The same goes for party financing, since in-depth reforms were initiated by the previous government in order to ensure better transparency and greater integrity.

It was also the Liberal party that undertook to enhance the autonomy of the auditor general, since the government was determined to ensure integrity in public finance management by correcting what needed to be corrected and by prosecuting anyone who broke the law. What concrete measures is the Conservative government proposing in order to go further in this direction? Once again, there is absolutely nothing in the Speech from the Throne on this matter.

The Conservative government gives us only hollow words as if it were afraid to make a real commitment. We must note, of course, the eagerness with which this government took credit for measures that had actually been taken by the previous, Liberal government. Furthermore, this government claims to consider that Canadians pay too much income tax. In fact, it is not at all the interests of the average citizen that the Conservative government wishes to defend

but rather those with large fortunes. As evidence, I refer to the GST reduction of 1%. Is anyone going to benefit from this more than those who can buy luxury cars and big new houses for themselves? This measure will have only a microscopic effect on the income of average or low-income citizens. These are the people, though, that a government worthy of its name should be favouring. No major measure was announced in the Speech from the Throne to lighten their burden.

Finally, the government has inherited a very strong economy, which is the result of the economical and responsible management approach assumed by the Liberal government throughout its mandate, and which was clearly beneficial for the vitality of the Canadian economy. It is therefore the economic heritage of the Liberal government that made the accumulation of a large budget surplus possible for the federal government, and this is what enabled the federal government to invest in our social programs, in health and in everything concerning the betterment of citizens.

Even more seriously, there is absolutely nothing in this Speech from the Throne to provide support for middle-class citizens and those most in need, notably where affordable housing is concerned. This government is deliberately forgetting that one of its most essential duties is to act to improve the living conditions of these significant parts of our society. No one should be sidelined in a country as prosperous as Canada. Nowadays the government has the means to do better, notably thanks to the healthy Liberal management of the past decade, but we cannot but conclude that it refuses to do so.

The government has also announced that it plans to fight crime more vigorously, but the directions it is advocating in this regard are retrograde, not to say reactionary, designed basically to please the ultraconservative electoral base that helped elect this government. The government is inspired far too much by measures prevailing in the United States, where we observe that the greater the repression is, the more the number of violent crimes soars. The Liberal government, however, had taken tangible action to reduce crime. Canadians recognize themselves fully in the measured and responsible spirit of the Liberal government's policies respecting justice, since they reflected a real respect for people and recognized the rights of victims of crime.

The Conservative government should know that Canadians are opposed to the creation of a repressive police state which is a potential source of harmful human rights abuse, and they can count on the official opposition to promote and defend that principle.

• (1720)

With regard to young offenders, the Conservative government is simply promising an approach that will only increase crime, thereby perpetuating if not feeding the cycle of violence.

Instead of its exaggerated and essentially punitive, retrograde approach, the government should instead be making young people truly responsible by giving them a chance to escape the cycle of violence.

The Address

But the Conservative government is instead doing the opposite. It is proposing no concrete measures in that direction, not to mention the need to work to improve the living conditions of the most disadvantaged families.

With regard to child care services, the Conservative government is advocating an irresponsible approach, one which first of all destroys the consensus with the provinces established by the Liberal government, in the wake of laborious but judicious consultations.

In addition to making a direct intrusion in a field of provincial jurisdiction, the orientation taken by the government clearly compromises middle-class and more disadvantaged families, for if it is compared with its aborted predecessor, those families are net losers.

With regard to wait times in the health sector, the government is again making claims which violate a provincial field of jurisdiction. The Liberal government had been able to respect provincial jurisdiction, while substantially increasing financial support from the federal government.

Yet the Conservative government is saying nothing about federal funding, even though this is a real priority for Canadians.

In summary, the agenda of this government is a clear disappointment, as it offers no measures to respond to the concrete needs of our fellow citizens.

The government offers nothing concrete to improve federal immigration services, nothing concrete for health and post-secondary education, nothing concrete to improve the standard of living of the middle classes and the most disadvantaged.

Canadians deserve much better, and they can fully rely on the official opposition to remind this government of that fact.

[*English*]

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by reading a line that is buried near the very end of the Speech from the Throne: the government “will promote a more competitive, more productive Canadian economy”. That is it.

I was disheartened to see that Canada's future prosperity registered only a 10 word mention at the end of the speech, a brief mention without any details. I might say that while I was disheartened, I was not surprised, because none of the Conservatives' top five priorities are aimed at improving our country's prosperity.

I have heard the Prime Minister say that when these five priorities are addressed, the government will have more, but such short term planning does nothing to create a medium term and long term vision for this country, and there is not a single indication that the government has such a vision.

It begs the question: why is Canada's prosperity not a top five priority? It is amazing. The prosperity of a country is basic in terms of living standards, jobs and creating the wealth that is the foundation for our social programs, and yet it is simply not a top five priority.

It seems the government has no vision for how to take a country of some 30 million people and make it competitive in a world of

economic giants like China, India and Brazil. There is no indication that the government has a plan to be more competitive with our closest neighbour and biggest competitor, the United States, yet this is what we have to do. We have to strive to create a Canadian advantage in everything we do.

● (1725)

[*Translation*]

The need to create a Canadian economic advantage is urgent. Yes, Canada's economy is strong today. However, if we consider the state of the world and the challenges of productivity and population aging we can see that it is not up to other countries to ensure Canada's economic growth.

[*English*]

In simple terms, the world does not owe Canada a living. That is why the government has to be concerned with our prosperity. That is why it is unacceptable that prosperity is not a top five priority.

[*Translation*]

The federal government must act on two fronts: competitive taxation and support for research, innovation and higher education. On the fiscal front, we must work toward the right balance between policies aimed at attracting and keeping businesses and skilled workers and policies supporting low- and middle-income Canadians.

In addition, we owe to the Chrétien and Martin governments a significant increase in federal assistance for research, innovation and higher education.

[*English*]

However, in each of these areas the government seems intent on creating a Canadian disadvantage rather than a Canadian advantage. This can be summarized very easily by saying that either the government is going in totally the wrong direction or it is missing in action.

On taxes, the government is going in the wrong direction. On everything else, innovation, research, higher learning, training, these things that are absolutely essential for Canada to prosper in the future, it is totally missing in action.

Let us look at taxes first. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce recently recommended:

That the federal government should:

Continue to put the highest emphasis on reducing personal income tax rates across all income tax brackets but particularly for low- and modest-income earners who face the most punitive effective marginal tax rates of all.

The Minister of Finance knows the benefits of reducing personal income tax. He believed in them when he was the minister of finance in Ontario. In 2001 he delivered several snappy responses in that legislature, showing that he truly understood that lower income taxes were the way to go. Let me quote from our Minister of Finance when he was Ontario minister of finance:

It has been the Ontario experience since 1995 that the reductions in the personal income tax have been most effective in stimulating the economy and creating jobs. They boost productivity growth the most directly of the various tax tools available to government. Lower personal income tax rates encourage entrepreneurs; they give employees the incentive to try harder and achieve success.

The Address

He then went on to say that the government was putting the money directly into people's pockets for them to spend as they saw fit. That almost sounds as if the minister was reading from Liberal talking points. It is almost as if he were a very productive member of the Liberal war room during the election campaign. He could not put the case for lower personal income tax more strongly and more coherently.

While the minister understood this concept, he is now not doing what he believes will boost productivity growth. He is not proceeding with the tax cuts that would encourage entrepreneurs. Instead, he is raising those taxes and creating a Canadian disadvantage.

[Translation]

Taxes, however, are not the whole story. There is no doubt that the Conservative program is also lacking in terms of research, innovation, higher education and training.

The Conservatives have cancelled \$9.4 billion of the Liberal commitments in this area. These commitments were made as part of the November 2005 plan for growth and prosperity. The Conservatives are committing only \$1.4 billion, a meagre 2% of their total election promises.

[English]

Here is one example which speaks volumes to the fundamental difference between the Liberal plan and the Conservative plan. Our plan was to pay up to half of the tuition fees in year one and year four for all college and university students. This is a major effort and a major expenditure to promote higher learning and increase accessibility.

The Conservatives would have none of that. What did they do? They give Canadian students a tax rebate on school books and scholarships to those who are already enrolled. There is the difference between our two parties in terms of the seriousness that we attach to higher education.

These policies put Canada at odds with almost every government in the developed world. All those other governments are all clamouring to become more competitive in a globalized world. As a comparison, let us just look at what is happening in the United States. The Speech from the Throne spoke of the U.S. as our best and largest trading partner and I certainly agree with that statement.

What the speech failed to recognize is that our best trading partner is also one of our biggest competitors and that our friendly competitor, which cannot be accused of suffering from a left-leaning government, certainly understands that there is a role for the public sector in creating its own competitive advantage.

• (1730)

[Translation]

The current mindset in the United States is explained well in a recent report ordered by the Senate and entitled *Rising Above the Gathering Storm*. Recommendation C mirrors the spirit of the report:

Make the United States the most attractive setting in which to study and perform research so that we can develop, recruit, and retain the best and the brightest students, scientists, and engineers from within the United States and throughout the world.

All of the report's recommendations focus on strengthening American economic leadership and most of them assume a significant increase in public spending.

If you believe as I do that Canada's economic future lies in the creation of a Canadian advantage, the American intention to implement decisive government measures in order to protect its economic leadership should send shivers down your back. It means that Canada must quicken its pace only to maintain the status quo and even more if it is to obtain an advantage. However, instead of quickening the pace, the government appears to be dropping out of the race.

[English]

At the moment, when other countries around the world are fixated in devoting expenditures to increase their research, innovation and universities, our government steps out of the race. At the moment, when other governments around the world are reforming taxes to make them encourage innovation, our government raises income tax and cuts the GST.

At the moment when the U.S. has indicated a new desire to search the world for the best and the brightest, given the aging population, our government is poised to cut the budget of the immigration department.

It is astounding and shocking, and unacceptable, that this government would ignore the prosperity of Canadians and that prosperity is not a top five priority. This side will oppose with all our vigour this total negligence of the prosperity of Canada and Canadians.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as this debate unfolds today, I want to make a comment on what has come across from the government benches. Government members have referred to the past 13 years in a number of interventions today. I guess what it boils down to is that a responsible government is one that does what is necessary to improve the lot of the citizens it serves.

When the Liberal government took over in 1993, we had a reality. The reality was that we were spending \$48 billion more each year than we brought in and we were adding to a total accrued debt. Over the past 13 years, the last eight, we have supplied surplus budgets. We have balanced the books and provided surplus budgets.

I think back 13 years and I remember unemployment rates of 12.5%. I know statistics released this week show that the jobless rate is at a 32-year low. I know that did not happen over the last couple of months. I know that happened over 13 years of work, but we did what was necessary.

What I see in this throne speech is that this government is not identifying what is necessary, and that is the prosperity agenda.

I have a question for the hon. member. What in fact are we staring down the barrel of? What is at risk here in not shoring up and making that investment, so that we are able to grow and prosper as a nation?

The Address

• (1735)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no doubt that if we look around the world today it is hugely competitive compared with what it used to be. There are the emerging Goliaths of China and India. China has 30 million engineers; almost as many as we have Canadians. So the question arises: How are we going to make a living? The world does not owe us a living. How are we going to compete with these Goliaths? The answer is certainly not on wages, and we do not want to.

It is only through brain power. Every sensible government of the left or right persuasion around the world understands that it is its responsibility to promote that brain power through research, through innovation, support for higher education and training programs. The U.S. government, not exactly left leaning, is seized of that because it is worried about losing its economic leadership.

Prosperity is not a top five priority. We sit on the sidelines and we, as a country, cannot afford to sit on the sidelines as other countries pass us by. That is the shame of this throne speech. There is nothing in it at all for this absolutely fundamental issue of the prosperity of Canadians.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too am disappointed that prosperity and productivity were not dealt with in the throne speech and they are so important. The previous questioner so adequately and accurately set out what happened to the country under a previous Conservative government when it took its ball off the productivity and prosperity agenda. We all know the numbers.

The member for Markham is a renowned economist. There must be thousands of economists across Canada and I understand that two of them can never agree. Does he know of any economist in the country who would agree that lowering the GST versus lowering income tax vis-à-vis the prosperity agenda is a better way to go?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I can think of only one economist in that category who thinks it is a sensible idea to raise income tax and cut the GST and that economist happens at this moment to be the Prime Minister of Canada. This is not a left-right thing. Members just have to think of my former Simon Fraser colleague, Herbert Grubel, the former finance critic for the Reform Party. He was hardly a raving socialist. He put it very well the other day when he said that cutting the GST may be good politics, but it is terrible economics.

If we look at economists across the spectrum, they all believe that this is the most anti-growth, anti-productivity measure that one could possibly imagine with the one exception of the right hon. gentleman who sits across the aisle, the Prime Minister of Canada.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I would again like to thank my constituents of Selkirk—Interlake for putting their trust in me one more time in this fine House and representing their views on an ongoing basis.

I am proud to speak to our new government's Speech from the Throne. As a father of three young daughters, I want to speak to the government's strong commitment to the well-being of children and families, a commitment that we are proud to advance through our proposed new choice in child care plan.

My wife, Kelly, and I have used many forms of child care over the years and participated very actively in our local community child care program. My wife served as director and president of our community child care centre and we have benefited from the professionals who work there.

As a rural farm family we also have relied on other forms of child care, including private care, family and friends, to help us raise our children and ensure a safe and healthy environment for our children to grow up in. So I know as a father how difficult it can sometimes be to fill all our child care needs as a family and as a community.

I represent a very rural riding in Manitoba with many towns spread out over a large area and with many families living on farms and in very remote areas. I knew very quickly that the former government's late conversion and promised child care system would not work for my constituents in Selkirk—Interlake. Many of my constituents live too far from towns and day care centres to benefit from the kind of day care that the Liberal government had promised would not work in Selkirk—Interlake.

Our new plan for child care will support families by helping parents to balance their work and family life. We all recognize that strong families are indispensable to children's good health and social well-being. This applies to families of whatever composition, two parent or single parent families, and whether they are paid in the labour force or raising kids, or are raising kids at homes while they are farming. All parents of young children will benefit from our child care plan because it is universal and designed to fit each family's unique needs and desires.

Mr. Speaker, I forgot to say that I will be splitting my time today with the hon. member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

This government's approach addresses all the necessary components of a successful child care strategy. We will support parents in their child care choices and we will work with employers and communities to create new child care spaces. Our plan is grounded in this government's understanding that parents know best when it comes to raising their children and creating strong families. We believe this approach is one in keeping with Canadian values.

The choice in child care allowance set out in the Speech from the Throne clearly reflects this understanding. This allowance is about choice and respect for all Canadians. It is based on the principle that government should support parents in their child care choices. It also recognizes that parents know best what their family needs.

The Address

As members of the House are well aware, Canadian parents face a diverse work environment. Not everyone is working nine to five, Monday to Friday. Parents work in the evenings, on weekends and at home. For Canadians who work on farms or in the fisheries, what they do is the core of who they are. Every day is spent balancing the demands of family with their work. The Canadian family today needs flexibility and innovative responses from this government to meet their needs.

Our choice in child care allowance also takes into account that nine to five child care facilities may not be a viable option for many families, including the approximately one-third of Canadians who live in small towns and rural communities without ready access to day care facilities.

The allowance recognizes that many Canadian parents continue to find ways to stay at home to care for their preschoolers themselves. In fact, almost half of all young children are cared for by a mother or father at home.

The choice in child care allowance gives these families options that they might not otherwise have. For parents who stay at home, the allowance will mean that they have the extra resources to draw upon when they need occasional or part time child care. For low income families especially, the allowance will make an important contribution to helping parents provide their young children with the kind of care they choose, whether it is centre based or a different type of child care.

In keeping with Canadian values, this non-discriminatory universal initiative treats all families with young children equally, regardless of income, where they live or whether the parents choose to work or stay at home.

• (1740)

Starting in July 2006, \$1,200 per year will go directly to parents for each child under the age of six. An estimated 2.1 million preschoolers and their families will benefit from this allowance. To help ensure that Canadian families get the greatest possible benefit from the allowance, it will be taxable in the hands of the spouse with the lowest income.

We see the new allowance as a complementary addition to the various income supports that the government already provides to families with children, including stay at home parents and those who are working. These supports include the Canada child tax benefit, the national child benefit supplement, the child care expense deduction, extended parental leave and the Canada learning bond.

As I noted earlier, our child care plan will also create new child care spaces. Starting in 2007 we will invest \$250 million a year in incentives for employers, non-profit organizations and communities to create new child care spaces. We estimate that these new measures will create 125,000 new child care spaces over the next five years.

We will be talking to businesses, non-profit employers and communities, in addition to the provinces and territories, to ensure we get this initiative right. We know that our key to success is to ensure flexibility of design. Our goal is to meet the needs of all Canadian parents, regardless of whether they live in a city or a rural community, and whatever their hours of work might be, which may not fit the nine to five mould.

This initiative will complement the roles of partners, such as provincial and territorial governments, by helping to create new child care spaces that are so desperately needed.

We also believe that employers will benefit substantially from this initiative by creating child care spaces for employees at their place of work. Many studies have shown that supports, such as workplace child care, can actually decrease workers' absenteeism by reducing employees' anxieties. Parents know their children are close by and being well taken care of, giving parents peace of mind. Employers in turn are rewarded with increased productivity in the workplace.

I also want to mention that while the previous government's plan only amounted to about \$700 annually per child care space in the province of Manitoba in increased subsidies, our plan will deliver \$1,200 per year to all children and spend an additional \$250 million a year to create 125,000 new child care spaces. That is \$500 more per space being made available by the present government and that is for every child under six years of age, not just the ones currently in child care spaces across Manitoba. Our plan delivers substantially more to all Canadian parents.

To sum up, our plan is one that recognizes the diversity of Canadian families' needs and preferences. It does so by providing a universal benefit that parents can use as they see fit toward the kind of care they choose for their children. Ours is a plan that will create new child care spaces that fit the wide-ranging needs of families across the country, and we will do it in a way that benefits all families in every part of the country.

This is a plan that responds, above all, to the choice in child care that Canadians want. I am confident that we will see the benefits in our children's future development, health and social well-being, and in stronger families that are the sure foundation of our nation.

After 13 years of being told about Liberal grand designs for a national day care program, parents were left with nothing more than promises. On January 23, Canadians voted for a government so committed to child care that it made it one of its top five priorities. Our government is committing over \$10 billion to assist parents with their child care needs, more than twice as much money as the previous Liberal program promised but not delivered. This money will help parents, giving them real choices in child care and support investments in the creation of child care spaces.

The Speech from the Throne promised a choice in child care plan because it is the right thing for Canadian families.

The Address

As the government, our responsibility is to lend a helping hand to ensure that Canadian families have meaningful choices in child care and to support them in whatever child care choice suits them best. This is also our responsibility as a society. I call upon my hon. colleagues to support the government in this most worthwhile initiative.

• (1745)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are several items in the Speech from the Throne where common ground can be found but I am disappointed, as I said earlier this afternoon, that the whole issue of productivity was not mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, which is one of the areas I want the member to address. He only talked about it in one sentence.

Over the past 13 years, when this issue was front and centre, we have seen substantial reductions of debt, employment has been up, productivity has been up, interest rates are down, and whatever international indices one wants to compare it to, Canada has done very well. If we were to compare that to 13 years ago, when that issue was not front and centre, we had a deficit of \$43 billion, the interest rate was 13%, unemployment was 11%, debt to GDP ratio was 73% and the country was a disaster.

What assurance can the member give Canadians that we are not on the very same track that we were on 13 years ago when the economy of this country was an absolute total disaster?

• (1750)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I just love that our Liberal colleagues across the way seem to have a memory of only 13 years.

When I became involved in farming back in 1982 at the tender age of 17 and took out my first loans, the government of the day was Pierre Elliott Trudeau's Liberals. If I recall, my interest rate at that time was 24%. That government was driving the country into the ground. We had huge deficits in place and the national debt just ballooned under the Trudeau Liberals. We had eight years as a government, during the nineties, to start to turn the page. When paying 20% and inheriting the huge debt and the bad management of the Trudeau Liberals, we never had a chance to really get after the debt. However we were able to start the right initiatives and put in place the right programs that put the country back on the right track.

I love the analogy. We had two people by the names of Michael Wilson and Don Manzankowski who went out and planted a beautiful garden and the Liberals just came along and picked all the flowers. Sure, the country is in good fiscal shape but it is in good fiscal shape because of the initiatives that were started by the government from 1984 to 1993. The first time I was able to vote was in 1984 for the Conservatives, to give the Liberals the boot and bring in some good government. I am glad to be standing here as a Conservative and glad that we will be inheriting an economy that is robust but one that we will continue to keep on the right track.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to affirm my colleague's comments. I have heard the members opposite taking the position that they are responsible for solving the country's financial woes. I believe that position is quite disingenuous. When we look back I think the record will show that the Liberals did that on the backs of Canadians. They eliminated the deficit and were able to start paying down the debt but how did they do that?

First, they did it by charging much more in GST than they ever had to. My understanding is that when the GST was first implemented it was supposed to be revenue neutral. In fact, we know that it never was revenue neutral. It provided billions of additional dollars to our national coffers.

Second, they took in way more money, under employment insurance premiums, than they needed to pay out employment insurance to needy employees who were without work. Where did that money go? It did not go back to the employers or the employees. It went into general coffers and was used to pay down debt and eliminate the deficit.

Finally, they downloaded to municipalities and local government. I was personally involved in local government in those days and I can tell members that our community itself took a hit of about \$7 million because of downloading.

Will the member confirm that our government will bring GST tax relief to all Canadians, not just the chosen few?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I want to say yes, we are bringing in a GST tax cut that is going to benefit all Canadians, including the 30% of Canadians who do not pay income tax and would never see the benefit of an income tax cut. The only way they are ever going to see tax relief is through a cut in consumption taxes. That is exactly why we are going ahead with the GST cut. This was a recommendation that actually came from the National Anti-Poverty Organization, and it is one that we are glad to have in our throne speech and will be moving ahead in the next budget.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by acknowledging what a great privilege it is to be elected as a member of Parliament. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the constituents of Souris—Moose Mountain for re-electing me for a second term.

It is indeed time to turn a new leaf. The throne speech was short and to the point. It is an indication of our no-nonsense approach to governing. The government is turning a new leaf because people have chosen change.

It is sometimes difficult to see change when the first few steps are taken, but change is coming. We are turning a new leaf. We will see our country change direction. It is changing direction for the better, whereby ordinary Canadians with ordinary values will once again be recognized.

Canadians pay too much tax. The government will, over time, reduce that tax burden, starting with a reduction in the goods and services tax.

It is time also to tackle crime, to make changes to the Criminal Code to provide tougher sentences for violent crime and repeat offenders, to increase the age of consent, to adopt zero tolerance in response to child pornography, and to place more police officers on the streets. Safe streets, safe communities and strong families will ensure a strong country. The strength of our families is the strength of our nation.

The Address

We must earn the trust of our citizens, and we also must earn the respect of our citizens. There is nothing more fundamental than that. The government must also be held to account. One of the first pieces of legislation tending in that direction will be the federal accountability act. This act will set the stage for bringing accountability back to government.

One of the most important investments we can make as a nation is to provide direct financial support to help families who raise young children. During the election campaign at a coffee shop at a small community rink in Storthoaks, Saskatchewan, I asked the young moms at the table how many children they had between them under the age of six. There were eight children under six, which would be a total of \$9,600 for those young moms in that small community. They could hardly believe this to be true. This represented a very real and meaningful benefit to those families.

How dare the Liberals say the program is of no effect? I invite them to visit the small rural communities that for the most part have been forgotten by the Liberal governments in Ottawa.

The rural communities in my constituency are starting to shut down due to years of Liberal neglect. The farming community is similarly starting to shut down. Recently, near my home community, an auction took place for an intergenerational farm, with a full line of farm machinery and 41 quarters of farmland all on the auction block. Land now sells for half the price it used to command just a few years ago.

On April 3, several auction sales were held in my constituency within about half an hour's drive of Benson, Saskatchewan. Six farmers held an auction sale on the same day. To see six auction signs one after another in the village of Benson caused me to stop, take note and see what was happening. We do not have to debate it in the House. It is obvious for all to see. In all of my life, I have not seen the likes of it. A sight like that is hard to take and goes right to the core of a person's being. It is evidence of an agricultural economy shutting down.

The number of auction sales this year increased from last year, and last year increased from the year before. Young people have been leaving with no immediate plans of coming back, yet the Governor General stated in the throne speech that "our young people represent not only the promise of a brighter future, but also the vitality of our present".

Under the Liberal government, the lights have gone out on many Saskatchewan farms and hope has been lost. Our government has a huge job to re-establish hope, but we must start by sowing seeds of hope that will in time translate into a vibrant rural community.

The Speech from the Throne is a good first step. It stated very clearly that the government recognizes the unique challenges faced by those who make their livelihoods from our land in agricultural industries. Our government will take action to secure a future for Canadian agriculture following years of neglect under the watch of the Liberal government.

The speech clearly stated that the government will respond to the short term needs of farmers, create separate and more effective income stabilization and disaster relief programs, and work with

producers and partners to achieve long term competitiveness and sustainability.

• (1755)

I urge our environment, agriculture and natural resources ministers to take bold and immediate steps to ensure not only that our farm families are preserved, but that our cities, towns and villages have quality food to eat and clean air to breathe. This means that we must get past the rhetoric, roll up our sleeves and pay the price of personal effort and sacrifice to make it happen.

We are all aware that world food markets are such that supply outstrips demand and commodity prices are lower than the cost of production. No one can operate on that basis for very long. We must take immediate steps to convert many of our acres to biofuel production, which not only will supply our increasing energy demands but will also make us less dependent on world markets.

We must ensure that our farmers participate in the profits generated in the biofuel cycle. This will take new ideas, fresh initiatives and some legislative intervention to make it happen. We must act and we must act now. The face of our world is changing quickly and so must our policies change if we wish to offer the promise of hope to our farmers and to preserve an industry that is the very bedrock of our society and the catalyst that will keep our rural communities alive.

I would like to transfer my attention for a few moments to the portion of the throne speech that touches upon immigration and its effect upon the fabric and strength of our nation.

I want to begin by saying that it is a privilege to be appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. I want to thank the hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and the right hon. Prime Minister for the opportunity to serve my country, my constituents and indeed all Canadians in this capacity. I look forward to working with all members of the House in promoting and advancing the interests of Canada and the many applicants for entry into Canada under Canada's immigration and refugee program.

Canadian citizenship is highly valued not only in Canada but throughout the world, and it is something we can all cherish and take pride in. At the very outset of the throne speech, the Governor General described Canada as a land "where people from around the world have found a home". She stated, "Women and men of ideas, conviction and action", people from all walks of life from around the world, have made Canada the unique and great nation it is today.

This refers not only to the massive contribution immigration has made in the past years, but to the role it will play in the decades ahead. To remain competitive in today's global economy when our demographics are dramatically changing, we need the skills, the ideas and the conviction that newcomers can contribute to their new country and to our future together. Immigration is not just about our past, it is about our future, a future built upon hope and a new dynamic that will express itself in a new and vibrant Canada, a Canada that is building, expanding and creating new opportunities for all peoples, a Canada where all of us can enjoy and share in the benefits of our growth and prosperity.

The Address

The speech also refers to Canada as offering “a promise of hope for the oppressed”. There are many in our world who are oppressed and Canada recognizes and accepts its international obligations. This is exemplified by Canada’s humanitarian tradition of being a safe haven for those in need of protection.

In its essence, our refugee program is recognized by the United Nations and countries around the world as a model of fairness and compassion, but yet no system is perfect, so improvements can always be made to make it more timely and effective. Our refugee system needs to be one that is readily available to those in need and vigilant enough to guard against those who seek to abuse it. It is a fine balance that we must attempt to obtain.

The Speech from the Throne affirms that our government will seek to improve opportunity for all Canadians, including aboriginal peoples and new immigrants. That is why our government envisions, among other measures, the reduction of the right of permanent residence fee for applicants who wish to make Canada their new home.

The government will work to hasten the recognition of foreign credentials. This will assist us in getting properly trained professionals working in Canada much faster and in jobs that make the best use of their skills and education.

Finally, the throne speech describes Canada not only as “a country where everything is possible, where each of us is free to follow his or her dreams”, but also as a country where everyone “has a duty to help build our country and prepare it for the challenges that lie ahead”.

● (1800)

With the great privilege of Canadian citizenship comes also the responsibility of citizenship, the shared responsibility all of us have, newcomer and long-timer, to contribute the best of what we are and have to a richer and better Canada of which we are all a part, a Canada where we are committed to the well-being of our neighbourhoods, our communities and our country.

The Speech from the Throne recognizes immigration as central to our past and vital to fulfilling the promise of the future. I am very pleased to stand in the House and recognize that this government is determined and committed in its aim to cherish and promote our shared values through Canadian citizenship and by enhancing and improving Canada’s immigration and refugee program, not only in substance but also in process.

● (1805)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his enthusiasm for immigration. I would like to ask him three questions.

First, he referred to farmers. The big problem for grains and oilseeds farmers, of course, is the subsidies from the United States and Europe. Why is there no mention in the throne speech of how we are going to be tough and fight at the Doha round and in international trade agreements where that problem can be solved?

My colleague also talked about Canada and the world. Why is it, then, that the only country mentioned in the throne speech, of hundreds in the world, is the United States? It is mentioned several

times. Is the end of the Conservative world at the United States and in North America?

My last point is on immigration. I am delighted that the member is so enthusiastic about immigration. He had good words to say about it, but he must be disappointed in what the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration could get into the throne speech. I would ask him to refer to what is in the throne speech, but I will not, because there is nothing in the body of the throne speech dealing with this issue. The word “immigration” is thrown in as an afterthought in one sentence in the conclusion, along with aboriginal peoples.

Perhaps the member could comment on these three deficiencies in the throne speech.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that the grains and oilseeds programs have not been working to the degree they should. The Liberal government had 13 years to address what was happening in the farm community and it failed to do so. Those members talked the flowery talk about all the kinds of things they would do, but they did nothing.

This Conservative government is poised to actually address the situation. When I talk about lights going out in Saskatchewan, that applies to Manitoba, Ontario and other places across Canada. Rural Saskatchewan is starting to fade away. People are moving. Farmers are leaving their land.

Why should farmers have to march on Ottawa with their hands out, asking to survive, asking to get almost their cost of production? They have eaten up their equity during 13 years of Liberal government. For many years farmers have lost hard-earned money and yet Liberal members have the audacity to say we have not done much in the throne speech. We have referred to agriculture specifically. We have set out the priorities and we will actually accomplish them, as opposed to the Liberals who will indicate numbers of promises, many promises, and who will make flowery talk but take little action, year after year. It is the same thing, year after year.

Canada recognizes that it must work in cooperation with other countries around the world, not only the United States, to make this country a better place. I can tell the hon. member that the immigration minister will work hard to achieve many of the goals that need to be achieved. It is not the number of times the word “immigration” is used in a throne speech that makes it good or bad; it is what we actually effectively do when we get into office to make it work better.

If that hon. member had put his government to the test over the 13 years it was in office, he would have found that the immigration system was under a lot of stress because of the inaction on the promises that were made but never carried out, because of the talking that was done without action being taken. It is only the good service of the public servants that has kept the system together, that has made it work as well as it works. It is their hard effort that has kept the system together, not what the previous government has done or said it would do.

The Address

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate you on your re-election to the position of Speaker. I also congratulate the member for Souris—Moose Mountain who just spoke. We served on the human resources and skills development committee in the last Parliament, an experience which I particularly enjoyed.

The member mentioned farming and agriculture in his comments. I can identify with him. There are some farming areas in my own riding, some communities that are served by the farming community. The member is right that there is great difficulty. I am told that there are two or three farmers a month leaving the farms in my area. It is indeed a crisis. We do not seem to be getting a good handle on what it is exactly we need to be doing to fix it.

I worked with the Liberals for some time to try to resolve the issue, but that really did not come about. I worry about the approach the present government might take. The Easter report which was written a short time ago mentioned that one of the biggest challenges to farming was the corporatization of agriculture, and the commitment of the member's party to the market and the free rein of corporations where commodities and goods and services are concerned.

I also heard a view from the member's colleagues when they were in opposition that vehicles like supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board were a challenge and presented some difficulty. I would like—

• (1810)

The Speaker: I am afraid that the time for questions and comments has expired. I will allow the hon. parliamentary secretary to give a very brief response.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that this government takes seriously the situation of the farm community. This government will be taking specific steps not only to improve the participation of the farms involved with produce but participation of the farmers of industries that are up the level in the food chain so that they can also participate in some of the extra revenue that can be generated from those types of activities. There is no doubt that we will also be looking at ways and means to make the sale of the product more effective than it now is.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my time with the hon. member for Vancouver North.

I would like to start by congratulating you, Mr. Speaker, on your re-election to the Speaker's chair. Although I am new to this House, your reputation precedes you.

I would also like to thank the voters of Parkdale—High Park for giving me their confidence. I consider it a great honour to represent our community in the House of Commons. I look forward to working with the NDP caucus and across party lines to advance my constituents' interests in this great chamber.

I campaigned on a platform of championing Toronto's issues in Ottawa and I intend to do just that working with the mayor of Toronto, David Miller, who is a constituent.

I was pleased that the new government's first throne speech included mention of the environment, the creation of new child care spaces and the importance of public health care. These are important priorities to the people of Parkdale—High Park and indeed to all Torontonians.

I was also immensely proud to have been witness to the long overdue official apology to the Chinese Canadians whose families were subjected to the humiliation of the Chinese head tax. As Parkdale—High Park is home to many Ukrainian Canadians, we look to this Parliament to address their internment as well.

Other NDP priorities were also touched on in the throne speech, however briefly, such as electoral reform and the prevention of crime. In this caucus we support making every vote count and we recognize the importance of stemming violent crime.

The government re-emphasized its five priorities. While some of them deserve attention and merit, they all fall short and in some cases are plain wrong. The citizens of Toronto have more than five simple priorities and they cannot wait years for them to be addressed.

We have waited too long for a national public system of early learning and child care. After 13 long years of promises from the previous government, we were finally to see the modest beginning of such a system.

I say to the Prime Minister through you, Mr. Speaker, that the children of Toronto, the children of Canada, need child care now. Their families are counting on the choice in child care that can only be achieved when we create spaces that today's working families will be able to choose to take advantage of or not. Investing in early childhood education is a key part of kids getting a good start in life. I will be monitoring this vital issue for parents in my constituency and across Toronto.

Torontonians most of all want a city that is sustainable, fair, equitable and just. In short, they want a city they can be proud of and a country they can be proud of. It should and I believe it can be a great city that is a cultural and social centre, not only an economic engine that benefits the rest of the country through equalization measures, although we in Toronto recognize this importance, but a truly great international city. However, for Toronto the good to be more than a slogan, for it to become really true, we need the help of the federal government.

After years of empty promises, we had hoped to see the needs of cities like Toronto better addressed in the throne speech. Cities need a real plan and real funding for vital services like affordable housing, transit, services for newcomers and crime prevention. I want to work with the Minister of Transport to address these important challenges facing our city. We need to expand on the new deal for cities introduced in the last Parliament. I hope that this current Parliament will see the need to enshrine the funding agreements in legislation and give municipalities like Toronto a real seat at the table. A real deal for our municipalities requires a national housing strategy. We are the only industrialized country without such a plan and it is time to right this wrong.

Affordable housing is key to the health and quality of life for my constituents in Parkdale—High Park as it is for the rest of Toronto. While it may not make the new government's top five priorities, it is at the top of the list for many Torontonians as it is for me.

Also of great concern to the citizens of—

• (1815)

The Speaker: I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but as she knows, earlier today an order was made that the debate be

The Address

interrupted at 6:15 p.m. and the question on the amendment, as amended, was deemed to be put and deemed adopted. Accordingly, I must interrupt her and deem the amendment, as amended, adopted so that we can proceed with the next order of business, which unfortunately is not the continuation of this debate. I regret that I have to interrupt the hon. member particularly in her first speech, but the rules provide for that.

(Amendment, as amended, agreed to)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, April 6, 2006, the House in committee of the whole will now proceed to the consideration of Motion No. 4 under Government Business.

[*English*]

I do now leave the Chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

[*For continuation of proceedings see Part B.*]

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Monday, April 10, 2006
(Part B)**

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 10, 2006

[Continuation of proceedings from part A]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1815)

[English]

CANADA'S COMMITMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 4, Mr. Milliken in the chair)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) moved:

That this Committee take note of Canada's significant commitment in Afghanistan.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first speech in this Parliament, I would like to thank my constituents of Carleton—Mississippi Mills for re-electing me. It is an honour to serve Canadians in the House of Commons.

Today I address the House on Canada's mission in Afghanistan. Recently, the Prime Minister and I visited Afghanistan. It is a difficult terrain, a harsh climate, an unfamiliar culture, and an elusive foe making military operations challenging and at times dangerous. I can say with confidence that the men and women of the Canadian Forces know the challenges, they are overcoming them, and we are proud of them.

The Prime Minister has made our stance in Afghanistan very clear. We will stay the course. We will support our service personnel. We will endeavour in concert with other nations to bring peace and security to Afghanistan.

Today, as Minister of National Defence, I will explain why we are in Afghanistan.

Canada is in Afghanistan because it is in our national interest to protect the security of the nation and the prosperity of Canadians.

[Translation]

Canada is in Afghanistan to protect the safety and prosperity of Canadians.

The danger is not always clear, but it is real and our safety begins far from our borders. Let us just say that our government's strategy is "Canada first".

[English]

Our approach to Afghanistan can be summarized in two words, "Canada first". The Canada first defence strategy seeks to protect Canada from threats that confront us at home and from abroad. This means going to Afghanistan to counter terrorists harboured there, terrorists that are not bound by borders nor dissuaded by oceans.

• (1820)

[Translation]

The terrible attacks on September 11, 2001 during which 24 Canadians were killed, and the events that occurred in Bali, Madrid and London, exposed our vulnerability to terrorism.

Do we have to wait for terrorists to attack Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal or here in Ottawa before recognizing the real threat that is hovering over our safety?

[English]

An effective strategy to counter an opponent is to carry the struggle to his own territory. It is unwise to sit and wait for his next move. Since Afghanistan is a source of terrorists who are committed to striking vulnerable targets globally, Canada needs to be there along with our 35 allies.

[Translation]

We are in Afghanistan at the request of the Afghan people.

During our visit last month, President Karzai warmly thanked Prime Minister Harper for the Canadian contribution and asked him to thank the Canadian people. The Afghan people appreciate us and Canada is an example of democracy to these people who aspire to it.

[English]

As well as being in our national interest, Canada, one of the oldest democracies and one of the richest countries on earth, has a global responsibility as a member of an international community to show leadership in helping overcome the problems of Afghanistan.

Let us not forget we are also in Afghanistan because the Afghans have requested our help and we have the capabilities to provide it.

For both security interests and humanitarianism, the Canadian Forces have been involved in the mission in Afghanistan since 2001. They have done everything from surveillance duties, to burning suspicious vessels in the Gulf, to confronting armed insurgents.

Government Orders

More recently Canada adopted a significant leadership role and enhanced its presence in the south through the deployment of a battle group as well as a provincial reconstruction team and a multinational brigade headquarters. Complementing the Canadian Forces commitment, Foreign Affairs established a Canadian embassy in Kabul in 2003, while CIDA has directed over \$650 million to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan, our largest recipient of bilateral assistance.

The Prime Minister has expressed his desire for Canada to be a leader in this multinational mission. I can confidently say that national defence, in partnership with other departments, has taken this vision to heart. The Canadian Forces are in Afghanistan in substantial force in a leadership role with a clear, logical, legal authority. Our troops are among the best trained soldiers in the world, with the needed combat skills, peace support experience and the cultural sensitivity to prepare them well for the mission. Our troops are having a positive effect in Afghanistan.

Within the strategic context of restricting terrorism while expanding Afghanistan's capacity to protect and govern itself, Canadians are assisting in the establishment of legitimate and effective security structures, a police force, a military and a judicial system. As well, they are assisting Afghans who have suffered decades of poverty, tyranny and abuse by supporting and facilitating the humanitarian projects that are needed there.

[*Translation*]

There are clear signs of progress. Destroyed communities and broken lives are recovering thanks to the support from the international community, the Canadian Forces, colleagues from other departments and agencies, including Foreign Affairs, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian International Development Agency. These reconstruction efforts help reduce poverty and misery.

Schools, hospitals and roads are being rebuilt. Millions of people can now vote. Women now enjoy more rights and economic opportunities than they ever could have imagined under the Taliban regime. More than 4 million Afghan children, of which a third are girls, are now registered for school. With Canada's help, the Afghan people are on their way to defeating tyranny and taking back their country.

●(1825)

[*English*]

Our diplomatic presence in Kabul, our command of the multinational brigade headquarters and our well respected position in NATO all enable the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan to align their efforts with the common international goal of a stable, sovereign Afghan state.

Let me summarize. Our Canadian Forces are in Afghanistan because it is in our national interest, because we have the responsibility to take a leadership role in world affairs and because Afghans need us and want us to help them. Our troops are well trained, well commanded, well equipped and empowered with robust rules of engagement and legal authority.

Most important, our efforts are proving effective. Together with our allies, our approach is to: stabilize the security situation;

concurrently train the Afghans to take over their own security by province and region; maintain long term economic support to assist the economy; and exit as they become increasingly stable.

[*Translation*]

We have to be prepared to defend what we believe in. We have to be prepared to do what it takes to guarantee the safety of the Canadian public.

[*English*]

I can assure the House that we stood by this commitment in the past and the government will continue to stand by it. We have the finest soldiers in the world who are placing their lives on the line for us. The government will not disappoint them. We will not fail them. The government will stand shoulder to shoulder with our troops.

I believe that I speak for all parliamentarians when I say we are proud of the efforts that our courageous soldiers are making in Afghanistan to help defeat the scourge of international terrorism. We wish them continued success.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. minister for his speech, which I might say, in all respect and friendship to the minister as a colleague, I found some traces of an earlier speech that was made in the House on this subject last November around these issues.

I am very pleased that the government agreed to this debate tonight. We, on our side of the House, do not consider this a debate. We believe this is an opportunity to allow the Canadian public to better understand this mission.

I want to start by echoing the minister's words about how we support our troops. We are very proud of them.

There are few people who can appreciate, unless one is actually in Afghanistan to see our troops, challenged as they are, the job they do. As the minister pointed out and as anyone who has been there will know, they are able to fight when they have to fight, but they are there primarily to help the Afghan people. A young officer like Lieutenant now Captain Greene almost lost his life because he went to a village shura and was sitting down with the very people that he was there to help. That is the image of Canadian troops.

It is a different way of going about this mission. We are confident they will do it in a way where, yes, they can fight, but at the same time they will establish links with the Afghan people so the Afghans will know they are there to serve them, and Canadians can do it better than anybody else in the world.

Government Orders

My question to the minister is this. There has been a lot of comment in the press about the fact that this mission is coalition-led, that this is an American mission we are participating in, not a NATO mission. Is it not correct that in June of this year this will become a NATO mission? The Afghan government wished this to be a NATO mission and Canada, by taking the lead in this mission with our Dutch and British colleagues, is enabling the very thing which the critics of the mission ignore; that is a transfer from being a coalition American mission to a NATO mission. In fact, it is the courageous acts of the Canadians that will allow this to become a truly international mission in Afghanistan for the interests of Afghans.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member. Our forces concentrated in the Kandahar area under the assumption that they would eventually come under NATO control. At the moment, they are under Operation Enduring Freedom in the south, but that will transit in the next few months to NATO control as was originally planned.

• (1830)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the take note debate held in the House in November, members of Parliament and Canadians were assured that this was a NATO-led mission and that it would be a multinational mission. We know that at this time it is not. We are operating under Operation Enduring Freedom.

Of course we support the women and men in our armed forces and we believe the best way to demonstrate that support is to ask the serious questions that need to be asked about this mission.

Why have the Dutch delayed their deployment to Kandahar? Why are we not operating now, as we were told we would be, under a NATO-led multinational mission in Afghanistan, in Kandahar province?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I was in that debate in November and my recollection might be different from the hon. member. I believe at that time the then minister of defence explained the situation. The troops were under Operation Enduring Freedom and going to NATO command. That was my understanding.

Regardless of that, the Dutch are not delaying as such. They are just taking time to assemble their forces. They made a decision in parliament to send their forces, and it takes time to assemble their forces. It is the same with the British. The British in the south have committed 3,300 troops and they will be streaming in there all through the summer. As we all know, the British have no problem working with the Americans, nor do we, nor the Dutch.

I think the member is trying to make a mountain out of a molehill.
[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois during this evening's debate.

This morning, I had to laugh at a few things broadcast in the media. Imagine a Taliban commander saying that our discussion of the pertinence of a mission to Afghanistan reveals our weakness and our fear. I do not agree with him at all. The Taliban may be in the habit of cutting people's heads off and making executive decisions about how to proceed, but we live in a democracy. Our decision to

hold this debate tonight and to discuss in depth the pros and cons of this mission demonstrates one of the strengths of a democracy compared with the unspeakable tyranny of the Taliban. That much must be said.

As members of the opposition, we have a specific role to play. No military mission is perfect. Our role is to suggest ways to improve the mission and ensure that it is being carried out appropriately.

To that end, I have a few questions for the minister. Among other things, I would like him to reassure us that Canadian military personnel will in no way cooperate with the use of weapons such as cluster bombs and anti-personnel mines, which are against certain treaties signed by Canada.

I would also like to hear what he has to say about prisoners. I am aware of the agreement on the transfer of prisoners. There is currently nothing to prevent the Afghan government from turning prisoners transferred to it over to the Americans. Does the minister agree that we must have a clearer policy on the transfer of prisoners?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his comments in support of our troops in Afghanistan.

With respect to mines, the Canadian Forces do not have any anti-personnel mines. They are operating in accordance with the treaty that was signed by Canada a number of years ago.

With respect to prisoners, it is possible that the Afghan government could transfer a prisoner to a third party, if I understand it, but the government has to report that to the Red Cross or the Red Crescent, whatever the appropriate organization is. Apparently there are about 1,200 members of the Red Cross or Red Crescent in Afghanistan and they will be tracking prisoners. Afghans are being captured in Afghanistan and that is their country so it is highly unlikely that they would be transferred to anybody else. If they were, the Red Cross would follow the individuals.

• (1835)

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for being here tonight to lead off the debate.

Over the last year, many in the House have had an opportunity to talk to our soldiers in Afghanistan. I have had that opportunity on a couple of occasions. One soldier, who was on the ground and in danger, sent me an email indicating they had a rough day, but he felt what our troops were doing there was "the face of Canada". That was the term he used. He said that Canada was all about soldiers working with these people to improve their lives.

Does the minister feel that our troops in Afghanistan have not only the equipment but the empowerment, the rules of engagement, or the proper protocols to do the job they are there to do? The provincial reconstruction team has a diverse role to play. Does the minister feel the team is properly equipped to do that?

Government Orders

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, the previous government accelerated a number of projects for the troops in Afghanistan. Nearly all of those projects have been implemented. There is still a bit of equipment to come. When that equipment arrives, our troops will be the best equipped in that zone, so I thank the previous government for its efforts.

The only criticism I had in the past was the commitment of troops without having the equipment. The equipment is catching up to the troops and they will be very well equipped.

With respect to the other topic concerning empowerment and rules of engagement, I have had a review of the rules of engagement. I think the rules of engagement, which are enunciated basically under the international laws of war, are robust enough for our forces to do what they have to do in Afghanistan.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is my first opportunity to formally address the House since the people of Vancouver South honoured me with re-election as their member of Parliament on January 23. I was deeply honoured by this reaffirmation of their confidence and I am very pleased that my first address since re-election is on an issue of so much importance, not only to my constituents but to all Canadians.

I want to thank the leader of our party, a most respected former minister of national defence, to have entrusted me with the role of defence critic. Much of the renewal of confidence and sense of purpose we have seen in our Canadian Forces in recent times is a legacy of his leadership.

I am pleased to speak in the House for the official opposition regarding Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. I would like to commend the Prime Minister for finally coming around to our view, that a take note debate is the right and proper forum through which to engage members and Canadians in a dialogue concerning our mission in that strife torn and troubled land.

There is no more solemn choice for any free and democratic government than that of deploying the men and women of its armed forces into a combat zone. There is no more binding obligation on a government that asks such sacrifice of its sons and daughters than that of explaining why it is in the national interest.

In recent weeks brave Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have been killed in the line of duty. Others have been grievously wounded. Mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, have received the awful news that they dread most. Canadians have looked to us, their elected representatives, for reassurance that the mission is worth the loss.

I am here tonight, on behalf of the official opposition, to offer Canadians an emphatic, yes. Our government agreed to this deployment. We believed then and we believe now that destroying root and branch the agents and infrastructure of supply and training that made Afghanistan into a safe haven for international terrorism is in Canada's vital national interest.

Moreover, consistent with the Liberal government's international policy statement of April 2005, we believe that stabilizing, reconstructing and democratizing failing or failed states such as Afghanistan is the primary organizing principle for Canada's future foreign military operations.

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the United Nations authorized a coalition intervention in Afghanistan where the retrograde Taliban government had provided safe harbour to the al-Qaeda masterminds of the attacks on New York and Washington. Some 800 Canadian soldiers were deployed to the Kandahar region as part of this initial deployment. They earned praise from our coalition allies for the exemplary manner in which they carried out their duty.

In 2003, when NATO took over the international security assistance force in Kabul, Canada contributed the largest contingent of forces to the mission, numbering close to 2,000. In 2005, Canadian Forces returned to Kandahar and established a provincial reconstruction team comprised of about 250 Canadian Forces members as well as officials from CIDA, the RCMP and foreign affairs.

This past February, pursuant to a decision taken by the Liberal government, and at the request of the democratically elected government of Afghanistan, our forces increased their presence in the south of Afghanistan by deploying a brigade headquarters of approximately 300 Canadian Forces personnel and an army task force of about 1,000 personnel to Kandahar where they will remain for 9 and 12 months respectively.

This is a multi-faceted mission with a strong humanitarian component consistent with our 3D approach: defence, diplomacy and development assistance. It places an emphasis on building civil society and democratic institutions, and a commitment to reconstruction. We believe that incorporating these components into the mission is vital to a successful future for Afghanistan.

As government, we knew then that this would not be a quick and easy mission. We knew the enemy was determined and that casualties were a virtual certainty.

● (1840)

We also knew that the mission marked a shift from the traditional Canadian role of peacekeeping. However, traditional peacekeeping in the post-cold war and the post-9/11 world has changed to include humanitarian, security and reconstruction dimensions.

Reconstruction is not possible without security. The area must be secure in order for reconstruction activities to take place and to take hold. This work is done in a uniquely Canadian way. Our troops operate in a manner that is respectful of Afghanistan's sovereignty and the local customs of its people, all the while trying to lead by example by promoting higher standards of human rights and strengthening the foundations of Afghan democracy.

As I have said, the Liberal Party fully supports the deployment in Kandahar. We are proud to stand today for a decision we made in government. We are proud to support our troops in the field in an unqualified fashion.

However, in making such judgments a government has to balance objectives against risk. It must do so not only at the outset of a potential combat deployment but also over time. If there were to be a significant change in the circumstances surrounding this mission, if for example the government were to decide that it was extending the mission beyond the timeframe agreed to, then I would respectfully submit that the government has an obligation to bring such a matter before the House for debate.

The official opposition will be looking to the government, to the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence, to live up to their responsibilities by ensuring that progress toward the objectives we seek in common with our allies in Afghanistan is sufficient over time to justify the risk to our troops.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our support for our men and women in Afghanistan. We sent them in harm's way. They command our gratitude and our unwavering support. No matter how eloquent, words alone shall not suffice. As a nation we must summon and exercise the immense wisdom of which we are undoubtedly capable.

We have carved a line in the ragged hills of Afghanistan not with our words but with the legendary courage, the blood and the sweat of our men and women of the Canadian Forces.

On our side of that line is liberty and freedom from tyranny and poverty. Beyond that line is injustice, violence and repression. By creating security and liberty, and lending a helping hand through reconstruction, we shall help Afghanistan erase violence and poverty, and bring in a stable, free and peaceful Afghanistan.

Canadians want our men and women in Afghanistan to succeed. The government must engage Canadians in this ongoing dialogue and inform the country from time to time on the status of our stated goals in Afghanistan. Democracy demands it and Canadians deserve it from their government and their parliamentarians.

• (1845)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his remarks and for his support of the Canadian Forces, and the job they are doing in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Canada has never acted alone in these kinds of affairs. We have always acted as parts of a coalition. We have been valuable members of every coalition we have belonged to. We cannot do without them and frankly, the world cannot do without Canada at this stage. I am proud of the fact that we are slowly starting to rebuild the forces to the level they should be at.

The member brought up the potential for an extended commitment. Clearly, the situation in Afghanistan will require an extended commitment on somebody's part to make Afghanistan the safe and prosperous country that we all want it to be.

Has the hon. member or his party given any serious thought to the specifics in view of a requirement to extend our participation beyond February 2007?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, there is no doubt in my mind that the mission may need to be extended in some form or the other. However, it is important for the government to set those goals and

Government Orders

objectives by which we will judge ourselves at the end in February 2007.

I remember a question asked by the hon. Minister of National Defence when he was the defence critic asking the then Minister of National Defence essentially that question, that we should have stated goals. I would say to the government that it should be consulting with parliamentarians and the country, so that when February 2007 rolls around we are ready for that.

It is important that if this mission needs to be extended, we must have a full and open debate in the House and across the country. Canadians currently are divided on this mission. They are divided clearly right down the middle. They are looking for leadership from this chamber and from the minister, from the Prime Minister, and from all of us. It is important for us to engage them in a dialogue on this very important issue.

It would be premature for me to set down what those stated goals ought to be as an opposition critic standing here tonight. However, it is important for the government to ensure that we have a yardstick by which we can measure our progress and move on if we need to beyond 2007.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Chair, the member for Vancouver South and I go back a number of years in different political contexts over the years. I agree with much of what he said but there are still questions in terms of our mission in Afghanistan at this point.

I want to ask specifically about the agreement that was signed with the Government of Afghanistan on the transfer of detainees. The member for Vancouver South indicated that he was proud of the record of the previous government in terms of how it dealt with the issue of Afghanistan. However today we saw that a number of international legal experts expressed some very serious concerns about the agreement that Canada signed with Afghanistan. They say that Canadian soldiers may be at risk of prosecution in the international arena because we are not adequately protecting detainees and their human rights.

As the member for Vancouver South has been in the forefront at other times on the issue of human rights, does he feel this agreement with the Government of Afghanistan needs to be renegotiated to be sure to protect the human rights of detainees and that they not be in jeopardy of being transferred to a third state where they may in fact be humiliated or tortured? Is he as proud of that agreement as he was of the work of the Liberal government?

• (1850)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, I have had an opportunity to look at the agreement. I agree that it is an important agreement and it is one that is quite good in many respects.

The involvement of the International Red Cross or the Red Crescent as an independent third party is very important because it can then follow the prisoners and ensure they are treated well and appropriately in accordance with the Geneva conventions. The agreement makes reference to the Geneva conventions and that is important for us to recognize.

Government Orders

It is also important for us to recognize that just because the agreement may be silent on Canada's right to follow through and pursue the prisoners wherever they might be does not mean that Canada has lost that right and may not have that right in the event that we need to pursue the treatment of the prisoners in an appropriate fashion.

However I do want to tell the hon. member that I have spoken to Michael Byers and his colleagues who held a press conference this morning. I want to say to the member and to the Minister of National Defence that as a government and as parliamentarians, if we can improve upon an agreement that is already in place, no one should ever close one's mind to it.

I think in that fashion one should take a look at that. I am happy to take a look at that and consider some of the issues. However one should keep in mind the balanced approach that some organizations have. The Human Rights Watch has said that some of the fears that are expressed by those who held the press conference today may be unfounded. I think we need to approach these issues in a balanced fashion that is fair and open.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Chair, I get the impression, when reading the media accounts and listening to some members of the House talk about our involvement in the Afghan war, that we were somehow co-opted into an illegal American-style war. I just want to state the way I understand the situation and then ask the hon. member to correct me if I have the facts wrong.

On September 11 an attack was launched against innocent civilians in our part of the world. Three thousand civilian people were murdered, 24 or so were Canadians and hundreds of them were from countries other than the United States. The war was against liberal, western, democratic values and the things we stand for. That was the motivating factor of that war, and it was a war.

Where did the terrorists come from? They came from Afghanistan. Seventy thousand of them had been trained in a state that sponsored and protected this group against civilized people around the world and nothing was done about these people. From my understanding, this enduring freedom war was sanctioned and approved by the United Nations.

I think the objective of our initial involvement in that war was to destroy those terrorist camps in Afghanistan and to remove the government in power that had sponsored and protected them, and, as has so rightly been put forward tonight, the role is to rebuild that country, to bring back some civilization and some badly needed things to their society.

Some of the wars in history were very questionable but, if my facts are correct on this matter, I am having a problem trying to find out how in any way this war is illegal, evil or wrong. This is a war in which we should be proud to be involved and we should solidly stand behind the men and women who are fighting for those values in Afghanistan.

If I have any of these facts wrong, would the member opposite, who is quite knowledgeable on these matters, please correct them for me?

●(1855)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, far be it for me to correct him if he were wrong. No matter how this intervention started, it did start under the auspices of the UN in an approved way through coalition forces. The fact is that now we are there for reconstruction, for humanitarian work, for opening schools, for providing other facilities and in fact providing troops to create secure zones so that that kind of work can take place. That is important to remember.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Chair, as is my custom, I would like to thank the voters of Saint-Jean for having chosen me for a fifth consecutive term in the House of Commons. I promise to defend them with all the vigour and strength necessary, as I have been doing for 13 years. Some of my voters are listening to me right now, and I think it is important to explain to them the kind of procedure that we are following. I want to assure my voters in Saint-Jean that if I am surrounded by Liberals, it is because we are in a committee of the whole, which allows us to move around the House and sit wherever we like. They can therefore rest assured that I have not crossed the floor and have no intention of doing so.

The basic question is the following: should we stay in Afghanistan or leave? This is the debate that is raging now. Let us start with a little history and recall the sad events of 9/11, when airplanes hit the twin towers in New York. The response was not long in coming. The next day, the UN stated that this was a case of self-defence, of an attack on the United States, and the United States had a right to respond.

NATO reacted in the same way. Article 5 stipulates that if one of the 26 states that are members of NATO is attacked, the others must come to its defence. The same day, September 12, NATO established the legal basis for intervening. Everyone agreed that it was a case of legitimate self-defence. Several operations were launched. Operation Apollo made it possible to invade Afghanistan, with the help of the British among others. Canadians took part as well. Then there was Operation Athena.

We are now in the third of the four phases of Operation Athena. This is an international plan. The first phase consisted in stabilizing the capital because that was where the major infrastructure was located and where we eventually wanted to establish a government, a militia and public safety. This first phase has been completed in Kabul.

Then, during the second phase, the north and west were stabilized. Troops were dispatched to ensure that the north and west were stabilized.

Now we are in phase three, when Canadians offered to maintain the provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar, one of 13 PRTs in Afghanistan. This is proof of an international effort. Why is there such an effort? Why do 36 countries want to get involved to restore stability? Because they know that it is not enough to rid Afghanistan of the Taliban, to push them back to the borders and maybe even into Pakistan. That is not enough. The Taliban have to be prevented from coming back. Canada decided to maintain one of the 13 PRTs, and Kandahar was chosen. Based on my frequent trips to Brussels, I can tell you that the international community is extremely grateful to Canadians and Quebeckers—because the Royal 22nd Regiment will certainly be called on to serve as well—because they know that it is the toughest place in Afghanistan. They commend us for what we have done.

Phase four, which is still to come, will target the eastern part of the country, and NATO will take charge of all operations in Afghanistan. It is important that people understand that. The legal basis is solid, and the UN has given its approval. NATO has not only given its approval but will take part as well. NATO has 26 member nations, and 10 additional countries are lending support. Australia, for instance, wanted to get involved to prevent the Taliban from returning to power, for obvious reasons.

What happened before the international community got involved? There were terrorist camps. Al-Qaeda had a strong presence and controlled the Afghan government and the Taliban. There were terrorist camps everywhere. People planned attacks on western capitals. All this was done openly, and no one raised any concerns. No one prevented it.

● (1900)

After the events of September 11, people said that we could not wait any longer and that it had to end. The international community got involved by first ensuring a very solid legal basis. The current situation in Kandahar is not complicated. Some people are trying to tell us that it is like the war in Iraq, but that is wrong.

Of course it is under the Americans' Operation Enduring Freedom but Canadians command in Kandahar. When a Canadian commanding officer needs troops, he will often call headquarters in Kabul to say, "I need this or that," and he is supplied. It is not the Americans who are dictating to the Canadian commanding officer in Kandahar what he has to do. In any case, this is going to change soon because NATO is going to take over. The Canadians are making the transition and NATO will eventually take control.

At present, there is a command of 250 soldiers in Kandahar. There is also a team in the provinces where the economy and diplomacy have to be restored and the government has to be supported. So we need more than soldiers. However, in Kandahar, we need many more soldiers because it is the most unstable place. It would be idealistic to think that diplomats—we have already lost one—could go there or that CIDA could do development work there, knowing that the climate is unstable. There must first be a military force there to stabilize the situation.

There are 1,000 soldiers on a combat mission. Of course, stability must be ensured and the Taliban must be pursued. However, if we leave, either the international community will come to our rescue

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when we are no longer there or the Taliban will resume their old ways of doing things.

Has there been any progress in this area? To my mind, we have made some progress. Presidential and legislative elections have taken place. At present, 2,000 schools have been built or restored. Over 5 million children have gone back to school, one third of whom are girls who did not have the right to go to school before.

I believe that if Canadians and Quebeckers knew the real story, support for the troops would be much stronger. That is why I appreciate the debate. It is wrong to say that we should leave now. We cannot invite the Taliban to burn the 2,000 schools we have just built or restored. We cannot tell the Taliban to return to having only men in power. We cannot tell the women they have no right to schooling and no place in the country's political structures. That is not acceptable. That is why the Taliban commander made me smile when he said that we were afraid and we were showing indecision.

As I see it, we are showing no indecision here, this evening. We will not let the Taliban return to power and tell 5 million children there are no more schools, tell girls they have no right to go to school. We will not allow the growing of poppies and the manufacture of heroin to continue. Afghanistan is the source of 90% of the world's production of opium and heroin. That has to change, and that is the task of CIDA. It is the task of the RCMP to train the state police and military so they can be given more and more responsibility.

We cannot permit a recurrence of scenes such as we saw in Rwanda. It is wrong to think that Quebeckers and Canadians sitting in their living rooms are going to watch massacres and say, "No way are we going to send our soldiers: it's too dangerous". I do not believe that people think like that. On the contrary, when they are well informed about the mission of our Canadian Forces, the people will be in agreement, and that will provide us with more support. So let us continue. We will assess the situation.

I could also talk about prisoners, but I will probably do that in question format. Finally, we have the international effort. The effort of the Canadian Forces is recognized worldwide. I believe that we are in the process of getting a country on its feet again. The feeling of solidarity in Canadians and Quebeckers will ensure that they support their Canadian Forces and restore Afghanistan to a more decent life.

● (1905)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chair, has the Bloc given any consideration to the concern about land mines? As members know, our current military will not confirm or deny the use of land mines in the effort in Afghanistan. As they also know, the Government of Canada has signed a land mines treaty banning, eradicating and getting rid of land mines on this planet.

Would the member not see a possible contradiction in our foreign policy on that issue? What would he advise the government that we should do in this regard?

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for his question.

I questioned the minister earlier. His answer was no. Antipersonnel mines are not involved.

In my opinion, we would look pretty stupid, given Ottawa's treaty, if the Canadian military in Kandahar had to lay land mines around the camp.

However, my concern lies elsewhere, perhaps. We will recall that during the first operation, Operation Apollo, cluster bombs were dropped. The Bloc Québécois objected because these bombs hit the military and civilians indiscriminately. They could explode after the fact.

[*English*]

The Chair: Order, please. Apparently there is no translation. I am not sure what to do, but I want the hon. member to know.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Do I have to start over, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Try it again.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Is it fixed, now? Were my remarks not translated for a long time, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: We will give you a break on the time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I was saying was that my concern was more about cluster bombs. The Americans used them, and there was no international treaty on them. We think they are vile things, because they hit more civilians than military personnel. That worries us.

As to the land mines, I have given my answer, and the minister was clear too. I hope there will not be any. If there are, I believe the party in power and the government will have to pay the political price. They will lose their credibility.

[*English*]

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as I rise for the first time in the House I want to begin by thanking my constituents for voting for me and having confidence in me as their representative. I also want to thank my supporters and the volunteers who helped me in the campaign. It is a great privilege to be here serving among 308 parliamentarians who are working together to better our country.

The people in my riding are extremely supportive of our troops and the work they are doing. What is the hon. member's opinion on how we measure success in this mission? And how do we keep track of it and report it to Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I already touched on this in my speech.

In terms of success, we could say that they are currently on the path to success. This country has gone from a dictatorship

government to a presidential government. A presidential election was held. This country went from a dictatorial attitude to a parliamentary election. Afghanistan now has a Parliament.

Economic growth is accelerating as well. I did not mention it in my speech, but GDP has been increasing by 8% to 10% annually. This is strong growth.

I especially want to talk about education. Today there are 2,000 functioning schools and when this country was in difficulty there were almost none. This allows more than 5 million children to go to school again. In my opinion they are on the path to success.

The same is true about women. Now there are women in Parliament. This was not allowed in the past.

All this suggests to us that they are on the path to success and more needs to be done to get there. We probably have to stay in that country for quite some time. I have no doubt that when we leave the international community will have turned Afghanistan into a democratic, vibrant and livable country for all its citizens.

● (1910)

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Chair, this is my first opportunity to speak in the House and address you in your new term. I wish you very well. I know that as the dean of parliamentarians you will do a great job.

For the hon. member across the way, I have had the pleasure of meeting a number of Canadians who would be on their way to Afghanistan very shortly. For the information of the rest of the House, I have the training base of Meaford in my riding. A lot of young men and women from all over the country come there to train. It is a great facility.

I was at a dinner a week and a half ago at which there happened to be four people who were just in the process of going through their training and heading off to Afghanistan. One fellow has actually belonged to our reserves for over 30 years. He has shut down his own business for a year to take six months of training and a six month tour in Afghanistan.

If I may ask my colleague about it, there seems to be a perception out there that some members of the public possibly do not understand this, in light of the fact that they compare Iraq and Afghanistan. I would argue that there is a big difference between the two. Number one is that the Iraqi people do not want us there. The Iraqis do not want democracy, but the Afghani people do.

I would be interested in hearing the hon. member's comments on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, certainly there is a difference between Iraq and Afghanistan. We also have a legitimate basis for being in Afghanistan.

My colleague raises an interesting point. I have a great deal of admiration for our soldiers. I often accompanied them in Eritrea and Bosnia. The operation that is under way in Kandahar is not just a military operation. It is an operation designed to win the people's hearts and minds.

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It is really something to see the soldiers in these theatres of operations. I once saw a captain stop his LAV3 because there were children on the side of the road. He got out to talk to them. Children were constantly blowing kisses to the soldiers as they passed by.

This dimension of the mission is also important. The soldiers are not just there to shoot. They are there to win the hearts and minds of the people as well. Often, this starts with the children.

In my opinion, the soldiers do a very good job. We must not forget that many of them are fathers who are away from their families for six or seven months. They see in these children their own children, whom they miss.

The soldiers are doing an outstanding job. If Canadians and Quebeckers knew exactly what our soldiers were doing, they would receive tremendous support. It is up to us, in Parliament, to explain as best we can what the soldiers are doing. That is why we appreciate the opportunity to hold this debate tonight. We would have preferred a vote, but at least we are having a debate. If it helps clarify the situation, then so much the better.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the member for Saint-Jean for his presentation, which shed light on certain aspects of this issue. The other members of the House will in turn attempt to do the same this evening.

Our Department of National Defence has deployed soldiers to Afghanistan to establish democracy. Sometimes the newspapers report that when we ask questions about why our military is there in order to explain the reasons for our involvement to Canadians and Quebeckers, it is as though we are demonstrating a lack of confidence in our military. I find it quite regrettable that we allow ourselves to be told, by certain groups or by the government, that questions may not be asked about support for our troops in Afghanistan. This is a lack of democracy in our own country. It is unacceptable. As parliamentarians, we cannot accept this.

I would say this to the member. We want support for our troops in one way or another. First of all, with full democracy, the opportunity for a debate on the issue is provided in Parliament. Second, would it not be reasonable for us as leaders of our country and representatives of our regions to speak on the matter, before deciding on the mandate of our military? We live in a democratic country. We have sent our troops to another country to establish democracy. We do not believe in dictatorship. However, a government that acts on its own, without these questions being raised in Parliament, could be called a dictatorship.

Both scenarios should be possible. We, as representatives of Canadians, should be able to conduct a debate and a democratic vote in the House of Commons.

● (1915)

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I find my colleague's comments very relevant.

We have always called for a debate and a vote. I believe that, in a democracy, there is no harm in publicly voicing our arguments as members of Parliament.

It is unfortunate that, as we speak, the decision has already been made by the cabinet alone, which, as we all know, is made up of

cabinet ministers. Perhaps we will only learn of their arguments in 30 years' time, although it would have been useful if members of Parliament had not only debated this issue, but also voted on it.

Imagine how soldiers would feel tomorrow if we could tell them that 270 of 308 members of Parliament voted in favour of this mission. I believe that this would show our support.

Furthermore, I do not understand why the government does not do so, given what it knows. The government will not vote against its own policy. The Liberals will most certainly not vote against the troops, since they were the ones to send them. I have just confirmed that we, the Bloc Québécois, support our soldiers. Only the NDP's opinion remains unknown. I believe that many NDP members must support the mission.

In short, I believe that we are missing out on a very good opportunity to send a better message, not only to Canadian troops, but to all Canadians and Quebeckers, in letting them know that all 308 members of Parliament have voted on the matter.

My dear colleague is right. I feel that the government is missing out on a very good opportunity.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

As we assemble here in this safe and venerable place, hundreds of our fellow Canadians are serving our country and standing in harm's way in Afghanistan. In doing this duty, they have our full support. New Democrats have called for a full debate for many weeks. I was hopeful that tonight at long last we would finally have the answers to the important questions that Canadians are asking about this mission. We share Canadians' concerns and so far, the government in this debate has not assuaged these concerns.

As I begin, I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to 12 Canadians, including one diplomat, who lost their lives in service to our country in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

I would also like to express our gratitude for the enormous sacrifice made by the families of the military on behalf of this country.

We must never forget that it is our task and our duty as parliamentarians to determine what we ask of our men and women in uniform. Such decisions must be made by the people chosen democratically by the citizens of Canada and not by bureaucrats, generals or cabinet alone.

● (1920)

[English]

After all, how can we ask our soldiers to bring democracy to Afghanistan if democratic debate and decision making is denied in our own Parliament? Mr. Chair, through you I call on the Prime Minister to set himself apart from his Liberal predecessors by committing to a democratic debate and vote in the House on any further role for our Canadian Forces in Afghanistan beyond our current commitments.

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We are here to support our women and men in uniform through the democratic debate that they deserve, something assured all Canadians by the democratic rights that our troops are prepared to secure with their own lives. Those who portray the request for a vote as a lack of support for our valiant and committed defence personnel are attempting to portray democratic debate on foreign policy as a choice between cheerleading or abandoning our soldiers. Such a characterization does not honour our troops or our democracy. Surely, wise foreign policy involves far more than that.

We are here tonight to ask questions and raise concerns to help Canadians determine if this is the right mission for Canada to be participating in beyond our current commitments, which end in February 2007, vital questions that are now being raised all across this country in legion halls, school classrooms, editorial pages and coffee shops.

Last November the Minister of National Defence, then his party's defence critic, outlined in this very place an essential list of questions that the government must be able to answer when committing Canadian troops abroad. The government could now have done this by answering the very questions the Minister of National Defence himself posed just a few short months ago. Let me remind everyone of these questions and some others.

What are the goals and objectives of this mission and how do they meet Canada's foreign policy objectives? What is the realistic mandate of the mission and how is it being enforced? What is the defined concept of the operation? What is the effective command and control structure?

[*Translation*]

What are the rules of engagement? Can we commit ourselves somewhere else while we are in Afghanistan? For example, could our forces undertake to stem the genocide in Darfur at the same time?

[*English*]

What are the mechanisms for effective consultation between the mission partners, criteria to measure progress, a definition of success, an exit strategy, all of these questions?

In addition there are some actions we must take immediately. We must renegotiate the agreement made on the transfer of detainees to third parties. We must ensure that our obligations under international humanitarian law are spelled out in the letter of our agreement to match the much more meaningful and clear treaty made by the Netherlands.

Canada's role in the world and our reputation around the world rests on our reputation as a peacekeeping nation. On September 11, 2001 an immense tragedy did strike the United States and indeed Canada, but we cannot let that act of terror, that day of great loss, cloud our vision of our country or ourselves. The United States, the Bush administration, has built foreign policy upon the fear brought on by those horrible attacks, but Canada must not succumb to the indulgence of fear over hope.

We must ask how we can harness the hopeful work of peacekeeping that has set our nation apart. Canadians are asking questions about priorities and so far in this debate, too many of these

questions are not adequately answered or not answered at all. More debate and a vote in the future are required.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC):

Mr. Chair, I wonder if the hon. member basically supports our effort in Afghanistan or not, because it is not clear to me. That is the party that opposed our being in NATO until a few years ago. I do not want to go back to World War II and that history. That party does not want the military involved in anything.

Does that party support our effort in Afghanistan or not? That is what I want to know.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Chair, I do not know what these broad sweep characterizations are all about. I do not know why the minister would go back to World War II and start drawing on the debates that happened at the time. Our party's history on those matters is very clear.

Perhaps the hon. member did not have an opportunity to watch the tribute paid to our former leader, Tommy Douglas, which highlighted the fact that he sought the opportunity to go and fight for this country against the Fascists. I make no apology for that act of courage.

Perhaps the hon. member does not know that my grandfather resigned from his seat as a cabinet minister in the Quebec legislature because at the time, the government of Quebec would not support going to war against the Fascists. I make no apology for our position on these issues.

Those who would try to portray that asking questions about a mission and asking about issues like exit strategies, terms of engagement, the rules under which the mission will be conducted, the objectives and how they will be measured and reported back, is somehow indicating that there is a lack of support for our service personnel who are risking their lives, are frankly not doing a good service to this country's democratic system.

I took good care to quote the very questions that were asked by the Minister of National Defence when he was in opposition, the exact questions. I would have thought that the defence minister might have dug out that speech prior to making his address to us today and made a point of answering the very questions he said any government should answer if it is sending its Canadian soldiers into harm's way.

• (1925)

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I was listening intently to the speech and I agree with a lot of it. There is one thing that makes me a little bit uncomfortable. It is the forum in which the government should consult Parliament.

I agree that these are matters of great national interest and should be debated not only in Parliament, but also with the Canadian public. At the same time we have to protect our troops and we have to show resolve. Whatever decision is taken has to be a unanimous decision. We cannot show fractures. How do we do it?

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I would submit for the consideration of the leader of the New Democratic Party that perhaps there is another way than in this chamber. Perhaps our committee process would be a good way for the government to consult with Parliament. Experts could be brought in to testify. Parliamentarians could hear not only from one another, but from people who could bring other opinions, other points of view. If necessary, we could go in camera and some very critical points could be discussed. Parliamentarians could be brought up to speed on information that perhaps could not be shared with the great public. We could give our opinions as Parliamentarians in our direction to the government.

I believe that at the end of the day, the decision is one of government. Government lives and dies by its decisions. It has a responsibility to do what is in the best interests of the country, and the population who votes the government out, who votes the government in based on those decisions.

I would ask the leader of the New Democratic Party for his comments on those points.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Chair, first, I will say that there should never be a requirement for unanimity. After all, there are some legislatures, so called, where unanimity is required. I do not call those democracies.

However, there was a serious proposition put before us in that question. Let me phrase it this way with two answers. First, parties presented themselves in an election not too long ago. The majority of Canadians voted for parties who said that we should vote on the deployment of troops. In fact, the seats in the House are now held in the majority by parties that told Canadians that if elected, they would make sure there were votes before we sent our troops into harm's way.

Unfortunately, that promise is being broken by the government. Our request, respectfully placed earlier in question period and repeated again that we have a vote on future deployment beyond the agreements we have already made up to February 2007 was not only rejected, but it was suggested that anyone who would even propose such an idea was somehow not backing our troops.

That to me is not an acceptable approach here. In a mature democracy, one ought to be able to have a discussion and a vote about the deployment of our service personnel, the investment of those resources and the initiative that represents that Canada is taking in the world.

• (1930)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would first like to acknowledge the sacrifices made by our men and women in uniform, particularly the 11 Canadian soldiers and the diplomat who have lost their lives. We here in the House grieve with their families. We grieve with their military comrades. We grieve for their loss and for their sacrifice to Canada.

Also, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment, Mr. Chair. You are a great Canadian and you will bring great authority to the chair.

The fact that we are gathered here this evening is important for Canadian democracy. Canadian men and women are putting themselves on the line overseas in defence of Canadian values and

international peace and security. The New Democratic Party supports the hard-working women and men of the Canadian Forces. However, we want to ensure that this is the right mission and that our soldiers are instructed to conduct themselves in strict accordance with Canadian and international law.

The previous Liberal government committed our forces to Afghanistan without a full parliamentary debate. We were told then that this was primarily a reconstruction mission. It has become clear that the mission today is primarily a counter-insurgency mission, that the risks are much higher than we were told.

The New Democratic Party is concerned about many issues in this mission. We are concerned about the fact that Canadian soldiers have been wearing U.S. army badges on their uniforms, thus creating confusion over the necessary distinction between Canadian and American troops.

The New Democratic Party is concerned about the fact that Canadian soldiers, as recently as September 2005, were transferring detainees to the U.S., a country with a demonstrated and recent record of abuse.

Canadians are very concerned that an agreement with the government of Afghanistan, designed to remedy this problem, does not. It does not ensure any detainees transferred are neither abused nor transferred onward. The latter is particularly appalling, given that the agreement was modelled on a much more rigorous agreement between the Netherlands and Afghanistan.

The NDP is very concerned that air cover for Canadian soldiers is being provided by Americans. In contrast, air cover for Dutch soldiers is provided by the Netherlands.

Canada and the U.S. have different traditions and obligations concerning the choice of weapons and the protection of civilians, as demonstrated by the recent controversy concerning the use of white phosphorous in Falluja.

The NDP is very concerned about Canada's commitment to upholding not just the letter, but the spirit of the Ottawa landmines convention, which prohibits indirect reliance on landmines laid by other countries.

The New Democratic Party is very concerned by the uncertain prospects for the success of this mission. The U.S. military has spent four years engaged in counter-insurgency in southern Afghanistan and the situation has only grown worse.

This summer, Canadian Major-General Andrew Leslie said, "Every time you kill an angry young man overseas, you're creating 15 more who will come after you".

The NDP is very concerned about how our commitments in Afghanistan might prevent or hinder the ability of Canada to engage in important missions elsewhere. For the last three years, a genocide has been unfolding in Darfur, claiming 300,000 lives. The UN has recently asked for peacekeepers from developed countries such as Canada. As part of this debate tonight, we need to consider other areas of the world, such as Darfur, where the help of Canadians is needed.

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These are very serious questions. The women and men in the Canadian Forces need to know that we are in this House paying very close attention. They need to know that their safety and their sacrifices are not taken lightly by anyone in the House.

• (1935)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Multiculturalism), CPC): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the member's constructive contribution to the debate.

I note that a short while ago two members of her caucus were in front of Parliament, participating in a rally under the banner, "Take our troops out; bring our troops home". Does she feel that it is helpful to the morale of our troops to have members of her party associating themselves with calls for the removal from the mission based on the view that they are engaged in a colonialist and imperialist enterprise overseas?

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, my party is an international party and recognizes the need for internationalist assistance around the world. The question that we are asking tonight in this place is this. Is the war fighting, U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom the correct way to improve the lives and increase the security of the people in Afghanistan?

When we were initially told we were going to participate in the southern region of Afghanistan, we were told by the government, which was defeated recently, that this would be a NATO-led multinational mission. Right now we are there only under the auspices of the U.S. counter-insurgency mission that has been going on for four years. As I said in my remarks earlier, that has not been a success. It is in fact creating a situation where people are not being encouraged to work in a way that builds peace and security.

Although the member wants to put words into my mouth tonight, we support the people in the Canadian services who are putting themselves in harm's way. We feel it is incredibly important that we take this debate in this place seriously on their behalf.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Chair, as this is my first intervention, I would like to recognize and thank all the people of Ahuntsic for placing their trust in me. I will try to be worthy of it. I will do my best to that end.

In Quebec, in my riding and in other ridings as well, I have met a lot of people who are very concerned about the presence of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan. There was another demonstration in March against Canada's presence in Afghanistan.

I have heard a lot of questions from people, such as, "Who are we to talk about democracy and to think of bringing democracy to countries in the Middle East? Are we any better? Have we got the divine answer? Do we deliver democracy with weapons? Do people establish democracy or is it imposed on them by other people?" Those are the questions I heard.

We do not know anymore whether our intervention in Afghanistan serves a humanitarian cause or whether it is war. It is hard to know. Is it a roundabout way of supporting the war in Iraq? There are no winners in a war, only losers.

My question is for the hon. member. What does she think of all these concerns, of all the questions from Quebec about the presence of Canadian troops in Afghanistan?

• (1940)

[*English*]

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Chair, I appreciate very much the comments from the member opposite. I think many of the questions that she indicated were being asked in Quebec are questions that are being asked from coast to coast to coast. Many people have concerns.

As I said earlier, one of my concerns and the concern of my party is the whole issue of the counter-insurgency nature of Operation Enduring Freedom. How does one build peace and diplomacy on the one hand when one is in a war fighting, or in counter-insurgency mode? We know that many of the people in the peace movement in Canada and ordinary Canadians share these concerns, as do many women and men in the Canadian Forces as well.

We are here tonight to try to get clarity on the mission, on what it is we are hoping to achieve in Afghanistan and by what means. We know the Americans have been fighting a counter-insurgency in Kandahar province for four years and during that time and most recent the insurgency has only grown and become worse. This is of great concern to all of us in the House of Commons.

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to take part in this important debate.

[*Translation*]

Canadians remember Afghanistan before September 11, 2001. They were struck by the revelations that followed the fall of the Taliban. Since then, remarkable progress has been achieved. The 2001 Bonn Agreement led to the adoption of a new constitution that enshrines equal rights for women and men. Elections have promoted the advancement of democracy.

Today, the international community's attention is resolutely turned to a new phase in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, a phase in which the focus will be on development.

I can assure you that our government firmly intends to pursue its leading role in achieving the Afghans' objectives.

Canada's activities in Afghanistan, which include ongoing assistance to the Afghan people, are ultimately intended to provide them with a better quality of life and more stable future. More specifically, Canada's activities in Afghanistan focus on socio-economic development and reducing poverty, improving security in that country and elsewhere in the world, and advancing democracy, good governance and human rights.

[*English*]

The Afghans welcome Canada's presence in their country. They welcome our military involvement, our development assistance and our diplomatic efforts. They can see the positive impact that we are having on their lives and they appreciate the difference that we are making in their country.

[*Translation*]

The security provided by Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan creates an atmosphere in which development can take place. In return, development gives meaning to the Canadian presence in the country.

Important progress has been achieved in that country, but building a country takes time and calls for ongoing assistance.

Canada respects the priorities established by the Afghan government. Our activities in that country are carried out primarily within national programs created and led by the Afghan government itself.

Last month, our government announced that this year Canada would maintain its Afghan development funding level. The government is currently considering appropriate funding levels for the coming years. While our program has a major component in Kandahar, it extends throughout Afghanistan. By helping Afghanistan to become a stable, democratic and autonomous state, we are contributing to ensuring that it will never again be used as a haven for terrorists. At the same time, we are creating an environment that will foster the adoption of lasting changes.

Canadians remember the Taliban regime. The Taliban gave safe haven to international terrorists and tacitly condoned a very real threat to global security. They systematically oppressed their people, and particularly women. Canada has chosen to take action to enable the Afghan people to recover from those dark years.

The provincial reconstruction team is working on stabilizing the situation in the province of Kandahar, which in turn stimulates the development efforts of the Afghan government and non-governmental organizations. The Canadian International Development Agency has allocated up to \$6 million over a year and a half to support a confidence in the government program. This program is mainly for remote and vulnerable communities where government presence is inadequate and confidence is lacking.

Canadians will recall that Taliban law prohibited women from getting together to talk. Now, thanks to financial support from CIDA, Rights and Democracy in Montreal has been able to open a number of centres for women throughout Afghanistan. These centres help women by providing them with basic services, such as literacy courses, health services, legal aid services or refuge. In cooperation with Care Canada, CIDA also supports food aid and training programs, which have helped 10,000 widows and their families. The current government recently allocated \$7 million for these projects. For Afghan women to have access to such services was simply unimaginable under the harsh Taliban regime.

In addition thanks to Canada's help, more than 4 million children, one-third of them girls, are registered in primary school. Canada is helping to bring concrete, lasting change to the living conditions of women and children in Afghanistan.

We think there is a need to develop entrepreneurship and agriculture. That is why Canada is still the largest donor to the micro-lending program in Afghanistan. This program has already benefited 157,000 clients, of whom the large majority, 78% in fact, are women. These women, who a few years ago barely had the right

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to go out at all, are now setting up small retail businesses, grocery stores and dressmaking shops. This will have direct effects on the living conditions of thousands of the most deprived Afghan families for many years to come.

CIDA is also funding the national solidarity program. Through this program, millions of dollars have been provided directly to communities. Elected village councils, consisting of both men and women, have decided for themselves on the infrastructure that they wanted to build in their communities. Schools, roads and wells have been built where people needed them.

● (1945)

Afghanistan has given Canada an opportunity to provide concrete assistance to human beings who really need it. The Afghans, men, women and children, see the results every day. In the Speech from the Throne, this government promised to promote and defend the Canadian values of liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. That is what we are doing in Afghanistan thanks to the Canadians who are helping to build a free, democratic and peaceful country.

This is not the time to turn our backs on the Afghan people, when there is so much need for our assistance. This is also not the time to abandon the international community. It is not the time to break with the government of Afghanistan and our international partners, who are trying to stabilize Afghanistan and reduce the security threat in this country and around the world.

Now more than ever, far from being indifferent, we must show leadership and compassion to give the people of Afghanistan and the world renewed reason to hope.

● (1950)

[*English*]

Canadians remember what it was like in Afghanistan less than five years ago. Canadians remember the cruelty of the Taliban regime, and the poor social and economic conditions in Afghanistan at that time. Canadians know the risk of a setback if we walk away now from the people and the government of Afghanistan. We need to help build on the success achieved so far and we must continue the Canadian tradition of providing concrete assistance to the less fortunate.

[*Translation*]

The people of Afghanistan need our help. They must be able to count on our support. I am convinced that Canada's support will result in positive change for all the people of Afghanistan.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to begin by congratulating the minister on her election to the House and her appointment to this department, which is a very important one for Canada, since it is often our image internationally. With National Defence and our Canadian Forces soldiers, it plays a leading role in the areas we were talking about concerning diplomacy, defence and development.

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With regard to Afghanistan, we recognize that here is a double-edged sword, since often what we should do in connection with development might help us in connection with defence. We know about the problems of drug-trafficking, opium poppy crops and all the drug networks.

Have any plans been put forward? Has a one-, two- or three-year plan been developed for farmers to replace opium poppies with other crops or other economic means to ensure their survival? They have to stop supplying these drug networks that create the kind of warlords seen in that country, who control the firearms and munitions and who, of course, cause lots of difficulties for our military, our Canadian Forces, because they hinder peace and development.

What is the plan? What is the role played by CIDA in the plans for Afghanistan, and how are we participating in this development with other international or multinational organizations?

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, CIDA has a project consistent with the Afghan government's plan to invest in economic replacement activities. This project provides for the payment of \$18.5 million over a four-year period to ensure that there will actually be a replacement crop for the current drug producers.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Chair, I wish to congratulate my colleague on her speech. She emphasized the humanitarian aid that can be offered to a country like Afghanistan, given all the difficulties it has gone through in the past. This is the way of the future that should be promoted, to my mind. Perhaps it is even more of a royal way than military intervention.

We have to recall a few facts about Afghanistan. For example, the life expectancy of men is 48 and that of women is 45. The infant mortality rate is 147 for every 1,000 births. These statistics are absolutely appalling.

However, this evening's debate is not necessarily concerned with the relevance of intervention in Afghanistan. It is concerned more with the fact that we all have a responsibility, both the members of the previous Parliament and those now part of it. Perhaps Canada's mission has not been defined clearly enough.

I quote the comments made by the current Minister of National Defence on November 15, 2005, when he was seated in the opposition:

When a government decides to intervene in a failing state there are a number of considerations that must be taken before committing troops...[For example, its] mandate is realistic, clear and enforceable.

Can we really say that the mandate given the Canadian troops was realistic, clear and enforceable from the outset? Let us not conceal it: we have had difficulty explaining to our fellow citizens the difference between the start of the mission and the turn it has taken today.

Next, the minister said that the mission must have "an effective command and control structure". We are presently debating about who is really controlling this mission. Is it being directed by the Americans or by NATO? This is the type of situation that has to be put on the table.

Another criterion mentioned by the minister was that "there is a definition of success". In other words, should today's debate not permit us all to agree that a fairly short timeframe should be established, and very closely monitored? That way we would be sure of not finding ourselves in a quagmire from which we are unable to extract ourselves. The best intentions in the world can lead us down a very bad road, if we have not properly identified the methods we should be using.

In the minister's opinion, should we not take the advice that was offered by the new Minister of Defence when he sat in opposition? Should the government not commit to meeting those conditions which he himself laid down and which are not well known at the moment to Parliament or to the Canadian population at large? In no way does this cast any doubt on the relevance of the mission. However there are additional efforts to be made in terms of the way this mission is being deployed. We expect the government to be much more clear on this point than was the previous government.

• (1955)

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, I welcome with much satisfaction my colleague's support on the importance of development aid and international aid.

I would draw the member's attention to the fact that development is certainly impossible without the whole notion of security that surrounds it.

I invite the member and all members of the House to work together so that the first beneficiaries of this international aid may be the people of Afghanistan.

My colleague in national defence could not be clearer in this regard. The mission is clear. The line of command is clear. I will keep to what he has said in this regard.

[English]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Chair, I congratulate you on assuming your new duties here in this House.

I have listened carefully to the member's speech and I cannot imagine a single parliamentarian, in fact I cannot imagine a single Canadian, who does not absolutely agree with her point, that the people of Afghanistan need and deserve our support.

However, I am sure the hon. member is aware that some 18 months ago, as far back as September 2004, a large number of non-governmental organizations involved in international development and humanitarian work in Kandahar issued the unambiguous warning that the blurring of military and humanitarian objectives in Kandahar was placing relief workers and Afghani civilians alike at unnecessary risk. As a result, a great many international NGOs actually vacated Kandahar, including some important Canadian NGOs.

It is well-established, in international humanitarian law and in practice, that it is impossible to give impartial assistance when the assistance is tied to a military campaign.

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Given that fact, would this member not agree that the role of the Canadian military should be to provide security and protection for Afghani civilians rather than blending a combat role with development and reconstruction? Does she understand the concern about the blurring of these role? Does she understand that the assistance needs to be delivered by Afghani and Afghani civil society, with support from international agencies and security provided to them by military who are not involved in aggressive combat roles?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, I would respond to the member by saying that the work of the NGOs in Afghanistan could not be done without the security provided by our Canadian troops there.

I remind her of the quote from the spokesperson for CARE Canada regarding our assistance to widows in Afghanistan:

CIDA's funding means that we can continue our work to help the most vulnerable women and children in Afghanistan. Not only will these women be given a chance to survive, they will become empowered and independent so that they can provide a better life for their children.

Clearly CARE Canada is pleased to be able to act in security in Afghanistan thanks to our troops.

● (2000)

[*English*]

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to first congratulate you, Mr. Chair, on your newly elected position. I would like to thank the minister for her outline. It really spells out what the provincial reconstruction teams would be doing in Afghanistan.

There are bad people around who have killed and continue to kill, suppress and tear down the democratic process that is just starting to grow in Afghanistan. The truth of the matter is that there are people in this world who do not care for others apart from using them for their own purposes, which some of the Taliban and a few of the others are doing. That is the situation there under "enduring freedom".

What is the status of the situation there for the provincial reconstruction teams to fulfill their mandate; that is, reconstructing many of the matters in Afghanistan for the people there?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his question. This is obviously why Canadian troops are there.

We have never denied the danger in Afghanistan. That is why our humanitarian aid organizations and the Afghani people, who are trying to adapt to the rules of law and order, need our troops and the presence of our Canadian military.

CIDA invests through various programs, such as the World Bank. It sets up programs there and supports them so as to help the people take control of their lives and to ensure that stability and security come out on top in this exercise.

[*English*]

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

I appreciate the opportunity to take part in this very important debate. There is no question in my mind that the mission that the Canadian Forces are currently undertaking in Afghanistan is vitally important for the future of that country and the security of Canada.

Many Canadians, however, are seeking greater clarity about the role and responsibilities of military and development actors. Many believe that the mandate for military engagement in Afghanistan must focus on the protection of civilians and security. I share that opinion.

Last fall I was fortunate enough to accompany the hon. Bill Graham, who was the then the minister of national defence, on a trip to Afghanistan.

The Chair: Order, please. I would just caution the hon. member not to use members' names.

Mr. Anthony Rota: I apologize, Mr. Chair.

During that trip I had a firsthand look at the extraordinary work that our dedicated men and women in uniform are doing to help that country face some incredible challenges. I also saw just how grateful the Afghan people are for the tremendous efforts Canada is making to help them rebuild the country.

The people of Afghanistan have been the victims of war and conflict and, consequently, have been deprived of many basic rights. Our involvement is helping to provide the security and stability necessary to ensure the systematic reconstruction of a country, as Afghanistan seeks to rebuild its economy, political structure and judicial institutions.

[*Translation*]

In Kabul, we met with several members of the government, including the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Rural Development. We also met with President Karzai.

During these meetings, we discussed Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, not only its military role but its diplomatic role, as well as its role in supporting development.

Let me tell you that all of the ministers, as well as President Karzai, expressed sincere gratitude for what Canada is doing. They consider Canada to be a true friend of Afghanistan, a friend who is determined to support them through these difficult times.

● (2005)

[*English*]

We received positive feedback from Afghan officials, local community leaders and ordinary citizens regarding the men and women of the Canadian Forces. When we were driving the streets of Kabul on our way to our meetings, I saw a city that no longer lives in fear. I saw a city where buildings were being reconstructed, where the markets were busy and where the boys and the girls were going to school. I saw a city where people looked to the future with hope. The Canadian presence in Afghanistan helped make this all possible.

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Our trip to Afghanistan also took us to the southern city of Kandahar where Canada has deployed a provincial reconstruction team. There we met with Pushtan tribal leaders and with the governor of Kandahar province to discuss Canada's role in bringing stability to that region. Through its work, the Canadian provincial reconstruction team is helping to extend the authority and reach of the Afghan government. By helping to rebuild a just and peaceful society, our team is fostering prosperity and improving people's lives.

The multilateral nature of our work in Afghanistan means that the Canadian Forces are working alongside our friends and our allies. In today's increasingly interdependent world, domestic security is closely linked to events happening outside our borders.

[*Translation*]

In both Kabul and Kandahar, we spent a lot of time with members of the Canadian Forces. Talking with these men and women confirmed what I already knew to be true: they are professional and dedicated people. They are open, generous, and sensitive to Afghan culture and the needs of the local population.

They are prepared to take on risks and are determined to use their many skills to provide the Afghan people with the stability and security they deserve.

[*English*]

It is imperative that Canadians are aware of the valuable service that our troops are providing. We must continue a public dialogue to keep them informed of the objectives and accomplishments of this mission. We must also ensure that the Canadian Forces are provided with the right equipment and financial resources to allow them to do their jobs.

In closing, I would like to thank our Canadian troops in Afghanistan for their remarkable efforts in the face of very challenging and often dangerous circumstances. These men and women are sacrificing a great deal in order to carry out a mission and the thoughts and support of this nation are with them.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Chair, for my colleague across the way I would suggest that there are two things that are regrettable, one a small regret and one a rather large regret. The first regret is the fact that Canadians needed to know and should have known what was going on when our troops were going to Afghanistan. I commend him for having obtained some first-hand information but the difficulty was that his government did not follow through and make clear what Canada's commitment was to the people of Afghanistan. The former Liberal government had that responsibility, which is one regret.

The most serious regret is the fact that as Canadians we live in a democracy and our proceedings are going out on CPAC and may end up on national television which, I can guarantee, will end up being seen by the fans of Al Jazeera, who are the Taliban and who are watching our proceedings here tonight.

I find it really regrettable that the defence critic from the NDP would have made the statement, "the uncertain prospects for the success of this mission". I wonder if my colleague would agree that the sense of defeatism, the sense of backing off that is being

expressed by the NDP is not getting in the way of the valued soldiers who we have on the ground. Believe me, the Taliban themselves said over the weekend that they were watching.

• (2010)

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Chair, the member across the way talked about his regret with the actions of the Liberal government. I do not know if he realizes it but he is in government now and there are new actions that have to be taken toward the future. There will be questions that have to be answered and we have to look at what we are going to do there.

This is a reconstruction. It is like rebuilding a house. When we go in we do not have a clean slate. No one knows what will come up. It is very difficult to say exactly what will happen. War is not exactly something one walks into saying that we are going to do this and then at a certain point that is it and we go home. This is a very messy situation. I do not mean messy in that we got ourselves into a messy situation. War is not a very pretty sight. What I saw was not pretty but it was something that was improving. It is something that I agree with and I think we have to be there in order to improve their situation. We have a responsibility to the rest of the world.

We cannot be everything to everyone. We have to choose certain conflicts. Right now we have chosen Kandahar and Afghanistan and that is where our responsibilities are.

The other regret the member has is that this will be seen around the world. Debate with hon. members across the way could come across as not supporting our troops. I think they are supporting our troops, just as we are. I believe in our troops 100%. They are wonderful, bright people. They are well-equipped and doing an excellent job.

If our troops hear that maybe there are some questions, it shows that we are thinking about them. It shows that we want the best for them. I think it is very important that they get the message that the people back home in Parliament are looking at what is going on and trying to ensure we are going in the right direction. I believe a discussion has to take place and if it is done in public like this then everybody sees it.

The member regrets that Al Jazeera will be transmitting this. This is a free country. The members opposite are blocked up and are not allowed to speak. The rest of us parliamentarians are allowed to speak and we have the right to speak freely and loudly.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to come back to the whole question of the treaty that we have with Afghanistan to turn over detainees. This morning on CBC Radio, Professor Amir Attaran from the University of Ottawa law school said, "We are quite sure that Afghanistan tortures detainees. The Afghanistan government in its own Human Rights Commission report this year said that torture continues to take place as a routine part of police procedures. In fact, the U.S. state department says the same thing; that torture is routine in Afghanistan and involves the pulling out of fingernails and toenails, burning with hot oil, sexual humiliation and sodomy".

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I wonder why the former Liberal government did not seek a treaty equivalent to what the Netherlands has to ensure that Canadian armed forces personnel are not being put in danger of being accused of war crimes for turning over detainees to the Afghani government in this kind of circumstance.

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Chair, the report is new. I really have not had a chance to look it over. I know that the agreement initially taken into consideration did take into consideration the Geneva convention and looked at certain areas.

We have to trust that the people who entered into this agreement have a certain amount of credibility. I would like to think that the Geneva convention is being followed. If there is any credibility to what has been reported recently, I would hope that the new government would take that into consideration and maybe look into who we are handing them over to.

I am not saying it is absolutely not happening. I am not saying it is happening. What I am saying is that this is a new report and I would like to see exactly what is coming up. I think it is something we should look at.

If I may add to that, please, I heard the same report from CBC this morning. It was interesting that the interview took place and they were talking about Canada's role in Afghanistan. Who did they interview? An American defector from the war in Iraq. To me, that was not fair reporting. What they did was a muddling of the two issues. I think we have two separate issues here. We have the war in Iraq, in which Canada is not taking part, and we have the peacekeeping mission or the mission in Afghanistan, which is bringing civilization—

● (2015)

The Chair: Order, please. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming for sharing his time with me.

I rise for the first time in the House of Commons to lend my support to Canadian soldiers, service personnel, diplomats, police, and aid workers who are risking their lives for the sake of Canadian and Afghan security in Afghanistan.

I wish to pay tribute to the Canadian families who have lost their sons there. I spoke last month to Jim and Sharon Davis of Nova Scotia, who lost their son Paul. I am sure members of the House join me in saluting the courage of this tremendously brave Canadian family.

Promoting human security for the people of Afghanistan is a goal worthy of the best Canadian effort. Training Afghan police, demobilizing ex-combatants, building health clinics and schools, all these have unquestioned support from Canadians on both sides of the House.

But some Canadians ask, and I heard this from the hon. members of the NDP, why development assistance requires troops and why these troops should have a mandate to return fire. This new paradigm appears to move Canada away from its traditional peacekeeping role. I support this change of paradigm.

I have been to Afghanistan myself. I have been to Afghanistan twice, once under Taliban rule and once since then. What I learned there is that we cannot do development in Afghanistan unless we control the security situation. The schools and clinics we build by day are burned down by night unless we have the troops to secure the development gains we have made.

Canadians, I think, also appreciate that states like Canada cannot be safe if we let Afghanistan fail, if we let it become a failed state, become a base for terror attacks. We all know that Canadians died on 9/11 and those attacks were planned in Afghanistan.

Canadians support our troops. There will be no firmer support for our troops than on this side of the House, but I think we all have two pressing concerns. The first is the possibility of torture and abuse of detainees handed over by Canadian Forces to our allies. As a former teacher of international human rights myself, I add my voice to those others, and some of those are in the gallery tonight with us.

I am speaking of international experts who voice their concerns, wanting the government, and I direct this toward the government side, to insist that the Canadian military do everything in its power to guarantee that detainees taken by Canadians and transferred to third parties receive the full protection of the Geneva conventions and receive visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross. I have been in places of Afghan detention myself and have seen the work that the International Committee of the Red Cross does, and I believe it is the best guarantee of their safety and freedom from abuse. All Canadians would agree that our mission there, which we all value, should not be sullied by human rights abuses committed by third parties.

The second concern of Canadians relates to the overall strategic goal of this mission. Our allies, the Americans, the Pakistanis and the Afghans, are engaged in an open-ended, counter-insurgency war in hostile terrain against al-Qaeda and Taliban elements. Currently, our operations are part of the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom. When this mission becomes a NATO responsibility later this year, will these strategic objectives change? If so, what position will the Government of Canada recommend to its NATO partners?

Canadians support reconstruction. We support the stabilization of a failed state. But we do question how far we should go in an unlimited counter-insurgency war led by our friends and allies. We are a country with a great military tradition, of which I am intensely proud, but Canadians want to know what is the goal of our counter-insurgency effort in Afghanistan, how long it will last and, most important, how we can keep this operation serving Canadian objectives, because we are nobody else's auxiliaries.

● (2020)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, we have heard a lot of use of the word “peacekeeping” tonight. Peacekeeping is a wonderful Canadian tradition that I suggest has gone the way of traditions; perhaps some day it will come back.

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I would suggest that we have not done peacekeeping in the Pearsonian model for a very long time. I would ask my colleague whether he agrees or not that classic Pearsonian peacekeeping, as we hear about from down the floor, has a place in combat against terrorism.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff: Mr. Chair, I think as I tried to make clear in my statement, I am deeply committed to the idea of a combat capable military combining the protection of human populations with development assistance. As the hon. member points out, this is a substantially different mission than the traditional peacekeeping that we saw in the 1950s and 1960s, where one interposed oneself between combatants who were ready to make peace.

We are in a world, and Afghanistan is the perfect demonstration of it, where there is no peace to keep, where, if we want to pursue development goals, as the hon. member well knows, we have to provide cordoned security for human populations and cordoned security for our own development personnel.

The paradigm has shifted, as I said in my remarks, and I support that shift of paradigm.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would like to come back to the issue of transfer of prisoners. My colleague seemed to be saying that he felt it was very important that prisoners be treated in accordance with the Geneva convention, for example.

The current minister said that he did not want to review the agreement signed by the former government because he felt it was satisfactory. However, I am concerned about how prisoners are monitored and treated. The Red Cross has been given responsibility for monitoring, and I trust the Red Cross. There are other models, though. For example, the Dutch decided that their own military officers and diplomats could visit prisoners at any time to make sure they were being well treated.

Would my colleague agree to see whether the agreement could be revised? I do not think that the Afghan government could object. We could at least suggest it. By monitoring prisoners ourselves, we could be sure that they are being well treated.

The second issue is just as important. In my opinion, nothing in the current agreement prevents prisoners we turn over to the Afghans from being taken anywhere—to Guantanamo, for example—at the request of the Americans. Does my colleague think that this agreement might be improved to make sure that prisoners' rights are respected?

Mr. Michael Ignatieff: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. It is not up to me, but the government, to reopen the agreement signed on December 18.

Like my colleague, I would fully support having the Canadian government take responsibility for visiting Afghan jails and prisons to make sure that detainees transferred by Canadian soldiers are being well treated. This is the responsibility of the ICRC, but I think that as Canadians, we have a moral responsibility to ensure that, if we transfer a detainee to an Afghan prison, our allies will respect that person's rights.

● (2025)

[English]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Chair, when we talk about goals and objectives, we have been asking, “Is it right to think about the goals and objectives of this mission?”

I would like to get the member's opinion. Should we be more precise when we ask this? Instead of just asking what the goals and objectives are, should we be asking, for example, are the warlords there implicated in the opium trade and are they part of the government? Have there been more terrorists who have arisen since our involvement? Do the Americans have any secret prisons where they are torturing prisoners and having arbitrary detention? Should we not only be asking about but investigating some of these allegations that are coming out? Is it our responsibility?

Mr. Michael Ignatieff: Mr. Chair, I take the sense of the question to be what ought our objectives as a Canadian government to be in Afghanistan, particularly as we transition from Operation Enduring Freedom to a NATO led operation.

My sense here is that we cannot be all things to all people in Afghanistan. As I listen to my hon. colleagues on this side and on that side of the House, there is a Canadian consensus around human security and development in the Kandahar area. That may take all of those 2,000 troops.

Where there is doubt and question is an unlimited pursuit of the Taliban and al-Qaeda into the mountains. My sense is that is an unlimited goal, where realizable objectives are very unclear, and that we should concentrate the activities of the Canadian Forces around the development and PRT activities in the Kandahar region.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Chair, I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you as you assume your important role in this House. It is well deserved for your long and very important tenure here as a member of this House and a person for whom I have deep and abiding respect.

It is with pleasure that I join in this important debate this evening. I will take this opportunity as well to thank the constituents of Central Nova for having the confidence to send me here for a fourth time.

I am also very proud of the riding that I represent in Nova Scotia that has made a storied contribution in times of war and peace. There have been individuals such as Lloyd MacDonald, who served with the Devil's Brigade from Pictou, General Jim Grant, Reg Connors, who served with the Gurkhas, and R.B. Cameron, who was also a very important and famous industrialist from rural Pictou County, and served at the Gothic Line for which he received the distinguished service award.

All of these individuals, like all the Canadians who have served overseas, have done so with tremendous sacrifice. This is something to keep very much in mind and have as a backdrop for this evening's debate.

The Prime Minister, during his recent visit to Afghanistan, clearly explained why we were there and why we must continue to be there and to be engaged. It is to protect our security by building an Afghan security and governance system. It demonstrates that we have much pride and purpose to accomplish and the presence of our soldiers there allows us to do just that.

• (2030)

[*Translation*]

I would like to speak in favour of Canada's important leadership role in Afghanistan. This role is important for Canadians, for Afghans and for our allies.

[*English*]

The events of September 11, 2001 brought home a sobering fact. We cannot continue to enjoy security and prosperity at home in the west without regard to the state of the rest of the world. Terrorism knows no boundaries. It was mentioned earlier in the remarks by my colleague across the way that Canada was hit. Canadians did die on that fateful day in New York. This is now the case that we have to look outward. Nowhere is this more true than in Afghanistan today. Security there is as important as security is here.

Canada is in Afghanistan at the request of the Afghan government and authorized by the United Nations. We are part of a multinational effort and we are there as proud contributors to the effort to rebuild that country. As they gain, so does the world.

After a series of political and diplomatic agreements, including the Bonn agreement of 2001, the Afghanistan compact agreed upon in London in January, there is a contract between Afghans and the international community. Each for their own interest have made commitments and investments in rebuilding Afghanistan.

Overwhelmingly, Canadians need to understand the importance of this mission. We have made progress. However, as the recent spate of attacks in Afghanistan demonstrates, complacency is not an option. It is important to take note that transition takes time. Capacity cannot be meaningfully developed in a few short years.

Al-Qaeda and the Taliban remain active, challenging Afghans as well as the international security.

[*Translation*]

We have undertaken certain risks to protect our national interests, show our leadership and help the Afghan people prepare for a better future. Our values are worth protecting. We can never again allow Afghanistan to become a haven for terrorists. We are taking concrete steps to change things; we are turning words into action.

And we are not alone. I recently met with my European counterparts. They too bear part of the burden. After all, Afghanistan is the largest and most important theatre of NATO operations in the world.

[*English*]

Canada, along with our allies, is committed to helping Afghanistan to become a stable, secure and self-sustaining democratic state. Because of boots on the ground and Canadian Forces with maple leafs as shoulder flashes, we are seeing some major progress. Canada's core values of freedom and democracy, and the rule of law

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and human rights, guide our engagement there and all of this happens because our soldiers are there.

These values are shared by Afghans. They have committed to it in their new constitution. The instruments to make these values real are still nascent. It is precisely because there is work to be done in these areas that Canada continues to be there.

Afghans have suffered in recent history conflict and instability, first under Soviet occupation and then Taliban oppression, leaving their country heavily militarized with little infrastructure, a human skills deficit, and a huge drug trade proliferation.

Together, with increasing Afghan leadership, much progress has been achieved and will continue in large part because of Canada's commitment and resolve. The culmination of the benchmarks first identified just over four years ago by the 2001 Bonn agreement demonstrates that Afghans are hungry for change.

The adoption of a constitution that enshrines the concepts of human rights, gender equality, ethnic plurality, and the staging of presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections are all significant progress in which Canada played an important part. We were there as observers. We made a significant financial contribution and there was a free vote. I am quick to add that women voted in that election for the first time. Young women are attending schools for the first time. Thousands of young women now have opportunities that never existed. Still, many challenges remain.

Canada has been a major contributor to democratic development in Afghanistan. Our investments have paid dividends. The two consecutive elections have demonstrated that Afghans have embraced democracy. For the provincial and parliamentary elections held in September 2005, 44% of those registered to vote were women and 6.4 million Afghans voted on election day, a testament to Afghani resolve to create a better future.

With the launch of the Afghanistan compact in February 2006, the compact, in its accompanying interim national development strategy and national drug control strategy, recognized outstanding challenges that chartered the path ahead. Canada's approach is also in line with the Afghanistan compact. Canada played an active role in shaping that compact and is committed to supporting its implementation.

Human rights and good governance feature prominently and throughout the compact. The Afghan government has pledged to recruit competent and credible professionals to its public service on the basis of merit, establish a more effective, accountable and transparent administration throughout all levels of its government, and implement measurable improvements in fighting corruption, upholding justice, the rule of law and promoting respect for human rights. Canada will help and continue to help Afghanistan realize those goals.

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We have already made the promotion and protection of human rights a huge priority. We have spoken out clearly in favour of freedom of speech and freedom of religion, and we have an important role to play in helping develop Afghanistan's justice sector.

We are providing some \$6 million to improve access to the justice system through legal aid and capacity building within the judiciary.

We will continue to work with our friends and allies in the international community to advance our common values and interests. Canada's role in Afghanistan has not gone unrecognized. The Prime Minister has already mentioned the appreciation conveyed by President Karzai and at the launch of the Afghanistan compact, U.S. Secretary of State Rice singled out Canada, stating: "Our friends in Canada deserve special thanks for their essential contribution".

● (2035)

[Translation]

I spoke with some of our international partners, including the Dutch, who will take over Canadian command of the multinational brigade headquarters in southern Afghanistan. We share common values and goals.

The Dutch and the British will soon take over command of the provincial reconstruction teams in southern Afghanistan currently under Canadian command. They will continue to share this heavy burden with us and with 35 other countries working in Afghanistan.

[English]

To conclude, we are in Afghanistan to defend our national interests and we are not there alone. Afghanistan and our allies are deeply interested and invested in this cause, and it is a common cause. It is by securing Afghanistan's future that we secure our own future. That is worth the risk being taken by Canadian diplomats, military personnel and development officials. They are worthy of nothing short of our full, continued and abiding support.

That is why this government commits to them today unreservedly. We are here tonight to explain to Canadians why we are there, why the mission will continue, and includes the reasons that we are discussing here this evening. Our government has every confidence that the men and women of our armed forces deserve this unreserved respect.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Chair, congratulations on your posting.

I would like to compliment the Minister of National Defence on his clear and cogent description of exactly what is going on in Kandahar today. He was exceptionally clear, but I am very happy that the Minister of Foreign Affairs has joined us because I believe that defence activities are always an arm of our general foreign policy.

In the eyes of Canadians, while diplomats meet quietly, the activities of our armed forces are the most visible symbol of our foreign policy. That is why Canadians are so concerned and that is why we are all here to support our troops. Indeed, it is our concern for our troops and the fact that many families are praying for their

safety every night that causes us to think deeply about this matter that is before us tonight.

We have had many excellent speeches here talking about what is going on and the problems, the irritants, things we have to solve about this mission at this particular time. However, we also know that this mission is going to end in February 2007 and the expression of concern by Canadians makes it incumbent upon us to begin to think about that date, when our commitment ends and the decision we have to make whether to go forward or not. It is my feeling that there are many questions Canadians will want answered.

The Minister of National Defence was in the armed forces during a much simpler time. In coming to this position there is even new language. He talks of failed states, and failing states. He talks of the duty to protect. This is a new concept, comparatively speaking, to that of many years ago.

I am not 100% sure that Canadians all agree on the definition of a failed state or a failing state. While they may agree that we have a duty to protect, they might wonder, thinking of all the trouble spots in the world and all the people who are suffering and poor, what is the criteria by which Canada decides an order of priority for deploying its troops to go and assist such people?

The minister has said that we will exit Afghanistan when the Afghans are ready, but what are the criteria by which the government will conclude that the Afghans are indeed ready? It seems to me that all these questions should be answered prior to February. I am going to ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs, does he agree with me that these questions include Canadians and therefore the answers to them should include Canadians? We should allow for their input. Would a forum for such a discussion appropriately not be the standing committee on foreign affairs, so that as circumstances change we can monitor what is going on in Afghanistan and be ready with a set of criteria to apply to the circumstances that will exist in February 2007?

● (2040)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for her interest in this issue. I agree that this debate tonight has been a fulsome and inclusive debate. It has been one that has allowed all members to put forward their ideas and contributions on some of the many important questions that she has raised.

The reality, though, is that this is an evolving situation. Clearly, much progress has been made as was outlined by my colleague, the Minister of National Defence. I am not sure that I would be quick to conclude that at any time in our country's history it has been easy for members of the armed forces or that it was less complicated then. These are arbitrary assessments that I think some might try to draw.

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As far as Canada's future role and capacity to continue to make the contributions we are making, this obviously will be monitored. There is no simple formula that will be applied. There is no simple questions that can be answered simply when it comes to an engagement such as this. The commitment is in the area of diplomacy. It is in the area of our continued presence on the ground. It is also incumbent upon all of us to realize that this is a multinational effort. This is not by far something that can be narrowed down. There is evolution in terms of who will play a more active and leadership role as far the command of certain troops under NATO or UN auspices.

The House of Commons has always been and will continue to be the best forum for Canadians to hear from their elected officials as to what Canada's commitment will be. Whether it takes the form of having certain questions at points of time in the future, be it reference to various committees, including the defence committee and the foreign affairs committee, that might be entirely appropriate. However, these questions will be monitored. This forum will be tested.

The government is ready to answer those questions, as we have at a very early stage. Just over two months in our tenure in office, we have actively engaged in not only legitimizing the decision that was made by the previous government, which we supported then. We hope we will see the same level of support continue throughout this evolution and the same type of cogent and important questions raised by members opposite.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Chair, the minister is an important member of the Cabinet. I would like to ask him a question, but I do not want him to reveal everything to me, of course.

The Minister of National Defence said, on November 15, that we had to be positive and that the mission would be crowned with success. What would happen, though, if the mission did not turn out well? Is there an exit strategy, and in what circumstances would such a plan be applied?

The Minister of National Defence raised the question himself. Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell us in what circumstances an exit strategy might be considered, while still hoping, naturally, that the mission will be crowned with success?

• (2045)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I very much appreciate my hon. colleague's question. I will reply directly.

In my opinion, I think that making speculations now or in the future about the successes or problems inherent in this mission will not help the cause.

[*English*]

Let me be clear. I do not believe in talking at this point about withdrawal or how we are going to react to certain difficulties and inevitabilities as far as the challenges that exist for our troops. There has been reference made to the fact that many are observing this debate tonight. Any sign of failure, or weakness or retreat will not help the brave men and women of the Canadian Forces.

It is my view, and I believe it is shared by many if not the majority of members of the House, our resolve has to be strong and our commitment has to be clear. We must stand four-square with strength, vision and commitment to our armed forces to see that they can continue this important work.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would like to continue the debate concerning my colleague's question. The minister has answered the question. Still, I do not know whether he finally actually realized what my colleague was saying.

When he was in the opposition, the new Minister of National Defence said that a clear exit strategy had been established in case the mission failed, that it was important that this be done and that we know, from the beginning, in what possible circumstances this would occur. Hiding this reality from oneself is forgetting an essential part of the responsibility of the military. In this regard, I would like the minister to come back to this question.

Was his colleague not right at that time? Is it not actually necessary to consider these elements, without admitting at the outset what the facts would be, but being prepared to consider all situations so as to avoid getting bogged down, as has happened in other cases, such as the United States in Vietnam, to mention but one?

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. I would like to point out that the usual practice in the House is to go through a rotation. You recognized a member from the Bloc and now you have recognized another member. There were members from the NDP who were standing. We would ask you respectfully to respect that practice so all members from all parties can be heard.

The Deputy Chair: I appreciate the good advice from the hon. member. I must admit that I did not see her. However, I have now seen her and I have heard her. Next time she will have a turn.

The hon. minister for a very short reply.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Chair, I repeat to my colleague that the importance for our government and our armed forces to have a plan is obvious. Still, at the same time, though it is important for our country to present a plan for the future, it should not take place in public.

[*English*]

We do not discuss operational details. We do not talk about how we might retreat or withdraw. That is not part of the public discourse that will help our troops. That is not at all something that will further the cause of elevating the people of Afghanistan. It is through diplomatic efforts of how we are going to complete the mission. It is through our commitment. It is through our fulsome support that I suggest we will get the job done.

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• (2050)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. Sir, with the permission of the House, seeing how we have the foreign affairs minister here and we have such an important debate tonight, I wonder if you could seek unanimous to have five more minutes of questions and comments for the opposition so we can comment and question the foreign affairs minister on this very important and crucial debate.

The Deputy Chair: I appreciate the request that has been made by the hon. member, but the member should remember that the motion, which was passed by the House unanimously, was that this kind of motion would not be receivable this evening.

Ms. Libby Davies: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I believe it could be done by unanimous consent.

The Deputy Chair: By unanimous consent it was ordered:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, during the take note debate on Canada's significant commitment in Afghanistan, scheduled for Monday, April 10, the Chair would not receive any dilatory motions, quorum calls or requests for unanimous consent; any member rising to speak during the debate may indicate to the Speaker that he or she will be dividing his or her time with another member...

The House has passed this motion, and I would like to move on and recognize the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Chair, I regret that this incident occurred before my turn to speak. I would have liked my hon. colleagues to be in a good mood when listening to me.

This debate is important. I asked for it and called for it, but in preparing for it I reread the speech I delivered on January 28, 2002. For Quebecers who might be watching and who are against the presence of Canadian troops, men and women of Quebec and Canada, in Afghanistan, I will read a few excerpts. This will help me make them better understand the context in which we decided to get involved. On January 28, 2002, I said:

Mr. Speaker, it is my duty to take part in this debate. This evening, my party and myself would have liked to have a debate that would have ended with a vote on the participation of the Canadian Forces, on the participation of men and women from Quebec and the rest of Canada in the American response, a response which we would like to see more closely co-ordinated by the United Nations.

The Taliban government makes women live in cages. Women are denied access to health care. Young girls are not entitled to education or to health care. Finally, women have no other function than to reproduce.

I speak as a woman and a mother this evening. I would have liked to vote on a motion. As much as the war disgusts me, I understand why countries like Canada react. If Quebec were a country, something I keenly want, I would want it to react too, not out of vengeance, but out of a need to say that what happened in New York City and Washington, the September 11 attacks, are totally unacceptable.

We must, however, make sure that it is not just through security measures, anti-terrorist legislation and strikes that we will fight this seriously, but rather by ensuring that there is hope that this world will become less unfair and less illegal.

Today, I will not repeat the same remarks because I take a very keen interest in Afghanistan, a nation that is suffering, and I know that the picture is perhaps not as rosy as some members here this evening would have us believe.

We have to speak the truth. In my view, this does not mean that we have to say that the men and women fighting in Afghanistan should pull out. But we have serious questions. Before I get to those

questions, I would like to quote Kofi Annan's March 6 report, which paints a rather bleak picture.

Further progress has been made towards the rehabilitation of the basic infrastructure that can support economic and social development. Nevertheless, as noted in my previous report, many issues that present challenges to the short and longer-term security and stability of the new democratic State have not yet been resolved. These range from the strengthening of nascent Government structures to upholding human rights, enforcing the fundamentals of good governance, justice and the rule of law, disbanding illegal armed groups and laying the foundation for sustainable economic and social development.

On human rights, he says:

The human rights situation in Afghanistan remains challenging, above all owing to the security situation and weaknesses in governance. Impunity of factional commanders and former warlords has also served to undermine incremental improvements. The significant upsurge in violence in some parts of the country has limited the access to those areas by both international humanitarian actors and Government representatives, denying the population access to entitlements, services and protection. Complaints of serious human rights violations committed by representatives of national security institutions, including arbitrary arrest, illegal detention and torture are numerous.

Insurgents departed from the seasonal trend of past years by maintaining a high level of operational activity throughout the winter period. The first months of 2006 witnessed a rising level of insurgent attacks, in particular in the south and east of the country.

In other words, in the Kandahar area.

Why should we be in Afghanistan?

• (2055)

Because it is a question of international solidarity that can make Quebecers feel obliged to be there.

These people have suffered a lot over the last few decades: droughts, war against the USSR, civil wars and the dictatorship of the Taliban, which have marked the daily lives of Afghans.

This country numbers among the poorest in the world and is one of the most dangerous, particularly because of the 10 to 15 million anti-personnel mines that have been sown, especially fragmentation bombs.

So let us ask our questions now because they have to be asked on behalf of the people who see our soldiers in Afghanistan and know that there are associated costs.

Do they have any idea how long the mission in Afghanistan might last? That is an important question. As much as I am inclined to say that we have to stay there, I have to wonder whether this democratic regime is always going to be on life support. We have a right to know.

In addition, are there any estimates of the cost of the mission?

The current Minister of National Defence asked a series of questions last November 15. One of them had to do with a withdrawal plan. The Minister of Foreign Affairs sent us packing with our question, but he was the one who asked it. Is there a withdrawal plan? We are not asking him for it, we are just asking if there is one.

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What guarantees do we have that NATO will take over from the Americans in the south, Kandahar therefore, and Canada will leave the American operation? It greatly annoys Quebeckers that our soldiers are under American command in Operation Enduring Freedom.

There is also the question of how prisoners are treated. Since our return here, the first questions I asked in the House had to do with the treatment of prisoners. They concerned the fact that our soldiers, men and women from Canada, were turning prisoners over without ensuring that they would be covered by the Geneva Convention.

American soldiers cannot be prosecuted, but Canadian soldiers can be. So this is an important question.

I have read the agreement on the transfer of prisoners. I was told that some lawyers said today that there are many weaknesses in it. A former unionist who reads a text of this kind soon sees that it is not very strong. Neither the soldiers nor the prisoners are protected. This agreement must be either completely re-negotiated, or rejected.

I am sorry, but maybe this can be explained by the fact that General Hillier negotiated the agreement all by himself, without the help of the former ministers of foreign affairs or national defence. In any case, it is not a good agreement, and everyone should admit it. We cannot continue living with this agreement.

Can the government assure us that the army is keeping its commitments in regard to the use of anti-personnel mines? Can we also be assured that our soldiers have all the equipment they need?

I have some more questions, but I would like answers to these first.

• (2100)

[*English*]

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Chair, I congratulate you on your appointment.

Tonight we are having a very important debate. We want to show our support for our troops in Afghanistan, and tell them that we are with them. Their very important work is making a difference all across the Afghan nation. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission has written quite clearly that there are many conditions within Afghanistan that need to be addressed. Our troops are over there fighting for a better life for the people of Afghanistan.

I would like to speak very briefly about the women and children. Trafficking and kidnapping of children in Afghanistan has become a major problem for families and the government. Sexual exploitation, forced labour and the removal of organs and limbs are issues that the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission is very concerned about as outlined in a document that the commission put out in 2005. Looking through the document, it is so compelling to see the importance of what our troops are doing over there in making sure that families and children have better lives. One child out of every five dies before the age of five. The life expectancy in Afghanistan is 44 years. Only 12% of the population has access to clean, drinkable water.

Our troops are working under very difficult conditions. These very valiant men are compelled not only to protect the people, but to build. Earlier tonight we heard on this side of the House a very

compelling speech about the better lives that are built for women and children because of the input that our courageous Canadian troops have made in Afghanistan.

Can the members across the way give absolute 100% support to our very courageous troops abroad who are doing this compelling job to make lives better for the people of Afghanistan?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure this evening to tell you that my constituency includes CFB Longue-Pointe. Longue-Pointe is Canada's largest supply depot. Except for ammunition, everything that goes from here to Afghanistan goes through my riding, including bolts and, unfortunately, coffins.

Of course we support the soldiers. However, when I met with these soldiers and other employees at the base, I told them that my way of protecting them was to ensure that their mission and objectives were justified, and their equipment and training adequate.

I am told that a soldier must be a diplomat in the morning, a humanitarian aid worker at noon and Rambo in the afternoon, throwing open the doors and firing away. Something is wrong with this picture, and I told the troops so. I think that being a soldier is already tough enough without taking on all three roles at once. Nevertheless, I will ask General Hillier to convince me they should.

We intend to protect soldiers by ensuring that their mission has been properly assessed and that we can evaluate it according to its true goals and outcomes.

There is one subject that never comes up. We talk about security in Afghanistan, but we never talk about its neighbour, Pakistan. The mission to Kandahar is especially dangerous because it is near the border with Pakistan, home to various tribes that have quietly been supporting the Taliban and the Mujahedeen for decades. I think we should talk about this. We cannot resolve security issues in Afghanistan if we do not do something about aid for the Taliban and other combatants coming out of Pakistan. And that—

• (2105)

The Deputy Chair: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore now has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to answer the question the Conservatives have been asking all day. The answer is yes, I support the mission and the troops in Afghanistan and so does my party, but I take great umbrage to the party over there that reflects in its connotations that the NDP does not support our troops because the NDP asks questions.

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What is really bad for the morale of our troops is quite clear. I have attended recently the funerals of four people in my own riding. They were for Mr. Nathan Smith, Mr. Richard Green, Mr. Braun Woodfield and Mr. Paul Davis. They were fine, young Canadian soldiers who gave their lives for our country. As a person who was born in Holland and whose parents were liberated by the Canadian military, I take great offence to anyone who questions my or my party's love and support for our troops and their families.

The reality is we have a democratic right in a responsible democracy to ask questions. All we did is ask the exact same questions the defence minister asked in November. The foreign affairs minister said three weeks ago that a debate in the House would cause disrepute and a loss of morale among our troops. Three days ago he said a debate would be very good for our troops.

In 2004, when in opposition, the Prime Minister said that if there is a change in the mission, if there is a change in treaties, or if there is a change in deployment in time he would bring that discussion to the House for a vote. All the NDP has done is give back to the Conservative government exactly what it said in opposition. If military personnel operate inconsistently in the field, it means people will lose their lives. What we are asking the government for is consistency in language and in debate.

The questions are not easy. They are very difficult for anybody in the House to answer. The member raised a very valid point not just about Afghanistan but about the entire region. What is the government doing in terms of ascertaining concerns with Pakistan, China, India and other countries in the region? Those countries play a very important role in the future of our deployments there.

We are basically asking that if the deployment is extended past February of next year that the issue come back to the House for a debate and approval, which is exactly what the Conservatives when they were in opposition said they would do.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member is not available at the moment, so we will resume debate.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for York—Simcoe.

As this is my first opportunity to rise in the House since the January election, I want to take this opportunity to thank the voters of my beautiful riding of South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale for the privilege of being re-elected to serve them for a second term. I would also like to thank the Prime Minister for the confidence and trust he has placed in me by naming me Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

It seems appropriate that the first opportunity I have to speak in the House as parliamentary secretary is on the subject of the most important deployment our forces will face during this Parliament. Our young men and women in Afghanistan are doing an excellent job of defending our national interests, protecting Canada and the world from terror and helping the people of Afghanistan rebuild their country.

[*Translation*]

I know that I speak for all members of this House when I offer them my full support and sincere thanks for their courage and sense of duty.

• (2110)

[*English*]

We need to recognize that it is in our national interest to see Afghanistan become a free, democratic and peaceful country. Canada is not an island which is able to live in isolation from events taking place around the world. Al-Qaeda has singled out Canada as a target for terror, which means the fight against terror is our fight. Too many countries have learned the hard way that not taking terrorists seriously is risky.

There is also the threat of drugs. If Afghanistan descends back into chaos, it would quickly become a safe haven for the production of heroin, which would likely find its way onto the streets of Canada.

The current mission in Afghanistan is also part of Canada's long tradition of standing up for what is right when it needs defending.

[*Translation*]

As part of this tradition, Canadian military personnel have participated in peacekeeping and peacemaking operations all over the world. On every occasion, Canadians have served with courage, distinction and honour.

[*English*]

Our current mission in Afghanistan is no exception. It demonstrates Canada's commitment to making the world a better place in which to live, not just for Canadians but for all. However peacekeeping and peace-building represent just the first steps whose real importance lies in the fact that they make what follows possible; namely, the humanitarian and development work which are helping the Afghan people build a stronger, more peaceful and prosperous country.

Here too Canada is playing a key role. Since 2001, Canada has pledged more than \$650 million to aid Afghanistan in rebuilding itself after the ravages of war. Canadian Forces personnel are providing medical and dental care to Afghans, many of whom have never seen a doctor or a dentist. They are helping to rebuild schools and making sure children can safely attend them, and they are protecting the civilian population so Afghans can restart their lives.

As a result of the work of Canadians and others, thousands of Afghan refugees have returned home from Pakistan and elsewhere. For these efforts, Canadian Forces personnel have won the gratitude and support of a vast majority of the Afghan people with whom they have come into contact.

[*Translation*]

Canada is actively participating in a number of humanitarian and development projects to promote equality for women, expand the public education system for children and ensure the right to vote for all Afghans.

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[English]

Thanks to these and other projects, much progress has already been made. Poverty has been reduced. Millions of Afghans are able to vote in free elections. Afghan women now enjoy rights and economic opportunities that were simply unthinkable under the Taliban. Afghan children are now able to attend school as freely as Canadian children.

These are important victories for the people of Afghanistan and they represent things worth standing up for, but for this to work we need to stay the course so our young men and women can return to a grateful Canada knowing that their self-sacrifice, hard work and courage made the world a better place. May God keep our land glorious and free.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I listened carefully to the hon. member's speech. I wonder if he would comment on the central contradiction of this entire mission and that is that there is no military solution to this conflict and yet there is no solution without military support. I wonder if he could comment on what he sees as the way out of that essential contradiction.

• (2115)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, I would have to disagree with the premise of the question that there is a contradiction there. I do not see any contradiction whatsoever. In fact, the primary responsibility of the forces that are present in Afghanistan are to bring peace, security and stability so that the pillars of democracy can surface and grow in that environment. Without their presence, there is no way that these important civil institutions could ever develop.

I would suggest that the hon. member take a second look at why we are playing the role that we are playing in Afghanistan.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Chair, I was outside on the steps of Parliament Hill earlier this evening with another member and I was glad I was there to hear the concerns being voiced by peace activists and anti-war activists. This is where they should be voicing their concerns about the government's policy and the nature of the mission in Afghanistan.

It has been alarming to hear Conservative members being critical of members of the NDP and members of other parties for daring to ask questions about their programs and policies. I would like to pursue this further because, as has been explained tonight, many of the questions that we are raising are the same questions that were raised by the Minister of Defence when he was in opposition. I guess they were okay then when they came from that member but they are not all right now if they are coming from the NDP.

It strikes me as very hypocritical that on the one hand a propaganda machine is now underway in the United States, and being referred to by the Minister of Foreign Affairs as "boots on the ground", which has been launched by the Conservative government to convince Americans of what we are doing and to appease George W. Bush, and yet on the other hand the same government is refusing to answer the questions Canadians have about this mission.

I would like to ask the member if he knows what the exit strategy is. Does he know what the objectives of this mission are in terms of what will happen after February 2, 2007 if he is the parliamentary

secretary? If he believes in the transparency and accountability of his government, why is he not willing to share that with the Canadian public?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, I remind my hon. colleague that the democratic right that she is exercising with freedom of expression is the very right that we are trying to establish in Afghanistan. I respect her right to speak freely and I respect the right of others to ask questions but at the end of the day we have a responsibility to the forces that are present in Afghanistan. We have to assure them that they are over there for a good purpose and that we will not back down from them during a debate like the one occurring here this evening in Parliament.

To further expand on the good work that we are doing in Afghanistan, I want to remind all members in the chamber of some of the accomplishments that have occurred recently: 4.8 million children have enrolled in primary schools as a result of our assistance in Afghanistan; 3.5 million refugees have returned; 63,000 former combatants have been disarmed and demobilized; and a president, a parliament and 34 provincial councils have been elected. We are doing good work. I encourage all members to support our Canadian Forces in Afghanistan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, through the Prime Minister's recent visit to Afghanistan, our new government spoke clearly and directly to Canadians and the world about how Canada will participate in world affairs and again provide leadership. For those of us who are believers in the importance of democracy and its promotion, it was good news.

First, the Prime Minister made clear that Canadian commitments would have weight. Our resolve in the face of challenges would be strong and our partners, allies and those counting on Canada could do so with trust and confidence. The building of confidence and trust is fundamental to restoring Canada to a leadership position in the world.

Second, the Prime Minister made clear that Canadian actions on the world's stage will be governed by our national interest. This may be old fashioned, realist school international relations. However, it ensures that our policies reflect Canada's concerns and that our commitments do not over-reach our capabilities. Canada, the confirmed multilateralist, would ensure an independent foreign policy in the context of working with our like minded partners to have maximum constructive impact.

That Canadian national interest is not a narrow and opportunistic seeking of mere advantage for ourselves. Rather, it is a broadly defined national interest, one that recognizes the interconnectiveness of the world today and that Canadian security and prosperity are enhanced and safeguarded when the world is a safer place where the rule of law is spread in partnership with the advance of human rights and democracy. It is a national interest that recognizes that Canada is not an island, but rather part of global humanity.

Government Orders

Third, the Prime Minister spoke clearly of Canada's intention to be a leader in world affairs. Some speak of our country as being a model nation, and it is true that Canada has much to commend it in that regard: a healthy, mature, functioning democracy; active civil society; tolerance of dissent and a respected judicial system with widely accepted rule of law. We have a healthy level of economic freedom, buttressed by a supportive social safety net. As such, Canada is a pretty good model. However leadership by example is not sufficient.

Leadership means duty. We have an obligation to help promote those values in the parts of the world that do not yet share our prosperous stability and freedom to move in that direction. That duty, which is part of leadership, requires sacrifice. In Afghanistan we see that leadership in numerous forms: from the so-called pointy end of military commitment, to the institution building efforts of provincial reconstruction teams and the simple but urgent delivery of humanitarian aid.

In Afghanistan and elsewhere, Canada will not be carping or hectoring from the sidelines. We will be providing leadership and working to make the world a safer, more secure and free place.

Which brings us to the fourth point the Prime Minister was making. We are in Afghanistan to help rebuild the country into a free, democratic and peaceful country. That objective is a legitimate and important Canadian objective. In fact, our work in Afghanistan confirms what is best about Canada on the world's stage and how much Canadians have to offer.

We are proud of the work our soldiers, diplomats and aid workers are doing. We are all grateful for their efforts. Canadians thank them and the Afghan people thank them.

Most Canadians will never see Afghanistan but they know of Kandahar. Canadians know and hear of the work that our people, who proudly wear the Canadian flag, are doing. They are uprooting the enemies of freedom. They are giving hope for a better life and Canadians are helping Afghans to rebuild their country.

For over four years now Canada has stood side by side with the international community, with 36 countries, in Afghanistan in fighting the campaign against terrorism. Achieving this requires the international community to adopt a multi-faceted approach, and Canada is doing just that.

I think I speak for all members of the House when I say that we are honoured and humbled by the sacrifices made by our men and women in uniform and by diplomat Glynn Berry who gave their lives in a far away land for people they did not know. They gave it for a belief, for a principle, for freedom and for democracy.

While for some of us the idea of Canada playing a leading role in advancing democracy is self-evidently desirable, it is not a path without obstacles. Foremost is a strong isolationist impulse harboured by some. There are those who would prefer that we pull up the drawbridges and keep our prosperity and freedom to ourselves.

A recent caller I heard on CBC radio was critical of the Prime Minister's declarations in Afghanistan. She said, "All this talk about

freedom, it's just not Canadian". I like to think that freedom is a Canadian value. I think it should be a universal value.

• (2120)

As this country learned in the last century, safeguarding and advancing freedom often comes at a price; a price paid by thousands of Canadians in two world wars and Korea. Throughout her history, Canada has been a leader in advancing freedom across the world. That is what Canada is doing today.

• (2125)

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):

Mr. Chair, I know how important this issue is to the member, his party, our party and all Canadians. Indeed, if I am not mistaken, he may have several of his own constituents, as do I, who are serving right now with our forces in Afghanistan.

I want to ask the member a very simple question. While we talk a great deal about what needs to be done and the purposes for which we are there, ultimately there has to be a solution and, one would presume, a political solution. Is the hon. member of the view that the total government approach, which been the standing policy of both governments—I presume nothing has changed under his government—will see or conclude Canada's maturation in terms of its involvement in Afghanistan at any time in the not too distant future?

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Chair, there is a tremendous desire among some to distill democracy promotion or democratic development to simply winning a military struggle and having free and democratic elections. Obviously it is much more than that. In many places, it requires institution building, development of civilian law enforcement and education systems, the stabilization of an economy, and the building of local governments and national governments. All of these things are important parts of the package. Of course, every circumstance is different. Every occasion is different.

As the Soviet Union ended, we saw many countries where there were willing recipients looking to go quickly down the road to embrace reform of their judicial system, to learn how to run it the way that western democracies have been doing it for years. Then there are some countries, obviously, where democratic development is done in the face of hostile forces; there are countries and regimes that really are resisting it. As we know, we see that right now in some places, such as Belarus, where it is a big struggle.

Then we have a place such as Afghanistan, and there are others around the world that are similar, where it is something in between the two, where there are local populations and newly elected governments, where we have had the successful elections and we have people wanting to move toward that state of a stable, democratic and free country, but where there are forces within the country that are resisting it. They are fighting it and trying to destabilize the country militarily and through terrorist actions. Those are perhaps the most difficult ones, obviously, because the solution is different in every case.

Government Orders

In a case such as Afghanistan's, which has gone through such difficult times throughout the Taliban era and even before that, there obviously needs to be a large and comprehensive model that involves development on every front. That is what we are doing in Afghanistan. I believe it is the right model and I know this government believes it is the right one.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would like to ask my colleague a question concerning NATO. As Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, he holds an important position. We know that NATO is to take over very soon. Given opinion in Canada and Quebec at this time, there is a problem: the Enduring Freedom command remains in place.

Ministerial meetings are being held concerning NATO. I am attending parliamentary meetings, but there are also meetings between the defence ministers and the foreign affairs ministers.

I would like him to give us a summary of progress on the NATO takeover. I know that it is planned, but is it a sure thing? Will NATO take over this summer, as agreed? Can we speed up the process or is it behind schedule? Could the parliamentary secretary tell us more about progress on the NATO takeover?

[English]

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Chair, as most people know, the mission in Afghanistan is divided into different portions or different provincial reconstruction teams throughout. Currently, the Kandahar one, where Canada has taken on a leadership role, is one where we are going to have a lot of troops from different forces coming in.

My own ancestral homeland of Estonia is actually committing 150 troops that will be working under Canada there. Of course, I might add that people from Estonia appreciate the importance of democratic development and democracy promotion, having lived for a half a century under Soviet tyranny and having seen that suffering. That is why Estonia, this tiny country of just one million people, is giving a commitment so out of proportion to its population.

Obviously ISAF has development teams that are in charge of some of the provincial reconstruction. The U.S. has different elements. We keep moving between different portions with our commitment. We are confident that the progress is a positive one and that things are making satisfactory progress, but obviously the commitment of when we do what and what we will do will ultimately be in our national interest.

• (2130)

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for West Nova.

I am pleased to participate in this take note debate on Afghanistan, as I did in a similar debate in the House on January 28, 2002. At that time, I shared with the House 10 principles that should underpin our reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, organized around the centrality of human security and rights protection and which included: the establishment of a viable justice system, support for the fundamental role of women in that reconstruction effort, the clearing of land mines, accountability for past abuses, an application of international humanitarian law, and the treatment and protection of persons in

armed conflict, including the protection of detainees and prisoners of war.

As we gather together for this take note debate in support of the human security mandate, mass atrocity and impunity, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide by attrition, continue unabated in Darfur. That is why we formed last Thursday an all party parliamentary coalition to save Darfur, first, to sound the alarm, *pour briser le silence*. As Andrei Sakharov once put it, the surest way to ensure that human rights will be abandoned is the continuation of silence. Second, we formed the coalition to issue a call to action, a 10 point agenda for action inspired by and anchored in that fundamental doctrine of the responsibility to protect.

I propose now to summarize the 10 points of that action plan, which include the following points.

First is supporting the rapid transition from the current AU force to a robust chapter VII, UN-mandated civilian protection force. Second is the enhancement of troop support so as to allow for the civilian protection mandate to be achieved. Third is the enforcement of the UN Security Council ban on offensive military flights over Darfur, including the no-fly zone. Fourth is the support of UN Security Council resolutions to bring the perpetrators of these international atrocities to justice before the International Criminal Court.

Fifth is the disarming of the militia groups collectively referred to as Janjaweed. Sixth is enabling internally displaced persons and refugees to return safely to their homes. Seventh is monitoring and enforcing the arms embargo mandated under UN Security Council resolution 1591. Eighth is the supporting of targeted sanctions as recommended by the UN expert committee on sanctions. Ninth is the supporting of the Darfur peace process, which should include representation from all parties to the conflict. Finally, there is the supporting of responsible disbursement of development assistance funding, which itself will only be made possible through the protection of human security.

The Speech from the Throne envisaged a robust diplomatic role for Canada and I share this. This is a test case for that robust diplomatic role and a test case for the responsibility to protect obligations. As Edmund Burke put it, and I will paraphrase it, the surest way to ensure that evil will triumph in the world is for enough good people and good countries to do nothing.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Chair, I appreciate having an opportunity to make a comment and ask a question. I listened to the member make his presentation. It seemed to me, and I look for his clarification, that he started out by saying that while the mission in Afghanistan may have some value, Canada should change its focus to Darfur. Maybe that is not what he is saying. If it is not, I would like him to clarify that.

Government Orders

It seems to me that this mission in Afghanistan is important. It has been made clear tonight by members from both sides that it is important. I believe this mission will allow the establishment of democracy and freedoms in Afghanistan. It has already allowed women to be treated not as chattels but as free members of the Afghan society. It has allowed children to attend school, which is, I would suggest, the only route to long term hope in Afghanistan.

Canada cannot be involved in all missions. Canada may choose to be involved in Darfur at some time down the road; I have no way of knowing that. It will be examined in the future. But it really did sound to me at the start of the member's presentation that Afghanistan is important, but—and then the focus went to Darfur.

I would like the member to comment on that. Does he feel confident that Canada could play a meaningful and important role in both theatres? Or is he saying, as it sounded, that maybe Canada should consider backing out of Afghanistan and putting our focus into Darfur? Does he believe that we can do both and that we have enough troops to do what he would like to see done in Darfur? I really would like clarification on that.

• (2135)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Chair, I am pleased to be able to respond. I did not introduce any “but”. The hon. member may have heard a “but”. There was no “but” in my remarks. I supported the human security protection mandate with regard to Afghanistan as early as January 28, 2002, in this House. I mentioned it at that time then, have summarized some of it now and I continue and reaffirm that human security protection mandate with respect to Afghanistan this evening.

I want to say that I do not think this is a matter of these two being mutually exclusive. I share the intention of the Speech from the Throne for a robust diplomatic role for Canada. I believe that Canada, in addition to Afghanistan, can play and exercise a robust diplomatic role and can exercise moral and political leadership. I sought to share with the members of the House a 10 point proposal whereby Canada can take the lead in helping to bring about one or more or all 10 of those 10 initiatives. I believe that a robust diplomatic initiative can do that without in any way impugning or undermining our involvement in Afghanistan.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to clarify a couple of points before I put my question to the member. I think it is perhaps important for some of the members on the government side to know where this party stood even prior to 9/11 on the issue of Afghanistan, particularly with regard to the Taliban. I would be curious to at some point discuss with them their role in holding to account the absolute horror that was going on in Afghanistan with the Taliban.

I am sure that when they found out what was going on with the Taliban in Afghanistan they, like my colleagues and other people in our civil society, signed petitions and tried to push the UN to challenge the Taliban because of what was going on in that country at that time. I am also sure that they are aware of the period between 1992 and 1996, when 50,000 Afghans were slaughtered by the warlords and in the civil war that ensued. I am sure that each one of them made sure the UN knew what was going on and I am sure they called for action.

My question for the member is this. In light of the facts of what we have heard of the concerns around potential human rights abuses with the third party, concerns that we and others have raised, is it not now time to look at the rules of engagement that our government has signed on to with the Afghans?

In light of the fact that there are concerns being raised in the media, concerns that the press and other experts have cited, that perhaps those whom we turn over to the Afghans might end up on the wrong side of what we consider Canadian values, in light of that, we should, if we can, do what the Netherlands has done. That is, we should guarantee access to prisoners so we can ensure that the men and women we support over there are not doing it under the auspices of something other than the values we all hold dear.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Chair, I will be very brief. I supported it then in 2002 when I spoke and I support it this evening, as I have mentioned: the application of international humanitarian law for the purpose of protecting persons in armed conflict, including detainees and prisoners of war.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Chair, it is a pleasure and a privilege for me to speak about our soldiers in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

My riding of West Nova is home to CFB Greenwood, the largest air base on the east coast. I have seen firsthand the resolve and dedication shown by our Canadian Forces members as they stand ready to serve their country overseas.

Above all, it is imperative that our troops know that we stand behind them 100%. We have confidence in their skills and we must ensure that they have at their disposal the personnel, the resources, and the equipment that they need to do the job that we have sent them to do. Anything less would simply not be acceptable.

However, support for our troops should not be confused with support for the decisions of our politicians. Questioning our government does not at all question our support for our troops.

With that in mind, we are here tonight to debate the future of Canada's role in Afghanistan. As a nation, we have worked hard to cultivate our reputation as peacekeepers. Even as we stand by our allies and deploy our military in areas of conflict, we must preserve our reputation as peacekeepers and safeguard our independent foreign policy.

With this in mind, however, I believe that we have an important role to play in Afghanistan and I fully support our ongoing presence in this region. Make no mistake, we have a responsibility to finish the job that we started.

We went to Afghanistan as part of an international commitment after one of our NATO allies was attacked on September 11, 2001. We went because the Taliban government supported and facilitated the work of al-Qaeda. We went on behalf of the Afghan people because we have a long term interest in ensuring peace and stability in a region that remains volatile.

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Afghanistan is now at a critical juncture. We toppled the repressive Taliban regime. On October 9, 2004 the Afghan people voted for the first time in democratic elections. We know that their government is less than perfect, but it includes the seeds of a burgeoning democracy and it needs our ongoing support. Some would argue the same of our Parliament. We must remain in Afghanistan because we cannot allow it to return to a failed state or become a safe haven for terrorists.

I want to touch briefly on the issue of prisoners of war. All prisoners must be treated with dignity and respect, in accordance with the rule of law. We must never do, through a third party, anything that contradicts our national values.

Finally, I want to speak about the nature of tonight's discussions. Our mission in Afghanistan is dangerous. We knew that when we went in. As the difficult reality of our peace support operations become apparent, my colleagues in other parties have been publicly calling for a debate and vote on the mission. This kind of debate may not serve a useful purpose and could in fact put our troops in greater danger. It could illustrate to our enemies the possibility of dissension, which might encourage our enemies to take action against our military in the hopes that they could break our resolve.

Moreover, the decision to deploy our military rests solely with the Prime Minister and cabinet. He asked Canadians to give him a mandate to govern and he must take responsibility to make these difficult decisions. Members of Parliament do have an opportunity to provide input into the decision making process to the Standing Committee on National Defence as well as the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. These committees provide advice to the Prime Minister and Parliament.

That said, it is up to the Prime Minister to make the final decision on the deployment of our military. Only he is privy to all the intelligence material, in its entirety, as collected by our security agencies and those of our allies.

This is a dangerous mission and we have already experienced tragic losses. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of those who have been injured or killed in the line of duty. They have made the ultimate sacrifice and have done so in the greater interest of humanity. We must keep faith with their sacrifice and honour their memories.

• (2140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Chair, I listened with great interest to the speech which told us what we should have heard months, even years ago.

We very clearly support the Canadian Forces, that is the soldiers in Afghanistan. We hope they will accomplish their mission without too many casualties.

During a debate such as this one, we must be very careful and cautious. Canadian public opinion is divided. The vision, which reflects the reality of information provided by the previous government, this government and the House of Commons, is not a clear one.

In this sense, is it not important for this evening's discussions to continue? Is it not just as important to have these discussions while keeping in mind that everyone in this House wants Canadian soldiers to carry out their mission under the best conditions and without calling into question the loyalty or motives of each member of Parliament? Several of the arguments made by the member represent conditions for a successful mission.

However, divided public opinion in this regard should get us thinking about the fact that information and details are missing. Questions asked by the current Minister of National Defence, when in the opposition just a few months ago, have not all been answered. Do we not have a responsibility to continue to provide answers, particularly with regard to the duration of the mission and efforts we will make to ensure that we do not have to take up this debate in two, three or four years, when we regret decisions that have been made?

Should the government not do additional work to ensure that Canadians will have all the necessary information to provide their support? The best possible support, aside from that of the House of Commons, is that of all Canadians. In this regard, there is still a great deal to be done.

• (2145)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his question. If we could always debate as we are debating this evening, I would be happy to debate these issues daily.

The problem arises from the fact that we get into partisan debates when questions concerning Afghanistan or other areas where our soldiers may be found become more complex or when one or other party wants to use the occasion to make political points.

I want to form the government and replace this government with our political party, but I want to do it on the basis of ideas and vision. This should happen in due course. It cannot happen to the detriment of our soldiers any more than on the basis of the fears of Canadians.

I think it is dangerous to have this sort of debate in the House in committee of the whole, when more in depth debates can take place in committee with the help of witnesses and experts who contribute to discussions. In the House we each tell the other what we already know. In committee there is the opportunity as well to hold discussions in camera, as we receive information we cannot share with the House.

We must rethink these debates in the House and ensure there are other ways to take part and to fuel more thorough debate, which would be to Canada's benefit.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I was impressed by the remarks made by the member for West Nova. He shed light on a number of points essential to establishing the context for us. We need to know what Canadians and the Government of Canada must do next to support our troops in Afghanistan.

The political solutions and tools still must be found. We are here to find the tools to help this people. A decision has to be made to find a permanent political solution. Does the hon. member have any answers?

Government Orders

• (2150)

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Chair, my riding is home to the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. All countries of the world and nearly all Canadian agencies work together there to train individuals who will go and work in the field, who will work with military and police forces, non-governmental international development agencies, and the United Nations, just to name a few.

All of this brings us back to the three D approach, which we have already discussed: defence, diplomacy and development. We are working with individuals towards development. I believe there will be more activities of this nature in the future.

[*English*]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Chair, in the context of this debate, I would like us to reflect on the past, the present, and then into the future. Obviously, it is important to reflect on the past because, as many people have commented, if we do not understand the past, then we will not understand how we got to where we are today.

It is important that we look at this debate in the context of the present, so that when things take place, for instance, the death of our brave soldiers, we can understand the context of that and it helps to determine the question of whether we should continue or not.

Then of course we have to consider the future to really get a grasp on whether what we are doing truly is going to be beneficial not just for Canada but in fact for the world. It is in those contexts that I am going to approach this debate.

We hear a lot today and we talk about the fact that Canada has a great reputation as a peacekeeper nation, but we forget that even before that we forged our history by being a peacemaker. We were involved in making the peace. Canadians were engaged in the first world war for three years before the Americans entered that conflict. In the second world war, we were there almost two years before the Americans arrived. We were in the Korean war with a very clear presence as a peacemaker.

In the first world war, our population was something like eight million, yet we enlisted almost a million troops. Just do the math on that for a minute. Of eight million people, we can figure that half were women, and in those days there were no women in combat roles, so we are down to four million men to choose from, from infants to the aged. Of that population of four million almost a million volunteered to go. Those were huge numbers.

When we look at that and our involvement in the second world war and Korea, those are some of the biggest reasons that literally we are here today in a democratic environment, and that much of Europe, western Europe certainly, is in a democratic environment, as is Great Britain and other countries.

If we had not taken part and if other countries had not taken part in those engagements, it could seriously be argued that we would not be here today in the present democratic environment which we enjoy. It is important to remember that. If we forget that we are in trouble.

I say this not for partisan reasons, but I reflect on a former Prime Minister being honest enough to say, reflecting on D-Day, that we

had landed troops on the beaches of Norway. We had a former minister of defence, before the present Leader of the Opposition was minister of defence, who was honest enough to admit he had never heard of Dieppe and that he did not know the difference between Vimy Ridge, where Canada's future was largely forged, and Vichy. It is very important that we remember from whence we came, so that we know where we are going.

Canada was able to be a force at the United Nations under Lester Pearson, a great Liberal I might add, and have a huge influence because we had been so significantly involved in peacemaking in those important years. There is a Liberal heritage to that of which we can be proud.

We are presently in Afghanistan on a mission there for these very same reasons. It was in 1999 that the United Nations listed the Taliban as a terrorist entity. In 2001, people who had been trained in Afghanistan under that same world view attacked our neighbours to the south and killed Canadians in the process. They killed Canadians in those attacks. It is very important that we recognize that, and that we recognize that Afghanistan has been and still is a major exporter of terrorism. It had been allowed to exist freely, training people in the vicious and devious acts of terrorism which they exported all over the world.

• (2155)

They are also the major exporter of heroin, which causes disruption in a different way, death and destruction I might add, even upon our young people here in Canada. The Taliban regime is so vicious and oppressive that women live constantly in fear. Men live in fear of regime.

When the people of Afghanistan called for help, quite rightly Canadians responded. Canadian history is that we have certain limits to what we will witness before we take action. Canadians are not seen as being maybe as outward and aggressive as others are, but there are limits. We do not like bullies. When we see people in other countries being bullied to such an extent, our history is that eventually we step up to the plate to protect them. That is what we did in previous engagements. That is what we did and are doing in this engagement.

We respect the right of sovereign nations to conduct their own activities within their borders. That goes back to 1648 and the Treaty of Westphalia. We respect that sovereign right, but there is a limit. Canadians have been the ones to stand up when we feel those human limits have been breached. We are there and we must continue to be there.

I reflect on the second world war. My father, as a young university student, had a limit to which he could continue classes and yet at the same time watch what was going on in Europe under the Nazi regime. Though there were children at home and he was already well into his thirties, my mother's father had certain limits at which he could watch and see oncoming destruction in Hong Kong. He went with the people we now call the Hong Kong veterans and paid a severe price of spending four years in a prisoner of war camp.

Government Orders

Canadians have limits. We eventually stand up for those who are being bullied almost beyond human belief. Private Robert Costall had limits. He was a young, married man with a 14 month old child. He had enlisted in our armed forces and was proud to do so, hoping that the time would not come but knowing it may come where the limits would be broached and where he would join others and stand in the defence of human beings for their most important human rights.

It is not a time to back off and appease one of the most vicious terrorist elements the world has ever known. As a matter of fact, it was Winston Churchill who said that those who believed in appeasing were like those who fed the crocodile hoping they would be the last one to be eaten. Canadians, historically, have never taken that particular approach.

Why would so many Canadians be ambivalent about the present engagement in which we now find ourselves? One is that the reasons for this engagement I believe do not get fairly broadcast. I am talking literally about the broadcasters.

We are not asking, nor would we expect, those who do the broadcasting of news in our country to sway one way or another. However, it would be nice if Canadians got a fair picture of what we are doing in Afghanistan, such as the results that have already taken place, an economy that is beginning to find itself again, the fact that young women are going back to school and being educated, the fact that the people of Afghanistan are voting like they never have before, voting in bigger numbers than we vote here in Canada. We must be in Afghanistan.

I was speaking with General Hillier today. Our soldiers are not only proud of the fact they are there, but they understand why they are there. They feel and understand the meaning of that. They sense the history and the future of that. Now is not the time to desert them. We have read in the papers how Taliban forces and their supporters literally are watching this debate. They are watching what Canadians are seeing and feeling about this. They have a sense that if they continue to mount their attack against our brave soldiers, then maybe we will lose our nerve.

• (2200)

As I conclude my remarks, I think of words of the poet John McRae. Now is not the time to back off from facing the foe. Now is not the time to stand back. Now is the time to pass the torch. In that poem and in the words of many Canadians and many soldiers who have paid the price, "Don't fail now, take up the torch against the foe so that we who have paid the price can sleep".

We want Canadians to sleep, not just tonight but in the generations to come. We need to be able to stand up for what we are doing in Afghanistan, to be there, to support our troops and know that it is the right thing to do even as we have in the past.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to thank the minister for his very spirited comments. I would not agree that misstatements by previous politicians are something that one should underscore. He will only too well remember that the Great Lakes flow in a certain direction, and I will not go down that road for him.

He raised a number of very interesting points and one that Canadians listening to this debate will want to hear from us. There have been allegations suggested today by experts that the role of our Canadian troops could be exposed to potential responses in the international courts as it relates to the taking of prisoners against international convention.

Given the hon. member's portfolio, I would like to get his take on whether there is accuracy in what is being suggested. If not, then how would he handle the questions that have been coming forward to his government to the effect that, notwithstanding the good that our troops are doing, there are many who are questioning whether it is in fact legal.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Chair, in terms of the word legal, legal is an opinion that is arrived at by one or more lawyers on either side of an equation.

In terms of the apprehension of prisoners in Afghanistan, it is far more appropriate that our troops hand them over to the Afghan authorities. We would not presume to take them under our own authority. They are doing the right thing in doing that. They have received commitments and we have received commitments from Afghan authorities that the treatment would be appropriate.

I feel our troops have no choice but to hand those prisoners over to the people in the country who have asked us to be there, whom we are defending, a country that hopefully we will be able to leave because it will be in a strong position to care for itself against these attacks. It is the right thing that we are doing in terms of not assuming control of those prisoners who are not "our prisoners", but handing them over under the authorities of the Afghan government.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Chair, the minister says he is convinced that turning prisoners over to the Afghan government is not a problem. We heard today that the Afghan human rights commission says that torture is a routine procedure in Afghanistan among police. We have also heard that the U.S. state department has said the same thing. It has said that torture is routine and it includes pulling out fingernails and toenails, burning with hot oil, sexual humiliation and sodomy. I do not know how he can be confident that those issues are being dealt with in Afghanistan.

I also want to ask him about a situation that was publicized about a convert to Christianity who was on trial in Afghanistan recently for converting from Islam. This man was facing imprisonment and even the death penalty for having done this. The international community avoided the whole issue by whisking him out of Afghanistan to Italy.

Could the minister comment on the state of human rights in Afghanistan, which we as Canadians are now defending, given these kind of examples?

• (2205)

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Chair, I just heard one of my colleagues from across the floor say that we should consider the previous regime. That is a good point to make. How can the member opposite raise these particular questions almost in light of maybe we should be abandoning these people to a previous regime whose level of desecration of human rights was far in excess of what is happening today? Progress is being made.

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Our forces consult with the Red Cross and the Red Crescent in Afghanistan in terms of the determination of the care of these prisoners. We hope to see ongoing improvement in human rights. Afghanistan's human rights record is not perfect, but it is better than it was before we entered. As long as we stay and help them until they are ready to stand on their own against this force, it will be even better when we leave.

I am pleased that my colleague raised the question of the person who converted from Islam to Christianity. I can tell the House what would have happened to that person if it had been six years ago. He would have been killed. Something horrific would have happened to him even before he was killed. By the fact that we are there gave our Prime Minister the moral ground to stand on when he phoned the Afghan authorities and said this could not happen. We are not over in Afghanistan to defend those types of practices. That man is alive today because of the intervention of Canadian authorities and our Prime Minister.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have heard the NDP speeches and questions tonight and there is confusion in the message they are communicating. On the one hand, they say they support our soldiers, but in the same breath they question the key elements of their mission. Despite what they say, this is not supporting our soldiers or their mission.

Our ministers and parliamentary secretaries have been very clear in their support. It is a dangerous mission, but Canadian soldiers are highly trained, disciplined, skilled and are the best in the world.

Could you comment on our Canadian soldiers, in the eyes of other nations, are contributing to international security?

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I would remind the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell to address his questions through the Chair.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Chair, thank you for that reminder. I can assure you my colleague was not responding out of any lack of attention for authority, he having served proudly as a Colonel in the Canadian Forces.

As most of us know, Canadians are regarded with huge respect everywhere around the world because of the dual role that we have played historically and that we play today, both as peace makers and peacekeepers. We are there. As our Prime Minister said, we do not cut and run. We stand there and defend people who need to be defended. We will continue to do this and not just in that country. I might add that it is not just in the role in terms of national defence and our armed forces, but also our policing forces.

We have officers from the RCMP and other police forces across the country who also serve in these places. They help train police forces in the proper administration of their duties such as what it is to be honourable police officers and how to apprehend people by following due process and course of law. It is not only our armed forces, but our policing forces from across the country are contributing as well.

It is really important to recognize that our involvement there is not only in the interest of Afghanistan, but it is also in Canada's interest to promote democracy everywhere. Historians record very faithfully that democracies very rarely go to war against each other. The more

democracies we can encourage around the world, the more failed states we can encourage to become successful states and the more democracy is promoted and protected, the more peace we will have.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chair, talk about confusion. The Conservatives have a lot to answer for. I wonder what the public safety minister would say if someone said that we needed to talk about withdrawal, about costs, about the mission, about a possible vote and about bad morale of the troops, if we had a debate in the House.

I remind the hon. member that those words came from the Conservatives, not the New Democratic Party. If there is confusion on anyone's part, I suggest they look in the mirror and try to clarify this for Canadians.

However, that kind of rhetoric will not solve the concerns we have in Afghanistan. I have a very serious question for the public safety minister. The previous Liberal government, when we were serving in the Balkans, took an awful lot of money out of the capital defence budget and moved it into operations thus starving the military of equipment purchases.

My question is for the hon. member who is in cabinet. What is the government doing about the financing of this mission in Afghanistan and any future involvement that we might have? Where is the money coming from? Is it coming from the capital expenditures of the military or is it new moneys so we do not starve our military in terms of training and equipment purchases for the future? Could he give us at least us an estimate of the financial cost of our mission in Afghanistan?

• (2210)

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Chair, I suppose I could start by saying what price freedom.

I can say that these are estimates that are being very carefully thought out. It is true that the previous government committed troops to Afghanistan. We were in support of that. As I have already said, we are in support of our troops there.

In the last question period before this one it was our Prime Minister who very clearly said that no longer will our troops have to suffer from lack of proper equipment, be it uniforms, equipment, lodging or whatever. We will properly care for our troops wherever they are in this world. Those have been cost accounted and laid out very clearly and independently audited.

The member opposite also raised questions about how long should we be there and what are the costs. Of course these are questions we need to address. That is why we are having the debate. We have also clearly said that future engagements such as this will require a debate and a vote here in the House of Commons. However, we are in fact committed here.

We are not surprised that the member has raised these questions. I am glad that he did. That is what debate is all about. Let us not forget that tonight two NDP members were outside protesting with a group saying to bring our troops home. That is what they were doing. Let us let Canadians know that. That is not a surprise because in the second world war it was their leader who said we should not even engage against the Nazis and let them run roughshod.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Chair, they are reacting now. I am just giving them some straight history. We understand their reluctance. In a democracy it is fair for them to take that position, but let Canadians know what their position is.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the distinguished member for Parkdale—High Park.

At the outset I want to associate myself without reservation with the expressions of support by my leader and my colleagues for the brave men and women who are now serving in Afghanistan, particularly under the desperately dangerous conditions in Kandahar.

I want to add my heartfelt condolences to the loved ones of the 11 soldiers and the one senior diplomat who lost their lives in Afghanistan. As the mother of two sons, each with two young families, I can identify with the agony and the grief felt by the families of our soldiers who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

Since 1997 I have been privileged to represent the people of Halifax in the House. I want to take a moment tonight to thank my constituents for once again giving me the privilege of representing them.

Halifax is a military town. The city I represent is home to a vast number of military personnel who have served our country and who are committed to going on serving our country. There are no armed forces in the world better trained or more committed than the Canadian military.

My understanding is that the majority of troops who will be deployed in Kandahar in the second half of the current mission will be deployed from the Maritimes primarily.

Some people ask, if I support the troops in their mission, how can I and my colleagues ask questions? I have to say that throughout my 26 years in public life, it has always been my belief that the ultimate loyalty to our troops and to their families is to ask the very questions that they are not free to ask. They are not free to ask those questions in two senses. They accept that when they enter the military and are deployed, they serve without asking questions. They trust their parliamentarians to ensure that the mission is achievable, that it is in accordance with Canadian values and that it is also in accordance with our international obligations.

They are not free in another sense. Once troops are deployed into harm's way, they have to protect themselves psychologically. They simply commit themselves without reservation to carrying out the mission they have been assigned and frankly, to doing everything they can to keep themselves alive.

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I have to say, and this may surprise some members, that although I come from a major military town and am proud to do so, over the last several months since we have been raising concerns, I have received one phone call and one e-mail challenging why I and my colleagues are raising questions about the mission, about the deployment and about what we are doing to ensure that it is achievable and as safe as it can possibly be. I know that having said that, it will evoke some further correspondence from people and I welcome that. I think it needs to be understood that it is not military families and military personnel that are saying do not ask these questions. In fact, the opposite is true. Let me go to two concerns.

The first arises around the whole question about the mixing of war fighting and peace support operations. When we raise those concerns we are told that this is not like Pearsonian peacekeeping and that we are stuck in the past. We understand that it is not Pearsonian peacekeeping. We also understand, and this point was made very, very well by Canadian journalist Cathy Gannon, an Associated Press correspondent in Afghanistan and Pakistan for 18 years. She underscored on CBC Radio *Sunday Edition* last weekend that there is a very negative legacy throughout the south and the east from the heavy-handed tactics of the Americans. When Canadian Forces go into those villages where the Americans have been, they face desperate, desperate conditions. It is very hard to hunt down Taliban at the same time the forces present themselves as the ones who are rebuilding.

● (2215)

Having said that, I will defer to my hon. colleague. I will ask further questions throughout the rest of the debate.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Chair, when I hear my colleagues from the New Democratic Party talk about the American command in Afghanistan, they seem to forget that the United Nations has authorized this mission, that there is a NATO mandate. They also seem to forget that in the most important military action in modern history, the second world war, Canadian troops fought under a joint command led by the United States. We did so proudly in the liberation of Europe, a military operation that the leader of their legacy party, the CCF, voted against.

At least twice tonight the NDP has stood up and said that all its members are just asking questions, that they are just expressing themselves. When I was coming up to the Hill tonight, two of that party's members of Parliament were expressing themselves in a rally in front of this building under a huge banner that read "Bring troops out of Afghanistan".

I do not want the NDP shuffle any more. Those members asked for a frank debate. Here is their chance for a frank debate and a frank answer to a straight question.

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Does the hon. member believe that colleagues of hers associating themselves with a call for troops out of Afghanistan is helpful to the morale of our troops and their mission? Does she believe that our troops would be proud to see members who help represent them and their families calling their mission, associating themselves with people who say that the mission in Afghanistan is really an imperialistic endeavour and that we should therefore call them home? Does she believe that is a morale building exercise or not, for her members to be associated with such an approach as that?

• (2220)

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chair, precisely that kind of innuendo causes a lot of concern about whether Canadians are being well served even in this debate. Surely it is the essence of democracy to be willing to acknowledge the right of those who even hold an opposite point of view to protest.

An hon. member: Yes or no?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: For us to present ourselves as the champions of democracy, the champions of free speech and then engage in that kind of taunting and demonizing is really an embarrassment—

An hon. member: I guess that's a no.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I totally agree with the hon. member that we should not seek in the House to demonize one another and to stifle honest debate.

The hon. member asked two questions. She said that she on behalf of her troops, those who live in her riding, those who have families and who are serving in the theatre, want questions asked: is the mission achievable and is it in accordance with our international obligations?

Does she take the position that it is not achievable? Does she take the position that it is not in accordance with international obligations? If not, why is she asking these questions, because how could she possibly pretend that it would not demoralize our troops if she was standing in the House and saying it is not an achievable mission and it is not in accordance with our international obligations? It does not make any sense.

This is not to demonize anybody. This is to have a debate about what this is. Our troops know that they are there not to solve this problem, but to set the conditions wherein a political solution can be achieved. But they must be allowed to set those conditions in a way in which they are allowed to achieve that, because we have faith in their judgment and we understand they are the best troops in the world that understand how to go about doing this mission.

Anything less, I suggest, is to undermine their capacity to do what we have sent them there to do.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chair, I think a growing number of Canadians and in fact a growing number of people in other parts of the world have very serious concerns about whether the objectives that have been identified for our troops are indeed going to be achievable if they continue to be assigned to play the war-making role while they also are engaged in the kind of development

assistance activity that causes an enormous amount of confusion having gone in behind operation enduring freedom.

There have been many expressions of concern by people who have witnessed this firsthand, who have knowledge of why it is extremely dangerous, in fact a transgression of international humanitarian law, to combine those two functions in such a way that they are indistinguishable.

If that hon. member, who has been a foreign affairs minister and a defence minister, does not—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am privileged to stand in the House as a new member of Parliament and participate in this important debate on Canada's involvement in Afghanistan.

When we send our citizens, our young sons and daughters, in harm's way, we want to be assured of the nature of the mission and the goals to which they offer their courage and sacrifice. As the parent of three sons, I know all parents believe their children are precious. That is why their fate should be decided only with the respect of a full debate in the House of Commons.

Previous speakers have described the positive role of Canadian troops in the rebuilding in Afghanistan, specifically in defending and promoting women's equality. This, of course, is a worthy goal. The oppression of women in Afghanistan has probably been more extreme than in any other country in the world. Promoting women's equality is a worthy goal but I question whether the war on terrorism, as originally designed south of the border, was really a struggle for women's rights and the dignity of Afghan women. I did not hear that in the public debates at the time of the invasion of Afghanistan in 2002, but it is still a worthy goal.

In my riding of Parkdale—High Park, there is an organization called the Afghan Women's Organization. It is a decades-old organization assisting Afghan women in Canada by addressing their particular needs. Many of them came to Canada as refugees and their needs have been quite extreme. I will say that they spoke positively to me about Canada's peacekeeping role in helping to stabilize and rebuild in Afghanistan. They affirmed that this assistance was sorely needed in such a wartorn country but they echoed what humanitarian organizations around the world are saying, that when troops blur the lines between humanitarian aid and reconstruction and offensive military action, they not only endanger themselves as troops, they endanger aid workers whom they are presumably trying to protect.

It is of course confusing for Afghans. They want the rebuilding to take place but the person in uniform might have a shovel in his or her hand one minute and a gun the next, one minute offering medical assistance and the next minute taking a life. Contrary to what a previous member said, of course rebuilding needs security in order to conduct its work, but the blurring of the lines between security and peacekeeping in aggressive military action is a troubling and dangerous development. We may well be disrespecting our troops by placing them in harm's way in this fashion.

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Afghan women also raised serious concerns about the growing lawlessness in Afghanistan. In rural areas, where 85% of the population lives, women fear roving militaristic groups which are increasingly wreaking violence upon them. They said that in some areas it has been even worse than during the times of the Taliban. I spoke to women parliamentarians from Afghanistan who spoke about the routine death threats that they face when they speak about women's rights.

We have heard many important questions here tonight that have not received adequate answers. Some argue that we should only engage in boosterism here tonight. I do not agree. Why is this democratic debate a sign of failure? On the contrary, surely it is a sign of the strength of our democracy and either we believe in the purpose of this House or we do not. Debate is healthy and does not equal a lack of support for our military. A censure of debate is dangerous and not worthy of this House.

Since the former Liberal government got us into this U.S.-led operation enduring freedom, we are being told today that we need to finish what we started. Some Canadian soldiers tragically have already given their lives. Could the government please tell us when our military will finally leave this U.S.-led operation and instead become part of a NATO-led mission with which we could all feel more comfortable?

• (2225)

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have patiently listened to attempts by my colleagues to my right, the political left, trying to convince us of the fact that they support our troops in Afghanistan. However, in question after question, answer after answer, comment after comment, we hear references to reviewing the rules of engagement, disclosing exit strategies and asking how long the mission will last. The Taliban would love to have those answers.

I heard reference to our troops being involved in war making. I just heard the member saying something about not placing troops in harm's way. It is not surprising that Canadians are puzzled by the NDP position in this attempt to provide democracy building in Afghanistan.

We also heard that somewhere along the line the NDP wants a vote on this issue. I want to tell my colleagues to my right, the political left, that in fact UN supported missions such as ours are not like some reality shows where we can vote someone off the island every week. Helping the people of Afghanistan build a democracy is serious business and it is not something for fickle minds.

Will the member and her party today affirm their clear and unambiguous support for our mission in Afghanistan and for the brave men and women of our armed forces?

• (2230)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, I caution the hon. member on his recklessness with other people's lives.

I will say that the questions we are asking here this evening are the same questions that ministers have asked before and which members of his party have asked in the previous government, including the leader of his party. There should not be a McCarthy-like pledge that needs to take place before someone can have a healthy debate in the

House. We can support our sons and daughters, and our troops and not want to place them recklessly in a mission that is under U.S. command without a vote in the House.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have a news flash for the member across the way. First, this is a NATO-led UN-backed mission in which our troops are involved.

I have another news flash for her. How on earth will our aid workers protect civilians, enable people to go to school and enable the Afghani people to have an economy if they are not protected and do not have the security on the ground to do the job? The milk of human kindness is not flowing through the veins of everybody in Afghanistan, especially not the Taliban and particularly not al-Qaeda.

How on earth will our CIDA workers, RCMP officers and foreign affairs workers enable the Afghani people to build an economy, democratic institutions, health care institutions and schools and protect the rights of women, children and men in that country if they do not have the security on the ground and our troops cannot provide it? How will they do that?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Chair, let me say that if the hon. member in asking that question does not see a contradiction between someone providing security for an aid worker and that same soldier in an aggressive military mission also providing aid and rebuilding, then I guess I cannot explain it any clearer.

As a news flash, this is not a NATO-led mission as his own party knows well, because of course that is the party that got us into this U.S. led mission.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

This is my first opportunity to speak in this Parliament and I want to thank the people of Scarborough—Guildwood for once again re-electing me. It is a great honour to be elected once to this chamber, but to be elected four times in a row is indeed quite humbling and unique, and I am grateful for that.

My riding is probably one of the most culturally diverse ridings in all of Canada and it includes many Afghans. As a consequence, I have become quite interested and informed by my constituents about what this conflict is all about. In fact, a key person in my riding office is an Afghan refugee and she has provided me with great service over the last nine years and helps me sort my way through this very difficult conflict.

The history of Afghanistan is one of violence. It is of war, invasion and deception. It seems that over time pretty well all of the empires have invaded Afghanistan, the latest of which was the Russian invasion and prior to that there were at least three British invasions. The pattern is always the same. The invasion seems to be relatively easy, but the exit seems to be somewhat less easy. The Russians and the British have lost literally thousands of soldiers and impoverished their treasuries in trying to invade Afghanistan.

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I recommend Gwynne Dyers' book called *Ignorant Armies: Sliding into War in Iraq*. He writes, "Afghanistan's reputation for eating up and spitting out invading armies is one of the most deeply entrenched myths of military history. It is a myth because in fact Afghanistan has always been quite easy to conquer; hardly any invading army failed to make it to Kabul. It's just a very hard place to stay for very long because the tribes simply can't get along and they can't stand having foreigners in their country telling them what to do and every male over the age of 14 has a gun".

Now we seem to be at it again. History is not on the side of the occupying force. Initial success is bled away by passive and aggressive resistance. It is naive to say that victory will be swift and it is naive to say that we will cut and run. There is a national and international consensus that we are here for the long haul.

We are in Afghanistan, frankly, for the best of reasons: freeing the people from an oppressive form of Islamism, allowing a form of government that allows people to make choices, reducing opportunities for international terrorism, and giving young Afghans, particularly girls, an opportunity for education. There are other reasons. We are all full of mixed motives, some of which are self-serving, but I would argue that Canada and the international community have a responsibility to be there and be there in force.

This brings me to the central contradiction of the mission stated very well by Ernie Regehr from Project Ploughshares who states quite eloquently, "On the one hand, there is no military solution to the crisis in Afghanistan and, on the other hand, foreign military assistance continues to be essential to the pursuit of a workable solution". In other words, no military solution and there is no solution without the military.

Thus far the debate has been about the military intervention and we are, as MPs, struggling with what will be the winning strategy. Obviously, the commitment to build economic, social and political measures that build the infrastructure, both social and physical of the country, is the right direction, but is a lot easier said than done. However, I would argue that we have a question and it is an important question to ask: How can foreign military forces which are necessary but not a sufficient component of a resolution be deployed over time to build peace and in so doing, defeat the insurgency?

• (2235)

That is the central question of this debate. I hope that Canadians see MPs struggling with this question because it is the central contradiction about the mission and our thinking about the mission.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am afraid I do not see it as a contradiction. It is a syllogism from logic and in the first premise where you talk about there not being a military solution, you are missing a piece of the phrase. That is, there is no military solution if you are only going to apply military force. There is a solution if you apply diplomacy, aid, reconstruction, et cetera. That is the solution.

I do not accept your argument that there is some kind of logical difficulty here. I think it is the way that things are phrased. Even I made that phrase at one time. It is recorded that I said that there is no military solution. What I meant when I said there was no military solution was that if you are only doing the military operation and if

you are doing nothing else, it is a hopeless cause. We are there to rebuild the country.

I wonder if you would reflect again on this being some kind of difficult logic.

• (2240)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I must remind the Minister of National Defence to address his remarks through the Chair.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Chair, I am not convinced that we actually disagree all that much. I think both he and I agree that there is no military solution to this insurgency. If we just stop the sentence there, there is no solution militarily to the insurgency that is going on in Afghanistan.

I agree with him that it has to be accompanied by diplomacy, forms of aid, and other forms of intervention, presumably some work with some of the surrounding countries, et cetera. I am not sure that we actually disagree. I think that we would agree that without the military there will be no solution. Simultaneously, there will be no solution if it is only military.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have a few comments. I would like to take this opportunity to affirm for our troops in Afghanistan and those stationed around the world and here at home that they have my unwavering support and the support of the people of Wetaskiwin. As long as it is my privilege to serve on their behalf, this commitment will not change.

While it is important for the democratic process to run its course, I am confused by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, from the NDP, who says he supports our troops, but. Then he referenced his roots from Holland. I wonder if his ancestors, during World War II, would rather have seen Canadian troops mouse holing through the cities and towns of Holland and Europe or parliamentarians sitting idly and debating among themselves the merits of being in-theatre or what the exit strategy would be once the job was complete. These are not the questions that instill confidence in our brave men and women.

Then the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore called the names of four brave men who have paid the ultimate sacrifice. On behalf of the people of Wetaskiwin, I would like to extend my condolences to the families and friends of those four soldiers and all the others who have died in Afghanistan.

I would like to assure them that these soldiers have not died in vain. The names not mentioned by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore however are the names of the women who are not enslaved, the names of the children who are not living in tyranny, and the names of all the people who are enjoying democracy.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Chair, that appears to be a question directed to the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. He is sitting far in the corner chirping away there.

I am sure there was a question there. Let me say that, on behalf of our party and I am sure pretty well everyone here, I hope our Canadian soldiers see us as supporting them fully, 100%, period, full stop. Even if we have disagreements among ourselves as to questions that should be asked, there should be absolutely no question among any of us that we do support our people in the forces.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Chair, let us get right down to it since we only have five minutes. Why Afghanistan? Why Canada? And why now? People forget that in 9/11 al-Qaeda were the perpetrators of that horrific situation. Canadian citizens died in that event.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban controlled the country and they harboured al-Qaeda. We are there to get rid of the Taliban and particularly, we are there to get rid of al-Qaeda. If we do not do that then al-Qaeda would come back and use Afghanistan as a staging point to engage in activities against us and our allies. That is not an option. For the citizens who are watching out there, that is the crux of the matter. That is the bottom line as to why it is in Canada's interest to be in Afghanistan today, a world half away from our own.

The way we are doing it is an innovative 3D strategy that we put together utilizing foreign affairs, defence, our international development arm and also the RCMP. These provincial reconstruction teams are in Afghanistan right now to enable the Afghani people to build their schools, to build their clinics, to rebuild their economy, and to have their own and take over their own internal security. We are there to assist them. In particular, that is why our troops are there, not to engage, as the NDP would suggest, in some war-making fashion.

It actually irritates me to no end to think that individuals in our country today, sophisticated individuals in this House, somehow do not understand, as I said in my questions, that the milk of human kindness does not flow through everybody's veins. There are nasty people out there who behead people in Afghanistan, prevent people from going to school, kill the peacemakers and the moderates in that country, and destabilize the country.

Those people do not listen to diplomacy, as much as we would wish. We tried that as a first effort. We tried that as a second initiative, and a third. However, there are some people who will not listen to that. Our troops are there to provide the security, to provide the peace, and to enable the Afghani people to rebuild their country. They do it with honour, they do it with courage, and they do it with the full respect for them and their families for the sacrifices they make for our country every single day.

The end point for this is at the end of 2007, when this particular mission will be reassessed. That is the obligation that we made as part of the NATO backed UN supported force. The Afghani people asked us to be a part of ISAP. They asked us to go into Afghanistan and help them, which is completely different from the situation in Iraq and what our friends south of the border have got themselves into in that country.

As my friend from Mount Royal said, there are also other countries well deserving of interventions. The Minister for Public Safety spoke very eloquently and mentioned "what price freedom?"

I would ask the government, using the logic of my colleague, who is extremely experienced and a world leader in human rights, what about the Congo, where our troops in fact have actually been and have tried to maintain the peace? What about the Congo, where two million people have been killed, the worst humanitarian catastrophe in the world next to Darfur? What about Uganda, which is the worst place in the world to be if one is a child?

Government Orders

A friend of mine was doing her Ph.D. out there. She wrote to me about child soldiers who were forced to hack off the lips and ears, and noses of women, and forced them to eat those parts of their own body, not to kill them but to terrorize them. She wrote about torture and horrendous acts against innocent civilians that we cannot hope to ever in our wildest nightmares imagine. That is what is going on there today.

What about Zimbabwe, where despotic Robert Mugabe is killing his people by another means entirely. He is preventing his people from eating. He is starving his people to death.

This intervention is fully backed by the Liberal Party. We sent our troops in there. We are deeply honoured and respectful, and grateful for the incredible work that they do. I hope, at the end of the debate, that we will see all party support, fulsome 110% support, for our troops and the work that they are doing over there, not only for the benefit of the Afghani people but also for the benefit of Canadians.

• (2245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Chair, I listened to my colleague's speech with interest.

Every time I hear someone ask for 100% support, for all members of all parties to agree, I cannot help but remember that public opinion is divided. Public opinion differs from what we have heard here today because both the former Liberal government and the current Conservative one, though it has been in office only a short time, failed to provide Canadians with sufficient information.

Before saying that people are asking other questions, they should be asking themselves the right questions. Last fall, when the Minister of Defence was in the opposition, he asked many of the questions that we are being discouraged from asking in the House today.

Perhaps the member should emphasize the fact that the government ought to make more information available to the public so people can better judge the situation for themselves. If people were adequately informed, public opinion might not be as divided as it now is.

This is certainly not solid support for our troops. Should the government not provide more information? This does not mean withdrawing support. It means making sure that people are aware of all decisions so they feel the government knows what it is doing, which is not too clear right now.

• (2250)

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Chair, let me tell my hon. colleague what we did when we were in government. The then minister of defence and current leader of my party went across the country articulating why we were in Afghanistan, what we were doing and what our objectives were. We stated those objectives very clearly.

General Hillier, the Chief of the Defence Staff, whom we appointed, has also been very vocal and very explicit about the objectives of this particular intervention in Afghanistan.

Op-eds have been written.

Government Orders

A take note debate took place in the House when we were in government.

Also, I was the former parliamentary secretary of defence and I can tell the House that these questions were brought up repeatedly in the defence committee.

If the public is having difficulty with this, it is because of particular questions and doubts that have been foisted on them by the NDP and perhaps by the Bloc Québécois, about falsehoods they are portraying and complete mythologies they are putting out about this particular intervention. I am sure the public will listen to the very eloquent comments that have been made by members across the House about the truth of the matter.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Chair, it has been clearly pointed out tonight by members on both sides of the House that we are not under a UN led mission at this point. We are part of Operation Enduring Freedom. We know that for the past four years the Americans have been operating a counter-insurgency mission with Operation Enduring Freedom.

I want to talk about a Canadian citizen, an associate of McMaster University's Centre for Peace Studies, Dr. Seddiq Weera, who is based in Kabul. Dr. Weera is also an adviser to the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan and an adviser to Afghanistan's independent national commission on strengthening peace.

This is what he said:

Too often, Canadians are told they have to decide between military involvement in Afghanistan under the guidance of the United States or NATO or an abandonment of Afghans to war and chaos.

The choice is misleading. There is a third way for Canada, and it is both more in keeping with Canadian values and more helpful for Afghanistan.

While abandoning Afghanistan has many dangers, both for that nation and for the rest of us, military intervention by itself cannot possibly bring security to this fragile country. That too—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I am sorry to interrupt the member, but we have to keep moving in the interest of getting all our speakers in. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca has 30 or 45 seconds to respond.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Chair, first, to correct the member, there are two leadership bodies in Afghanistan. One is Operation Enduring Freedom and the other is ISAF, under NATO. In two months, we will be moving underneath that umbrella.

Second, this is not a military intervention. This is a novel, integrated approach whereby the RCMP and our Canadian Forces are providing security and our diplomatic members under the foreign affairs department and our development workers under CIDA are enabling the Afghani people to provide the civil society for which they have been yearning for more than 30 years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is my duty to speak this evening to support our important mission in Afghanistan.

By the way, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

I support this mission for two reasons that have been given this evening. The first reason is that the mission is to make Afghanistan a safer place and to fight the terrorism there. The second reason, which has been well explained this evening, is that it supports the reconstruction effort of a country that has gone through decades of war and conflict.

We have been asked this evening whether the Conservative government has shown leadership. In the early days after being elected, our Prime Minister went to Afghanistan. He stayed there and met with the troops. He went straight to the source. He also met the leaders. He clearly showed the type of leadership we should expect from the head of the nation.

It is important to point out that 36 countries are currently involved at the United Nations. We are there at the request of the Afghan people. The United Nations has endorsed this mission.

We have the privilege of living in a free and open society that allows us to hold debates like this one this evening and demonstrations like the one that was held tonight outside these halls. It is not a right but a privilege that we owe to our ancestors who fought to give us these rights and freedoms. Too often, in the comforts of our modern lives, we forget that these people went to battle to make sure we could have these rights and freedoms.

• (2255)

[*English*]

It is in our national interest to ensure that a free and prosperous Afghanistan is nurtured through this difficult part in its history. Canada is helping Afghanistan to become a stable, democratic and self-sustaining state so that it will not serve as a haven for terrorists who threaten global and Canadian security.

[*Translation*]

Afghanistan currently represents our most important overseas military deployment. There are over 2,000 soldiers from various military bases, including bases in Quebec like Valcartier.

[*English*]

Our mission in Afghanistan involves not only peacekeeping but also the rebuilding of the social fabric of this state; there are two parts to the mission we are working on there. We are helping the impoverished, the poor and the destitute to a better quality of life with programs that rebuild the national solidarity structure.

[*Translation*]

This evening, the Minister of International Cooperation gave examples of microeconomics and small practical projects. For instance, a dressmaker received a loan to buy sewing machines, so that now she and her children can make and market clothing.

We are in Afghanistan to support a mission recognized by the United Nations and at the request of the Afghan government. We hope Afghanistan will become a stable, democratic country we can rely on for support. Our national security depends on it.

Government Orders

Canada has also promised to help the Afghan people. We intend to keep that promise. We must do more than just give our word. We have to be ready to stand up for our convictions and do what is needed to safeguard Afghans' security and, by the same token, our own.

This mission is part of the proud tradition of Canadian missions to protect rights and freedoms to the best of our ability.

While our soldiers are putting their lives on the line in the streets and mountains of Kandahar, they need to know that they have the unwavering support of our decision-makers and the members of this House, who made an informed decision. I am certain that the hon. members will agree that the men and women of our armed forces deserve our support and our respect.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the member as I take his comments to heart, and I would like to say to him that on this side of the House we share his views on this issue.

First, the major challenge for us and for the member is to convince the world that this is not a mission of aggression, but rather a peacekeeping mission. Next, we must assure ourselves and our constituents that the reasons for this mission are different than those for the Iraq mission. These two situations are very different. Finally, of course, there is the underlying issue of multilateralism.

This is the question I would like to ask the member: what is he doing? I am not talking about this evening and the debate underway. But rather, what is he telling his constituents to reassure them and convince them that he feels very strongly about the two issues which I spoke of earlier?

• (2300)

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, I feel that it has been clearly demonstrated this evening that the Afghan mission entails greater risks than those usually encountered by peacekeeping forces, and it is important to face them in order to maintain security efforts enabling the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

This evening's discussions have clearly demonstrated that the government was headed in that direction and that efforts would continue to ensure tangible results in the end.

[*English*]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Chair, Canadians understand the necessity of helping Afghanistan rebuild its country. What is less clear, however, is the counter-insurgency mission that Canada seems to have drifted into.

I know the government likes to repeat that questions are synonymous to lack of support of the military. I want to assure members that I completely support our military, having worked with them for a number of years, including one member of the Conservative Party at this moment.

Given the drift in our mission, given the mutation, the change, does the member support a vote in Parliament before this mission is extended? This is consistent with the Prime Minister's comments. He made the commitment and said that if the government made major military commitments or changes like this, the government would bring this to Parliament and Parliament would get a vote.

Does the hon. member agree with the Prime Minister on this?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for her question.

I really have no experience in international relations, but I think it must surely be quite similar to personal relations. It is often said that we discover our true friends when the going gets tough.

Afghanistan needs to count on its friend Canada. In this context, I think that we must work together and support the current effort, which is part of the process. We are in the midst of reconstruction efforts. We must continue along this path.

In this regard, I fully support the position of our Prime Minister.

[*English*]

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Chair, this being the first time I have had an opportunity to rise, I would like to thank my constituents in Chatham-Kent—Essex for the support and confidence they have placed in me as well.

This is a country that has harboured an organization determined to export its brand of revolution across the globe. This group of terrorists think nothing of mass murder, treading on the rights of women and setting back education by centuries. It is a group that has absolutely no tolerance for any other religious group other than its own.

My question for the hon. member is this. Will this mission work toward establishing a government that ensures that freedom extends to the religious freedom we cherish so much in this great land?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Chair, it is very simple. We can see it clearly, and our colleagues have said so this evening. This is a two pronged mission. The first is security and the second is reconstruction. Both are such that tangible progress can be expected in Afghanistan.

• (2305)

[*English*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, first, I would like to thank the good people of Edmonton Centre for choosing me over a tougher than average opponent and giving me the honour and privilege of serving them in this place.

[*Translation*]

The world has changed since the defeat of communism, and we in the west have not been paying attention.

September 11, 2001 marked the tragic dawning of a new reality, when two dozen Canadians were among the thousands of victims of indiscriminate murder and terrorism. This terrorism goes on unabated, and much of it has originated in Afghanistan, a country that is truly in distress.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Not only was terrorism being unleashed upon the world from Afghanistan but the Taliban and their allies were ruthlessly suppressing the lives of the people of Afghanistan, a people who have spent far too many decades with little hope for the future.

As Canada has done throughout the past century and more, we stepped up to the plate and took a share of the international responsibility for peace, freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

The previous Liberal government recognized our international responsibility and, to its great credit, it committed Canadians in and out of uniform to the task of helping Afghanistan to become a stable, democratic and self-sustaining state. That task is not yet accomplished but significant progress has been made and we simply cannot quit now.

Whenever Canada and other freedom loving peoples have stood up to those tyrants and regimes who would take away freedom there is a price to pay. That has not changed and Canada is paying a price.

This is not just a fight for the people of Afghanistan. It is a fight for the people of Canada. The Minister of Public Safety took away my Winston Churchill quote so I will just say that organizations like the Taliban and many others and people like Osama bin Laden are, indeed, alligators and by their own admission their appetite for evil knows no limit.

They have let it be known that Canada is on their target list and no amount of wishful thinking will make their evil intentions go away. The only way to stop the alligator of terrorism is to starve it and to strangle it. That is what we must do and that is what we are doing along with our allies.

Our men and women in Afghanistan know that they have the complete support of the Government of Canada and of their Prime Minister who made that known in the clearest possible way through his visit to Kandahar.

[Translation]

I am certain that they also have the personal support of each and every member and that the only reason for this debate is to show that unlimited support and our gratitude. It is no secret that most of the men and women in uniform and their loved ones did not want this debate. And frankly, neither did I.

[English]

However here we are and it is time to affirm our support for our brave men and women and for their mission in support of the Afghan people and Canadians. The mission is dangerous to be sure, and it was never a peacekeeping mission as some have suggested.

It has been a long time since Canada has been involved in a classic peacekeeping mission in the Lester Pearson model. The world has changed. The nature of conflict has changed and the enemy has changed. Those who do not recognize those facts run a grave risk of making serious errors in judgment that will endanger our long term security.

I do not take lightly the commitment that our men and women make in service to Canada and neither does our government. I have had the very unpleasant task of presenting our beloved maple leaf flag from a fallen warrior's coffin to his widow on her birthday. It was not much of a birthday present but the present that our men and women in uniform give us every single day is the present of the freedom to pursue our future as we would like. The sacrifice that they make and the work that they do in giving us that present of freedom comes home to us when we talk to them.

I met two Canadian Forces airbus aircraft that brought our wounded back to Edmonton in the past couple of months. I have talked to the soldiers and some of their families. They know why they are in Afghanistan. Their unselfish, courageous acceptance of their mission and its risks is truly inspiring and, frankly, brings a lump to my throat when I think about it.

Great progress has been made in Afghanistan but there is much left to do. There is a face to the freedom, security and prosperity that the Afghan people are starting to enjoy. The Afghan people recognize that face and we need to recognize it as well. It is the face of a Canadian, whether servicemen, servicewomen, police officer or civilian.

I call upon every member of every party in this place to give his or her unequivocal support for our brave Canadians overseas and their families, as well as their mission in support of Afghanistan and the support of Canada. They deserve nothing less.

● (2310)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Chair, congratulations on your appointment. You are doing an excellent job.

I too want to commend our brave forces for the tremendous job they are doing on peacekeeping missions around the world. This is a great debate. Anytime there is something as important as this is for Canada, it is important to have these debates.

The people in my riding are split. Especially more recently, there have been concerns coming up, some I think through lack of information. I would encourage the government to make sure it gets full information out as much as possible on the purpose of our troops being there, their role, any commercial interests, the international nature of it and the protocol on prisoners so they know that the Red Cross has access. This would certainly help Canadians' understanding of this.

I visited Afghanistan to make sure our troops were happy and well equipped and they were. I was excited about the pride of the Afghans in having us there and wanting us there to protect their democracy, and the role the troops are playing in making sure that in dangerous situations aid can get through, and the way we have modernized the armed forces.

Following on the comments of the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, I hope that the member will encourage his government to take even more action for exactly the same noble reasons of protecting lives, protecting democracy and protecting human rights in Zimbabwe, the Congo and Darfur.

Government Orders

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Chair, the member is quite right. There are many areas around the world where other people need the assistance of countries like Canada. Regrettably, as much as we would like to be everywhere, we cannot be everywhere.

We have chosen Afghanistan. We have chosen the mission that we are in. It is a very important mission. We are going to see that mission through to its completion, whatever that takes. When we have resources to help other parts of the world, as we have done in the past, I am sure we will be more than happy to do that, but we have only so much to go so far at this time.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chair, first of all I would like to congratulate the hon. member from Edmonton on his victory in the election. He and I have corresponded for many years on issues of the military. While I have the floor, if he could put a word in to his defence minister for the future of the Shearwater air base, I and many others would greatly appreciate it.

My question is quite simple. He asked for unequivocal support for the troops in the mission in Afghanistan. He has it in spades. Rhetoric will not solve the problems in Afghanistan. What this country requires and what Canadians require are clear facts. Regarding the future debates coming up in the House of Commons foreign affairs committee, the defence committee and in this Parliament as well, having debate is never a sin. Having facts put on the table and discussions involving all parties in order to advance this issue for the betterment of all Canadians so they could have clear information, as my colleague from Yukon said, would be very helpful.

Would the member commit his party to presenting those clear facts in the future so that all Canadians can continue the debate on this very important mission, and show the troops and most importantly their families back home that we truly do care and we would like to move this issue forward?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Chair, it is true that the member and I have spoken many times over the past about military issues.

Facts are important to a debate. Facts to this House and to the Canadian public are very important. There are facts that are of clear interest to everybody in a public forum. There are also facts that for various reasons of mission security of our forces can only be disclosed in forums like the Privy Council, which of course has members of all parties present. There is all-party knowledge and agreement on those areas that may be up for debate, but within a

more closed and secure circle. Not having been there, I am sure it is free and open debate in that forum, just as there is free and open debate in Parliament on the things we can debate freely without endangering our mission or our soldiers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Chair, as we end this debate, I would like to repeat that the Bloc supports the deployment of Canadian troops in Afghanistan. Canada must continue to demonstrate leadership. It must not abandon that role, rather it must show leadership by answering the questions that the defence minister asked when he was in opposition.

I would like my colleague to tell me how the government intends to use the deliberations of the Standing Committee on National Defence, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and the debates held in this House to demonstrate that leadership. According to Canadian public opinion, leadership is not obvious at this time.

What action will his government take—

• (2315)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but the hon. member for Edmonton Centre now has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Chair, there were lots of questions. I can only say very briefly in 30 seconds that I am a new member of the defence committee. It is one I asked for. It is an area I think I am particularly suited to by experience. I intend to use my experience and be forceful in furthering the cause of defence in the global environment that Canada is committed to.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: It being 11:17 p.m., pursuant to the order made Friday, April 7, the committee will rise and I will leave the chair.

(Government Business No. 4 reported)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Pursuant to order made Tuesday April 4, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:17 p.m.)

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