



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 141 • NUMBER 011 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, April 27, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 27, 2006

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

•(1000)
[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

CANADIAN FORCES

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 rise on a point of order concerning yesterday when the hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo introduced a motion in the House asking for unanimous consent to have the House observe a moment of silence for our fallen soldiers in Afghanistan. There was no prior consultation yesterday, but I believe you would find today that if the hon. member cares to reintroduce the motion he may find unanimous consent for the motion.

I would ask the Speaker to perhaps give leave to the hon. member to re-introduce the motion.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, during my S.O. 31, I mentioned that Canadians from coast to coast to coast, as well as the international firefighters, who have been visiting us in Ottawa, have been observing a minute of silence in respect of our four fallen soldiers. The soldiers who paid the ultimate sacrifice were Corporal Matthew Dinning, Bombardier Myles Mansell, Lieutenant William Turner and Corporal Randy Payne.

We also remember all the men and women who are serving and have served and all those who are giving their lives in the service of their country.

On Monday, we in this chamber observed a minute of silence on behalf of the Armenian genocide. On Wednesday, we observed a minute of silence in memory of the Holocaust. On Tuesday evening, when I was at the Armenian reception, they observed a minute of silence in respect to our fallen soldiers.

Given the fact that it is the soldiers of our armed forces who are trying to prevent those kinds of events that we commemorated this

week, it would be a good opportunity for members of the House to give unanimous consent to the following motion:

That on Thursday, April 27, after question period, we observe a moment of silence in this chamber, as Canadians are doing from coast to coast to coast.

•(1005)

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: We will arrange that at 3 o'clock.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

AERONAUTICS ACT

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-6, An Act to amend the Aeronautics Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

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NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-7, An Act to amend the National Defence Act.

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

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[Translation]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canadian group of the InterParliamentary Union respecting its participation in the following events:

Routine Proceedings

meeting of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians of the IPU, held in Geneva, Switzerland, July 11 to 15, 2005; seminar on the implementation of legislation on indigenous peoples' rights, held in Geneva, Switzerland, July 25 and 26, 2005; Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments, held in New York City, USA, September 7 to 9, 2005; meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee of the IPU, held in Ghent, Belgium, September 19, 2005; 113th IPU Assembly and related meeting, held in Geneva, Switzerland, October 14 to 19, 2005; annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, held in New York City, U.S.A., October 31 and November 1, 2005; and the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, held in Hong Kong, China, December 12 and 15 2005.

[English]

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, a report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Japan Interparliamentary Group representing parliamentarians' visit to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan from November 12 to 15, 2005.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the guidelines for access to committee meetings by the electronic media.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the second report later this day.

* * *

● (1010)

CITIZENSHIP ACT

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-232, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (service in the Canadian armed forces).

He said: Mr. Speaker, we need to think of imaginative ways to recruit men and women into Canada's armed forces. The military needs more recruits and many permanent residents would appreciate an accelerated, service-oriented route to citizenship.

Earlier this year the Chief of the Defence Staff offered up accelerated citizenship for permanent residents as one way to increase recruitment in Canada's armed forces. Similar legislation is in place in other countries and has proved to be a success throughout military and immigrant communities.

Specifically, the legislation would entail permanent residents receiving one additional day off three year residency requirements to acquire citizenship for every day served in the Canadian armed forces. If we compare it to other countries' experience, we would recruit 2,000 to 3,000 new recruits for the armed forces.

This is a win-win scenario for our military and immigrant communities.

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

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ) asked for leave to introduce Bill C-233, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (public transportation costs).

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I reintroduce this bill, which is essentially designed to allow public transportation users to claim, when filing their annual tax returns, a tax credit for their transit passes.

Let us hope that, in keeping with the Kyoto protocol, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party will facilitate the speedy passage of this bill.

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

* * *

[English]

BROADCASTING ACT

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-234, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act (decisions and orders).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is the same private member's bill that I tabled in the last two Parliaments. The bill is quite simple.

[Translation]

This private member's bill would amend the Broadcasting Act to require that the decisions and orders of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission be made within six months after a public hearing.

[English]

Just last month the telecommunication policy review panel requested, under an executive summary on page 12, that the CRTC expedite any decision making policy.

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I would move that the second report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I once again rise in the House to present a petition that has been signed by many people across this country who are calling upon the government and Parliament to immediately halt the deportation of undocumented workers and to find a humane and logical solution to their situation.

Many people working without documents in this country play a vital role in this country's economy. If they were to be deported immediately en masse it would have severe economic consequences, not to mention, of course, the humanitarian consequences of dividing families who have many children born in this country.

•(1015)

CHILD CARE

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of presenting a petition from residents of Petawawa and Pembroke, just a little outside of York South—Weston, calling upon the Prime Minister to honour the early learning and childhood agreement for all the reasons entrenched in this petition.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition of 295 names in support of the child care agreement signed between the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada.

In my riding, the municipalities received a very supportive gesture from the Province of Ontario in that the province, assuming in good faith that this agreement would go forward, uploaded the services that had been paid for by municipal tax bases through the social services administration boards. This means that with the plan to end the agreement after this year, the Province of Ontario has been compelled to spread out the funding awarded to them over the next four years. After that period of time, the municipal tax bases will be again burdened with this aspect of child care in each municipality.

The petition calls upon Parliament to restore the agreement and asks that the government continue in good faith with the agreement that was signed not only with Ontario but with other provinces and territories. I put this in very plain terms. This will severely impact municipalities by raising property taxation and it also would not create the intended spaces.

* * *

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.

S. O. 52

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

AGRICULTURE

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am putting forward this motion under Standing Order 52(2) to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing an important matter that needs our urgent attention. It has to do with the agricultural crisis.

[Translation]

Have you noticed the tiny shoots emerging from the earth today? Weeds will soon be taking over the fields. Some families are in a crisis situation: they cannot afford to buy seed.

This crisis exists because this Parliament has not taken the necessary steps to prevent it.

[English]

Our farmers have done everything possible to shine a glaring light on the real and immediate danger to our food sovereignty that our country now faces. They have made it abundantly clear that if we are so reckless as to allow the family farming industry to go down for lack of seed money, we will forever regret it as a nation.

They have tried to point out that they will miss the very small window when spring planting must occur. It is not as though this can happen in July. If they cannot borrow the money now in order to purchase the seeds to put in the ground, some of these farmers are going to go under and they will not be coming back.

This crisis is not of their making. It is not that they are somehow inefficient or unproductive, far from it. It is because of years of bad trade deals and neglect on the part of successive Conservative and Liberal governments, which have reduced the once proud industry to begging its own country, on its knees, by protesting in front of Parliament Hill.

Farmers are not in a position to wait for the budget. The votes on the budget and the cashflow emanating from it are weeks and maybe months away. While it may be said that a week in politics is a lifetime, it has to be said that in farming a week can mean the difference between a viable farm and a bankruptcy, foreclosure and total ruin for the many more farmers that we cannot afford to lose.

In closing, there is a solution to this. If the government were to give a bankable commitment of sufficient emergency funds, as we have suggested, of \$1 billion more than announced previously by the government, the farmers could go to their banks and have a fighting chance to deal with those across the table who are being asked to loan farmers the funds to buy the seeds to produce the food we eat.

This is an emergency. It is urgent. We should attend to it today.

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•(1020)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth knows that a similar request was made yesterday. The Chair rejected the request and suggested to the hon. member who made it that appropriate consideration could be given to this next week when the Minister of Finance brings in a budget on Tuesday at four o'clock.

I must say that my views of yesterday are the same today. I do not believe that this matter meets the exigencies of the standing order at this time, but I am sure that the Minister of Finance will note the hon. member's submissions in the House. I urge the hon. member to send him a copy of blues so that he has the matter in hand before his budget speech next Tuesday and is well aware of the hon. member's views and indeed the views of those who have been here with us for the last number of days in the protests we have witnessed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed from April 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, an act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today and continue this debate on accountability.

I also want to take this opportunity, as it is the first chance I have had to speak in the House after the election, to thank the constituents of York West for their overwhelming endorsement. It was an interesting election. I increased rather than decreased my vote and I want to thank my constituents for that. I am very proud of that fact. It is a great privilege to be a member of Parliament for the riding of York West. I intend to continue to be an effective member and a strong voice, even if it is in opposition, and to work with all colleagues in the House to ensure that our country continues to grow strong and move forward.

My constituents and I certainly welcome any initiative to improve accountability in the government. In fact, this new accountability act is nothing more than a continuation of the groundbreaking work done by my government, the previous Liberal government. It was the government of the right hon. member for LaSalle—Émard that took the courageous step of appointing the independent Gomery commission, which acted very decisively to change the culture of government.

It was my government that reviewed the responsibilities and accountabilities of ministers, senior officials, public servants and employees of crown corporations and brought in a wide variety of concrete measures that were adopted to increase oversight in crown corporations and in audit functions, which have been strengthened across the board.

From his first day in office, our former prime minister reformed government in many ways so that everyone in the public service will

be held to account. It was the Liberal government that re-established the office of the Comptroller General of Canada. It was the Liberal government that strengthened ethical guidelines for ministers and other public office holders and established an independent Ethics Commissioner. It was the Liberal government that introduced a new publicly posted recusal process for all members of cabinet, including the prime minister. It was the Liberal government that put forward legislation to encourage whistleblowers and to give them the protection they needed from reprisal.

In February 2004 our Liberal government put forward an action plan on democratic reform to strengthen the role of parliamentarians in many ways, including implementing a three line voting system to allow for more free votes in the House and referring more bills to House committees before second reading so that committees have greater influence in shaping government legislation. That was a very important move in order to allow all of us as parliamentarians to participate fully in making sure that legislation is created to reflect the views of Canadians.

We have also pushed for the establishment of a committee of parliamentarians on national security.

It was the Liberal government that strengthened audit practices in the public sector through a comprehensive initiative that included the policy on internal audit and an initiative to strengthen and further professionalize the internal audit function throughout all of government through higher professional standards, recruitment of additional skilled professionals, training, and assessment.

As we go through all this process, we must recognize that our civil servants who work for the Government of Canada are some of the best in the world. We should be very proud of them and their commitment not only to us but to Canadians in general.

In 2004 the Liberal government delivered on a commitment to proactive disclosure. Since 2004, all travel and hospitality expenses of ministers, ministers of state, parliamentary secretaries, their political staff and other senior government officials have been posted online on a quarterly basis. That is accountability, without question, when all of those expenses are posted for anybody in Canada or abroad to see what kinds of expenses are being incurred and whether taxpayers' money is being spent appropriately. When we talk about accountability, I think those were huge steps forward.

Government contracts worth more than \$10,000 are now disclosed publicly and posted online, another act of the Liberal Government of Canada.

My government embraced transparency in key appointments.

Through the government's action plan for democratic reform, parliamentary committees were empowered to review the appointments of the heads of crown corporations.

•(1025)

My government brought increased transparency to the selection of Supreme Court justices. It made a lot of changes when talking about transparency.

In March 2004, while I was the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, and along with a lot of my other colleagues in cabinet, I introduced fundamental reforms to the appointment process for Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada members. These reforms improved the processes to ensure the quality and effectiveness of decisions made by the IRB and responded to the increasingly complex environment of the board, as did many other reforms made by my other cabinet colleagues in their portfolios.

Under the new process, the chairperson of the IRB is fully accountable for the selection and quality of the IRB decision makers. The new independent, transparent and merit-based selection process ensures that only the highest quality candidates are considered for appointment in that particular portfolio. The qualifications of candidates are measured against a new strengthened standard of competence to ensure that skills, abilities and personal suitability are the basis for appointments. I hope that continues under the new Conservative government.

My government also committed to expanding access to information. The Access to Information Act was extended to 10 key crown corporations that were previously exempt. It also presented a discussion paper to Parliament which proposed, among other measures, that the Access to Information Act be expanded to several federal institutions that are currently exempt.

My government was the first to seriously limit both individual and corporate political contributions as well as third party election spending. Bill C-24 was enacted in June 2003 and came into effect on January 1, 2004, representing the most significant reform to Canada's electoral and campaign finance laws since 1974. It affected contribution limits, those eligible to make contributions, public funding of political parties, spending limits for nomination contestants, and disclosure of financial information by riding associations, nomination contestants and leadership candidates.

I am pleased with most of the content of the legislation before us as it is a continuation of the Liberal government's 10 years of work on this file to increase full accountability and transparency in government. I do, however, have some concerns about the proposed bill, specifically regarding what is missing from it.

The bill does not strengthen the access to information regulations as I had hoped it would and I hope that there will be amendments to do just that. I am also troubled that the legislation before us restricts individual contributions to political parties and does nothing to reduce third party election spending. It is an area that still needs work to be done and I would expect that we would work together on amendments to ensure that it gets done.

This legislation would actually strengthen the third party influence in Canadian democracy and it seems like a deliberate exclusion. I would certainly hope that it is not the case. I also understand that there will be some amendments coming forth from the government regarding the lobbyist portion as it is already creating problems for people.

Canadians must have faith in the integrity of government and in the people who administer it. My government worked very hard to be accountable to the citizens of this great country. I am committed to support measures, as many of us are in the House, to enhance our

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prior work of building accountability, transparency and the public trust.

I look forward to being part of this discussion and debate.

• (1030)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on the subject of this bill.

I would like to congratulate my colleague from Papineau, who seeks to correct the French title of the bill because the use of the word "imputabilité" is not correct in this context according to the Office québécois de la langue française. We should use the word "responsabilité" instead.

That said, my party and I expected a lot from this accountability bill, particularly with respect to the independent budget forecaster, referred to in the bill as the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and to the transparency of foundations. I will address these two points over the next few minutes. I find the bill very disappointing in many ways, including its wording, and especially in its treatment of these two issues.

With respect to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, we expected that once the Conservatives came into power, they would have something substantial to offer. After all, they have been preaching for years in support of the Bloc Québécois' demands for transparent figures—real numbers—in, for example, budget and surplus forecasts. One need only study the mandate and powers of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to see that the position has no real power. So we are back to square one.

Allow me to offer a historical profile, since 1997-98, at least, of parliamentary activity regarding budget forecasts.

When the Liberals were in power, the Prime Minister, a former finance minister and an hon. member of this House, would present us every year with data that had no relation to reality. Every year he forecast zero surpluses, even though the surpluses accumulating from month to month indicated that we were heading for figures well above zero. So we were told nonsense for years and years, to the point that, starting in 1997-98, when we saw the Liberals presenting us with figures totally devoid of sense and contrary to reality, we in the Bloc Québécois decided to form a small team and do our own surplus projections.

Mr. Speaker, you have been in this House for years, and you were a witness to this: we managed to come up with surplus forecasts that were within 3% or 4% of the actual numbers. With a small team and a pocket calculator bought on sale for \$2.98, we managed to make accurate forecasts which reflected the real situation. But year after year, this charade continued.

I was listening to my Liberal colleague earlier. I was totally flabbergasted to hear him speak of transparency, when the Liberals were in power for 13 years and showed no transparency at all.

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We know what happened with the sponsorship scandal, but even with these forecasts, when the Liberals were making these meaningless forecasts, they were trampling on basic democratic principles. For the people to be able to form an opinion on the intelligence of a government, or its ability to meet their needs, they need to be presented with the real picture of public finances. Otherwise they will say, it may be true that the government does not have the resources to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged persons in society; to invest in social housing; or to reform the employment insurance program so that it does not exclude 60% of workers, as it now does thanks to the Liberals. But the figures were completely opposite to reality. There were forecast errors in the neighbourhood of 300%. And year after year, surpluses of \$12 billion to \$14 billion were accumulating. At fiscal year-end, there was no provision for the redistribution of this money, to help the most disadvantaged of society and to lighten the tax burden. What is more, these unexpected surpluses, these surpluses juggled and fiddled by the Liberals, were, in large part, allocated to paying down the debt.

The Bloc Québécois led a battle with the Conservatives at its side, and even with the cooperation, in the Standing Committee on Finance, of Mr. Penson, a veteran member who has left this House, and the current Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, who was a worthy representative of his party on that committee. That battle was to get an independent forecast office, one that would give us figures that looked right, that were meaningful, and that reflected the real situation.

• (1035)

They even supported two Bloc Québécois motions to create an independent office of budgetary estimates. They went so far as to introduce another motion spelling out the mandate of this office. They supported a second Bloc motion. This one proposed that, while we waited for this office to be set up, four independent forecasters should be hired, one per party, who would provide figures that made sense, rather than the far-fetched figures of the Liberal government.

In this bill, the position of parliamentary budget officer is an empty shell. This person reports to the Library of Parliament. He is not given the power to access essential information. We are not speaking here about the information on individual citizens held by the Canada Revenue Agency but about aggregate data. He does not have access, either, to information from the Department of Finance. This was exactly the problem that we faced. I thought that the Conservatives were going to improve the situation, but no, this bill does not make it any better.

The greatest obstacle we faced in getting accurate forecasts, even when we hired forecasters who were independent of the government, was access to information. Senior officials in the finance department told us that they did not have time to deal with this because they were tied up with other tasks, such as the budget. Or else they just cavalierly told us that we could not have this information because the minister did not permit them to provide it to forecasters. So that was the situation we faced.

Even when the new position of parliamentary budget officer is created, we will still have the same problem. How can the

parliamentary budget officer arrive at accurate, sensible figures when he does not have access to this information?

In addition, the budget officer should report to Parliament. He should basically have the same powers—although perhaps not the same budget—as the Auditor General, that is to say, the ability to get all the information he needs to provide real figures to the people of Canada. The budget officer is not vested with this mandate. He will not have the tools he needs to provide us with forecasts. We will be obliged to continue making these forecasts ourselves every year and making them as accurate as possible, as the Bloc Québécois has always done.

At times I see a dichotomy between what the Conservative government says and the facts. We can see it in this bill, where transparency and compliance with the fundamental principles of democracy are not part of the game plan. We also noted it during oral question period yesterday and the day before, when we simply asked the Minister of Finance if it were true they had created five foundations before March 31 in which to deposit \$1.3 billion in order to meet social housing, transportation and other needs. The minister did not deign to reply. Is that transparency? He told us to wait for the budget. But it has nothing to do with the upcoming budget. It concerns the previous budget, money allocated in the previous fiscal year. So there is a gap between what the government says and the facts of the matter.

I will cite a second example of the lack of transparency in the bill. It concerns the foundations. Why did the government resort to dirty tricks in its efforts to explain why it had decided to make only three foundations of nine subject to the Access to Information Act? The three foundations in question are the Canadian Millennium Foundation, the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Canada Foundation for Sustainable Development Technology. Why permit public scrutiny through the Access to Information Act of these three only and not the other six as well?

There is \$2 billion in the coffers of the other six. Under this bill, they will continue to be outside public scrutiny and debate in the House. Parliamentarians will not be able to follow what is happening in these foundations because the government has decided to continue to hide them from public scrutiny.

I would like someone to explain why this bill does not apply to all of the foundations. Why keep \$2 billion of taxpayers' money from vital public scrutiny? I am waiting for an answer from the government.

As I wait, I can assure this House that we will introduce amendments in order to improve this bill, which is disappointing in some respects.

• (1040)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot had to say. He continues to claim that with his laptop computer he can calculate financial estimates better than the best economists in Canada and the experts at the federal finance department. I continue to be amazed.

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[English]

Is the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot happy with the direction the Conservative government is taking in terms of Americanizing Canadian public policy? We have seen that in many respects. We have seen it with respect to the way the Conservatives are treating the fallen soldiers who have come back from Afghanistan. We have seen it with respect to the throne speech in the Senate chamber where they selected a number of people, just like they do in the state of the union address when the president speaks to the American people. We have seen it now when they are calling for a public prosecutor just like Prosecutor Starr in the United States. I do not know if the member has ever had the chance to read the autobiography of Bill Clinton where he spells out and describes the terrible venom that this prosecutor had for Bill Clinton and followed him day in and day out on the Whitewater case. Now we have the government talking about a budget office of Parliament, another Americanization of public policy in Canada.

I wonder if the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot would comment on that, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks. I can tell him right off that I am very happy that the Liberals are in opposition. That is a great source of pleasure for me.

But I am sad to see my colleague's attitude, even after all these years, even though he was part of the Standing Committee on Finance. He saw the forecasting the Bloc Québécois did. The forecasts were all made public, a year before the end of the fiscal year. With one exception—because the Liberals were so secretive that it was impossible to find any information—our estimates always came within 3% of the actual surplus. We used a calculator that I presented to the former finance minister. He rejected the gift out of hand, even though I was just trying to help him count properly so that he could come up with an accurate estimate of the surplus.

So if the hon. member wants to check, he should look at media reports since 1997-98. He will see that our forecasts were accurate. They brought clarity where his government did not. His government confused people and duped them for years, making them think that the government could not help the unemployed, the sick and students. His government cut federal transfers at their expense because it said it did not have the money.

We made a positive contribution. We fought a battle that landed the Liberals in opposition, and we are very proud of that.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that when the previous government took office it inherited an annual deficit of \$42 billion and that by the time we balanced the budget in 1997 and with the surpluses that were accumulated since then, the national debt actually is at the same level as it was back in 1993, approximately \$500 billion. It does not show that there are grave problems. However we do have to pay down debt.

About two fiscal years ago, when the surplus was \$9.1 billion, which was quite a bit higher than was forecast, all the economic forecasters did not foresee the fourth quarter revenue increases on

the corporate sector. Does the member agree that there are circumstances which cannot possibly be anticipated and that, in fact, large surpluses can occur without any unintended information from government or committees?

• (1045)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Mr. Speaker, as an economist I have made projections. We cannot predict that the Earth will stop turning no more than we can predict natural disasters. However, with the information available to us at any given time, we can make projections within a margin of error of roughly 3% or 4%. When consulting firms hire economic forecasters who make projections with a margin of error of 300%—like the former finance minister did—they let them go. Yet, since 1997-98, that is what the Liberals did.

Talking about the deficit, I want to remind my colleague that the first major deficit created here in this Parliament was the fruit of the former Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien, who was finance minister at the time. Therefore he does not have any lessons to give to anyone on the matter, least of all to his party, the Liberal Party of Canada.

There is a way to streamline operations and clean up public finances. The Liberals chose to go after the poorest members of society, to attack the sick, to attack students, to cut essential transfers to the provinces and to the Government of Quebec. Accordingly, after 13 years of Liberal government, the situation seriously deteriorated.

Because the fiscal imbalance was not acknowledged and we were given the run around on the issue—the term fiscal imbalance was not even uttered—some situations became disastrous, like the situation in post-secondary education. Colleges and universities in Quebec and the rest of Canada are being crushed under the weight of these budget cutbacks. We have to make up for lost time.

I hope this government will not make the same mistake and that in its upcoming budget the priority will be on post-secondary education. We cannot go on like this and say that education is the future, without providing money for it.

[English]

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my belated congratulations to you on your election as Deputy Speaker of the House. As you are the senior statesman in this House, it is a well-deserved honour.

As this is my first formal speech in the House and I want to direct a significant portion of my time to the residents of Abbotsford, the people who elected me and trusted me to represent their interests in this chamber. I am honoured to have been chosen by them to reflect their values and aspirations in this 39th Parliament.

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My roots are firmly planted in Abbotsford. For the past 24 years my wife, Annette, and I have raised a wonderful family, built a thriving law practice and nourished many very special friendships, and Abbotsford has become our home. It has blessed us much more than we could ever repay and for that we are truly grateful.

I follow a handful of others that have walked these halls and who have come from my community, for example, Alex Patterson, Robert Wenman, Ross Belsher and, of course, the person who preceded me in this position, the irrepressible Randy White. I particularly mention those individuals because each of them in their own way articulated the conservative values that have for decades sustained Abbotsford, values such as hard work, family, respect for the law, accountability, fairness and caring for others, values which my government warmly embraces.

Let me introduce all members to Abbotsford and in so doing I hope to tell them why my community strongly supports the federal accountability act. Abbotsford is nestled in the heart of the Fraser Valley of B.C., framed by the Fraser River on the one side and by the shadow of majestic Mount Baker on the other, just a stone's throw from Vancouver. It is governed by our 81 year old mayor, George Ferguson, who is completing his thirty-first year in office. Members heard me correctly, that is 31 years as mayor of our community.

Abbotsford is among the most dynamic communities in Canada. With the fastest growing economy in the country last year and the largest farm gate revenues in B.C., we are certainly the destination of choice for many Canadians. Abbotsford is also the home of three *Canadian Idol* finalists, a professional symphony, Olympic silver medallist Alana Kraus and Canada's most decorated Paralympic athlete, Eugene Reimer.

My city is also a community of volunteers distinguished by its generosity. In fact, Statistics Canada recently reported that when it comes to donating to charity, Abbotsford is, by far and away, the most generous community in the country. It will thus come as no surprise to members that I speak with pride about my community of Abbotsford.

Nevertheless, Abbotsford is not without its own challenges. As I mentioned earlier, farming continues to be the heart and soul of our community and remains our number one industry. Many of our farmers are now facing labour shortages during harvest season with no relief in sight. Other farmers in Abbotsford worry about unfair trade barriers abroad and the impact international trade pressures will have on their livelihoods.

Perhaps the most compelling story is the avian flu disaster which has devastated the poultry and egg industry in my community. We have borne the full brunt of that crisis. In fact, some of my constituents face the loss of their family farms due to the inadequate compensation payable under the CAIS program. These are all concerns which my community needs addressed and I know the government will address.

Abbotsford has other challenges as well. The problems of the big city also affect us. Criminal and gang activity is on the increase. Marijuana grow-ops and crystal meth labs have become more common. Homelessness, family breakups and substance abuse are no longer strangers in Abbotsford. And, of course, seniors and

working families are finding it increasingly difficult to cope under the heavy burden of taxes from all levels of government.

That is exactly why I am filled with great optimism over what we, collectively, as the 39th Parliament of Canada, can achieve in this session. Our government's initial five point plan is focused on strengthening families across Canada and addressing many of the critical failings within our society.

● (1050)

Our child care policy will benefit all young children, not just the 16% who use institutional day care. Our wait times guarantee will strengthen our publicly funded health care system. We will impose mandatory minimum sentences on drug traffickers and violent and repeat offenders. A 1% and then a 2% reduction in the GST will provide relief for all Canadians, not just a select few. Finally, the very cornerstone of everything we hope to accomplish for Canadians, is the federal accountability act.

Those are the five major commitments, which we made during the last election, and our tabling of the federal accountability act moves us one step closer to fulfilling those commitments.

There is, however, one great challenge facing Abbotsford and all communities across this country, and that is the quality of our environment. It is in that context that I would like to relate to the House an event that has forever changed the character of my city. In so doing, I hope to provide a springboard for further discussions on accountability.

In 1997 a number of our residents caught wind of a proposal by Sumas Energy, a well-heeled power company, to construct a power plant immediately adjacent to our community. Conveniently it was to be built on the American side of the border. The plant would have spewed millions of tonnes of poisons into our sensitive air shed every year. The profits and the power would have gone to users south of the border, but almost all of the pollution would have been borne by Canadians.

Never before has my community rallied behind a cause as it did against SE2 power plant. People from all stations of life, from all faiths and from all political stripes put aside their differences and spoke out with one voice. Together we fought the proposal on both sides of the border. We were told that it was a battle we could not under any circumstances win, yet soldier on we did, suffering a number of setbacks along the way.

It was under the visionary leadership of people like John Vissers, Patricia Ross, Mary Reeves and thousands of others in our community and region that we took the battle to the National Energy Board and eventually to the Federal Court of Canada and amazingly, against all odds, we actually won. In the process we established new legal precedents in the area of environmental stewardship.

That struggle and that monumental victory for my city have come to define the character of my community, the city of Abbotsford.

Why do I give this snapshot glimpse into the life of my community? My purpose is twofold.

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First, it is to highlight the fact that our successful struggle against SE2 reinforces the fact that there is very little, if anything, that can prevail against the power of people coming together in a common cause, putting aside their differences and focusing on building a better a community. It is my hope that others will take courage from our experience and apply it in their own communities.

My second purpose, however, is to challenge the members of the House to use Abbotsford's experience with SE2 to clean up not only our environment, but the ethical mess that was left behind by the previous government.

The residents of Abbotsford have become quite disillusioned with the culture of entitlement, which has paralyzed our federal government for over a decade. Corruption, scandal and mismanagement are certainly not Abbotsford's values and, quite frankly, I know they are not Canadian values. Without a clear ethical framework for those who work in, for and with government, Canada cannot be a leader among the nations of the world.

Sadly, over the last decade, Canada has achieved distinction not as a lighthouse for responsible government, but as an example of how even great democracies such as ours can be hijacked by the selfish and the greedy. That is why I can say with great confidence that the residents of Abbotsford strongly support the federal accountability act.

It will take great courage. It will involve significant political risks by all of us in the House, but those are risks that Canadians are asking us to take, and take them we will.

• (1055)

Our accountability legislation addresses everything from strengthening the role of the Ethics Commissioner to banning secret political donations, tougher lobbyist restrictions, truth in budgeting, protection of whistleblowers and so on.

Since 1993 the message from Abbotsford has always been the same. We wanted real change. It is my hope that, as with our battle against SE2, members of the House will set aside partisan differences and heed the call from ordinary Canadians to support the federal accountability act. My community demands it; Canadians demand it.

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, we welcome our new member to the House. I was impressed by his first speech until the last few minutes. In his introduction he brought the attention of our House and of our nation that Abbotsford is a very fast growing community. With that, we note the affluence and so forth, but in his speech he referred to certain problems in Abbotsford.

With that, I am disappointed that his coloured glasses do not reflect on the true situation in our country. We are very proud as Canadians of the civil service, the public servants in our country. I believe, and I think most people in the House concur, that they have worked very well for Canadians over the past generations and in fact since our country began.

Would the hon. member briefly comment on this? I am disappointed to hear of the crime in Abbotsford, the grow ops and it crystal meth problems. Could he perhaps reflect to the House some

further information on how Abbotsford is dealing with this and if we, as a nation, can work with Abbotsford to see that these problems are corrected across the country?

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, we are discussing the federal accountability act. It is difficult to get into all the different problems that beset communities across this nation.

I do know that we, as a party, support our civil servants. What Canadians judged on January 23 was not the civil servants. It was the elected officials who were in government for the last 13 years. That is the statement Canadians made.

We have brought forward an accountability act that covers over 250 pages. It is comprehensive and probably the most sweeping accountability and ethical legislation that our country has ever seen.

I would encourage the member opposite to focus in on what we are trying to accomplish here, which is to restore accountability to government. We will have time to discuss some of the other issues such as crime and drug use. Those issues will be coming up, but in this forum right now, we are discussing accountability. It was sadly lacking for 13 years, but I am pleased to report that our government has a plan for real change.

• (1100)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was really pleased to hear the member of Abbotsford talk about the power of the people. One of the most powerful tools that people have is their ability to cast their vote on election day. We know the people cast their votes for the member for Vancouver Kingsway as a Liberal and he chose, after a very brief period of time, to cross the floor and become a Conservative.

Could the member specifically comment on how the power of the people would translate into perhaps some support for the New Democrats' suggestion that we include in the accountability act a mechanism to prevent floor crossing, or if a member should cross the floor to join another party, that member should sit for a byelection?

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, there are a number of different views on the issue of floor crossing. Some believe an elected official's first responsibility is to their party and to the flag that they carry. Others believe the first responsibility is to the people who elected them, regardless of political stripe.

Since there is such a diversity of opinion within the House, the member will know that our accountability legislation does not address that. This matter, if it passes in the House, will be referred to committee. The member, members of her party and members of the House will have an opportunity to have input and to make amendments. We will have the opportunity to add it if they believe they have the support for it.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to speak to the accountability act that has been tabled in the House. All parliamentarians know that it is important for Canadians to keep their trust in elected public officials and the government that serves them.

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The bill was tabled in the House a few weeks ago. Since then I have had the opportunity to review it, as have most of my colleagues. There are very many positive positions in the bill, and I welcome them, and there are provisions in the bill that simply serve as evidence of the overarching, in my view, duplicity of the government.

Others have spoken of the selective accountability of the bill and what is not in it. My efforts today will be to focus specifically on the accountability provisions as they relate to Canada's first nations and aboriginal peoples.

I have many concerns about the impact of the accountability act on first nations. First and foremost, the bill does not acknowledge the government to government relationship that exists between the Government of Canada and Canada's first nations. First nation governments will now be subjected both to audits from the Auditor General and access to information requests from the general public. Self-government first nations will be exempted, but given that only 2% of first nations have self-governing agreements, virtually all first nations will be singled out under the proposed legislation.

The bill will no doubt not apply to provincial or foreign governments that receive federal funds. First nations governments deserve nothing less than the same arrangement. If it were to do so, it would know that by applying the new rules to Canada's first nations, the government is entering into murky waters as to the constitutionality of such actions.

Equally important is the fact that the federal accountability act was introduced without any consultation whatsoever with first nation leadership or communities. The era of first nations being dictated to has long ended. The Conservative government, by implementing and introducing an act in this manner, has undone years upon years of nation building and intergovernmental relationships by dictating to first nations, as opposed to consulting with them and reaching a joint decision with which both groups can live. The actions of the government in this matter will surely only result in protests and resistance similar to those that we have seen when legislation in the past has been imposed upon them without consultation.

Had the government done its homework and consulted with first nations, it would have seen that Canada's first nations have taken the issue of accountability very seriously. For the past two years, the leadership of the Assembly of First Nations has been working in a consultative, cooperative and constructive manner with the Auditor General of Canada on strengthening its accountability to its people.

Specifically, the following actions have been taken or are ready to be implemented: the creation of an independent first nations ombudsperson and a first nations auditor general; and the development of an accountability for results action plan, initiated by the AFN in conjunction with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the Treasury Board Secretariat. The implementation of the plan would see the development of financial management standards, certification of financial management processes, investments in management capacity and building capacity, improvements to the policy on transfer payments and many self-imposed accountability measures.

We have known from the Auditor General's report of 2002 that each first nation has been required to file 168 reports every year, about three a week. The proposed legislation just adds another layer to this review process.

The bill does not speak to the accountability of governments to first nations people. It does not speak or address the accountability of the federal government of the lack of results of social, economic and health progress of first nations peoples in their communities.

• (1105)

Mr. Speaker, you and I are both from Manitoba. Last evening there was a group of people from Manitoba in my office who are living in third world conditions with an outbreak of tuberculosis in their community. The outbreak of tuberculosis is doubling by the week, if not faster. The response by the government is that it needs to do an assessment of all those in the community to determine their health status. That is not accountability.

When we talk about accountability we have to speak about the accountability of the government to first nations. We have to speak about the Kelowna accord and how it will address housing, education and economic opportunities for first nations people. The Kelowna accord was arrived at by the 13 provincial and territorial leaders and the leadership of all of the aboriginal communities across the country from coast to coast to coast.

Instead of addressing the complexity of the accountability relationship between the Government of Canada and aboriginal peoples, Bill C-2 is a simplistic solution that will have little results for governments or for aboriginal peoples across the country. My great concern about this is that the bill is evidence that the government is still stuck in a colonial mentality, a mentality of a time long past where one imposes without consultation and one knows what is best for others without asking them.

I urge the government to go back, to review, to consult and to discuss so that first nations people can show the responsibility and accountability they have put in place to be accountable both to their own populations and to the Government of Canada. It is incumbent upon the Government of Canada to be accountable to them.

• (1110)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has gone to lengths to exclude those particular aboriginal organizations that have self-government agreements with the federal government. The decision of the Prime Minister and our government to subject the others to treatment by the Auditor General does not contradict any self-government provisions whatsoever.

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I do not understand why the Liberal Party would not want these billions of dollars in expenditures to be subject to the same accountability as other expenditures made by this government and paid for by taxpayers right across the country. Why is it that she wants to shield all of those billions in spending from any scrutiny by the Auditor General? Is it because she knows that under the previous Liberal government there were expenditures that did not actually benefit the aboriginal people? Is it that money was wasted in that area just as it was wasted on the gun registry, in the HRDC boondoggle and in the sponsorship program? Is she afraid to expose to scrutiny the actions and mistreatment by her Liberal government toward aboriginal people and to the taxpayer?

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, the question from the member opposite is quite remarkable. It really underlines the lack of understanding of the relationship between first nations people and the Government of Canada.

I am astounded at his comments. He said things like “treatment of the Auditor General”, “shield” and “money wasted”. What the member opposite does not understand is that only 2% of first nations communities are self-governing. What the member opposite does not understand is that an audit process is currently in place. I mentioned in my comments about 168 reports a year. Does the member know any other jurisdiction that has to file 168 reports, often for \$5,000, \$10,000 and \$20,000 contributions?

It is time that the member understood that one does not impose on first nations governments. One does not tell first nations governments what to do. One consults with them. One comes up with a common understanding of what the issues are and what the responses will be. What the member must understand is that it is incumbent on his government to be responsible in return to first nations people to ensure that their social, health and economic concerns are addressed. What astounds me about his comments is the total lack of understanding of what in fact goes on in first nations communities and what is happening in the realities of today.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was saddened to hear that we have to talk about the Garden Hill First Nation and the second tuberculosis outbreak in two years. This adds to a litany of events in communities across Canada, such as Caledonia, and another evacuation in Kashechewan. It goes on and on.

We bandy around the word “accountability”. We talk about accountability yet we have had decades of Conservative and Liberal governments that have neglected and have not fulfilled their obligations around first nations communities. I would like the member to comment on specific steps that must happen immediately to make sure that first nations from coast to coast to coast are at the table in a meaningful way to get what they deserve in Canada.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost the member referenced the matter of Garden Hill First Nation. Unequivocally there has to be a medical assessment of every member of that community to see how far the tuberculosis outbreak has spread.

On the other items, first and foremost there has to be a consultation with the leadership in the aboriginal community. The Assembly of First Nations has been open. It has been part of the

discussions with government over the years. To impose this kind of legislation on them is indeed shortsighted.

The most important thing the House could do would be to ratify the Kelowna accord and the dollars committed and booked by the previous government for the Kelowna accord. The Kelowna accord provides hope for aboriginal communities from coast to coast to coast. I have visited with many. They are waiting to train further health officials, for education and for the plans that will lead to economic development and opportunities for them.

Unequivocally, the ratification of the Kelowna accord by the House would be an important transformative change for aboriginal peoples in the country.

• (1115)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am obviously very pleased to rise today to speak on the subject of Bill C-2, the federal accountability act, because as my colleague, the member for Repentigny, said earlier, we are going to ask the government to change the actual title of the bill to “Loi sur la responsabilisation” in order to reflect the spirit and rules of the French language.

To start with, I want to say again that the Bloc Québécois supports the bill in principle. We believe that the bill is a necessary first step to restoring public confidence in federal institutions and also to instituting greater transparency in the management of public funds.

The reason we are discussing this bill today is that the previous Liberal Party government was covered in mud from the many cases of corruption, and in particular the sponsorship scandal. That scandal exposed the full scale of the contempt in which the former Liberal government held the nation of Quebec and its democratic institutions.

The people of Quebec decided to chase a corrupt government from power. We saw this in the recent election. Let us hope that the new Conservative minority government does not try to do the same things.

As a number of my colleagues have already said, I am pleased to see that several Bloc Québécois proposals were incorporated when Bill C-2 was drafted. One of those proposals relates to federal political party financing.

Since it was founded, the Bloc Québécois has always advocated that Ottawa's political party financing legislation be amended and modeled on the political party financing act enacted in Quebec in 1977 under the aegis of the Parti Québécois and Premier René Lévesque.

When the Parti Québécois government enacted the political party financing act, the new legislation was based on two principles: fairness and transparency. “Fairness” meant that the government wanted to promote equality of opportunity among the parties by giving them public funding, while the principle of transparency required that political parties and candidates account for their election financing and spending activities.

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The Gomery commission and the sponsorship scandal returned the importance of processes for overseeing political party financing to centre stage in public opinion in Quebec and Canada. We are pleased to see that the new federal government is adopting the measures that the Bloc Québécois has long been proposing and we will support initiatives of that nature. We will nevertheless be making some recommendations in committee, of course.

There is another aspect I would like to mention. That is the whole process for appointing returning officers. For many years the Bloc Québécois has criticized the fact that the system made returning officers more accountable to the political party in power, to which they owed their appointment, than to the chief electoral officer. In Quebec, the majority of our returning officers were very often of Liberal allegiance, since the Liberals were in power.

That is why, in the 38th Parliament, my colleague from Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord introduced Bill C-312 to have returning officers appointed on merit and to have those appointments supervised by Elections Canada.

Unfortunately, the accountability bill does not provide for open competitions to choose returning officers. We hope to correct this by proposing an amendment, for we believe that returning officers must be appointed through an open and transparent process, so that anyone who believes he or she has the necessary skills can apply for the job.

That being said, we have to question certain measures advanced in this bill, measures which in our view contain major shortcomings which will need to be corrected. For example, the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act should not provide for \$1,000 rewards for whistleblowers.

• (1120)

This could encourage an unhealthy culture of whistleblowing by proposing financial rewards for those who disclose wrongdoing, in addition to creating very unhealthy work atmospheres within the various operations. The Bloc Québécois has always maintained that the best way to support public servants who want to disclose wrongdoing in the public sector is to ensure that they are better protected by the government and by the management of their department or agency, so that they are not transferred, dismissed or harassed.

In this bill, I am also worried by everything to do with appointments of senior officials and heads of crown corporations. Certainly, this bill proposes a public appointments commission, but it would be controlled by the Prime Minister's Office. It would be responsible in particular for overseeing the selection process for appointments. In my opinion, this process is inconsistent and lacks transparency, especially when we know that most appointments come from the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's Office. We feel that a formal appointment review process should be established, that the parliamentary committees must be central to that process, and above all that no appointment should be made against the advice of the committees.

We have similar concerns about the appointment of the new parliamentary budget officer. This officer will be responsible for forecasting the federal government's budgetary revenues and

expenditures. Here too, the mechanism lacks transparency and thoroughness because, under Bill C-2, the position will be within the Library of Parliament. The act even provides for exceptions that could prevent the budget officer from accessing certain information.

We know that the Liberals presented us in the past with budgetary estimates that were often far-fetched and contained considerable forecasting errors. As my colleague, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot already said, it would be better to have an independent agency attached to the Standing Committee on Finance which could provide the committee members with realistic, complete financial estimates that, most importantly, are periodically revised. The people of Quebec and Canada have a right to know how the taxes they pay to the government are managed.

I could elaborate on other aspects of the bill which, in my view, raise questions and are cause for concern. I am thinking, among other things, of the fact that certain foundations will continue to escape public scrutiny, that lobbyists will still have certain loopholes—because, after a year, they will be able to work for lobbying firms and brief lobbyists—or that the government has decided to delay the reforms to the Access to Information Act.

While on this subject, the Conservative Party promised to reform the Access to Information Act on many occasions during the last election campaign. In their platform, they made it clear that a Conservative government would implement the recommendations of the Information Commissioner on reforming the Access to Information Act. In reality, and like the Liberals, now that the Conservative Party is in power, it is much less interested in reforming the act and providing greater transparency. Like the previous governments, it prefers to limit or even escape the surveillance of the Information Commissioner.

In view of the complexity of this bill, the range and importance of the matters dealt with, and the shortcomings that must be corrected, our party believes that it is important to study the bill properly and thoroughly. There is no reason to rush. Let us take all the time we need in committee to make the amendments that are necessary to correct the shortcomings in this bill. In this way, we will get legislation that reduces the risk of abuse and corruption within the government and that restores the people's confidence in our institutions and politicians. Politicians have a responsibility to defend the interests of all the citizens and respond to their needs.

• (1125)

[English]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I very much welcome the comments the hon. member has made on the accountability act.

Let me say first that I am really quite disappointed that we need to legislate accountability from government to Parliament and that we have to deal with this act at all, but apparently, after the last 12 years in particular and the way the Liberal government conducted itself, it is now necessary for us to deal with this in a legislative manner. I do welcome the Conservative government's bill.

I also appreciate the member's very detailed analysis of that bill. He has focused on many of the items on which I would have wished to talk today, so I will be very brief.

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I wonder if the member could perhaps explain his position on what to me is the most fundamental omission in this bill. Yes, this bill deals with government's accountability to Parliament, but it does very little to speak to our accountability to the people who have sent us here, who have expressed their faith and their trust in us as elected members. This bill would do nothing to stop parliamentarians from crossing the floor immediately after an election. Mr. Emerson's crossing the floor certainly is not the first—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would remind the member for Hamilton Mountain that we are not supposed to refer to members by their names but by their ridings.

Ms. Chris Charlton: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I was speaking about the member for Vancouver Kingsway. He certainly is not the only one or the first one in this institution who has crossed the floor, but I think that is a fundamental breach of trust with the voters in his constituency.

Any bill that wants to address real accountability needs to speak to the accountability of politicians to the people who elected them. I wonder whether the member could just take a few minutes to express his views on that very important omission in the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

The Bloc Québécois has studied this bill very carefully. It is important that it be passed as soon as possible because Quebec, in particular, has been robbed. Public funds were used to try to buy the conscience of Quebeckers through the sponsorship scandal. Parliamentarians, the House and, above all, our voters all must be protected. The rights of Quebeckers have been trampled for many years due to the Liberal Party's failure to respect the code of ethics.

In answer to the hon. member's question, the NDP will propose amendments to the bill in committee. The Bloc will also have amendments. It will examine all the amendments closely, as it always does. Following discussion and analysis, the Bloc will adopt a position on this matter.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is my first time addressing the House in French. Half of the citizens in the riding of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe speak French. I am pleased to ask my colleague from the Bloc a question about the bill.

As mentioned in paragraph 3(c) the aim of this bill is to:

provide the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner with the mandate to determine the measures necessary to avoid conflicts of interest and to determine whether a contravention of this Act has occurred.

The commissioner was chosen by the Prime Minister. Does the hon. member expect the commissioner to decide if he is in a conflict of interest himself? Is this not a flaw in the bill?

• (1130)

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question. The matter of conflict of interest is an important component of this legislation.

As I indicated, for many years the government in power was in conflict of interest in connection with the financing of the Liberal Party. Changes must be made.

In the case of conflict of interest, the amount of the fine is minimal. In the sponsorship scandal, for example, there were cases of fraud of \$200,000. If an individual is fined \$1,000 or \$5,000, that is very little compared to the \$200,000 fraud. There are improvements to be made to this bill.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to participate today in the debate on the accountability act, Bill C-2. I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak and to express some of the concerns of my constituents from Burnaby—Douglas on this important topic.

I think it is appropriate that this is the first bill before the House of Commons given the concerns many Canadians had about the corruption scandals of the previous Liberal government, but I am going to take a little more conciliatory attitude than some in the House. No government or party will be without its scandals. We all make mistakes. We are all human in this place and we make mistakes from time to time. I think the test for us is how we deal with those mistakes and what systems we put in place to handle them. I think that is what has been lacking recently.

I am glad this Parliament will have the opportunity at the beginning to take note of some of those important issues and to make some important changes, debate them and improve the legislation that is currently before us. Accountability and transparency are buzzwords that we often hear around here, but I think this legislation puts them squarely on the agenda of the House and gives everyone here the opportunity to make some progress toward both those important goals.

As an aside, I wanted to mention that this morning I came from a press conference that dealt with another issue of transparency and accountability, and that is the issue of security certificates in Canada. Right now, four people are being detained on security certificates here who do not know the charges against them and whose lawyers have not seen the evidence. The trials are held in secret. The detention goes on indefinitely. I think that is a real issue of accountability for our government.

This is a process that merits re-examination. The Conservatives, to their credit, made some proposals during the last campaign and said they were prepared to look at some changes. I think more needs to be done than what they have proposed, but we need to hold the government accountable for moving on those changes.

The security certificate process is something that has caused particular concern in the Arab and Muslim communities in Canada. Amnesty International has spoken out very directly about the flaws and the injustice of the process. I think it is one that we here in the House need to address without delay. I am proud to have a motion on the order paper that would call for the abolition or repeal of that section of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

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To go back to the bill at hand, there are some important changes in the legislation. I would like to mention a few of them. There are important changes on lobbying, including something that we in this corner of the House call "Ed's clause" in tribute to Ed Broadbent and the work he did on this issue, which would ban contingency or success based fees paid to lobbyists. It means that profit related to success based fees should be illegal to pay and those making them should be brought to court. It should also be illegal for a lobbyist to accept those kinds of payments and the penalties for doing it should be significant. I am glad that is included in this legislation.

There are also changes to ethics enforcement, to budgeting and to government appointments, although I would prefer that this did not remain in the Prime Minister's Office as it does. There are changes in regard to whistleblowing, although there is a concern, as was raised by the previous speaker, that the whistleblowing provisions of this legislation still include a cash reward, although it has been reduced significantly. I do not think that is an appropriate way to go.

I am sure that most public servants do not need to be rewarded for what they understand should be an integral part of their job. We are well served by public servants in Canada. They understand these important concerns about accountability, transparency and ethics in government. I think it is inappropriate to say they deserve or require some kind of cash reward for acting on those important understandings.

There is a lot in this bill about the internal workings of government, but there is very little about democratic accountability. I think that is the significant failure of this legislation. I am hoping that New Democrats will propose changes to improve that failure in this legislation but also that there will be other legislation before the House, either from private members or from the government, to address some of those things.

Those are the things I want to focus on this morning.

There are some things in the bill and there are some things not in the bill. In the bill there are bans on corporate and union donations, which I think is a good thing. There is an attempt to clean up the use of trust funds for election campaigns. That is a good thing. There are limits and rules set for gifts given to candidates. That is also a very good thing. However, there is a whole list of things that are not included in this legislation.

• (1135)

I think we are all aware that Ed Broadbent, the former member for Ottawa Centre, made some very clear and important recommendations in the last Parliament for what he said was an attempt to clean up politics. Those have been very instructive for me and for other members of the House.

First, I want to talk about the lack of floor crossing legislation in the bill. It is a serious failure and it was the first major accountability challenge of the new Conservative government. Sadly, I think most Canadians feel that the government failed miserably in that first challenge. The defection of the Minister of International Trade, the MP for Vancouver Kingsway, from the Liberal Party to the Conservative Party and to a cabinet position was extremely disappointing and has justly angered many people in Vancouver Kingsway.

Earlier my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan talked about the power of the people and that the vote is where people express their power in our system. To see the expression of the votes of the people of Vancouver Kingsway so early quickly and cavalierly disregarded shows a major flaw in our system.

Over 80% of the people in Vancouver Kingsway voted for a party other than the Conservative Party and now they have a member of Parliament who is a representative of that party. The member in question ran a very partisan election campaign. In fact, he was one of the most partisan of all Liberals in British Columbia and his attacks on the Conservative Party were direct, relentless and sometimes very personal, yet only days after the election he changed his stripes and announced he had decided to be a Conservative.

There is no wonder why right now in Vancouver Kingsway there is a de-election campaign. There is no wonder that protesters follow the minister wherever he goes in the Vancouver area to denounce this change that he has made. I can understand why people of Vancouver Kingsway are so disappointed in their member of Parliament. I was proud to stand with members of the de-election campaign recently at one of their demonstrations when the Prime Minister actually visited my constituency of Burnaby—Douglas.

There is no excuse for this. We could have been dealing with this now as part of Bill C-2. We need floor crossing legislation. We have a good example already on the books. My NDP colleague, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, has had a private member's bill on this issue for many years and it came to a vote in the House of Commons in the last Parliament. Unfortunately, it did not succeed but there were members of the current government who supported it at that time and I hope they will continue their support for that kind of legislation. We will have a chance to vote on it again in this Parliament. We are going to ensure that comes before the House at some point but it should be part of the legislation we are debating today.

My colleague's bill would require any MP who wishes to change parties to resign his or her seat, seek the nomination of the new party and run in a by-election or sit as an independent. These choices could have existed for the member for Vancouver Kingsway. He could have considered and could still consider any of those options and I would encourage him to do so. At this point I happen to think that he should resign and seek re-election, seek the nomination of his new-found party and put that to the test of the people of Vancouver Kingsway so they can be sure that their wishes are clearly represented by the person who represents them here.

Most of us here run as representatives of political parties, although there is one independent member of the House and that is a different circumstance. We function here in caucuses of political parties and we must honour the decisions of our constituents who pay attention to what we say on behalf of our political party, who pay attention to the platforms of our political parties and who make that part of their decision making process.

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Again, the absence of this provision in Bill C-2 is a serious failure. It causes me great concern and I wonder about the government's interest in dealing with issues of democratic accountability when I see its absence.

Many other issues are not in this legislation, such as electoral reform. The New Democrats believe there should be a mixed proportional system where we maintain constituency representation but we ensure that the House better represents the overall voting pattern of Canadians, and that has not been the case of our House.

There are no spending limits or requirements for disclosure on party leadership contests. We have seen some incredibly big spending moments in leadership contests over the years from parties. It is particularly important when that person exercises the responsibilities of leadership, the discipline functions of his or her caucus and when often he or she is the person who becomes the prime minister. We need to ensure there are those limitations.

● (1140)

Those are some of the concerns I have but I have many more. I do look forward to questions from other members and to further discussions with my constituents on this important issue.

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest in terms of the hon. member's attention to the situation in Vancouver Kingsway. I would like to mention that this is a unique situation in terms of a person accepting a nomination and receiving support for one particular party and before arriving at the House to change his stripes.

I know we do have floor crossing. Sometimes members who sit on one side of the House decide that the policies of their particular party are not what they believe their constituents need and do cross the floor.

Would the member comment on not even crossing the floor, but representing and being elected under false pretenses of being a Liberal and coming to the House and accepting a cabinet position with another party? It certainly is a very bad reflection on all of us. Constituents across the country want us to introduce some measure to restrict this so it will not happen again. It is a very dangerous precedent. Maybe the member, who has a good knowledge of this and of the situation in Vancouver, could comment on this further in the House.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I am a bit surprised at the member's question given that the Liberal Party did not support the private member's bill that came before the last Parliament to ban floor crossing. We had the opportunity to make that change but the Liberals, I think en masse, voted that bill down in the last Parliament.

It is something that is absolutely necessary to ensure we maintain our credibility with our constituents, the voters. It is something right now that the people of Vancouver Kingsway could desperately use. I understand their anger and frustration. We have seen hundreds and thousands of people participate in public meetings, demonstrations, picket lines and protests about the actions of the member for Vancouver Kingsway. I think the voters are rightly angered.

We have seen members of the Liberal Party who are outraged that he used their resources to be re-elected and then abandoned them so quickly after the election.

I do not think it matters when it is done. I think that in this case he did it before this House even sat. However it should apply to us whenever we are sitting in this place, whether we have been here one day, one month or have not even taken our seat, or four years for that matter. We need to ensure this kind of legislation is in place so that when we run on a particular platform, when we say that we support the ideas and values of a particular political party, that we are held accountable for those statements and for that position. The people of our ridings must have an opportunity to express their views should we decide for some reason to make a change in our political affiliation.

This legislation is absolutely necessary. It is a failure of the government early in its term to deal with questions of democratic accountability. The fact that it is not in this legislation is a failure to address an important issue of accountability.

● (1145)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member began his speech and spent most of his speech talking about floor crossing, which is fair, but near the end of his intervention the member said that the voters voted for the particular party based on its platform during the election.

Our platform during the last election on accountability, the accountability act that we had put forward as an item during the election, was on my website and readily available. Nowhere did it talk about floor crossing in that piece that we had promoted to the Canadian public of what we were going to do to clean up government.

Is it fair to criticize our party for legislation that deals with something that was not what we had promoted during the election? What we actually have on the table is what we did promote during the election?

I fully recognize the right of any person or party to bring forward amendments and additions to the legislation. However what we are presenting here today and have presented over this past week is exactly what we promised to do during the election. We did not promise to bring forward any floor crossing legislation.

Therefore, does the member think it is fair to criticize our legislation based on the fact that he believes that what we put forward in the election is what we should do here in the House?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely fair to criticize the government for what I see is a failure to address an important accountability issue.

The other important accountability issue that the member for Burlington might want to consider is the fact that, yes, it was not part of the Conservative platform but neither did it win a majority in the House of Commons. The Conservatives need to struggle with what Canadians want to see done in the House. They also need to take account of all of the ideas raised in the last election.

It is very important that the Conservative Party look to all corners of the House to find the best ideas that are most representative of the hopes and concerns of Canadians and bring those forward to this Parliament.

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We saw a very arrogant Liberal Party struggling with the whole question of how to govern in a minority position in the previous Parliament. I hope the Conservatives have learned something from watching the terrible struggles the Liberals had with that. One of the ways a government struggles with a minority government is to look for ideas to broaden its base of support and be more representative of the actual outcome of the previous election.

To say that it was not part of the Conservative platform and therefore we are not moving on it, is very wrong-headed and borders on the kind of arrogance that we might have heard from the Liberals often in the last Parliament. I would hope that the Conservatives do not follow that kind of approach and would be willing to take a different tack in this Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I wish to congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker of the House. I had not yet had the opportunity to do so. This is an honour bestowed by your colleagues.

Second, I would like to thank the voters of the riding of Terrebonne—Blainville for the affection and recognition they expressed when they re-elected me on January 23.

I am proud of this very positive result in my riding. Almost 60% of voters put their faith in the sovereignty of Quebec and showed that they were vigilant in the face of the charm offensive carried out by the current Prime Minister in Quebec. The voters in my riding quickly realized that the sole purpose of this public and political offensive was to hide the Conservative Prime Minister's true intention of imposing on Quebecers his vision of, I quote, "a strong Canada". Judging by the early months of his administration, Canada will soon be governed by laws and measures inspired by the Canadian and American right.

I have read the accountability bill—we will continue to use the word "responsabilité" in the French title. That choice of terminology was confirmed to the Prime Minister by Public Works and Government Services Canada's Translation Bureau. With the parliamentary experience he has acquired in recent years, the Prime Minister should, in my opinion, recognize the Bureau's expertise. In the past, the Conservatives have always shown themselves to be timid when it came to the status of the official languages, in the House and in committee. They are still demonstrating their lukewarm feelings about that subject.

It is understandable that the use of the French language is a difficult subject for an anglophone, but the Prime Minister's Office simply cannot, given the resources at its disposal, take this kind of dismissive attitude when it comes to using the correct French terminology.

And so Bill C-2 is the first to be debated in the House of Commons since the Conservatives came to power. It is time to act. This government was elected on January 23 of this year, and not until four months later did it introduce an omnibus bill. It is asking the opposition to cooperate, to facilitate passage of the bill sometime in June. Based on what has happened this morning, I have the impression that it is even wanting to speed things up.

The content of this bill is in contrast with the little throne speech that was read on April 4. The bill that has been submitted to us is a complex law that will amend a number of existing acts. It will therefore take a lot of time, probably months, to analyze it, study it and amend it.

Although the Conservative government says that it wants to pass this bill before the parliamentary summer recess at all costs, the Bloc Québécois and the other opposition parties, and the actors who are affected by the bill, must get to have their say. We must ensure that the members of this House vote on Bill C-2 only when the committee assigned the task of studying it has done its job and all stages in the consultation with the organizations and individuals affected have been completed and they have had time to be heard.

Today, I want to address just one part of this bill. That is the part relating to whistleblowers. I will then leave it to other colleagues to speak to the other aspects of Bill C-2.

Laudable efforts were made by the previous government, in Bill C-11. Unfortunately, that act was never proclaimed, because of the election call in November. This aspect is a major concern of the Professional Institute of the Public Service which, as we know, represents more than 50,000 federal employees.

It may take a lot of time to get a federal accountability act in place, and this will significantly delay the protection for which the Institute has been fighting for more than 15 years.

• (1150)

According to this institute, the government's argument to justify its strategy is that it does not want to implement the machinery of Bill C-11 so that a major review does not have to be carried out after Bill C-2 is passed. The fact of the matter is, however, that public service employees urgently need the disclosure and protection mechanisms provided in Bill C-11.

Hon. members might recall that, at various times during the Gomery hearings, the public witnessed numerous attempts by managers and deputy ministers to shift the blame for illegal actions committed as part of the famous sponsorship scandal to public service employees. Instead, the deputy ministers and managers should have admitted they were the ones who meddled and put pressure to circumvent existing administrative rules.

I jumped when I read, in section 53.1, that the Conservative government was considering paying financial awards to employees who make disclosures. What lack of respect for these men and women who devote themselves, with professionalism and integrity, to the daily operations of the federal government.

A major player we heard in December 2004, namely the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, told the Standing Committee on Governmental Operations and Estimates that it did not advocate such rewards. In a survey on values and ethics conducted by the institute, respondents said they wanted a work environment where these values would be an integral part of the organizational structure. Instead of rewards, and I quote the report:

Leadership that visibly demonstrates and supports values and ethics beyond words, and holds people to account for unethical actions and behaviours was identified as the key to creating a trusting environment where employees can express their ethical concerns.

I want to congratulate the Professional Institute of the Public Service on this fine piece of work, a serious report, entitled *PIPSC Membership Consultation on Workplace Values and Ethics*. This final report was presented on February 28. Professionally done, it has shown us that ethics is a top concern among public service employees.

The report states that “organizational ethics is not a status or a state, but a sense of what is right and wrong embedded in organizational policies, practices and activities.” According to the Institute, which cites a report published by the OECD,

encouraging ethical behaviour is not just about establishing a list of rules, a code or a level of certification to be attained. It is an ongoing management process that underpins the work of government; it is crucial to the functioning and the evolution of governance.

When asked to rate the ethical environment of their workplace, just over half, 51%, of responding members felt it was high, or very high and 16% felt the ethics in their workplace were either low or very low. These statistics reveal a lot about the importance of ethics.

Allow me to draw to your attention the issue of management. In its report, the Professional Institute of the Public Service says it is the managers who are not acting ethically. However, today we are considering a bill that asks federal public servants to become informers, to denounce others. Who should they denounce? Their managers? The deputy ministers? Deputy ministers who are incapable of enforcing the code of ethics?

• (1155)

In my opinion, the problem is neither the informers nor the thousand dollar reward that undermines the integrity of these public servants. The problem is systemic. It starts with deputy ministers and managers. The government must enforce the existing code of ethics for the federal public service because public servants themselves do.

[English]

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was impressed with respect to the manner in which my colleague from the Bloc spoke regarding ethics and how it relates to managers and deputy ministers within the context of the workplace.

I note that the government is putting forward its accountability bill and focusing on that area of management and deputy ministers. The proposal would strengthen auditing and accountability within departments thereby bolstering the internal audit function within departments and crown corporations and keep it within the framework of ministerial responsibility.

Inasmuch as she has indicated, and I think quite appropriately, it is not a question of managers not respecting ethics and not knowing how ethics apply, but it is a question of how we, through the mechanisms of government, auditing, committees and how they report through committees, hold the system accountable.

I would like to ask the member if she could expand on whether she believes that this recommendation would in fact achieve what we all wish, which is for ministers and deputy ministers, through the

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committee structure and audit committees, and through the Auditor General, to be held accountable.

• (1200)

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for this very pertinent question.

In my speech, I wanted to demonstrate that, in the end, the burden of proof always rests upon the public servants and the employees.

However, in its report, the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada raised an extremely important point, namely, that the code of ethics that currently applies to public service employees is unfortunately never discussed.

Enforcing the code is not a priority for managers and deputy ministers. There is no transparency in the management of the code in terms of ethical values. So, how can we expect an employee who receives an order from their manager or deputy minister, who in turn received an order from the minister to enforce a particular standard even if it is unlawful, to say anything?

In my opinion, the committee that studies this bill must go even further. The Ethics Commissioner will address the question of disclosures. Perhaps we could ask a high-level public administrator or the Clerk of the Privy Council to establish a policy for ministers, deputy ministers and managers alike.

As my colleague knows, for the past five years, I have been working very hard on the issue of psychological harassment. Every such case that I have looked at—the institute highlights this fact in the case of whistleblowers—involves a lower-level boss, a manager or a deputy minister who asked that a job be done.

I believe that greater attention must be paid to the integrity of managers.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will say straightaway that I think this is a good bill. This is a good time to discuss it, for all sorts of reasons which we all know and on which we can agree, regardless of our different political opinions.

It would be an illusion to think that a bill of this scope can be made perfect in a hurry. This bill necessarily contains certain weaknesses which I would like to illustrate in a certain way. I do not wish to blame those who designed it. However the legislative process, if properly conducted, can improve a text. That process includes discussion in Parliament and review in committee. I also believe there should be public sessions at which witnesses are invited to comment on this bill and its provisions. Also, if this bill is arriving at the right time, it is because we consider it necessary to do this at this time. So we would like to do the best that is possible.

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Among other things, when I read this bill, I cannot help detecting signs of a certain partiality, a certain desire for vengeance or destruction aimed at another political party. During review of this bill, the government should be open-minded enough to accept the criticisms made to improve it. In any case, that is certainly that attitude that my party and myself will be taking, in our desire to improve the bill and see whether it does not go too far at times.

I will speak now of the title, as other francophones have done. Even here I seem to see a sign of a spirit of vengeance. When I first saw the title, I ran to check a dictionary. And indeed, my question was whether “imputabilité” was the appropriate term. It is dangerous to rely on the dictionary only. When we were children, we would do an exercise that involved looking up the definition of a word. We would find various terms describing it. Then we would look up the definition of those other terms, which in turn were described by various other terms. At some point we found ourselves back at the first word. So words are defined by other words. However, one should not refer to the dictionary as an authority for saying that word X has the meaning of word Y; it is clear that different words have different nuances. With the word “imputabilité”, when you impute something to someone, the nuance is generally pejorative.

I offer an example. Mr. Kagame’s visit to the country is in the news. Those who are against this visit and demonstrating their opposition “impute” to him the role of provoking the airplane accident that triggered the terrible genocide. He denies this and defends himself: he instead “imputes” this act to Hutu extremists. This shows the connotation of accusation that is carried in the French word “imputer”.

In addition, when we read the highlights of the accountability action plan, we see that imputability is not what is meant. It seems to me that the government is pointing the finger at the members of the former Liberal government and saying that now there will be an act to punish people who do not carry out their responsibilities properly. The government gave us a booklet that explains the action plan, and it is funny to see that, from the very start, it uses different French terminology:

Dans le cadre de la Loi fédérale sur l'imputabilité et du plan d'action qui s'y rattache, le gouvernement du Canada prévoit des mesures précises qui visent à accroître la responsabilisation, la transparence et la surveillance des activités gouvernementales.

• (1205)

The introduction to the document begins as follows:

La responsabilisation constitue la pierre d'angle du régime canadien de gouvernement responsable. Un régime rigoureux de responsabilisation est essentiel pour garantir au Parlement et à la population canadienne que le gouvernement du Canada—

Further on, the document states:

Une responsabilisation efficace suppose également que les gestionnaires des ressources publiques —

The text continues:

Dans une culture de responsabilisation, les rôles et responsabilités sont clairement définis, de sorte que les gens savent ce que l'on attend d'eux et qu'ils répondent de leur rendement, le bon rendement est dûment récompensé et il existe des conséquences immédiates lorsque les règles sont sciemment contournées.

These excerpts, which use the word “responsabilisation”, reflect an open-mindedness that I did not sense in either the title of the bill or certain other provisions.

Transparency and accountability will be upheld. Imputability will take care of itself, as it always does when rules are broken.

I found another interesting passage on page 30 of this explanatory guide. It says in French that the purpose was to “renforcer la vérification et la responsabilisation des ministères”. This supports the arguments made by authorities in these matters. Translators say that this term is incorrect, as does the Office de la langue française du Québec and certain utilizers of the language and French teachers. This term should therefore be corrected in the bill to give it the general character that it is meant to have.

• (1210)

I also noted that some provisions really need to be improved, or at least raise questions. In this respect, the Bloc finds itself in a good position. We do not aspire to form the Government of Canada. On the other hand, though, I always remind the House that the Bloc is not here just to “block”, contrary to what some people like to say. Like all my colleagues, I am happy to state over and over that I do not dislike either Canada or Canadians. As a matter of fact, I like Canada much more than any other country in the world. What I do detest, though, is the Canadian constitution from which we want to escape in order to create one on the basis of the sovereignty of the two great nations that make up Canada. In so doing, we will be more open to the other nations living here as well.

They want to impose a \$1,000 limit on contributions. I feel compelled to compare the ways in which the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party are financed. It is true that the Liberal Party received contributions from some very rich people. The Conservative Party, like the Bloc Québécois, I might add, is funded by ordinary citizens. This was also true of René Lévesque’s party. He had the advantage of being a great media star. It was easier for him, therefore, than it is for other, less well-known people. Even he, though, imposed a limit of \$3,000. This corresponded at the time to about \$5,000 in 2006.

Some contributors are prepared to give more. I might humbly say that, personally, I have been contributing more than \$1,000 to political parties for a long time. I do so out of conviction, without ulterior purpose. And I know other people who do the same. The limit established in the bill seems to me specially chosen to upset the Liberals. There is a spirit of vengeance here that I do not like.

There is a bit of the same thing in the rewards for whistleblowers, even though this is not aimed directly at the Liberal Party. We respect whistleblowers. We feel that they really are acting in the public interest and have no personal reason for blowing the whistle on things they find unacceptable in the conduct of government affairs. So I have a lot of respect for these people. It is very important to protect them and provide legal support, as the bill does. Whistleblowers will be able to go to an independent commissioner, I think even anonymously. However, the idea of giving them a reward detracts a little from the respect that people might have for them.

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The Conservative government will always have the honour of being the originator of this bill. But if we address the problem in a spirit of openness, the honour will go to all the political parties in this House.

How much time do I still have, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In fact, your time expired a while ago.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had not noticed.

Obviously, these reasons are given in a spirit—

• (1215)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry but I have to interrupt the member.

We will now proceed to questions and comments. The member for York South—Weston has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps my question will give the member the opportunity to follow up on the theme he was just engaged in. That was the role of the Auditor General with respect to reporting, as is her responsibility, on matters of internal and external audits and the whole role that she plays with respect to making the functions of government, particularly the comptroller general and the role that is now going to play, in closing the accountability loop. I appreciated everything the member has said.

A great deal of this legislation focuses on the accountability of the institutions and structures through appointing watchdogs of various degrees, but at what point is there a crossover where we, as the members of Parliament through our structures, for example the committees, can hold the executive power to account? At what point is there a crossover? Does the member see that in this legislation, or are there further amendments that would reinforce the kind of accountability that exists among the policy makers and those who are elected to develop policies and those in the government who are charged with responsibilities to be accountable at the departmental level?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have a system where accountability does exist. The government is accountable to the House. We have various tools at our disposal to hold the government to account. Question period is one of those tools, and committees are another one. I think it forces the government to be more transparent so that those who were elected by the people and can hold the government to account are better informed.

I would like to add that it is important to take Mr. Loubier's suggestions seriously. I am not an economist—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The member has gained considerable experience in two previous Parliaments, if I am not mistaken. He knows that members are not referred to by their names, but by the names of their ridings.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, you are right. I apologize. I will rephrase.

The member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot had a great deal of experience. For example, he said that he can forecast what the actual government surplus will be. As a matter of fact, he said that anyone with the same background he has—he is an economist—can do it.

Consequently, if the government came up with a different forecasted surplus based on the same numbers, there certainly was a reason for that. The member talked in his remarks about the need to appoint an official who would be totally independent and who would have the necessary tools to make these kinds of forecasts.

• (1220)

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate today. Obviously when dealing with accountability and ethics, as we are doing here with Bill C-2, one cannot get too far without bringing into the debate the opinions and contributions of the former member for Ottawa Centre, the hon. Ed Broadbent.

I will say as my own personal historical footnote, that I am not only honoured to have been returned to this place by my fellow citizens in Hamilton Centre, but I am also sitting in what was Ed Broadbent's seat in the House. I also have the honour of being in his former office. I feel somewhat responsible to ensure as much as I can, and it will be totally and woefully inadequate, that I present the thoughts of Mr. Broadbent. It is important that they be part of this debate.

Mr. Speaker, you may be familiar with the document that was put out by Mr. Broadbent and the NDP caucus before the last election entitled, "Cleaning Up Politics: Demanding Changes in Ethics and Accountability". In the front of the document Mr. Broadbent stated:

When they find themselves in the midst of wrongdoing those with a vivid sense of right and wrong have feelings of remorse. On the other hand the defining characteristic of corruption is that feelings of remorse have been lost, replaced by the impulse to deny, perpetuate and cover-up. The Liberal party is losing its sense of remorse.

Certainly the Liberals lost a lot more than that in the last election.

Let us understand that the reason this is here is the scandal coming out of the previous government, the Liberal Party. When the Liberals were given the trust of the Canadian people to govern this great nation, they betrayed that trust. They not only had their fingers in the cookie jar, they had both hands, both feet, body and all, and a whole host of other Liberal members were into the cookie jar with them. It was disgraceful. It is one of the most outrageous scandals this nation has seen arguably since the great railway scandal. It is that big.

Today in this minority House we are attempting collectively to do the best we can to bring in rules that will deal with those who are dishonest. Honest politicians, like honest citizens, do not really need the laws or enforcement of them. They know what the laws are and they abide by them. It is the dishonest ones that require rules and oversight. We do that through transparency and accountability. I must say that to some degree Bill C-2 gets us going in that direction.

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Certainly there are good things in Bill C-2. We in the NDP would like to see some changes. Hopefully, there will be some improvements at the committee stage and we can make some amendments, but notwithstanding that, this is a good start. Unless there are major changes to it, the NDP caucus will support that good start. Make no mistake that there is a long way to go. I only have a few moments and I want to pick up on at least two issues not in the bill that we in the NDP believe have to find their way into legislation if we are truly going to deal with the issues coming out of the Liberal sponsorship scandal.

The issue of floor crossing is huge. In fact, Ed Broadbent made it number one in his recommendations. He made it number one before the last election, before any of us knew anything about what the member for Vancouver Kingsway was about to do.

Let me say something that needs to be said over and over. Let us understand exactly what happened. Historians are going to have their breath taken away by this. We sort of lose track a bit because we move on. People in Vancouver have not forgotten it, but for the rest of the country things go on. People will look back and will see that before the official count was in, before he had even packed up his campaign office, the member crossed the floor, took a cabinet position and had the audacity to say that he was doing it out of the goodness of his heart for his constituents, that he did it for them. Such sacrifice is beyond what any one person should be asked to give in the service of Canadians, but we are lucky that the hon. member saw fit to put his constituents ahead of the election process, a minor little detail.

What did Ed say about this? Certainly we know how the people of Vancouver Kingsway feel. If we listen to other members from my caucus who are in that area, those constituents are angry. We may not hear it every day in Ottawa but believe me, they are not taking this lying down.

• (1225)

There are an awful lot of people who gave money, who worked hard and gave up their weekends and vacations to help that member get elected. Why? Because they loved the member? Some probably did, but we can bet there were an awful lot of people who were there because they believed in the platform that was put forward.

Our system is very different from the American one. In large part the American Congress is almost like a large city council. My friend the former mayor of Toronto would know much about this in terms of the wheeling and dealing that happens. We do not get elected on the same kind of platform here. That is why it matters what party we belong to, because our platform is our party's platform. In the U.S. it is a lot looser. It is not unusual for Republicans and Democrats to have personal platforms in their material that is contrary to their party, or more consistent with the other party, but that is what works in their electoral area and so that is what they go with.

What did Ed Broadbent say about floor crossing, recognizing that this was before we saw the wishes of over 80% of the people in Vancouver Kingsway being ignored? He said:

Democratic accountability should mean no M.P. can ignore his/her voters and wheel and deal for personal gain: No MP should be permitted to ignore their voters' wishes, change parties, cross the floor, and become a member of another party without first resigning their seats and running in a by-election.

Some feel that is unfair and that it is a little too restrictive, but two weeks after the election? We are not saying that members are prisoners of their caucuses, if we approve the proposal put forward by Ed Broadbent and the NDP. We would say that for whatever reason, if a member feels the need to leave his or her caucus, the member would have that mechanism. The member could sit as an independent and finish the term and choose to do what he or she wanted to do after that.

We are not captives of our caucus. If caucus is doing or saying something or taking a position that members cannot live with or is not in the best interests of their constituents, then they may sit as independents. But if members want to make the big sacrifice that the member for Vancouver Kingsway did and go to cabinet and be forced to take another \$60,000 or \$70,000 a year, if that is their lot in life, then they have to go back to their constituents and get their okay. That is not unreasonable, not when we think about the implications. Let us look at this House, at one vote and how it matters. This is an area that needs serious consideration.

My time is rapidly winding down, but I also want to talk about another key area. This is very big. The fact is that there are still not the kinds of controls and transparency we need around party leadership races. As Ed Broadbent and the NDP said:

Set spending limits and transparency conditions on leadership contests within political parties: Parties are largely financed by the [taxpayer] and the same principles pertinent to the public good should apply to the internal affairs of parties as they do to electoral competition between parties.

That certainly is true when the person who wins that party leadership becomes the prime minister of Canada; it is not unreasonable for the House to say that the mechanism by which one can become the prime minister will have as much control, whether it is through a general election or whether it is done inside one's own party. The fact remains that there must be accountability. Money still plays far too big a role in Canadian politics. I like the idea that we are no longer allowing union or corporate contributions. In my opinion, the further we keep politicians away from money, the better the democracy we are going to have.

These are just a few of the areas that we believe need a lot more work. Certainly out of respect for the work that Mr. Broadbent did in this place and the commitment that our leader and the NDP caucus have around these issues, we are going to be on top of the bill. We are going to follow it very closely. We are going to push really hard. Hopefully members of other caucuses will be open to some of the amendments that we want to make because we want to improve this. We are here to get something done. We are here to make things better. Bill C-2 is a good start, but there is more to do and the NDP is ready to roll up its sleeves and get that work done.

• (1230)

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague who just spoke was referring to one who is in the chamber who served as the mayor of Toronto. Being one who was present, and I think he was looking in this direction, I would like the record to be correct. In the interests of not maligning those who really were the mayor of Toronto, I was the chairman of Metropolitan Toronto and I appreciate my colleague giving me that recognition.

Government Orders

The member spent a great deal of time talking about floor crossing, and I do believe that is important, but I think the House would also be interested in what his party has talked about as democratic accountability and open government.

My colleague also has served on the public accounts committee. From the perspective of members of the House who want to see more accountability through this House and through elected members, and based on his experience and coupling that experience on the public accounts committee with the recommendation to establish a parliamentary budget authority, which I take would reinforce the efforts of committee to hold the executive into account and the administration into account, I wonder if the member would give us his opinion.

Would he give us his opinion with respect to his experience on the public accounts committee and whether that recommendation, and through the public accounts committee, would even further close the accountability loop in a manner that we would all like to see?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for York South—Weston and I recognize the minor error. I would just say that from the viewpoint of Hamilton, when we thought Toronto, we thought the hon. member. I was pleased to have been in the municipal world when the hon. member was there.

The member raises some very good points. I do not think I am in any way avoiding the answer, but to step it out one, Justice Gomery made quite a number of recommendations as a result of his inquiry. Many of those affected the public accounts committee. I am pleased to say that I am back on that committee again. I am looking forward to the work that will go on there.

However, I would say to the hon. member that there were a number of things flowing from the inquiry that could also be in Bill C-2. I recall that for the actual public accounts committee itself, Justice Gomery said there should be more resources and more independence. The member will recall that there times when we wanted to get further legal advice; it was more a matter of having a staff assignment rather than a question of whether or not they could be unbiased, and I want to be very clear about that. It was a matter of having the resources, in other words, of having a staff lawyer assigned to the committee who would be with us and know the corporate history and the issues and be able to give us advice along the way. Because it was a very legal process we went through, in that it involved personal information, people's rights, et cetera.

There is another thing that the committee would have been given the power to do had Bill C-2 incorporated those recommendations. The committee would have been given the power to ensure that deputy ministers were held accountable for their legal responsibility. Right now in terms of transparency and accountability, the minister rolls in and says, "I make the policy decisions and the department is run by the deputy, so I really cannot answer that one because it is about the mechanics of the ministry". The minister says to speak to the deputy.

Okay, so we bring in the deputy minister. He rolls in and we ask the deputy, who says he can speak to some of the mechanics of what happened, but that most of this relates back to the policy and he does not make policy decisions, that the minister does. The deputy says

we need to ask the minister. I am not making this up. This is how it works and anybody who was on the committee watched this.

Then we get to the second and third tiers of the bureaucrats in trying to get at the answer, and of course when it is a political issue, they are not going to get involved if they do not have to because there is no win. But deputy ministers have a legal framework of responsibility and Justice Gomery was saying that it should extend to going to the public accounts committee and answering for all decisions made by the deputy or his or her staff with regard to all areas of legal responsibility. It would end the ability to have this merry-go-round whereby one person comes in and says it is not really his or her job, but to ask so-and-so. When so-and-so comes in, the answer is no, we have to go back to someone else. We can go around and around with this.

Had Bill C-2 incorporated this, we could—

●(1235)

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be taking part in this debate on Bill C-2, the federal accountability act. To start with, like a number of my colleagues, I will point out that the title of the bill is not correct in French, and that an amendment which should be unanimously agreed to by this House would make the French title of the bill the *Loi sur la responsabilité*.

Our spokesperson on this subject, the member for Repentigny, said at the beginning of his speech that the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-2 in principle. Obviously, the entire question of ethics and good governance has been central to our debates in recent months, starting from the specific point when the Auditor General submitted her report on what is now commonly called the "sponsorship scandal". In the last months of the session preceding the election, we therefore had ample opportunity to discuss all aspects of that scandal in this House.

I would remind the people listening that the Bloc Québécois did not wait for the Auditor General's report. In our 2000 election platform, we had already identified the advertising agencies that had obviously benefited from the diversions of funds resulting in the sponsorship scandal. In recent months, we have spoken at length about the question of ethics.

The recent campaign was an opportunity, particularly for Quebeckers, to punish the Liberals for their negligence in managing public funds, and particularly for the fact that a portion of those public funds ended up in the coffers of the Liberal Party of Canada. And so Quebeckers punished the Liberal Party very severely: it now has 13 members in Quebec, when Mr. Trudeau once had 74 of the 75 members. This is an indication of the extent of the harm that this scandal caused in terms of public trust in the Liberal Party of Canada, but also to politicians as a class, unfortunately. It was therefore entirely appropriate that one of the first bills introduced by the minority Conservative government deals with ethics. I think that we are all very glad to see this.

Government Orders

The Bloc Québécois participated in the Gomery commission, and submitted a report that included 72 recommendations, some of which have been incorporated in Bill C-2. We are very pleased with this. On the other hand, there are things missing, gaps that we want to address over the course of the parliamentary process that will lead to passage of this bill. I would reiterate that the Bloc Québécois supports it in principle, for the very obvious reasons to which I have referred.

We are very pleased to see that returning officers will be appointed by Elections Canada based on merit, under Bill C-2. Of course, we would hope that, as in Quebec, returning officers will be selected after a public competition is held. We will have an opportunity to come back with this proposal and argue its merits to all of the members in this House.

Another thing we are pleased to see in Bill C-2 is that the Registrar of Lobbyists will be independent. It seems to us that it is extremely important that the person responsible for registering lobbyists be totally independent of the government and have the resources to do that job.

We know that the practice of lobbying is growing. I imagine that all our new colleagues who were elected in the last election of January 2006 must have been a little surprised to see the number of pressure groups who wanted to meet with members of Parliament to express their concerns to them and the solutions that they had to offer for the problems they identified.

I consider that it is absolutely proper, in a democracy, for hon. members to receive input from groups of lobbyists. However, we must avoid the excesses that we saw with the previous government.

• (1240)

For that reason, the independence of the registrar is important. Moreover, as in the case of the Ethics Commissioner, it is essential to ensure that the registrar has the resources to fulfill the mandate that the House has established.

Concerning the Act to regulate the funding of political parties, the Bloc is pleased to note that the suggestion from Quebec and from the Bloc Québécois has been included. That suggestion dealt with a prohibition on corporate donations. It has been part of the Quebec legislation from the very beginning. In reality it is a step forward to ensure that there is no blemish on the independent judgment of hon. members and parties. Personally, I do not believe that corporate donations could buy the consciences of some of our colleagues but they have created negative impressions among the public. Once those donations have been eliminated, the public image of all politicians should have a higher standing among the population.

There is a last element with which we agree and that we are pleased to see in Bill C-2. That is the strengthening of the powers of the Auditor General, in particular, the fact that in future she will be responsible for overseeing the administration of crown corporations. I recall that the Bloc Québécois had introduced a bill for that purpose. The government's decision to adopt that measure is good news.

However, there are a number of elements that we do not agree with. As a result, I will take some time to analyze and comment on the bill. The amending of the Access to Information Act has been put

off to a later date. A draft bill was introduced—if I may call it that—and yet we have been discussing amendments to the Access to Information Act for decades, to make it more accessible and to broaden its application. So it is not something new.

It is a shame that the Conservatives, who had promised—in fact, it is in their election platform—that the recommendations of the Information Commissioner and the Privacy Commissioner concerning amendments to the Access to Information Act would be implemented, have now decided to put that off until later. They made a promise and the Bloc agreed with that approach. In spite of that, they have decided to delay, while the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, during the previous session, rejected a proposal by the then Minister of Justice who wanted to postpone any changes in order to further study the recommendations of the Information Commissioner and the Privacy Commissioner. The committee, including the Conservative members, rejected that position and unanimously accepted the commissioner's report as the basis for legislation. The committee also called on the government to introduce legislation without further delay.

It is amazing to see how the Conservatives are in a lot less of a hurry to give the media, the legislators and the public in general a means of gaining access to government information than they were when they sat on the opposition side. This is very strange.

As I pointed out at the beginning, during the study of this bill, the Bloc Québécois will want to improve the proposed legislation by adding the items I have just mentioned.

The Bloc has also identified some flaws, such as the idea of a financial reward to public servants who disclose wrongdoings. The Bloc recognizes that the strengthening of the law protects those who report questionable or dishonest practices. We believe that this is extremely important.

In closing, I will remind members that, with regard to the Access to Information Act, the bill proposes that only three of the nine foundations be subject to that act, and I did mention how unfortunate it was that the Conservative government did not keep its promise. This is very strange. Why these three foundations and not the other six? There is no logic to this decision.

As a political party that cares about democracy and the strengthening of democracy—and this is true for Canada as well as for Quebec—we will have an opportunity to bring forward amendments to this bill. I am convinced that all members will support the suggestions from the Bloc Québécois. They will aim at making the bill better and more complete, which has always been our goal as a constructive and vigilant opposition.

• (1245)

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently we learned, contrary to the contents of the federal accountability act, that the Conservatives have been engaging in a practice that would seem to contradict what they state. A member of the transition team, which hired the new Conservative government officials, chiefs of staff, deputy ministers, et cetera, is now a senior lobbyist in Ottawa, lobbying the very people who she hired for the government.

Government Orders

Clearly, this is either an oversight or a blatant undermining of the spirit of the accountability act. Would the hon. member agree with me that this type of lobbying should be outlawed, barred and specifically cited in the federal accountability act?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

I think we have all been able to see that the Conservatives in power do not have quite the sense of ethics and good governance that they had in opposition. This is a little disturbing, for we would have expected more consistency on the part of that party, even though, as I mentioned, the bill is a step in the right direction.

There have indeed been actions on the part of the government that are incompatible with sound ethics and good governance. The hon. member has just mentioned one. The appointment of Michael Fortier as senator so that he can be in Cabinet and represent the Montreal region is another. The fact that, two weeks after the election, the Minister of International Trade crossed from the Liberal Party to the Conservative Party is another major ethical issue.

In no way has the Ethics Commissioner cleared this affair. He has said that it is the responsibility of parliamentarians to tighten the law so as to avoid this type of situation. For what happened between the election on January 23, 2006 and the decision by the Minister of International Trade to move from the Liberals to the Conservatives? Probably a telephone call from the Prime Minister. If so, it was not the political environment that caused the Minister of International Trade to change his plans.

I always give the following example. When Lucien Bouchard, who was a Conservative, decided to go independent and found the Bloc Québécois, something fundamental in Canadian history happened, namely the rejection of the Meech Lake Accord. That was justification for leaving one party and creating the Bloc Québécois.

In the case of the Minister of International Trade, opportunism and his political career were probably the only criteria for his decision. In that sense, I am in complete agreement with the hon. member. One does not sense a political will on the part of the government to make a real change to ethics in this Parliament and this government. In my view, the weeks ahead will be very telling.

To close, I would mention that the Prime Minister's relations with the media are also worrisome. The fact that the Access to Information Act is being brushed aside is consistent with his refusal to work with the media toward better publicizing the analysis and political directions of his government. This is prompting a great many questions and is inconsistent with Bill C-2.

• (1250)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the hon. member for Joliette. It concerns the process for selecting the conflict of interest and ethics commissioner. As we know, the commissioner is selected by the Prime Minister alone.

Does the hon. member not think it would be a good idea to have a process established by a committee of this House or some other

mechanism along the lines of this bill, which would be fair and transparent?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I totally agree with the hon. member, Mr. Speaker. All programs of the public appointments commission, which is responsible for overseeing appointments made by the Prime Minister, come under him, because appointments are generally made by the Prime Minister's Office.

We end up with exactly the same kind of situation as previously, when the Ethics Commissioner was appointed by Prime Minister Chrétien and responsible for monitoring ethics within government. This is very much like asking the fox to guard the hen house.

I believe that all these very important players in our parliamentary life ought to be selected by the House.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-2, a very important bill.

First, I thank the member for Winnipeg Centre, who is our lead critic on this bill and on the question of ethics. He has done a brilliant job of focusing the debate on the issue before us.

We are very aware that this is a massive bill. It is a very weighty document, and it is a lot of material to go through. I think from the point of view of the public interest and public concern, it is very important that we focus on some of the key issues and ensure that this is actually followed through.

Just before the election, when the whole sponsorship scandal was in full flight and was raised every day in the House, I remember being in a coffee shop in East Vancouver getting a cup of tea when somebody came up to me and talked about the sponsorship scandal. The person looked at me and said, "Well, what do you expect. We don't expect any different". That comment really struck me. It spoke to the deep level of cynicism, unfortunately, that people have about politics, the political process and this place. They shrug their shoulders. They do not expect anything different from the people in Ottawa, or anywhere else for that matter. I find this very disturbing.

The Liberal corruption and sponsorship scandal was an issue that was raised and very hotly debated in the House every day. However, it was also an issue that went so broad and deep that we all ended up suffering from, this growing cynicism about electoral politics and the political process. That is a very difficult thing to get at.

On the one hand, the bill sets out very strenuous rules about ethics, conduct, conflict and public interest. On the other hand, it is very hard to legislate ethics. Ethics comes from an environment. Unfortunately, we have become very used to an environment where, as Mr. Gomery himself said, the culture of entitlement was very prevalent in this place. That is what we are up against.

The bill is significant and it is an important document. The NDP will be examining it in great detail and we will be offering suggestions about how to make the bill a better instrument. However, it is also incumbent upon us, as members of Parliament, to think about our own personal conduct.

Government Orders

I am reminded of the speech that Mr. Broadbent made when he announced to the House that he was leaving Parliament after many decades of public service. He spoke about the dignity of members and the respect that we needed to have for each other and for this place, and the service we provide to our constituents. We cannot legislate that kind of thing. It comes from us in terms of how we conduct ourselves, and that is something for which we all bear responsibility.

Another thing I want to raise in a general sense around the bill is this. It always bothers me, when corruption scandals erupt and so much public attention is on them, as there should be, that the role of the civil service and civil servants gets dragged into them. It becomes something that is dishonourable.

The NDP have enormous respect for people in the civil service. I think people act in a very honourable way, yet they see all this stuff going on around them, the accusations, the wrongdoing, the cover-ups and the secrecy. Hundreds of thousands of people work for the public service, whether in Ottawa or in our local communities. They go out day after day on the front line and try their very best to do the right thing, and they do the right thing. They are the ones who provide the service, but they are also the ones who get a lot of the flak because of this culture of entitlement and cynicism.

It needs to be said by us all that we value the work of our public servants. We recognize the role they played in exposing the secrets that had been hidden within the government. It was a very bold thing to do and it took a lot of courage.

• (1255)

I want to thank and pay tribute to all of those civil servants in the public service who work so hard and provide the service to our constituents and the people of Canada. They are very honourable people and should be held up as a role model of what we should be doing as parliamentarians.

A lot has been said about this bill and a lot more will come. There are some aspects that are quite disturbing that are not covered. My riding is Vancouver East. The riding next door to me is Vancouver Kingsway. The day that the member for Vancouver Kingsway crossed the floor and became a member of the government my phone was ringing off the hook. There were e-mails instantly from people in my own riding, but also from Vancouver generally. These people felt so betrayed by what was done by that member.

I think that member has a difficult time showing his face in the city of Vancouver and attending any event. There is a fundamental feeling that the most basic form of accountability is to your voters. Bill C-2 does not deal with that. We have to ask the question as to why this bill, if it is about ethics and dealing with ethical practices, does not deal with this most fundamental question of honouring the vote of the people who elect us as members in this place?

I know that the member for Vancouver Kingsway has heard a lot from his constituents. I also want to lay it at the door of the Prime Minister. It was the Prime Minister who set up this arrangement just a few days after he spoke about the new government being the most transparent, the most accountable, and that he wanted to bring back the public trust. To me and to many people, it is quite incredible that within a few days of saying those words we would have this action

take place, where the voters of Vancouver Kingsway had their trust betrayed by a member who crossed the floor and a Prime Minister who basically participated in that act.

There are other issues that we wish were included in the bill, including the issue of democratic electoral reform. Again, this gets at the question of accountability and ethics as it relates to election practices themselves, the way we conduct our elections and the way we are voted into office. I am very proud of the fact that we in the NDP have championed the issue of democratic electoral reform. We are not going to give up on that issue.

We are very concerned that there is nothing in this bill that deals with electoral reform. It is an issue that we will keep pressing with this government and with all parties because we believe there is a real public appetite to democratize our electoral system. When people vote, their vote should actually count. We want the House of Commons to reflect the way people are actually voting. This is something we will definitely keep pressing.

We are also concerned that Bill C-2 does not go far enough in terms of the limits that need to be placed on practices around lobbying. As the member for Winnipeg Centre outlined in his comments, we still see this going on. We see practices where the relationship with the government and lobbyists and people being appointed and favours being done is still there. It is still happening.

Although the bill does go some distance, we believe that it does not go far enough in limiting the way that lobbyists act. Canadians can expect to see amendments from the NDP when the bill goes to committee.

The same is true of the appointment process. Mr. Broadbent had put together a very good package to deal with appointments. While this bill contains some of those elements, it is still within the purview of the PMO and basically gives a veto to the PMO. We think that is something that needs to be further reviewed to ensure that there is clearly an independent process.

• (1300)

Finally, as many members have remarked, it is questionable as to why the government chose to leave out its access to information reform package that was promised. We all know that when there is an environment of secrecy, there is also an environment of corruption.

The promised package of reform on access to information, opening up information and providing access to people, is a fundamental part of the spirit of this bill. The fact that it is not here is really a contradiction to what the government has put forward. We are very concerned that it is not here and again we will be pressing that in committee to ensure that those questions are raised and that there is indeed a commitment to bring forward the reform for access to information.

We will be giving this close scrutiny in committee. It is a substantial bill. We need to ensure that it is actually followed through and that it does not fall or stall under its own weight, whether it is in the House or in the Senate. We believe that elements of this bill must go through and that we must work in the public interest to bring back public trust and confidence in what we do in this place.

Government Orders

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, through the past terms of Parliament, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates took approximately 17 months of meetings, reviews, calling of witnesses, and drafting and passing legislation for the whistleblower act. That legislation was awaiting royal assent, but obviously that will not happen.

This part of the proposed act would cause a total recommencement of this entire process, which occurred at considerable expense to the government by calling witnesses from essentially all over the world.

Generally, in a minority government situation, it was clearly the prerogative of the other parties to defeat that legislation, even in committee, or insert those amendments that they felt were necessary because it certainly would have carried.

I am asking the member if her party has a particular perspective on the recommencement of this legislation and if her representative actually felt that it was good legislation because it did pass unanimously through the committee stage and on to first, second and third reading?

•(1305)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, while I am not the critic and I am not a member of that committee, I would point out that the NDP has been very consistent in wanting to bring forward whistleblower legislation and have it pass through the House.

I would point out to the member that the original introduction from the President of the Treasury Board under the Liberal government was so poor that it actually did fall to the committee and the opposition parties to go back and redo it, and to come forward with another package. In fact, many people thought the bill that was brought forward was actually worse than the status quo. That was kind of an interesting situation and I do not think we should forget that.

It is a priority for the NDP to put in place whistleblower legislation that protects people's rights. There are some aspects of the current provisions in Bill C-2 that we have concerns about in terms of the compensation that is being put forward, but we have been on this from day one.

It is one of those issues where the former government had so much time to deal with; however, like so many issues, it was a record of broken and failed promises. That legislation could have happened a long time ago if the government were truly in favour of it, but what it brought forward was not very good and it had to be redone by the committee.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the distinguished member is absolutely right when she says that the previous Liberal government brought forward a piece of legislation on whistleblower protection that was so chronically flawed that every whistleblower in the country opposed it.

The Liberal government claimed it wanted whistleblower protection, yet it took two years not to pass whistleblower protection. It sent it to committee, loaded it with flaws, bogged it down with bureaucracy, and interrupted it with scandals that had to be

investigated before that committee. Ultimately, after two years of promises, in fact after 13 years of promises, the Liberal government never passed into law whistleblower protection.

The reality is that the Liberals are now making the case that we need to slow down on the accountability act because they do not want the accountability act. They do not want whistleblower protection. They do not want to extend the Auditor General's control. They do not want to broaden access to information. They do not want any of those things.

I wonder if the hon. member and her party will continue with their record of supporting accountability to help this government pass swiftly into law the accountability act, despite efforts to block it by the Liberal Party.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I have been very clear that the NDP sees this as a major priority.

We are also very aware, though, that this is a major bill. What is it, 270 pages in length? It does require a lot of scrutiny and we will do that very carefully. It is really important that we focus attention on ensuring that the bill gets implemented and that it does not get stalled. There may be some amendments. That is why it will go to committee.

In terms of the whistleblower legislation, the history is there, but it is important, if we are genuine in our intent to actually have whistleblower protection and if the government is genuine in its intent in having accountability and ethics, to work in a very constructive way to get the bill to a place where there will be all party agreement. I do not know if that is possible.

We will certainly have some amendments and that is legitimate, but our intent is to improve the bill to make it the best it can be to restore the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. The Chair recognizes the hon. member for Malpeque on a point of order.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the parliamentary secretary opposite that there is no strategy by the Liberals to block the bill. We want to get it to committee fast. I know he wants—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The Chair appreciates the point made by the hon. member, but it appears to the Chair that it is a point of debate and not a point of order. The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Mr. Speaker, my question to the hon. member from Vancouver was very straightforward. The committee on whistleblower legislation met for 17 months. The legislation was passed and anything to infer that there was some kind of process, it was a joint process of all committee—

•(1310)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Again, I appreciate the point, but the period for questions and comments on the previous member's speech has expired. We are now resuming debate and I will recognize the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Government Orders

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in talking about the accountability act I will go back through a bit of the history. During my term, which started in 2004, we called numerous witnesses. We realized that the previous legislation that had been proposed but which was never brought to the Commons, was flawed and had some serious problems. We had 17 months essentially of having people make representations as witnesses from the United States and all over Canada, people who essentially had been victimized as whistleblowers.

We had a tremendous amount of concurrence in terms of the understanding of the legislation that in a minority government forum all parties would have input. Indeed, several of the committee members are in the House today. Through that process, indeed, on the last day of Parliament in June 2005, the legislation actually concluded in Parliament and went forward.

Since we already have the legislation, which has gone through the process of having called witnesses and having spent a lot of time calling these people, why would this legislation not simply be passed and, if it needs strengthening in some form or another, then we could simply do it through other processes? We know a lot of work has already been done and that during the committee process there were certainly more members of opposition parties at that time than the government which, in effect, gave them a majority on that committee.

It seems strange that the parliamentary secretary would resort to attacking other kinds of things as opposed to simply answering the question. I did not think I had asked anything untoward. It was pretty clear in terms of this and it was a reasonable question to ask.

The second component glaringly and obviously missing from the legislation is third party financing. Most of the people with whom I have spoken can agree with the financing rules and with the general intent of the accountability act. I do not know anybody on our side who is trying to slow this down whatsoever. In fact, we are probably ready to send it to committee as soon as possible so let us do that.

In this case the question then looms: Could other nations have an influence on Canadian elections? It is very clear that there is a gap in the proposed legislation. If we want it to work and we are concerned about making it work then let us send it to committee where these kinds of things can be addressed and there are no tragic gaps that are in there now.

Yes, the legislation is necessary and timely but, in this case, I believe that with the good work of committee we can actually make it even better.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments and his willingness to move this along. Some of his colleagues today made reference to the Auditor General and her ability to review expenditures with first nations communities in the country and that somehow this was wrong.

I want to bring something to the member's attention. In Saskatchewan I have had aboriginal people speak to me about a very serious situation. They have not received any of their child tax credit payments for their bands and they have other bands in Saskatchewan that have received way more than they are entitled to. By the looks of the books it looks like there could be perhaps

millions of dollars unaccounted for in the administration of funds by Indian affairs in the province of Saskatchewan.

Children and young people in those bands are the real victims of this abuse. I turned the whole matter over to the Auditor General who told me that her hands were tied because she had no authority to review the matter, which I found quite shocking. I guess I should have known but I assumed that the Auditor General would have the ability to review this thing. This to me cries out for some accountability. The Auditor General should be able to lift the veil, look at these sorts of problems and root them out. I think the aboriginal people in Saskatchewan would want the Auditor General to review the books to ensure there is real accountability on this sort of matter.

Does the member opposite share the same view as many of his colleagues about not giving the Auditor General the ability to review the expenditures that go out to first nations bands in Saskatchewan and other provinces to ensure the money is really going where it is supposed to be going and that we are getting results for the money we are spending?

• (1315)

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Mr. Speaker, two days ago, April 25, the chief of the Assembly of First Nations corresponded with every member of Parliament addressing this very specific question. I am sure the member opposite did not intend that he would represent first nations communities.

The letter is very clear in terms of the issue at hand. If it is accountability I do not believe that anyone in the Assembly of First Nations has any issue with that whatsoever. However for someone to insinuate that any one group, in terms of self-government or any of these processes, is deliberately doing something incorrect, I think the person probably owes an apology to the Assembly of First Nations.

We can only go by our communications in a nation to nation discussion. I believe that many of the points put forward by Chief Fontaine are reasonable and achievable in terms of a really rational approach to accountability.

Let us try to stop the accusation being made continually by the parliamentary secretary about what Chief Fontaine is hiding. I do not think that is the kind of talk we want to hear in Parliament.

Basically, we want to improve the bill. I have 11 first nation communities in my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River. They have lots of issues with different parts of accountability and accounting: duplication of some of the requirements, reporting that they feel is not really necessary, and those types of things. However in general they know that they are audited. That is very clear. Once one has been in the field and met with first nations at the community level, then one understands that they are very sincere about wanting to be accountable and in a democratic way.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak to Bill C-2, introduced at the first session of the 39th Parliament. The bill is called the Federal Accountability Act.

Government Orders

First of all, I would like to remind that we would have preferred to see the government follow the recommendations of authorities such as the Office de la langue française who clearly declared that it would have been better to call that legislation the *Loi sur la responsabilité* in French. That would have been more in line with French usage and would have been a recognition of the recommendations of the Office.

I will limit my comments to four or five aspects of the bill. First, I would like to remind the House that this is relevant legislation. Bill C-2 is more relevant today than at any other moment in Canadian history. Why? Because the Gomery commission showed us how a government could divert public funds for partisan purposes and in the end prevent public money from being spent wisely.

The ad scam — a defining moment in Canada's history — has made Bill C-2 more relevant than ever. We must remember that, during the Gomery commission, the Bloc Québécois was the only party that presented a report with over 72 recommendations to ensure that what Canadians saw, learned and read in the last years could not happen again.

First of all, the Bloc was proposing, in its October 2005 report, to use all the means at our disposal to recover the money from the sponsorship program. Moreover, we had to give more power and resources to Parliament officials to ensure greater integrity and transparency.

Second, we asked for an amendment to the Access to Information Act. We know that, from one government to another, from one commitment to another, all governments refuse to acknowledge that the Access to Information Act must be amended in Canada. We have been debating this issue since 1987. Governments are passing the buck to one another. It is clear that the culture of secrecy is the policy of all the governments in Canada since the debate has been launched.

This government, like the previous ones, should concur with the arguments of the Information Commissioner and should start reforming the Access to Information Act. This would allow citizens to learn more about the use of public funds as well as about public policies, government plans and programs. Canadian taxpayers should be able to find out how their money is really used.

The Access to Information Act has many loopholes. Some government corporations and trusts are not covered by this act. Yet, as governments increasingly use foundations and trusts, it would be absolutely normal for taxpayers from Quebec and Canada to be able to find out how financial resources are used in foundations such as the Foundation for Sustainable Development, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation or other foundations.

We would therefore have expected that, with Bill C-2, this government would begin seriously reviewing and seriously considering the need to review the Access to Information Act.

Also, through its 72 recommendations, the Bloc Québécois was proposing to strengthen the accountability of the individuals appointed by the government.

• (1320)

The relevance of Bill C-2 seems obvious to us.

There are naturally a certain number of improvements to be made. Some of the important progress included in this bill comes from concrete recommendations and proposals made by the Bloc in the last few years.

Here is one for example: the appointment of returning officers. The Bloc Québécois put forward Bill C-312, which provided that returning officers would be appointed through a competitive process, as defined by the Public Service Employment Act. Bill C-312 from the Bloc could have certainly been included in Bill C-2. Of course, Bill C-2 says that returning officers will be appointed on the basis of merit by the Chief Electoral Officer, but we believe that we must go even further. We must use the Quebec Election Act as a model, whereby the appointment of returning officers has to be done through a competitive process.

Accordingly, I encourage the government to examine carefully Bill C-312, put forward by the Bloc, and to be guided by it.

Second, the bill addresses the independence of the registrar of lobbyists. We believe that this is a step in the right direction. However, we would have liked to see the range of activities covered broadened and the penalties directly associated with the infringement of this legislation toughened.

We must first broaden to the maximum the range of activities covered by the bill, then make sure that we extend the exclusion period in those activities, and finally, we must toughen the penalties. However, while this bill has some interesting proposals and is going in the right direction, we would like to see the government go a little further.

The third point that we have to look at is the Act respecting the financing of political parties. There will be a ban on corporate donations. We believe that this is the right road to take. In the last few years, the Bloc Québécois has played a major role as far as the Act respecting the financing of political parties and the reforms brought about in the House of Commons are concerned.

We believe that we have just come full circle and that, with regard to political financing, the measures taken by Canada will resemble more and more what is being done in Quebec and will imitate the models that were developed in Quebec. I am thinking, for example, about the ban on corporate donations. There is room for that, and the idea of limiting personal contributions to \$1,000 is certainly another step in the right direction.

I want to get back to the Access to Information Act. For us, parliamentarians, for journalists and for all those who wish to have transparency in the government, the hope that the Conservatives created in the last election campaign should have found its way into the Access to Information Act. As I have said, in all the debates that have taken place in Canada since 1987, everyone agrees that the Access to Information Act needs to be reviewed and that the culture of secret within ministers' offices and departments has no place in a so-called democratic society. That act has to be amended so that the public can be better informed.

Government Orders

• (1325)

This does not apply only to this government, but to all governments.

We strongly support Bill C-2. However, we intend to bring forward amendments, including at committee stage.

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the contribution made by the member to this debate. I would like the member to elaborate a little more on the spending limits and full disclosure on leadership contests. As the member will know, there is still some uncertainty about what happened in the last Conservative leadership race, and as the Liberals are about to enter into a leadership race, although I guess they are in the middle of it now, I would be interested in hearing a little more about that.

As Ed Broadbent said in his wrap-up of work on this very important subject before he left Parliament, political parties are not private clubs. The public has a right to know who is financing leadership bids. I know the people in my community of Hamilton Mountain would be very interested in being assured that there will be full disclosure and transparency and in the end that there will be public accountability for who is financing the leadership bids.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, we must not create a system that would allow us to do indirectly what we cannot do directly. In recent years, the new legislation on political financing provided for stricter rules with regard to the expenses of candidates seeking nomination in a riding. There are now new rules that did not exist when I was elected eight or nine year ago.

If we want to tighten, and rightly so, the rules that apply to candidates seeking nomination, we should also tighten the rules that apply to leadership candidates for all political parties, including the Liberal Party of Canada.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for his speech on “imputabilité”, or on “responsabilité” should I say.

Right now, Canadians, Quebeckers and Acadians, everybody that is, see Parliament as an institution which represents them. They all want to have respect for their members of Parliament but in return, they want those members and the political parties to respect them.

Members crossing the floor is an issue that bothers me. We can ask what we want of our fellow citizens, their support, for example. However, they are not naive. They know which candidate and which party they are voting for.

Earlier, the member said that we should not be able to do by the back door what we cannot do by the front door. That is exactly how people see the situation. Some candidates run for a political party but change party once elected. They do so for personal gain rather than for the benefit of their riding. That would not cause any problem if people readily accepted that, but it makes them furious.

I would like to hear the comments of the member on that issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. Please be very brief.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, in the few weeks that followed this government's election, we have seen members legitimately elected under the banner of one political party change parties and be offered ministerial positions. This is a totally unacceptable ethical situation. That is exactly what a former Liberal minister, not to mention his name, has done in recent weeks.

If we want the people to have confidence once again in our political system, we must ensure that the voters' choice is respected. The people deserve—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry to interrupt the member.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-2, the Federal Accountability Act. In this 39th Parliament, Bill C-2 could be extremely beneficial to Canadians and could prevent continuing corruption, both from the Liberals, as in the past and perhaps in the present as well

Several of the proposals for ethical measures that Ed Broadbent made public before the last election are found in the bill.

First, I would like to raise a point: I am disappointed that, in a country such as ours, a country that is officially bilingual, the Prime Minister has willfully chosen a bad translation of the word accountability. I will quote from the *Journal de Montréal* of April 25:

—The Journal learned yesterday that the Prime Minister's Office has willingly rejected the recommendation of the federal Translation Bureau by entitling his bill “sur l'imputabilité”, a bad translation of the original English title. ... Yesterday a reliable source said that the Prime Minister disregarded the recommendation made by federal experts on official languages.

In proper French, the bill should be entitled “Loi fédérale sur la responsabilité”. The issue is highly political. As the critic for official languages, I find this attitude deplorable.

As for the reform of the Canada Elections Act, the bill sets a limit on campaign donations and bans all contributions by corporations and unions. It cleans up the use of funds held in trust during an election campaign and sets limits and rules with regard to gifts to candidates. However, it leaves aside certain key elements of the proposal made by Ed Broadbent, former member for Ottawa Centre, on ethics. There is nothing concerning fixed election dates, electoral reform and spending limits or transparency requirements for leadership campaigns. And it does not prohibit floor crossing, an issue which we think must be examined in the 39th Parliament.

Government Orders

With regard to floor crossing, I remember the member for Kings—Hants. As mentioned by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, when the member for Kings—Hants crossed the floor to join the Liberal Party, the Leader of the Opposition, the current Prime Minister, said that anyone who would change parties for 30 pieces of silver would make their government corrupt. Had the member for Vancouver Kingsway remained a Liberal, he would have had the salary of a regular MP. However, he crossed the floor and became minister. I do not think he would have changed parties to become a backbencher. I feel very strongly about this issue.

I will give a concrete example of the way people perceive those who represent them. There is a reason why the popularity of members of Parliament is at 14 per cent only. We are lower than anyone else in society. This is how we are perceived, and we deserve it, because of the things that are done in the House and within political parties. My colleagues will remember the member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, Angela Vautour, who went from the NDP to the Progressive Conservative Party—that was its name then. I remember visiting her riding and meeting a lady who was over 75 years old and who said that she had been a Liberal all her life, that she had voted Liberal all her life and that she had never voted Conservative. She was not crazy. She was a very intelligent woman.

• (1335)

She knew that the candidate, Angela Vautour, was running for the New Democratic Party. So she decided to make a change and vote for the person in a party she could support. She could, we might say, test-drive the party to see what would happen. However, she was certainly not going to vote for the Conservative Party.

This woman from the Bouctouche region also said that she had contributed \$300 to the election campaign. She considered it the greatest insult of all to have the member cross the floor of the House to join another political party, a party she would never have voted for.

This applies to all political parties. I am sure that here in Canada people who voted Conservative all their lives would never have voted Liberal. They did, however, decide to vote for a person. To change parties is to betray the confidence of Canadians and Quebecers. If that were true we would not have seen what happened in Vancouver, with people demonstrating in front of the riding office of the member for Vancouver Kingsway.

This new government talks about cleaning up Parliament, being ethical, but it allows a member to be Liberal one day and Conservative the next and be paid as a minister. I have a problem with that.

It appears, it is true, that changing from Liberal to Conservative, makes no difference; they are the same thing. This is what the member for Vancouver Kingsway said the next day on the news. I agree with him on that. There is no difference.

Imagine someone elected democratically under the banner of one political party and who, the next day, gets into office because the Prime Minister or someone in his office or in cabinet called and told the person if he wanted they could offer him a ministerial position with a salary increase of \$50,000 to \$60,000. No problem. He accepts. When the member for Kings—Hants changed from

Conservative to Liberal, the same Prime Minister, then the Leader of the Opposition, said the member had been bought for a quarter. In the other case, it was \$60,000. That is why Canadians lose faith in politics and in us and I do not blame them.

The government is presenting a bill that we intend to support. We want to improve it. This bill is almost as thick as a brick. I could use it to build a house. It is a good thick bill. Just before the bill was presented, Michael Fortier was rushed into the Senate. Yet, when it was in opposition, his party was against Senate appointments. Nevertheless, he was appointed minister, while the same party had also said that nobody should become a minister without having first been elected by the public. We were given the excuse that Montreal needed to be represented by a minister. But Montreal had chosen not to elect a minister. It was Montreal's choice not to do so, as it was Toronto's choice. What the Conservatives did was not right.

Let us hope that, during the debates on this bill, the government will have the wisdom to change its attitude and to take concrete action to deal with all the things that are not right or ethical.

• (1340)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am really proud of the vigour and passion shown by my colleague from New Brunswick.

I know that the member for Tobique—Mactaquac also considered the members from New Brunswick as being passionate people. However, I am a Liberal, not a Conservative, and there is a difference.

Given the obvious cooperation between the Conservatives and the NDP, I am wondering if there is still a difference between them. But here is the real question regarding this bill. With respect to floor crossing, does the member think that it would be good to allow a cooling off period or does he think that his party, the NDP, does not need one for this bill that, I hope, will make it into law.

• (1345)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe said that there is a difference because he is a Liberal member, not a Conservative one, adding that there was no difference between Conservatives and NDP because we are on speaking terms. I would therefore like to remind the people of Canada that the Liberals also voted with the Conservatives for approving the Speech from the Throne.

It is important to make it clear that, in the House of Commons, we will vote in favour of bills that are good for the people of Canada; if and when a bad one is introduced, we will vote against it. There is no question of us being in bed with any given political party, that is for sure.

With respect to the period of reflection when a member leaves a party to join another, I do not think that it is necessary. There is no cooling off necessary; there is only one thing to do: become independent and represent the people of one's riding. Members who want elections should resign; this will cause an election to be held. This way, the voters will be able to decide who they want to represent them in the House of Commons.

Government Orders

Indeed, this seat behind me does not belong to me; it belongs to Acadie—Bathurst. It is up to the people of Acadie—Bathurst to decide who they want to represent them in the House of Commons, and under which political banner. This is not to be decided based on a single party and a \$60,000 increase in salary.

[*English*]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a question was asked in the House of one of the New Democratic members, who was giving a similar speech with respect to floor crossing. That may be the most relevant issue with respect to accountability, but I would like the member to go a little further than that.

Last year we had a very important vote in this place. It was on same sex marriages. A member of the New Democratic caucus, who in her conscience felt that her constituents were opposed to the legislation, voted against that legislation. We know what happened. She was kicked out of the caucus. Even the Liberals would not do that because a number of Liberals stood and opposed it. Then the NDP went one step further. It would not even let her run in her riding in the next election and put someone up against her.

Should this type of thing be discussed with respect to accountability?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, just for the information of my dear colleague, he should check the record. I am the whip of the NDP, and she was not kicked out of the caucus.

As a matter of fact, under our democratic rules, people have the right to run in a riding and have an election. If the people of Churchill decided—

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I appreciate the hon. member providing a short answer, just as I had requested.

• (1350)

[*English*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the first full speech I have given in the House, so I want to recognize the constituents of Nanaimo—Cowichan for sending me back to the House for a second time.

I am pleased today to speak about the accountability bill. Bill C-2 is an important opportunity for parliamentarians to have a full debate around the importance of openness and transparency in government. Canadians have been calling for accountability in light of the shenanigans over the last couple of years. They want parliamentarians to be responsible to the Canadian public.

There are a couple of aspects of the proposed legislation to which I would like to specifically speak.

We have heard a great deal about democratic accountability for members of Parliament. We have heard a great deal of sound and fury around the Vancouver Kingsway member, who shortly after an election chose to go from one side of the House to the other. Whether it was the actual physical walking from one side of the House to the other, or whether it was the virtual crossing, does not matter. What

matters is the fact that the member chose to run for one party and sit as a member of another. One would ask whether it would seem fair and reasonable for his constituents, who work and live there and who pay taxes, to have a say on that. I would encourage members to look at supporting an amendment that would ban floor crossing the House.

The second matter in the accountability bill that I specifically would like speak to is electoral reform. In the last sitting of the House, the former member for Ottawa Centre, Ed Broadbent, put forward a proposal to the government of the day, suggesting a format for parliamentarians and the public at large to consider electoral reform, specifically proportional representation. Five provinces in Canada are in various stages of considering proportional representation. This would seem like an opportune time for the House to consider demonstrating some leadership by examining in detail and with meaning electoral reform. I noticed there was a glancing mention in the throne speech around it, but I would encourage us to move quickly in implementing some steps toward having Parliament and the Canadian public engage in a dialogue and some planning around electoral reform.

Many Canadians no longer vote, and that is a major concern for us in the democratic process. It is important for Canadians to feel that their votes count. Canada is one of the few western democratic countries left that still relies on a first past the post system. The House is a good example where somebody can only have 35%, give or take, as a percentage of the vote and yet form government. Many Canadians do not feel this is an adequate representation of their vote. I would encourage the House to develop a strategy around electoral reform.

We often talk about accountability. Earlier today in the House we were talked about people from Garden Hill. The chief and some of his council are here today talking to parliamentarians about the fact that their community has been hit with a second outbreak of tuberculosis in two years. It took eight months to diagnose the first case. There has not been the kind of assistance they need to help them deal with this problem. They are pleading for parliamentarians to pay some attention to the desperate situation in their community.

One might wonder how that relates to accountability. It relates to accountability because one of the reasons for an outbreak of tuberculosis is due to poverty and inadequate housing. Numerous studies have been done in Canada which have talked about the dire conditions on many first nations reserves with respect to their housing situations, yet we still do not have an adequate remedy.

Statements by Members

●(1355)

Just to refresh the memory of the House, in the Auditor General's report of April 2003 under Appendix A, she listed numerous studies which have been done that talk about the conditions in first nations communities and the recommendations that have been made to remedy that situation. This goes back in recent memory to 1983 and the special committee on Indian self-government, also known as the Penner report; in 1985, the task force on program review; in 1990, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs; in 1991, the Office of the Auditor General; in 1992, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs; in 1993, the Office of the Auditor General; in 1996, the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples; and in 1998, Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan.

A litany of Conservatives and Liberals have failed to act in a meaningful way on housing on reserve. Now for the people who live in that community there is the third world outbreak of tuberculosis which is directly attributable to lack of adequate housing. On top of that, only 4% of this community of 3,500 has running water.

We must go beyond talking about accountability in terms of making parliamentarians accountable for how money is spent. We must be accountable to the Canadian people to make sure that first nations and aboriginal peoples have access to clean water, access to safe, clean affordable housing and that they get the health care that is their right in this day and age.

When we are talking about accountability, I firmly believe we need to expand that conversation beyond talking about parliamentarians and how they spend their money.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): On questions and comments, the hon. member for York—South Weston. However, I want to advise the House that there is a little less than two minutes left. It will be a short question and a short answer.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very short question. I appreciate very much the point the member has made with respect to building accountability into programs through the budget and the estimates. The member suggested that the House may not have the responsibility to the extent of making sure that money that is budgeted for is spent on programs. That happened with respect to the Walkerton debacle where money was not spent on programs with respect to water quality and we know the result.

How does the member feel that accountability can be built in where programs are delivered? If they are not delivered, would we be made aware of that through the appropriate structure, be it the committee or whatever?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, it is appropriate that we ask that reports do come back to the House. One of the criticisms the Auditor General specifically raised was some of the reporting, for example, that Canada Mortgage and Housing had done around building houses on reserve and in fact those reports were not coming back to the House. There was no accountability built in. One of the recommendations the Auditor General specifically made was that Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporate do that kind of reporting.

I think it will be incumbent upon the committee to ask that those reports on money which goes into housing actually come back to the committee for review and consideration.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

●(1400)

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while farmers and governments focus a lot of time and effort on farm support programs and international trade talks, there are other things which could be done to help fix the crisis in agriculture. I encourage farmers to continue to contact me with suggestions of things which could make a real difference.

Here are some of the suggestions already made: Make the CAIS replacement program more predictable and simpler so that the \$500 to \$3,000 application costs can be reduced or eliminated; ensure that products like generic ivermectin and glyphosate, which are less expensive in the United States, will continue to come across the border; return to farmers effective control of gophers, which may save \$200 million or more each year; remove unnecessary red tape which costs farmers time and money; find ways to get more reliable and less expensive rail delivery. There are many more.

Enough of these smaller changes could make a real difference. Focusing more effort on things which can be done more quickly just makes good sense.

* * *

HOUSING

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Winnipeg South Centre is home to Canadian Forces Base Kapyong, the former base of the Princess Pats Regiment. There are approximately 350 housing units on the site, 190 of which have been empty for almost two years.

The high maintenance, heating and associated servicing costs for these empty houses is an extraordinary waste of taxpayers' dollars, and all the while we hear about additional funding for the military. There are also other urgent housing priorities for families in the city of Winnipeg.

These homes could be put to good use immediately to relieve the rental housing shortage in Winnipeg and to provide opportunities for children and their parents.

I have written to the Minister of National Defence and asked him to immediately declare these homes surplus. I have asked him to ensure that the transfer process to the Canada Lands Company takes place quickly.

These homes have been vacant since the summer of 2004. Residents of Winnipeg need safe places to live. It is time to act and I urge the government to do so. I await the minister's response.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

MINING

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is mining week in Quebec, and I would like to recognize the vitality of the mining industry in my riding and congratulate the skilled workers who are employed in it.

The regions of Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Northern Quebec are major mining centres. A significant share of mining exploration and operations investment is made in those regions.

In Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Northern Quebec, the number of jobs in mining rose from 4,600 in 2004 to 5,900 jobs in 2005. In Northern Quebec, the number of jobs is likely to keep going up, given the mining potential in that region. Some mining companies have prospered because of the rise in the price of gold, which has hit an all-time high, and because of certain tax measures.

However, it is essential that the federal government combine forces with Quebec to implement tax measures that will minimize cyclical impacts, and so provide the industry with greater stability.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN FORCES

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the brave men who lost their lives in Afghanistan. They served our country with honour and distinction and deserve our respect and thanks.

The Prime Minister has indicated that he will not respect the tradition of lowering the flags to half-mast in honour of those who have died serving our country, nor will he allow Canadians to participate in the solemn ceremony of paying our respects as the bodies are returned to Canada.

The Prime Minister suggests that November 11 is the only appropriate time for honouring the men and women who died serving our country in wars and in peacekeeping efforts.

I take the Prime Minister at his word and would ask him to demonstrate his commitment by giving unanimous consent to both waiving notice and passing today my private member's bill which amends the Holidays Act to make Remembrance Day a legal holiday and to give it the same status as Canada Day.

I will give a copy to each House leader. I would ask all members to remain in the House after question period so that we can unanimously endorse this sign of respect for those who have sacrificed their lives for Canada.

* * *

● (1405)

PROMISED LAND PROJECT

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Chatham-Kent—Essex is a riding that is rich with tradition and history.

One of our most famous historical footnotes is that Chatham-Kent—Essex and surrounding area is the end of the underground railroad.

Between 1840 and 1880, one-third of Chatham's population was made up of people of African descent, a diverse society that included an elite class of free people of colour. Their resources, education and experience connected the area to a sophisticated network of abolitionists and enabled them to make important contributions to the community as a whole.

The Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society, the Dresden Community Development Association and the University of Ottawa are partnering to restore this lost history in a new project entitled, "Promised Land: The Freedom and Experience of Blacks in the Chatham and Dawn Settlement". This project will create an accurate picture of black settlement and black contribution and will create a greater appreciation of the diverse backgrounds and talents of early black settlers.

I am proud of the tradition and history that our first black settlers brought to my riding of Chatham-Kent—Essex.

* * *

ETOBICOKE—LAKESHORE CONSTITUENCY

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my gratitude to the people of Etobicoke—Lakeshore for electing me as their representative in this Parliament. I am honoured to be their voice in the House of Commons, and I will serve them to the best of my ability.

Nearly one-third of my constituents are first generation Canadians from many backgrounds, especially Italian, Polish and Ukrainian. I hope to serve all of these communities with affection and respect.

Etobicoke—Lakeshore can be especially proud of the strength of its community organizations: Lakeshore Community Partnership, LAMP, the food bank, Stonegate Community Health Centre, Mimico Residents Association, and New Toronto Good Neighbours.

[Translation]

This riding can take special pride in the école Félix-Leclerc.

[English]

They all serve their community with devotion. I will do my best to enhance their capacity to do so and serve all the people of this wonderful riding.

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WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, April 28 is Canada's official Day of Mourning for Persons Killed or Injured in the Workplace.

According to WCB statistics, 928 Canadians were killed in the workplace in 2004 alone, and over 340,000 others were injured. That record meant that Canada was tied for worst place in the developed world. Sadly, our fatality rate was three times that of Germany.

In my home province of British Columbia, there were 188 fatalities in 2005, the highest toll in 25 years, and 43 of those fatalities were in the forest sector.

Statements by Members

We are encouraged to see the B.C. government create the new position of Forest Safety Ombudsman and a dedicated coroner for forest related deaths, but safety ought to be everyone's concern.

On April 28, tomorrow, I encourage all Canadians to pause and remember the families and workers lost and injured on the job.

It is clear that Canada's safety record has room for improvement. May we, as members of Parliament, take our place alongside management and labour and work together to reduce accident and injury and to instill a culture of safety in the workplace.

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[*Translation*]

ERASMUS-DUSSAULT REPORT

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 2006 marks the tenth anniversary of the release of the Erasmus-Dussault Report on Aboriginal Peoples.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry, which was an initiative of then Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in response to the tragic events at Oka, was a promising start and a demonstration of political will, not to quantify the distress of the Aboriginal people, but to look for ways to remedy it.

Quebec recognizes the aboriginal peoples as distinct peoples who have a right to their culture, their language, their customs and their traditions, and their right to decide for themselves what path to take in developing their own identity.

The Bloc Québécois asks that the federal government adopt the findings of the Erasmus-Dussault Report and implement them at last.

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[*English*]

RAIL SAFETY

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that this week is Operation Lifesaver Rail Safety Week.

In the first three months of 2006, there were nine fatalities and nine serious injuries at crossings, down from 11 fatalities and 22 serious injuries last year. Incidents such as these remind us all of the need for greater awareness and safety around trains.

Operation Lifesaver is a national public safety program. It is co-sponsored by Transport Canada, the Railway Association of Canada and partners in police, communities and other organizations.

Over the past 25 years this program has helped to reduce crossing collisions and trespasser incidents by some 60%.

I urge everyone to participate and visit the Operation Lifesaver website at www.operationlifesaver.ca for event details in their area. Preventing tragedy begins with learning about what can be done to stay safe.

● (1410)

VOLUNTEERISM

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the honour being given to Marlene Bryenton of Charlottetown. This morning here in Ottawa she received the 2006 Thérèse Casgrain Volunteer Award.

This prestigious award was created to acknowledge the contributions of volunteers across Canada and to serve as a lasting legacy to the 2001 International Year of the Volunteer. The award is presented to one man and one woman whose pioneering spirit, social commitment and persistent endeavours have significantly improved the well-being of their fellow Canadians.

I can think of no Canadian more deserving of this prestigious award than Marlene Bryenton. She began volunteering as a young teen and continues to make tremendous contributions to her community today. She is well known on Prince Edward Island for her work with the Lake of Shining Waters IODE where she has been a dedicated volunteer for 39 years, implementing and coordinating numerous successful projects such as the Baby Think it Over program and for raising awareness of breast cancer.

She has spearheaded programs to help all ages and needs. Marlene has touched the lives of many and her efforts have been recognized through many prestigious awards.

I ask all my colleagues in the House to join me in paying tribute to this remarkable woman.

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LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first opportunity to rise in the House, I want to thank my constituents of Westlock—St. Paul for the mandate they have given me to represent them. They sent me here to work for them and to make Parliament work but the Liberals just do not get it. Instead of respecting the will of Canadians, they continue to threaten to bring down the government. Their threats and irresponsible sabre-rattling show they still put their own party interests above the interests of everyday Canadians.

The message from Canadians in the last election was very clear. They voted for change. They are tired of Liberal broken promises. The people of Canada want to see action on issues that are important to them. They want government cleaned up. They want the GST reduced. They want accessible health care and safer streets. They want choice in child care.

They do not want Liberal games jeopardizing their priorities.

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CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Labour Congress celebrates its 50th anniversary this week. As the national and democratic voice of labour, representing over three million workers, the CLC has much to celebrate. It has a proud record.

Oral Questions

Over the past 50 years, the CLC has played a pivotal role in establishing rights for Canadian workers which are now an important part of our Canadian work culture. The Canada pension plan, student loans, universal public medicare and laws promoting health and safety were all brought in through the work of the CLC.

In recognition of these incredible accomplishments and in celebration of its anniversary, Canada Post has issued a commemorative stamp.

We in the NDP stand in solidarity and congratulate the CLC and its dedicated members for the immeasurable work they have done and continue to do for the rights and equality for all Canadian workers.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians do support the young men and women of the armed forces. We know they are bravely executing the orders of their government but it is not an equation that support for our troops equals support for the mission. Each mission must be evaluated by cool heads every step of the way. Evaluation is a political responsibility, one that we in Parliament must never shirk.

That is why it was unsettling to read the defence minister's letter in the newspaper last Saturday which said, "Our commitment to this [Afghan] mission is unwavering".

No, our commitment to our young Canadians is unwavering and it is that commitment that compels us to monitor, analyze and evaluate each and every mission we dispatch. Our commitment to long term peace and justice is unwavering and that is the standard against which all decisions will be measured.

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●(1415)

[Translation]

VICTIMS OF CRIME AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, April 23 to 29, 2006, marks the first Victims of Crime Awareness Week, whose purpose is to raise our awareness about issues and about the services and laws available to help victims and their families. I would therefore like to recognize the dedication of the people who support victims of crime and draw attention to the recent victory won by an advocate for the rights of victims, who have too long been forgotten.

Pierre-Hughes Boisvenu, whose young daughter Julie was raped and murdered in June 2002, became an activist who for years called for more assistance for victims and their families. His commitment will be rewarded, because the Government of Quebec will be allowing families of crime victims to receive psychological assistance at public expense.

I therefore congratulate and thank Mr. Boisvenu today for his battle on behalf of victims of crime.

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to commend the Saskatchewan legislature, Premier Calvert, opposition leader Brad Wall and all members of the assembly for passing an all party motion calling upon the Conservative government to honour and implement the full scope of the Kelowna accord.

The Kelowna accord is not only about the fiscal commitments but also about the successful negotiations of the accord in setting a high water mark in the relationship between the federal government and aboriginal Canadians.

Prior to the 1970s, federal-aboriginal relations could best be described as "ad hoc crisis response", with aboriginal issues largely ignored and the federal government responding to a crisis. From the 1970s to the mid-1990s, the relationship changed, perhaps best described as adversarial. Aboriginal Canadians used the courts to advance and protect their rights. It was a time also marked by conflicts such as Oka and Ipperwash. The courts said, "Enough is enough".

The Kelowna accord was the culmination of the efforts by provincial premiers, the federal government and especially the aboriginal leaders themselves. I call upon the government to stand up for aboriginal Canadians.

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SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals slept right through the softwood lumber agreement while the Americans prepared for its expiry in 2001. Then for five years the Liberals dithered and delayed which cost the Canadian forest industry over \$5 billion.

The Liberals even voted against supporting our forest industry in 2002 and all the while they continued the most anti-American campaign that this country has ever seen. In fact, the Liberals did not even want a softwood deal in 2005 because they wanted to run an anti-American election campaign. The Liberals continued to play political games on the softwood lumber issue, right up to their election defeat in January of this year.

The Prime Minister and the government have been working continually to find a softwood resolution and we will find a softwood resolution because, unlike the Liberals, we know and respect the importance of the forest industry in this country.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's celebrated relationship with President Bush so far has given us a collapse in Cancun on the passport issue and now a sellout on softwood.

The provinces and the softwood lumber industry tell us that the Prime Minister is trying to stampede them into a bad deal, a deal at any cost, with a gun to the head of our producers. This is nothing less than abandoning free trade and turning our back on every legal victory Canada has won in this dispute.

Why has the Prime Minister now decided to cut and run on our softwood lumber industry?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to indicate that there is no final confirmation of any agreement with the Americans. If the Prime Minister has anything to say on this issue, he will be down to address the House later.

[Translation]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Very well, Mr. Speaker, it will be later. However, only two weeks ago, the Minister of Industry spread concern through the softwood industry by weakening the Canadian position. Now, the Prime Minister is negotiating an agreement that divides the industry, an agreement whose objective seems to be to follow the agenda of President Bush and not the Canadian agenda.

As a result of his minister's gaffe, does the Prime Minister now have any other choice than to accept the little that the Americans are offering us?

• (1420)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr., Speaker, I repeat what I said a few moments ago. For the benefit of all members of Parliament, I wish to advise that there is no agreement as we speak. If an agreement is reached, the Prime Minister will come here very shortly or later today to inform the members of this House of that event.

[English]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been said by some that free trade ranks somewhere between going to church and jogging as a virtue that is much talked about but little practised. It is now clear that the Prime Minister has no intention of practising the virtues he talked about.

In September of last year the Prime Minister told us that all duties had to be returned to Canada if the Canada-U.S. trade relationship was to remain fair.

When the Prime Minister does deign to come to this House, will he commit today to ensuring that none of the money collected illegally from Canadian producers winds up in the pockets of American lumber companies?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honestly quite unimpressed with what I am hearing on the other side of the House. Clearly this is an issue that is extremely important for all Canadians and particularly to the people who work in the forestry industry. I reiterate once again that when we have something to say on this issue, the Prime Minister will address the members of the House.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we have just heard is unbelievable. The American government

announced, Tuesday night, that an agreement in principle had been reached between the two governments.

Are the Americans lying or is it the minister? In fact, the announcement by the American government confirms the agreement as of Tuesday evening, after which there were consultations.

Speaking of consultations, the Government of Quebec and Quebec industry are calling on the government to return to the table and do its homework. Will the government go back to the table or will it allow the Americans to hold a knife to their throats?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must correct my hon. colleague by telling him that we on this side are extremely anxious to hear the opinions of everyone. We are not going to precipitate matters. We will defend the best interests of Canada, of the industry, and, of course, all the workers in that industry.

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister had only to listen to the television news this morning to know that Ontario is totally opposed. This morning, Quebec told the government to go back and do its duty. Moreover, British Columbia is expected to make known its position in a few minutes.

We do not need a diploma to understand that the people of Canada recognize that this government leaves them to fend for themselves and favours the interests of Americans rather than Canadian interests.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague can shout his fine slogans until he is hoarse, but the fact remains that the Conservative Party made a commitment to try to solve the problem, whereas the Liberal government was not able to do anything regarding this issue over a period of many years. If an announcement is to be made, it will be made today.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the agreement in principle between Canada and the United States in the softwood lumber dispute establishes an export tax on Canadian softwood lumber, requires the Americans to reimburse only \$4 billion of the \$5.3 billion in duties paid by Canadian industries, and limits Canadian exports to 34%. In short, this agreement in principle amounts to negotiating far beneath all the rulings handed down under NAFTA.

Why does this government suggest to the softwood industry that it should accept such a bad deal?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as usual the opposition, and especially the Bloc Québécois, are one-sided in their opinions. We have not had a chance to hear the other version of the facts. I would ask my hon. colleague to wait for the results. When the time comes, the members of this House will be informed about the issues at stake.

Oral Questions

● (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, an agreement in principle has been suggested to the provinces and the industry. If someone is one-sided, it is this government which is one-sided in favour of the interests of the Americans and not those of Canada and Quebec. That is the reality. That is what this government is doing.

Will the Conservatives agree to return to the negotiating table and improve this agreement in principle in order to meet the demands of the Quebec industry? They should not say that there is no agreement in principle because they have proposed one to the provinces and industries. They have signed an agreement in principle with the Americans, not a full agreement. Obviously, it has to be accepted by the provinces and the industry, but there was an agreement in principle.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what my colleague says, I repeat that the agreements to be concluded—if that happens and if the Prime Minister so decides—will be for all Canadians. These agreements will not be concluded for Quebecers only but for all Canadians and all the workers involved.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one of the requests made by the Quebec Forest Industry Council for improvements pertained to Quebec obtaining a larger share of Canadian softwood exports as a result of basing the calculation of the quotas on the last five years rather than just 2005.

Does the government recognize that this is a reasonable request which it should immediately carry out?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition members are getting agitated again, even though we do not have an agreement yet. I repeat that if an agreement is reached, the Prime Minister will be present to announce the ins and outs of it to the members of this House. Let us wait for the Prime Minister to arrive before drawing hasty conclusions.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the next few minutes I will fax over to the minister the agreement in principle that I have in my office.

Does the government realize that by refusing to implement loan guarantees thus far, it has put the entire softwood lumber industry in a position of weakness and that if the rest of the negotiations fail an aid package will be needed more than ever? Will an aid package for the industry be announced tomorrow morning if the negotiations fail?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it would be reasonable for the members of this House to ensure that they have all the information and wait for the Prime Minister to come to them and present the ins and outs of the matter. Then the hon. member could ask his questions constructively.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for years the forest communities from one end of this country to the other have been devastated by these U.S. tariffs on our softwood

lumber. Just this last week 300 jobs were lost in Smooth Rock Falls in Northern Ontario.

The fact is that the previous government and now the current government is selling out working families, accepting 80¢ on the dollar. That is a sellout. New export charges are a sellout. New quotas are a sellout.

Will the Prime Minister finally stand up to U.S. trade bullying and say no to this slap in the face?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for a number of years members of this House and the members of the previous House and the previous House before that saw this issue grow and grow without any resolve.

I am asking the member to reasonably wait until such time as the Prime Minister comes to see us. As we know, there is no agreement as it stands now. When the Prime Minister comes, he will probably address this House today in that regard.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, members in this House have been waiting for years, as have people in working communities, for action from the other side and now we are being asked to wait once again. What is there to negotiate?

[*Translation*]

Canada won ruling after ruling at NAFTA and the WTO. We have nothing to fear. At 80¢ to the dollar, with new export charges and new quotas, this is a sellout.

Is the Prime Minister afraid to stand up to George Bush or will he show that he has a backbone and reject this proposal?

● (1430)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the risk of sounding redundant, it is clear that on this side of the House we are not doormats and we are not giving in.

Like the hon. member, for a number of years now workers in our communities and at our plants have been suffering as a result of this problem. We are trying to resolve the problem. I am asking my hon. colleague and all the hon. members of this House to wait for an announcement on this.

[*English*]

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Trade is leaving a disastrous legacy. First, he sells out his constituents. Now, he is selling out British Columbia and the rest of Canada with a softwood deal which he originally rejected.

Why does the ethically challenged minister think this deal, the same one he took a chainsaw to a few months ago, is now worth signing when it would lead to mill closures, and job losses in British Columbia and the rest of Canada?

Oral Questions

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the new Government of Canada is very much aware of the challenges that the softwood lumber industry is facing right now. I would like to ask him, as did the minister, if there is any agreement and there is no agreement right now, to wait for the Prime Minister to come forward. He will explain it to this House.

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not good enough.

When the Prime Minister launched his B.C. election platform, he promised that he would “return the more than \$5 billion in illegal softwood lumber tariffs to Canadian producers”. Today, the minister wants to hand over a billion of those dollars back to the Americans.

When will the government stand up for British Columbia and stand up for Canadians?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the first things the Prime Minister did was to go to the Cancun summit and stand up for Canadians. With years of Liberal government neglect and mismanagement, we have finally the opportunity to come together with industry in the United States to put forth what is in the best interests: a long term agreement on this very important subject.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a mill in Kenora that had 900 employees lies gutted and empty. In my home town of Dryden, 600 jobs were lost at the local mill.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I am sure the hon. member for Kenora appreciates all the help he is getting with his question, but we have to be able to hear it. The minister will not be able to answer it.

The member for Kenora has the floor. We will have a little order, please.

Mr. Roger Valley: Mr. Speaker, I could point out that this mill has closed since that party saw fit to trigger an election. The people of Ontario are outraged with the Conservatives' sellout on softwood. Will the Prime Minister stand up for Canada, reject the deal that he once opposed, and insist that every penny of American duties be returned to Canada?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that this member would stand in the House because every single issue that he brings forward is due to the lack of action of the previous government.

We are taking action now. We are working toward a long term agreement that will be acceptable to industry, to Canada and the entire community.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we cannot tell if this is a flip-flop or a sellout. The sellout might curry favour in Washington, but it is not going to work in the Kenora riding. Northern Ontario took a crippling blow on the softwood lumber crisis. The Conservative government sold out to Washington for less than a victory.

Why is the Prime Minister's policy on softwood an unconditional surrender? If he ever shows up, when is he going to stand up for us?

• (1435)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only sellout is the former Liberal government that did absolutely nothing to help this industry. It is with utmost arrogance that he would stand here today and criticize us for taking action.

The Prime Minister is standing toe to toe with the Americans to make a deal that will lift the industry to move forward and forget about the inaction of the Liberal government for the last 13 years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one thing is clear: the government's refusal to grant immediate loan guarantees to companies places them at a disadvantage in negotiations with the United States.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his actions on softwood lumber will force forestry companies to accept a deal that is less than what the rulings gave them? Does he not understand that his refusal to help our companies could cost them dearly while benefiting the Americans?

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the challenges affecting this industry right now and we are prepared to include loan guarantees, if necessary. I would ask the member to have patience. There is no agreement at this time, but we are looking forward to seeing what the Prime Minister has to table in the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, do the Prime Minister and the minister realize that the billion dollars the Americans want to extort from Canadian companies will be used to modernize the American industry at our expense and to rebuild New Orleans? In other words, instead of investing in an aid package at home, would they rather leave a billion dollars of our money in American hands.

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are looking for a long term solution not a short term one-off deal similar to the deals of the former government. I again ask for this member's patience. We are working very hard with the industry and the American government. We are looking forward to bringing a resolution to this problem.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the issue of child care, the government wants to help families; we have no problem with that. They want to pay out assistance monthly; we have no problem with that. They want the assistance to be universal; we agree. But we take issue with the fact that the proposed system is not fair to low-income families.

Why does the minister continue to reject the refundable tax credit formula proposed by the Bloc Québécois, which is fairer to less affluent families but does not cost the government any more money?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I explained to the hon. member the other day, we are very keen that this be a universal benefit available to all parents of children under the age of six. We want to ensure that the net benefit to them is fair and equitable no matter what their family structure and no matter what their income range.

In fact, Quebec families are going to receive less than their neighbours in Ontario, New Brunswick or Prince Edward Island unless the hon. members across the floor urge those governments to ensure there is no clawback because we are encouraging equity.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, realizing that he had a minority government, announced immediately after the election that he intended to work with the opposition to manage more effectively. The Bloc Québécois has made a constructive proposal that is fairer to the families in greatest need, meets the government's goals and fits within the budget.

Does the Prime Minister not think that his minister's dogmatism and stubbornness are at odds with the openness and cooperation that he promised?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the hon. member to have her province join with five other provinces across this country to make sure that parents, and not politicians, get the benefit of this child care allowance. I would also encourage her to wait until the budget next Tuesday so that she can deal with the rest of the story.

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THE BUDGET

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, come budget day, the government must be transparent and accountable in its \$22 billion of cuts. Whether the victims are child care or the environment or aboriginals or immigration, the government must show Canadians exactly what services they will be losing.

Will the minister commit, just as the previous government did, to a line by line description of every cut on budget day?

● (1440)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we will commit to fiscal restraint, not a 15% increase in spending, which we suffered under the hands of members opposite in the past year. When it comes to managing taxpayers' money, we do not belong to the David Dingwall entitlement society, resulting in a payment of \$417,780 of taxpayers' money when that minister was responsible for saying, what was it, "voluntary" or "involuntary". I forget which it was, but I am sure the former minister can remember.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that was a totally unacceptable non-answer and political spin in response to a very serious question. Canadians who are the victims deserve to know who they are.

It also goes to the heart of fiscal competence. The Mike Harris technique of cutting taxes before the money is in the bank is a recipe for deficits, so I will repeat a very simple, serious question. Will the minister give a line by line accounting of his cuts on budget day?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to fiscal restraint, which I must say is a term that is likely foreign—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The Minister of Finance is trying to answer. The House seems unusually noisy today. I am going to have to ask the whips to bring out their chains of office if we do not have a little more order in the House, particularly from the party on my immediate right and the one on my left. The noise at the far end of the chamber is much better today.

I will have the Minister of Finance give his answer.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to fiscal restraint.

The member opposite speaks of victims. I have the victims here: the taxpayers of Canada. With 18 months' salary, \$379,800, 10% of the amount in lieu of benefits, the taxpayers of Canada get to pay \$417,780 to the save the entitlements of David Dingwall society, and it is from the library of the society right here, this decision.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): First, Mr. Speaker, the fate of Portuguese construction workers was declared a low priority by the government. Now we have an appointments commissioner who has declared that immigration from Jamaica and Vietnam is to blame for gang violence in our cities. He says that Jamaican and Vietnamese cultures are "dominated by violence and lawlessness". We have not heard a public figure slander immigrants like this since the days of the Reform Party.

I ask the Minister of Immigration to apologize to Jamaican and Vietnamese Canadians for the appointment of Gwyn Morgan.

Oral Questions

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member is concerned about lawlessness, she certainly belongs to the wrong party.

Going to an earlier question, hers is a party that still has not accounted for \$40 million that disappeared while it was in government.

I want to say to this issue that Gwyn Morgan is one of the most decent and respected men in this country. I would be happy to have him as an appointments commissioner. There is not anybody on the other side who has the kind of integrity of Gwyn Morgan.

• (1445)

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously the member is more concerned about the reputation of one oil baron. He should be more concerned about the reputation of thousands of hard-working immigrants and new Canadians here in this country.

Gwyn Morgan is responsible for more than his own opinions. He is now responsible for overseeing appointments to the Immigration and Refugee Board. Mr. Morgan said that “most immigrants who abuse our society have come in as refugee claimants—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member's time has expired.

The hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member conveniently forgets to point out that under her government well over 100,000 immigrants were deported. I point out that in previous years, in the last few years, over 700 people from the Portuguese community were deported, despite all the rhetoric from members on the other side about how they wanted to do something about this issue.

I find it a little ironic, and frankly it is pretty hypocritical, for members to get up on their high horse and say they are concerned about this issue when they deported so many of the people they say cared about.

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PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a former public servant, I would like to ask a question on behalf of every hard-working government employee in Canada.

The Liberals have been fearmongering by claiming that cuts to the public service are the only way to pay for our budget. These statements are false and misleading. In fact, it was past Liberal members, such as the current environment critic, who proposed thousands of job cuts to the public service as a way to pay for Liberal waste and mismanagement.

Will the President of the Treasury Board please set the record straight on this Liberal misinformation campaign?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to a constructive relationship with the public service, whose morale was very low after 13 long years of the blame game attributed to Liberal members and to the previous cabinet.

Let us look at what the head of the Public Service Alliance of Canada had to say about the government: “[The minister] has proven he is willing to work with the PSAC and he has taken the time and gone around to meet with different unions and meet with members. That is a good sign”.

What did he say when the Liberal fearmongering began? He said that he is “apt to believe Baird”.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I received a letter from a constituent of mine. His son is a proud, fourth generation member of our Canadian Forces. He expressed anguish that the flag atop our Peace Tower would not be lowered to honour our fallen soldiers. He said:

The Parliament Buildings are for Canadians and not just dignitaries—and such Canadians who die serving this great country of ours should be granted to have the flag at half mast in their honour. It is time we made our own Canadian identity....

I could not agree more with my constituent. Will the minister revised his ill-conceived policy?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no, I will not. The government recognizes a tradition of 80 years, where the flag on the Peace Tower was lowered on Remembrance Day to commemorate all the deaths in all the wars and all the operations, and we will continue that practice.

Within the defence department, we will lower the flag at national defence headquarters, at the original base where the soldier or airman or sailor died, and at the home base. On the day of the funerals, we will lower the flags in all the units of their environment.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the intransigence on the issue of lowering the Peace Tower flag obviously will only be broken by a majority vote of the House. I understand there is a vote coming. I look forward to casting my vote in favour of what Canadians want on this issue.

In the interim, if I could offer up a responsible solution, would the minister agree to allow one or both of the ceremonial flags that flank the Centre Block to be lowered on the days of the Canadians' funerals until such time as we can resolve, as a Parliament, the broader issue?

• (1450)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the policy has been stated a number of times in Parliament. We will stay with our policy.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the United Kingdom allows open media access to the repatriation ceremonies for fallen British soldiers. The British government changed its policy so the public can mourn with the families of the fallen. British military officials say there has never been any suggestion this should not be so, not from the families and not from the government.

Oral Questions

Why does the Prime Minister insist on following the controversial path of the American government rather than the open and democratic way of the British and our own experience here in Canada?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not following anybody's process but our own. As explained, at the point of origin in Kandahar, the media has full access to the events. They can interview people and they can show the coffins being loaded on the aircraft.

At Trenton it is a private affair, where the families for the first time meet their loved ones. It is a time of personal grief, and no media will be allowed on the base. In the third stage, at funerals and ceremonies, the media can attend in any number, according to the families' wishes.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question would be, why is the minister there if it is just for the families?

Yesterday Reporters Without Borders protested against the government's ban on media coverage of repatriation ceremonies for fallen Canadian soldiers. This is not just about the media's right to access. Ultimately it is about the public's right to know and, even more important, the public's right to be able to mourn fallen soldiers.

Shame is on the other side and my question is this: why did the Prime Minister change the rules and deny Canadians the opportunity to—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just explained the policy. I will be, where I can, at the reception in Trenton of any bodies coming back from operations, as will the Chief of Defence Staff.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's own backbench has been swamped with faxes, letters, e-mails and phone calls from constituents across the country objecting to his refusal to allow—

An hon. member: How do you know?

Mr. John Cannis: You get them too.

The soldiers, upon their return—

Mr. David Anderson: Tell the truth.

Mr. John Cannis: And the Prime Minister has not been listening to Canadians. Will he listen to his own members of Parliament, reverse his short-sighted policy and allow the country to grieve as one when our sons and daughters come home?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as has been said a number of times, the media has full access at the point of origin in Kandahar. They have access, depending upon the families' desires, at the funerals and ceremonies. They will not have direct access in Trenton. This is a moment when the families first receive the coffins. It is a very personal moment and we will protect their rights.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me tell members opposite how I know. The member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, the member for Prince Edward—Hastings,

the member for Halton and so many other members of their own caucus have said to the Prime Minister that he is doing wrong, that this is not right, and they have expressed this publicly.

I ask the Prime Minister if he is a true leader. A true leader should know how to admit his mistakes. Let him be a true leader and stand up and say "I made the mistake" and reverse his unacceptable decision.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the media has full access at the beginning of the event in Kandahar. They have access, depending upon the families, at the funeral or ceremonies. They do not need access when the bodies are arriving.

There is nothing being hidden, and every detail of every incident is known, so this is a false allegation.

The families will get their privacy at Trenton. Then it will be up to the families to decide what they want to do at the funerals.

* * *

[*Translation*]

OLDER WORKERS

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government voted in favour of the Bloc Québécois amendment to include an assistance program for older workers in the Speech from the Throne. If the government wishes to be consistent, this program must be included in its budget.

Does the government intend to help older workers who have lost their jobs and announce the implementation of such a program?

• (1455)

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a subject about which I have had discussions with members of the party opposite. It is an issue of some importance, particularly in communities where single industries run into economic difficulty. It is an important issue and the member opposite, I am sure, also feels that way. I encourage the members to await the budget.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister is surely aware that from a strictly economic point of view, it costs more to let these workers fend for themselves than to provide an assistance program. In addition to maintaining their purchasing power and keeping the economy going, this type of program respects what is most precious to them—their dignity.

Will the government at last support these workers by announcing the implementation of an income support program for older workers?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, this is an important issue, with respect to which I have heard proposals and comments from members opposite and from members on the government side of the House, with respect to concerns about workers, particularly older workers who find themselves out of work and who are at a stage in their lives where retraining is a challenge. Retraining is obviously preferable and most important for workers to be able to engage in productive work in our society. However, it is a specific issue with respect to which I encourage the members to await the budget.

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CANADA POST

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister will know that Canada Post is pursuing injunctions against a number of small Canadian businesses that are in the business of international re-mailing, some of which have been in business for 20 years. Thousands of employees will lose their jobs, hundreds of businesses will close and Canada will lose \$150 million in business.

What will it be: monopolistic abuses by Canada Post or vigorous competition from small business? Will the minister use his authority under the Financial Administration Act and tell Canada Post to withdraw its assault on small business?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a very important subject. I have received representation not only from the members opposite but also members from our political party. We are looking at that issue now and we will be taking note not only of that issue, but we will be advising the House as to what we want to do in the coming days.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition is deliberately misinforming Canadians. The Liberal member for Lac-Saint-Louis claims that funding for the Encounters with Canada program is in jeopardy. This is simply not true.

Could the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell the House her plans to continue funding for this worthwhile program?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government remains committed to youth. Encounters with Canada brings together youth from all backgrounds and regions in Canada. It is important to invest in our youth and to encourage them to enter into discussions on the major questions facing our country.

On Monday of this week, I was able to meet with participants of Encounters with Canada from across the country. I was pleased to announce our commitment to continue funding for this worthwhile project and to make a positive influence on the leaders of tomorrow.

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people of my riding of Vancouver Island North, throughout B.C. and across Canada are being affected by the softwood lumber conflict. Enough money has been given away. Enough jobs have been lost. Enough families' lives have been destroyed. This is happening in spite of Canada's repeated wins at the NAFTA appeal courts.

Will the Minister of International Trade explain to the people of my riding how he could ever think that the deal we are hearing about is in the best interests of Canadians?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the minister said, at this time there is no deal. In contrast to the former government's approach to delay and hope it goes away, we are right now in negotiations. We are talking to all the involved parties, and we are looking forward to a long term solution, not a one-off solution like the former government.

● (1500)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand why the trade minister does not want to answer any questions on this. This deal stinks so bad that even the minister should run away from it.

The minister sold out the voters of Vancouver Kingsway. He sold out British Columbians. Now he is in the process of selling out all Canadians. What he wants to do is let the Americans keep a billion dollars of the proceeds of trade crime, \$600 million paid by hard-working communities in British Columbia.

Does the government even understand that this attempt to capitulate threatens every other industrial sector with the same American illegal action? How could they—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find that language unbecoming a parliamentarian.

As the minister said, we are awaiting a deal, we are in negotiations and we are putting forth what we feel is in the best interests of everyone involved.

* * *

INDUSTRY

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very important question for the Minister of Industry. The people of Sudbury are enthusiastic about the friendly takeover of Falconbridge by Inco. Northern Ontario and all of Canada will benefit greatly from the creation of a Canadian based, truly global mining champion.

Now that the Competition Bureau has approved this major transaction, will the government, as did the previous Liberal government, express its unequivocal support for this exciting made in Canada transaction?

Privilege

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the Inco-Falconbridge transaction is subject to regulatory reviews and shareholder approval.

I cannot comment on this case. What I can say is that we are very proud to see Canadian champion companies move forward. We really look forward to the employment opportunities that these will give to Canadians in the future.

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FOREIGN AID

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian soldiers are working hard to ensure the safety and security of citizens in Afghanistan. Bringing democracy to Afghanistan is the first step in the important process of reconstruction. Assistance for the Afghan citizens is also necessary.

Could the Minister for International Cooperation give us an update on Canadian aid to Afghanistan and the good work that is going on in that country?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for this year our government has committed to maintaining \$100 million to help the people of Afghanistan. We are working in the field with our partners to rebuild that country, including the Kandahar region.

[Translation]

Among other things, and thanks to Canada's contributions, landmines are being cleared, more children are attending schools—especially girls—and over 12,000 villages have access to clean water. These results are why we should and must maintain our presence and our leadership in Afghanistan.

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[English]

CANADIAN FORCES

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made earlier today, I invite hon. members to rise and observe a moment of silence in honour of the four fallen Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.

[A moment of silence observed]

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• (1505)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Marlene Bryenton, a recipient of the 2006 Thérèse Casgrain Volunteer Award.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the Government House Leader inform the House about his plans for government business at least through to the end of next week? Also,

could he tell us after the budget next Tuesday, how quickly the House will see specific legislation to cut personal income taxes?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are going to continue and hope to complete the second reading debate on the federal accountability act, Bill C-2. When second reading debate on Bill C-2 has been completed, there has been agreement to adopt, at all stages, by unanimous consent Bill C-4, the party registration act.

Tomorrow we will begin the second reading debate on Bill C-3, bridges and international tunnels. On Monday, we will continue with Bill C-3, followed by Bill C-5, the public health agency.

As the Minister of Finance has announced, the budget will be presented on Tuesday, May 2 at 4 p.m.

I would like to also inform the House that May 4 will be designated as an allotted day.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, following consultations, I think you would find consent for the following motion to have a take note debate on the ongoing crisis in Darfur. I move:

That a take note debate on the subject of the ongoing crisis in Darfur take place, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, on Monday, May 1.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have a question for the government House leader with respect to the debate on Darfur, which I am sure the House welcomes. Would he confirm that not only is the holding of this debate important in its own right, but it also helps to satisfy the suggestions from a number of organizations, including the Canadian Jewish Congress, that it would be appropriate for the House to have such a debate, at least in part in acknowledgement of the Holocaust, and that those sorts of incidents should not occur elsewhere?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the suggestion. Certainly that and all issues surrounding this difficult situation can and should be raised at the take note debate on Monday evening.

[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.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[English]

PRIVILEGE

PARLIAMENTARY PRECINCT FLAGS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question of privilege. I maintain that the privileges of the House as a collective have been breached in that the government has assumed direction and control over when parliamentary precinct flags will be lowered to half-mast, when, according to the authorities that I have researched, that choice in fact should be the jurisdiction of the Speaker on behalf of Parliament.

On page 275 of Marleau and Montpetit, chapter 7, it states:

One of the fundamental privileges of the House is to regulate its own internal affairs, holding exclusive jurisdiction over its premises....

Notwithstanding that certain government departments have a role in the upkeep and maintenance of the buildings in the precinct, ultimately even those tasks are the duties and responsibilities of you, sir.

I argue, and I ask you to consider, that it should not be up to the protocol office of the Departments of Heritage or Public Works and Government Services to dictate when the flag is lowered. It should be you on behalf of my colleagues in the Parliament of Canada.

I would like to quote as well for your consideration page 170 of the book *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, second edition, by Joseph Maingot. It states:

—the House of Commons is not a department of the government of Canada, but exists as a constituent element of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I think you will find it instructive that in today's question period, when asked again to lower the flag, the Minister of National Defence said, "government has decided", "government has its policy and is sticking to it".

Neither the Minister of National Defence nor the Prime Minister representing the executive branch of government has primacy over the will of Parliament. I believe their unilateral and arbitrary actions pertaining to the treatment of the flag flying over the Peace Tower usurps the authority and undermines privileges of members of Parliament. Our collective privilege as MPs should have primacy over any minister, even the Prime Minister.

Therefore I believe that my rights as a member have been offended and limited. I respectfully point out and remind you, sir, that according to Marleau and Montpetit it is the responsibility of the Speaker to act as the guardian of all the rights and privileges of members and of the House as an institution.

I quote lastly page 170 of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* by Maingot which states:

Each House of Parliament is entitled to the administration of affairs within its own precincts free from interference.... Control of the accommodation and services within the Parliament Buildings is therefore vested in the Speakers...on behalf of their respective Houses. Thus Public Works and Government Services and other government departments act only on the advice of officials of each House.

I read this to say, Mr. Speaker, and I hope you agree, that it should be the Speaker on behalf of members of Parliament who should determine if and when the flag flies at half-mast.

The government taking upon itself the authority to tell staff whether or not they should lower the flag to half-mast is an appropriation of the powers of Parliament and violates the privilege of each member here. I ask that you to find a prima facie case of privilege in this argument.

• (1510)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I suppose you could address this on several levels. First, I think it is a bit of a stretch to say that the privileges of some hon. members have been breached by following a policy that has been in place most of the years since Confederation.

Points of Order

I would like to remind the hon. member that it is not only this House that composes Parliament. They may not like the other place and they may have some views with respect to its reform but Parliament consists of both Houses of Parliament.

As my colleague pointed out, which is my third point, something like this is the prerogative of the Crown and the Crown exercises that prerogative on the advice of the Government of Canada. That is exactly what has happened here.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think you will have to spend too much time with this one.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issues having to do with the control of the parliamentary precinct are very important issues and they do have a bearing in relation to the privileges of members of Parliament. There is a very intricate interrelationship between the functioning of Parliament and the functioning of various government departments.

Physically, of course, the flag is raised and lowered on a daily basis by the officials who work for the Department of Public Works and Government Services. That is part of their function.

I think there is an important legal question about the issue of control here. Perhaps it would be helpful, at least for members of the House generally, if we could ask the Table to seek the appropriate legal advice as to the issues of control. Part of this is a matter of parliamentary privilege but part of it is also a legal interpretation of where the authority of government departments begins and ends vis-à-vis Parliament. I think it would be useful for us, for this purpose and perhaps for some other purposes, to precisely identify that line.

• (1515)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre for raising the issue and the government and opposition House leaders for their interventions on the matter. I will take it under advisement and do the research the hon. opposition House leader has suggested.

As hon. members are aware, the House and the Senate are tenants in this building of the Department of Public Works, our wonderful landlord, but we do have certain controls within the building. How far out they go will be the question I will examine in relation to the flagpole on the top of the Peace Tower and I will get back in a way that I hope will satisfy all hon. members on this issue.

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POINTS OF ORDER

QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago, during question period, the hon. member for Scarborough Centre, during a question in which he was actually making a statement regarding the repatriation of fallen Canadian soldiers at CFB in Trenton, told the House that I had informed the Prime Minister that the policy of the government was wrong.

That is an absolutely false statement. I have said no such thing.

Government Orders

I have obviously, as many members have, received a great volume of response from constituents on this issue. I would certainly invite anyone who is interested, and certainly the member for Scarborough Centre, to go to www.garth.ca to read a very nice selection of messages from constituents.

I may voice a dissenting or contrary opinion from time to time from that of some of my colleagues but in no way does it mean that I believe this government is wrong in this policy, because I do not. In fact, I would make a point in saying that the ability of the Conservative Party to embrace dissenting views is one that makes this party inherently strong.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Halton for clarifying the point but I think perhaps it is a matter of debate with the hon. member for Scarborough Centre rather than a point of order on that particular item. I do not think we need to go further with that one but I am sure all hon. members will appreciate the opportunity to go to www.garth.ca.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to that website, apart from the very serious issue in relation to the repatriation of our fallen soldiers, that website includes very detailed speculation about what may or may not be in the budget next Tuesday. I wonder if the hon. gentleman could inform us if that reflects government policy or is that just to dissent.

The Speaker: Obviously question period has ended and no one is rising to respond to the point of order that the opposition House leader has raised so we will move on.

HOLIDAYS ACT

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated during statements by members, I rise on a point of order to request unanimous consent for the following motion: "That this House waive notice of the private member's bill which redefines Remembrance Day as a legal holiday in the Holidays Act be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at the report stage and deemed read a third time and passed".

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

• (1520)

QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period, I believe the hon. member for Perth—Wellington misled the House and Canadians in suggesting that I had made an erroneous statement about Encounters with Canada when I said that funding had not been restored when it had been restored.

I issued a press release on Friday calling on the government to restore funding for Encounters with Canada. At that time the organization had not had any confirmation from the government about restored funding. The situation was so murky that the Minister of Canadian Heritage, who threw the organization into a turmoil of

uncertainty, saw fit to hold a press conference on Monday afternoon to clarify the matter.

I would expect and hope that the hon. member for Perth—Wellington would apologize for his misstatement.

The Speaker: I am sure the hon. member for Perth—Wellington will take the matter under advisement when he reads the submissions the hon. member has made in his point of order and, if necessary, he will get back to the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, an act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today about how we can make the government more accountable. After all, we all want a clean, transparent and democratic government, and we want a government that works better for Canadians.

I want to speak specifically to access to information and the accountability of government agencies. We must remember that these government agencies are funded by the taxpayers of Canada. In my riding of Trinity—Spadina stands an airport that operates under the authority of the Toronto Port Authority. The Toronto Port Authority has lost taxpayer money every year since its inception. It was created by the former Liberal government. It ignores the wishes of the citizens of Toronto. Every mayor since its inception said no to a port authority. This port authority continues to refuse to pay property taxes to the city. It is a completely disastrous agency. What we have been asking is that the government get to the bottom of how this agency is operated.

In April 2004, all of a sudden the former government made a secret deal with the port authority and handed \$35 million over to it, which was supposed to be used to settle a lawsuit on a bridge that was cancelled. The bridge cost \$22 million to build but somehow the lawsuit was for \$35 million. It was not even a lawsuit. We need to know and the people need to know who received the money. Why is it a secret?

Independent folks in the local area have been asking for the information over and over again and have been completely stonewalled by the former Liberal government. People are saying that they want to know why taxpayer money has gone into a secret deal where no one knows what happened. I believe the public has a right to know.

Government Orders

Quarterly financial reports are needed but none are presently available. Community organizations cannot find out how many planes are flying above their heads. They do not know what kind of pollution is being caused nor do they know the flight paths. They have been asking government over and over again for information but they have not been able to get any. One year some documents are available but another year they are not.

If the government has nothing to hide there must be very clear language in the accountability bill to say that the public has a right to access information that is due to them, information that is not available right now. Only the NDP is committed to accomplishing these objectives. Only the NDP wants real access to information. People need to know about their public agencies. They need to know how the government is spending their taxpayer money.

Prior to the election last year, Mr. Broadbent and the NDP demanded change in ethics and accountability. The NDP plan recognized that access to information is essential for the public to investigate what the government is doing and is a vital part of our democracy.

• (1525)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her pristine analysis on what is generally missing and lacking in accountability with government. Specifically, one of the areas that I have concerns with is what happens now with a bill that does not have the accountability that we ask for in terms of things like democratic accountability. I think that is clearly lacking.

We asked for fixed election dates. We hear that there might be some movement there. We asked for making sure that when we are looking at accountability to Parliament that voters get the member of Parliament for whom they voted and they do not end up a couple of days later after the election with a member from a different party. It would be interesting to see how Canadians feel about that. I know that in my own office people have been contacting me about that issue.

The other issue is lobbying. There are some measures that are moving forward in the accountability act on lobbying, but one that is missing is what happens when somebody who had been lobbying government turns around and then is a recipient of government contracts. Will this be something that the government is going to act on and change in the bill because there seems to be a void?

Finally, the whole point of probity of the government into be it port authorities or crown corporations is the provision in the bill to allow the Auditor General to have scope into those areas. It would be important for us to know what resources are going to be afforded and particularly how much money is going to be afforded to the Auditor General to allow her or him to do that job.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. Access to information is critical and in this act it is very limited. It is expanded to include several officers of Parliament and seven crown corporations, namely, Canada Post, VIA Rail, CBC, Atomic Energy Control Board, Export Development Canada, NAC and the Public Sector Pension Investment Board.

There are three foundations: the Canada Foundation for Innovation, Canada Foundation for Sustainable Development Technologies

and the scholarship fund. What about the rest of the agencies? What about the agency I just talked about, the Toronto Port Authority? It deals with our airport which deals with flights coming from the U.S. for example and it is critically important that we know how it is organized.

It is unfortunate that the meaningful reform that we are looking for in the bill has been sent to a committee as a draft bill and a discussion paper. That is not meaningful reform because if it goes to the committee as a discussion paper, it will never come back and that is not my definition of a clean and accountable government. That is not what democracy is all about because the public has the right to know.

In terms of lobbyists and the Auditor General, all of those things need to be fine tuned. There is a lot that we need to work on in the bill. Hopefully, in the standing committee, we can begin to make some improvement to the bill because the public deserves a clean government.

• (1530)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member is experienced at another level of government and I thought I would perhaps get her opinion on one aspect of the bill which would reward, up to \$1,000, those who would come forward with allegations of whistleblowing. There is some concern that this is somehow an indication of lack of confidence in the public service.

I would suspect that at other levels of government there is a duty to perform and that the people doing the job probably do not need a monetary inducement to do a good job. This \$1,000 trinket may in fact have negative consequences in terms of good relations with the public service. I would like to have her comments.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, whistleblowers should have a right to seek remedy through the court system, even as a last resort. In this legislation they would not. That is a problem.

In the case of a retaliation, a whistleblower would be referred to a tribunal headed by justices that are appointed by the Prime Minister. That is one of our concerns. Another area of concern is the lack of interim measures such as allowing public sector workers easier access to a neutral third party and interim statement when they come forward to make disclosures. All of those areas need to be addressed.

With regard to the \$1,000 cash reward, if people want to speak the truth, they are going to speak the truth anyway whether there is \$1,000 or not. I do not really know what it would do.

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to talk about some of the aspects of our new government's accountability bill. Before I begin, I want to say how proud I am that Canadians chose our government to turn over a new leaf and make government work for the people instead of the other way around.

Hard-working people in my riding of Leeds—Grenville have been concerned for many years about the direction being taken by the federal government. They saw that the country needed change and they voted for that change in 2004. In January of this year they welcomed the news that the rest of Canada, in many other ridings, recognized the same problems that they had recognized for many years.

Government Orders

The federal accountability bill is about fixing a system that the people of Leeds—Grenville knew was broken. It is part of the response that the people in my riding expected from their new government and I know that they stand behind it.

The bill is about strengthening and streamlining how government works, and to the joy of the people of Leeds—Grenville it is about making government more effective and more accountable. This bill begins to deliver on a promise that we made during the election campaign. The government is taking action to earn back the trust of Canadians.

The bill is about moving from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability. It is about making everyone in government, from the Prime Minister on down to elected members of Parliament, answerable to Canadians.

Bill C-2 is about letting Canadians know that their hard earned tax dollars are being spent properly and wisely. There is probably nothing that infuriates the taxpayers of my riding more than the belief that their tax dollars, the money that they work so hard for and then give willingly to the government as their due for living and working in this great country, are being misspent.

Changes for Canadians in the bill include: reducing the opportunity to exert influence with money by banning corporate, union and large personal political contributions; giving Canadians confidence that lobbying is done ethically with a five year lobbying ban on former ministers, their aids and senior public servants; by ensuring people who see problems in government are allowed to speak up by providing real protection for whistleblowers; and by ensuring Canadians know how their money is spent by enhancing the powers of the Auditor General to follow the money trail.

The government's proposals are not just being laid out like a skeleton on a table to be picked at and rearranged. I am pleased to see that my colleague, the President of the Treasury Board, put some meat on the bones when he tabled this bill by including an action plan that gives clear explanations and clear directions.

I mentioned earlier that nothing infuriates people in my riding more than not knowing what is happening with their tax dollars. Over the past number of years they have been as concerned as many others in this country about the amount of taxes that they pay compared with the federal surplus, which is large and growing. They have been most concerned by the federal government's practice of not being clear about the size of that surplus or what was being done with the money.

One of the keys to the federal accountability bill is the truth in budgeting provision and I want to spend the rest of my time talking about that aspect of the legislation.

Improving the transparency and credibility of the government's fiscal forecasting and budget planning process will help make it more accountable to Parliament and Canadians. No longer will the people in my riding pick up a newspaper one month and find that there is a \$1.9 billion surplus and then a few months later turn around and find it was \$9.1 billion. That is great that we had more money; however, we need to have truth in knowing how much money we have in order to make proper plans on how those tax dollars will be spent.

Truth in budgeting is very important for all parliamentarians and all Canadians. Parliamentary committees must have access to independent and objective analysis and advice on economic and fiscal issues. Committee members cannot review their committee estimates and listen to witnesses and make valuable judgments if they do not have accurate information about all the aspects, including budgetary information.

The federal accountability bill would expand the mandate and resources of the non-partisan Library of Parliament by establishing within it the position of parliamentary budget officer. It would give this officer the mandate to provide objective analysis to the Senate and to the House of Commons concerning the state of the nation's finances and trends in the national economy.

• (1535)

We will undertake economic and fiscal research for the Standing Committee on Finance, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts or the Senate Standing Committee on National Finance. On the request of these committees, we will estimate the cost of proposals currently or prospectively under consideration in either house when asked to do so by a member, a committee of the Senate or the House of Commons, or a committee of both houses. We will also require departments and agencies to provide the officer with any existing data necessary to fulfill his or her mandate.

I know the people of Leeds—Grenville are applauding. They are applauding these changes that will increase transparency in the government's fiscal planning process and will enable Parliament to better hold government to account. I am pleased to be here today to voice my support not only for this specific area of the federal accountability bill but for the entire bill.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, firms that lobby under this accountability bill can still apply for government contracts. There is something wrong with this picture. Former public office holders can still go and work for lobbying firms as long as they are not registered lobbyists. There is also something wrong with this picture.

What I do not understand is, if we are talking about an accountable government, citizens need to know what the government is doing. If they do not know what the government is doing and they do not know where the money is going, they cannot get to the bottom of it. How could they hold the government accountable?

Ultimately, the most important piece in a very clean, transparent and democratic government is the right of the people to access information. That is the core of it. What I do not understand is how the Conservative government is starting to act like the former Liberal government. It has studied the whole question of access to information for 13 years and has not done anything.

The new government has said it wants change and it wants to stand up for Canadians. If that is the case, let me ask one question. Which is more important? The right of Canadians to know or the government's right to keep the information secret. What is more important? Is the right of Canadians to know more important? Or, is it the government's right to keep—

Government Orders

• (1540)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville.

Mr. Gord Brown: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that for so many years it was who one knew in the PMO. That is why the government is bringing forth this bill as the first act of this new Parliament to clean up government.

Canadians have been asking this for so long. As I said in my presentation, in 2004 the people of my riding of Leeds—Grenville voted for that change and they are so happy that now this government is now in place to bring the bill forward. This will go a long way toward cleaning up government and Canadians are behind it.

I urge the hon. member to get behind the bill, so that we can get it through Parliament as quickly as possible and clean up government. Canadians will once again have confidence in their country and their government.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of examples of where things are happening, like the appointment of Gwyn Morgan, who is a Conservative fundraiser, as the appointments commissioner and the transition secretary who has now gone to a lobby firm and is registered but is not going to be subject to this legislation. The government is doing all of this in advance of passage of this bill.

I have a sincere question. It has to do with political donations. In terms of adjusting the amount of donations, I am not sure of what is meant by a secret donation? I understand a donation to be something that is ordinarily receiptable, but what is a secret donation? I would like to understand what we are voting on.

Mr. Gord Brown: Mr. Speaker, there is a reason that we had a Gomery inquiry. We are debating this bill today because secret political contributions were made and documented in the province of Quebec. Brown envelopes bursting with cash were handed over under restaurant tables. The party that was named in the Gomery inquiry is the Liberal Party.

That is what the bill is all about, to put an end to that type of contribution. The bill will ensure that no longer will there be that type of contribution.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-2. There have been a number of very eloquent speakers from the New Democratic Party caucus, including the member for Trinity—Spadina.

To start, it is important to go back to the 38th Parliament. In a sense, the roots of Bill C-2 come from the constant corruption that was exposed through the course of the 38th Parliament. We sat here throughout 2004 and 2005 and we saw the results of the sponsorship scandal, the reports that Judge Gomery produced and his very clear indication of an ongoing culture of entitlement within the Liberal Party and the Liberal Party administration, something that most Canadians found absolutely reprehensible.

There were repeated scandals, including the David Dingwall scandal and the André Ouellet scandal, consistently and constantly exposed through our work in the House, a variety of misappropriations of Canadians' funds. We have to remember that we in the

House are beholden to over 30 million Canadians from coast to coast to coast who want to see honesty and transparency in their government. That is a fundamental tenet at the roots of our democracy.

As the member for Trinity—Spadina mentioned a few minutes ago, we also saw the scandals that are emerging, such as the Toronto Port Authority scandal, something that came to light over the course of the fall. Basically \$35 million has disappeared. The transport committee was starting to do its work to expose where that funding went. I am sure the transport committee will be starting its work again in the next week or two to trace that \$35 million that was paid out through the Ministry of Transport, through very shoddy means in my opinion, and without the accountability that must come with the use of any public funds.

We saw corrupt event after corrupt event after corrupt event. Things fundamentally needed to change. That is why through the course of the most recent election campaign Canadians decided to elect more Conservative MPs, certainly, but also fundamentally change the composition of the House by electing more New Democratic Party of Canada members of Parliament to come in and to clean up the House of Commons and Parliament so that it is at the level that Canadians expect and at the level that Canadians deserve.

Canadians want to see much more accountability and accessibility and much more honesty and transparency in government operations. They are the ones who pay for our government. They are the ones who deserve the right to have the knowledge of what is happening at all times in our government. What we want to do, and need to do, is eliminate the secrecy and the corruption that has characterized the last few years in Parliament.

Ed Broadbent, a former parliamentarian, the former member for Oshawa and most recently the former member for Ottawa Centre, has been replaced by somebody who is just as good, or even better, which is saying quite a great deal. Mr. Broadbent presented in the 38th Parliament a seven point plan to clean up government, to clean up Parliament and to bring about the government and public administration that Canadians deserve. It is important, when we go back to the issue of Bill C-2, to see how the accountability act actually corresponds to what Mr. Broadbent proposed a few months ago.

Mr. Broadbent talked about the banning of contingency fees for lobbyists. That certainly is in the legislation and is something we strongly support. Also within the legislation and proposed by Mr. Broadbent was the toughening up of lobbyist regulations. However, there are elements missing when we talk about lobbyists, and I will come back to that in a moment.

• (1545)

Mr. Broadbent spoke of strengthening the Ethics Commissioner and certainly there are elements of that which are found in Bill C-2. He talked of improving the appointments process, appointing a parliamentary budget officer and extending the powers of the Auditor General. This is fundamentally important because what we saw over the course of the last Parliament and preceding Parliaments was money being constantly shifted away from the Auditor General's purview.

Government Orders

The Auditor General protects all Canadians by providing that third party independent verification of what is happening with public funds. The Auditor General plays an extremely important role in the life of our public administration and in our Parliament. It was important to extend the powers of the Auditor General. That is what Ed Broadbent proposed in his seven point plan and we are happy to see that element at least within the elements of Bill C-2.

However, there are crucial elements of the Broadbent plan that are missing. It is important to note that what Ed Broadbent did when he brought that forward was he set the bar at the level Canadians expect and at the level Canadians deserve. Anything short of that shows disrespect to the Canadian public. There are elements that were in the Broadbent plan that are not yet within Bill C-2.

I can promise, as can my colleagues in the New Democratic Party, that we are going to fight to make sure that those elements are included to make this accountability act one without holes and one that is truly at the level of Canadians' aspirations.

One of the key components of the Broadbent plan is to ensure that floor crossing without recourse to a byelection would be banned. I come from the riding of Burnaby—New Westminster. We have seen the public reaction in our neighbouring riding of Vancouver Kingsway to the floor crossing that occurred shortly after the election on January 23. People in the lower mainland of British Columbia continue to be outraged by the blatancy of that disrespect to the voters of Vancouver Kingsway.

We cannot have a full accountability act and restore the confidence that Canadians need to have in their parliamentary institutions unless we ensure that their votes count come election campaigns. Their votes can only count in election campaigns if people know that when they vote for that candidate and for that party, that situation will not change unless that individual comes back to the voters in a byelection.

In the case of Vancouver Kingsway, for those who have been in that riding in the past few weeks, literally more than a thousand signs have been placed throughout the riding by individuals who are saying very clearly that this floor crossing has to stop. That was in the Broadbent plan. It is not in this legislation. That is a serious gap, a serious hole in this legislation. We will be fighting to repair that breach in accountability, to repair that hole in the legislation.

There is also the whole issue of access to information reform. The member for Trinity—Spadina referred to that a few minutes ago. There is the issue of the Toronto Port Authority and the scandalous use of \$35 million of public funds for a reason that as yet is to be confirmed. There are no receipts, no idea where that money went.

As transport critic for the New Democratic Party, I put forth continued requests for access to information, as did many activists in the Toronto area. What we got was page after page after page of blanked out documents, in some cases 120 pages of papers that had been blanked out. In other words, to try to get to the bottom of that misuse of \$35 million, we were completely stymied and stonewalled by the existing Access to Information Act.

The problem is we may extend an act that does not work. It may cover more areas, but all that means is that when Canadians make a request under the Access to Information Act, they will get more

pages back that are blanked out in more areas. It does not mean there is any guarantee of actual access to information. This is a serious flaw in the accountability act. In this corner of the House we will be fighting to have a real freedom of information act that actually allows access to information, which Canadians must have to make absolutely sure that Parliament is transparent and honest.

● (1550)

Finally, there is the issue of fixed election dates. Mr. Broadbent referred to this in the Broadbent plan for accountability for Parliament. We need to have election dates that everyone is aware of to end the manipulation around when election dates might occur. Fixed election dates have been a long-standing commitment of our party so Canadians can be comforted in knowing when elections might occur.

There are parts of this legislation we support and parts that we will fight to improve. The New Democratic Party believes this is of fundamental importance in this Parliament.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly do agree with the member with regard to the Access to Information Act. A number of members of his party and our party had been working on a committee. He may recall that John Bryden, a former member, led an ad hoc committee. The member for Winnipeg Centre reintroduced the Bryden bill as a private member's bill and carried it some way.

I would like the member's comments on a more global question with regard to accountability. The approach by the government to this federal accountability bill is to say it wants the bill delivered back and passed by the summer. At this point we have not had the benefit of expert testimony from the public service or experts from other areas relating to the bill. Many bills are going to be affected by this legislation, such as the Canada Elections Act, the Access to Information Act, the Privacy Act, and the whistleblower act which was passed and given royal assent in the last Parliament but still has not been proclaimed. The Conservatives want to take credit for that once this bill is passed.

It seems to me that to suggest that we can today set a deadline at which time something must be done is almost contemptuous of parliamentarians and restricts our ability to do our job. We do not control what witnesses are going to be necessary and whether or not there is going to be consensus. I wonder if the member would like to comment on the—

● (1555)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, there are two elements to this. One is the timelines that are set out for this summer. The whole issue of accountability is one of fundamental importance to the Canadian public. It is important that we proceed forthwith to put in place more accountability, to broaden the mandate of the Auditor General, to broaden the whole issue of access and transparency within our public administration. I and my colleagues in the New Democratic Party are certainly willing to work as hard as we can to move the bill forward.

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However, we are not prepared to say that there should be no amendments, that there should be no changes, that somehow this is a take it or leave it proposition. With the softwood sell-out that was discussed earlier today in the House, we are seeing that this idea of a take it or leave it proposal is absolutely unacceptable. There are serious flaws in this legislation. We want to work in committee to address these flaws, to fill these holes. To have it done through a special legislative committee that does not allow for amendments would be completely inappropriate.

I share the member's concerns in terms of moving this along, but we have to address the holes and the flaws in the legislation so that Canadians get the kind of legislation they expect and deserve.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from British Columbia.

Before asking him my question, I must say that listening to my colleague from the NDP talk about members who cross the floor of the House has got me thinking. For example, Robert Toupin, a Progressive Conservative MP, crossed the floor to join Ed Broadbent in the NDP during Mr. Mulroney's first or second mandate. This begs the question, if it was acceptable at the time then why is it no longer acceptable now. Why put so much emphasis on this if you cannot lead by example? What is more, a former NDP minister from British Columbia is currently a member of the Liberal Party of Canada and a former NDP premier of Ontario wants to become leader of the Liberal Party of Canada.

My question is on clause 44 of the bill, about the information from the public. I find that elected members are being given a very heavy responsibility in having to accept reports of acts of wrongdoing. Hon. members are being asked to judge the reports of wrongdoings by an individual, a member of society. Under the bill, if we deem the report serious enough, we have to take an oath and try to clarify the situation.

I simply want to know whether we could have a system like the one used by the official languages commissioner for example. In that system, the complaint is addressed to the commissioner rather than to an hon. member—

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry, but we do have to allow the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster time to respond. The member for Burnaby—New Westminster for a brief response.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question.

As far as floor crossers are concerned, the Ethics Commissioner conducted a study on the number of members from each party who have crossed the floor of the House in 100 years and the NDP came in last. We have had six deserters in 100 years. The NDP does lead by example. There are many past examples proving that once a person becomes a new democrat they stay a new democrat. There are always exceptions, but very few in our case.

The hon. member for Gatineau also asked a question about clause 44 of the bill. We share his concerns about some parts of the bill. That is precisely why the NDP feels that—

• (1600)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I apologize for interrupting the hon. member, but it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, Culture.

[*English*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to stand in the House to speak to Bill C-2, an act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability, otherwise known as the federal accountability act.

Before I begin my remarks, I want to thank the citizens of the federal riding of Crowfoot, Alberta for their confidence shown in me on January 23 when they re-elected me for the third time. I appreciate very much their continued support for the work that I am doing in Ottawa and at home on their behalf.

I am in support of the federal accountability act, Bill C-2. This is the first bill introduced by the new government. It will make profound changes in the way the federal government does business. Bill C-2 would move the federal government toward an open and accountable government and address the government corruption, mismanagement and waste that had been allowed to take root over the past 13 years of Liberal rule.

From the campaign trail to the Speech from the Throne, my colleagues and I in the Conservative Party have pledged to clean up government. The federal accountability act, Bill C-2, marks the beginning of change for which Canadians voted.

As a government, we are committed to doing a number of things, but predominantly we are committed to respecting taxpayer dollars. We are committed to respecting the independent offices of Parliament, like the Auditor General and others, as well as the institutions of Parliament.

The bill contains at least 13 major reforms, major ways that we are going to change the system, and 60 distinct initiatives. It is about 270 pages long. This is a very large piece of legislation that will affect many offices in the Government of Canada. Great attention has been paid to try to ensure that it does not duplicate, overlap or conflict with existing accountability measures.

Canadians are asking, why now? Bill C-2 represents a big change in the way we govern ourselves. Canadians have asked, in the wake of the previous government's difficulties, that the system be changed. The Auditor General reported in 2004 that there was large scale corruption, the loss of \$100 million, and that "every rule in the book" had been broken.

Government Orders

Further investigations uncovered the fact that the unethical behaviour had been going on for years in the country's political leadership. The former Liberal government did not stop it. That is why Bill C-2 is here. We are saying that the buck stops here. We asked Canadians to allow us the power to do something about corruption and they gave us the opportunity.

Our first piece of legislation is to lead the way in trying to prevent in the future anyone, any party, any government from engaging in the kind of corruption and scandal that occurred in recent Liberal governments. Canadian taxpayers have simply had enough.

In the hours of debate on the bill so far, I am pleased to see that there appears to be support for Bill C-2. I think the Bloc has shown that it supports it in principle. The NDP member for Winnipeg Centre, a long time member of the public accounts committee, spoke eloquently about the changes proposed in the bill. The Liberals have said that they will support the bill, while they are busy trying to mend their own ways on the other side of the House, and those ways should be amended, we all know. We are here to fix the system, to create systemic change.

Let us look at what Bill C-2 does. Let us look at what we have to do to prevent future corrupt behaviour with taxpayer dollars. Listen to this.

•(1605)

Bill C-2, if passed, will reform financing of political parties. It will ban secret donations. It will strengthen the role of the Ethics Commissioner. It will toughen the lobbyist laws. It will ensure truth in budgeting; \$1.9 billion is not the same as \$9.1 billion. The list is not finished yet. It will ensure that government appointments are based on merit. It will clean up government contracting, polling and advertising by preventing the government in power from abusing this information for its own political purposes. It will protect whistleblowers. It will strengthen the power of the Auditor General, auditing and accountability systems in departments. It will create a director for public prosecutions. That is quite a long list.

The government is not holding back. The government will deliver what Canadians have asked for and what was committed in the last election.

We need to get the bill to committee. Together we can work on it in detail and ensure it gets the job done once it is passed into law. That is not beyond us. I know there were some recommendations that may be amendments coming from colleagues from the NDP, the Bloc and the Liberals. Let us get it to committee and let us take a look at those amendments. With political will, we can try to have Bill C-2 protect taxpayer dollars from being abused, misused, even lost or stolen.

The bill gives life to countless recommendations made by the Auditor General over the years. This follows her requests. The bill includes what Justice Gomery recommended in his reports, after months of testimony and tens of thousands of pages of evidence.

I want to refer to the remarks made a couple of days ago by the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert. He has for many years served the House extremely well as the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. His committee heard testimony on many chapters from auditor general reports down through the years.

He is also the chair of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption. He stated in his speech that he had a real concern for the intergovernmental community and the governmental corruption in many other parts of the world, which thwarts development assistance and causes suffering and hardship for millions of people. In other words, he was very concerned about governance in other countries.

As a result of my service as vice-chair on the foreign affairs and international trade committee, that was a major concern which was brought forward in our committee as well. The feeling of the member for Edmonton—St. Albert was that this was a comprehensive enough bill that he believed many nations would look to the bill as a grid, as a guideline, as a standard, that could help in their countries for their own purposes.

When we talk about building democracies around the world, we do not simply talk about having a free election. We talk about ensuring that a strong government is in place, a government of integrity, a government that is not going to misuse or misappropriate public funds for its own political purposes. I appreciated his comments.

I truly hope this document does not only change the system, a systemic change that Canada so desperately needs, I hope it helps other countries as they look to making their democracies stronger. I hope we can all benefit and bolster the efforts to combat corruption.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the member for Crowfoot. I know he believes, and all members should believe, that we all allow our names to stand to serve our country with good and honourable intentions. However, they also came here as a party in 1993 with this law and order initiative, and I personally agreed with that. What is law and order? When we see corruption, misuse and abuse, it is incumbent upon us, as legislators, to initiate the proper machinery to rectify, to apprehend the culprits and to bring them to justice.

However, if he believes in a just and lawful society with due process and the rule of law, then he will agree with me that the commission under Judge Gomery was brought forward by the Liberal government because we wanted to get to the bottom of who abused the system. Does he not agree that it was the right thing to do, no matter what came out of it and who the culprits were?

•(1610)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I remember when I was growing up that the punishment always came after I got caught. When I did something wrong as a young child there would be a very quick and just punishment, but there was also something else. There were the laws and the rules of my little home that were put in place and I knew what was right and what was wrong.

I watched the previous government carry on for 13 years. I wonder if it even had any idea of the difference between right and wrong.

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When we watched during the last number of elections that took place the things that were happening, the political donations, the brown envelopes, the sponsorship scandal and others, it was *modus operandi* of that party. After the Liberals got caught with their hands in the cookie jar, they came forward with a judicial inquiry, the Gomery commission, and he said, “Shame on you”.

The Conservative government said that we will clean up the mess. This bill brings forward changes that will clean up the system.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people in Trinity—Spadina tell me that they want access to information without all the barriers. They want timely access. They want the cost to be minimal. They want improvement. They said that cabinet documents should be made public. They also said that government records about third parties, about contracts and about polling should be made public and there needs to be improved access to this information. They also said that non-profit groups that receive two-thirds of their funding from the government should also be opening up their books.

If the government really wants the public to know what is happening, why is it so eager to keep information secret, especially information on the deals that were made by the former Liberal government? We want to have that information made public, especially if those deals are not the best deals around. Why do you not want to make this information public?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I would just remind the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina to address all comments through the Chair and not direct them to members. The hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, the member has asked that question a number of times today.

I am one who has brought forward requests for access to information. I have been very dismayed when after years have gone by the documents come forward with white-out over the whole page, with maybe a little paragraph at the bottom of one page and another paragraph somewhere else.

That is one of the reasons I am very pleased with the accountability act, that there will be changes to the Access to Information Act and to a number of other acts as well.

We want to be able to hold governments to account. Canadians want to be able to hold governments to account. They expect openness and transparency in their government.

Legitimate concerns are still there with access to information. We also have privacy laws. Some things perhaps may have to be kept secret for legal reasons. There are other commercial confidentialities. There is the protection of intergovernmental affairs which is very legitimate.

However, pages 24 and 25 of the accountability bill lay out a very comprehensive strategy for making government more transparent.

• (1615)

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. While the member for Crowfoot was responding to questions, when he was referring to corruption, mismanagement, misuse and so on, and I will

not repeat all the words, the member for Nepean—Carleton pointed to me directly referring to “you, you”.

We all come, as I said earlier, to this hon. House. When he gets one to one and personal, I say that the member should stand up and apologize simply because it is that type of poisonous environment that is hurting the Canadian nation as a whole.

I demand an apology because he addressed it directly to me.

An hon. member: From who?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the member will be waiting until it is a very cold day some place other than here before he gets an apology from me. I am proud to say that I am a member of a party that has exposed 13 years of brutal corruption unparalleled in Canadian history. I will never be silenced in speaking out against it.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I challenge the member for Nepean—Carleton to step outside this chamber right now and make the same statement. Step outside and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke on a point of order.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear the accusation. I did not hear it actually happen. Could we check *Hansard* and see whether or not anything was picked up?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I think all hon. members will want to remember the tones and the phrases that were used in the first days of this Parliament, when we all agreed to try to elevate the decorum of this place and to try to follow the rules regarding language and procedure and decorum in the House.

I will review the blues as to what was said by the parliamentary secretary to examine what was said. I would really implore all members to not impute any motives of other hon. members, to not assign any kind of purposeful misbehaviour.

On that note we will continue with the rest of the debate.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many of us in this House routinely begin our speeches on various issues by saying what a tremendous pleasure it is to speak to the issue and how important the issue is to Canada and to Canadians. Never has that been more true for me than it is today.

I believe this government's accountability act is truly the most important and the most necessary piece of legislation this House has seen in decades. I cannot say strongly enough how proud I am to be standing here today as part of the government that has introduced this bill.

This legislation will profoundly change the way government does business. It will dramatically change the relationship between the federal government and Canadian society. It will lay bare the mechanics of government, including the way Canadians' tax dollars are managed and the way government makes important decisions. It will replace partisan political interference and corruption with non-partisan oversight. It will allow public scrutiny to restore public trust.

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In short, the government's accountability act heralds a new age in Canadian governance. This is an enormous bill and believe me, it does not waste any ink. Every single clause in this bill contributes to the real and meaningful reform of the way the federal government does its work and relates to Canadians.

[Translation]

Given that I have very little time—

• (1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I apologize for the interruption, but the hon. member for Scarborough Centre is rising on a point of order.

[English]

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, the member for Nepean—Carleton is now leaving his chair, indicating that he was going to come outside and pose the same wording that he had in this chamber. I either get an apology for personally addressing those comments to me, or he immediately steps out of the chamber and states that publicly. I meant it the first time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I have already indicated that I will review what was said in the House and come back after reviewing *Hansard*. So anything other than that is not a point of order at this time.

We will continue with the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

Mr. John Cannis: I will not argue with you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, given that I have very little time, I cannot address every aspect of this very important bill. I will simply mention the highlights, particularly the part of this bill that most interests me, that is, how we treat public servants who denounce corruption.

[English]

The accountability act will clean up the way political parties are financed. Donations from corporations, unions and organizations will be banned. Individuals will be allowed to donate no more than \$1,000 each to parties, candidates, riding associations, and leadership candidates.

This will make party financing more transparent and level the playing field for all Canadians who wish to donate to political campaigns. Unions, businesses and the very wealthy will no longer be able to decide which party has a richer war chest.

Even more important, these changes will prevent scandals like the Liberal sponsorship scam from being repeated. No governing party will ever again be able to give taxpayers' money to its friends in the business world in return for kickbacks in the form of political donations.

The accountability act will also entrench the conflict of interest code for public office holders in law and create a new conflict of interest and ethics commissioner to administer those rules. The Prime Minister will no longer be able to overrule the Ethics Commissioner. Ministers will have to put their interests in truly blind trusts. We will no longer see a situation in which a Prime Minister or

a finance minister can discuss his shipping business with the people managing it, or sell it to his sons and pretend to be uninvolved.

[Translation]

This bill will enable ordinary citizens to participate directly in the accountability process. Under the act, the public can provide information to the Ethics Commissioner through members of Parliament.

[English]

The accountability act will prevent ministers and their aides from leaving government to immediately take lucrative jobs lobbying their friends who remain in government. It will require lobbyists to register their lobbying efforts and prevent them from collecting so-called success fees.

This bill will help Parliament scrutinize the government's financial management and budgeting process by establishing a budget authority to provide independent financial analysis, information and advice to parliamentarians. Canadians have seen in recent years how governments can hand out money with one hand while picking taxpayers' pockets with the other. Canadians are fed up with their money being concealed and shuffled around in a political shell game.

The budget authority will also have a mandate to estimate the financial costs of proposed programs. Maybe if we had had an independent body like that a few years ago, the true costs of the Liberal rifle registry would have been known ahead of time and the whole fiasco would have been prevented. Instead the registry went ahead and ended up costing a thousand times what it was supposed to cost. This must never happen again.

• (1625)

[Translation]

The accountability act will also give Parliament a voice in the appointment of officers of Parliament. We will thereby put an end to preferential treatment for friends of ministers in the public service hiring process.

[English]

The bill would also allow the Auditor General to audit organizations and individuals who receive taxpayer money. Wherever public money ends up, the Auditor General would be able to follow it and shine a light on how it is being used. Gone are the days when the hard-earned money of Canadian taxpayers was simply siphoned off into oblivion, never to be heard from again.

The accountability act would also strengthen the audit functions within departments and create tougher penalties for fraud involving public funds. At the same time, it would create a director of public prosecution, independent from the political system, who would decide when to prosecute criminal offences under federal laws.

Canadians were disgusted with the lack of charges laid and the lenient penalties handed out after untold millions of dollars of their money were stolen through the Liberal sponsorship program.

There are many other concrete ways the bill would keep governments honest and transparent but I want to finish off by focusing on one area with which I have been deeply involved: assisting and protecting public servants who have the courage to come forward to expose corruption.

I was sickened to see the way the previous government treated our public servants. As a retired public servant myself, I know very well the depth of professionalism and the quality of people in Canada's public service. I was shocked to hear the Liberals repeatedly blame public servants for the massive kickback scheme that filled the Liberal Party's coffers with taxpayer money. I was heartbroken by the way the Liberals repeatedly and systematically ruined public servants who had the courage and the integrity to blow the whistle on corruption and abuse within their departments.

The bill the Liberals introduced in the last Parliament to address this issue, Bill C-11, offered nothing for public servants. It contained no independent process to receive and investigate whistleblower complaints, no penalties for punishing whistleblowers and no new process for whistleblowers to report reprisals. In fact, it actually added insult to injury by shielding internal audit information from access to information laws and allowed the Prime Minister and his cabinet to arbitrarily exempt government bodies from its provisions.

The Conservative members in the government operations committee, sometimes with the support of the NDP, fought tooth and nail to address some of the shortcomings in the Liberal bill. At the end of that long battle the House passed a bill that was still very weak but at least we could say that it was slightly better than the status quo.

Now that we are in government, we Conservatives will provide strong, meaningful support to our honest and courageous public servants. Never again will public servants like Allan Cutler have their careers cut short and their lives derailed because they exposed corruption and saved taxpayers money.

The accountability act is the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history. For example, the bill would bring in a corruption watchdog to protect whistleblowers against bullies; end the revolving door between lobby firms and ministers' offices; give the Auditor General the power to shine light in every dark corner in her hunt for waste and theft; and ban big money and corporate cash from political campaigns. By moving from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability, we are fixing the system for all Canadians.

I recognize the importance of allowing Parliament to fully study and debate all bills, and I realize that the bill is a very thick document, but I hope my hon. colleagues opposite will treat the accountability act with the urgency it deserves so we can get on with restoring the public trust that has been so badly damaged by the scandals of the past government.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made a statement that the bill would provide a protection watchdog for whistleblowers.

In the last Parliament, over a one year period the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates dealt with Bill C-11. The hon. member will know that the bill was referred to the

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committee before second reading, which gave the committee full latitude to do a very good job and make it an effective bill. Indeed, the committee did a very good job and actually made very substantial amendments, almost re-wrote the entire bill. The bill was passed unanimously at the committee. It came to the House and it passed with the support of all parties at all stages and was given royal assent.

It is law in Canada but it is not in force today and the reason it is not in force today is because it has not been proclaimed. It is that act, the Liberal bill on whistleblowers, that is providing the protection for whistleblowers. This particular bill, Bill C-2, makes some minor amendments to our bill but does not, in fact, provide for their protection. I just wanted to provide that clarification.

My question is with regard to the thickness of the act. Does the member believe that we should ram this bill through by the summer or should we take the time that our committee did in the last Parliament to ensure we make good decisions?

• (1630)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member calls Bill C-11 a Liberal bill. At committee we received a bill that was, quite frankly, absolutely unacceptable. There was great discussion as to whether we should tear the damn thing up and start over or whether we could work with it. Quite frankly, it was touch and go as to what we would do. We, as a committee, decided that maybe we could work with it because we needed whistleblower legislation.

Thanks to the Conservatives and many members in this House, we worked and finally came up with, certainly not a perfect bill but a bill that gave some protection to whistleblowers. We decided as a committee that we would bring that bill back to Parliament.

The new bill we are introducing really does the job that the Conservatives wanted all along and I am glad I am part of the government that is doing that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to ask a question of my colleague across the way, whom I thank for his statement.

I would like to address certain points. My colleague mentioned that government must be accountable, and that is certainly important. We must, however, be aware of certain realities. After ministers leave politics, they cannot become lobbyists, but is it acceptable for lobbyists to become ministers? We must ask ourselves this question, which is directly related to accountability.

And now for the question for my hon. colleague. Many promises are made during election campaigns. Does he think that a government that fails to keep all of the promises made by its elected members or candidates during the last election campaign is an accountable government?

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Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[English]

It is interesting that he asked about ministers. How many ministers during an 18 month period in the last Parliament had to resign because of the scandal that surrounded the last Parliament? Those were ministers of the Crown who had to resign in shame. We had strippergate and all kinds of gates but the truth of the matter is that we finally have a government that will clean house. The last two members who asked those two questions sat on the committee and protected the previous corrupt government that had spent 13 years getting us down to the depths where we were.

After 13 years of corruption, we finally have a government that will be transparent and will give Canadians value for dollar.

• (1635)

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by saying that I do support the spirit of the proposed accountability act because accountability is our obligation as parliamentarians and the very least that Canadians should receive from those entrusted to guide this nation and to serve its people.

We heard a great deal about the sponsorship scandal not just today but it has dominated debate during the last two federal elections. It was a stain on our nation. It demeaned our democracy, this House and the work of the members who serve our many and diverse communities.

As I said, I do support the spirit of the bill but I do have some concerns. Like any bill cobbled together rather hastily, Bill C-2 has many flaws. My concern is that in its 270 pages it may prove to be more ponderous than enlightening and could collapse in on itself. Therefore I believe that it needs some refinements for the sake of ensuring that it does precisely what it was intended to do and that is to bring back accountability and integrity. We in the New Democratic Party would like to work with all members in the House to effect those needed changes.

I am going to refer shamelessly to the work of my former colleague, Mr. Ed Broadbent, the former member for Ottawa Centre, because he did put together a very comprehensive package to address the kinds of problems that we have seen in the House over the last few years.

I would like to begin with financing. Bill C-2 does make some important changes to the financing laws. These changes have been around for a little while. Some were brought in by the previous government. However, unlike the previous government, we see some clear restrictions: lowering the contribution limits locally to \$1,000, an additional \$1,000 nationally and an additional \$1,000 for leadership races. That is very important.

I would like to comment specifically on leadership races because that is missing from this bill. If we allow those who have financial wherewithal to take control and be the only ones who can run for the leaders of this nation, then we are buying into the kind of elitism that we see in American races. I believe that wealth should not be the basis upon which one seeks leadership. I would like to see a lowering of limits or a very clear limit set on leadership races so we

can be assured that we have people with the genuine skills and determination to be our leaders rather than those with deep pockets.

I am also pleased to see the elimination of corporate and union contributions. We in the New Democratic Party certainly support that move. We believe it will provide a measure of fairness. I have run many times, both provincially and federally, and it was always a problem. My opponents were constantly able to draw on corporate resources that were well beyond anything that my constituents and my supporters could ever provide. This kind of limit is very important.

I also like the fact that loopholes have been closed in terms of trust funds. Unfortunately, much of this is too little too late. I think the ship has sailed on trust funds and I rather strongly suspect that those trust funds are now in the hands of riding associations. It would have been nice to have seen this much sooner.

One of the things that I do have some real concerns with is the elimination of cash contributions over \$20. I would not want members to think that supporters in London—Fanshawe were so well-heeled that they were coming out with lots of cash. In fact, most contributions were made by cheque and they were modest but heartfelt contributions, and I appreciated every one of them.

• (1640)

A lot of seniors in my riding do not deal with credit cards, and money orders just add a lot of extra expense. They are hard-working people who deal in cash. Credit is an alien concept to them. I would not want them to be undermined in any way by this limitation.

I have a story about one supporter of mine, a wonderful man. He had not been on employment insurance. He had worked many years and contributed to the fund, but had never qualified because his work was sporadic. It was very important to him to get the kind of representation that would address this inequity. We know this inequity has been endemic in Canada for a very long time. He walked several miles from his home to my campaign office with \$25. He wanted to show how important his participation was and how much he believed in fairness and in an opportunity to have his voice heard. For him, this was a great sacrifice.

Unfortunately, if we start to eliminate those kinds of very small contributions, we are going to lose out a great deal in being able to extend and allow our supporters of modest means to contribute and to feel positive about that.

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I also want to talk about fixed election dates. It is very important that we do this. Mr. Broadbent was very clear about that. He said that prime ministers in governing parties should lose their control over when we voted, that the date should be every four years unless the government failed because of a confidence vote. This would add fairness because a prime minister should not be able to manipulate the vote. A prime minister should not be able to look at polling and decide not to call an election because things are not looking good. There should be a consistency to our elections for the various houses in this nation, and fixed election dates would go a long way in terms of doing that.

I would also like to talk a little today about electoral reform. This is sadly missing from the bill, and I think we suffer for that. As a community and as a Parliament, we do not have the kind of representation we should have in terms of our constituents and of the people who should be here in the House.

A few weeks ago, the women in our NDP caucus, and there are 12 or 41% of our caucus is female, of which we are very proud, challenged the other parties in regard to proportional representation and effecting the kind of electoral change that would allow people from visible minorities, from the disabled community and from first nations and women to participate fully in the life of our nation.

I throw this challenge out once again to the members of the House to look very closely at electoral reform, to bring in proportional representation, to add it to the bill and make it better in regard to the electorate's wishes being clearly reflected and respected in the representation of Parliament.

Third, I want to speak very briefly about the lack of floor-crossing legislation. I guess we could call it the Vancouver Kingsway hangover. I make reference to the donor who walked all those miles to my campaign office in order to bring his \$25 contribution. Imagine if his member had, after a few weeks or months, seen fit to cross the floor—

•(1645)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Oakville.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest, and I cannot say I disagreed with much that the new member for London—Fanshawe brought forward. I can tell by her speech that she is dedicated to those who are less well off in her riding. It is a good lesson for all of us. I can also tell that she is dedicated to accountability. Being a member of that party, I can also guess that she is pretty dedicated to the workers of our country, including public servants. That particular point was made by the previous speaker about dedication to public service.

Considering the fact that the chief economist at Toronto-Dominion Bank has suggested there will be cuts of \$22.5 billion in the budget, would she agree with me that it would also be suitable, as a part of accountability, which the new government is espousing and claiming to achieve, that when the Minister of Finance presents his budget, he bring forward the list of budget lines he is cutting to achieve that \$22.5 billion?

If the member really believes in care for the more vulnerable people, I am sure she would be very interested to know what cuts are

going to be made so she can warn her constituents about it. Does she not agree that it is part of accountability in the broader sense?

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. We in the New Democratic Party are very concerned about what we may see in budget cuts. Ultimately, the people who work in our civil service, very dedicated and hard-working people, have talked to me about their concerns in regard to the lack of services.

In specific regard to that, one example is the services offered by Revenue Canada to seniors who go in to talk about their tax returns. The problem is that these civil servants are being instructed to wait 20 minutes between each customer. If seniors do not understand that they need to have an appointment, they may arrive at 9 o'clock in the morning without an appointment. Then they have to set up one up, they are fourth or fifth in line and they have to wait for several hours before they can see someone who can help them with their tax returns. The rationale is that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last couple of days members have been having a conversation among themselves about the issue of fixed election dates. I know the NDP is very much in support of establishing fixed election dates. Maybe to advance the dialogue among members, would the member care to share some of the reasons why she believes fixed election dates would be a good idea?

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Speaker, it is very important for the citizens of the country to be able to rely on fixed election dates. It gives us a sense of when elections will happen. It is a commitment of Parliament to say that it will work for a four year period and not play games.

Unfortunately, we saw this in Ontario with a Liberal government in 1990. The premier of the day thought he could avoid the recession and played around with the timing of the election. He lost that election, but it was clearly a very cynical kind of behaviour. We have seen enough cynicism in Parliaments and legislatures across the country. We need to be very clear with people who are depending on clarity. We need this manipulation to go away. Fixed election dates would do a great deal in terms of remedying that.

•(1650)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this extremely important debate on probably the most important piece of legislation that Parliament has seen in the 13 years I have been here. I think, undeniably, that Canadians feel there is a great need for this federal accountability act.

We have had three days of debate now at second reading and a couple of things are clear just from listening to that debate.

We hear some productive debate by the members of the New Democratic Party on the issue and also some petty criticisms. Overall, they have taken part and have offered some ideas. I do appreciate that.

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From the Conservative Party, we have heard full support for the federal accountability act. It is our legislation, legislation that the country wants. It is for that reason that we are going to work hard to get the legislation through the House.

From members of Liberal Party though, we have heard quite a different story. What I have heard is that they really do not want this legislation to pass. That is the last thing they want. They do not want accountability. On the surface, that would be surprising. However, when we think about it, it should be no surprise at all. Why was it necessary for us to bring this legislation before Parliament? Because we had 13 years of a Liberal government that was laden with corruption and the lack of accountability that Canadians simply did not accept.

We heard Mr. Dingwall, a former Liberal minister, at committee. I chaired the government operations and estimates committee in the last Parliament. He said that he was entitled to his entitlements. That seems to be the attitude on the part of the members of former governing Liberal Party, that they are entitled to their entitlements and they do not want anything to happen that causes them to lose those entitlements should they ever get back into government. We have heard resistance to the legislation from them, and I guess it should no surprised.

The reason this legislation is necessary is not only that over the past 13 years we have had government that has been completely unacceptable and unaccountable, with a culture of entitlement and corruption. It is necessary because we saw this creep in from time to time from other governments, particularly when governments had been in power for a long time. That tends to happen. This legislation is critical to ensure that it is very difficult for that to happen again.

In the end I would concede that the only way we are going to have ethical government is with ethical people in government. However, Bill C-2 will go a long way to ensuring that governments in the future will be accountable, no matter what party is governing. We are putting in place mechanisms that will make it extremely difficult for them not to be accountable, and that is important.

I want to talk briefly about one aspect of the legislation, which is whistleblower component of the bill. This is a broad bill and the whistleblower component is only one part of it, but it is a very important part.

We saw in the last two Parliaments attempts by the Liberal Party to have whistleblower legislation passed, which would probably have been a step backwards. I was on the government operations and estimates committee when the former president of the Treasury Board, Reg Alcock, the member from Winnipeg, who was defeated in the last election, chaired the committee. That was when the Liberal government brought forth its first attempt at whistleblower legislation. It was so bad that even Mr. Alcock said that it had to be rejected, that it would probably make things worse rather than better. Everybody on the committee said it was completely unacceptable and threw it back at the government.

• (1655)

In the last Parliament, which started in 2004, the government operations and estimates committee was again presented with a piece of legislation before second reading, Bill C-11, which was the

government's next attempt at putting in place whistleblower legislation. That legislation was so bad—there were a few changes and improvements made—that the committee was ready to throw it back to the government and to say the government should do it over because it was a step backwards.

The government did come back with some concessions. It had refused, for example, to provide an independent office of Parliament to head up the whistleblower legislation, to be the body that whistleblowers could go to when they wanted to report wrongdoing in government or waste in government. The Liberals were proposing that the individual in the office in fact would be a member of government, so whistleblowers would not be going to an independent officer of Parliament. Instead, they would be going to someone who would answer directly to cabinet and government. Clearly that was not going to work.

The committee was ready to throw it back. Concessions were made. To make a long story short, after many months of members of all parties working together, we did pass through committee and through the House a piece of whistleblower legislation, Bill C-11, which was not the government's legislation at all. It was a brand new piece of legislation developed by the committee members working as Canadians expect them to work: working together to make things better.

Most of us acknowledge that the legislation was only a start. There were a lot of things that we had determined would be very helpful and would make Bill C-11 much better and stronger legislation if they were added. Really, that is exactly what the whistleblower component of Bill C-2, the federal accountability act, provides. It provides a series of changes that will take Bill C-11 as a start and make it powerful whistleblower legislation. I would suggest that it would probably be the best whistleblower legislation in the world. It would be extremely good.

The government is taking an active role in restoring the trust and confidence of Canadians in federal government institutions. That is important. Canadians have a right to expect the highest standard of ethical conduct on the part of public servants. We must provide the compelling evidence that a culture of integrity exists in the federal public service. Without a doubt, if these changes, the proposals we have in Bill C-2, are passed, then we will have that. We will have the world's strongest regime for the disclosure of wrongdoing.

We will be the only country in the world with an independent officer of Parliament dedicated to the issue, the only country with a strong legislative framework to protect whistleblowers, and the only country with an independent tribunal to order remedies. This is extremely important and is something that was absent from Bill C-11.

We will be the only country to have an independent body to provide remedies for reprisals and discipline of those who take reprisals. That is such a key point. If we have whistleblowers, who go out on a limb and put their careers on the line, afraid to come forth and report wrongdoing and inefficiency in government, then we have a piece of legislation that simply will not work.

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When we dealt with Bill C-11, we had witnesses before our committee who had had their careers destroyed because they had done the right thing. They had become whistleblowers. They had reported wrongdoing inside government. They had their careers completely destroyed.

Our legislation, although I do not have time to get into the details, will truly protect whistleblowers so that in the future people within the federal service and people doing work with the federal government who see wrongdoing can come forth and report it and we can act upon it. It is such a powerful piece of legislation, such an important part of the federal accountability act that I am certain all parties in the House will support it. I welcome any questions.

• (1700)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that the reason the Dingwall situation came up was with regard to allegations made by the Conservative member for Portage—Lisgar about financial improprieties. He will know that, as it turned out, there were in fact no improprieties on behalf of the minister of the Mint, which led to that situation. I think it is a bit of a stretch to suggest that this was somehow the problem.

My question is really simple. The member will know that we passed Bill C-11 out of committee with all party support and it passed at all stages in the House. Subsequently it has received royal assent, but it has not been proclaimed. I agree with the member that it is an important bill and that it is important for us to move forward with accountability measures, particularly whistleblowing. If he agrees with that, will he recommend to the government that it immediately proclaim Bill C-11 so that we can get on with the process of setting up the mechanism for having this new officer of Parliament to protect whistleblowers?

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the hon. member opposite was a member of the committee that dealt with Bill C-11. I also appreciate the question, because as for his suggestion that Mr. Dingwall did nothing wrong when we recently found out that he was dismissed from his job by his government, it is absurd. It is absurd that he would suggest such a thing. Of course there was wrongdoing and of course he should have been dismissed, but for him to be paid \$400,000 and some—

An hon. member: Outrageous.

Mr. Leon Benoit: —as a fee to leave when dismissed, it is in fact outrageous.

In terms of Bill C-11, he is left behind once again. We are so far ahead of Bill C-11 with our legislation that it is like comparing apples and oranges. What we are proposing is whistleblower legislation that really will work.

It would put in place an environment that will encourage whistleblowers from within the federal civil service, and also from outside of the federal civil service, those who are doing business with a federal department, such as contractors. It would allow any of those people to report wrongdoing and inefficiencies in government when they see them. It is so important. For the member to suggest that Bill C-11 is anything like what we are proposing here is really simply not accurate.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's discussion on the federal accountability act and listened to the history of the scandals over the 13 years, but it occurs to me that despite all the things that have happened and the necessity to introduce the bill, there are some members in the Liberal Party across the way who had nothing to do with any of the wrongdoing over the years.

I would ask my colleague if he could tell us about something they could do to reflect the fact that there are a few over there who are honest and who want to do the right thing.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright has one minute to respond.

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, the member has brought up a really important issue. Again and again we have heard, just as we heard a few minutes ago from the member for Mississauga South, members of the Liberal Party denying that there was wrongdoing in their government when everybody knows that it was widespread.

To answer my colleague's question, if those Liberals really want to do something to help reduce cynicism on the part of the public, each one will apologize for their government and for the type of government they provided this country. It is shameful. They should apologize. Then we can move on with a positive piece of legislation.

• (1705)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to speak to this bill, because I think it speaks to the incredible gap that exists in this country between what happens in Parliament and the people of Canada. I represent the region of Timmins—James Bay.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Charlie Angus: They love Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to speak about tonight is very important. It speaks to what every single member here has as a fundamental obligation, which is to serve the people who elected us.

I have to say that I did not wear a political hat for a long time because, like many people in my riding, I was fairly cynical about politics. When I was first asked about running for federal politics, I said, "What is a member of Parliament? Isn't that the guy who sends us a calendar once a year?"

In my experience, what I saw were people who stood up when they were told to stand up and who sat down when they were told to sit down. It seemed that their fundamental job was to take a message from Ottawa back to the people of Timmins—James Bay saying, "I am sorry, you are wrong about the gun registry. You are wrong about what it is like to live in rural Canada. We are going to give you a message". There was a deep sense of alienation as a result.

Our obligation is to speak to our people and bring their issues forward. Our people expect accountability in the House. Number one in terms of accountability I would say, which is not in this bill unfortunately, is the need for proper electoral reform.

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In my region, which is over 1,200 kilometres long, the Mushkegowuk Cree have not traditionally voted and they had good reason not to vote, because they did not have representation. In fact, the former member never seemed to know that they even existed. What we need up there and right across the rural north is representation that recognizes the vast distances and cultural disparities that exist. In an electoral reform system we could start to have some of those voices at the table. It is very important and would be productive to bring people into the discussion.

Another thing we need in terms of accountability is that when we make promises to our people we do our best to live up to them. That is why as New Democrats we have continually supported legislation against crossing the floor.

There was a situation last year when a member of a political party crossed the floor on the eve of a historic vote and was awarded a cabinet post. That was one of the most shameful things I have ever seen. The member crossed the floor on the eve of a crucial vote, when that vote would have made the difference between whether the House stood or fell. The member was awarded a cabinet post. That was a complete betrayal of her constituents.

Another member stood and told his constituents day after day to vote for him and support him, that he would be the Conservative Party's worst nightmare. Now he is sitting with that party.

An hon. member: He is its worst nightmare.

Mr. Charlie Angus: He still is that party's worst nightmare.

We need to put this into some kind of codified law. I accept that there will be members who break with their own party over issues, who might want to sit as independents and who in good conscience can no longer support the direction of a party. That is perfectly fair. It is perfectly fair for a member to say he or she has seen what another party is doing and is impressed by some of it, but the obligation is to sit as an independent first and then go back to the voters so that the voters can decide whether or not they will accept that person as a member in a new party.

The other thing I would like to offer, and maybe we could ask for all party consent on this, is that we should take all the red book promises over the years and put them in a glass case at the centre of Parliament so that when school children in years to come ask their teachers why an accountability act was needed, they could be told to look at the red book.

Imagine if there was a red book year after year. We could just change the cover and tell our voters, "Vote for us; we will support child care. Vote for us; we will fix EI. Vote for us; we will fix the environment. Vote for us; we will have an independent ethics commissioner". When someone has the temerity in the House to stand and say that perhaps we should ask the government to be accountable to some of the red book promises and have an independent ethics commissioner, the government of the day will say, "Absolutely not, all of our promises are strictly voluntary". No wonder there was such deep cynicism.

The people I met while knocking on doors in places like Schumacher, Elk Lake and Kirkland Lake felt that they had been written off the political map of Canada by a party that never bothered

to come out to them, except every three years with the same old Liberal red book. None of those promises was ever acted on. No wonder people are not voting. People are not voting because they feel nobody here listens to them.

• (1710)

The worst act of cynicism we have ever seen is the famous Liberal deathbed pinata. The Liberals put in all their promises over all the years that were never acted on and smashed it across this country. They said, "Please God, vote for us otherwise all these promises will never come to naught".

The most cynical thing about this deathbed pinata is the revisionist myth that the promises were enacted, that all that money was spent, that all the little children across Canada were finally cared for, that the environment was finally fixed, that EI was finally fixed, that the first nations of Canada, who those people disgracefully and systemically ignored, were suddenly repaired because the money was out there. That is cynicism. The cruel myth is that voluntary promises are not enough. We are obligated as parliamentarians to do our best to live up to the commitments that we make.

An hon. member: What about shipbuilding?

Mr. Charlie Angus: The people of Timmins—James Bay would definitely support a shipbuilding plan.

I have serious questions about how far this bill will go and whether it is adequate. The time has come in the House of Commons to have accountability standards that are not simply voluntary.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think you would find consent at this time to revert to Statements by Ministers to allow the Prime Minister of Canada to make a statement, with the understanding that after all parties respond, we return to Government Orders.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons have the unanimous consent of the House to continue in this manner?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since re-entering Parliament, I have spent considerable time addressing the critical issues facing Canada's resource industries. While most Canadians now live in cities, much of our economic success as a nation still depends on the health of our farms, our forests, our fisheries, our mines, our rivers, and the oil patch.

Routine Proceedings

●(1715)

[Translation]

Our resources are not only a part of our heritage. Resource-based industries create jobs, they support our communities. They are vital to the wellbeing of our country.

[English]

Among the many issues facing the resource sectors, one of our greatest concerns, and one of my greatest concerns as Prime Minister, has been the long-standing softwood lumber dispute.

[Translation]

As all parliamentarians know, the resolution of this dispute is vital to our industry, to the communities that depend on softwood lumber and to forestry workers and their families.

I am therefore pleased to announce that we have reached an agreement, which will put an end to this dispute.

[English]

I am pleased to announce today that the United States has accepted Canada's key conditions for the resolution of the softwood lumber dispute. Canada's bargaining position was strong, our conditions were clear, and this agreement delivers.

Canada asked for stable and predictable access to the U.S. market. The U.S. has agreed to provide Canadian producers with unrestricted access under current market conditions.

[Translation]

To be quite clear, with the market prices at the moment, it means neither quota nor tariff.

[English]

Canada asked for the return of duty deposits. The U.S. has agreed to return at least \$4 billion U.S. of duties to Canadian producers.

[Translation]

To put it clearly, our industry will receive a minimum of \$4 billion U.S. Canada asked the United States to take into account the various operating conditions. The U.S. agreed to flexibility as regards our provinces and regions.

[English]

Our government, tired of legal wrangling, asked for a long term solution. The U.S. has agreed to a seven year deal, with a possibility of renewal.

Canada asked for a return to the historic exemption for Atlantic producers. The United States has agreed.

[Translation]

Canada requested an exemption for mills on the Quebec border. The U.S. agreed.

[English]

Finally, Canada has long expressed concerns about other nations gaining U.S. market share at Canada's expense. The U.S. has agreed to third country provisions to cover such a situation.

●(1720)

Stable and predictable market access, \$4 billion in returned duties, provincial flexibility and a long term deal: those are the things Canada wanted and those are the things Canada got. This is a good deal for all. This is a deal that resolves the longstanding dispute and allows us to move on to other challenges facing the Canadian forest industry, move on to other issues affecting the Canada-U.S. trade relationship and move on to finding new outlets for North American lumber in world markets.

Today's agreement is the product of intense engagement by our government. For my part, I have used every opportunity to remind the President of this issue and to urge quick action.

[Translation]

Our ministers and officials wasted no time getting to work.

[English]

Together they have doggedly pursued a deal that defends Canada's national interests and helps Canadian companies, communities and workers. In particular, I would like to thank my colleague who is in Washington right now, the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway, the Minister of International Trade.

[Translation]

The Minister of Industry, the hon. member for Beauce, was also in Washington.

[English]

I also want to thank Michael Wilson, our ambassador to the United States.

[Translation]

I also thank Claude Carrière, our deputy head of mission in Washington.

After consulting our partners in the provinces and industry, I am pleased to announce that British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario have given their support.

[English]

I am pleased to announce that the provinces representing the vast majority of Canada's softwood production have given us their support. I thank Premier Gordon Campbell, Premier Jean Charest and Premier Dalton McGuinty for working with us and for forcefully defending and advancing both their provincial interests and Canada's national interests.

In conclusion, I would like to say that this agreement demonstrates that when we focus on the achievable, when we work hard in pursuit of our goals and when we put the national interest first we can get results.

Let us make no mistake; this agreement does not solve all the challenges facing the forest industry but it is an important step.

[Translation]

As I said, it will allow us to move ahead on many other bilateral issues that are crucial for our jobs, our families and our communities. Today is a good day.

*Routine Proceedings**[English]*

Today is a good day. I look forward to continuing our work with the industry, with our provinces and with our principal trading partner to build a much stronger Canada.

• (1725)

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we came into the House before the Prime Minister spoke, members will recall that from the NDP benches there was a great attack on the reputation and on the activities of the previous Liberal government. That attack was warmly received by our colleagues opposite in the Conservative Party for reasons we in this party and the Canadian public understand. The Canadian public understands that it was the NDP's betrayal of the possibility of getting so many things done in November that resulted in the Conservative government being elected.

When the leader of the NDP rises in his place in the House today he will no doubt be congratulating the Prime Minister for what he has done because he and his party are responsible for where we are today on this and on other files.

Today we are called upon to rise in our place in this House and comment on the Prime Minister's speech in respect of the deal that he has just achieved. We have not seen the agreement. The Prime Minister is an intelligent and knowledgeable observer of international trade. He will know that these, as in all agreements, the devil is in the details. I have a strong suspicion that there will be a lot more devils in those details than the Prime Minister revealed to this House in his speech today.

It is very hard for us to believe the Prime Minister's words when he says that there is a real improvement as a result of the agreement that he is boasting about in the House today. After all, I watched this deal on television this afternoon and most industry representatives condemned it completely and without reserve.

The Prime Minister told the House today that he received stable and open market access. What we got, what industry got and what Canadians got were several things. We got stable limited access. This is not free and open trade. This is capped and managed trade.

Hidden in his statement, the Prime Minister made it clear that the market access that is guaranteed under the agreement is market access that is guaranteed under present day economic conditions and present day conditions of trade. We know that when we see the details of the agreement we will see draconian measures in the agreement that will punish our industry the minute the conditions in the United States go down and the American industry, which has been sold out through this agreement, will shut Canadian lumber out now because it is not in its interest. That is what we will find out when we get the details of the agreement.

The Prime Minister spoke to us today about the \$4 billion of illegal duties that the agreement provides for. Where is the elusive \$1 billion that the Prime Minister spoke about in his election campaign? I would like to remind the government of what the Conservative platform provided for. On page 19 of its platform it reads:

A Conservative government will:

Demand that the U.S. government play by the rules on softwood lumber. The U.S. must abide by the NAFTA ruling on softwood lumber, repeal the Byrd

Amendment, and return the more than \$5 billion in illegal softwood lumber tariffs to Canadian producers.

Today the \$5 billion, by the magic of the Prime Minister's words and no doubt with a little help from his finance minister, has become \$4 billion. What will happen to the \$1 billion? We know very well what will happen to the \$1 billion that have been left on the table. We know that under the Byrd amendment that \$1 billion will go into the coffers of the American lumber industry which will use that money to continue to harass the Canadian lumber industry the way it has been doing for the last 12 years, with hundreds of millions of dollars in legal fees and constant attacks.

Does anybody believe this will put a stop to the aggressive American lumber industry's attacks on the Canadian lumber industry the minute their market share is threatened? I suggest to the House that is a complete pipe dream. The Prime Minister has betrayed what he said when he told the Canadian people, "If the rules are simply ignored, then the very basis of a rules based trading system threatens to come unravelling and the future of all Canadian-American trade relations could probably be affected".

Obviously illegally collected duties must be returned to the Canadian softwood industry. That is what our treaty and laws demand but that is what the government failed to demand when it entered into this agreement under the pressure of President Bush and the American lumber barons. I think it is most unfortunate.

We have heard that this is a seven year deal capable of being extended. I am not surprised the Americans would be delighted to extend this deal. This is a deal they would be delighted to extend forever and forever, but will our Canadian industry want to see the deal?

• (1730)

[Translation]

What I heard our colleagues from Quebec saying is that they are already afraid that the industry in Quebec will be completely wiped out by this agreement. Everyone who speaks for the workers, the people who work in the plants and the people who depend on this industry, are very concerned about what this agreement means.

When we have a chance, we will study the details. Let us rely on what the people in the industry, who know what is good for them, are saying. Let us not rely on the words of politicians who wanted to put an end to this matter at any cost. That is what has happened today. Canadian industry has been sold out, to put an end to something that was embarrassing the government. That is clear and plain.

[English]

The Prime Minister said that today was a good day. He believes so. If I were standing in the United States Congress, if I were standing in the United States trade office and if I were standing in a United States industry meeting I would be saying that, this is not a good day; this is a great day. Unfortunately, it is a great day for American industry, for American politics in trade and it is a disaster for Canada, for free trade and the Canadian industry.

Routine Proceedings

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, you will understand that my remarks are preliminary: I have not read the agreement and I have negotiated often enough to know that it is better to read an agreement before coming to any conclusions. The Leader of the Opposition is actually correct. The devil is often in the details. We will not know until we read the agreement. If it is a good one, I would not hesitate to congratulate the Prime Minister.

However, I have not read the agreement. I was here a decade ago when I heard a speech something like this one made by a Liberal leader at that time. He told us that he had got an extraordinary agreement and that from now on there would be no more problems with the Americans in the area of softwood lumber. Praises were sung of the fantastic days to come and it was a great day for Canada at the time. We have seen what happened. We have seen that the Americans did not honour that agreement either, an agreement signed by the Liberals, which was not a favourable one, even though they praised it as eloquently as the Prime Minister has done today. I therefore prefer to be cautious.

A few details have drawn my attention, however. I did in fact hold joint press conferences on this issue with the Conservative Party and the Prime Minister, in his former role as leader of the opposition, calling for the \$5.1 billion to be returned in full. Because I have done it so often, I recognize that plans may have to be abandoned during negotiations, but I have never abandoned anything after a ruling was given in my favour. When they rule in your favour, it is not the time to say that you are going to ask for a little less. It is rather like the police arresting someone who has robbed you of \$100 on the street and offering a good deal: the thief will agree to give you back \$80, and the whole thing will be forgotten.

I am not sure that this is such a good deal as all that. There is still a \$1 billion loss.

An hon. member: Let's ask the industry in Quebec about that.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: I listened to the Prime Minister speak, and he should offer me the same courtesy.

On the question of Quebec's share of the market, we were asking for more. I heard this afternoon that this was not achieved.

Will there be an export tax based on price fluctuations? The Prime Minister did not talk about this, but there was one in the agreement we knew, according to whether the price was above or below \$360. Apparently there was a gain at \$355. The fact remains that, at that point, a tax would be imposed. That is not what we call free trade.

I submit to you the following hypothesis. To the extent that the production cost, and hence the purchase cost for the Americans, is set at \$355, and according to the Speech from the Throne and the numerous statements by the Minister of Finance on the need to boost the productivity of Canadian companies, then the \$355 price will decrease. Indeed, as productivity rises, we reduce our production costs. These are very simple economic concepts, I would point out to the Minister of Transport: if productivity increases, the products are sold cheaper and more of them are bought. However, a tax would be imposed under the agreement we have seen today. But they are not talking about that. And that tells Carl Grenier, of the Free Trade Lumber Council, that this is the worst agreement in 25 years.

I cannot arrive at the same conclusions, since I have not read the agreement. So I will not reiterate his conclusions: I want to read it first. There is no question of my supporting someone who tells us it is the worst agreement, any more than I would support someone who tells us it is the best. I want to study all the aspects.

Companies had a gun to their head, they had no more resources; in no way do I blame them for accepting this. The industry is not to blame.

I have been saying for three years that the American strategy was very clear: it was to drag out the legal proceedings as long as possible, so that on the day of final defeat, the victors would no longer exist. That is exactly what the Americans have done. They have also bought a good many of the companies involved. I am thinking of Louisiana-Pacific Canada Ltd. which has made multiple acquisitions all over Canada and Quebec.

So we cannot blame the companies, which had their backs to the wall, because there has been no loan guarantee policy for years—I blame the Liberals for that. That is what is needed: loan guarantees equivalent to the money confiscated so that the companies involved have enough cash flow to deal with the situation.

● (1735)

Companies had nothing left. That is when the agreements were reached that are below the rulings and below what could have been obtained. We will see when we read the agreement, but I maintain that businesses need to be compensated for this billion dollars.

In another negotiation with the Americans, through the policies of this government, companies lost a billion dollars, including \$500 million that will be used to update U.S. companies and \$500 million for rebuilding New Orleans after the hurricanes. This billion will be used.

I see that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Transport are saying no. If the Americans took \$5 billion and gave back \$4 billion, by quick calculation there is \$1 billion missing. If they are not giving it back then they are keeping it. It might be simplistic logic, but it is quite obvious: there is a billion missing. It will be used to the benefit of U.S. companies, when even the NAFTA rulings do not allow the U.S. to keep that money. Nonetheless, this was accepted.

Furthermore, I predict future job losses. Regardless of this agreement, many older workers will be affected. This is true not only in this sector, but also in other industries such as textiles, clothing, furniture and bicycles. There is a way to use the existing World Trade Organization requirements. The previous government did nothing. I hope that this government will act. Only time will tell if any action will be taken.

Greater attention must also be paid to the dispute settlement mechanisms that exist in NAFTA. Rulings must not be repeatedly called into question under false pretenses. The government must address this issue to ensure that clear mechanisms are put in place to settle disputes with the Americans. This, I believe, is the government's responsibility.

Lastly, I would like to point out that I was here when the House voted in favour of NAFTA. The Bloc supported such an agreement. Quebec, as a whole, also supported it, including the unions.

Routine Proceedings

An hon. member: Except for Parizeau.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: That is possible, but others have opposed certain things in the past. However, I will not mention all of the examples of former colleagues of the Minister of Transport. Someone criticizes him everyday when they are face to face.

That said, if the minister could let me speak and refrain from taking his good old Liberal-style arrogant attitude, it would make things easier to understand.

The NAFTA mechanisms have ensured total free trade. This has just been denied. Those would supported NAFTA, who fought for it and voted in favour of it in the House, figured they would have an agreement ensuring that there would no longer be the kind of attitude we are seeing right now in the United States. The American protectionist legislation had to go. No more, people said. The thinking was that these panels could determine whether a given act was contrary to a treaty like NAFTA.

We used it, but that did not do us any good, because they did not respect it. In other words, the very object of the treaty is being frustrated by the Americans' attitude, and that is backed up by an agreement. I can see a big problem there.

We have a little time left. We will take the time to read the agreement, but it is imperative that we deal with the consequences, because seven years down the road, we could end up back where we were when the last agreement expired. The Americans grab a little more each time, but this time it is a chunk of at least a billion dollars that they are grabbing. That much we know.

As for the rest, we do not know much about it right now. We will take the time to read about it, but I have my doubts.

• (1740)

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I put myself in the position of one of the workers who has been laid off in Smooth Rock Falls in northern Ontario. That worker is wondering what the impact of all of this is going to be on the community and on his or her family, a community that has lost 300 jobs in just the last week, with his or hers one of thousands of jobs that have been lost.

The most disturbing aspect of the statement we have just heard from the Prime Minister is that there was absolutely nothing said about what is going to happen to those workers and those communities where these decisions by the Americans, along with the fact that they were not resolved and addressed, have left them high and dry. It is an insult to those workers and those working families that their needs were not addressed today in the address from the Prime Minister. That is our first concern.

Our second concern is that an agreement that was supposed to provide fair and free trade between nations has not only been violated, but the violations have now been accepted by the Prime Minister of Canada. Indeed, he has attempted to wrap it up as a celebration day, as though we should now be happy that multinational corporations in the United States, completely in collaboration with the administration of the U.S., can impose illegal tariffs on Canadian products, and can fight every attempt to have them

overturned by polite Canadians who go off to court time and again and who win time and time again, with multinational corporations meanwhile holding that money in the bank and continuing to charge these charges on any new product coming in, resulting in thousands of people being laid off.

Now we have a situation where the Government of Canada says that is okay and we are only going to ask Americans to give back 80¢ on the dollar. I can imagine the other industrial sectors now, despite the catcalls and the chirps from the members over there who of course do not want to hear the truth about this. They would rather not hear any criticism, I am sure. They would rather just hop up and applaud as NAFTA gets torn apart and as communities are left absolutely devastated by what has happened here. What we can imagine now are other major industries in North America, in the United States, taking a look and saying, "Guess what. We can take Canada on. We can slap on charges and duties. We can take all kinds of steps and it will take the Canadians years before they are willing to stand up, and when they do, they are only going to ask for some of the money back". What a joke.

And it is despite this being in NAFTA itself. There is a mechanism, section 19 of NAFTA, which could have allowed us to say no, that all of the duties come back, that we are taking the kind of action that insists they all come back. Clearly that has not been the course for the government. It has not wanted to defend NAFTA and make it work for Canadians. That is the first conclusion we should draw.

Our national government has now left \$1.3 billion of Canadians' money in the United States. The government has left it on the table. I can only imagine what the Prime Minister would be saying now if he were on the other side of the House. In fact, when he was on the other side of the House, he expressed every kind of outrage, and so did his caucus members, about money that belonged to the public being mistreated, whether it was by the former government or whether it was by the United States in these unfair and illegal tariffs. Every kind of moral outrage was brought forward by the Prime Minister to protest and now he has turned away from \$1.3 billion. That money is not just abstract. It comes out of the very communities that right now have no employment.

Here is something worse. This deal will make it very unlikely that investment in Canadian industry is going to happen. Why? Because if we put investment into a mill we are going to make it more efficient and that is going to change the price of the product. That is why we do it, so that we can sell more, thus changing the very market conditions that our Prime Minister is so proud to have apparently stay the same.

• (1745)

This is one of the absurdities of what has been proposed here today, that we have to freeze-frame market conditions. The Prime Minister purports to have been at once upon a time an economist. I would like him to show me any market that had the same market conditions for any protracted period of time, for example, for seven years. We cannot find a case like that.

What the agreement apparently says, in the Prime Minister's own words, is that as long as there is no change in the market conditions, there will be no tariffs and quotas. In other words, there will be tariffs and quotas because markets always change and that is how markets work.

Anyone out there who is attempting to draw some solace from the words and the sugar-coated language and the thumbs up attitude of the Prime Minister better be ready to face the difficulties that are going to face this industry as a result of this agreement.

[*Translation*]

It is totally unacceptable to leave more than a billion dollars with the United States. We are being robbed of that money by the United States. It is as if a judge said it was acceptable to give back only 80% of the money stolen. As far as I am concerned, that is unacceptable.

Market conditions will change, as they do on all sorts of markets.

The Prime Minister should be straight with the people of Canada: there is no hope in the agreement that was signed, and we reject it. A great battle to protect our industry, our workers and their communities is to be expected.

• (1750)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I would like to inform the House that because of the minister's statement, government orders will be extended by 35 minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My colleague from Timmins just ended his speech when the prime ministerial speech began. Would it not be in order to go back to the questions and comments period that generally follows the regular speeches?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member is anticipating the Chair, and I appreciate the good advice. Before ministerial statements, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay had finished his 10 minute statement. Now we are going to questions and comments. The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River.

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure I join with all my colleagues on both sides of the House in offering my appreciation to the member for the unfortunate fact of having his speaking time interrupted by the ministerial statement. It is appreciated for such an important announcement.

One of the things I have heard throughout my tenure, as a member of Parliament for some 13 years, is the deep respect that Canadians have for our Auditor General, Sheila Fraser. One thing I take a lot of

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pride in that is contained in the new federal accountability act is the increase in powers of the Auditor General's Office to dig deeper into different government departments. One of the complaints we had when we were in opposition was the fact that the previous prime minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard when he was finance minister, took it upon himself to stash away billions of dollars in foundations that were not accessible to the Auditor General in order for her to provide a proper degree of accounting and accountability.

My constituents have conveyed to me on many occasions the respect they have for the job the Auditor General does for us on behalf of Canadians. They look forward to the swift passage of the federal accountability bill so she will have even greater powers to ensure that not only this government but all successive governments following us will be held to a much higher standard. The bill would ensure that no departments or foundations would be out of the reach of the Auditor General to ensure that she could report back to Canadian taxpayers that they are getting proper value for their investment.

Would my colleague from the NDP comment on the increased role of the Auditor General under the FAA?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General definitely plays a very important role. However, I do have some concerns when we talk about accountability.

Accountability goes in two ways. For example, in the 1970s there was a diesel fuel spill in Attawapiskat, a community of 2,000 people in my riding. A family I know very well has been living on top of that spill. The woman has had three miscarriages. One of the children is developmentally delayed, we believe. The former Liberal government denied and denied. Study after study was done to establish whether there was a problem.

The school was contaminated and has since been condemned. No efforts were made by Indian affairs to move those students out. It was considered perfectly fine and acceptable for Cree children to go to school in a condemned environment. I was a school board trustee in Timmins and if there had been any problems in one of our schools, that school would have been shut down that weekend and fixed.

Here we are over six years later since the former Indian affairs minister Robert Nault came into that village and said the department would work with them toward a new school. There still is no new school. Nothing has been done. The community has actually gone to the banks themselves to get funds to build their own school because of the inaction of Indian affairs, year after year.

First nations have received capital study after capital study, interim report after interim report. Bureaucrats build these files on their desks. Communities are in debt, basically coming up with the infrastructure plans. What is needed is will. We never saw will on the James Bay until communities were crumbling in terrible deficits.

Yes, accountability goes both ways.

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• (1755)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board has been saying in his questions throughout this debate that Bill C-2, the federal accountability act, must be passed quickly before we rise for the summer. It seems to me that setting a timetable in which parliamentarians have to deal with a very complex bill that touches consequentially on so many other bills is asking members not to be accountable in terms of doing their work, such as presupposing how many witnesses are necessary and what work we will have to do in order to pass it by the summer. Would the member agree with that?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, ethics is not something to be done tomorrow. Accountability is not voluntary. That is what we have heard year after year. Let us study this. Let us find out what we need to know. These are simple answers.

I will give an example, and I do not want to bring up names in the House. However, during the Dave Dingwall affair, what struck me was the disconnect between the House and what happens in real life. I had Miss Carol—

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member.

We now resume debate. The hon. member for Laval.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud as a parliamentarian to rise in this House today to debate accountability and ethics and especially to express my opinion on certain clauses in Bill C-2 which aim to make us responsible for our actions. However, as I do not yet have a lot of experience in matters of government, I looked at the points that are easier for the general public to grasp.

This is a huge bill. It contains 317 clauses. It amends some 40 acts and creates two new ones, namely the Conflict of Interest Act and the Director of Public Prosecutions Act.

Some of the clauses correct situations that have gone on for too long and that we have always criticized, such as the appointment of returning officers on the basis of merit. It is a very important clause, because there have been horror stories in this regard in the past. In the latest election, in the riding of Alfred-Pellan, which is next to mine, there were irregularities and a partisan returning officer. He boasted of being a friend of the Liberal candidate, having served as his organizer provincially and that payback was normal. It is important to have issues such as these addressed in this bill.

Some clauses go too far, such as the provision that whistleblowers could receive cash awards of up to \$1,000. That would be rewarding someone for doing his or her duty. But it is important to protect whistleblowers, which should have been the case for Shiv Chopra, Margaret Haydon and Gérard Lambert. They were fired by Health Canada in June 2004 because they criticized the approval process for drugs in general and in particular the approval process for growth hormones and antibiotics.

There was also the case of Pierre Blais who was fired a few years ago, also by Health Canada, because he would not stop expressing reservations about silicone breast implants. He wrote memos on that

subject. He reviewed reports that expressed grave concerns about the safety of those breast implants and, sometime later, it was realized that he was right. The damage, however, had already been done. They would not listen to him and he was dismissed.

Nevertheless, we must not commit the monumental error of developing a culture of whistleblowing based on monetary incentives. Justice Gomery also made a plea for responsibility to be accepted at every level of the hierarchy. That approach will do more to prevent fraud than a culture of informers.

Let us not forget that when the parliamentary committee examined Bill C-11 on protection of whistleblowers it rejected the principle of paying them.

Finally, some clauses do not go far enough, for example, on the subject of appointments.

The bill proposes a public appointments commission within the Prime Minister's portfolio, in particular to monitor the selection process for appointments. Most appointments come from the Privy Council Office or the PMO. Is this not a little like asking the fox to protect the chickens? It is rather strange

The Bloc Québécois is also concerned that the Prime Minister has nominated Gwyn Morgan, a fundraiser for the Conservative Party, to head the new public appointments commission. Mr. Morgan, who will receive only a token salary, will ensure that those who fill positions have the necessary qualifications. This commission is not really necessary.

Last year we denounced the fact that foundations escaped public scrutiny. This year, they are starting to be included in this bill. Unfortunately, many of them will continue to escape public scrutiny. I am quite concerned about this. We know that these foundations have a lot of money and billions of dollars are kept in reserve there. I believe it is important for all the foundations to be covered in Bill C-2.

• (1800)

The bill proposes that only three of the nine foundations be covered by the Access to Information Act. Yet, the Conservatives election platform announced that a Conservative government would “expand coverage of the act to all Crown corporations, officers of Parliament, foundations and organizations that spend taxpayers' money or perform public functions”.

Why then exempt the foundations that have received hundreds of millions of dollars? Barring the elimination of these foundations, the Bloc Québécois is calling on the government to no longer be able to exempt transfers to foundations from the Treasury Board policy. The Treasury Board prohibits payments from being made before the funds are needed. Furthermore, all the foundations should be covered by the Access to Information Act.

In closing, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of the principle of Bill C-2. Nonetheless, major amendments will have to be made before the Bloc can give its approval.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a number of colleagues have raised the issue of whistleblower protection in the House. I notice the member is supportive of the concept and the principle, as her party has been over the years.

This particular bill, the accountability act, would create an independent office with teeth. It would have the power to restore a whistleblower and to discipline an employer who has carried out a reprisal. Those powers did not exist under the previous Liberal government's bill, Bill C-11. Bill C-11 did not create those powers nor did it provide for them.

Furthermore, the accountability act would provide for a tribunal which would be comprised of, when needed, federal court judges who would hear these cases and have the power to act upon them. The whistleblower would then have the ability to appeal to a federal Court of Appeal.

These are solid legal protections for whistleblowers. They are totally independent from the executive branch of government. It is an unprecedented act of a government to relinquish this kind of authority and trust to an office of Parliament.

I wonder if the Bloc could confirm that they will support this ironclad protection for whistleblowers that the accountability act would provide.

• (1805)

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Indeed, this colleague is quite young and he probably does not have a large family yet. Perhaps he does not know how a large family works. When you have to take care of several children and you want them to tell you the truth, it is not a good idea to offer them compensation for providing information on how their brothers and sisters are behaving. I think the same is true in business.

The Bloc does not doubt that Bill C-2 currently has some very interesting and very important aspects for protecting whistleblowers. We agree, that is true. However, the shortcoming is the suggestion of compensating people for blowing the whistle. That is not normal.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Accordingly, the bill stands referred to a legislative committee.

Adjournment Proceedings

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

(Bill C-4. On the Order: Government Orders:)

April 24, 2006—Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs of Bill C-4, An Act to amend An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act—the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform.

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

That Bill C-4, An Act to amend an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act, be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at the report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): 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, bill read the second time, considered in committee, reported, concurred in and, by unanimous consent, read the third time and passed)

• (1810)

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, with the indulgence of all members, I believe that if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 7:05 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Accordingly, I see the clock as 7:05 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[Translation]

CULTURE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in one of the first adjournment debates of this 39th Parliament. My remarks deal with the very first question I asked of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, concerning the funding for the Canada Council for the Arts.

Adjournment Proceedings

We will recall that, last fall—more specifically on November 23—the previous government announced a commitment of \$342 million over three years not only for the Canada Council for the Arts, but also for other institutions in the same field.

This investment would have seen the annual budget of the Canada Council for the Arts grow from \$150 million to \$300 million over three years. This represents an increase of \$50 million for the fiscal year that started on April 1. Another \$50 million would have been added each subsequent year. This was responding in a tangible way to the pressing and repeated demand of cultural and artistic communities across the country to increase from \$5 to \$10 the per capita amount allocated to the Canada Council for the Arts in support of our country's cultural and artistic communities. In those days, the heritage minister was the critic for the Conservative official opposition. During her election campaign, she said:

[*English*]

“We will honour the commitment that they have made, that the artistic community has received”.

[*Translation*]

The word *We* was used.

[*English*]

In saying, “We will honour the commitment,” the minister, who was then the official opposition critic, was speaking for her party. However, we heard her say on the radio on the weekend that she was speaking for herself. That has caused a great deal of concern in the community as to whether or not the government indeed will honour the commitment that was made by the previous government of doubling in three years the funding for the Canada Council for the Arts.

It was a commitment that was made after long discussions and consultations with the community. It was a commitment made in good faith. Money had been accounted for it in the fiscal framework, which would have seen the budget go from \$150 million to \$300 million over three years.

Unfortunately, in the estimates that were tabled earlier this week, we see that there is no increase. Some of us are still hopeful that the government will come to its senses, respect the commitment of the previous government, respect its own commitment that it gave to the community during the campaign through the voice of the Conservative Party's own critic that they would respect that commitment, and indeed increase the budget of the Canada Council for the Arts.

We are hopeful that come May 2 the government will honour that commitment. It is one that is the appropriate response to the repeated demands and representations from the artistic and cultural community of Canada.

• (1815)

Mr. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first and foremost the government has been clear on our commitment to Canada's artists and the creative community.

We recognize the important contribution made by arts and culture to Canadian society. For more than a century the government has

invested in the arts and culture in recognition of the role they play in stimulating our social and economic development.

Support for artists and the arts has led to the development of Canadian talent in the literary, visual, media and performing arts, thereby enriching the lives of Canadians and laying the foundation for our cultural industries to thrive.

The arts help to build internationally competitive and innovative communities that are attractive to knowledge workers and investors. Our artists also serve as influential ambassadors abroad, projecting the image of a modern and cosmopolitan country. They affirm Canadian identity, critical in an increasingly integrated North American and global environment.

The arts are at the core of the mandate of the Department of Canadian Heritage and are central to many of its portfolio agencies.

Through the arts and cultural industries, Canada is able to promote its interests abroad, enhance the tourism sector and develop technological opportunities.

Investing in the arts is an investment in our cultural industries and economy. The cultural sector employed over 597,500 workers in 2002, roughly the same as agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining, and oil and gas combined, or the workforce of a province such as Manitoba. Canada's cultural sector is built around Canada's 131,000 artists, key players in the research and development work of the cultural industries.

Musicians, singers, writers, actors and visual artists form the core of arts activities and provide the creative spark upon which the film, television, publishing and music industries depend.

The government appreciates the powerful role of the arts sector in social, economic and international issues. It also recognizes the value of the arts to our communities and the contribution they make to furthering knowledge and understanding of our experience as Canadians.

Communities across Canada, from the largest to the smallest, are investing in the arts and culture as an economic lever, as a means to attract investment, and as a way to improve the quality of life in their communities. They recognize the power of the arts and culture in creating a sense of place and in enriching the lives of their citizens. They are taking advantage of the tremendous creativity and cultural vibrancy that exist within their communities and are building strong partnerships with their local arts and heritage organizations to foster artistic and cultural expression in Canada.

The arts and culture are currently supported through a variety of federal programs delivered directly by the Department of Canadian Heritage and through the portfolio agencies such as the Canada Council for the Arts.

It is important to note that the Minister of Canadian Heritage has met Karen Kain, chair of the Canada Council for the Arts, and will continue to work with the council in order to ensure that the best means of meeting the needs of the artists will be used.

Our artists and creators deserve stability, and a long term plan must be part of the government's commitment to the arts. We will therefore examine the effectiveness of the current funding available and to determine what level and type of support is needed to address the long term stability and sustainability of the arts sector in Canada.

We are committed to providing artists and creators with the resources they need to continue to make a meaningful contribution to Canadian life and to Canada's future prosperity. We will ensure that federal funding for the arts is tailored to maximize the government's investment in this sector and is aligned with our commitment to a transparent and accountable government.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully when the parliamentary secretary was talking about how valuable the artistic community and artists are to one's society. He is preaching to the converted. He does not have to convince me of that. I have always supported the artistic community, either in private or public spending.

What I did not hear is whether or not the government will respect a commitment that the government made. When she was the critic the minister said, "We will respect a commitment," and then when she was minister she said, "We are not going to honour any Liberal commitment". Then on the weekend she said on the radio that she was speaking for herself when she said, "We will respect a commitment".

There is a great deal of nervousness in the arts and culture community in our country because of the contradictory statements coming from the government. The only hope the artistic community has is that it will see some money in the budget.

If the government is just throwing up smoke screens while we are waiting for the budget, so be it. However, I would hope that it will

Adjournment Proceedings

also think about the effects its words are having on the artistic community as we wait for the budget. People in the artistic community should not have to be put through such stress.

• (1820)

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, the member seems to have forgotten that the Liberal government, his government, had 13 years to stabilize the funding for the arts and it failed miserably.

Let me restate that the intention of the Conservative government is to examine the effectiveness of the current funding available and to determine what level and type of support is needed to address the long term stability and sustainability of the arts sector in Canada.

The Conservative government is committed to providing artists and creators with the resources they need to continue to make a meaningful contribution to Canadian life and to Canada's future prosperity.

The Conservative government will ensure that federal funding for the arts is tailored to maximize the government's investment in this sector and is aligned with our commitment to a transparent and accountable government.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

[*English*]

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:22 p.m.)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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