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(Part A)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 1, 2006

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1100)

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL BRIDGES AND TUNNELS ACT

The House resumed from April 28 consideration of the motion that Bill C-3, An Act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: When the matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Western Arctic had the floor and there remained seven minutes in the time allotted for his remarks. Accordingly, the hon. member for Western Arctic.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today, on May Day, to have the opportunity to speak in this House on a day that is so significant to working people around the world. I certainly want to make that point.

With regard to Bill C-3, I really do not have too much to carry on with. I would like to re-emphasize the point I was making on Friday in regard to rail transport and the need to ensure that the investments we are making in infrastructure are the correct ones for the future. When this government proposes to legislate and control the development and repair of infrastructure and the direction we take with international trade across our borders, and when we look at the qualities for the future that rail transport offers to freight in terms of the environment, security, the movement of goods across the border, and the ability to provide a clean, effective system that is less intrusive on the communities it will travel through, I think we need to look very closely at rail transport and its future in this country.

When we come to making decisions about upgrading or installing new bridges, which would be designed for improving truck transport and vehicle transport across the border, I would put my order in for the provision of greater opportunities for rail transport in this country. That is the one issue I wanted to highlight here today. I have no further comments. I now will leave this for questions.

•(1105)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Are there questions and comments in this question period of 10 minutes? There being no members standing, I recognize the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, resuming debate.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I pleased to stand today in support of Bill C-3, the international bridges and tunnels act. This is a very important bill. I think the very fact that it has not been brought into effect until this time, especially after 9/11, speaks volumes to the negligence of the previous government.

It fills a long-standing gap in our legislation and finally gives Canadians the ability to protect critical infrastructure, to protect our international bridges and our tunnels. What could be more important than protecting our citizens, the safety of our citizens, the safety of Canadians, the safety of our economy through trade, to protect our friends and relatives traveling to work, live and play every day?

This bill will create Canadian jobs. It will grow Canada's economy and strengthen our international relationships, especially and of course those with the United States. Most important, as I said, this bill will safeguard Canadians and Canadian interests.

Canada's border with the United States is some 6,400 kilometres of land and water. It is the longest undefended and unguarded border in the world. Unfortunately, this border is only as secure as its most unsafe and weakest part. There are 24 vehicle bridges and tunnels, 5 railroad bridges and tunnels and also 130 border crossings. All of these are very difficult to protect.

Over \$1.9 billion worth of goods is transported across the border each and every day. This means that 11 million trucks cross the border every year. That means 30,000 trucks a day or one truck every three seconds. In fact, since I stood up, over 100 trucks and \$5 million in products have crossed the border. It is incredible.

In fact, the four busiest international bridges alone handle over 50% of this volume. This represents 33% of all of Canada's trade with the United States. These are very important crossings, and we need to protect them not only for the safety of citizens but for our trade. Let us face it, before September 11, 2001, we took these bridges and tunnels for granted. They are both publicly and privately owned, and no one really expected security on this border to be such a critical issue, especially in catching people, and also critical to our economy. Now we understand how critical these bridges and tunnels are to our economy. We need to protect those assets. We need to keep traffic flowing, as it is so vital to our economy.

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As government and as members of Parliament, we have an obligation to ensure that our citizens and those assets are protected. This legislation will indeed protect them. It will go toward ensuring that we have an interrupted flow of goods and people across the border. It will ensure that the manner in which these bridges and tunnels are managed and maintained keeps security and safety as job number one for the government. Finally, as I have said, it will protect our national interests on an ongoing basis.

After 9/11 we recognized the need to conduct threat and risk assessments and to improve the overall security of our perimeter all over the country. After 9/11, Transport Canada launched a process in cooperation with the Bridge and Tunnel Operators Association. Their study proved that we need to conduct security reviews and threat and risk assessments for all of our international crossings. The results and recommendations of this study include everything from specific engineering analysis to general operational security analysis.

One of the reasons this legislation is so important is that currently each bridge is owned, operated and managed differently. Some are privately owned. Some are federally controlled. Indeed, some are controlled by provinces and states jointly or by each independently. All of these parties currently have different regulations, rules and standards and, quite frankly, different expectations of what they want out of the bridge or international tunnel. This legislation will create one standard for all bridge and tunnel crossings, a standard that is in the best interests of Canadians and guarantees the safety of Canadians on an ongoing basis.

•(1110)

Job number one for the government is to keep Canadians safe. Canada does and always has had constitutional authority over international bridges and tunnels, surprising as it may be. We may ask why this particular legislation has taken so long to come in, especially after 9/11. It is shocking that nothing has been done but under the vision of the Prime Minister and the Conservative government, this is one of the first pieces of legislation that we have put forward because of its importance to Canadians. What could be more important to Canada than our safety and our economy?

The legislation would work toward the security, the safety and the economy of all of our border crossings. Even U.S. agencies have identified these crossings as potential targets for terrorists. They have even identified them as choke points. They have said that the terrorists' objectives could decimate these crossings and our economy and our safety.

The bill would give the governor in council the authority to make regulations for the safety and the security of international bridges and tunnels. For example, this may include setting the minimum security standards for bridge and tunnel operators. It may include provisions to prepare and submit regular threat assessments and vulnerability assessments for particular bridges or for all of them. It may include the development and implementation of an emergency response. We do not even have an emergency response system set up to know what we will do in cases of dire emergencies in this country for international crossings.

The very lack of this legislation currently being alive in this country was a glaring and obvious gap. I cannot believe that for five years, since 9/11, the previous Liberal government could not find the

initiative and motive to protect Canadians and to push this legislation through. It is a priority and we will work toward getting this through with the other parties. The safety and security of Canadians is a real priority. We know the Prime Minister and the government will work with the United States and Mexico to set up systems to protect our critical transportation infrastructure, which is so important for us as a trading nation.

The government will be working on a transportation security action plan. The government will get expert analyses from governments, industry and international partners on how to keep Canadians safe. As I said, that is the government's number one priority and we will work toward that.

The bill is a first step only. It would give the federal government the ability to keep our international bridges and tunnels secure. We believe that nothing could be more important than this bill and we are asking for all party support on getting the bill passed as quickly as possible. I fully support the bill and I urge my colleagues on all sides of the House today to join me in keeping Canadians safe and secure.

•(1115)

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the parliamentary secretary and I have a little difficulty with his description of governments, namely the previous government. This has been a long work in process in terms of the difficulties with the tunnel and bridge legislation.

If the parliamentary secretary would ask for the unanimous consent of the House we could simply pass the bill at second reading and send it to committee. If the parliamentary secretary would do that I am sure we on this side of the House would concur to send the bill to committee immediately and pass it into law as soon as possible.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I think it would be appropriate at this time to answer the first comment made by my colleague across the floor which is that this was an initiative by the previous government. Initiatives are fine but the reality is that it had five years to implement the bill but nothing was done. The safety and security of Canadians is our number one priority but it was not the previous government's priority.

My understanding is that this proposal was actually put forward in two bills that the previous government could not pass and did not put it as a priority to pass. We, under the direction of the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party, have made it very much an initiative to get it done and that is what we will do.

We want to ensure we pass it at every stage and that we hear from parties on all sides of the House. We want to work cooperatively with the other parties and we want to hear from all parties. We will send it to committee to ensure this important legislation receives input from, not just our own party but all parts of Canada and all members of Parliament so that we get a good legislation and Canadians are protected.

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[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. I would like to ask him a question regarding a particular provision in the bill regarding crossing the St. Lawrence River. The provision is no doubt included because of the existence of the St. Lawrence Seaway.

In view of the joint jurisdiction over environment, among other things, did my colleague cooperate and negotiate with the Government of Quebec before including this provision in the bill?

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, because of the unique nature of all bridges and international crossings there needs to be input by all parties. As the member is aware, there is an international crossing in Quebec that is important and vital to Quebecers.

I assure the member that the government will be collaborating with not only all members of this House but with all stakeholders, private, state, federal and, most important, provincial. This is an area that is vitally important to provincial economies and the people who use those crossings.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my own personal view is that critical pieces of infrastructure, such as the Ambassador Bridge, should not be privately owned. I think this is far too critical to be in private hands, to be bought, sold and traded away to who knows whom down the road.

I know the political philosophy of the Conservative Party is to privatize everything. It wants to get government out of everything and sell it to the private sector. If the government can make a buck on it that is what is holy.

Does the parliamentary secretary agree that things, such as the Ambassador Bridge, should not be privately owned? Is there anything in the bill to give some comfort to Canadians that we will retain public control and ownership over those key infrastructure pieces such as the Ambassador Bridge?

• (1120)

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, that is an amusing question. I did not know that was what the Conservative Party stood for. I am happy the member suggested that but it is simply not the case. The Conservative Party's number one priority is safety.

I am happy the member supports Bill C-3 because it would establish one set of rules and one priority, which is safety. It would also ensure, under clause 6 of the bill, that:

No person shall construct or alter an international bridge or tunnel without the approval of the Governor in Council.

We want to establish one set of rules that will ensure the safety of Canadians no matter who owns the bridge, whether it be federal, provincial or private. Our number one priority is to ensure the rules are in place so Canadians are safeguarded.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly support Bill C-3 going to committee. However I find it quite amusing when the government takes credit for bringing this legislation forward. If the opposition parties had not called the election that bill would have been in the House. Governance as it

relates to our border operations has been of concern for many members on this side.

We have a classic example in Windsor-Detroit where we have some private sector interests that are basically setting the standards and buying up all the real estate that will be a part of any transaction of any new crossing. The previous government had started to get on to this and had drafted the legislation, and I hope the government deals with this.

I am not a big fan of nationalizing these sorts of operations but there are some people who would, and perhaps some our colleagues down at the other end and on their side.

I think we need to have a state of governance that provides the national security and the national interest of the Canadian people in this massive corridor that takes care of so much trade and the passage of people across our borders. We need to be in charge here, not these private sector interests because this represents a key national corridor for the trade of goods and the mobility of people.

The member also alluded to the concept of perimeter. Is this a new change? Is this a change in the philosophy of the government? Does the government still subscribe to the notion that we need to harmonize all our national security policies with the United States and Mexico?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the member was in government for a period of time and had the opportunity for some 13 years to make changes, 5 years under what I would consider to be a critical mandate, and did nothing. It is absolutely uncalled for to now criticize us for making the safety of Canadians a priority, especially given that Canadians had a choice. They had a choice some months ago and they chose change. They did not like the job the member and his government were doing before. Instead of a party that did nothing or a party that could not do anything, they wanted a party that would make positive changes for Canadians, which is this Conservative government. We will be making positive changes for people and we will actually get some work done.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for bringing forward this Liberal bill and it seems that all members in the House support this Liberal bill.

I guess the bill is not that much of a priority because he refused the request for unanimous consent to get on with the bill. However, does the member have any problems with the bill as the Liberals wrote it and with the debate in the last Parliament?

• (1125)

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, it is a tremendous day because I have been amused three times already. This is not a Liberal bill. I think Bill C-44 was a Liberal bill and it was about four times thicker and did not accomplish anything. It was, quite frankly, not agreed to by all parties.

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The difference is that we are putting forward a bill that all parties will agree to. We as a government will listen to members of all parties and ask for their input. We do not just shove things through. The difference between this government and the previous government which Canadians had for 13 years is that we will listen to people and we will get things done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to rise to speak to Bill C-3, An Act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act. Since it incorporates part of Bill C-44, which the Bloc Québécois supported, we must support this bill, but with certain reservations, as I will explain later.

This is the first time the Government of Canada has put legislation in place to allow it to exercise its authority over international bridges and tunnels. The new government tells us it wants to ensure that the security, safety and efficient movement of people and goods are in accordance with national interests.

The events of September 2001, it must be noted, made clear the importance of protecting these vital infrastructures. The proposed amendments would give the Government of Canada new and broader legislative powers to oversee approvals of international bridges and tunnels. These amendments would give the government power to approve, on the recommendation of the Minister of Transport, the construction or alteration of international bridges and tunnels and to formulate regulations governing the management, maintenance, security, safety and operation of these structures.

The bill would also authorize the federal government to approve the sale or transfer of ownership of international bridges and tunnels. Note as well that it would strengthen federal government oversight of all new and existing international bridges and tunnels in order to better protect the public interest and ensure the flexible flow of international trade. There are currently 24 international vehicular bridges and tunnels and five international railway tunnels linking Canada and the United States. These bridges and tunnels carry the vast majority of international trade between Canada and the United States and play a vital role in Canada's transportation system.

The provisions of this new bill are almost identical to those of the defunct Bill C-44, which was tabled by the former government and died on the order paper when the election was called. That bill, the Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act, to enact the VIA Rail Canada Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, was tabled in the House of Commons on March 24, 2005 by the former Minister of Transport. Bill C-44 was itself similar in many respects to the previous Bill C-26, which bore the same title and was tabled in the House of Commons on February 23, 2003. Those two bills each died on the order paper upon the prorogation of Parliament. As you can see, the Parliament of Canada needs a lot of time to get its bills passed.

What affects us in Quebec most closely in this bill is a provision concerning the international bridges and tunnels that cross the St. Lawrence River. This provision corrects a legislative anomaly in the Navigable Waters Protection Act, which requires that a permit be issued for all work that has repercussions on navigable waters but which does not authorize the issuing of permits with regard to the St.

Lawrence River. That anomaly had become evident during review of the proposed highway 30 bridges crossing the St. Lawrence Seaway. Those bridges have yet to be built, as you know, and these projects have been making very slow progress for many years.

In his speech last Friday, the minister said that any new crossing over the St. Lawrence would be subject to federal approval. I would like to know to what extent that sort of approach has the approval of the Quebec government, as it is likely to infringe upon its fields of jurisdiction.

Although the bill fills a legal void in the area of international bridges and tunnels, is designed to improve the safety of the infrastructures in that area, and has the consent of local stakeholders, we still have certain reservations. In the context of the regulation of international bridges and tunnels, the bill gives us the impression that the government is being conferred some very extensive, quasi-police powers, for example, a power to investigate without a warrant and a very authoritarian power of seizure.

● (1130)

The government has the power to legislate, but the financial responsibility rests on other shoulders. The Bloc Québécois believes this situation can lead to conflicts. What disappoints us the most is that a number of important measures that were in Bill C-44 were dropped from the current bill. It is important to point that out because we were told that this bill included the measures already outlined in Bill C-44, but only a small number of them are left.

Some parts of Bill C-44 were very important for the Bloc Québécois and for now they are being dropped. I am talking about the requirement that airline advertising be more transparent. The former bill would have required airlines to change their advertising methods. They would have been required to list the total price of the flight including related fees. This measure was much demanded by the consumer associations.

The bill would have improved the conflict resolution process for sharing the rail lines between passenger transportation companies and freight companies.

Bill C-44 included a section under which a railway company wishing to sell a rail line would first offer it to any interested urban transit authorities before offering it to municipal governments. A number of residents in my riding and in other regions of Quebec are concerned about this issue. Bill C-44 promoted setting up commuter trains across the country.

Our constituents are increasingly aware of the importance of developing public transit as a solution to traffic congestion problems and greenhouse gas emissions.

The bill also included a provision on Via Rail. It gave Via Rail more power to make its own decisions with a view to improving the rail service. Rail transit is a good alternative to road transportation, which currently is about the only option.

Clause 32 of Bill C-44 gave the Canadian Transportation Agency the power to investigate complaints concerning noise caused by trains. It required railways to implement certain measures to prevent unnecessary noise, particularly at rail yards. The noise issue is causing a lot of controversy in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada.

According to the British North America Act of 1867, the responsibility for international bridges and tunnels falls exclusively within federal jurisdiction. But in most cases, the Canadian portion of these structures is owned by the provinces. We must ensure that the regulatory and financial application of this act is negotiated and occurs in collaboration with the provinces.

In his speech last Friday, the minister stated that the federal government will be able to ensure that environmental assessments of international bridges and tunnels are conducted in accordance with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, when appropriate.

What did the minister mean by adding the word “appropriate”? I believe the minister was implying that jurisdiction over the environment is shared between federal and provincial governments, and that he does not necessarily have the final say in the matter.

I again ask the minister if he held negotiations with the Government of Quebec concerning sharing jurisdictions. Given its declaration of good will toward Quebec, it would be desirable for the new government to demonstrate its good intentions with respect to Quebec's areas of jurisdiction.

In conclusion, the Bloc Québécois will support the second reading of the bill, despite the fact that it only partially resolves the many transportation problems that still exist in Quebec and Canada.

• (1135)

[English]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have risen in this Parliament to deliver a speech. I made a statement previously, but since my time was limited then, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your very important role in the 39th Parliament.

I also take this opportunity to thank the constituents of Sarnia—Lambton who made it possible for me to be a member of this august body. Their support and faith in me is gratifying and extremely humbling. I will certainly do my utmost to represent all constituents in my riding.

I give a special thanks to my family, who has always supported me 100%: my husband, Bill, our son, my mom and my sisters and brothers. None of us get here on our own, and I am pleased to be able to acknowledge all those who helped and supported in so many ways.

I am pleased today to add my full support to the international bridges and tunnels act, not only because I feel it will be an important piece of legislation, but because one of Canada's most important international crossings, the Blue Water Bridge, is located in my riding. For those who have not had the opportunity to visit the village of Point Edward, which is surrounded on three sides by the city of Sarnia, Ontario, and on the fourth side by the St. Clair River, let me say a bit about the Blue Water Bridge.

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The crossing is a major traffic and economic link between Ontario and Michigan, and serves as a critical component in our trade corridor linking Canada, the United States and Mexico. The bridges connect Highway 402 in Ontario to Interstates 94 and 69 in Michigan, which provides southerly access to Detroit, Indianapolis, St. Louis and the entire gulf coast, extending down through Florida to New Orleans and Mexico.

To better handle the volume of traffic, the Blue Water Bridge was twinned in 1997 with the addition of a second span. We now have the distinction of having the only twin international bridge crossing in Canada. My riding is also home to an international rail tunnel and an international ferry crossing.

The Blue Water Bridge currently ranks as the fourth busiest Canada-U.S. border crossing. In 2005, 5.5 million vehicles crossed the Blue Water Bridge. It is the second busiest crossing for the number of commercial vehicle crossings. Approximately 5,000 commercial vehicles cross the bridge daily. On busy days, this count exceeds 7,500 trucks. In 2005, 3.7 million commercial vehicles crossed the bridge, carrying Canadian exports south and bringing foreign products to Canadians. The bridge handles 12% of Canada's total trade with the United States and is the fastest growing truck crossing on the Canada-U.S. border. It is interesting to note that the Blue Water Bridge is the busiest live animal port of entry on the Canadian border. This critical piece of our transportation infrastructure is essential to maintaining our current economic stature.

We have heard that special acts of Parliament created most of our international bridges and tunnels quite some time ago. This is the situation with the Blue Water Bridge. An act to incorporate the St. Clair Transit Company was passed by Parliament on June 11, 1928, and authorized the construction, operation and maintenance of an international bridge. There were subsequent acts and amendments related to the bridge passed in 1930, 1934, 1940, 1964, 1970, 1972, 1979, 1981, 1988 and 2001.

It would seem to me that this practice of continually debating and passing special acts of Parliament is an ineffectual way for the federal government to exercise its jurisdiction over international bridges and tunnels. I therefore support the approach taken by Bill C-3 of having governor in council consider and approve aspects related to these crossings, rather than take valuable House time for the same purpose.

• (1140)

I gave the House some statistics relating to commercial crossings at the Blue Water Bridge. This international crossing is also very important for the tourism industry. In 2005 there were 1.8 million passenger vehicles that crossed the Blue Water Bridge. Obviously this link is vitally important to this sector of our economy as well.

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The international bridges and tunnels bill contains provisions to ensure that these facilities are safe and secure. The Blue Water Bridge Authority takes safety and security very seriously. Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001 the authority was very proactive and on its own undertook a security threat assessment. It was one of the first international bridges to implement increased security measures. It has also been very cooperative in sharing its lessons learned with its sister members of the Bridge and Tunnel Operators Association. There is no doubt in my mind that the Blue Water Bridge continues to be actively concerned with safety and security measures and will continue to be vigilant in carrying out its responsibilities.

Many security improvements have been implemented over the past three years. One of the objectives is to further develop and maintain policies and procedures for emergency response, threat assessment and disaster recovery. Three security assessments have been completed and all high priority recommendations have been implemented. The bridge is also a member of the Chemical Valley Emergency Coordinating Organization.

I am concerned, however, that not all international bridges and crossings might be taking security as seriously as does the Blue Water Bridge Authority. It is for this reason that I support the provisions in Bill C-3 that would permit the federal government to pass regulations concerning safety and security measures. What good would it do Canada if not every bridge or tunnel took security as seriously as the Blue Water Bridge? A terrorist would simply target the weakest facility. That is why we need to establish a minimum level of security that every bridge would need to respect. A bridge or tunnel could exceed this standard, but at least there would be a minimum standard which all bridges would be required to attain.

The Blue Water Bridge has been able to strike a healthy balance between traffic efficiency and security. Security and medical alerts, customs contract negotiations and a general lack of capacity on the American plaza during peak traffic demand has at times created traffic congestion in Canada. With the introduction of NEXUS and the FAST program, some of this volume pressure has been relieved. The bridge authority has taken a lead role in coordinating a focus group including the Ontario Provincial Police, the Sarnia Police Service, the Ontario Trucking Association and the Ontario Ministry of Transportation to implement short and long term solutions to traffic matters. The authority's master plan will reduce the potential for congestion and accidents in the long term while short term solutions such as reducing speed limits, better signage and increased police presence have had positive results.

In December 2004 the U.S. and Canadian governments consulted border operators on how to improve transit times for cars and trucks by 25% by the end of 2005. This challenge was directed at easing border congestion. The Blue Water Bridge quickly completed and implemented a traffic management system which achieved the 25% improvement for traffic coming into Canada.

Considering the importance of international bridges and tunnels to Canadian trade and tourism, it is remarkable that no law has ever been adopted that uniformly applies to all international bridges and tunnels and sets out the manner in which the federal government can

exercise its jurisdiction with respect to these structures. Bill C-3 would rectify this vacuum in federal legislation.

• (1145)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I compliment the member on a very good speech. She raised some very good points. Her party also showed good judgment in bringing forward the Liberal bill in exactly the same way as we presented it.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that Bill C-3 is an excellent bill. It will improve things greatly at all international border crossings. Although there are a lot of similarities to Bill C-44, there are a couple of differences in our bill. Certainly crossings over the St. Lawrence River and the sale and transfer affecting international bridges and tunnels are two of them. We look forward to support from across the floor.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment my friend in relation to her attendance and interest in this bill, and obviously the significant work that she wants to put into this area. I am wondering if she would comment briefly on what she felt were the most important areas to concentrate our efforts on in order to facilitate border crossings and to get goods transported back and forth between the United States and Canada. What does she think is the most important issue to deal with right now in relation to this?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, certainly the security at our border crossings is one of the very first things we need to deal with. The standardization of security at all international crossings is of utmost importance. If we do not have a standard across the country, then as far as our trade partners go, there will be a great deal of ambiguity and a great deal of concern as to which border crossing they will be dealing with. The standardization of security is one of the first things we need to deal with.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a provision of the preceding bill gave the Canadian Transportation Agency the power to investigate complaints about noise and require the railways to take measures to reduce the harmful effects of noise as much as possible, during both the construction and operation of rail lines. Of course, this must take into account the operational needs of railway services and the interests of the communities in question.

I would like to know the hon. member's opinion on the provisions concerning noise.

[*English*]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, I had spoken mainly on bridge crossings. Bill C-3 certainly does cover all international crossings whether they be bridges or tunnels. The issue the member has brought forth will be discussed when the bill is before the committee. We look forward to hearing the comments from all the parties and the different areas as consultation continues.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member did not discuss one particular aspect of the question. We know that rail transport is much more environmentally friendly than any other form of transportation that exists in Canada, and particularly in Quebec.

The previous bill was much more explicit in that sense. Specifically, it gave VIA Rail greater power to improve rail transport.

I would like the hon. member to explain how she believes this new bill is better than the previous bill. We, in fact, prefer the previous bill.

• (1150)

[*English*]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-3 addresses all aspects of the international crossings, whether they be tunnels or bridges. That is an issue we will be discussing further as I have said. There will be further discussion on the different aspects of rail travel. Rail travel is an extremely important part of moving goods in this country. Certainly coming from a riding that has an international tunnel crossing, I fully realize the value of moving goods by train. As a government we look forward to further discussion on this issue at committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to hear what my hon. colleague has to say about controlling pollution from railway transportation, particularly noise pollution. Bill C-3 makes brief mention of this, but it was covered in Bill C-44, specifically in connection with marshalling yards.

Another element that was missing from Bill C-44 and is also missing from Bill C-3 concerns the inconvenience caused by train vibration and movement at the entrance to cities when trains stop and block vehicle entry or access routes for a long time. Every city is limited to two such rail entry points.

You will tell me that there are regulations for this, but there are regulations for noise as well.

I would therefore like to know why a distinction is being made regarding inconvenience caused by vibration and entries when noise is covered.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about this issue.

[*English*]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, certainly, as I have said before, Bill C-3 deals with all aspects of the international crossings. We will also be dealing with rail traffic and rail crossings and the tunnels. I look forward to further discussions as this bill goes through committee.

I live in a small rural municipality where, on average, there is one train every 20 minutes. I know what the sound of trains is like. I know what the pollution from trains is like. I know what the vibration from trains is like. I, too, look forward to further discussions.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak today to Bill C-3, a significant bill relating to bridges and tunnels that connect our country with the United States. Bill C-3 is actually a part of a former bill, Bill C-44, which was a package of three other elements that have been left behind at the moment to deal with this significant and important issue. I give the government credit for doing so. It is important that we recognize that this bill has a high priority.

I would like to note that I will be splitting my time with the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, who is also affected by this issue. Windsor West, Windsor—Tecumseh and Essex County have significant border infrastructure issues that have affected not only our community but the county and even the country.

In fact, 40% of the trade with the United States happens along two kilometres of the Detroit River on a daily basis. There are four border crossings in the Windsor West corridor that are involved in the transport of goods, services and people on a regular basis. They have significant impacts not only on the health and vibrancy of the constituents in my riding but also on this country's ability to trade with the United States.

I am pleased that there are many elements in this bill coming forward. It will be important to add some accountability at the border that is not there at this point in time. In fact, there are 24 international bridges and tunnels that connect the United States and Canada. There is really just organized chaos in terms of the way they are actually run and administered right now. A few have some very good best practices. I would point to Niagara Falls and the Fort Erie-Buffalo region that have border commissions and actually have oversight, operation and public ownership, which is critical to the oversight and governance.

Members of the public who are watching this debate today and others across Canada may not realize how at risk we are in terms of the corridor in my riding and the influence of 40% plus of trade that is done on a daily basis. In the Windsor-Detroit corridor there are currently four different border crossings and there is no oversight whatsoever. There is a complete void in the aspects of safety, security, best practices, and has actually put the community at risk.

Currently, a fifth border crossing is under examination. The first of the four others is an international tunnel owned by the city of Detroit and the city of Windsor. The city of Detroit has decided on a long term lease on its side of the tunnel. The city of Windsor actually owns and operates the tunnel after it was in the private sector for so many years. It was rundown and the municipality had to fight to get it back.

Since that time, we have kept fares low, put investment back into public infrastructure and increased the safety aspect of it which we did not have previous knowledge of because it was once again private infrastructure. Without Bill C-3, there are very little safety regulations, inspections, and empowerment from the federal government to look after those jurisdictional items that are so important to infrastructure.

Government Orders

The Ambassador Bridge is the second crossing. In terms of transport trucks and cars, this is the busiest bridge in North America and processes the most trucks in the world on a regular basis. Almost 40,000 vehicles traverse the corridor. The vast majority, I think 34%, use the Ambassador Bridge.

In that capacity, a private American citizen actually owns the Ambassador Bridge. The most important infrastructure, which is 75 years plus, is owned by a private American, and has the highest fares in the region by far and the least amount of accountability because there are no laws of governance. Lastly, I would argue, it has caused considerable grief in the community because of a lack of planning and oversight, not only in terms of the operation of the site itself but also the previous government not increasing trade corridor expansion.

The third is a rail tunnel operated by CP Rail. This is a significantly old infrastructure. I believe it is close to 100 years old. It has two rail tubes. There is a proposal for regeneration, which is beneficial for the rail aspect, but at the same time there is a private proponent that is looking to expand border capacity called the DRTP, which is the city is universally opposed to.

The fourth and last is a ferry operator that transports hazardous waste materials. I am going to use that as an example of the lack of oversight we have in terms of the border and more importantly some of the things that have been happening that this legislation is going to address.

• (1155)

One of them is in regard to a newspaper article. I have asked for an investigation from the government. I have yet to receive a response from the minister's office. The office called back asking for a second copy of the letter I sent but it has not actually dealt with it yet. It is a very serious issue. It is about chemicals and hazardous materials that are crossing the Ambassador Bridge and that is not supposed to be happening.

The Ambassador Bridge goes across the Detroit River which is connected to the Great Lakes ecosystem. From the legislation on the United States side, which is different from the Canadian side, certain chemical materials are not supposed to be traversing over the Ambassador Bridge. They are supposed to go to a ferry operator operated by Gregg Ward, which is down river by about two kilometres. His company has received grants and awards from the Homeland Security Department because of the types of operations it has on site to ensure the goods and materials cross safely.

There has been a public spat between the Ambassador Bridge and some of its operators. The headline of a Windsor *Star* article reads: "Bridge OKs risky cargo: Letter of permission given to chemical company". The article then states:

The Ambassador Bridge is telling its toll collectors to wave through trucks carrying hazardous cargo in violation of a U.S. ban, according to a document obtained by The Star.

It goes on to say:

Bridge spokesman Skip McMahon claimed last week he was unaware of any such shipments.

But a representative of another firm, Harold Marcus Ltd., a Bothwell-based transportation company, said it uses the crossing almost daily to import alum.

The representative said the company did so with the bridge's blessing and said other companies are also granted permission to haul hazardous cargo across the bridge. The Windsor West MP is calling on the federal Public Safety Minister to investigate the reports.

We are yet to hear about that. That is on a daily basis. We know that there is no accountability on this aspect of the file and we have to sit and wait.

This has significant implications because if there were a spill or accident, there would be very little that could be done. That is why we agree that Bill C-3 must have some regulations and oversight to ensure that federal officials can examine and do best practices. Not only could an accident just happen but we do not have the capacity to respond to it. We know our fire department has very limited operations in terms of going onto the Ambassador Bridge and the hazardous material would then go into the Detroit River and contaminate it.

It is also not reducing some of the chemical exposures that we have through our corridor. This is why Bill C-3 is very important. It is one of the elements that we believe should go forward.

I would also like to note some of the failings in Bill C-3. We are concerned right now that the ministerial powers on connecting infrastructure seem to be very dominant in the bill. That is one of the things that we would like to examine, ways that we can actually have some type of involvement from a municipal aspect, so the infrastructure relationship in the corridor can be softened.

I know that in my municipality of Windsor West there may be an imposed solution in terms of connecting the Ambassador Bridge to the 401 because ironically it was a provincial Conservative government and a Liberal federal government that ended construction of the 401 in a farmer's field because they were fighting. It is about eight miles short of the Ambassador Bridge crossing, so we actually have the 401 in the busiest part of this corridor stop in a farmer's field and then it connects to a city linking road because those two governments could not get along. As a result of that we still have backups. There are a number of different problems related to schools, churches, businesses and institutions that have built up along there. They will need compensation if there is going to be any type of shift in the type of landscape.

In summary, we support the bill as an important step forward. There are many aspects that I would like to get into but I cannot. I wanted to highlight the need of this to the general public of Canada. There is such a significant degree of infrastructure problems in Windsor West. There are risks associated as well with having a private infrastructure connecting Canada and the United States as a business conduit as opposed to what it should be, and that is a social, economic conduit between our two countries.

• (1200)

Instead of raking in profits between these two transportation link elements, we should have a high degree of accountability, security and scrutiny with the lowest cost possible for the free flow of goods, services and people. That can only be done with public infrastructure oversight. The government is tabling a piece of legislation that will have some benefits. We are cautious on a few elements and we are looking forward to working on those in committee.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with regard to transportation beyond our borders, one element of Bill C-44 has disappeared. I am referring to advertising of airline ticket prices. We felt that this was a perfect opportunity for greater transparency in ticket sales. In other words, the agency should have the authority to regulate advertising so that hidden charges, especially taxes, are included in the ticket price. Various consumer associations called for this.

There was also the issue of sales of one-way airline tickets that were conditional on the purchase of a return ticket. The former bill required that contract terms and conditions be posted on the Internet. This measure also helped the airlines because they could know exactly what to expect.

Consumer associations called for these measures. I would like to know what the hon. member thinks about this.

• (1205)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I have been working on a number of different consumer bills. We should actually have the appropriate pricing available for consumers on a regular basis.

As we are speaking to this piece of legislation, one of the interesting things that has been happening in my corridor has been the marketing of a border crossing. The government has still failed to do this. It is following in the same footsteps as the previous administration, saying that it will have the next border crossing publicly owned and operated.

We have had chaos in our area where the DRTP, a rail tunnel consortium of Borealis and OMERS, has been pushing its agenda on people and we have been fighting that. Regarding Ambassador Bridge, the private American infrastructure has been calling for twinning against the wishes of the city of Windsor.

An incredible amount of advertising goes on. It is interesting because the Ambassador Bridge receives \$13 million a year for customs officials who operate on site. They just have to take in the tolls. Toll takers are part of the expense operation. It is very limited in terms of expenses.

It is a shame because we have had billboards that say, “Stop the misery” as it relates to border infrastructure clogging our area. We have had full page ads and TV commercials. Private proponents pushed this solution on the community as opposed to finding the right solution, funding it publicly, administering it publicly, and ensuring it is there in perpetuity for the future.

That would be a great economic investment strategy for those who are looking to invest in Ontario because they would know the government is serious about lowering costs, and having greater scrutiny and security as opposed to allowing these two private firms threatening the Ontario economy with the confusion, legal wrangling, and the threats that they continually pose to our community.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member complimented the government on bringing forward, again, the Liberal bill with the same points.

However, I want to talk to the hon. member about the United States initiative related to passports, which will affect both our border crossings. I appreciate that it will be worked on by the government and that the border caucus will meet with the ambassador and the chair of the Senate committee responsible for that bill. I thank everyone who made that happen.

I was in Washington last Thursday meeting with a couple of representatives, congressmen and senators, about that bill because it affects my riding. I have three crossings with the United States. It will definitely hurt trade and tourism in my riding, as well as hunters and fishermen et cetera who cross the border constantly.

I would like to ask the member, what effect will that have on his riding?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, it will have a major impact, not only to my constituency but there will be billions of dollars lost across the country. That is why the New Democratic Party is calling for a national tourism strategy.

First, we have to continue to fight the implementation of this policy. There are actually progressive persons in the United States doing so in Congress and the Senate. Second, we must have a national tourism strategy to lower the cost of passports, increase the use of them, and get people on the U.S. side to do the same. Those are things we should be doing now. We should also be promoting awareness. There should be an implementation schedule and a demand that the Homeland Security Department peruses the study on how to offset the effects. These are the things we should be demanding. The government is sleepwalking into this, just like the previous administration.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity I have had to give a speech since the 39th Parliament started, although I have been up on my feet on a few other occasions. I want to acknowledge and thank the constituents of Windsor—Tecumseh for their support. It is extremely humbling. I pledge to them, as I have each time, to do my very best to represent them here in Ottawa.

The bill is one that is way overdue. It is interesting to hear the Liberal side taking credit for this, but the reality is that we did not get the bill from them. We did not get the provisions of the bill that have been badly needed in my community, in the city of Windsor and the county of Essex, for a very long period of time. This became extremely accentuated after 9/11. When 9/11 occurred, we sat for the first 24 to 36 hours with literally kilometres of delays at our borders. Part of this was that we did not have a legislative infrastructure. The federal government could have moved much more effectively had it had that legislative infrastructure to control the problems that we were confronted with on that occasion.

Government Orders

That has now been repeated over the last four to four and a half years, repeatedly, and it is a problem that our city and our province of Ontario are suffering from, but so is the federal government in terms of tax revenue, efficient administration of our border crossings and our relationship at the international level with the United States.

The provisions in the bill are fairly general. It will be attempting to provide a legislative framework and then follow that with what I hope and expect, for my riding and my constituents, will be a very detailed regulatory body of rules that will in effect allow for an efficient, proper administration at our border crossings.

We in our city and county have the distinction of having more trade and more passengers, both vehicular and rail, than any other place in the country. We are the key crossing, as the House heard earlier from the member for Windsor West. Almost 40% of all the trade between Canada and the United States occurs in one of those four crossings in the Windsor area, through rail, ferry, the tunnel for passenger cars and some trucks, and the bridge.

As most members of the House know, at least the members who were here in the last Parliament, we have been struggling for a good number of years to reach a final consensus on a new crossing, on where it should be located, how it will be funded and how it will be owned and managed. This bill would have helped significantly had it been law, with the regulations along with it, to expedite that process.

It is actually interesting to watch on the U.S. side how on several occasions their authorities, both at the state level and the federal level, were able to intervene and speed up the process. We did not have the ability to do that. At the federal level well over 10 years ago, if not closer to 20, the U.S. changed its legislative framework to make it possible to effectively and efficiently deal with border crossing issues. This legislation would accomplish that assuming the regulatory framework is put in place.

It will deal, as the encompassing legislation allows for, with the regulation with regard to the management and operation of crossings and the roads and streets running up to those crossings, which is a fairly important feature in the bill because it is not a provision within our existing law at all. What is also very important is that it will, for the first time, significantly control the ownership and change in ownership of border crossings.

● (1210)

We have a major problem in our area in that the Ambassador Bridge, which is by far the single busiest crossing in this country, is owned by an American business person who runs it obviously in his interest and not in the interest of the communities on either side of the border. That is a major problem. The ownership issue is going to be very crucial as we reach the final decisions on how this new crossing is owned and managed.

I have had a fair amount of involvement on the whole issue of public security, which is one of my critic responsibilities for my party, and I just want to point out a number of incidents we have had happen that, again, a proper regulatory function would assist us with.

We have a major air quality problem, particularly at the Ambassador Bridge but also at the tunnel, because of the number of vehicles that are crossing in a confined space, oftentimes with significant delays. We know that the health of the people who work

at those structures is being imperilled, as is the health of the people who live in the immediate areas.

There is a major problem at our border crossings with illegal trafficking in weapons, drugs and humans. I know, from having had extensive discussions with police forces on both sides of the border, that we need to significantly augment our coordination and cooperation. They attempt to do it and I want to give them credit for that, but an overall streamlined framework on the Canadian side would significantly improve our ability to deal with those problems.

Quite frankly, we have problems with protocols. We have had two really quite significant incidents of police forces on the U.S. side crossing over without permission. On one occasion it was a chase through the tunnel that occurred in the downtown core of both Detroit and Windsor. They were coming across with guns in hand and apprehending alleged drug dealers on the Canadian side. It was done in the presence of a large number of regular passengers moving through that tunnel, and staff were present with no protection. This is a clear breach of the protocol. We think we have now cleared up the problem, but we cannot help but think that if we had had the proper regulatory framework it would not have happened in the first place.

There was another incident with a police officer who realized at the last minute that he was carrying his gun. He attempted to take it out as he was coming across the bridge and, I suppose, hide it somewhere in the vehicle, and he shot himself in the foot. That occurred as he was in the line approaching customs. His gun very easily could have discharged and injured other people. Again, the ability to regulate and to some degree publicize in the United States the need for them to keep their guns on that side of the border could be, I believe, much more efficiently handled with the type of regulatory framework that I envision coming out of this legislation.

The House has already heard of the problem that we are having with hazardous materials. We know, and I say this with some degree of confidence, that hazardous materials are being taken across the bridge. That is illegal. Hazardous materials are supposed to cross on the barge ferry. It is not happening and we do not have the ability to enforce this. Again, it is because of the lack of coordination and the streamlining that is required, which should come out of this legislation.

All of this is a major concern for us in the Windsor-Essex County area.

The NDP is in support of this legislation. We do have some concerns, some of which will be fine-tuning of the legislation. The one major concern we do have is the ministerial discretion that is encompassed in part of the legislation. I can advise the government that our members at committee will be pressing hard to tighten up how that discretion can be exercised, so that the concerns of the local community will continue to be protected. We are hearing quite clearly from the local community members that it is a concern on their part.

Government Orders

•(1215)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his speech. I would like to know what he thinks of the fact that the government will establish guidelines on approving the construction of new bridges and tunnels and the alteration of existing ones.

Does he think that these guidelines should be established in cooperation with the provinces, taking into account, among other things, the particularities of the provinces and the landscape and especially the environmental impact.

•(1220)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my Bloc Québécois colleague for her question.

[*English*]

The basic answer is yes. We would be very supportive of having significant input both from the provinces and from the territories, which at some point will become an issue, but also from the municipal level of government. In our community, quite frankly, the input from the City of Windsor and the County of Essex levels of government would be at least as significant as it would be from the Province of Ontario, because of the impact that the border crossings have on our city and county and also because of the level of knowledge and expertise that resides in that level of government.

[*Translation*]

The other problem there is with some provinces is that they do not have the infrastructure in place to help us and to allow the federal government to discuss and sign agreements with them. They are not prepared at this point. The provinces of Quebec and Ontario can do so, as can certain other provinces.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member for Windsor—Tecumseh as well as the member for Windsor West that as a government we are listening. I think they know me and they know that the members of this side of the House are very interested in listening to all the stakeholders.

Indeed, they will also take note of the fact that the government House leader has four international bridges in his riding and speaks about the GDP and the safety and security of bridges. As well, they will note that our member for Essex talks about aging infrastructure and the additional capacity that is necessary.

The member for Windsor West compared us to the previous Liberal government. I am curious about his expectations. In 80 days we have solved the softwood lumber issue and brought in an act that is going to clean up government. I am wondering if the member believes there are other priorities that we could also accomplish. We did not have 13 years like the previous government did; we had 80 days to accomplish the great things that have already been done through this Prime Minister. He talked about some of the number one issues that he sees. As far as the minister's discretion is concerned, I wonder if he would go into more detail on how he would see that taking place in the future and how he would see some tightening up.

Finally, I would like to say for both members that I would be more than happy to listen to any input they have on this particular bill or any other bill within my portfolio. I would be happy to recommend that to the minister as well, especially if they are getting that from the people they represent, which is the most important thing we can do in this House.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the overture to continue the dialogue. I do have to say to him that we are concerned that the issue around ministerial discretion has not been more clearly addressed. The previous Liberal government had it in very similar terminology; it may have been exactly the same terminology. The member for Windsor West communicated our concerns quite strongly. I know that the mayor of the city of Windsor has communicated his concerns to the government. I am a bit disturbed that we have not seen any alteration.

What we are really looking for is that there be a confirmation, a very clear guideline, about how that discretion would be exercised if there is to be any deviation from the regulations, and we would want to see clear regulations as to the process by which the minister would be exercising his or her discretion. From the legislation we have now and, quite frankly, what we had from the prior government and from the department, there has been a lack of any type of positive response to those kinds of concerns. I would ask them to do this. I do not think it is unreasonable to say that there has been enough time and the government could be looking at this.

•(1225)

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank my constituents for showing their faith in re-electing me as their member of Parliament. Your riding is very close to mine. The good people of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry chose to re-elect me to be their Conservative member of Parliament, and I cannot say how proud I am.

As I was driving to the Hill this morning, I heard the results a poll, which involved about 4,000 people, to assess how well the government of the day and the Prime Minister were doing after 100 days in office. It gave me a great amount of pride when the results showed that 92% of the respondents felt the Prime Minister was doing an incredibly good job and only 8% felt he was not. To get re-elected and to form a government that gets those kinds of results after 100 days, I can only thank the constituents of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. They made the right choice in choosing a Conservative government and, hopefully, we will earn their respect and their loyalty.

Addressing Bill C-3, I add my support to the international bridges and tunnels act. It is obvious to me that this bill will fill a void that currently exists with respect to how the federal government can exercise its jurisdiction over international crossings.

The Seaway International Bridge, which is in my riding, is the most easterly of the 14 international bridge and tunnel crossings between Ontario and the United States. The closest border crossing is the Ogdensburg-Prescott bridge, which is located 70 kilometres to the west.

Government Orders

Spanning the St. Lawrence River from Cornwall to the Mohawk territory of Akwesasne, and on to Roosevelt, New York, the Seaway International Bridge is a series of two high-level structures and a connecting roadway that opened to traffic in 1962. I am very proud to tell the House that as a young student, I worked on the construction of this bridge for summer employment and I did have a little part in the construction of that wonderful structure.

The bridge has served us very well for 44 years. We have crossed that bridge many times, with Canadians going to the United States and to Akwesasne, the Akwesasne natives coming to Canada or the United States and the Americans visiting Canada. It has allowed us to build relationships. That is what bridges do, do they not? They build relationships between two diverse countries and two diverse cultures.

I am particularly proud to give a personal example of one of those relationships. I have the honour of being the chair of the Cornwall Canada Day committee. On July 1, when we celebrate Canada's birthday, we have a huge fireworks display. We cooperate with the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne to have the fireworks displayed on Cornwall Island so all residents of Cornwall can see them over the water.

That does two things. It allows the residents of Akwesasne to enjoy the fireworks along with our American neighbours as well as the Canadians. We are celebrating Canada's birthday, and three cultures are involved in the celebration. It gives me great pride to be part of that process. That is a result of the relationship we have been able to build because of the Seaway International Bridge.

Over 2.5 million vehicles cross the bridge each year. A lot of it is truck traffic, making it one of the most important trade links between Canada and the United States. The Seaway International Bridge carries 49% of the total traffic across the St. Lawrence River between Ontario and New York, but only 18% of the truck traffic. The other two St. Lawrence River crossings, the Thousand Islands Bridge carries 67% while the Ogdensburg-Prescott Bridge only carries 14% of the trucks crossing the river.

• (1230)

The international bridge is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Federal Bridge Corporation Limited, a federal crown corporation, listed in schedule III, part I of the Financial Administration Act. As a crown corporation subsidiary, it reports directly to Parliament via the Federal Bridge Corporation Limited. On an annual basis, we receive a summary of its corporate plan and its annual report. We therefore have the ability to review these documents and ensure ourselves that the bridge is safe, secure and operated in a manner to ensure the efficient flow of traffic and of trade.

[Translation]

In addition, the Treasury Board receives and approves the corporation's business plan. It is in the context of these approval mechanisms that the federal government can draw on its legal authority regarding the Seaway International Bridge. The situation is the same with the Blue Water Bridge, which is also a crown corporation.

[English]

The rest of our international bridges and tunnels are owned and operated in a variety of other manners, provincially owned and operated, municipally owned and operated or privately owned and operated like the Ambassador Bridge and the Fort Frances-International Falls bridge. The same level of transparency is not available at these crossings.

Bill C-3 would provide the federal government with much of the information we already get from the Seaway and Blue Water Bridges and from the non-crown corporation international bridges and tunnels. Bill C-3 would ensure that not only would we be kept current with respect to the safety and security conditions of these facilities, but also we would have the ability to intervene should a bridge or tunnel not adhere to current standards.

Speaking of safety, the House may be interested to know that the environmental assessment for the replacement of the north channel span of the Seaway International Bridge is nearing completion. This bridge span was constructed in 1959 and connects Cornwall and Cornwall Island. The bridge was constructed as a high-level crossing over the north channel of the St. Lawrence River and the old Cornwall canal to accommodate a plan for an all Canadian seaway that unfortunately was never built. On May 5, 2000, the Government of Canada announced that there was no longer a requirement to maintain an option for an all Canadian seaway.

[Translation]

The St. Lawrence Seaway Authority spends considerable amounts annually on bridge maintenance, and costs will increase significantly over the coming years. Considerable sums will have to be invested to replace the bridge deck and to repaint the structure.

Preliminary studies have indicated that the costs of replacing the deck and painting the structure will be higher than the cost of building a new, lower bridge.

Following the May 5, 2000, announcement, the option of replacing the high bridge, which is quite costly, with a lower bridge at less cost is more viable.

[English]

Over the years this bridge has experienced extensive and advancing deterioration of the concrete bridge deck and widespread deterioration of the structural steel coating. The bridge deck curb-to-curb distance does not meet the current standards and the current bridge railings are not likely to meet current crash test requirements and are deficient in height. For these reasons, the Seaway International Bridge Corporation has decided to build a new low-level bridge and tear down the existing high-level one. The residents of Cornwall, Akwesasne and New York State are anxiously anticipating the structure of the new low-level bridge.

The federal environmental assessment for this initiative was undertaken in full cooperation with our neighbours of Mohawk Council of Akwesasne and a harmonized environmental assessment report was produced. Since members of the Akwesasne community are the major users of the crossing and the bridge touches down on Akwesasne, it was imperative to take their concerns into consideration. The new bridge will significantly reduce trip times between Cornwall and Akwesasne and offer new opportunities for vehicular, cyclist and pedestrian movements and will potentially result in increased business on both Cornwall Island and in the city of Cornwall. We are looking forward to that enhanced economic activity.

Negotiations have been ongoing between the corporation, Transport Canada and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne to arrive at a consensus on the design, the work schedule, contracting arrangements and other details to ensure a smooth atmosphere during and after construction.

I have spoken about the Seaway International Bridge which is located in my riding, but I would like to add a few comments on the Ogdensburg-Prescott bridge and the Thousand Islands Bridge, both of which are located close by in the riding of Leeds—Grenville.

The Ogdensburg-Prescott bridge is the only international bridge between Canada and the United States that is completely owned and operated by a U.S. public benefit corporation. All seven members of the board of directors are appointed by the governor of New York State. Ownership of the bridge will revert to the Canadian federal government and the State of New York when the construction debt has been paid off. However, there is no deadline for this payoff and estimates have placed it far into the future.

• (1235)

[Translation]

I am told the bridge is well managed. However, without the powers that will be granted it with the passage of Bill C-3, the federal government has very little information on the operation of this bridge.

Public Works and Government Services Canada receives inspection reports on the safety and security of the bridge, but the federal government has very little authority over it.

[English]

The Thousand Islands Bridge, which is located in Leeds—Grenville, was opened in 1938 by former Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The bridge is operated under an agreement between the Thousand Islands Bridge Authority, a U.S. authority, and the Federal Bridge Corporation Limited, a federal crown corporation. This arrangement has proven to be an effective model of true partnership between Canada and the United States of America.

All three of the bridges across the St. Lawrence River are currently well managed and well operated. With the passage of Bill C-3, Parliament can rest assured that this situation will continue and that the Canadian people can feel completely safe and secure as they cross these structures, and that the goods and services that cross these bridges every day will continue uninterrupted.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

In my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche, there are three international bridges in the region of Madawaska alone. They are located in Clair, Edmundston and Saint-Léonard.

My honourable colleague mentioned at the end of his speech that there will be uninterrupted access and that is important.

Can my honourable colleague tell us whether or not these bridges will in future receive funding for infrastructure improvements? Could he clarify the new American border crossing policy: will we need a passport to cross? Will that mean that there will no longer be the free flow that he mentioned?

Madawaska—Restigouche is an important riding with its three international bridges. There is a considerable amount of activity and trade between Canada and the United States.

Thus, I would like to ask my honourable colleague if he anticipates a significant investment. I would also like to know if the free flow which he spoke of excludes, on the part of our American friends, border restrictions and the requirement to carry a passport.

• (1240)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I am very proud to sit on this side of the House, with the government. I have a great deal of confidence in my colleagues. They will handle the situation pertaining to bridges and passports in such a way as to keep flow as we know it now.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like my Liberal colleagues to take careful note of the question I am about to ask, which they know is a relevant one.

My question is for my honourable colleague, with whom I have been privileged to sit on several committees. It is about the former bill and some of its clauses, which do not appear in Bill C-3. I am referring to Bill C-44, which served as the inspiration for Bill C-3. Specifically, I would like to discuss what happens when a company abandons a rail line. The former bill provided that in such cases, the company must offer to sell the line to the urban transit authority first, while giving the municipality priority in such transactions.

In my riding, Repentigny, and in greater Montreal, the commuter train issue is very important. Our prefect, Chantal Deschamps, is doing exemplary work with Montreal and industry stakeholders to make the commuter train happen as soon as possible. The industry supports her.

I would like my colleague to tell me why this part of Bill C-44 was removed from the new Bill C-3. This is a very important issue for people in Repentigny and for residents of greater Montreal. I am certain that it is equally important in other parts of Canada where commuter train issues are coming to the fore.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

*Government Orders**[English]*

There are some departures from Bill C-44 for obvious reasons. There is a new government in town and we are going to do it right. The Conservatives have been in government for 100 days and it looks as if we are getting a grade above 90%, so I think we are doing quite well.

I have full confidence in my colleagues at the ministerial level. There is no question in my mind. I understand my colleague's concerns but I can say from the bottom of my heart that I believe the Conservative government will serve every Canadian. That is why certain appointments were made. It was to make sure that everyone in Canada was well represented right across this wonderful country of ours.

If my colleague has any concerns about service or anything that might happen in the future, he probably knows already that all he has to do is convey them to one of the ministers and his concerns will be addressed effectively. I suggest he make his concerns known to the minister while this bill is being studied and I am sure they will be incorporated if they make sense. The Conservative government is prepared to listen. We want to move the country forward like it should be moved. We do not want the country to stand still like it has been for the last 13 years.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the chief of police in the city of Toronto said that half the illegal guns in Toronto have been smuggled across the border from the United States and it is causing a serious problem in big urban centres. The lives of a lot of families have been wrecked because of illegal guns being smuggled across the border. The Toronto mayor and the police chief have talked about the need to control the border crossings to stem the flow of illegal guns.

Clauses 38, 39 and 40 of the bill talk about enforcement, searches, warrants, those kinds of details. How will this bill enable big urban centres by having fewer illegal guns coming across the border?

• (1245)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, we sure do want to stop the crime that is going on in this country and we have the solution. The Conservative Government of Canada unquestionably has the solution.

The beginning of the solution is to take the billions and billions of dollars that have been wasted in that sinkhole of a gun registry and put it toward the very thing the member is suggesting. We want to stop the smuggling of guns. We want to stop the illegal guns. We do not want to stop the farmers who use guns as they do shovels and rakes.

If there is a legacy that will hurt this country forever, it will be that darn gun registry that the former government left us. After 13 years of waste and mismanagement it is a \$2 billion sinkhole. Hopefully tomorrow in the budget we will be able to address that terrible mismanagement which went on in the last 13 years.

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how the member relates bridges and tunnels to the gun registry, but he said that he has solutions.

I am from the Miramichi where we have the processing centre for the gun registry and the people are doing an excellent job with their work.

Perhaps he has solutions but when we brought in Bill C-68 in terms of the difficulties that we are having in this country with peace and with guns, it was a bill that was sponsored by a great number of Canadian organizations. I say to the hon. member that he should be very cautious in terms of his so-called solution. We are looking for peace and good government in the country. We are looking of course at our law enforcement people to have adequate inventory in terms of the risks they have.

I suggest that the member has to be very careful in his statements.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member will be both careful and short.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I respect my colleague opposite and I thank him for his advice. We can always learn from people with more experience.

I still feel very strongly about the money that has been wasted on the gun registry. I know the intent of the gun registry was honourable and it was for the right reasons, but quite frankly, \$2 billion was spent on a gun registry that is totally ineffective.

Police officers in uniform walked up to me during the recent campaign and asked me what my position was on the gun registry. I quoted the Conservative policy that we want to eliminate the wasteful gun registry, and they said, "You just got my vote".

I do take my colleague's advice, but quite frankly, I also take my constituents' advice.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address the subject of Bill C-3. At first glance, this bill seems to stir up passions in this House. We are on our third bill and already we get the feeling that the pressure is starting to rise seriously.

This is also an opportunity for me to mention that today, May 1, is International Workers' Day. I wish all workers a happy May Day.

This is also an opportunity to point out that this Bill C-3, An Act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act, addresses a regulatory vacuum concerning the bridges and tunnels linking Canada to the U.S.

There are 24 international road bridges and tunnels. Of these 24 bridges, 14 are located in Ontario, nine are located in New Brunswick, and one is located in Quebec. I will come back to this one, since this bridge, the Glen Sutton bridge, is in poor condition. There are also five railway bridges and tunnels in Ontario, and only five of these bridges belong to the federal government. We must recall, on this May 1, that all these infrastructures were made possible thanks to the contributions of our workers. Unfortunately, many of them lost their lives on the job. Last week we had a day to remember all those who have been victims of work accidents. Once again, a happy May Day to everyone!

Government Orders

Back to Bill C-3. We know (several of my colleagues have already mentioned it) that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of this bill, in principle. As I indicated earlier, there was actually a regulatory vacuum concerning international bridges and tunnels. We also know that, since September 11, there has been concern about the security of these structures, which play a strategic role in trade between Canada, Quebec and the U.S. So we cannot be opposed to a bill that aims to improve the security of these infrastructures.

By the way, I wish to underscore something. As I mentioned, these infrastructures are obviously extremely important for trade and the circulation of people between Canada, Quebec and the United States. Eighty per cent of our exports go to the U.S., a good part of which, or perhaps even all, transit through these important structures.

According to the Department of Transport, local stakeholders are mainly in favour of the provisions of this bill. This remains to be verified, however, and I am counting a lot on the assistance of my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel to confirm this opinion from the Department of Transport among those concerned. We have heard that the Government of Quebec has some misgivings. By the time this is discussed in committee, I am sure that my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel will have consulted local stakeholders, if he has not already done so, to make sure that the bill addresses most of their concerns.

Such are the essential points and the most positive points of Bill C-3. Some points, however, seem, questionable or outright negative.

The first thing is found in clause 39, for example. It seems to us that the federal government is being given virtual police powers in relation to regulating international bridges and tunnels: for example, the very authoritarian power to investigate without warrant and power of seizure. We will have to be shown what purpose these exceptional powers of investigation and powers of seizure serve.

I would note that the federal government gives itself powers to legislate, but the financial responsibility is placed on other shoulders. In the case of the Sutton bridge, for example, the municipality is responsible for a large portion of the maintenance of the bridge. It is always easy for the federal government to set the bar very high when it comes to some of the rules relating to the safety and security of these bridges and tunnels.

• (1250)

This is somewhat related to the commitment made by the Prime Minister. This power to legislate should therefore be better circumscribed, so that we can be sure that if the federal government makes decisions resulting in costs that go beyond day-to-day infrastructure maintenance operations, it will contribute to those costs.

This again reminds me of the Canada Health Act. For several years, the government patted itself on the back about the criteria set out in the Canada Health Act and threatened the provinces, which in its opinion were in violation of those five criteria—I believe that was it. However, in 1993-94, the federal government started making unilateral cuts to its transfers, which were significantly reduced. Everyone seems to agree on the fiscal imbalance. The idea is even catching on among the Liberals.

So on the one hand, we have some lovely requirements in the bill to enable the federal government to make this its trademark, to make it a component of its visibility strategy, and on the other hand we have the provinces, the municipalities or both, absorbing all of the costs of these lovely and very generous speeches. I am very concerned.

Obviously, you will tell me that at the end of their reign the federal Liberals reinvested in transfers to the provinces. I would note that Quebec is still missing \$5.5 billion. Once again, I appeal to the Minister of Finance. I hope that he will begin to provide us with some solutions in his speech tomorrow. It is quite clear that this cannot be fixed in a single day or a single speech. As we know on this side, the problem is profound. However, we have to hope that tomorrow's speech will contain some elements of a solution to the fiscal imbalance.

Even if transfers to Quebec were restored to their level before the Liberals' unilateral cuts, to 1993-94 levels, there would still be \$5.5 billion missing, as I said. Thus it would not completely solve the problem of the fiscal imbalance. According to the Conference Board, \$3.9 billion would still be needed in order to truly restore the balance between the revenue available to Quebec and the revenue it needs to meet its responsibilities.

You will therefore understand that seeing provisions of this nature in a bill relating to bridges and tunnels is a matter of great concern to us.

The member for Repentigny pointed out quite rightly that some items from Bill C-44 are missing from Bill C-3, for example, more transparent advertising of the sale of airline tickets. We know very well in this House what a difference there is between the advertised price of plane tickets and what they actually cost in the end. A number of somewhat random items are added with the result that the price is always substantially higher or even doubled. So it is a question of transparency. All the consumers' associations have been asking for this for a long time. What explanation can there be that these provisions, which seemed very good to us, have simply been changed, forgotten, or deleted in Bill C-3?

As I just mentioned, I think that in the work done in committee, my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel will have an opportunity to reintroduce these points.

Another point in Bill C-44 seemed very good to us. That is the mechanism for resolving disputes over the sharing of rail lines between passenger carriers and freight carriers. As my colleagues and I have mentioned, railway transportation looks very attractive insofar as the objectives of the Kyoto protocol are concerned. It is an environmentally friendly method of transportation. However, the rails need to be available to carry passengers.

Government Orders

I am not an expert. Still, until shown proof to the contrary, I have the impression that priority is always given to freight trains and this hardly encourages people to take the train when travelling among major centres in Quebec and Canada. My colleague for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel can probably give me an answer after I have spoken. In view of all this, such arbitration will be very important over the next few years.

● (1255)

The member for Repentigny picked up on a certain aspect of the issue. I am returning to it as well because we are both from the Lanaudière region. If a train goes through Repentigny and Mascouche, the chances are very good that it will go to Joliette eventually. I will support him therefore, as well as Ms. Deschamps and all the people who are trying to get this commuter train.

In addition, when a railway company decides not to use certain lines any more, we must ensure that they are not automatically torn up. Rail lines that have been abandoned and torn up in the past could have helped meet our current need for commuter trains.

Bill C-44 provided that the local administrations would be offered an opportunity to buy the rail lines before they were torn up. We should draw an important lesson from the lack of foresight shown in regard to our entire road infrastructure. For a long time people said that there was no future in rail and we should rely on roads and trucks. Now the Americans have rediscovered rail, and in a few years, Canadians will rediscover it as well. We have already started to understand the importance of rail for transportation around big cities such as Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa and Quebec.

However, there has been an enormous lack of foresight, of clear-sightedness. So we must avoid committing the mistakes of the past over again. Bill C-44 contained a provision in this regard. It also provided for a new VIA Rail Act which would have given that corporation more autonomy in making its own decisions on improving rail transportation. As I was saying, this is one of the solutions that would allow us to meet our Kyoto protocol targets.

I want to mention one final negative element. Clause 32 of Bill C-44 granted the Canadian Transportation Agency the power to examine complaints of unreasonable noise caused by trains, so as to oblige railway companies to find the best possible solutions to this pollution. This is not greenhouse gas emissions, but it is extremely annoying pollution all the same.

I myself have been in contact with VIA Rail regarding a poorly set railway track. Unfortunately, the track was located a few feet from a seniors' residence. Seniors sleep light. So we filed a complaint. Fortunately, a VIA Rail official, Mr. Daniel Lacoste, was extremely attentive, and I would like to thank him for that. He is a resident of Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes, in the lovely riding of Joliette. Things were resolved because all of us acted with good will.

Unfortunately that is not always the case. Sometimes the problem does not originate only in the marshalling yards. I am very familiar with the problem at the Outremont yard. As I was saying, tracks are sometimes poorly set, and that causes noise. It is a problem which can easily be corrected with proper welding.

That is the review I wished to offer of Bill C-3. It is a first step toward filling a legal void, something which can only be our

common desire. All the same, it is not enough. Clearly there are corrections to it that we will have to make.

I would like to return to the questions concerning the most important clauses of this bill. Clause 2 defines the terms of the bill. This is its definition of an international bridge or tunnel: "a bridge or tunnel, or any part of it, that connects any place in Canada to any place outside Canada, and includes the approaches and facilities related to the bridge or tunnel". As I was saying earlier, most of these infrastructures are not the property of the federal government. So far as I know, even though the bridges and tunnels lie within exclusive federal jurisdiction, relatively few of them are owned by the federal government. As I said when I began, I have counted five of these. So it will be extremely important to clarify the powers of the federal government in this regard.

Clause 6 states that "no person shall construct or alter an international bridge or tunnel" without the government's approval. That is self-evident.

● (1300)

But, as I said, who will pay when the federal government has requirements that go beyond the proposals made by those responsible for maintaining these structures?

According to clause 4(4), "approval may be given...to the site or plans of an international bridge over the St. Lawrence River". We have a great deal of concern about this. We do not know whether there are any projects in the works. In my opinion, this will have to be much clearer. There is certainly a need for such a structure, but it is still surprising to see a clause reserved for something that is to come, a project that, to my knowledge, does not even exist yet.

According to clauses 14, 15 and 16, the government may make regulations respecting the maintenance and repair, operation and use, and security and safety of international bridges and tunnels. This takes us back to the comment I made about clause 6. It is all well and good to talk in broad terms and have high standards, but who is going to pay for these infrastructures? Perhaps the Minister of Finance will announce a new infrastructure program in his budget tomorrow, with a specific component on international bridges and tunnels. In any event, I am convinced that that would reassure a lot of people.

According to clause 17, "the Minister" of Transport "may make directions" if "the Minister is of the opinion that there is an immediate threat to the security or safety of any international bridge or tunnel". Logically, everyone should agree with this, but once again, who will pay the costs associated with these directions made by the federal government?

According to clause 23, "the approval of the Governor in Council" is required for any change of ownership, operator or control of an international bridge or tunnel. This goes without saying, although it reminds me of a debate we had about satellites that take pictures. In the case of the Telesat remote sensing satellite, if I recall correctly, the Bloc Québécois had a great deal of difficulty understanding how the Canadian Space Agency could give up ownership when the taxpayers of Canada and Quebec had paid for all the research. It likely would have been simpler to keep ownership of the satellite.

Government Orders

In the Telesat bill, whose number I have forgotten, there was no provision for a company that might become a foreign company. So, when the Canadian Space Agency transferred or gave the satellite to this company, for a few months, the company in question belonged to some Americans. It would have been pretty extraordinary if a technology developed with income tax and taxes paid by all Canadians and Quebecers had been given to a foreign company. We were assured that all sorts of provisions of the act prevented that. Nevertheless I prefer an explicit mention, as in Bill C-3, because of significant strategic elements pertaining to both security and international trade.

According to clause 29, it is possible to create a crown corporation to administer a bridge or a tunnel. This is credible, to my mind. If we have a new structure on the St. Lawrence River, it seems to me that this should be public property. So clause 29 provides for this possibility.

I said earlier that clause 39, whereby the government is given very extensive police powers, such as searches without a warrant and a very authoritarian power of seizure. It seems to us that there are some things to be corrected in this area.

I wanted to end quite simply by pointing out the state of the Glen Sutton bridge, the only one in Quebec linking Quebec, which is still politically part of Canada, to the U.S. It is a metal bridge built about 1929. It will probably go from being a strategic axis of communication to being a museum artifact, where finally people will go to see it. It is relatively long, covering 50 metres. It spans a gorge. It is a magnificent sight. It is also used by trucks. According to our information, it is in a fairly pitiful state. I mentioned, though, that ownership of the bridge is shared between the state of Vermont and the municipality of Sutton. If there are, in connection with Bill C-3, instructions from the federal government with a view to improving safety and security, who will actually pay?

• (1305)

Will the municipality of Sutton be asked to pay these costs? It seems to me that this would be irresponsible. I hope that, when Bill C-3 goes to committee, an infrastructure fund will be created that is dedicated specifically to international bridges and tunnels.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I assure the member that as a government we are listening. In fact, some of his comments were questions brought about by the member for Shefford and the member for Laval on the Sutton bridge, the ownership of the bridge and the environmental impact.

I want to assure the member as well that I am, by way of information, pursuing those particular questions and will have answers for those members in due course.

I also want to assure the member, in relation to clause 39 of the bill, that it is somewhat intrusive. I would appreciate a comment from the member as to what could be more important than intruding on the values of Canadians by keeping them safe and secure, which of course the bill specifically deals with.

I also want to assure the member that we are very aware of some of the other issues he brought forward, in particular, advertising for

plane tickets, the dispute mechanism and some of the issues that were more contentious.

We brought this bill to the forefront because our number one priority as a government is to ensure the safety and security of Canadians. We will ensure we have consistent objectives and, in this case, we will implement the rules necessary to keep Canadians safe and secure. What does the member feel would be the best avenue to pursue this? If the member can think of some other ways for us to proceed on this, he can approach me outside the House and bring those issues to me. I would be more than happy to look at them and give him responses on each and every issue.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary said, the Bloc thinks that section 39 is very police-oriented, very repressive. He said that nothing was more important than safety. I can agree with him, but for a long time the Bloc Québécois has been calling on the government—both the previous government and the present government—to properly balance safety or security and the rights of individuals and corporations. Here, we are talking about the power to search without a warrant. Obviously, there should at least have to be some legal or judicial authorization to conduct a search.

As in the case of the debates regarding Bills C-35 and C-36 in the two preceding Parliaments, the question is one of finding a balance between safety or security and individual rights, including the rights of businesses. My colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel will have some suggestions to make in committee. I am not an expert, and if I was getting too far ahead of myself, it was relatively unintentional. I will therefore yield to the work that the committee will do, and in particular the work of my colleague in the Bloc Québécois.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my constituents for re-electing me for a third time and for being very fair during the election in acknowledging the work that was done. I appreciate all the support my constituents give me when I return to the riding and while I am here in Parliament.

As the member said in the opening of his speech, as today is May Day or workers' day, on behalf of my party I commend all workers. I also commend the people who celebrated on Friday, April 28 in Whitehorse. It was a great commemoration of those workers who were injured or died on the job.

The member mentioned a couple of times what he hoped would be in the budget tomorrow. In that the throne speech had almost nothing in it, is the member looking for things in the budget that are important to the Bloc that were not in the throne speech, such as items related to drug abuse, education, homelessness, getting low income people back to work, the social economy, social housing, programs for women, any social programs and the environment? Does the member hope we will see these items in the budget speech tomorrow since they were not mentioned in the throne speech?

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I would echo what my colleague said about May Day. I am pleased to know that this international day was celebrated in Whitehorse. Last Saturday, in Montreal, there was a demonstration in which over 50,000 people took part to call for improvements in labour laws, working conditions and health and safety issues. I am pleased that this has been echoed today in this House.

The member referred both to the Speech from the Throne and to tomorrow's budget. I think he was quite right. Concerning the fiscal imbalance, we are expecting—as I said in my speech—to see a major step forward in increasing transfers from the federal government to the provinces, in particular in relation to post-secondary education. Tomorrow, we expect a response from the government, because our universities and colleges are underfunded, and this creates problems. In terms of productivity, the most important factor is going to be human capital, and thus training and education. We keep repeating it, but we have to invest the necessary money in order to ensure not only that there are adequate educational institutions, but also that the labour force is well educated, both now and for the future.

As for social housing and affordable housing, the Bloc agrees entirely with the member. The previous government had begun to slowly reinvest in social housing and affordable housing. Although we found the amount of funding inadequate, at least some investment was being made.

In that respect, one can only hope that the Conservative government will continue on the same path, by increasing investments, which are extremely effective socially and which create a dynamic economy. This involves more than just the construction industry. At present, there are social housing projects in small municipalities, which are facing two types of exodus: young people moving to larger centres in search of employment, and seniors leaving rural areas to be where services are provided. In my riding, for example, many people are leaving the municipalities surrounding Joliette to move to Joliette or Repentigny, where there are more services. This is both a social and economic phenomenon, and a matter of land use.

As for employment insurance, which the member did not mention, the Bloc hopes that the budget will include major announcements concerning improved access to employment insurance. As we know, only four in ten people who pay premiums are eligible for benefits. This is totally unfair. Employment insurance has become the federal government's cash cow. The bulk of the surplus comes from EI fund surpluses. This misappropriation of funds must be stopped, as well as the abuse of the principle behind employment insurance, which is to guarantee the economic security of workers who are temporarily unemployed.

• (1315)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak about Bill C-3, An Act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act. Also, I wish to congratulate my colleague for a very good presentation. It showed me how conversant he is with this issue. His fellow citizens are undoubtedly proud to see that he is very up on all this.

With this new Conservative government, there was to be another way of governing. With this bill we see that they want to impose requirements on those managing the structures without contributing financially. They continue to maintain this philosophy of the federal government, which divested itself of the ports, regional airports and bridges, without ever investing the money required. And it is transferring these responsibilities to the cities, as we see from the case of the Sutton bridge. The Quebec government is responsible for its inspection and security.

This bill imposes standards. Standards will be imposed on those who manage and inspect these structures, but there will be no financial contribution.

Once again, we have this federal government culture of entitlement and no money forthcoming. I would like to know what the member has to say about this.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, the question raised by the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel is very pertinent. Although the tone of the Conservative government seems more conciliatory than that of the previous government, things are no different. Standards are being dictated in other jurisdictions—especially provincial, but also municipal in the case of Bill C-3—without the requisite funds being made available.

That is why, as I indicated in my speech, fiscal imbalance cannot be addressed by means of transfers alone. Tax point transfers to the provinces are needed in order to enable them to assume these responsibilities, without the fear that one day the federal government will unilaterally cut transfers.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first opportunity to speak in the 39th Parliament, I want to thank all of my constituents who have sent me here for five terms.

I also want to reiterate the fact that the best part of this job is probably back in the riding when we get to meet all of the volunteers and get back with family and so on. Mr. Speaker, you I am sure well know what I am talking about.

This past weekend was a good example of what it is like. I got off the plane on Friday and helped a group raise over \$96,000 for Kids for Cancer. That evening I attended a Striving for Excellence banquet at which 178 public school system kids received awards for excellence. We heard a speech from a 13 year old girl who has been blind for the last nine years. She told us how she strives for excellence and hopes to get to the Paralympics in horse riding and in a number of other sports. It makes one feel pretty good coming back here knowing what the great volunteers in the area are doing.

Government Orders

On Saturday night I attended a homebuilders banquet. I would like on the record the fact that my constituency is booming. A fly-by-night operator came into our town and built 11 homes that had faulty foundations and no kitchen doors. All of the builders in our community banded together and announced at the banquet that they would be repairing the homes of those 11 people who were unfortunate enough to have been taken for a ride by a bad contractor.

That is my constituency and those are the kinds of volunteers we have. I thank my family and my constituents for sending me here.

I come from central Alberta and we are a long way from any international bridge or tunnel. I could suggest the number of bridges and tunnels, which might help us out, but I do not think we could quite get to the U.S. border. It is important that we talk about how vital bridges and tunnels and the flow of traffic from north to south really is. We have to remember that 80% of our jobs and well over \$1.5 billion cross the border and whatever we can do to make that border safe and secure and function better is important to all of us. My riding has seven world scale petrochemical plants and a great deal of their material goes across the border. Many of the jobs and much of the activity that is going on is because of the effective way we handle this.

I also want to bring to the House's attention the fact that when we talk to truckers and various other groups that have come to Ottawa they tell us that one of the most serious issues is infrastructure, how it is deteriorating and how its management is sometimes in question. We have heard about this in some of the other speeches today. I remember one trucker saying that they were driving over bridges that have the year 1938 or 1955 stamped on the concrete. Little has been done since then to make sure that vital means of transportation is upgraded.

We have a lot to do. For 13 years we have heard a lot of talk but seen little action. Two bills have come before this bill but none got through and none of them actually cleared up the problem. We now have a bill that I believe will do that. Our plan is to institute this, get it done and get on with the job. We do not need to have 100 priorities. We have these priorities and let us get them through.

● (1320)

It is my pleasure to talk about Bill C-3, the international bridges and tunnels act. As many of my colleagues have mentioned in the past, many of these bridges and tunnels came into existence with the creation of special acts of Parliament. These acts served to create the company that would ultimately own the bridge or tunnel and be responsible for its construction, set out the company's share capital and other corporate information, and would establish the company's various powers, including borrowing powers and the right to charge tolls.

More important, these special acts set terms and conditions for the construction of the bridge or tunnel, such as the location, the approval of plans and specifications, the time period within which the bridge or tunnel was to be constructed, and finally, how the company could deal with the bridge or tunnel once it was constructed. Federal government approval was therefore given via these special acts.

Government approval for construction of new international bridges or tunnels is therefore not a new concept. The approval process proposed by the new bill will, however, relieve the need to enact a special act of Parliament each time a new bridge or tunnel is constructed.

I have not been here for as many years as you have, Mr. Speaker, but obviously if we had to bring about a special act every time we wanted to do something you know how that could get bogged down. We know how the lobbyists work in this place and just how difficult it is to get any action sometimes. This act would end that problem.

Keeping in mind that these are international bridges and tunnels and that our jurisdiction over these bridges and tunnels ends at the Canadian border, it is interesting to note how our American counterparts deal with the approval of the construction of new international bridges or tunnels on their territory. Since 1968, persons in the United States wishing to build a new international bridge that connects with Canada must first seek permission from the president. This permission is given in the form of a presidential permit, which must be applied for to the Department of State.

In this application, applicants must provide the following information, among other matters: information regarding the proposed bridge, including location, design, proposed construction methods, the safety standards to be applied, copies of the engineering drawings, and the construction schedule; details of any similar facilities in the surrounding area; and traffic information, including projections of international traffic volume and the effect the proposed bridge would have on the traffic volumes of other nearby bridges.

During the election campaign, I was in the riding of Essex working with our member there. I went into Windsor as well. I know that the hon. members from Windsor have been talking about this in committees and in this House for a very long time. They have talked about the great difficulties. There are four bridges there, four crossings, a railway tunnel, and obviously the talk has been going on as long as I have been here, and maybe a lot longer, about the difficulties in that Windsor-Detroit corridor, about how things get slowed down and how ineffective it is. We have all seen television pictures of the long traffic jams. It is to be hoped, and obviously as this goes to committee I am sure it would be made clear, that this kind of problem will be dealt with, that we will get on with it instead of talking about how we are going to solve that problem.

How the project is going to be financed also is very important, including what the toll structure will be. Those are the kinds of things that the public has the right to have discussed and openly talked about.

Also, there is how the proposed construction would impact the environment, including copies of environmental assessments or reports. Members know of my interest in environment. I think it is very easy to make this process go a lot faster. The cooperation among municipalities, provinces and the federal government, where one study in fact accomplishes all of the environmental impact studies, just goes so far.

Government Orders

In my over 30 years of being involved in environmental areas, so often I have seen the turf wars among the three levels of government certainly take a project to the point where, if it is not scuttled, it becomes uneconomic, and the players leave and go on to somewhere else. That should not be the way it is. There is one environment. It does not matter what levels of government are involved; they should cooperatively do the environmental assessment and in fact get on with the project. This should not be used as a delaying tactic. They should be using what is best for the environment and for the people of that area.

• (1325)

In the United States, details of other permits and approvals must be obtained from other U.S. agencies. Again, I would add that sometimes, with their turf wars, those agencies can in fact slow things down a lot too. We really have to start working as a House to get more cooperation in this kind of thing. Hopefully this bill will accomplish that.

The applicant in the U.S. also of course has to work closely with the Canadian government and vice versa. I think it is very important that the relationship between the U.S. and Canada, which is now finally moving forward, will make those negotiations much easier and will allow us to get on with the building of these bridges and tunnels. In fact, I think that cooperative approach I mentioned between provinces and municipalities can be extended to our U.S. counterparts. In the process, the state department, after all its consultation and, certainly from our perspective, our consultation, then moves on to get consultants and look at the best routes and locations. All of that, of course, should be in the public domain.

As mentioned, the new bill would allow the government to establish similar Canadian guidelines so that information is provided when the government is seeking approval for the construction of a new international bridge or tunnel. There is no need to keep reinventing the wheel, as we so often do. Obviously a lot can be learned from other projects and proposals in moving this whole thing forward.

Having said all of this, I note that our guidelines will specifically take into account what is in the best interest of Canadians when it comes to international bridges and tunnels. The approval process, including the information that the applicant will have to provide, will be tailored to respond to Canada's national objectives and this government's priorities to secure our border while at the same time encouraging international trade through the efficient flow of goods and traffic via these borders.

I fully support the bill. I think it clarifies a lot. I look forward to it going on to committee and to speeding up the process of the three bridges that are being proposed now, one in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, one in Fort Erie, Ontario, and one in Windsor, Ontario, as mentioned earlier. I think it will be good to have the oversight of the federal government and to get on with the project, in cooperation with the others.

• (1330)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while my riding does not in any way touch upon an international bridge, it is said that the people of Albert county are so fiercely independent they are a separate country and the new bridge

that spans the mighty Petitcodiac probably took so long because of the international aspect.

My friend brought up an aspect of infrastructure. In municipal infrastructure, provincial and federal programming has been working terribly well in our province and in our region. There are programs like CSIF, on strategic infrastructure, and MRIF, for municipal rural infrastructure programs, which we felt might be under attack in the coming days as an effort by the government to redo or redress what it perceives to be the fiscal imbalance.

I fear, and I ask the hon. member for his comment, that money will be taken out of infrastructure programs that might otherwise help to update bridges and roads in our communities. I fear that the money will be taken out of those programs, with those programs collapsing like the bridges the member referred to from 1918 and 1938, and will be put into provinces for other purposes that are laudable but are not infrastructure purposes.

Does the hon. member feel that these infrastructure programs are very important to municipalities and communities around our country that face deplorable states of aging infrastructure?

Mr. Bob Mills: Mr. Speaker, we have been here for 13 and a half years and we have heard about a lot of projects. We have heard a lot about lobbyists and a lot about infrastructure. As we travel the country we see a lot of that infrastructure and I think there is a major concern. Probably the reason I got into this and that I am still here is that concern. In fact, we have not done anything for 13 years. We have talked a lot and there have been hundreds of bills, but we really have not done anything.

We have talked about our Trans-Canada highway, about it being improved and about how it is not up to standard compared to south of the border or other parts of the world. We have talked and talked about it and we have not done anything. It is like the environment. We have 140 programs. Let us say most of those have \$100 million, but \$60 million is spent on establishing the program in Ottawa, so we have the bureaucracy established here and then we just do not have enough money to actually carry out very much.

With the streamlining that will go on and the priorities we have in dealing with cities and infrastructure, I am very confident that the government will not in fact rob those projects, and that through cooperation, municipalities and provinces will actually accomplish much more, certainly, than has been done in the last number of years.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had a chance to speak about the importance of international bridges for regions like mine, but we should look at this issue from the standpoint of the environmental impact as well. My hon. colleague's party does not necessarily like to talk about the environment. That party, it seems to me, prefers to put all environmental issues aside.

There is an incinerator very close to the riding of Madawaska—Restigouche. Does my hon. colleague think that it is good and appropriate to take contaminants or any toxic materials from our American neighbours to burn and process them here in Canada? Is that a priority for them? Is the environment more important? We need to work very hard on this problem.

In conclusion, I was at a Ducks Unlimited event last weekend. In studying the situation, it becomes clear that we need to work very hard in order to stabilize the environment in our regions and our wetlands. My hon. colleague will have a chance to tell us whether it really is a good thing to bring these materials to Canada.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Mills: Mr. Speaker, it is as if I had given the hon. member the question to ask me. I gave my first speech on garbage in 1972. It is a 48 page document that I would be glad to provide for the member. I have been working on not allowing landfills to be built anywhere in this country.

I have visited garbage facilities around the world. I spent some of the summer last year in Denmark looking at facilities there. I plan to go to Barcelona this summer to look at its newest plant, which gasifies garbage. There is no stack. It is an internal process at 8,000° Celsius. It turns everything into basic carbon molecules and recomposes it into safe by-products of electricity, heat and a glass-like material. That is the future.

Toronto is hauling 416 truckloads of garbage a day to Michigan. This is a huge problem that should not be going on. The fact that we are bringing contaminated waste from the U.S. into Canada in exchange should not be going on, not unless we build the technology, the gasification plant. I would be glad to give the hon. member however many hundreds of pages he wants of information on that subject.

My colleagues are probably sick and tired of hearing me talk about the environment and about gasification, but members can get the picture. Environment will be an important part of our portfolio. We know that it is not one of the first five, but I ask members to just wait for the fall and they will see.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it makes me smile to see my Conservative colleague blaming the Liberals and the Liberals blaming the Conservatives. Since the beginning of Confederation, Liberal governments and Conservative governments have succeeded one another and have all abandoned their responsibilities. That is why, in 2006, a bill must be introduced to say that international bridges and tunnels are a federal jurisdiction. Why? Because in the past they decided to abandon our responsibilities. These responsibilities were transferred to the provinces and municipalities. Now, since September 11, 2001, they realize that there are security problems. They want to be able to assert themselves and get involved.

Does my colleague not find it a bit strange, and even embarrassing, that there is no dedicated funding in this bill? If they want to improve security and tell the provinces and municipalities that have been managing these bridges and these facilities for generations that they want to take over safety and security, why did they not establish a fund dedicated to these facilities in the bill, so

Government Orders

that municipalities or provinces do not have to pay for improving safety and security at these facilities?

• (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Mills: Mr. Speaker, the point the member has missed is the fact that we need to cooperate. When we have that many bridges and tunnels, they are not all being equally managed as well as they might be.

The one the member is speaking of might be managed perfectly, but there is no guarantee for Canadians that this is happening with all 24 of them. Therefore, the bill would allow the federal government to work with the provinces, the municipalities and the U.S. to ensure that they are managed properly and to a safety and security standard, which is the best thing for all Canadians, not just for one municipality or one area.

Therefore, this is not a big stick. This is a willingness to cooperate and ensure that there are equal standards for everyone.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member for Red Deer is uniquely qualified to talk about gas.

Returning to my riding, it became poignantly clear that Canadians were hearing much of the disparaging and demeaning attacks on the previous government. Canadians know of the tremendous record of achievement in the G-7 and all of the other things, but I am going to use my time to talk about the actual act before us.

By way of background, my riding is composed of 27 communities, 16 municipalities and 11 first nations. It is a seven and a half hour drive covering two time zones. In the issue at hand, we are talking about a bridge between International Falls, Minnesota and Fort Frances, Ontario. We want to make this act work, not only for Fort Frances, from which this bridge connects to an area larger than many countries in the world in addition to the other two border crossings at Pigeon River and Rainy River. If we use this time wisely, I believe we can come up with some legislation that is effective and productive for all those concerned.

Right now many of us are deeply concerned about the passport issue and security itself and how it relates to these border crossings and tunnels. For my area in particular, commercial traffic and the vitality of the forest industry are of prime concern.

As we know, the tourist trade in Canada has been diminishing. We have to do everything possible to make it easier for tourists to be attracted to Ontario in particular, Canada in general and northwestern Ontario specifically, which depends very highly on the Midwest of the United States.

Government Orders

The concerns of the communities in the Rainy River district are very much justified as to who controls and owns this bridge. Recently private holdings have put this bridge up for proposal and offered it for sale, after many decades of being in private hands. This bill gives one of the first opportunities to investigate public ownership in this case specifically. We have the support of the municipalities on both sides of the border and the councils of which have passed resolutions encouraging the governments of Minnesota, Ontario, Canada and the United States to adopt some form of public ownership. This is the first opportunity, and the bill is timely in allowing us to come forward with this.

When we think about what we can do on a national basis, this is a step by step process in which we can reclaim jurisdictional, operational and physical control of these facilities. Many may ask why the government would want to incur another expense or more ownership and maintenance issues, but this should be viewed as an opportunity. I will get into that in a few moments.

MPs and interest groups representing the council and business interests of Fort Frances have attempted to have meetings with the minister. As of yet, they have not taken place. I hope that a plea in the House for some personal attention to this matter will fall upon the right ears.

The bill should accommodate such situations about which we have talked. Funding for borders in terms of purchasing and restoring Canadian control would be a wise move. Tomorrow's budget should accommodate this and any future opportunities. I believe this is a chance for us to regain some of the composure in our national security issues.

• (1345)

Having done a considerable amount of research of the bridge crossings of Canada, it is interesting to see the many variations of theme, how many different combinations of ownership exist from public, private, provincial, independent or national. When we look at one bridge in isolation, it will take some meshing over a long period of time. I am well aware of that and I trust that the public service is also aware of it. When we ask for one-time funding or to make a special case, I understand the difficulty of this because of the precedents that it will set.

However, we should all take some consolation in knowing that this is a way to make things better. A national strategy or a national policy on access to our best neighbours, trading partners and friends should clear up uncertainty and turn it into an opportunity. As a case in point, the tolls at Fort Frances are among the highest in the country. Although there are packet rates for people who work or have frequent business across both sides of the border, it still can be viewed as a deterrent. Any chance to lower those would be an encouragement of trade and tourism. Those are the types of issues we would look at if the government would take this step.

As I alluded to earlier, Northwestern Ontario is extremely concerned about the rollover on the passport issue. Unanimously, people are very upset about the acquiescence to President Bush on this. Many individuals and organizations such as the Northwestern Ontario Tourist Association, led by Jerry Fisher, the Northwestern Ontario Association of Chambers of Commerce and the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association were making significant

progress in gaining allies in the United States, particularly American legislators who also understood the detrimental impact of destroying two-way traffic.

The town of Fort Francis came up with a great idea to have a conference of border communities. Leadership from coast to coast could get together and impress upon their respective governments the need to deal with this issue. The potential for extra parliamentary support could have turned this issue around. Rolling over to President Bush was a much too rapid and rapid turnaround.

The concerns of infrastructure in general and the draining off of infrastructure support through other funding has also been discussed in this debate. I hope that will not be the case, and I wanted to go on record on that. I believe this would be something the bill could accommodate, separate from existing community infrastructure and planned border infrastructure funding. We want to ensure that the funding is focused, not defused, and that it gets the attention it deserves. The community movement in the Rainy River district has said that it has witnessed this over years. It sees this as an opportunity in terms of economic development.

I believe the bill can accommodate such proposals, which I believe the minister will soon acknowledge. I am not saying he has not yet, but these are probably on his desk and he is looking at them. I would think we should view these as opportunities, as chances for regions of the country to benefit. This area extends from the Manitoba border to Lake Superior. We are talking about the entire northern section of Minnesota. Not many people can say their riding covers one whole state. I am pleased to say I do.

When we look at these access points, in particular the opportunity for the town of Fort Frances and the entire region, which goes up to James Bay and Hudson's Bay, we can look at something that will do a tremendous amount of good. I am asking the government to consider this in the bill and I will be making presentations to committee as it comes forward.

• (1350)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member obviously understands a great deal about municipal infrastructure. Through the years various roads and highways have been downloaded to municipalities. As a result, there is a lot of disrepair. I understand that perhaps there will be some infrastructure funding in the upcoming budget. There needs to be at least \$1.1 billion for the strategic infrastructure plan and the rural infrastructure plan in order for municipalities to catch up and deal with their roads and highways. There also needs to be a gas tax of 5¢ so there could be funding for roads, tunnels, bridges or highways.

The member also talked about cooperation with municipalities that are connected with these highways and bridges. Without significant funding for operations, it is going to be very difficult.

Statements by Members

Clause 23 of the bill allows for the private operation of tunnels and bridges. How do we deal with national security issues if there are private operators involved? How do we stem the illegal smuggling of guns into big urban centres, or human trafficking, or illegal migrants falling prey to unscrupulous consultants? How do we deal with that when the tunnel or bridge at the border is privately operated or maybe even built by a private operator?

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Mr. Speaker, I have had the pleasure of working with the member for Trinity—Spadina on these issues over many years. I believe she has asked me a nine part question. I will endeavour to do my best to provide an answer in the time allotted to me.

The province of Ontario suffered greatly through the Conservative era and it has only been in the past few years that the new provincial government is trying to undo that. As well, the federal commitment to infrastructure for communities was the first attempt by any national government to take a very active and pecuniary support role in addressing municipal revenue shortcomings in a direct way.

In the past year, I believe for the first time in history, the province of Ontario actually came to an agreement with the federal government on a national highway program. That was also very significant because the previous government would not do that.

With that in mind, we know that organizations such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario are very concerned about the ending of these infrastructure funds. In my presentation today, I tried very clearly to show that infrastructure funding must continue to communities in general, but that any supportive funding for border security, accessibility, tunnels, bridges, and all these kinds of things must be an independent and freshly directed source of funding so that it does not dilute the other funding that is available to communities.

When we talk about this commitment, currently the municipal leaders all across the country are in great fear of tomorrow's budget. They do not want to start all over again in trying to convince a national government of the need to support municipal or community infrastructure. The member's question was very well put in that way and I know she understands the issue very well. Throughout my riding and throughout many people's ridings, indeed throughout all parties, people are quite concerned about tomorrow's budget, that it may undo many years of good work by intelligent municipal leadership across the country.

• (1355)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for my Liberal colleague. Has he reached the same conclusion I have, which is that today, the federal government is obliged to table a bill to clarify that international bridges and tunnels fall under federal jurisdiction? Why is it doing this now? It is because these structures are managed either by the provinces, municipalities or private companies. In Ontario, many of these structures are managed by the province.

As a result, the government is forced to make this declaration today because, since 1967, the federal government, whether Liberal or Conservative, has systematically abdicated its responsibility for

international bridges and tunnels, just as it did for airports and ports. These governments wanted to divest themselves of facilities that, since September 11, 2001, should be under intense scrutiny. They no longer know what to do. Today, they have to declare that these structures fall under federal jurisdiction, but the bill contains no provision for dedicated funds. However, it mentions, among other things, that the government will oversee monitoring and maintenance of the structures. The government will oversee inspections, but there will be no money to help the provinces or the municipalities or to replace the private companies that can manage such structures.

Does my colleague agree that a section is missing from this bill, specifically the one on the funding that may be required to maintain international bridges and tunnels?

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We have reached the time of day for Statements by Members, but there are 3 minutes and 22 seconds remaining for questions and comments when we return to Bill C-3.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

ARCTIC ISLANDS

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the resourcefulness of the builders of Lévis, Bellechasse and Les Etchemins in the long Quebec maritime tradition.

Almost 100 years ago on July 1, 1809, Captain Joseph-Elzéar Bernier staked a claim in the name of Canada to most of the Arctic Islands, an area of more than 500,000 square miles.

Climate change has increased the strategic significance of this exploit, considering navigation through the North and the development of the wealth it contains.

On this May 1, 2006, International Worker's Day, labourers are working with perseverance and dedication to pursue this great naval tradition in Lévis and Quebec City. I want to pay tribute to them today.

* * *

BIRTHDAY WISHES

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take time today to wish my little girl a happy birthday. Émilie was born at this very minute, exactly one year ago.

Despite the fact that I am here in Ottawa today she is with me in my thoughts. This past year has been a wonderful time in my life. To watch my little girl grow and explore the world brings me great joy.

We have to take time to be with our children and teach them the values of our society because they are the future. Every moment I spend with my daughter is a memorable one. I am very proud of my daughter Émilie and I wish her much success in the future.

Statements by Members

As we all know, parliamentary life requires me to be away from home to serve the people of Madawaska—Restigouche. I want to thank my wife for taking such good care of our child.

Happy birthday, Émilie.

* * *

● (1400)

NYCOLE TURMEL

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on May 5 the President of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Nycole Turmel, will leave her position after six years of dedicated service at the helm of this major union.

A union activist for nearly 25 years, Ms. Turmel has been behind a number of PSAC's major achievements. She worked on the union's pay equity lawsuit against the federal government, which culminated in the payment of \$4 billion to some 200,000 PSAC members in 1999.

She also created PSAC's social justice fund, which aids development projects to support and train workers, provide emergency relief and fight poverty in Canada and abroad.

The Bloc Québécois applauds Nycole Turmel for her hard work and the tremendous contribution she has made, both in Canada and abroad, to improving working conditions for all workers.

* * *

[English]

JANE JACOBS

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the world lost Jane Jacobs, one of our greatest citizens. In the riding of Trinity—Spadina we all lost a great neighbour. I lost a great friend, constituent and mentor.

Her first campaign in Canada was to stop the Spadina expressway which would have ripped the heart out of Trinity—Spadina and destroyed our amazing neighbourhood. Her last great battle was also close to home, for the Trinity—Spadina waterfront. She fought to stop the bridge to Toronto Island, to stop the island airport, to shut down the corrupt port authority. In fact, she said that the Toronto Port Authority was the greatest single impediment to revitalizing the waterfront.

I hope Parliament and the government will help us honour her memory by closing the island airport and creating a park in her name, Jane Jacobs Park in Trinity—Spadina in the heart of Toronto, a park that would represent our shared vision for a clean, green and vibrant waterfront.

I wish she were still here to help lead this campaign. We will miss her and so will the world.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situation in agriculture has been deteriorating for a decade, especially for grains and oilseeds producers. Drought one year,

untimely frosts the next and flooding have made it impossible for them to cope.

Evidence of the crisis is obvious: land values are going down and unpaid bills from last year make it impossible to get credit to put in this year's crop. On top of all this, rising fuel costs and low commodity prices are having a devastating impact on our farmers' ability to manage.

Nowhere is this crisis more evident than in the northern part of my riding around Porcupine Plain. At least 100 farmers will be unable to seed a crop on a major portion of their land because of 40 inches of rain last year. Water still covers much of their fields. Deep ruts make planting almost impossible in those fields that were harvested.

The CAIS program is not working effectively. Urgent assistance is needed and I call on the government to address this crisis now.

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[Translation]

WEST ISLAND YOUTH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the great pleasure of attending the 20th anniversary concert of the West Island Youth Symphony Orchestra.

Audience members enjoyed an evening of inspiring music as the orchestra offered a program of classical and modern works, including a piece composed for the occasion by conductor and artistic director Stewart Grant.

[English]

I would like to congratulate the musicians of the youth orchestra for a successful evening. They are a talented, bilingual and multicultural group of young Canadian achievers. As such, the orchestra is a reflection of Montreal's West Island and of the country itself.

I would also like to congratulate the orchestra's dedicated volunteers, past and present, who have worked to inspire others in the pursuit of the joys of playing and listening to great music.

● (1405)

[Translation]

The West Island Youth Symphony Orchestra adds enormously to the quality of life in the west island. I am proud of the accomplishments of this orchestra and grateful to have it in my community.

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[English]

THE BUDGET

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow afternoon Canadians will see what electing a Conservative government will do for their families, themselves and their financial lives.

Statements by Members

There will be a reduction in the GST from 7% to 6% putting thousands of dollars in the pockets of new home buyers; a payment of \$1,200 to every family with small children; help for students, farmers and apprentices, and our brave servicemen and women; real tax relief that touches the lives of every Canadian, more than the Liberals ever promised and certainly more than they ever delivered; a big tax break for seniors; tax relief for small business; and a better deal for investors.

In total, honest, substantive, effective and enduring tax relief for middle class Canadian families who for more than a decade have suffered the neglect and uncaring arrogance of the last government. Tomorrow night millions of Canadian taxpayers will go to bed saying “thank God for the Conservatives and the Minister of Finance”.

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*[Translation]***HAITI**

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 21, 2006, a second round of elections was held in Haiti. As part of a parliamentary mission there, I was able to observe first-hand the successful conduct of those elections.

I would like to congratulate the people of Haiti on this important step in the return to a democratically elected government. I welcome Mr. René Prével, the newly elected president, here to Parliament Hill today.

The Canadian government must not delay in making a commitment to work with the new president and the new Haitian government to rebuild the country by providing strong, ongoing assistance as long as necessary.

The 75,000 Quebeckers of Haitian origin share our concern over the fact that the Conservative Party made no specific commitment to Haiti during the last election campaign.

Haiti, however, deserves our full support.

* * *

*[English]***PALLIATIVE CARE**

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the launch of the 10th National Hospice Palliative Care Week. This week is annually coordinated by the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association, a national association which provides leadership in palliative care.

This year's theme “My Living, My Dying. Informed, Involved and In-Charge...Right to the End” was chosen to create awareness about the importance of advance care planning, which is a process to prepare for the possibility that one may no longer be able to communicate and make medical decisions for oneself.

This event is aimed at increasing Canadian awareness and understanding of end of life care by highlighting its issues and its champions. This occasion gives Canadian hospice palliative care programs and services the opportunity to showcase their accomplishments and promote discussion of palliative care issues.

Please join me in recognizing and celebrating the significant achievements of the palliative care community.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend I met with several members of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 23, in North Bay, who were appalled by the Conservative government's decision to not lower the flag above the Peace Tower in honour of the four Canadian soldiers who were killed in Afghanistan.

There are 39 branches of the Royal Canadian Legion throughout northern Ontario, consisting of nearly 4,000 members. They are all calling on the Prime Minister to reverse this decision and lower the flag as a proper tribute to those who lost their lives.

There is a very real cost to the important mission our men and women are undertaking in Afghanistan. We have an obligation to recognize the courageous sacrifices they make as they carry out their duties.

At a time when remembrance is waning across this country, especially among young people, the lowering of the flag atop the Peace Tower is the very least we can do to mourn the loss of four brave and dedicated men who died trying to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party cannot keep its story straight when it comes to the fiscal imbalance.

Behind door number one we have the member for Wascana and the member for Scarborough—Guildwood who have both stated that there is no such thing as the fiscal imbalance.

Meanwhile, behind door number two is the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore who, for the benefit of his leadership campaign, now claims that the fiscal imbalance does exist and something needs to be done to correct it.

Finally, there is door number three where we find the member for Kings—Hants, who over the weekend amazingly enough said that the fiscal imbalance had already been corrected.

While the Liberal Party keeps on dithering with three completely different positions, Canadians can rest soundly knowing that our country now has strong leadership under a new Conservative government which acknowledges that a fiscal imbalance exists and is looking at solutions to ensure that Canada remains strong, united and free.

Statements by Members

●(1410)

CHILD CARE

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are on the eve of the federal budget and across the country working families are desperately hoping the Conservative government does not abandon them and turn the clock back on child care.

For 12 years, with majority after majority, the Liberals broke their promise of a national child care program. Only when cornered in a minority and with NDP pressure, did they finally take the first meagre steps toward establishing a national program. Now a government that does not seem to grasp the vital importance of child care to working parents is threatening to send us back to the beginning.

The need for safe, regulated, and non-profit child care spaces has never been greater. In Manitoba, the number of children in child care has doubled over the past decade and that demand is increasing. In Winnipeg alone, there are nearly 15,000 names on waiting lists. The story is the same across the country.

Federal government investment in child care spaces on a multi-year basis is an absolute requirement. It has taken decades to climb the long child care ladder and the NDP urges the government not to make tomorrow's budget the snake that sends the children of working families back to the bottom of the priority list.

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[Translation]

FRANCO-ONTARIAN ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT IMPROV LEAGUES

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Association franco-ontarienne des ligues d'improvisation étudiantes, better known by its acronym L'AFOLIE, will be holding its 19th annual tournament this week.

Some 400 students from French high schools across Ontario will be meeting in the mid-north of the province, at Franco-Cité High School in Sturgeon Falls.

L'AFOLIE develops pride in Franco-Ontarian heritage, contributes to academic collegiality and encourages the personal development of each participant.

These youth will improvise on the theme of "Green and White", the colours of Franco-Ontario, exploring the boundaries between theatre and comedy, and leaving us laughing all the way.

Bravo, my young friends from L'AFOLIE. You know we are crazy about you.

* * *

WORKERS

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is International Workers Day and the Bloc Québécois would like to pay tribute to the 4 million Quebec workers and 17 million Canadian workers.

These individuals contribute daily to the well-being of their fellow citizens and to the social and economic development of our society.

Every hour of the day, the work of these individuals contributes to the advancement of our society.

The Bloc Québécois recognizes the exceptional contribution of these men and women and will introduce several bills to improve their quality of life.

Parliamentarians are responsible for ensuring that the rights of workers are respected and that they have the fairest and the best possible working conditions.

Today, let us pay tribute to the solidarity of workers around the world, to all these individuals who, day after day, help make our communities a better place. But let us not forget that we should acknowledge their contributions every day.

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JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the memory of John Kenneth Galbraith, a great liberal economist who passed away two days ago.

He was a great man, a world renowned economist. He advised five presidents and was an Officer of the Order of Canada.

[English]

I had the privilege of having him as a professor. I have vivid memories of sitting at the feet of the great man in a packed Cambridge Union as he debated against William F. Buckley.

The fact that not all economists admired his work reflects the sad evolution of the discipline in the direction of ever more technical, mathematical minutiae. He swam against this tide and throughout his life remained dedicated to the study of the fundamentals of the human condition. He will be sorely missed.

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●(1415)

[Translation]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how can the Liberals and the leadership candidate from Etobicoke—Lakeshore still have the nerve to claim to be the only representatives of Quebecers' values? It is deplorable that the Liberals have learned absolutely nothing since the last election. They still have the same arrogant and shameless attitude they had before the election that was so harshly condemned in the Gomery report. Justice Gomery deplored that the Liberal Party put the interests of the party before the interests of national unity and, according to him, this attitude is "difficult to reconcile with basic democratic values".

He also talked about "the failure of some members of the Government at that time to consider that any political party other than the Liberal Party of Canada could have a role in promoting federalism in Quebec".

Quebeckers understood and supported the Conservative party, the party of change.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we heard a lot from the Prime Minister when he was in opposition about the importance of access to information. The Conservative election platform sung the praises of the information commissioner and promised to implement his proposals. That was then. Now the information commissioner tells us that the government's proposals will not strengthen the accountability of government but weaken it.

Will the Prime Minister now admit that his proposals are designed to accomplish the opposite of what he has promised and commit today to implementing meaningful access to information by the government?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the first time in Canadian history, crown corporations, independent officers of Parliament and foundations will be under access to information when the House passes the federal accountability act.

The information commissioner has expressed some reservations. He can take those to committee. One of his reservations is that when we open CBC to access to information the government has protected journalistic sources. We believe those sources should be anonymous. If the Liberal Party does not think so, the Leader of the Opposition can say so.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Reservations, Mr. Speaker. No previous government has put forward a more retrograde and dangerous set of proposals is what the commissioner said, proposals that actually reduce the amount of information available to the public. We could not get a more damning condemnation from a more credible source.

Why will the Prime Minister not listen to the leading expert in the country who he boasted about before and fully implement his recommendations as promised in the last election?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the President of the Treasury Board has had meetings with the information commissioner's office. We believe there is a fair degree of agreement on what we can accommodate and what we cannot accommodate. However there are some things that we believe do need some degree of privacy, including a specific debate we have with the information commissioner about his view that journalistic sources should be turned over to him to decide whether they become public or not.

These should not be turned over to any officer of Parliament. Once again, I challenge the leader of the Liberal Party to endorse that idea if he really believes it.

[Translation]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is boasting again. He was bragging yesterday about championing reform to access to information and respecting the work of the Information Commissioner. Today, however, the commissioner is saying that the text of proposed legislation is nothing but a bureaucratic dream. It is a bureaucratic

Oral Questions

dream, but a nightmare for anyone wanting access to information in this country.

Will the Prime Minister promise today to implement the commissioner's recommendations, like he promised us during the last election campaign?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the federal accountability act gives access for the first time to information on crown corporations, officers of Parliament and the secret funds created by the former Liberal government.

We disagree with the Information Commissioner on certain things like his desire to subject journalistic sources to access to information. In our opinion, these sources should remain anonymous. However, that is not the position of the commissioner or of the Liberal party. Well, they are wrong.

* * *

● (1420)

CHILD CARE

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government wants to cancel the national daycare and early childhood centre system and replace it with cheques for about \$1.60 a day.

How can the minister claim that this measure constitutes a plan to support a working mother in Vancouver who pays about \$1,100 a month to put one child in daycare?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, or at least after a number of days in the House should know, we are not talking about the kinds of numbers she is. What we are talking about is real support for Canada's parents: \$1,200 a year as a universal benefit to the parents for each child under the age of six.

We are going to do something that the previous government promised for 13 years and never delivered on. We will create 125,000 new child spaces right across the country.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government and the minister are living in a dream world. Cancelling daycare agreements and replacing them with corporate tax credits is doomed to fail. It did not work in Ontario, or in New Brunswick, or even in Quebec.

Will the minister finally admit the truth, which is that her government has no real plan to help children of working mothers?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we do have a plan. We are working on the details in consultation with the opposition parties, the provinces and the territories to develop the details to make sure it works.

Oral Questions

I am surprised, quite frankly, at the member's comments because several premiers, including the Premier of New Brunswick, who she just cited, have endorsed our plan. They see that it is good for parents and as good for the provinces.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in December 2004, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities tabled a report recommending the creation of an independent employment insurance fund. This recommendation had the unanimous approval of the committee. In April 2005, the Conservative Party and the NDP voted in favour of a Bloc Québécois bill which sought the creation of an independent employment insurance fund.

Will the Prime Minister therefore establish an independent employment insurance fund, an initiative he supported on many occasions in the past?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this policy was not in the throne speech. However, as the leader of the Bloc knows, our party supported the idea in the past. I am on the verge of proposing to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development that she formulate alternate measures for this government.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister no doubt knows that without an independent fund the government can dip into the fund and use the money for purposes other than those intended.

I know it was not in the throne speech and is not a priority, but will the Prime Minister commit to establishing such a fund by the end of this year?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have not yet set all our priorities for this year. However, as I have just said, we share the Bloc leader's philosophy on this. We will continue to look for solutions to achieve this objective.

* * *

OLDER WORKERS

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on this workers' day, the government should finally look after older workers who are victims of group layoffs and set up a real program to help them make a smooth transition to retirement.

Does the government plan to set up a program for older workers, in view of the relatively low cost of such a program?

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my good friend, the finance minister, said last week, we do recognize the importance of older workers and the challenges that they are facing right now in Quebec, in Newfoundland and in other parts of the country. Anything that will be done on this issue will be done in a national context.

I ask that the hon. member wait until the budget tomorrow.

* * *

[Translation]

SEASONAL WORKERS

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, next June 4 the pilot project set up by the previous government to deal with the spring gap is slated to end, and many seasonal workers—in my riding and elsewhere in Quebec—will again suffer the concrete effects of the major cuts made to employment insurance over the previous years.

Does the government intend to extend the pilot project or make it permanent by including it in the protection provided under the employment insurance program and to do so before June 4 or by the time that the employment insurance system is improved?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of pilot projects is to try things out. Once they have been tried out we need to evaluate them. We need to take a look and see what really happened, if we are getting value for our money and to see if we are achieving the goals we have set.

As the program does not expire until June 4, we need time to examine the results to determine if this is truly the best way to serve Canadians or if we should be looking at something else.

I have invited my colleagues from the opposition to help in that evaluation.

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[Translation]

CHILD CARE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, under this family allowance plan, the families of working women will not receive the announced amount because the government is going to give with one hand and take with the other. Families will see their allowance reduced by their federal taxes, their lost GST credit, and their lost child benefits.

Will the government agree not to reduce the promised allowance through these unfair clawbacks?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note that the NDP leader and some other House members have spoken to me about this. I can only say that they will have wait for yesterday's budget in order to learn the wise decisions of the Minister of Finance.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the child tax credits and the payments to families, we will find out the true meaning of that ad, "hands in my pockets". It will be the Prime Minister's hands in their pockets on that one.

Oral Questions

The government's plan to create child care spaces through tax credits to corporations will not work. Mike Harris tried it and guess how many child care spaces were created? Zero. About as many as were created by 12 years of a majority government by the Liberals.

Could the Prime Minister tell us why he thinks this will work any better under his watch than it did under Mike Harris? Why does he not just commit to multi-year funding for child care spaces for working families?

[Translation]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I should correct myself. Obviously, the budget will be brought down tomorrow.

[English]

The leader of the New Democratic Party expresses reservations about whether we will achieve our objective of creating 125,000 child care spaces. Let me just be clear that this is the intention of this government and we will make whatever modifications are necessary to ensure that we reach that goal.

* * *

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Public Safety.

Agents of the Canada Border Services Agency caused a major disturbance at two Toronto schools last week. They apprehended four children while they were attending school. In one case, agents held two girls, aged 7 and 14, for ransom and used them as bait to trap their hard-working parents who are undocumented workers. Such acts are reprehensible in the extreme.

Will the minister assure the House that he will instruct his officials that schools are for learning and are off limits for the purpose of immigration enforcement?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, along with most Canadians and along with my colleagues, I share the concern when I read the reports about what happened. I have asked for a full review of the matter, and that is coming, but I can say that this is not a normal process or procedure, nor do we want to see it become that.

* * *

● (1430)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Many Canadian industries have a critical shortage of skilled and other workers. Instead of meeting its mandate of providing desperately needed skilled workers for industry, the department is making matters worse by deporting them. This is hurting the Canadian economy.

Would the minister correct this urgent problem by issuing temporary work permits for undocumented workers who are gainfully employed and are contributing to the Canadian economy?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have tremendous sympathy for people who have come to this country wanting to find a better life. We just want them to come by regular means.

It is a little bit rich hearing that come from a member on the other side who over the course of a number of years deported over 100,000 people out of this country, people of the same type that he just described.

I am looking for some suggestions specifically, if the member has them to offer, but I can assure the House we will not talk about keeping people, such as the ones we are talking about here, in this country while on the other hand intending to deport them like the member's party did when they were in power.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my Canada is not one in which law enforcement officers intimidate school teachers, nab children from class as bait and then put them in a detention centre. Canadians expected that tough on crime meant going after guns, gangs and drug dealers.

Will the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration use his ministerial discretion and issue a work permit for Mr. Lizano and allow the process of landing his family to begin. Mr. Lizano is a hard-working construction foreman whose youngest child is Canadian and his other children, Kimberley and Gerald, are A students. They are exactly the kinds of immigrants Canada wants.

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that I am forbidden by the Privacy Act from commenting on individual cases.

I want to point out that the member across the way is part of a party that was in government for 13 years. Not once in that time did I see members across the way stand up for undocumented workers, not once in that entire period of time. Where was the indignation when they were in power?

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously someone was not listening carefully. Enough excuses and obstinacy from the Conservatives. The rules allow for ministerial discretion.

The member for Medicine Hat is the minister. The buck stops with him. Instead of guarding our borders against terrorist cells, our officers are now terrorizing hard-working would-be Canadian citizens by nabbing their children in schools and jailing them in detention centres. Two of the children, Kimberly and Gerald, are in Ottawa today.

On humanitarian grounds, why will the minister not show compassion, good judgment and do the right thing by immediately issuing a work permit?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has the most generous immigration system in the world. Every year we allow 250,000 people to permanently land. Hundreds of thousands of other people come here as students or on work permits.

Oral Questions

My point is that we have shown extraordinary generosity to hundreds of people who are here as undocumented workers. However, there are 800,000 people who are trying to get into Canada today legally. What message does it send if we allow people who are here without documents to get ahead of those who are playing by the rules?

* * *

[Translation]

ANTI-SCAB BILL

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for the tenth time since 1993, the Bloc Québécois will introduce an anti-scab bill this week in the House, to introduce rules that the workers protected by the Quebec Labour Code already enjoy.

On this International Workers' Day, could the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec announce that he intends to support the anti-scab bill that the Bloc Québécois plans to introduce in this House?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I would inform this House that the existing provisions of the Canada Labour Code permit the use of replacement workers during a strike. That right should not be used in any way if the purpose is to undermine the union's representational capacity. The objective of the act is to preserve the balance between what the unions want and the employer's right to continue its operations.

• (1435)

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, employees who are on strike or lock-out are under enormous pressure. They no longer have a weekly income. On the other hand, a business that can hire other employees as it sees fit can drag out the dispute, because it is under much less pressure. As a result, disputes last longer.

Will the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, whose riding is one of the most heavily unionized in Canada, support the Bloc's anti-scab bill as he did in this House in 1990 and thus contribute to reducing the length of labour disputes, as was the case in Quebec after this kind of legislation was enacted?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Quebec has had this anti-scab legislation since 1977. It is a characteristic of our distinct society, in the province of Quebec. However, as Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, I have to look at things from a Canadian angle.

The objective currently authorized under the Canada Labour Code, as I said, permits employers to use replacement workers, but that must not be done for the purpose of undermining the union's representational capacity.

LABOUR

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in Canada and Quebec, more and more industrial sectors, sectors where there are manufacturing jobs, are threatened by unfair competition, due to the failure in many countries to respect fundamental labour rights, with the resulting use of child labour, forced labour, and clandestine labour.

Will the Canadian government agree that its criticisms would be more credible if it signed the international conventions concerning respect for freedom of association, prohibition of discrimination and prohibition of child labour and forced labour?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has committed itself to protecting children and abolishing harmful forms of child labour. All Canadian administrations have laws to protect children from economic exploitation and hazardous work.

It is indeed our intention to continue to cooperate with the provinces and territories so as to guarantee compliance with Canada's international obligations. Of course we also intend to cooperate with our international partners toward that end.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the unionist Napoleon Gomez has been removed from his position of secretary general by the Mexican government because he accuses the government of negligence and certain companies of industrial homicide following the deaths of 65 workers.

Given such serious allegations of political interference, does the Minister of Labour intend to ask the Commission for Labour Cooperation to seek clarifications on the actions of the Mexican authorities in this matter?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the communication did indeed allege that the Government of Mexico had failed in its obligation to ensure the effective enforcement of its labour legislation with respect to freedom of association as well as other labour rights. The Canadian National Administrative Office also concluded that the communication did not comply with the necessary criteria and has decided not to accept the communication for review.

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SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in addition to having \$1.5 billion of its money left in Washington by this government, the lumber industry is now being told that it could take up to a year before it gets its money. In the meantime mills will close and jobs will be lost.

Can the Minister of International Trade assure us that the money will be available immediately or is the government prepared to help producers by establishing industry assistance, as the minister announced himself last fall and as the Prime Minister also called for?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud to say that the softwood lumber framework agreement is going to be good for Canada. It is going to be good for the softwood lumber industry. It is going to be good for Atlantic Canada. It is going to be good for the sawmills in Quebec, in northern Quebec, in Ontario, on the Prairies and in British Columbia.

• (1440)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the record will note that the minister did not answer the question. Perhaps in the supplementary he could do so.

Canada's independent lumber remanufacturers provide thousands of jobs in every region of Canada, yet over the last five years they have seen a reduction of 70% in their exports to the United States. The softwood deal now threatens this industry.

Could the Minister of International Trade confirm that their exemption or quota concerns will be accommodated in discussions within the Canadian industry and the Government of Canada, or has he cut loose these small and medium size businesses?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hate to have to say this, but the concerns of the remanufacturers were cut loose eight years ago by those members in that party.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. Obviously many are trying to assist the minister with his answer but we have to be able to hear what the minister himself has to say. He has the floor and we will have a little order, please, for a short response.

Hon. David Emerson: Mr. Speaker, I know they would like to give me credit for what happened over there eight years ago, but it is not going to wash.

The reality is that under current market conditions, there are no quotas and the remanufacturers, along with other members of the industry in different provinces, will be able to choose in weak markets whether they want to opt for a quota-type arrangement or an export tax arrangement.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec environment minister says that the Kyoto protocol sets out the strict minimum. Ontario says it agrees. Nevertheless, the Conservative government wants to drop it and replace it with the AP6, a program that does not provide for penalties or emission credits.

Why drop the Kyoto protocol in favour of a lesser plan if the provinces support Kyoto?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to reducing pollution and greenhouse gases.

The difference between the Liberal Kyoto plan and our made in Canada solution is the Liberals were willing to send billions of dollars in taxpayers' money overseas. Our made in Canada solutions refuse to do that. We will invest in Canadian solutions and Canadian communities and Canadian technology. In our plan Canadians come first, including Quebec.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month the Conservatives killed the energy retrofit program that was helping seniors and low income Canadians conserve energy and save money. Did the Conservatives kill the energy retrofit program because of their indifference to the environment, or did they kill the program because of their indifference to low income Canadians?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the hon. member's memory is so short. In fact, the program he is referring to specifically under Bill C-66 was a program for a one time payment for seniors and low income Canadians.

I can tell the member that for all those people who are eligible for it, the cheques have been sent and are in the mail. That program has been completed.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, for years and years the Liberals failed to make one ounce of progress on the softwood lumber file. It was so frustrating that the provinces ended up sending representatives to Washington themselves. It was embarrassing. The provinces had negotiators in Washington but the federal Liberals were hiding out in Ottawa.

Now that there is a deal, will the government confirm that the Atlantic exemption that recognizes the unique forestry practices of Atlantic Canada has been totally preserved in this new agreement?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the very best question of this question period. I want to thank him for a couple of years of good hard work, in fact a number of years of hard work on this very file. Yes, I can confirm that exemption has been fully preserved on paper and confirmed.

Oral Questions

●(1445)

NORAD

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Conservative government indicated that the House would have the opportunity to debate and vote on Canada's future in Norad. Now we know that the Minister of National Defence already signed the agreement in secret on Friday.

How can we have a debate on Canada's future in Norad if the government has already crossed the *t's* and dotted the *i's*? Why would the minister sign this deal negotiated by the Liberals before Parliament even had a chance to look at it?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that this agreement makes provision for a signature prior to its ratification and entry into force. It allows for the type of debate that will take place. We look forward to the participation of the hon. member and all members in this very important debate that furthers Canada's commitment to North American security.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no matter what weasel words the minister wants to use, it is a deal. It is a done deal.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: This is the second time that phrase has come up in the last few days. I would urge hon. members to be judicious and proper in their choice of language.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, it is shocking that Canadians learned about this from the U.S. state department, not from their own government.

The minister expects us to waste our time debating an issue that he has already decided. Without the ability to amend the Norad motion, the minister will have neutered the House.

Will the minister allow a real debate? Will he allow the House to do its job?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there will be a very important debate, as I have mentioned. We invite the hon. member to take part. International treaties, as we promised during the campaign and as we said in the throne speech, will come to Parliament for debate, and for a vote, I might add. This will take place this week in the House of Commons. The hon. member will have ample opportunity to ferret out all the questions she wants.

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POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the rising cost of post-secondary education puts a heavy load on students, yet the government plans to spend 85% less than the Liberal government committed to help students in need.

What is worse, the government believes everything can be cured by a tax credit, but not one penny will get to students by the time

tuition is due. Why is the government abandoning lower and middle income students in this country?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that there will be more about post-secondary education in the conversation that will follow tomorrow. I encourage him to be patient. Tomorrow I hope to be able to satisfy some of his concerns, if he will wait—

Hon. Monte Solberg: Just one more sleep.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Yes, one more sleep for the hon. member.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. colleague is still asleep. The Conservatives have stitched together a pathetic package of credits and exemptions and are calling it a plan for education. Credits and exemptions are for tax time. They are too late for tuition time. They are not a plan for student assistance.

The government's scheme will mean that the only students who get higher education are those from higher income families who can cut the cheques in September. When will the government provide real support for Canadian students?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

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RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Joe Fontana (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians wake up each and every morning and juggle dozens of priorities, yet we know that this government has trouble counting past five.

Let us take research, for instance, the key to our economic future. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada is calling on the government to immediately address the indirect costs of research, as the previous Liberal governments have done.

Why does the government fail to understand that research is a priority? Will the government match previous funding commitments made by the former government?

●(1450)

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, an hon. member of this House, knows very well that research and development is a priority. It is what drives this country's economic growth. He will see, very soon, that research is something we support on this side of the House.

[English]

Hon. Joe Fontana (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's answer, but the facts are entirely different. In fact, I think that party is starting to like the smell of its own manure, because what they say during the campaign and what they commit to Canadians is not beyond the truth. Will the minister now stop fluffing this stuff off and make a commitment for research, universities and students in this country?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is too bad that my hon. colleague was not in Quebec City on Friday, where it was my pleasure to announce an investment of \$85.7 million in basic research in Canada.

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CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the previous government left correctional officers without a labour contract or collective agreement for four long years. It is to be hoped that the new President of the Treasury Board will not emulate his predecessor and let the situation deteriorate further.

What concrete measures has the President of the Treasury Board taken to address this issue since he was appointed?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell my hon. colleague from Quebec that since being appointed President of the Treasury Board, I have met twice with the union leaders. I have also spoken with them twice on the phone.

The other Treasury Board officials are working very hard. Under the Liberals, we waited more than four years for an agreement with this union. We know that these employees do very important and very dangerous work. We will continue to work toward a real solution that is good for both the taxpayers and the employees.

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PAY EQUITY

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, female workers in Quebec have been protected since 1996 from sexual discrimination in jobs held mainly by women. However, that is not so for women in Quebec working under the Canada Labour Code.

Since the federal government is already ten years behind Quebec's pay equity legislation, will it take advantage of May Day to announce in this House that it will correct this aberration very shortly?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two things to say about this. First, every five years the Employment Equity Act has to be reviewed. We will be reaching the fifth stage shortly and there will be a full review.

Next—and the hon. members of this House might be interested in this—an inter-departmental committee is currently working on establishing a legislative framework that would help settle pay equity disputes. This would avoid having to go to court for every dispute.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, although a peace accord may be signed in Darfur in the next little while, history has shown that the Sudanese government's

Oral Questions

unwillingness to rein in its state-sponsored Janjaweed from murdering and raping innocent civilians has been utterly appalling.

My question to the Minister of Foreign Affairs is very simple. Would he be willing to direct our ambassador at the United Nations to present to the Security Council a resolution calling for a chapter 7 peacemaking mission to Darfur as soon as possible if the killings continue?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the sincere question from the member opposite, who has had a long and abiding interest in this file. I can tell him and the House that I spoke with the ambassador to the United Nations for Canada as recently as coming to question period today. He is in Abuja, where, as the member will know, there are ongoing talks. They now have been extended by 48 hours.

The entire international community is of course looking for ways to make a meaningful intervention on this issue. We are going to have a debate in this House tonight in which the hon. member and all members are invited to take part. We are looking for the best possible way to find a solution for the horrible killings and the horrible situation that currently exists in Darfur.

* * *

TRANSPORT

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year there were 270 railway crossing accidents in this country in which 97 Canadians were killed or seriously injured. The fact is that many of these accidents could have been prevented with the installation of side reflectors on train cars. Sadly, the previous government did nothing despite repeated calls from the Transportation Safety Board, from safety advocates from coast to coast, and from victims' families.

Will the transport minister today take the long overdue initiative of requiring Canadian railway companies to install reflectors on train cars?

• (1455)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his tireless dedication to rail safety as of 2004, shortly after one of his constituents was killed when the car he was driving struck a train at an uncontrolled crossing. It is largely due to the work of my hon. colleague that, beginning today, all Canadian owned domestic and freight cars will begin to be equipped with reflective material. This will help improve safety across the country.

* * *

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Carl Grenier, vice-president of the Free Trade Lumber Council, described very clearly what happened last Thursday. He said, "Every victory obtained over the past three years under NAFTA has just been erased with the single stroke of a pen".

Oral Questions

This government has just undone everything we gained under NAFTA. It has just paid George Bush a 22% commission for his trade crimes and it just strong-armed our companies and required them, forced them, to accept the unacceptable.

Honestly, why be so irresponsible?

[*English*]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess that is NDP economics. The NDP prefers a prolonged period of litigation, of uncertainty, of leaving \$4 billion U.S. down in the United States where it is not being put into new technology and it is not creating jobs here in Canada.

This lumber deal is a deal for the Canadian lumber industry across this country and it is going to give us a period of seven to nine years of growth and stability. That is good economics. That is not NDP economics.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister says this is a good deal for B.C. How would he know? He has not been seen in his riding in three months.

We know what the Conservative strategy on softwood lumber is. It is to wave the white flag of surrender. The Conservatives surrendered \$1 billion in illegally taken tariffs that the Americans keep as the proceeds of trade crime, surrendered Canada's dispute settlement rights, and surrendered the interests of every softwood community in Canada.

Now we learn that the Americans filed their appeal anyway and that premiers like B.C.'s Gordon Campbell were not even told about concessions such as the anti-circumvention clause.

How could they sign such a bad deal?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure the hon. member would know an anti-circumvention clause if it fell on his head, but nevertheless, the reality is that those hon. members should go out to the mills. They should look at the families who have been disrupted, who have lost their jobs and who have been under terrific pressure for eight years under the softwood lumber agreement.

Those hon. members should explain their economics, which would be saying to those workers, "Let us have another eight years of instability and uncertainty".

* * *

TRANSPORT

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 1999 the port of Digby was turned over to the Maritime Harbours Society, a not for profit organization. Serious questions and allegations were raised by members of the Conservative Party as to the use of those funds. Five years of legal wrangling and studies ensued. The arbitrator has released his report to the Minister of Transport. He finds no blame on either part.

It is now time to stop pointing fingers, stop blaming past participants and come to a resolution to the benefit of the people of

Digby. When will the minister take over that facility and put it into the hands of the people of the community of Digby?

• (1500)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): As we say in French, Mr. Speaker, la vérité a ses droits. There are some facts here that have been left undisclosed. The fact of the matter is that the hon. member had an opportunity to do something for the people in his area, and for 13 years he did nothing. We will handle the file. We are looking at the file and we will make a decision on this.

* * *

ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency plays a very important role in the economic development of Atlantic Canada. As an example, there are many success stories throughout my own riding of Avalon.

During the recent election campaign, the then Liberal government, through its campaign of fear, tried to convince voters in Atlantic Canada that by electing a Conservative government they would see the end of ACOA. During the past weekend, the Prime Minister announced additional funding for business initiatives in Atlantic Canada.

I would like to ask the Minister of ACOA to tell the House about the positive impact these initiatives and others will have on Atlantic Canada and what we hope to see from ACOA in the days and months ahead.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the excellent question of the hon. member for Avalon shows that he is working very hard on behalf of his constituents. I can assure the House that ACOA will be around in our Conservative government for a long time.

The hon. member referenced the announcement by the Prime Minister, which is in fact a five year, \$10 million federal-provincial agreement signed by this government and delivered by this government, and which again ensures that Canadians and Atlantic Canadians will come to know that cash in hand and cheques in the bank from a Conservative government are a lot better than years of promises from a Liberal government.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order, please. I wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in our gallery of His Excellency, Mr. René Préval, President-elect of Haiti.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION**

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 have the privilege to table today two certificates of nomination, one for a position to the Laurentian Pilotage Authority Canada and the other for the position of Canada Council for the Arts.

* * *

NORAD

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today, pursuant to section 32(2) of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, to lay upon the table, in both official languages, the agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America on the North American Aerospace Defence Command, known as Norad.

* * *

AIR-INDIA

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House will know that on June 23, 1985, Air-India Flight 182 on its way from Montreal to London, England, exploded in mid-air near the coast of Ireland.

[Translation]

A total of 329 passengers and crew, including over 80 children, perished in this tragic accident.

In January the following year, the Canadian Aviation Safety Board concluded that the plane's destruction was the result of a bomb.

● (1505)

[English]

Clearly this was an act of terrorism, one that claimed hundreds of innocent lives. Canadians and indeed citizens of all countries around the world demanded that those who perpetrated this act be brought to justice. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, this has not yet been possible and we must sadly admit may never come to pass.

[Translation]

Over 20 years have passed since this tragedy occurred. While Canadians have not forgotten it, they tend unfortunately to think the circumstances were connected to the political situation in India.

[English]

But we must never forget that the vast majority of those who perished on Flight 182 were citizens of our country. They were Canadians. They and their families came here, just as our ancestors did, to seek a better life for themselves in a country with unlimited opportunity. The stories and the dreams of those 329 men, women and children, along with those of their families, were shattered by that terrible tragedy on that day in 1985.

It is our duty as Canadians to do everything in our power to prevent a similar tragedy from ever happening again.

[Translation]

The bombing of Air India flight 182 has been the focus of many investigations, but for reasons known only to them, previous governments have not launched an official public inquiry, the only action that would have helped the families of the victims turn the page, provided answers to the main questions left unanswered and perhaps prevented other acts of terrorism against Canadian citizens.

[English]

A full public inquiry is required. That is what we promised the families. This is what we are announcing today.

The inquiry will be launched immediately and will be led by an outstanding Canadian, retired Supreme Court Justice John Major. Justice Major has met with the families in Ottawa, Vancouver and Toronto and has developed detailed terms of reference with their full support and cooperation. I have every confidence that Justice Major will conduct a thorough and compassionate investigation into the events surrounding this incident.

[Translation]

I want to make it clear that this agreement has nothing to do with reprisals. Neither is it to be a reprise of the criminal trials in this matter held in Vancouver between 2003 and 2005. That would serve no purpose.

[English]

What this inquiry is about, however, is finding answers to several key questions that have emerged over the past 20 years about the worst mass murder in Canadian history. It is a reflection of our compassion as a nation to those who lost mothers, fathers, siblings, relatives and friends to this terrible act of terrorism. It is our sincere hope that this action may bring a measure of closure to those who still grieve for their loved ones.

This inquiry is about analyzing the evidence that has come to light since 1985 and applying it to the world we live in today. Now more than ever the Government of Canada must be prepared to take action to protect our citizens from the threats of terrorism. Under Justice Major's guidance, we hope a focused and efficient inquiry will provide information that will help ensure that Canada's police agencies and procedures, its airport security systems and its anti-terrorism laws are among the most effective in the world.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge and to honour the efforts of the families of the victims of Air-India flight 182 and their perseverance in pursuing the launch of a full public inquiry. Some of the spouses or parents of those who lost their lives in this tragedy have themselves died over the past two decades. Their cause has, in many cases, been taken up by their children or by other relatives. Despite a long and agonizing wait, their faith and their commitment to seek the truth, no matter how painful it may be, has never wavered. They serve as an example to all of us.

We cannot undo the past, but we can provide some measure of closure to the families who lost loved ones on that Flight 182. By seeking answers and confronting shortcomings in our current system, we can ensure that we save lives in the future.

Routine Proceedings

•(1510)

[*Translation*]

I invite all members to support the efforts of our government in this regard.

[*English*]

Maybe a bit later, Mr. Speaker, we could revert to tabling of documents and I will table the terms of reference for this inquiry in the House.

The Speaker: To save time, is it agreed the Prime Minister can table the document at this moment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party shares the sentiments of the Prime Minister. The bombing of Air India flight 182 was the worst terrorist incident in our history and a Canadian tragedy. For the friends and families of those who perished, the loss of their loved ones was catastrophic.

[*English*]

The 329 passengers and crew members, including the 80 children, who perished are not just a tragic statistic. Each person had a name, each had an identity, each had a family, each person was a universe, and so, 329 universes perished that day, the enormity of which, as I mentioned, is difficult to comprehend, let alone feel.

Accordingly, besides creating permanent memorials to honour the Air-India victims, the Liberal government also designated June 23 as a national day of remembrance for victims of terrorism. We did this not only to recognize the victims of the Air-India bombing, but also to ensure that June 23, 1985, would be forever etched in our Canadian history as a day that thrust Canada into the terrible reality of international terrorism.

It is for this reason also that the Liberal government appointed Mr. Bob Rae to provide independent advice and whose report “Lessons to be Learned”, and recommendation for an inquiry was welcomed by the families and commentators at the time.

[*Translation*]

We are pleased to see the government is honouring the decision the Liberal government made last November to set up a public inquiry.

[*English*]

The government has, however, preferred to establish it as a judicial commission of inquiry, under former Supreme Court Justice John Major, and the families have also welcomed this initiative.

Clearly the families, given their ongoing pain, are seeking answers and deserve closure. Canadians want to ensure, as the Prime Minister has stated, that such a tragedy never happens again, that the lessons that need to be learned are in fact learned and that the appropriate action is taken to protect Canadians from acts of terror.

While the Prime Minister has underlined, rightly so, the *raison d'être* for such an inquiry, he has not identified the subject matter of

the inquiry, nor the questions that need to be addressed and the lessons to be learned.

Accordingly, I would hope that Mr. Justice Major's inquiry, and I have the highest respect and regard for Mr. Justice Major, will in fact examine the four key areas that concern the families.

[*Translation*]

These were identified by the former government.

[*English*]

Mr. Rae's report, “Lessons to be Learned”, addressed the concerns. These included: first, whether the government's assessment of the threats of terrorism in the mid-1980s was adequate; second, how communications breakdowns and schisms between the RCMP and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service might have caused mistakes and omissions; third, how does one approach the requisite use of intelligence evidence at a criminal trial and what one might learn from this about what we might do in terms of the prevention and prosecution of acts of terrorism; and finally, what shortcomings existed in airline security at the time, have those been rectified and what can we learn from those unresolved questions?

In conclusion, may I express our understanding for the ongoing ordeal that the families continue to endure, our commitment to ensure that such a terrorist tragedy will never again happen and our hope that under Justice Major's inquiry the appropriate lessons will be learned so the necessary action can be taken.

•(1515)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, out of respect for the 329 families affected, light, indeed full light, must be shed on this tragedy. At the end of one of the longest, most costly and most complex criminal cases ever heard in Canada, the Supreme Court of British Columbia found that the evidence was not sufficient to sentence the two accused of the attack against the Air India plane in June 1985. At the end of all the legal procedures, many of those involved blamed CSIS and the RCMP for having fumbled the management of this investigation, notably by destroying the tapes of transcriptions of conversations that would have had a considerable impact on the whole case.

In a report dated April 5, 2005, or barely a little more than a year ago, the Auditor General maintained that Canada was still vulnerable to terrorist acts. This means therefore that the Canadian security agencies are still not able to prevent the occurrence of terrorist acts on Canadian territory.

It therefore seems obvious to us that it is time to establish an inquiry so that we know how the security agencies are conducting investigations, and how they are protecting Quebecers and Canadians. We have to keep all our compassion for the families and loved ones of the victims of the Air India attack. We all agree that an inquiry will not bring the Air India victims back to life, and that it will never succeed in consoling these families and their loved ones. Nevertheless, a verdict of not guilty and acquittal of the accused based on a lack of evidence and a series of fumbles by CSIS and the RCMP is quite unacceptable.

An independent inquiry would make it possible to prevent such an injustice from occurring again. Such an inquiry would soothe the pain and suffering of the families of the victims of the Air India tragedy, who feel cheated by the Canadian legal system. Full light must absolutely be shed on what the court described as “unacceptable negligence” in talking about the destruction of evidence by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. It is absolutely vital that we have an open and transparent process to discover what took place in the Air India plane crash.

The families and communities have a right to know. Quebeckers and Canadians should be able to feel secure and sheltered from terrorist acts. They should be able to count on the agencies mandated to ensure their security. They should know whether CSIS and the RCMP are able to fulfill their respective missions, which amount to ensuring security.

So the Bloc Québécois supports the Prime Minister’s initiative to set up a commission of inquiry into the Air India tragedy.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats welcome this public inquiry into the Air-India disaster announced today by the government. We hope that this inquiry will, at long last, provide answers to the questions that have haunted the victims’ families and indeed all Canadians for over two decades.

On June 23, 1985, when Air-India flight 182 exploded off the coast of Ireland, all 389 people aboard, most of whom were Canadian citizens, were killed. There were 82 children among them. Twenty entire families were lost and many more families have been left to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives.

This was the largest single act of terrorism and mass murder ever executed against our country. Yet, for two decades, government after government, both Conservative and Liberal, refused to acknowledge the need for a public inquiry.

[*Translation*]

On March 16, 2005, when the BC Supreme Court acquitted two men on eight charges related to the bombing, it was brought home once again to the families and friends of the victims and to all Canadians that two decades on, there is no justice for those who lost their lives on Air India flight 182.

During the trial, a great deal of gravely concerning evidence came to light about the role of Canada’s RCMP and CSIS in the period preceding the bombing and in the years that have followed. This evidence demands greater examination.

• (1520)

[*English*]

Following the trial, New Democrats joined with the families to call upon the Liberal government to pursue a public inquiry. The refusal to do so was an unconscionable denial of justice. It is our sincere hope that this inquiry, announced today, will finally shed light on this dark corner of our collective past.

I join with all New Democrats, and I believe all members in this House, in commending the efforts of the victims’ families. For 20 years now they have fought an often solitary battle against a wall of

Routine Proceedings

indifference and wilful neglect by the Canadian government. Where there ought to have been comfort, and swift and sure justice, there has been only painful silence.

[*Translation*]

Today at long last there is hope, hope that the questions which have haunted the victims’ families, questions all Canadians are asking, will finally be answered.

[*English*]

As former Supreme Court Justice John Major undertakes this important and long overdue inquiry, we hope that he will endeavour to do so with the highest consideration to the pain and suffering endured by the families and always with their best interests in mind. We are confident that he will do so.

New Democrats trust that, through this inquiry, we will finally comprehend the events which led to the Air-India tragedy, that we may be able to heal the wounds of two decades of neglect, and most importantly, and this is what is so impressive about the families’ struggle and effort in this regard, work to find answers that can prevent further such tragedies ever occurring again. With that, we may move forward together with greater understanding.

* * *

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-236, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code (replacement workers).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I could not be more proud than to be joined by my colleagues in the NDP today on May Day, the international day of worker solidarity, to introduce this private member’s bill which we see as the natural progression of the right to free collective bargaining.

The NDP, since its inception, has struggled for the rights of working people. In fact, many would say that was the very reason that the party was founded. Canadians enjoy the right to free collective bargaining, but that right is undermined when employers use scabs in the event of a work stoppage.

This bill will finally bring Canada and its labour relations regime fully into the 21st century by banning the use of replacement workers, banning scabs. We believe it is an idea whose time has come and I am proud to introduce this bill on May Day.

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

* * *

REMEMBRANCE DAY NATIONAL FLAG ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-237, an act requiring the national flag of Canada to be flown at half-mast on Remembrance Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to introduce this bill. Yesterday in Halifax, Nova Scotia, a group of Dutch Canadians presented a monument on behalf of the 5,700 veterans who are buried on Dutch soil. Many veterans who are here today were quite proud of that fact.

Routine Proceedings

This bill says very briefly that the lowering of the flag on Remembrance Day is done voluntarily. It is not legislated. We would like to put it into law, so that no future government could fool around with this very important day, and ensure the flag and all other flags around the country are lowered at half staff.

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

* * *

●(1525)

CANADIAN FORCES SUPERANNUATION ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-238, an act to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act (marriage after the age of sixty years).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this again comes from a bill by a previous member of Parliament who served 12 years in the House of Commons, Mr. Werner Schmidt of the Reform Party, Alliance Party and Conservative Party. Imagine a guy in three parties who never had to cross the floor once.

Presently, if a veteran's spouse dies when a veteran is 50 years of age and that veteran remarries at age 59, the second spouse is entitled to all the pension benefits. However, if the veteran remarries at the age of 60, the second spouse is entitled to nothing upon the veteran's death. That has to change. We believe the age discrimination of 60 has to end. For example, it is time the gold digger clause is gone. We believe we should treat our veterans and all people fairly in this country.

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-239, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (services to a charity or public authority).

He said: Mr. Speaker, in Nova Scotia alone, volunteerism creates \$2 billion of economic activity. People who join groups like the Lions Club, the Kinsmen Club, et cetera do not receive tax deductions for their services. We believe that people should be able to claim a blanket tax deduction for a certain number of hours that they serve. The membership fees that are paid to these organizations should be tax deductible as well.

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

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-240, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code (compassionate care benefits for caregivers).

He said: Mr. Speaker, back in 1998 I introduced a bill called compassionate care leave which basically gave the same exact benefits for those who are looking after people under palliative or severe rehabilitative care as others have when they are on maternity leave.

For example, we have maternity benefits for up to a year, but we have no eternity benefits, which is what I would like to call it. I believe that people who look after people under palliative or severe rehabilitative care should be able to leave their place of employment and collect employment insurance for a period of time, so that they indeed could care for their dying loved ones or those who are under severe rehabilitative care. In a country such as Canada, it is the least we can do.

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-241, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of expense of tools provided as a requirement of employment).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a copy of a bill my great colleague from Winnipeg Centre has also introduced. It is also great that this bill is introduced on May Day.

If people working for Canadian Tire had to bring their own tools to work, those tools would not be tax deductible. If Canadian Tire supplied those tools for the individuals, they would be tax deductible. That is wrong.

We believe the tax deductibility should work both ways. If a person is a mechanic or travels across the country and brings his or her tools along, it should be no different than a businessman who brings his laptop. It is a tax deductibility that should be encouraged, so our workers in this country can be treated fairly by the income tax system.

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

* * *

●(1530)

CANADIAN BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-242, An Act to amend the Canadian Bill of Rights (right to housing).

He said: Mr. Speaker, we do not have to look further than our hon. colleague from Timmins—James Bay when he talked about the housing concerns on Kashechewan. One of the fundamental aspects of human dignity is to have proper shelter that is affordable.

The NDP believes that the Canadian Bill of Rights should be changed to include a right to proper shelter with unreasonable barriers and ensure that it is affordable, so that all Canadians can raise their families in proper, safe and decent housing.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-243, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance by the Canadian International Development Agency and other federal bodies.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this bill designed to ensure that development assistance through CIDA and other federal bodies makes poverty reduction its principal priority. It should be delivered in accordance with Canadian values, Canadian foreign policy, international human rights standards and sustainable development principles. It should include criteria that are set out for allocating funds for enhancing transparency and for monitoring Canada's international development efforts.

If, in the spirit of this minority government, the government is prepared to make this legislation its own, it will have our full cooperation to see that it is quickly dealt with and put into effect.

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

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, notwithstanding the Standing Orders or the usual practices of the House, the take note debate scheduled for Monday, May 1, shall be extended by 1 hour; during debate on the motion the Chair will not receive any dilatory motions, quorum calls or requests for unanimous consent; and any member rising to speak during debate may indicate to the Speaker that he or she will be dividing his or her time with another member.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

CHILD CARE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of the early childhood centres of New Brunswick. They are concerned, I would say even angry, about the government's child care plan. They believe it represents a step backwards in relation to the child care agreement and that cancelling the agreement will have negative consequences for Canadian families.

[*English*]

These petitions are submitted by the Cunard Street Children's Centre and I thank them for their assistance in this important cause.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I stand in solidarity with undocumented workers being deported from Canada.

Unfortunately, the situation is getting worse. Today we are joined by Kimberly and Gerald Lizano-Sossa, the children detained by Canada Border Services Agency officials inside their school. I met with them and their parents and this story is truly sad and inspiring.

There is a problem when the government storms a school, a place of sanctuary, and uses children as bait. The petitioners and I call upon the government to find a humane solution to this, and I pray that the minister will never again use children as bait.

CHILD CARE

Hon. Mark Eying (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition on behalf of my constituents of Sydney—Victoria. I have received an overwhelming response from over 1,000 constituents calling upon the current government to honour the child care agreement made by the provinces and our previous government.

The Conservative plan of \$3 a day to every Canadian who has a child under six is not a realistic solution to child care. Canadians need a federally funded program that creates the day care spaces needed.

I ask the current government to listen to the people of Sydney—Victoria and the people of Canada and keep the previous agreement made by the federal government and the provinces.

● (1535)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition pursuant to Standing Order 36 signed by a number of Canadians, including from my own riding of Mississauga South. This is probably one of the most disturbing petitions that I have ever had but I believe it should be drawn to the House's attention.

The petitioners want to advise the House that an investigative journalist revealed the existence of a concentration camp in Shenyang City expressly for Falun Gong practitioners. The evidence from independent sources is that no one has yet come out of this concentration camp alive and that Falun Gong practitioners have been killed for their organs, which have been sent off to various medical facilities, and that organ sales are now a highly profitable business in China.

Apparently some 2,840 of these people have died and there are reports from witnesses of family members who verify that some of the bodies were missing body parts and were tortured to death.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Prime Minister, the Government of Canada and the Parliament of Canada to strongly condemn the Chinese Communist regime's crimes against Falun Gong practitioners, particularly in the Sujiatun concentration camp, and to speak out to the UN to mobilize an investigation and rescue.

*Government Orders***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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement government orders will be extended by 18 minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL BRIDGES AND TUNNELS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-3, An Act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River has three and a half minutes left for questions and comments.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to the question posed by the hon. member from Quebec, the \$600 million border infrastructure fund, which is already in the bank, should go a long way toward helping communities, such as the ones we are talking about, with regard to their infrastructure.

He also asked about jurisdictions. Ontario has the International Bridge and Terminal Company and Baudette and Rainy River Municipal Bridge Company. St. Mary's River Bridge Company owns the bridge at Sault Ste. Marie. The Blue Water Bridge Authority owns the bridge in Sarnia. The City of Windsor has the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel. The bridge between Buffalo and Fort Erie is owned by the Buffalo and Erie Public Bridge Authority. Three bridges are owned by the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission. We have the Federal Bridge Corporation and the Thousand Islands Bridge Authority. There are several more.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in presenting the bill the minister outlined the importance of safety and security issues and highlighted the reasons why in a post-9/11 world it is very important that these considerations be taken into account.

I note in clause 16 of the bill that it states:

The Governor in Council may, on the recommendation of the Minister, make regulations respecting the security and safety....

It seems to be contradictory that the minister would say that the issues related to safety and security are extremely important and yet the bill itself only provides that the minister may, at his discretion, recommend regulations on these matters to governor in council.

I wonder if the member would care to comment on the importance of not just including legislation in regulations, but if it is so

important to have safety and security provisos related to this legislation, that maybe they should be right in the bill themselves.

• (1540)

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Mr. Speaker, I agree wholeheartedly with the questioner because it does make sense that we have those protections right in the bill. I must confess that my interest in this particular bill was to use that section in the hope that there would be some latitude for the town of Fort Frances that would actually allow the federal government to assist it. I can only agree to the nth agree with the hon. member's question.

Without elaborating on this part of the bill, it is so general that it may cause problems later on. In my case I am hoping that it will actually open the door so that the town of Fort Frances will get some assistance from the federal government and that we would find a way of financially going to the table to honour the request from northwestern Ontario for assistance.

[Translation]

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of Bill C-3, An Act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act.

[English]

The bill was first tabled on April 24 and it would establish an approval mechanism for the construction, alteration and acquisition of international bridges and tunnels and would provide for the regulation of their operation, maintenance and security. I want to commend the minister for the speed in which he introduced the bill following the federal accountability act.

Previously, these important clauses were part of a more general omnibus bill, referring back to the 38th Parliament, where they were part of an act to amend the Canada Transportation Act. In that form, both Bill C-26 and Bill C-44 died on the Order Paper when the election writ was dropped, which concluded the 38th Parliament. These bills that the previous government had brought forward had the disadvantage of being complicated omnibus bills. They covered a whole range of issues.

I would say that the bill before us today, Bill C-3, is a concise bill. It has some 60 clauses and addresses the issue rather concisely. These 60 clauses address issues such as the construction and alteration of international bridges, maintenance and repair, security and safety, change of ownership, operator control, incorporation by letters patent and shares of a corporation. It is a housekeeping bill but it puts in order a very important aspect concerning transportation across borders, our economy and our trade with our largest neighbour.

Therefore I applaud the minister for bringing this important bill forward. It is clearly a priority for the minister and our government and I am pleased to be able to speak today in support of the bill.

Government Orders

The member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River, who spoke earlier, raised concerns about tolls on international bridges as being disincentives for visitors, transportation and commerce, and that is a concern, but I suggest to him that our infrastructure needs have to be supported somehow. The residents of Vancouver Island where I live have a huge disincentive for all commerce and visitors visiting Vancouver Island. We do not have a bridge. We have ferries that cost the average family per crossing about \$50 per trip each time they come and go from the island. A transport truck coming on the island has a disincentive we might say of \$150 to come to the island and we know that drives the cost of our fuel and our food supplies up on Vancouver Island.

We understand that tariffs are a problem and are certainly a problem across the country but somehow we need to come up with the funds to support infrastructure. It is a problem that many communities have to deal with.

Nothing man builds lasts forever. I suppose this is particularly true of bridges and tunnels. Our harsh climate, the pounding of trucks and cars have an exacting toll on our transportation infrastructure. The condition of Canada's aging infrastructure has increasingly become a major issue for governments and for the motoring public.

A 2006 study conducted by Statistics Canada points out that although the condition and calculated age of roads and highways has improved, bridge infrastructure has been falling behind. This study indicated that in 2003 Canadian bridges had reached only 49% of their useful life with a calculated average age of 22.6 years over a service life of 46 years. Federal bridges, which accounted for about 3% of the total stock, had an average age of 26.4 years compared with 24.6 for provincial bridges and 19 years for municipal bridges.

As a result of a previous government's priorities between new construction and maintaining existing facilities, between 1992 and 1997 I note that the federal government spent 77% of its bridge funds on new construction and only 23% on renovations.

I just want to remind members that in 2005 the United States remained by far Canada's most important trading partner and represented more than 70% of all of our international trade in value. The majority of this trade is carried by truck and a high percentage of these trucks cross international bridges.

• (1545)

If we look at the age of some of these bridges, it is apparent that many of these structures have been in existence a very long time. The four busiest international border crossing points for trucks include the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor and Detroit; the Blue Water Bridge between Point Edward/Sarnia and Port Huron, Michigan; the Peace Bridge between Fort Erie and Buffalo; and the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge also in Ontario.

The Ambassador Bridge, which carries over 25% of our trade to the United States, was constructed in 1929. The Blue Water Bridge, which carries about 13.4% of our trade, was built in 1938, and the second span in 1997. The Peace Bridge in Fort Erie was built in 1927. The Queenston-Lewiston Bridge was built in 1962.

Other key border structures include the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, which was constructed in 1930; the International Bridge in Sault Ste. Marie, which was built in 1962; the bridge between Edmundston,

New Brunswick and Madawaska, Maine, which was built in 1921; and the Clair, New Brunswick to Fort Kent, Maine bridge, which was built in 1930.

We appreciate that there has been ongoing maintenance and repair to these bridges during their existence. However, as bridge infrastructure ages, the bridges will require more and more attention. Since they fall within federal jurisdiction, the federal government must ensure that they are safe for the motoring public. Bill C-3 addresses this concern.

Clause 14 of the bill provides that the governor in council may, on the recommendation of the minister, make regulations respecting the maintenance and repair of international bridges and tunnels. This clause requires the owner or operator to provide reports to the minister on the condition of the bridge or the tunnel. It specifies what information is to be included in the reports and makes provision for the inspection of the facility by the minister or a person so designated.

With a few exceptions, these bridges are owned and operated by others than the federal government. Provincial or municipal governments own many of these bridges and tunnels, while binational authorities and private industry own a few.

Since it is in everyone's interest to ensure these bridges are well maintained and safe, the federal government is acting to ensure that infrastructure is maintained to a minimum common standard. It is not the intention of the federal government to pay for the inspections, nor for any necessary improvements. Safety will remain the responsibility of the individual owner and operator.

The intention is also not to impose unreasonable standards on the various owners and operators. Although the details would be developed during the regulatory process, the intention would be to rely upon existing provincial inspection standards. Since the bridges were built originally to provincial standards, it would only be logical that their inspections be to the same standards. This would ensure consistency within the provincial transportation network.

I realize that a logical first question might be, if we are inspecting the Canadian half of the bridge, who is inspecting the other half? I am sure everyone fully recognizes that federal jurisdiction only extends halfway across an international bridge, and the Americans are owners and operators of the U.S. half. We can therefore only regulate our own half of the bridge and trust that the American owners and operators do the same on their half of the bridge. In most cases, American and Canadian owners and operators cooperate very closely not only in the construction, but in the operation and the maintenance of these bridges.

In the case of bridges between New Brunswick and Maine, the provincial and state governments take turns being responsible for the construction of new bridges. The Bridge and Tunnel Operators Association has expressed the view that it would probably use the most stringent standard where the U.S. code and the Canadian code differed.

Government Orders

Since 9/11 things have changed. We also must change. Safety has become a concern for Canadians. It certainly has become a concern for Americans. We just had discussions here a short time ago as the Prime Minister announced the Air-India inquiry, certainly the worst terrorist incident in Canadian history.

We must ensure that we upgrade our laws so that we can provide for the safety and consistency of transportation across our border, to make sure that our commerce with our largest trading partner is secure, not impeded, and that we minimize the risk of any kind of incident that would disrupt that trade and the flow of people and commerce across our borders. It is a sad reality, but it is something we do need to address.

• (1550)

I fully support the passage of Bill C-3, the international bridges and tunnels act. I am confident that the safety clauses contained in the bill will ensure that these critical pieces of our national infrastructure remain safe for future generations.

I hope that all members of the House will support the bill. It is a housekeeping bill, in essence. It puts in order the necessary structures so that bridge construction in the future can be undertaken, bridge maintenance can take place, and cooperation with our neighbour in terms of maintaining an unimpeded traffic flow across the border continues.

I understand there are a number of proposals for new bridges. There are some 24 existing crossings which have a wide range of arrangements for their management. At least three new proposals are currently before the government. It is time that we put in order the necessary legislation that will allow these projects to proceed in an orderly fashion and in a manner that protects the security of our transportation, our cross-border traffic for visitors, commerce and trucks.

I hope that all members will support the bill and see that it goes through the House, moves on to committee where it can be discussed more thoroughly and be enacted as quickly as possible. In this new 39th Parliament it can become an early act to ensure that we put in place the necessary protection for part of our economy.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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. I think you will find there is consent by all parties to move the following motion:

That the time taken up by Ministerial Statements not be added on to the time allotted as per the Standing Orders for today only.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the parliamentary secretary have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is there unanimous consent to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*Translation*]

RESPECTING INTERNATIONAL BRIDGES AND TUNNELS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-3, An Act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act, be now read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming questions and comments. The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my Conservative colleague discuss the bill concerning international bridges and tunnels. This is a perfect example of how Canadian federalism works. In this bill, the government has decided to declare that bridges fall under federal jurisdiction, as they have always done. They want to clarify it because bridges have always been administered by provinces, municipalities or the private sector.

As my colleague is well aware, no funds are provided for in this bill. All the federal government is doing is asserting its jurisdiction, but it will not pay for maintenance. It will conduct inspections, but it will not pay to fix bridges.

There are many examples of this. I just noticed my colleague for Lévis—Bellechasse back there nod in agreement. The Quebec City bridge, which is owned by CN, is one such example. It is completely rusted. It needs to be fixed, but the federal government, the province and Canadian National have all drained their budgets. In the end, the work will not be done.

This is what is being proposed today. This bill provides no money to repair bridges or to upgrade them if security standards are tightened. No budget is included—we will discuss it later. Nevertheless, the federal government states that this falls within its jurisdiction. It will inspect bridges and tell the provinces and municipalities what to do, but it will not pay.

Is this what the member is proposing?

• (1555)

[*English*]

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, the bill puts in place the necessary regulations so that security and consistency can be addressed in the future.

When we are talking about investments in infrastructure like this, there will always be discussion with the provinces, the municipalities or with the appropriate authorities. With the alignment of bridges, which affects traffic in the municipality and in the province, all of those things will require close cooperation between federal, provincial and municipal authorities where that is appropriate.

Government Orders

Certainly, when it comes to funding, whether it is for repair or infrastructure investments, those are ongoing discussions that will take place on an individual basis. They are not addressed in the bill, but they have been discussed individually when these projects have come up in the past. I am sure that will be the pattern in the future.

I look forward to moving ahead to see these projects advance in our country.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not share the member's assessment of the bill. I really do not think it is a housekeeping bill. I think it is a bill that does not exist in the first place and we cannot keep house on something that is not there.

Notwithstanding, in clause 16 under the main heading "Security and Safety", it says, "The governor in council may, on the recommendation of the minister, make regulations respecting the security and safety of international bridges and tunnels, including regulations", and paragraph 16(c) says "requiring any person or class of persons to provide to the minister any information related to the security and safety of international bridges and tunnels".

We have to think about that for a little while. The minister may make regulations and it has to do with requiring people to divulge information, not people involved in the project, but every person in Canada apparently. I wonder if the member has any knowledge whatsoever about this regulation. If these safety and security issues are so important, why is it that they are being buried in the regulations? Why are these requirements not laid out in the bill as we would make these requirements of Canadians subject to the detail as laid out in regulations?

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, the member is a seasoned member of the House. We have enjoyed discussing a whole range of issues in which we share a common interest. We know how regulation works in this place.

When we are referring here to requiring any person or class of persons to provide the minister information related to security and safety, it is clearly implied that we are going to be directing that request to people who would be custodians of that information or would be in charge of the bridge or in some way would be expected to have some competence in providing information.

I think that the language, of necessity, does not spell out exactly who those individuals might be because there are some 24 such structures that exist today. There is a wide range of responsibilities. The first structures we mention I think go back to the 1930s so we are talking over 60 or 70 years. The range of arrangements has changed and evolved considerably over these years and therefore the governance structure would be a little bit different in each instance. That is probably why the language is a little more vague than my hon. colleague would prefer.

However, it is the nature of the beast that we are trying to address. I am sure it will be discussed at committee and any concerns can be straightened out at that time.

• (1600)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member please provide his views in terms of hazardous waste materials that are actually crossing over our international crossings, bridges and tunnels?

Currently, there are very few regulations and actually there is zero inspection going on with regard to some of the crossings. One in particular in Windsor, Ontario where I have my constituency is the Ambassador Bridge where they have been in public dispute with some of their operators about hazardous materials that are crossing but are not supposed to be crossing at that location. They are supposed to go to Sarnia or to a hazmat ferry.

Would the member agree that there needs to be greater prudence? Perhaps there should be an investigation team or a resource so that we can actually maintain public safety for individuals in the community and also make sure that hazardous waste materials are not going onto the infrastructure. Hazardous materials could be used for terrorism or there could be an accident that would cause a failing of the infrastructure.

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has raised a very important issue. Transportation of hazardous materials is a big concern certainly within the country. Cross-border transportation is something that should require some very close scrutiny.

On this side of the House, we are very concerned with the lack of attention to border security in a whole range of matters. It does need to be addressed. I am sure that these concerns will be very welcome at committee. They need to be looked at. I am sure we need to tighten up the way we manage hazardous materials within the country and certainly at our border crossings. The member has raised a very valid concern. I am sure committee members, as this bill goes forward, will be anxious to look into this matter and make sure that we take the appropriate precautions.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-3, which is an important bill. In fact, it was a bill that was first brought forward by the previous government, primarily because every time a bridge or a tunnel was to be built, specific legislation was required to cover that particular project. As one can imagine, there are differences in the requirements of each and every international bridge or tunnel.

The short title of this act is the "International Bridges and Tunnels Act". Its enactment will establish an approval mechanism for the construction, alteration and acquisition of international bridges and tunnels and it will provide for regulation of their operation, maintenance and security. This is by no means a housekeeping bill. It is a very important bill. It touches a lot of things. The previous speaker referred to it as a housekeeping bill.

As I looked through last Friday's debate, I saw some of the questions. It struck me that there were some very important issues that had to be addressed.

Just by way of background, there are currently 24 bridges and tunnels that carry vehicular traffic across the 6,400 kilometre border between Canada and the United States. There are also five rail bridges. More than \$1.9 billion worth of goods moves across the border each day, so we can certainly understand the importance of this. We know there has been for many years discussion about the need to alleviate the congestion at border crossings, particularly in places such as Windsor, Sarnia, Fort Erie, et cetera.

Government Orders

The federal government has jurisdiction over all international crossings, but it is clear that bilateral negotiations have to take place at the federal level as well as provincial and state levels where either responsibilities or authorities exist. This is kind of a comprehensive approach to this. We have the authority with regard to the Government of Canada, under section 92 of the Constitution Act, but the federal government's ability to exercise this authority has never been set out in a legislative framework, and that is the purpose of the bill.

Everyone knows that since September 11, the issue of safety and security has been extremely important to everyone around the world. With regard to Canada's bridges and tunnels, we cannot leave this issue to less formal procedures than would be prescribed in a piece of legislation. That is why it is important that we have legislation in which we have a foundation that will allow us to strategically address the concerns related to either the repair, the maintenance, the change of ownership, or the construction or replacement of new bridges or tunnels.

The bill begins a process that provides us with the ability to deal with the necessary crossings. However, the minister, when he tabled the bill in the House and spoke at second reading, stated:

The development of new crossings is a complex undertaking, requiring negotiations between provincial, state and federal governments on both sides of the border.

Although the bill itself is written in a unilateral form, it has very little detail with regard to the understandings or obligations. One of the areas I thought was important, and a previous speaker spoke about it, was the environmental impacts. I thought immediately about my days on the environment committee where we had regular visits from representatives of the IJC, the International Joint Commission, which is a group of people who are responsible for all of the waterways that we have shared jurisdiction between the United States and Canada. It deals with things like ships coming in and dumping their ballasts. We have alien invasive species and all these other problems. However, there are other things such as watersheds and the impact of important or major construction, as we talk about in the bill.

• (1605)

Under the bill, the legislation would give the governor in council, or cabinet, the authority to make regulations for all matters related to safety and security. It would also be able to make regulations respecting the operation of these crossings, such as ensuring the efficient and competitive flow of international traffic is not jeopardized. These are important aspects of it, but as I indicated, the environment is also very important to Canadians. That is why the proposed legislation and framework has to address some of the environmental aspects.

I cannot find much that I would disagree with in the bill. It is an important bill to have. Although there are a couple of new provisions, one dealing with crossings related to the St. Lawrence and also matters related to change of ownership or control, the only other area where I had some concerns about were the regulations. It is the issue of legislation being buried in the regulations, which I have talked about in this place a number of times.

The previous speaker will be very familiar with the reproductive technology bill, in which I think there were some 24 clauses of the bill that had the phrases "subject to" or "as per the regulations". The problem with that is parliamentarians are asked to debate, from a knowledgeable point of view, a bill on a very important subject without knowing what the regulations are. Buried in those regulations could be some of the most essential details that could change one's total outlook on the efficacy of the bill.

This idea of making laws through the executive branch, going around Parliament, is something with which we have to deal. It is a wrong premise, and parliamentarians have a responsibility to be accountable. We talked for a whole week about accountability. How can I, as a member of Parliament, be accountable to my constituents, to Parliament and to Canadians as a whole, if I cannot even see legislation with the full impact? How can I vote at second reading and give approval in principle to the main provisions of the bill, if I have no idea what will in the regulations?

We have to be vigilant about what is buried in the regulations. It comes down to that little line, which I have heard so often, the devil is in the details.

Talking about the devil in the details, members will know that there was debate here about the softwood deal. There was a legitimate concern that the little detail of under-prevailing market conditions could mean a big difference. We do not know. I have not seen that deal yet, and I would like to see it. However, I can say that a 30% maximum quota is not free trade; it is managed trade.

I can also say that \$4 billion is not \$5 billion. All I know is if we are not getting back the duties, if we are not getting back that additional \$1 billion, I know where it is going. It is going to the U.S. producers who are going to use it to either continue to fight these battles or take the resources. The devil is in the details.

Let us have a look at another example of the devil in the details. We talked today in question period about a little detail: tax credits for corporations to create 125,000 day care spaces. That is wonderful except the federal government has no jurisdiction for child care. It has no standards or standard-setting process. How can say that if we give them some money, they are going to do this? We have no responsibility or authority to specify the conditions for that child care. Remember the OECD said that what we had in Canada, other than Quebec, was basically glorified babysitting. Are we giving some money to set up more glorified babysitting? How is this helping children? There is the detail.

• (1610)

Let us look at reducing the GST and paying for it by reducing or rolling back an income tax cut. The income tax cut that Canadians received in the last Parliament saved the average Canadian family about \$400. Canadians would have to spend \$40,000 on taxable goods and services to receive the same amount.

We know the providers of goods and services are not going to pass that all on to the consumers. They are only going to increase their prices and say that this is the way it works.

Government Orders

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I appreciate that we have quite a bit of latitude in our discussions, but we are talking about bridges and tunnels.

The member has been through the softwood lumber issue, and he made some statements that would be appropriate to correct. He is now into child care and GST. Is he planning to bring his speech back on track to the bridges and tunnels bill that is before us and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I thank the member for Nanaimo—Alberni for his point of order. I am sure the member for Mississauga South will want to address the main tenets of the bill in the rest of his speech.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the main point in the bill is that the devil is in the detail and these were examples. The members obviously have some examples and if they wanted more they could look at the tax credits or transit passes of Kyoto.

However, let us move on to the regulations. Clause 16 states:

The governor in council may,—

It says “may”:

—on the recommendation of the Minister, make regulations respecting the security and safety of international bridges and tunnels, including—

It then goes on for three paragraphs.

As I discussed with the members earlier, the regulations can be extremely important and vital to the operations of a piece of legislation. I understand that projects for bridges or tunnels, whether to build a new one, repair one or change its ownership will have some fundamental differences. Look at the Minister of Transport's speech. It was all about the vital nature of safety and security issues that we needed to take care of very specifically.

In particular, clause 16 on safety and security says that it may issue regulations requiring persons, who own or operate bridges or tunnels, to develop and implement security plans and establish security management systems. What does it mean by it “may” develop a security and safety plan? What does it mean “may”? Why is that not in the legislation subject to the regulations where the detail would be? That is what it is supposed to be. This is absolutely unacceptable.

Safety and security plans must be tabled with every project and the details of what has to be included must be put in regulations which can be amended from time to time by order in council. I do not want a bill that says we may do this and, for our friends, maybe we will not. This is a recipe for abuse and lack of accountability. Can we not put this in the legislation? There is another requirement which states:

—must be included in the security plans and requiring persons who own or operate international bridges or tunnels to make the additions, changes or deletions to their security plans that the Minister considers appropriate—

This seems to be a general catch-all, but it was the last one that got me. Subclause 16(c) under “Regulations” states:

—requiring any person or class of persons to provide to the Minister any information related to the security and safety of international bridges and tunnels.

Think about it. This is a regulation that the minister “may” come forward with, requiring any person or class of persons to provide the

minister any information related to the security and safety of international bridges and tunnels.

I must say that the first things I thought of were constitutional rights, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the rule of law. What is this? This is utter nonsense. What kind of catch-all is this? Does anybody in the House really understand what it is? What does it say? Can anybody stand in this place and give me an example? If no one can, then why is it that we are being asked to debate this at second reading and vote to give approval in principle which, once we do that, based on ignorance, we will not be able to reverse?

This is nonsense. This is making law by regulations. I hope members get interested in this because there is more. Let us look at paragraph 39(5)(b) where there are more regulations. It states:

The Governor in Council may, on the recommendation of the Minister, make regulations respecting—

(b) the return of the evidence to the person from whom it was seized or to any other person entitled to its possession.

This is pursuant to paragraph 39(1)(c), which I guess we have to read in order to understand what that means.

• (1615)

Clause 43 is another one. It states:

The Minister may, by regulation,

I will move down to paragraph (b):

prescribe the maximum amount payable for each violation,—

If a law prescribes violations and penalties, then I hate to tell the House that there will be penalties and they will be prescribed in the regulations. It may be better to be put in the legislation that there will be penalties and the penalties are as laid out in the regulations.

This idea of the government saying it “may” do this really bothers me. We are going to see this often. We as parliamentarians must be more vigilant. If we are expected to vote on legislation and want to be accountable in this place, then we must know what is being asked of us. It is not here.

Usually a department would provide briefing notes with an explanation on each clause. Members get those notes the first time a bill goes to committee and after all the witnesses. Members do not even have that information when they are talking to witnesses. I hope potential witnesses will look at this bill and say we are missing something, or we are on a track that basically says Parliament is going to give us approval in principle and then we are going to slap on what we really want to do in the regulations because it says we can do it. That is law made by the executive. It is law made by regulation and it is wrong.

This bill is a perfect example of this. It is a straightforward bill on a very important matter. It provides a legislative foundation and framework by which we can deal with issues to do with the international bridges and tunnels. It has some environmental implications et cetera.

Government Orders

What is the legislative framework in the United States? The United States have had it for a number of years. We are now bringing ours into line. I wonder what the United States has to say about this. I wonder whether or not we have patterned this on the American framework. It is clear to me that everything that is happening around here seems to be looked at through the lens of the American people. This is what I call the sniff test and the sniff test is telling me that we are very slowly embarking on the Americanization of Canada.

It seems to me that everything we do is based on what the United States does. It seems to me that we have taken on the attitude that if the United States does something then maybe we should do it too. The attitude seems to be that if the United States wants to steal our billion dollars on softwood lumber, then let it steal it. If it wants to have a maximum quote and have managed trade instead of free trade, that is okay. It seems to me that is the way we are doing business. We have to have big Bush and little Bush. What the heck.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Paul Szabo: I am sorry, but I am really concerned about the quality of the legislative material.

This legislation is at second reading. I hope that members who are going to be on the transport committee and will be looking at this bill will take an opportunity to look at what is being asked in terms of the detail in the regulations. I hope the committee will seek the approval of the minister of the department to have these important considerations incorporated directly into the legislation.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question for my Liberal colleague will be simple. He said in his speech that the devil is in the details. I will call to his attention a small detail that is not in the bill and that is the federal funding to help maintain the bridges in question.

It is not just Bill C-3. When his Liberal government was in power, there was nothing in Bill C-44, the basis for Bill C-3, on funding for the 24 international bridges and tunnels.

They could have taken the opportunity to establish funding and tell those managing them, namely the provinces and municipalities, that the money was available. As I was saying earlier, this federation has a funny way of doing things. It says in this bill that the international bridges and tunnels are a federal jurisdiction, but it does not invest any money in them. It is the provinces and municipalities that are currently paying. That is the reality.

I gave the example of the Quebec City Bridge because it is an obvious one. It is not an international bridge, but a bridge for which there is an agreement, for which the federal government pays its share. The province should have to pay its share just like a private company. We are just a few years shy of Quebec City's 400th anniversary and we would like to have a bridge that is not all rusty. Our hands are tied because everyone is saying there is no budget available for this.

Why was there no money allocated for these 24 international bridges and tunnels? Why, at the time, did the Liberals not allocate any money either?

That is my question for my colleague.

An hon. member: That is a very good point.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member raises a good point. I am not sure whether it has to be in this legislation. It really is an issue of the fiscal responsibility of the government of the day.

There is no question that the most significant portion of our exports goes to the United States. I have forgotten the number. It is something like 75%. It relies heavily on the infrastructure of the tunnels and the bridges as well as the road system connecting the producers to the export points.

We all have a vested interest in it and therefore, as a general statement, I would say all stakeholders have a responsibility to make contributions that are commensurate with the benefits that they derive from that project going forward. I think it is something that should be argued strenuously especially when the alternative to having no federal funding is to have no infrastructure project. That is simply unacceptable.

• (1625)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to listen to my colleague's speech. It was a typical Liberal speech. In the first part of his presentation he tried to take credit for the actual legislation which was formerly Bill C-44. It is actually significantly the same. There are only a couple of modifications that are different in this legislation.

What is critical though is that the government of the day has carved it out of another bill, Bill C-44. It had other components that made it going forward very complicated. Therefore, at least we can concentrate on this major infrastructure challenge that we have.

There are some negative aspects to the bill, but there are some positive things as well that are very important. However, by the end of the member's speech he was distancing himself from the bill, calling it utter nonsense, despite the fact his own member is going to be sitting on the industry committee that crafted the bill or at least a good part of it to begin with. He had convinced himself that it was actually bad, calling it Americanization and a whole series of things. It is just amazing that one can go within a 20 minute period of time and make a completely contradictory statement about a presentation.

I would like to move on though. The former Prime Minister said this to the Windsor *Star* in January 2004. He said that there was no doubt that the crossing here was the single most important crossing in Canada and it was the priority. We know we then got a list. Sadly enough, the Windsor-Detroit region corridor was probably one of the initial priorities that then got quintuplets, then dozens, then after that a population explosion of priorities and got put into a mix of things.

I have a question for the hon. member. Why did it take so long to get this actual legislation to this point in time? I have many concerns about the legislation and there are some issues that need to be dealt with. However, the fact is there are over 24 crossings that are bridges and tunnels between Canada and the United States. Two are privately held right now: one in Windsor West and one in Fort Frances. There are no regulations whatsoever protecting citizens and the commerce of this country. Why did it take so long?

Government Orders

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, it is too bad the member did not listen to my speech. I said very clearly in my speech that it was effectively the same bill that was proposed by the last government within those two areas. The member could check the blues or tomorrow's *Hansard*. The two areas I noted were the St. Lawrence River crossing and the authority to improve all transactions affecting ownership control.

The problem that I have with the bill is with regard to the regulations. That was my speech. It was with regard to putting matters, which were late to the legislation, in the regulations under the auspices of the minister "may". In fact, on safety and security issues, I am of the view, and perhaps the member does not agree, that if there were provisos of the bill such as penalties and safety and security plans that must be made and so on, those should be requirements in the legislation itself. The details of what matters should be dealt with in this plan, who should it be reviewed by, and all these other things. That is what regulations are for.

My concern was clearly with regard to essential legislative information being buried in the regulations and not available for the members of Parliament to consider before they vote at second reading which would then restrict our ability to make changes at a later date. That is the point.

We are at second reading which gives us the opportunity to make a recommendation to the transport committee. I support the bill, but I want the committee to look very carefully at the requirements of the regulations. I want the committee to ask the government and the department to state some of those requirements in the bill itself with a clause relating to regulations where the amplified detail would be present but the principles would still be in the legislation.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, was the hon. member for Mississauga South concerned about the same degree of Americanization when his Liberal government approved 11,000 takeovers of Canadian firms through the course of its 12 years in power?

• (1630)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, if the member would like to name them, I will comment on them. His is a throwaway question, so in that case let me go on to the last two devils in the details.

Can we imagine giving a tax credit for transit users for transit passes? Ninety-five per cent of that money is going to existing transit users. They want to increase the ridership from 5% to 7%, which they cannot do because there is no capacity. There has to be an investment. What it is going to mean, mark my words, is that there is going to be an increase in the price of transit because of this tax credit and they are going to have to invest more and come to the federal government to invest more in transit.

This is not going to do anything. It will cost \$2,000 a tonne to reduce greenhouse gases, 10 times more than the programs this government has scrapped.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start the discussion on Bill C-3 by coming back to the comments of the member for Mississauga South. He gave quite an impassioned comment and, for those of us who have actually been in the House over the last few years, a rather strange

comment, in that he said he was concerned about the Americanization of Canada.

This is coming from a member who represents a party that, as I mentioned earlier, has accepted, without one single rejection, 11,000 takeovers of Canadian firms over the past 12 years. Eleven thousand firms were taken over and the Liberal government just gave them a green light, with the subsequent loss of jobs, loss of revenue and loss of profits that go elsewhere, outside of the country.

It was also strange to me when we talked about the softwood deal. Indeed, I will come back to this because this touches on the issue of international trade. The Liberal government was bringing forward an agreement on softwood lumber that was basically the same as what the Conservatives are trying to push this week. The difference is about 3¢ on the dollar, but in both cases, Liberal and Conservative, what we have is essentially allowing the Bush administration to profit, to keep the ill-gotten gains of trade crime.

Both the Liberals and the Conservatives agree with this stand. Certainly for the hon. member for Mississauga South to step forward and say he is concerned about the Americanization of this country when the Liberal government showed that, if anything, the Liberals wanted to accelerate that Americanization, it is quite strange indeed. I did not want to leave those comments without a response.

I will come back to the issue of Bill C-3, which is to a large extent taken out of Bill C-44, brought forward at the transport committee in the 38th Parliament. Although there have been calls for years to have a legislative framework around our international bridges and tunnels, under the Liberal government there was not the movement that we needed to see, so largely we welcome what we are seeing in Bill C-3.

But I should give credit where credit is due. Essentially, and I think overwhelmingly, this bill coming forward is due to the work of the member for Windsor West, who has been tireless in pushing the cause of having a federal legislative framework around international bridges and tunnels. The member for Windsor West and his colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh have been pushing forward this issue in Parliament since they were both elected a few years ago.

I think it is nice to see that their efforts have borne fruit, that their work has led to the reintroduction of this bill. It is certainly our commitment that we will be working very hard to ensure that we get this type of legislative framework around international bridges and tunnels. I should also mention the work of the member for Sault Ste. Marie, who is also impacted directly. He has been a strong defender of making sure that access passes through international bridges and tunnels, and he has been a good advocate as well. However, all of us in this House, from all four corners of the House, should thank the member for Windsor West for his tireless advocacy on behalf of the Windsor area.

Government Orders

What does this bill contain? The bill essentially takes components from Bill C-44 and allows, in a sense, a legislative framework to be established around international bridges and tunnels. It may be surprising to most of the people who are listening in tonight to this debate to know that there is no legislative framework existing now. Indeed, many of the international bridges and tunnels that we have across this country are privately owned and there is no legislative framework for the federal government to play its role in ensuring that bridges and tunnels are safe and secure, that they are properly maintained and that we can make the kinds of investments we need to in order to ensure that jobs are created and maintained in Canada.

[*Translation*]

I should also add that when we refer to bridges, we are talking about 24 bridges across the country. Nine are located in New Brunswick, essentially in Acadia. That area has the most international bridges in the country. Of course, there is also one in Quebec, in the Glen Sutton area.

● (1635)

It is a very beautiful part of Quebec. There are also seven bridges connecting Ontario and New York State. We are talking about the whole of the St. Lawrence. This sector is also very important to the Canadian economy. Four other bridges link Ontario to Michigan, including the Ambassador Bridge. I will come back to this, but let me say that this bridge is extremely important to the city of Windsor, which is represented by the members for Windsor West and Windsor—Tecumseh. In addition, there are three bridges in northwestern Ontario, connecting the province to Minnesota. The best known of these is in Fort Francis.

There are also five rail bridges: two between Ontario and New York, two between Ontario and Michigan and one in the northwest, again in Fort Francis, between Ontario and Minnesota.

Of course, we are talking about all the bridges and tunnels that have an enormous impact on the economies of the provinces, particularly Ontario, but also Quebec and New Brunswick. This is an extremely important facet of Canada's economy.

[*English*]

Speaking more specifically about some of the elements, when we talk about truck trade between Canada and the United States, the total value in 2004 was \$346 billion. Trade by rail was valued at \$98 billion. Essentially trucks and railways carry 80% of the total value of Canada's trade with the United States in the year 2004.

The Windsor-Detroit tunnel connects the U.S. interstate system with Ontario's Highway 401. It is one of the fastest and busiest links between Canada and the United States. Approximately 27,000 to 29,000 vehicles use the tunnel on a daily basis, amounting to nine million vehicles per year, 95% of that traffic being cars and 5% being trucks.

As I mentioned earlier, the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor and the Blue Water Bridge in Point Edward rank as the top two commercial crossings on the Canada-U.S. border. More than 4.7 million commercial trucks and 19.4 million passengers use these annually. With that important volume, one can understand why the member for Windsor West has been such a tireless advocate on behalf of his constituents as well as the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Also, the Thousand Islands crossing on an average day in 2003 served 1,600 commercial vehicles, carrying about \$27.5 million worth of goods, and served 3,500 passenger vehicles. That would be carrying nearly 8,000 people between the United States and Canada at that border crossing.

The three Niagara Falls international bridge crossings support an estimated \$26 billion in trade per year, and reportedly more than 500,000 U.S. and Canadian jobs depend on that export traffic travelling across the Niagara Falls bridge connectors.

Finally, in 1996 almost \$1.7 billion American dollars in Canadian exports were shipped through the Sault Ste. Marie crossing, which is the largest international trade crossing in northwestern Ontario, to the United States, over one-third of which was transported by rail. In 2001, 2.5 million vehicles, including nearly 2.4 million passenger vehicles, crossed that bridge.

Therefore, we are talking about crossings that have a fundamental importance for the economy in Ontario. That is why it is extremely important that the efforts of the member for Windsor West and the member for Windsor—Tecumseh have arrived at the point now where we as a Parliament can now consider this important legislation.

We are largely in favour of the principle of the legislation. We feel it is long overdue. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that NDP members have been pushing to make this legislation a reality.

There is one area where we are concerned. When we look through Bill C-3, as other members have mentioned, we see an excessive level of centralization of power of governor in council. In other words, the government is taking over the essential ability to promote regulation when it comes to Bill C-3. That is a problem.

We have seen in other areas of international trade serious concerns with the direction of that young government. Admittedly we are perhaps talking about a government that is still trying to find its feet, but the recent softwood sellout does not allow us to increase our confidence level in the kinds of decisions that the government would make on trade issues. As I very clearly laid out, this is a matter of fundamental importance for international trade.

We have been saying that we need this legislative framework, but the member for Windsor West particularly has been saying that we need the local input to ensure, when decisions are made on safety, security, maintenance and ownership, that those decisions are made both in the local and national interests. The member for Windsor West has been a tireless advocate to ensure that the people of Windsor are involved in decisions that have a profound impact in that area.

Government Orders

• (1640)

I come from British Columbia. We are profoundly affected by softwood lumber. Yet we have seen the most catastrophic sellout of British Columbia interests on softwood lumber imaginable. It is absolutely mind-boggling that we would see the government, after hundreds of millions of dollars paid by British Columbia communities to ensure that Canada would maintain its rights under NAFTA, with a stroke of the pen give away those rights of the dispute settlement mechanism we won last August, which allowed for binding closure. The government is saying that it does not matter if Canada wins, that it will give it all away. It gave away over a billion dollars of proceeds of trade product illegally collected in softwood tariffs.

It is astounding that on an issue that impacts communities in British Columbia to such a great extent, the government would wave the white flag and surrender our rights under NAFTA, surrender over a billion dollars. In other words, it has provided the ammunition to the American industry to attack even more strongly the B.C. industry. It astounds me beyond belief that this could happen.

Our concern is if we are giving this much power into the hands of the government over international bridges and tunnels, which have as much of an economic impact, it will make the same foolish disregarded decision and sell out our interests. That is the problem.

On international trade, we have seen that the government does not understand the implications of the decisions it makes.

When it comes to international bridges and tunnels, we have shown that it has a profound impact on trade. It is of immense concern to us now that we are centralizing that control within the government. This is not how the NDP has been promoting this issue. We have been saying that local areas, Windsor, Sault Ste. Marie and other areas, need to have substantial input into those governmental decisions.

When it comes to softwood lumber, British Columbians have had no input into a softwood lumber sellout that gives away \$600 million in hard-earned money paid by B.C. softwood communities to Washington in illegal tariffs, the proceeds of trade crime that the Bush administration can keep and use against the B.C. softwood industry. Even the B.C. premier, who obviously too hastily said he thought the deal might be okay, now that he has seen portions of it, though none of us have seen the complete deal, is having second thoughts. That is why he wrote to the Prime Minister and said that it was not the deal he signed off on, that there were new clauses that allowed American control of our forestry practices.

If the chaos of this bad deal on softwood is any indication, with no B.C. input for softwood communities, which are hard-pressed and which have fought to have Canada's rights maintained under NAFTA, this may be a very poor precedence that we will see for Bill C-3. That is our concern.

Though we agree with the principle of the deal and though we agree that after many years of work by NDP MPs, such as the member of Parliament for Windsor West we are finally getting to the point where we have that federal oversight, we do not see anywhere in the legislation the opportunity for the kind of local input, which is important.

I cannot stress this enough. If we go back to the softwood lumber deal, forestry companies were saying that this was a bad deal. However, the Conservative government said that it was a take or leave it situation, that it would cut them adrift, that it would not provide loan guarantees or litigation support, that it would not provide them with anything. The companies have to take the deal as it is. Because the government has to rehabilitate the trade minister, the member for Vancouver Kingsway, it will sign anything no matter how outrageous, no matter how bad a giveaway, no matter the precedent it sets, not only for softwood lumber but for any other industrial sector.

Next week, next month, next year the Bush administration can target other industrial sectors and we no longer have a dispute settlement mechanism. We no longer have a binding process that allows us to see trade justice. We now have a state of permanent trade crime that has been created because the government did not understand what it was signing. It is a nightmare

• (1645)

Coming back to Bill C-3, the one component that we do not like and that we will endeavour to change and improve in committee is the government's ability to make these changes and perhaps do further sellouts without having the substantive local input from regions like Windsor and Sault Ste. Marie. It is fundamentally important to ensure that our trade works on an even playing field and in the interests of those areas. I believe that is the fundamental issue.

Because of the work of the NDP MPs, the NDP believes we are finally seeing legislation, which should have been passed before, that provides the legislative framework for international bridges and tunnels. However, we are concerned about centralizing the power with a government that has shown, so far at least, that it does not know how to handle it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments on Bill C-3 on international bridges and tunnels.

However, I would nonetheless like to call him to order. In his speech, my hon. colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster erred on another subject, that being the settlement of the softwood lumber dispute. As you know, this is an issue which has received the support of the Government of British Columbia—where my colleague is from—and of the Government of Quebec—where I am from—as well as the support of the sawmills of Chaudière-Appalaches. For them, this settlement resolves a problem which was latent for many years and which had been left by the Liberal government.

Now we can make plans for the future, because we know we will be able to work. People in the industry will be able to invest, to recover and invest the money that had been held back. They will have a framework for operations and will be able to export their wood. I wanted to correct the facts with my colleague.

Government Orders

•(1650)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question, which did not relate to Bill C-3 but to the softwood lumber industry. It will be my pleasure to respond to this question.

First of all, the Premier of British Columbia has said that this was not the agreement he had approved and it was not what he wanted. This agreement is worse than what he accepted. So the Premier of British Columbia—who may not have read what he signed, or did not understand what he signed—now has second thoughts about the deal. Now the deal is coming apart. Furthermore, as my colleague very well knows, Carl Grenier, a Quebecker and executive vice-president of the Free Trade Lumber Council, has said that, with one stroke of the pen, three years of effort and three years of victories in the NAFTA case have just been erased. It is obvious that this auctioning off of our Canadian rights is generating a good deal of negative comment.

Now the question is rather how the Conservative members can vote in favour of such a measure. It places not only the Quebec industry, but also the industries of British Columbia, Ontario and the entire country in a bad position, and it particularly affects the communities concerned by this bad deal, which should never even have been considered.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will return to Bill C-3. My colleague earlier expressed his concerns about communities not being consulted. I would simply read for him clause 13, even though I know he has read it:

The Minister may order the owner or operator of an international bridge or tunnel to take any action that the Minister considers appropriate to ensure that it is kept in good condition.

In addition, the government is giving itself the right to apply sanctions. The owners are provinces, cities and, in some locations, private companies, but for the most part they are levels of government. This is what the government is proposing today—I repeat—without including any provision for the creation of a dedicated fund, by which the federal government would guarantee its financial involvement. It waves a stick. If there are problems, it will use it.

I would like my colleague to tell me whether he thinks it reasonable, once again, for the federal government to rap the knuckles of the communities, provinces, cities and private firms with its big stick.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It concerns, specifically clause 13 of the bill, which provides that “The Minister may order the owner...to take any action that the Minister considers appropriate to ensure that it is kept in good condition”.

My colleague from Windsor West has illustrated this fact very eloquently. When the Windsor-Detroit tunnel changed from private to public ownership, it was in very poor shape. It was noted at the time that the private administrator had not done the maintenance necessary to ensure safe transportation between Windsor and Detroit. The tunnel is now owned by a public firm, which ensures it is maintained.

We consider it very important these bridges and tunnels be maintained. They play a vital role in the economy not only of the cities I have mentioned, such as Windsor and Sault Ste. Marie, but of the country as a whole, especially Quebec, New Brunswick and Ontario.

•(1655)

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of Bill C-3, an act respecting international bridges, today. This bill is part of our government's comprehensive plan to provide a clear transportation policy for the whole country in a sustainable development context.

Today, it has become clear that the whole House supports this very concise bill. We can therefore proceed quickly.

I would like to tell my colleagues a little more about this bill and the context within which it was drafted.

As you have already heard several times today, Canada and the United States are linked by 24 road bridges and tunnels, as well as five rail tunnels. Most of the trade goods exchanged between our two countries travel across these bridges and through these tunnels, as well as via the rail and marine transportation networks. They play an essential role in our transportation system.

This is the first time the Government of Canada has established a legislative framework—not a funding framework, but a legislative one—to fill a gap. This is why the House supports the bill.

Furthermore, the bill fits into the government's plan for border security, infrastructure improvements and, as a result, job creation through international trade.

[*English*]

The proposed bill would serve to confirm the federal government's exclusive jurisdiction with respect to international bridges and tunnels; require governmental approval for the construction or alteration of new and existing bridges and tunnels; require governmental approval for all changes in ownership, operation and control of those facilities; and authorize the government to make regulations regarding bridge maintenance and repair, safety and security, and operation and use.

[*Translation*]

Because people move across those bridges, we are entitled to expect that the government will ensure that those structures are well maintained and safe.

I support the bill presented by my hon. colleague, the member for Pontiac and Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. It is a reflection of our government's desire to restore the backbone of our country, transport—highway transport, rail transport, air transport and marine transport—to its proper place.

As members of Parliament, we are elected to legislate. I am sure that with the consent of my colleagues in the House, we will be able to move this bill forward.

Government Orders

Under the previous government, there had been hard times in recent years in terms of the development of transport in Canada. We witnessed the closing of a number of marine facilities in municipalities along the St. Lawrence River. We also witnessed the abandonment of marine transport, one of the four pillars of the transportation system. I know something about this, because I live in Lévis, where the largest Canadian shipyard is located, with nearly 180 years of history. Today, the workers in that shipyard are fighting hard to keep this jewel in the crown of our industry going strong.

For the manufacturing companies of Bellechasse and Chaudière-Appalaches, which are Quebec's "tigers", as for others in other regions of Quebec, transportation costs are all-important if they are to preserve their competitive edge, whether in the agri-food sector, the plastics industry or the furniture industry. In Sainte-Claire, we have the largest manufacturer of intercity buses in North America. Links with the American economy are crucial, as we know.

Given the soaring price of gasoline and the climate change that is upsetting our ecosystems, we have to develop a bold and innovative transport policy. That is what our government intends to do, and marine transport—and the bill we are considering today—is one element of that policy.

Today, we use various modes of transportation when we travel. At one time, the waterways were the only routes that existed. They contributed to the building of our country. Canada would not be what it is today if this transport network had not existed. What economic development would there have been in the St. Lawrence Valley and the Great Lakes region without the St. Lawrence Seaway? How many tons of essential materials, goods and supplies have been transported on the St. Lawrence? These waterways have helped to build Canada and they will continue to do that. This is an important mode of transport and it is part of a strategy of sustainable development.

There are several advantages to doing a better job of using our navigable waterways. We reduce the congestion on our roads and at our border crossings—on the roads and bridges that we are talking about today—and in our airports. We improve the efficiency of our supply systems. We facilitate trade and effectively reduce air pollution, including greenhouse gases.

Congestion is very expensive, amounting to about \$3 billion a year in lost time and wasted fuel that goes into the atmosphere, in addition to the negative effect on our productivity. We know that trade will only increase in the future and the congestion on our roads will grow worse as the number of cars and trucks increases.

International trade is expected to reach 2 billion tonnes a year over the next 20 years, or twice as much as current levels.

To avoid overloading our infrastructure, we are going to have to innovate and find different methods of transporting goods. This will affect not only the environment but also our health and the expenses that governments incur to build and maintain the necessary infrastructure. We should therefore examine all the available options that could make our transportation systems as efficient, effective and sustainable as possible.

So it is logical to send more of our goods by ship. This reduces congestion while actively helping to fight climate change, in addition

to being very beneficial economically. All that shippers want is for their goods to reach market in a cost-effective way.

We are not inventing anything here. In Europe, 63% of the total volume of goods is carried by short-distance ships. This amounts to a total of 1.6 billion tonnes. European countries promote marine transportation as a complement to road, air and rail. They have studied this option and decided in favour of it. If it works elsewhere, it could work here. The job has already begun.

• (1700)

In 2003, Canada, the United States and Mexico signed a memorandum of cooperation to share information on waterways. On April 19, at a conference in Vancouver, our minister took part in signing the protocol for promoting the use of our waterways, thus reducing pressure on our bridges and tunnels. That is why we must conduct research on shipping and collect more data in order to apply it effectively.

In Quebec, in Rimouski, UQAR is setting up a research chair on shipping, which will be a major advance for research in this field in Quebec. It will help support this industry on specific scientific and technological research. It will also open the door to discoveries that will further our knowledge of the shipping sector and help us develop it to its full potential.

We need to have efficient means of transportation to improve our competitiveness—especially with a strong dollar—and to help us stay on course with our ambitions for our shipping companies and the St. Lawrence River.

We need an integrated approach to transportation to enhance our economic productivity. Our Prime Minister recently met with the President of the United States and the President of Mexico in Cancun. The three leaders reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing security, prosperity and the quality of life for North Americans. It is in this context that this current initiative is being taken.

Bill C-3 on international bridges will allow us to legislate on this matter and provide leadership. As we have seen, this House will probably be called to support other bills for improving our transportation policies in a context of sustainable development. Shipping is part of that.

Located at the confluence of the river, near the large seaway, the major transportation routes and rail lines, the riding I have the privilege of representing could seize this opportunity to improve its productivity and contribute to the prosperity of the country.

Government Orders

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to mention one thing to my colleague. At the start of his speech, he stated that he had the consent of the House. I would like my colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse to understand that he will have the consent of the House when we vote on the bill. First, the bill must be referred to a committee that will make amendments. I would like my colleague to understand that the Conservative Party does not have a majority on the committee. Thus, the bill will be amended and we hope that the other opposition parties will agree. We will see how the Conservative Party votes after we have amended the bill.

Naturally, this leads me to ask the following question. Does he not find it strange that today we have a bill which, early on, in clause 5, states that “International bridges and tunnels are declared to be works for the general advantage of Canada”, in other words, under federal jurisdiction? This is already spelled out in the Constitution.

Why are we bringing this up today? I would like to suggest a small exercise to my colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse. It is because the federal government has divested itself of its responsibilities over the years. It gave us a nice statement about marine transportation but the federal government has divested itself of its responsibilities. It is no longer responsible for ports—except for some designated ports—having turned them over to local authorities. In addition, the federal government divested itself of regional airports, wharfs and bridges, handing them over to independent managers.

As a result of 9/11, the federal government wishes to reappropriate these installations for security reasons. Could my colleague tell us today that the government would support an amendment to the bill that would force it to allocate funds specifically for international bridges and tunnels if more restrictive security measures were applied and that these measures would be paid for by the federal government?

• (1705)

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for updating me on parliamentary procedure. I was simply illustrating the nature of the comments I heard today from the four parties.

I am confident that the bill presented will receive parliamentary approval after work is completed on the amendments.

That said, my hon. colleague's question concerns the issue of regulations. I would say to him, as I indicated in my speech, that it is true that there has been a federal disengagement, particularly with respect to responsibilities for port facilities in small municipalities in Quebec. The Liberal Party was responsible for this and, unfortunately, the Bloc Québécois could not do anything about it.

I would point out to him that this bill aims to legislate in the area of international bridges. This bill does not target the funding of infrastructures. The distinction must be made.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, since he is giving me the opportunity, I would add that the federal government had the Conservative Party's support when it offloaded its responsibilities concerning ports and airports.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments.

Canadian infrastructure faces many needs. I know this is true in the municipalities within my colleague's riding. This is certainly true in the municipalities of Bellechasse, Etchemins and Lévis. This is a collective challenge we must overcome together.

As for the famous fiscal imbalance, it involves more than just the provincial and federal governments. It also affects municipalities and ordinary citizens.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that, as transport critic for the Bloc Québécois, I talk about Bill C-3.

In theory, everyone may be in favour of the federal government accepting its true responsibilities as regards international bridges and tunnels. In any case, they fall within its jurisdiction. We have to grasp how the situation is, though.

The federal government downloaded its responsibilities in the past and transferred them to the provinces, the municipalities in some cases and to private companies in others. Of 24 bridges, only five are within the jurisdiction of the federal government. The others were entrusted to other administrations.

This is what the Bloc Québécois is wondering about. The federal government, for the sake of national security, is now deciding to interfere directly in the administration of equipment managed by other levels of government.

Earlier, I quoted to the New Democratic member a text which I will take the liberty of reading to the House. Under “Maintenance and Repair” in the bill, clause 13 reads: “The Minister may order the owner or operator of an international bridge or tunnel to take any action that the Minister considers appropriate to ensure that it is kept in good condition.” Thus, for national security, the federal government can decide to impose standards or force an administration to redo maintenance of its infrastructures. That is hard to accept, when we know that the act does not contain any measures creating funds dedicated to the repair of these infrastructures while ensuring federal participation.

Earlier, when I put some questions to my colleagues from several parties, I mentioned the Quebec City Bridge. It is not an international bridge or tunnel. It is, however, an example of a very important infrastructure in Quebec City, which is currently in the news headlines. Actually the 400th anniversary of Quebec City is coming up. This steel bridge is completely rusty, and they want to repaint it. That is the objective.

Canadian National has to maintain the railway system—let us never forget that this railway system is within federal jurisdiction—in accordance with the agreement concluded. This company, though, has always repeated to all levels of government that it does not have the means to maintain this superstructure. In the past, an agreement was signed between the Province of Quebec, the federal government and the said company. As in many projects, however, the costs were exceeded and the objectives could not be met. Money is lacking to renovate the Quebec City Bridge in time for the 400th anniversary. In fact, it should be renovated so as to avoid all sorts of catastrophes that might arise.

Government Orders

The money is lacking and everyone is passing the buck. It is not anyone's fault, especially not the federal government's. The Conservative members went for a walk, the federal government, through the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, said that the bridge was not its responsibility. In fact, in this case, maintenance of the bridge is the company's responsibility. It is Canadian National that is responsible for the maintenance of railways and structures. This bridge is therefore its responsibility. But we know in advance that the private company is not able to do the maintenance.

We have the same problem with international bridges and tunnels. Some are managed by the private sector. Earlier, a colleague mentioned the Windsor-Detroit tunnel, which had to become public property. A public authority had to take over responsibility for managing the tunnel when it turned out the private company that was managing it was unable to maintain it. This example speaks volumes, but other bridges and tunnels are facing the same problem. The bill does not solve the problem.

In the bill before the House today, the federal government is not saying that it will pay. It is only saying that it will oversee bridge inspections and order the owners or operators to take any action to ensure that they are kept in good condition. If any work is to be done, the government will force the owner to do it. However, if the owner has no money to do the work, as was the case with Canadian National and the Quebec City bridge, what will the government do? This bill does not say.

The bill does not provide for a fund for the 24 existing bridges and tunnels or any new international bridges. We should at least allocate sufficient funds to renovate these 24 or 25 infrastructures. That way, we could fix the problem right away by using the fund to pay for the repairs.

Since the beginning of this debate, our Conservative colleagues have said that we should discuss funding mechanisms. Some say that if we increase prices at some locations, it would end up costing so much it would weaken the economy. If that happens, people will not use the bridges or the tunnels.

• (1710)

There is no trade because it costs too much to cross the bridge or travel the tunnel. Clearly, this means that the government does not want to pay. A Conservative colleague even said earlier that the government would force owners to pay by refusing to pay.

In short, no one is willing to pay. Money is the crux of every political issue. Once again we see that the federal government divested itself of all responsibility in the past because it did not want to pay.

Of course, the communities or provinces involved told the federal government to transfer responsibility to them and that they would look after the structures if the federal government was unable and unwilling to. Today, these huge and often old structures are expensive to maintain, and money is running out.

You will see that the Bloc Québécois will defend the public interest. In Quebec, we have one bridge, the Sutton bridge, which the city manages. Imagine, the City of Sutton manages the bridge. Of course, administration has been delegated. I am told that the bridge is

very well managed and that everything works quite well. But judging by the community's reaction, Sutton was in favour of the bill because it assumed that money would likely be invested. The community thought that money would be forthcoming if it had to do major work, because the federal government recognized that this came under federal jurisdiction.

This bill does not hold any surprises for the residents of Sutton, but it does not answer their questions either. In any case, there was no money when these bridges came under federal jurisdiction, and this bill does not provide for any money.

The Bloc Québécois will therefore try to put that point across to all its colleagues, to the Liberal Party and, of course, the Conservative Party, which introduced the bill. In fact, I have to hand it to the Conservatives. This entire part of the bill is identical to Bill C-44, which the Liberals prepared.

Today, the residents of Sutton cannot count on any help from the Liberals or the Conservatives, nor can any other communities that find these infrastructures too costly. It was already decided that we might talk about money at a later time, but that we would not resolve this issue today. The Bloc Québécois and the communities in question who face this situation would not mind if the federal government were to declare its authority and impose standards—as long as the government pays for it. It is as simple as that.

I myself feel that more and more of these infrastructures should be transferred in order to find the funds needed for major projects and to avoid situations such as the one in Windsor, where the services of a private company were used but a public agency had to be created to pay the bill.

Again, I cite the Quebec City Bridge as an example. The hon. member for Québec is defending this file in the House. Quebec City wants to spruce itself up for its 400th anniversary, which is only normal. The oldest city in Canada will soon celebrate its 400th anniversary. We are very happy to have it. However, we cannot get the bridge painted because no one wants to foot the bill.

I cannot get over it: it's crazy. The city wants to beautify itself, huge amounts are being invested for the community, but we cannot manage to reach an agreement because the bridge belongs to Canadian National, it is under federal authority, and the Quebec government does not have the money.

That is how the Canadian federation works. We have a fine structure, and on the 400th anniversary of Quebec City, you will be able to go and see the rusted Quebec City bridge. It will become a historic monument, because that is what is going to happen.

That is how the world will be invited to visit Quebec City. We cannot manage to agree, we cannot repaint the bridge because the agreement between the federal government, the provincial government and the private company has expired. There is no money and we fell short. We did part of it, but we are unable to finish the job.

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We hope that the 24 international bridges and tunnels will not meet the same fate. The citizens of Quebec and Canada will be able to rely on the members of the Bloc Québécois to defend their interests. There can be no question of the rest of Canada going through what we are now experiencing in Quebec City, which wants to make itself attractive for its 400th anniversary.

• (1715)

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with what my colleague said about the infrastructure deficit. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which represents thousands of municipalities across Canada and Quebec, has very clearly said that the infrastructure deficit is in the billions of dollars.

Municipalities cannot maintain their bridges, highways and roads. They cannot maintain their water structures so cities and towns can have clean water. They have difficulty dealing with their infrastructure. The decades of downloading have been hurting municipalities. Even painting a bridge has become a problem.

However I need some clarification on some of the other problems. I recently read that the toll collectors at the Ambassador Bridge were told to wave through trucks carrying risky cargo. According to a document obtained by a local paper, this is in violation of a U.S. ban. This is a real problem.

Does the member believe that the operation of these bridges should be maintained by the government, whether it be federal, provincial or municipal, or should the bridges be privatized and given to private operators?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the New Democratic Party for her question. I am pleased to respond to the first part of her question.

As a former president of the Quebec union of municipalities, I can say that it is true that the cities of Quebec are running a \$15 billion deficit just to restore existing infrastructures. Development does not even come into it. These are the needs of the cities of Quebec, not including cities in the rest of Canada. My colleague is entirely correct. Is private enterprise the solution? The example of the Windsor tunnel, which was given earlier, shows that private enterprise is there to make money. In the long term, that is not what we want. These infrastructures have to be preserved by the provincial or municipal public administrations, provided that the federal government, which regards them as coming under federal jurisdiction, decides to pay. They lie within its jurisdiction.

I see no problem with deciding to have them administered by a city or a province, if that is easier. However, if they are under federal jurisdiction, let there be an immediate announcement in this bill that a dedicated fund will be created. That will assist the administrators or governments, which will be able to manage these infrastructures under federal jurisdiction without putting other programs into debt.

• (1720)

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask my colleague for further information about the amount of responsibility that the federal government should assume when it transfers the management of certain infrastructure.

Unfortunately, there is an enormous mess in the fisheries in regard to the Fisheries and Oceans facilities for small craft harbours. My colleague came to the Gaspésie and Îles-de-la-Madeleine region just recently to look into the railway infrastructure issues. This shows that when someone is responsible for a particular file or sector, there has to be money, too, or else we end up with a bill like the one that the Liberals introduced last year on heritage lighthouses. It was all very good in principle, but when it came time to put the principles into action and get concrete results, it turned out that there was many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The handover of harbours and wharfs is a very good example. The communities were not opposed. Everybody was thinking about it. The Province of Quebec even made a proposal to take over some of the harbours. The problem was that there was no more money in the federal program. There was not enough money to transfer it. It is all very well just to decide on a policy. But if someone does not want to be in charge of a facility any more, the money has to be made available so that when the facility is transferred, it is at least in good condition. The problem with the federal government is that when something does not suit it any longer, it transfers it to a lower order of government—the provinces or municipalities—but forgets to provide the money. The federal government wants to save the money and invest it in an array of jurisdictions that are not its own. That is the cruel reality that we face.

I thank my colleague, who is doing an excellent job in the riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

[*English*]

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to put a few comments on the record. I have listened to a lot of the debate and although there have been varying aspects of the debate we are starting to get into the discussion of what we are actually trying to do.

I want to put on the record that I support the bill. The international bridges and tunnels act has been long overdue and is necessary. Having listened to the debate, I know that most of the focus so far has been on the 24 international bridges and tunnels that carry vehicle traffic. I certainly recognize their importance for all the reasons that have been presented today but I would like to take a few minutes to talk about the international rail bridges and tunnels. Although they are fewer in number, they are an important part of our national transportation system, particularly with respect to the movement of freight. Bill C-3 applies equally to those international bridges and tunnels.

Railways have been described as the backbone of Canada's transportation system and we all know that rail is certainly one of the oldest modes of transport. Some railway companies date back to before Confederation. I have almost finished reading "The Last Spike", which tells the history of the railway that was built into western Canada. To read about the trials and tribulations that people went through to construct that national tie has enlightened me a lot in some of the difficulties that they went through but also the objective and goal that they were trying to obtain.

Government Orders

It is interesting that this past February the Canadian Pacific Railway celebrated its 125th birthday. An even older birthday was celebrated this year, the 170th birthday of the Champlain and Saint Lawrence Railroad, Canada's first railway. It was established in 1836 and ran from La Prairie to Saint Jean in Quebec. The rail lines have been an important part of the Canadian economy but also our Canadian heritage.

The importance of rail to the movement of goods and people today cannot be underestimated. There are a few things that I did not know. In 2003, 59 million passengers travelled by train using the country's commuter and tourist excursion lines and cross country service provided by VIA Rail. That is a huge number of people and is something that we should always be cognizant of when we talk about safety in infrastructure that transports that number of people.

In terms of moving goods, over 270 million tonnes of freight is shipped annually using the Canadian railways. It is still the cheapest method of shipping containers and bulk commodities over long distances. Many would argue that we have moved away reluctantly from the use of the railways, which used to be the lifeline of many of our communities, particularly in rural and western Canada, to a highway system. As the member so rightly commented, it has created a huge expense and burden on governments. How do we afford to move from one to the other and pay for both? Are there better ways to utilize the dollars we have?

There are two main national carriers, as we all know, the Canadian National and the Canadian Pacific Railways. The CN Railway's network extends from Halifax to Vancouver and Prince Rupert, through the United States to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico. CPR's network runs from Montreal to Vancouver and to Chicago and New York. These important links to the United States are assured by the ownership of and affiliations with several U.S. railways.

CNR and CPR account for about 90% of the industry's activity in revenues. It highlights how much volume there is and how important these two lines are to us. The other 10% is made up by several provincial carriers and short line railways that complete the network. Manitoba is very proud to have one of those short line networks that is establishing the rail lines that are currently being taken out of service by the majors. I am very proud to say that one of them is in my community of Brandon—Souris. I know it is doing an excellent job of providing the service.

• (1725)

A significant portion of CN and CPRs' business is trans-border traffic and traffic within the United States. This, along with increased trade with Asia, has led to a healthy bottom line. Both CN and CPR are able to compete with the U.S. railways and offer some of the lowest rail freight rates in the world.

The contribution of rail and rail bridges and tunnels to Canada's national transportation system by ensuring the movement of many millions of people and millions of tonnes of freight per year means that international rail bridges and tunnels are deserving of the same protection and the same federal government oversight as the international bridges and tunnels that carry vehicle traffic. We need to acknowledge and confirm that these are important aspects of this bill. We must include them and encompass what they are doing for

Canadians and for the rest of North America when we are talking about this particular issue.

Over the past four decades the trend has been toward deregulating the rail industry. We know that this industry is still regulated, particularly in terms of rail safety, and that is one of the emphasis the bill tries to address.

Any regulation made under Bill C-3 in the area of bridge or tunnel safety and security would only complement those that already exist. What we are trying to do is to take what we currently have and move it into the modern era, take it to today's position where we understand the concerns and the issues that people bring forward. The bill moves directly to address this.

Just as in the case of international bridges and tunnels that carry vehicles, there currently exists no formal process for approving the construction of new international rail bridges or tunnels. Bill C-3 addresses this and would fill this gap. The construction of new international rail bridges and tunnels would also have to be approved by the government.

The fact that the bill includes international rail bridges and tunnels just goes to show how valuable they are to the Canadian transportation system. They clearly fall within the scope of this bill, the intent of which is to ensure the efficient movement of goods and people over these critical structures, and the safety of the same. Just like the international vehicle bridges and tunnels, they are important to international trade and tourism and they are a source of jobs for Canadians in the transportation industry.

I will be supporting the bill. I congratulate the government for moving ahead with this legislation in a timely fashion.

• (1730)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I gave a speech earlier in the House on the bill and raised some concerns about the regulations in clauses 16, 39, and 43. Maybe the member could help out here.

Clause 16 reads:

The Governor in Council may, on the recommendation of the Minister, make regulations respecting the security and safety of international bridges and tunnels, including regulations...

(c) requiring any person or class of persons to provide to the Minister any information related to the security and safety of international bridges and tunnels.

I am a little concerned with the word "may" because it seems to indicate that it will not necessarily happen. In regard to clause 16(c), I have some concerns from the standpoint of a charter issue as well as basic rights and the rule of law.

I wonder if the member has any information whatsoever with regard to the regulation requiring persons or any class of persons to divulge information. I have no idea what the purpose is. If we cannot determine that, I wonder if maybe we should support having a clarification put into the legislation so people will understand what they are voting for.

Government Orders

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the member's comments. I listened to him earlier when he talked about the word "may". I may be mistaken, but I think that if the hon. member were to look back at most legislation, he would see that the word "may" is used when empowering a minister. I think the intent is that it gives the minister some discretion.

The member obviously has some issues and concerns. I know that he has raised them throughout this debate and in his comments. I think that is why we go to committee: to discuss these things. That is why we have committees. We have committees to follow this up because there are things that may or may not have been overlooked. We have the ability to move it on to committee, to move it into the structure where we will challenge some things and hopefully come to an agreement.

Nobody I have heard speak or to whom I have spoken is saying that it is a bad bill. I think what they are saying is that if there are some concerns and issues, we will have an opportunity to discuss them. I think that is what good government does.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, listening to the member for Brandon—Souris address his position on Bill C-3, I could not help but wonder if in fact the Conservatives are going through some sort of transformation or metamorphosis around the whole issue of regulation, especially when it comes to our transportation sector.

I think I heard the member for Brandon—Souris suggest that deregulation, when it came to the railways, was a bad thing, and that now we are looking at more of a regulated environment. If I did not hear that, I am hoping that he is at least thinking along those lines, because Bill C-3 does at least attempt to ensure that we look at improving the transportation of goods and services across the border in a way that is in the best interests of the nation and is regulated.

Does the member at least appreciate that part of the bill when he says he is supporting it? Is he in fact prepared to go a step further and ensure that the implementation of this bill does not lead us down the path of using P3s, public-private partnerships, as a mechanism?

• (1735)

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, perhaps for clarification for the member, in my comments I did state that over the past four decades there has been a trend toward deregulating the rail industry, but the industry is still regulated, particularly when it comes to terms of rail safety. That is the direction we are talking about. The purpose of the act would serve to confirm the federal government's exclusive jurisdiction. I think it clearly states that. It talks about government approval for the construction. It talks about government approval for all changes in ownership and it authorizes the government to make regulations regarding maintenance and repair, with safety and security being a vital part of that entire plan.

The Deputy Speaker: The time for questions and comments has ended. Resuming debate.

There is no further debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion is carried on division. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

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PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA ACT

Hon. Diane Finley (for the Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario) moved that Bill C-5, An Act respecting the establishment of the Public Health Agency of Canada and amending certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to begin debate on Bill C-5, an act respecting the establishment of the Public Health Agency of Canada. I thank the Minister of Health for providing me with this opportunity.

As we indicated in our Speech from the Throne, this government is committed to building a better federation in which governments come together to help Canadians realize their full potential.

By taking action on things that make us healthy or sick, through public health the Government of Canada can help Canadians make meaningful gains in their health, yielding benefits for our health system and across our economy and society. This piece of legislation represents a critical step in the government's effort to promote and protect the health of Canadians.

As members may know, in 2003 the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, launched an important discussion and debate about the state of public health in Canada. I am pleased to say that my minister was a leading voice in the protection of Canadians during that crisis. SARS provided a significant wake-up call to all governments on the need to renew and strengthen public health in Canada.

Two subsequent expert reports, one completed by Dr. David Naylor and the other by Senator Michael Kirby, pointed to the need to establish a federal focal point to address public health issues. Specific recommendations included the establishment of a Canadian public health agency and the appointment of a chief public health officer for Canada.

In response to the recommendations in the Dr. Naylor and Senator Kirby reports, the Public Health Agency of Canada was created through an order in council. However, the agency currently lacks parliamentary recognition in the form of its own enabling legislation. Unfortunately, the previous government did not have the legislation proceed advantageously through the House, but I am pleased that this government will ensure that the legislation is brought forward and passed.

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These reports also emphasized that understanding, preventing and managing chronic and infectious diseases, as well as promoting good health, is the key to a healthier population and to reducing pressures on the acute health care system.

In terms of its links to health issues, promoting good health or preventing illness helps to contribute to the sustainability of health care. Most disability or death in Canada is caused by a few leading chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, respiratory illness and diabetes. International examples have shown that by placing a greater emphasis on disease prevention, Canada could help alleviate the pressures from these diseases on the health care system.

Providing a statutory foundation would give the agency and the chief public health officer parliamentary recognition and would allow the agency and its staff to assist the Minister of Health in the exercise of the minister's powers, duties and functions in relation to public health.

This legislation is but one example of this government's commitment to protecting and promoting the health of Canadians. The Public Health Agency of Canada spends over \$500 million in programs and services that benefit the lives of Canadians each and every day. These appropriations reflect the government's recognition of the agency as a federal focal point for addressing public health issues, as recommended by the experts. It also reflects the important level of the federal government in the issues of public health.

With its roots in the federal constitutional authority for quarantine at our borders and in the 1918 influenza pandemic, there is a clear federal role in coordinating a response to infectious disease outbreaks. From the start, there has evolved a clear role in surveillance, research and knowledge sharing, which can be seen in our lab work at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, Canada's only level 4 lab. Naturally, as Manitoba MPs, we are very proud of the virology lab and look forward to its continued success.

● (1740)

Over the past century, Canadians have increasingly called upon the federal government to take action on health issues of national interest. Efforts have developed to address HIV and AIDS and chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer and diabetes, as well as programs and activities that support early childhood development, active aging and community action on health.

This government recognizes that in order to have an efficient public health system and to protect public health in Canada, we need to continue to foster collaborative relationships with the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments as well as international organizations and public health experts. This is an objective that is clearly set out in the preamble of Bill C-5.

It is also why Bill C-5 does not expand the existing federal activities relating to public health. Rather, it simply confirms our existing federal role and creates a statutory foundation for the agency. Further, it responds to provincial and territorial calls for a federal focal point with the appropriate authority and the capability to work with them in preparing for and addressing public health emergencies.

As the federal focal point, the agency is able to link into worldwide efforts in public health and with institutions such as the World Health Organization so we can ensure that best practices can be applied to Canadian settings.

Additionally, the agency worked with the provincial and territorial authorities to establish the Pan-Canadian Public Health Network as a forum for multilateral intergovernmental collaboration on public health issues that respects jurisdictional responsibilities in the areas of public health. The network includes representation from all jurisdictions and is led by a council of senior public health officials, which is currently co-chaired by the chief public health officer and the provincial medical health officer in B.C. Through the council, the network also provides policy advice through conferencing with the deputy minister of health on public health matters.

The network also includes expert groups that focus on key issues around health, such as communicable disease control, emergency preparedness and response, Canadian public health laboratory surveillance and information, injury prevention and control, and population health promotion. There is also a one-time limited task force on public health human resources.

The network represents a new way of federal-provincial-territorial collaboration on public health matters. By facilitating intergovernmental collaboration through the public health network, the agency is also able to develop and draw on scientific knowledge and expertise in order to provide the best public health advice to Canadians. As we can see, the federal government has a well established leadership role in public health, working in collaboration with the provinces, territories and other levels of government.

Moving forward with the legislation at this time reaffirms the federal government's commitment to public health and underscores the important role that the agency and the chief public health officer will play in supporting a strengthened public health system in Canada.

Let me now turn to the actual piece of legislation, which contains three major elements that collectively will help to protect and promote the health of Canadians.

First, the legislation establishes the agency as an entity separate from Health Canada but part of the health portfolio. In practice, this means that the Minister of Health will preside over the agency and will have management and direction of it. It also means that the agency will assist the minister in exercising or performing his or her ministerial powers, duties and functions in relation to public health as set out in the Department of Health Act.

Having a separate agency within the health portfolio will bring greater visibility and prominence to public health issues, while at the same time supporting policy coherence across the health sector. With the complexity of public health issues and growing public health threats, it is important that the agency be integrated as a key player in the federal system.

Government Orders

● (1745)

Further, the departmental type model will allow the agency to be part of and influence government-wide policy discussions. This is of particular importance to support effective federal efforts on key public health issues, such as pandemic preparedness. For example, the agency developed in collaboration with the provinces and territories Canada's pandemic influenza preparedness plan which is recognized by the World Health Organization as one of the most comprehensive in the world. This model will also ensure continued ministerial accountability with respect to public health issues.

The legislation also sets out the unique dual role for the chief public health officer. This dual role reflects the consensus of the Dr. Naylor and Senator Kirby reports and responds to strong expectations of the public health stakeholders and Canadians that the chief public health officer should be able to speak to Canadians on issues of public health.

What does the dual role imply? First, as deputy head of the agency, the chief public health officer will be accountable to the minister for the operation and management of the agency. In this respect the chief public health officer will be expected to advise the minister on public health matters, giving the federal lead on public health a very influential role in the policy making process. Second, the legislation also recognizes that the chief public health officer will be Canada's lead public health professional with demonstrated expertise and leadership in the field.

As such the chief public health officer will have the legislative authority to communicate directly with Canadians, provide them with information on public health matters and to prepare and publish reports on any public health issues. The legislation also requires the chief public health officer to submit to the minister for tabling in Parliament an annual report on the state of public health in Canada.

The legislation, by conferring on the chief public health officer the status of lead health professional, enhances the credibility and authority not only of the chief public health officer but also the Government of Canada more generally on public health issues. As an impartial credible voice on public health able to communicate directly with the public, the chief public health officer is a visible symbol of the federal government's commitment to protect and promote the health of Canadians.

The ability to collect, analyze, interpret, publish, distribute and protect public health information is critical in managing and controlling disease and preparing for and responding to public health emergencies. The SARS outbreak showed clearly the importance of government having not only accurate information but also the ability and the means to access that information.

That is why the legislation includes specific regulatory authorities for the collection, management and protection of health information, to ensure that the agency can receive the health information it needs to fulfill its mandate.

Specifically, the provisions provide the governor in council with a regulation-making power, to regulate, on the recommendation of the Minister of Health, the collection and management of information relating to public health, including personal information. The information gathered by the agency will continue to be subject to

the Privacy Act. Moreover, regulations made by the governor in council on the recommendation of the minister may contain provisions dealing with the protection of confidential information, including personal information.

That information is necessary for the effective functioning of the public health system, which is a lesson we learned during the SARS outbreak and which needs to be addressed before any other health emergency, such as an influenza outbreak pandemic. In light of this possibility the health information provisions in the proposed legislation are crucial to give the agency a clear legal basis for the systematic monitoring and surveillance needed to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to such an emergency in a timely manner.

● (1750)

These provisions are also needed to provide assurances to the provinces and territories that they can lawfully share information with the federal government. With such provisions, provincial and territorial ministries will have the certainty and clarity to confidently share health information with the agency. Having this power in the legislation is also critical to ensure that the collection and protection of health information is done in a manner that respects the privacy rights protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Rest assured that the information provisions in the legislation reflect the government's concern for protecting the personal health information of Canadians. As regulations are developed, we will ensure the privacy of Canadians is respected.

My colleagues and I support the legislation as it represents a critical piece in the ongoing improvements this government is making to strengthen Canada's public health system. By giving the agency its own enabling legislation and making the chief public health officer an independent critical voice for public health, the government will not only bring greater visibility to public health issues or threats facing Canadians, it will be taking a step to renew and strengthen the public health system as a whole.

It will support the agency as it continues to promote and protect the health of Canadians through leadership, partnership, innovation and action, just as it has been doing since its creation. Ultimately the legislation will give the Public Health Agency of Canada a sound legislative footing to assist the minister to protect and promote the health of Canadians. The agency is meeting, and will continue to meet, the challenges and critical responsibilities that have been given to it by the Government of Canada.

I have appreciated the opportunity to start the debate on behalf of the Minister of Health on this important piece of legislation.

Government Orders

• (1755)

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are some other points I will raise later, but the member said that the public health officer will speak directly to the people. Given that the public health officer is responsible actually to the minister, how would the member envision that direct communication with the public if indeed the responsibility is through the minister? I assume the information that goes to the public would therefore first go through the minister. Has there been a consideration of that position being more independent?

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, the legislation actually deals with that point. The role of the public health officer is very similar to that of a deputy minister, with the major exception that the chief public health officer would have the authority through the legislation to speak directly to the public.

The other issue the member may be interested in is the chief public health officer will also have the ability to provide a report to the House on public health issues that he or she feels are important to Canadians. Canadians will be very pleased to have an independent credible voice if and when, but hopefully never, a pandemic occurred. This is something that did not exist when there seemed to be a lot of confusion on how to respond to the SARS crisis.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health whether the new agency, the Public Health Agency of Canada, has more powers? Its role and mission are quite broad. How will the department meet all the expectations and carry out the whole mission set for it now?

We know officials were transferred, because 1,400 public officials were transferred from Health Canada to the Public Health Agency. Now, there are 2,000 officials, because the agency is operating, as we know. We are simply discussing the legislation that will give it its powers, the bill before us today. I would like to ask the Parliamentary Secretary of the Minister of Health whether, with all the powers this bill will give it, it will have more employees? I would say the answer is yes, in order to meet the provisions of the legislation.

[*English*]

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, it is important to understand that this is a machinery piece of legislation. The powers that this legislation would help streamline already exist under the mandate of the health minister. If we had more time I could explain it in more detail, but one way to look at it is it would be a different way of allocating responsibility to ensure that if a pandemic strikes, we would be able to act quickly as a nation, including the provinces.

It is unique in the sense that the chief public health officer would have the ability to speak directly to Canadians. The powers to which the member was referring already exist. There would be no extension of powers per se. The powers are already within the mandate of the minister.

• (1800)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Toronto was hit by SARS a few years ago. There was a great deal of concern at that time as to what kind of protocol there would be at

the airports. There seems to be different practices in different airports and very little collection of central information. In Toronto not only is there Pearson International Airport but there is a tiny airport that wants to expand its flights from not just within Canada but also flights from elsewhere. It gives me great concern that we would have airports that have different protocols and that, in my reading of this bill, the public health officer would not seem to have any jurisdiction over such agencies as airports.

How would the member envision this bill trying to stop this loophole so that we would have a clear protocol that is mandated by the public health officer so that we could be safe and secure? Not that there would be another SARS crisis, but we really should have clearly demonstrated regulations and standards in airports. How would the bill deal with this issue?

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right that there was confusion when SARS hit. I am pleased to say that the current Minister of Health when he was the Ontario health minister showed a great deal of leadership at that time and received kudos from all parties and stakeholders for his leadership.

To answer the specific question, the Government of Canada already has significant powers in the event of an emergency under the Emergencies Act and the Emergency Preparedness Act. Combining those two acts with the quarantine powers in the new Quarantine Act which was passed in the last session of Parliament and with this current bill would deal with any foreseeable scenarios. One has to look at the bill in conjunction with the other three acts that I have mentioned.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would certainly agree with the parliamentary secretary when he said that there is not much point in having a chief public health officer unless that person is prepared to speak to Canadians on important matters. This is the case in the United States where the equivalent position, the Surgeon General, heads up many important public health campaigns, such as the movement to stop drinking during pregnancy because it leads to fetal alcohol syndrome.

Here in this country a motion regarding putting labels on all alcohol beverage containers has been languishing because of Liberal inaction. Conservative members supported that motion which was passed almost unanimously by Parliament. I would like to ask the member if he will indicate to Canadians, who are waiting desperately for action on this issue, that he is prepared to have all alcohol beverage containers contain the wording that the chief public health officer of Canada warns everyone to avoid drinking during pregnancy.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, the issue that the member raises is a serious one. As health critic in the last session, we spent a lot of time looking at this issue in the health committee. We have a crisis with fetal alcohol syndrome and other ailments pertaining to alcohol related matters deal.

Government Orders

The Public Health Agency of Canada may look at an issue like this in conjunction with Health Canada. Extensive consultation took place in the last session of Parliament. The intent of the member's question is excellent. We need to deal with this crisis of drinking while potentially carrying a future person. There are lots of social consequences to that.

If the member would like to bring suggestions to the health committee, the stakeholders or myself, I would be happy to address it. However, I think the discussion today is on the broader issue of trying to set the machinery in place, so that there is a mechanism to deal with issues such as the member has raised but also a worldwide pandemic. I think that was the seed that brought the legislation to where it is today. I hope that members in the House of Commons will support the legislation, so we can deal with the potential of a severe pandemic or other public health concerns.

● (1805)

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I wish to congratulate our new Minister of Health on the introduction of Bill C-5 because I believe it is his first piece of legislation as a federal minister of the Crown.

This bill, which would establish the Public Health Agency of Canada with a legislative mandate, was introduced in the last Parliament. The agency itself was created more than two years ago by order in council and was supported in its initial stages and first growth period through budget allocations approved by Parliament. This bill solidifies the agency as an integral part of the Canadian health network.

I am sure Canada's new Minister of Health, the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, did not require much persuasion to introduce this bill. As Ontario's minister of health during the SARS crisis, he experienced both the need for and the desirability of a federal source of support, federal lab based scientific information, a federal communications capability, and federal international contacts. His own experience would lead him to a true appreciation of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

I am also sure the minister would want me to commend the former minister of public health, the member for St. Paul's, for her leadership on this file over the last couple of years. Her leadership gave birth to the Public Health Agency of Canada and that leadership nurtured it along to where it is today.

At this time I would also like to thank Dr. Butler-Jones for his dedication as the Chief Medical Officer of Health Canada and essentially the captain of the team of public health professionals at the agency.

As Canadians worry about new and frightening communicable diseases like SARS, the potential bird flu and others not yet identified, they can be encouraged by the capabilities of the Public Health Agency of Canada. Bill C-5 deserves the support of this House because our agency deserves to be secured for the future by an act of Parliament.

For many years Canadians have been concerned about the state of the health care system. They ask if it will accommodate them when they get sick and need care, and that is a legitimate question. A reading of history shows that public health measures have improved

more people's health over time than any amount of care given after they have fallen ill. Clean water, sewage treatment and mass immunization projects, for example, have prevented more illness and death than anything else.

Let us pass this bill quickly, so that we can all focus on the public health challenges that face us. For example, we are witnessing a resurgence of tuberculosis with a local outbreak in the constituency of Churchill, Manitoba. Last week, officials from the affected community were unable to meet with those responsible at Health Canada and were shuffled off to officials at the Department of Indian Affairs who have no jurisdiction over health. I am totally confident that our new Minister of Health will attend to this matter quickly.

There is a deep concern in the north about the imminent arrival of so many outsiders, for example, workers for the Mackenzie Valley pipeline project and apparently about 2,500 members of the armed forces. People are particularly concerned about sexually transmitted diseases and some are actually referring to the pipeline as the new AIDS highway. It seems to me that we need to develop quickly a new set of public health strategies to prepare for this influx of people and to protect an already vulnerable indigenous population.

With the extreme weather events of the past few years, we have seen catastrophes like Katrina imperil people's health and even their lives. In addition to weather events, some people in B.C., for example, live on a fault line which could give rise to a serious earthquake. Apparently, hundreds of schools in B.C. are not built to earthquake standards. All these phenomena give rise to public health concerns. This House needs to be reassured that plans and resources are regularly updated to protect the health of Canadians.

● (1810)

Recently, some physicians have suggested that the biggest threat to the long term health and well-being of Canadians is the developing epidemic of obesity. This House will want to know what the minister is planning a response to this newly identified threat.

In addition, prescription drug therapy is increasing. Use has increased 47% in the last seven years. In 2004 there were 375,000 prescriptions from retail pharmacies alone, not to mention prescriptions dispensed within hospitals and other institutions.

The good news is that drug therapy is often replacing surgery and expensive hospital stays as the therapy of choice. The bad news is that adverse reactions to prescription drugs are estimated to represent about 30% of admissions to hospital, and that does not even take into account adverse reactions experienced by patients already in hospital.

We have experienced Vioxx, Celebrex and Propulsid and know of deaths based upon these drugs. It is becoming a fact that the sheer size of the population involved in the ingestion or injection of prescription drugs propels the clinical trials and the eventual approval of these drugs into an issue that could be considered as public health.

I support the establishment of the Public Health Agency of Canada, but I am also anxious to move beyond Bill C-5 in order to address some of the very real threats to public health that are emerging in Canada every day.

Government Orders

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her comments and support for the bill. The member spoke about bringing the bill forward and hopefully getting it through the House quickly. I am obviously very supportive of that as well.

I would like to ask the member, why did the previous government not act on this legislation earlier? It was two years in order in council and the legislation was tabled for first reading in November of last year. It did not even make it to second reading. This makes one question the commitment of the previous government to the Public Health Agency of Canada given that it had potentially up to 13 years to implement it and certainly five years after SARS.

Could the member tell us why it took so long for the previous government to even table the legislation?

• (1815)

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is questioning the commitment of the previous government to the agency and its work. In this place, it seems to me that the best way to measure commitment is to count the dollars that flow to ensure something happens.

The agency was created by order in council, but it was fully supported each step of the way. In other words, somebody was hired first to set it up and that somebody had to find space, and then rent that space or renovate it. That someone begins to hire staff. The agency did not appear out of thin air as a fully functional entity.

Therefore, there was some time between the actual creation of it by order in council and the assignment of moneys to it in ever increasing amounts to the point where there was an appropriateness for having a bill.

As far as the bill not getting past second reading, I would look to the member opposite and his party who voted against the government and brought down the House. Had his party not done this, the previous government would have delivered this bill.

Bill C-5 is exactly the same, word for word, as the earlier bill. I do not mind that. I am enthusiastic about what I hear from the other side in the same manner as the government seems to be so enthusiastic about its bill on bridges and tunnels, which is another identical bill. The government was so enthusiastic that about 10 of its members rose and sang its praises. Liberal bills are proving to be quite valuable. I appreciate the support members of the new government are giving them.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the former Liberal government certainly talked a lot about public health and the former health minister talked a lot about giving all grade 3 kids the opportunity to learn to swim so they would not drown.

We also heard a lot of talk about childhood obesity and the need to ensure there were programs in the schools to teach young children to know what kind of healthy food they should be eating and to ensure this food was accessible in schools.

We heard a lot of talk about cancer prevention but I saw nothing over the last few years in the way of a public health funding commitment in this area, funding that is desperately needed.

Clause 20 of the bill mentions an annual report. Aside from an annual report and some regulation capacity, what does the hon. member see in the bill that could give us hope that we would finally see some funding, whether it is for a food program in schools or helping kids to learn how to swim so there are no drownings, all of which has been talked about by many public health officials and the former minister of health?

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged by the interest the new member for Trinity—Spadina has shown in all these public health measures which she described and which the former minister did mention in some of her speeches.

However, learning to swim is usually the purview of the YMCA or the municipal government. Public health obesity programs are usually decided upon by more local authorities and even food programs in schools are usually not the purview of the federal government.

However I can understand the member's interest in those things because it represents activities of the level of government from which she came to this place. In fact, the role of the federal government, which is to transfer money to the provinces for those kinds of measures, both public health measures and health care measures, is our responsibility. The public health agency creates a framework for coordination and action, as described by the parliamentary secretary.

However we do not spend a lot of time in this place debating food programs in schools or learn to swim programs.

• (1820)

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, perhaps if we spent more time in the House debating food programs we would have fewer children in this country going to bed hungry every night and perhaps it would bring us a little closer to what is really happening in the homes on the streets that we live in all of our cities and towns.

The member who brought forth the bill has referred to this as a machinery bill. I understand the point that he is making. It is a mechanical bill to pull pieces together. However that does not in any way mean that it is not a bill that can show vision. It can be a machinery bill and show vision for the people of Canada about their public health agency.

I did not find much reference to interdisciplinary work with other ministries. If, for instance, tomorrow morning there were a nuclear spill, where in the bill does it say what ministries would take responsibility or how they would coordinate their responsibilities? Surely a number of ministries would have very significant life saving responsibilities in such a tragedy but I see no reference for the agency to be working cross government with other departments.

I was hoping that perhaps the member could either refer me to the part of the bill that I might have missed or explain to me how that could happen.

Government Orders

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in the member's comments about the need for vision. It was exactly that need for vision and the need for across the department coordination that led the last Liberal government to establish a new department called the Department of Emergency Preparedness and Public Safety because all these things have to do with public safety. In any such event as a nuclear accident or some such thing, it would be that minister and that department that would lead, and then all relevant departments would participate, the public health agency being one of those, and meetings would be convened with that set of ministers to each take on their own roles in solving the problem and guaranteeing public safety.

I take as a compliment her idea of this coordination and cooperation in a horizontal way, but I can assure her that one department would be in charge and one minister and that would be the minister of public safety and emergency preparedness.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the new critic for health, I join today's debate with interest. The bill proposes legislation that will give the new Public Health Agency of Canada all its powers. It is currently operating, but no legislation has yet given it its powers and responsibilities.

It must be noted that this is a bill that comes from the Liberal government. In February 2004, the creation of a public health agency was announced. The new agency was to ensure that Canada was well connected at the national and international level in health matters and that there was a network responsible for monitoring diseases and responding in an emergency. A budget of \$404 million was attached to it. The Public Health Agency of Canada was under the responsibility of the Department of Health, and so \$404 million of Health Canada's budget was allocated to the new Public Health Agency of Canada. A further \$665 million has been added to that budget. So the budget was increased. Employees who worked at Health Canada were transferred to the new Public Health Agency of Canada. It started with 1,400 employees. If I am wrong, I would appreciate someone correcting me. This new agency is operating at present, and there are now 2,000 employees working in the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The total budget is broken down as follows: \$100 million to improve public health; \$300 million for new vaccination programs; \$100 million to improve the surveillance system; and \$165 million spread over two years for other federal initiatives. That last point is cause for concern. What does that mean, "federal initiatives"? We do not have enough information to discuss this new \$165 million that will be spent on new federal initiatives.

There is also a plan to develop strategies with the provinces and territories. This new Public Health Agency of Canada will have six regional offices, including one in Quebec City.

The new Bill C-5 that we are discussing today is an extension of the defunct Bill C-75, which was introduced on November 16, 2005. It also allowed the government to provide minimal details about the agency's obligations, including submitting an annual report to this House. The new director of this new agency, the Chief Public Health Officer, will also have to report to Parliament in an annual report. The intention was to clarify the agency's mandate and obligations.

The bill also explained the reasoning behind the new agency. The idea was to have an autonomous body in an area that would no longer come under the government. The new agency is therefore much more autonomous. It comes under the authority of the Minister of Health, naturally, but it is separate from the government. The idea was to grant certain powers with regard to quarantine.

The same spirit underlying Bill C-75 is now found in Bill C-5. The Bloc Québécois finds it a bit suspicious that the new Conservative government is able to approve such a bill. I could quote the new Prime Minister and the Minister of Health. They said that there should be no more intrusions into areas of provincial jurisdiction and no further use of the provinces' spending authority. The Prime Minister made big promises in Montreal in front of the business community.

● (1825)

Yet he is able to agree to a bill that the Bloc Québécois feels will allow still more intrusions into areas of provincial jurisdiction.

The Minister of Health also made this promise. He said that respecting the provinces meant respecting areas of provincial jurisdiction and providing a framework for spending authority. The Minister of Health will not necessarily respect provincial jurisdiction. He even said that respecting provincial jurisdiction meant taking a bit more time to act. The Bloc Québécois would have liked it if the new government had taken the time to really analyse the impact on the provinces. We know that there is an act—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but her time is up.

Pursuant to order made Thursday, April 27, 2006, the House shall now resolve itself into committee of the whole to consider Government Business No. 5.

[*English*]

I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

[*For continuation of proceedings see part B*]

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Monday, May 1, 2006
(Part B)**

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 1, 2006

[Continuation of proceedings from part A]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

DARFUR

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 5, Mr. Bill Blaikie in the chair)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) moved:

That this Committee take note of the on-going crisis in Darfur.

• (1830)

The Chair: Before I begin the debate, I would like to remind the House that during the debate this evening members will be recognized for 10 minutes in debate, followed by 10 minutes in questions and comments.

Earlier today a special motion was adopted which allows members to divide their time, if they so indicate to the Chair. Furthermore, no dilatory motions are to be received by the Chair, no quorum calls or requests for unanimous consent. Finally, the time provided for this debate is extended by one hour for a total of five hours of debate.

I might also remind members that this is committee of the whole format, so members do not have to sit in their ordinary chairs. People may gather down at this end around the table for a more intimate debate, if they choose to participate in that way.

The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Chair, we very much appreciate you presiding over this important debate this evening. While we will miss your interventions in this place, we know that you are making a great contribution through your activities in the chair.

On behalf of the government, I want to begin the debate by stating emphatically the government's position in doing all we can to help achieve peace in Sudan and continue to ensure that this is a major policy initiative and priority for Canada.

I have just returned from the NATO foreign ministers gathering that took place in Sofia, Bulgaria, where the tragic and pressing situation in Darfur was discussed at length. All my international

colleagues in the world community clearly understand that we have to work together, collectively, to help stop this conflict now.

It is critical that we continue to support African efforts to resolve this conflict and to bring whatever leverage the international community can muster to put pressure on all the various parties fighting in Darfur to take responsibility themselves for the violence being perpetrated against the most vulnerable of Sudan's citizens. Canada has been an active and important player in this international effort.

Tonight the government is listening to Canadians. We are listening to the voices of those who demonstrated in support of the people of Darfur over the weekend. We are encouraged by the fact that Canadians are engaged and in some cases enraged, as they pay attention to the plight of the almost 2 million people who have been forced from their homes by this conflict. Student organization such as STAND, Students Taking Action Now: Darfur, and many others in our country are putting pressure and bringing forward helpful suggestions.

I note the presence in the gallery of David Kilgour, who for many years championed this cause. We are pleased to see him back in the nation's capital.

It is important, and we wish to hear the voices and ideas of hon. members present who represent their constituents from around the country. We should be doing so in concert with our partners in the African Union and those in the United Nations and other international organizations.

This is the cut and thrust of this evening's debate. The government is listening to the collective wisdom of Parliament. Canada is not only ready to play an important role in these efforts. As hon. members know, we presently are engaged and are prepared to do more. My colleagues, on behalf of the government, will speak to this in greater detail this evening, including the minister responsible for CIDA and my parliamentary secretary, the member for Calgary East.

The pursuit of peace in Sudan and its region represents huge challenges for all. To provide context to the situation that we are considering tonight, I will say a few words about the region, its history and the current situation.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Sudan is the largest African country and has the sixth largest population. This country has been the theatre of civil wars and has suffered chronic instability for the greater part of the past 50 years. Sudan is located in what is historically the poorest area of the world and the most inclined to conflict. Establishing peace in the area requires addressing and resolving the various conflicts that are tearing Sudan apart. The impact of the conflicts does not stop at the national borders. It must also be addressed and resolved in the context of the region and the continent.

● (1835)

[*English*]

It was only a year ago that Sudan's long-standing north-south civil war was brought to a conclusion. This conflict had a devastating toll, taking an estimated two million lives and displacing upward of four million. The impact of the north-south conflict continues to be felt and requires a massive Sudanese and international effort to build the necessary infrastructure to support the long term development of the region and to ensure that it does not again lapse into conflict.

However, the fragile peace agreement between north and south, called the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, may be jeopardized by the continuing conflict in northern Uganda and the recent incursions by the Lord's Resistance Army in southern Sudan. I have recently instructed officials to step up Canada's diplomatic efforts with partner countries to address the root causes of the Ugandan humanitarian crisis, efforts which we hope will also help Sudan.

Canada is proud to have played an important role in the peace process that ended the north-south war and we are continuing this role, including through our participation in the United Nations peacekeeping force, which has been deployed to oversee the agreement.

The reason I am taking time to talk about the north-south agreement tonight, in the context of our debate on Darfur, is that we cannot hope to address the tragic plight of the people of Darfur out of the context of peace in the whole of the Sudan. The regions and, more important, governments impact very directly on one another in Africa, as the members know.

Let me now turn to Darfur, a conflict which erupted in early 2003 due greatly to the fear of the people of Darfur that their communities would continue to be marginalized and denied essential services in the wake of a north-south peace agreement which was touted as comprehensive, but did not take into account their needs.

Today the conflict continues, despite a humanitarian ceasefire agreement voluntarily entered into by the warring parties in the spring of 2004. Who are these warring parties? The conflict in Darfur is one which has pitted community against community. The population is predominantly Muslim, but divided upon ethnic and tribal lines, as well as being pastoral and nomadic livelihoods.

[*Translation*]

The United Nations estimates that violence in Darfur, in western Sudan, has displaced roughly 2 million people. Today, 200,000 refugees are living in camps in Chad in disastrous conditions. Canada remains deeply concerned by the continuing violence and

the persistent culture of impunity in Darfur, and especially by the attacks on civilians.

[*English*]

Violence continues in Darfur because parties are not abiding by their own agreements. However, the latest reports from the African Union-led Darfur peace talks in Abuja are ongoing. While they may be encouraging, the next days will be critical. All parties, working through the agreement, have decided to extend the talks by 48 hours. This was granted on Sunday.

I spoke with Canadian officials as recently as moments before this debate began this evening. They are doing tremendous work to assist the process both in Africa and, as they have previously, at the United Nations in New York. We commend those officials for their work.

I have written as well to all participants encouraging the acceptance of the peace agreement. Although imperfect, it provides a political framework and an ongoing process to follow. All international parties are calling for the agreement to go forward and be accepted. It makes significant progress on the issues that are important: political participation; bringing rebel factions into the Sudan army; democracy building; recognizing parties, things that we take for granted; wealth sharing; humanitarian and development and infrastructure needs; compensation and help to those people who have been displaced; and most importantly, an end to the violence. Canada has done a great deal. We have been consistent and generous.

We all need to encourage other international parties to do the same and to honour their commitments. Canada's continued presence at the talks and our financial support to the African Union has facilitated the process. I mentioned the letters that were sent, at the urging of our officials there, to the various rebel leaders and the government of Sudan urging them to reach an agreement that all parties could uphold.

This international community has supported the talks for some time and the time has come for an agreement. The people of Darfur and indeed the international community expect nothing less. Canada again commends the tireless efforts of the African Union mediation team which has been instrumental in the progress achieved thus far.

However, this political settlement is long overdue when considered against the backdrop of the continued violence and suffering in Darfur. Reaching an agreement is only the first step, and implementation and reconciliation must follow quickly. Canada will be there to support both.

I would like to tell the House more about what Canada has done to date to help the people of Darfur and assist in resolving the conflict itself. The African Union has stepped up to the plate to lead international efforts to resolve the conflict. It has deployed a multinational force of over 7,700 military police and civilian personnel. The African Union's mission in Sudan, AMIS as it is known, is to encourage the parties to live up to their agreements, cease attacks on civilians, and establish the conditions necessary for the success of any peaceful agreement.

Government Orders

Canada has assumed an internationally recognized leadership role in support of the African Union's peacekeeping mission. We are currently one of the mission's top donors. Our contributions to AMIS total \$170 million in logistic, financial and equipment support necessary to allow the mission to fulfill its mandate. We have supplied helicopters, fixed wing aircraft, armoured personnel carriers to provide the mobility necessary for the force's effectiveness, and we are continuing to provide military police and civilian experts to assist in the carrying out of their operations.

The AU mission has achieved much under exceptionally difficult circumstances. Those circumstances would have taxed even the most experienced and well equipped international forces, but both the AU and the wider global community recognized that the time is here, and the time is right for a new phase of international engagement, particularly in the hope that things will be settled at the Abuja peace talks.

This situation demands a new level of international engagement and has led to a request from the African Union to the United Nations to begin planning for the transition of the AU mission to a UN mission. That will integrate the peacekeeping force with an ongoing humanitarian, political, and development and peacekeeping effort into one cohesive fold. The UN planning effort is well engaged and Canada hopes for a transition to the UN mission by early fall.

We welcome the AU's request to the UN. We will continue to work closely with both and encourage them and others to provide the necessary support to succeed in the process. While assisting the AU mission, we will also engage in other programs to help build the conditions necessary for lasting peace. Through my department's role and the Global Peace and Security Fund, we are providing support for a community arms control and disarmament program led by the United Nations.

• (1840)

We work with civilian police, help to ensure the safety of communities, and provide assistance to train police and military forces on international human rights and humanitarian law.

I want to restate that Canada has been involved in the international effort to prevent the escalation and instability within the region, and to improve the humanitarian situation in Sudan. Canada will continue to monitor the situation in the future. We recognize the need to get these peace talks finished and then get on with the important job, the heavy lifting that will be expected.

We encourage all members to make their contributions here this evening. We are looking forward to hearing their advice and input. The peace agreement is hanging in the balance this evening and we know that the time is now. We emphatically encourage all participants in the peace talks to come to an agreement. Vigorous diplomatic efforts will continue in order to end the violence in a comprehensive ceasefire that will allow the entire region to get back to bringing people home and ending the suffering in the Sudan.

• (1845)

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the minister for his extensive review of what has taken place up to now, Canada's extensive contribution to what is taking place in Darfur, and his recognition that the previous

contribution was very much balanced around the fact that this was an African Union mission supported by the United Nations, one where Canada could play its most important role by supporting the African Union.

He made it very clear tonight that the prospects for a lasting peace in the region and the end of the suffering for the people there requires a more extensive form of international commitment, which would include diplomatic, United Nations and other activities. He would appreciate, of course, that all of us understand that in this type of situation, the primary condition for peace is the establishment of stability. That stability can only come with the provision of troops that have rules of engagement which would allow them to enforce a mission which would establish that. The African Union have done their best. We have supported them with equipment, helicopters, mobile vehicles and money, as the minister has said.

Is it now time that we can expect the government to either share with the House or with the Canadian people its plans for the deployment of troops in this area? Do we have the troops available should they be called upon to take part in a United Nations mission? The minister seemed to indicate clearly to the House this evening that it is expected to come forward shortly?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, let me first thank the hon. leader of the official opposition for his intervention, and of course for his commitment and previous involvement in the effort in the Sudan.

Simply put, the request has not been made, nor do I believe that we should speculate at this point on troops being deployed from this country. I believe, as far as capacity is concerned, that this is an issue we can examine. It is an issue more appropriately put to the Minister of National Defence.

However, the Government of Canada will certainly continue to commit all efforts, first and foremost, to pursue the diplomatic means that we have been pursuing to date. We believe that we are so close with respect to the peace process. We are hearing very encouraging things, although clearly, this is volatile and changes almost hourly, based on recent reports.

The Prime Minister said very clearly that there has been no final decision taken, nor will a decision be taken with respect to troops. Canada currently supports aims through the provision of a small number of Canadian Forces who are there in a supportive role, as are civilian police. We will be relying upon advice that we will receive this evening and ongoing monitoring on the ground in Darfur. Canada is committed to continue to play as supportive a role as we can throughout the region.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would first like to congratulate the minister on his speech, which gives us a little more information on Canada's role in this matter.

Government Orders

I was born not too far from there. Thus, I know the region, which has a history of violence. This has been going on for generations. From one tenuous peace signing to another, the same patterns often repeat themselves.

This calls to mind what was happening in many African countries at the dawn of their independence in the 1960s. Similar types of conflicts persisted even after agreements were signed that normally would have brought about lasting peace in Africa. However, our history has been different and, as we are seeing, history repeats itself.

A mistake that is often pointed out by observers—including anthropologists and sociologists—is that the necessary conditions have not been established or suitably reinforced to allow sufficient emphasis on education and culture in the minds of the people in African communities, which are often divided based on ethnicity, clans and so on. After all, it has been said that to educate a child is to educate a nation. It is about taking charge of one's future.

General William Balfour, a Scotsman who lived in Nigeria prior to its independence, once said, "One does not bring fruit to trees; one waits for the fruit to grow". From this point of view, what can the minister tell us regarding what will happen beyond the peace signing, assuming there is a desire for a lasting peace?

● (1850)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, a very big thank you to my dear colleague. He has provided a profound and very personal perspective to the debate this evening. I wish to congratulate him for his contribution.

Canada is also working to promote stability, although it is a slow process, and the reconstruction of Sudan by helping establish new government institutions and promoting federalism in the country.

We are also helping civilian organizations and providing resources to community organizations working at the local level for projects that promote human rights and good governance, access to justice and conflict resolution.

Our government is working with international partners. This evening provides an opportunity for all members present to express their thoughts about and visions for the future of the region and Canada's future participation.

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the remarks made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. As he knows, we have just marked Holocaust Memorial Day. On that occasion we heard from many noted members of the Jewish community, who in particular have a lot to teach us in terms of genocide. Darfur, in fact, represents the first genocide of the 21st century. That I think helps bring all of this into perspective.

My question relates to the previous question asked about Canada's policy vis-à-vis aid, what happens after an agreement, and how do we help to sustain a population that is suffering in terms of adequate food and nutrition? Can the minister tell us if it is actually true, as we heard the news this week about United Nations organizations requiring reductions in caloric intake per individual in this region? In fact, is it true that Canada had cut its contribution of food aid from \$20 million to \$5 million, thereby contributing to this very serious

problem and the reduced value of food that was left for members of this region in order to survive?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, first I want to thank my colleague from Winnipeg for her interest and participation in tonight's debate. I want to reference the comment she made at the outset regarding genocide. I know that some members, including the former minister of justice who is present here, have referenced this in such a way.

I would just state emphatically that it does not matter what we call it, it has to stop. As for the focus around the use of the word, albeit it may be a final determination that it constitutes genocide and this is of course a definition that comes about from proceedings that are still ongoing, it is something that the UN special adviser on the prevention of genocide has stated and has given and provided commentary on. Yet I think it is the real situation and the people who are suffering that has to be the focal point.

This brings me to the question. I believe that the premise put forward by the hon. member is factually incorrect. I do not believe that it is in fact the case that Canada has reduced its aid to the region, as she has referred to it. The minister of CIDA will be here to talk about the international contribution that Canada has made and continues to make. Bearing witness to what we are seeing here, to the interest within our country, and to the ongoing commitment that we have made to the people of Sudan, clearly Canada can and will do more and will continue to keep faith and solidarity with the people of Sudan.

I am most encouraged by the level of interest and participation that we are seeing throughout the country in debates such as this. We must move on and move forward together with our international partners to see that we do not in any way waver in our commitment to the people of Sudan at this critical hour.

● (1855)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will share the time I have been given to speak with the member from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

I rise today in this House to appeal to our international responsibility, our responsibility to protect the most vulnerable, our responsibility to act, our responsibility to combat impunity, our responsibility to human solidarity.

The recent developments in Darfur are both encouraging and disturbing. They are encouraging because the African Union last month agreed that its mission in Darfur should be transformed into a United Nations peacekeeping mission. They are encouraging because the Sudanese government accepted the peace proposal of the African Union mediators yesterday, although the main rebel groups have so far refused to accept it.

The humanitarian situation, however, is very disturbing and continues to worsen, as this debate has clearly shown. The World Food Programme last week announced that, for lack of money, it must now cut in half the daily food rations distributed in Darfur in May.

Government Orders

Violence and the humanitarian crisis have caused the deaths of 200,000 to 300,000 people in Darfur since the beginning of the crisis in 2003. I think that the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed the seriousness of the situation well.

Yes, we Canadians have a responsibility towards the Darfur refugees and towards peace in Sudan.

The Liberal government fulfilled this responsibility by increasing political, diplomatic, military and development initiatives in order to support the efforts to resolve the conflict. I thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs for having mentioned it. I would like to mention the role of the right honourable member for LaSalle—Émard, who as prime minister demonstrated his leadership on this issue.

Canadians hope that the current government is equally concerned about the situation in Darfur and just as determined to act. Again I thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs for having expressed the government's concern. Since, until now, the Prime Minister had not made any official statements pertaining specifically to Darfur or Sudan since he took office.

We know that the Prime Minister did not renew the mandate of the prime ministerial advisory team on Sudan, set up by the right honourable member from LaSalle—Émard. The purpose of this multidisciplinary team, composed of my colleagues Senators Jaffer and Dallaire, and the Prime Minister's personal representative, was to broaden the Canadian contribution to seeking a solution to the conflict.

It goes without saying: the Prime Minister is completely within his rights to want a new advisory team, appointed and selected by him, but he has chosen to appoint no one.

[*English*]

My colleagues, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca and the member for Mount Royal, will also outline the official opposition's proposals for what we hope will be a most robust engagement from the Canadian government, but allow me to concentrate on a few measures.

Canada, as one of the biggest donors to the world food program, should lead an international effort to get donors to fill the shortfall in the WFP's appeal for Sudan. The current government must increase its logistical assistance to the African Union mission in Sudan. The government must push for the chapter 7 deployment of UN troops to Darfur to protect civilians. The government should be forceful in proposing Canadian logistical expertise to the United Nations mission.

Canada can also offer training via the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre to member countries that are part of the UN force, their police contingents and civilian aid workers to help them work together in a complex peace operation. Getting civilian aid workers, civilians, soldiers and police officers from different countries and cultures working together in a peace operation is a difficult thing to do, but Canada has proven know-how in this area and it is an important contribution we could make.

We also call on the government to provide increased funding and Canadian expertise to the International Criminal Court and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in order for them to increase

the scope of their inquiries in Darfur and to bring those guilty of war crimes to justice.

• (1900)

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, since my colleagues will add other proposals, I will say that, as more and more voices are being raised to criticize the lack of interest of western governments in the situation in Darfur, the Government of Canada should above all not distinguish itself by a lack of leadership. On the contrary, it should increase its efforts, since such is Canada's calling: to be a good citizen of the world, dedicated to the cause of peace and justice.

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to pursue the member's very serious emphasis on aid and international assistance efforts in the region of Darfur, since this is a matter that is at least something we can handle, deal with and work on if in fact there is a serious shortfall in the Canadian contribution to the provision of food and other assistance in the region.

I asked the minister earlier whether or not Canada was missing the mark and had dropped its aid from \$20 million to \$5 million, thereby contributing to the reduced caloric intake of each of the individuals in the region who are seriously undernourished and malnourished. He said he did not believe that was the case.

I am wondering if the member from the Liberal Party has any ideas about whether or not there has been a reduction in funds from the time that he was in government. What is his understanding of the present levels of aid for people in the region? What other ideas does he have for, as I understand it, the 3.5 million people currently in need of humanitarian assistance in Darfur at the present time?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Chair, this is a very important question. It would be very interesting to hear the answer of the CIDA minister, who is coming later, because the last thing we need to do at this time is decrease our help. To the contrary, I have called on the government to increase it, because if it is true that the capacity of the program to give calories to the people is decreasing, if I understand it well, what they want to do is to keep a reserve for July and August when it is clear that at that time a famine may come about. If that is the case, then Canada must do more. It is certainly an urgent situation. We must never do less. We must do more.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for his remarks, but I would point out one thing, which is that the previous government and this one, to the credit of both governments, have so far contributed over \$218 million to the situation.

Simple dollars of course are not the solution and the member alluded to some of the things that perhaps are. He talked about training and getting a multinational civilian force together to go in and address some of the issues on the ground in Darfur. I would like to ask him if he has given any thought to the serious question of how many people we are talking about.

Government Orders

Where they are going to come from? I think it is important that we consider where the people on the ground in Darfur are going to come from. Are they going to come from the west? Are they going to come from Africa? How long will it take to get together a training program? If it were run by Canada, we are very good at training, but how long would it take to get something like that together, to gather the people to be trained, get them trained and get them over there on the ground?

It is a good concept, but I am afraid that it might just take a little too long to have any effect on what is happening on the ground right now. I would like the hon. member's comments on that.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Chair, I strongly think that the African Union has done its best, but it is requesting the help of the United Nations and that means the developed countries. Otherwise, why call on the United Nations?

Canada must certainly be part of it because we have a lot of expertise and the capacity to help with this kind of training, and I will also add the police training. Also, I would say to focus on what Senator Jaffer did so much of in helping in the awful situation of the women in the refugee camps. Yes, Canada has a lot to do, and we cannot do everything, but it is clear that we need to do more even though we have done a lot.

● (1905)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Chair, last week we heard across the world echoes of “never again” as we remembered the Holocaust and yet all of us in the House know that “never again” has occurred time and time again, from Angola to Liberia, Sierra Leone to the Congo, and now to Darfur.

The United States has called this a genocide. The United Nations has called Darfur the worst humanitarian catastrophe in the world today. Despite a dizzying array of treaties and conventions to protect innocent civilians, we have failed to put action behind those treaties and conventions and failed to make them live, breathe and function as they were intended to.

Right now we are seeing peace negotiations take place in Abuja, but if we look at Khartoum's behaviour, the conflict in the south and what has been done in Darfur, a leopard does not change its spots and Khartoum will not change its. Khartoum is engaged in a very clever and cynical game of engaging in false peace negotiations with the international community, leading all of us down a garden path in the hope that peace can come and that Khartoum will live up to the obligations it signed on to. However, in reality, it will not do that.

Over the last year and a half, despite signing on to other peace agreements, Khartoum has failed to disarm the Janjaweed and it continues to support them. The Janjaweed continue to maintain their state-sponsored terrorism of the people in Darfur and it continues to murder, rape and pillage innocent civilians.

Khartoum has led us all down the garden path and I have very little hope that it will live up to the obligations that no doubt will be signed on to in Abuja. This is something the Minister of Foreign Affairs must be very cognizant of. I agree with allowing the negotiations to finish but we need to determine, in a short period of time, whether Khartoum is living up to these obligations.

The ask is simple. First, Canada should call for and lead a chapter 7 peacemaking initiative into Darfur to protect civilian lives. We will not and cannot do it alone. We must ask the United Nations, which has agreed to take this one. We must ensure the peacemaking mission goes in now and not later, as Khartoum desires, if at all, and if we work with the African Union, NATO and other partners, we can and should make this happen. The legal obligations are there.

Why should we do this now? Three things happened over the last week that should change everything.

First, last Tuesday, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini met with Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir. The purpose was for Iran to share nuclear technologies with Sudan. Sudan said that it needed it for electricity. What a crock. Sudan is sitting on a sea of oil. The only purpose for this meeting was the exchange of nuclear technologies for terrorist activities, full stop. If that cannot shake the international community out of their torpor, nothing will.

Second, the World Food Programme, as has been said before, has cut food rations by 50% to the some 3.5 million refugees who are currently in camps. Two thousand calories is the minimum requirement. One thousand calories in a stressed population will result in starvation and death, which is something we cannot sit by and allow.

Third, we have seen that the conflict has expanded into a regional conflict into Chad. This is no longer within the borders of Sudan.

First is the ask is for the chapter 7 peacemaking force. Second is that we make the contributions to make-up the \$500 million deficit that the World Food Programme needs for foods. Third, we need to challenge Islamic nations to make the contributions that they have not made. And fourth, we need to support the International Criminal Court to arrest and prosecute the 51 people identified by the United Nations for crimes against humanity.

We champion our responsibility to protect. We need an obligation to act. We need to put teeth into that. Darfur is the challenge before us. We have the ability to lead and I would inspire and challenge the Minister of Foreign Affairs to do that because he will see widespread support for that in the House.

● (1910)

I want to congratulate and thank Senator Roméo Dallaire, Senator Mobina Jaffer, David Kilgour and the Canadian Jewish Congress for their support and that of many others in our country toward developing and promoting a resolution to this genocide.

Canada can do it. We can lead and should lead. I challenge the Minister of Foreign Affairs to do that. We will work with the government to make this happen.

Government Orders

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I know my colleague over there has been working on this issue and is very passionate on human rights issues in Africa. He has championed the cause in Darfur and has worked very hard to do that.

Does my hon. colleague know that a north-south dialogue has taken place? I have a very large Sudanese community in my riding that came from the south. They have all stood behind this north and south peace agreement that has been signed and already exists today.

When the vice-president, Mr. Garang, died, a large memorial was held for him in my riding. The Sudanese from down there want to see this north-south agreement succeed and it is succeeding there. Part of that agreement, which is under the UN mission in Africa, is what my hon. colleague has said about chapter 7, the right to protect. It is already in that agreement with the UN which is in the north-south agreement.

Similarly, the African Union that is now in Darfur has that in its mandate, which, as the hon. member said, gives teeth to it. We know that the problem in Darfur is that the African Union forces do not have the institutional capacity to make the peace agreement and to ensure that the former peace agreement was respected, which is why the African Union has now agreed to have the UN come in there.

I would like to say to my hon. colleague that what the north-south agreement is showing is that there is hope for this peace, which is why we are waiting to see if what comes out of Abuja in Nigeria will be of a similar nature and that the killing will stop immediately.

I would say that the north-south agreement does relate to that point and the UN mandate that is in Sudan does have the ability to do that.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Chair, I thank the parliamentary secretary for working with all of us in trying to establish a motion that we could support to focus Canada's initiative and activities in a constructive way toward this conflict.

The African Union's mission would not have failed if Khartoum had stopped funding the Janjaweed and its murderous activities in Darfur. If Khartoum had disarmed and immobilized the Janjaweed, the African mission would have been a success.

The reality is that it signed a peace agreement a year and a half ago to do just that and now the same conversations are taking place in Abuja. What happened is that Khartoum deliberately failed to stop the Janjaweed from its activities. The rebel forces in Darfur are having difficulty signing on to this deal because it knows that Khartoum deliberately failed to stop funding the Janjaweed. It has a very legitimate concern.

Based on Khartoum's previous activities and actions, which are well-known to all, not only in Darfur but also in the south, we have to ensure that if it signs on the bottom line it has to live up to the intent of that agreement.

As the member may or may not know, Khartoum threatened to tear up the peace agreement in the south if the international community walked into Darfur.

What happened with Darfur, interestingly enough, was that Khartoum told the AU, which deserves a lot of credit for having the maturity to ask the UN to take this over, that the United Nations could take it over but that the AU would have to ask for Khartoum's permission first, which was not a problem. The second thing Khartoum said was that if there were any non-African Union troops that it would not give the UN permission to come into the country. It is putting in obstacles and making agreements that simply cannot be used to resolve this problem.

I have one last point with respect to the south. We need to do a lot more in supporting the peace agreement in the south. We have to ensure that the international community puts the moneys in through international development to support the newer Dinka tribes in the south who are trying to get their lives back together after this conflict.

I would also like to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs for bringing up the situation of the LRA in Acholiland in northern Uganda. This is the worst place in the world to be a child. There are 20,000 child soldiers. Sudan has a lot to answer for with respect to that, but so does President Museveni in Uganda.

I would encourage the government to support the United Nations' desire to arrest and prosecute Joseph Kony, the head of the LRA, for crimes against humanity. This person and his cabal of murderous cronies must be arrested and prosecuted in the interests of international human rights.

• (1915)

The Deputy Chair: Before resuming debate, it is my pleasure to recognize in the gallery the hon. David Kilgour.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Chair, at the start of this 39th Parliament, I rise to speak in this House for the first time. I rise not to thank, congratulate or pay tribute to anyone in my riding, but to debate the drama unfolding in Darfur. With dignity, in humility and out of respect for these people and my colleague from Saint-Lambert I speak this evening in the House.

The education I received from my parents and the values they passed on lead me to believe that every person is entitled to health, freedom and happiness. In support of my remarks, I quote Benjamin Franklin, one of the fathers of American democracy, who, in 1776, wrote:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Three hundred years later, this declaration still underlies the fundamental principles of human rights.

Government Orders

Negotiations are currently underway in Nigeria in order to reach a peace agreement in Darfur. The African Union proposed this agreement and agreed this morning to extend the talks between the Sudanese government and the Darfur rebel movements until tomorrow evening. The role of the African Union in the peace process must be maintained and respected to ensure better cooperation between the parties.

The extent of the UN mission must be inversely proportional to the progress of the peace talks and, in the event an agreement is reached, close communication must be maintained in order to adequately support the African Union.

The Bloc Québécois unreservedly supports the African Union's mission and believes the Canadian government must provide financial and logistical support to the African Union so that it has the resources to achieve its objectives.

The African Union does remarkable work in Darfur and as Kofi Annan said:

The UN peace mission must not replace the African Union peace mission. This is above all an African conflict and the African Union must have leadership in the talks and in implementing the mission to help these people.

We absolutely must not get involved in the power struggle of the Islamic extremists in Khartoum by giving the impression that the West is telling the Africans and the Muslims what to do.

That said, Darfur has been in the battleground in a civil war for more than three years and a serious humanitarian crisis has so far resulted in nearly 300,000 deaths, 2.4 million displaced persons and 200,000 refugees in Chad.

The situation is critical and the Bloc Québécois believes that the international community has to be more proactive in order to overcome this crisis.

The issue is not whether or not there is a genocide, it is about taking action as soon as possible with a peacekeeping force that would cooperate fully with the African Union's mission in Sudan on technical, logistical and financial levels. The violence must stop so that the civilian population can live in peace.

● (1920)

Obviously, the Bloc Québécois will always remain faithful to its principles and will support a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

The humanitarian situation has been deteriorating since early 2006. Last Friday, the World Food Program, the WFP, announced that it was forced to cut its rations in half because donor countries' contributions were too low.

This year, the World Food Program received only \$238 million of the \$746 million it requested from the international community. The World Food Program wants to hold on to its reserves so that it can help people until harvest time in September. Currently, half of the population of Darfur depends on this humanitarian and food aid. The Bloc Québécois is asking the federal government to boost its humanitarian aid by increasing its contribution to the World Food Program.

Last March 9, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees cut its operating budget for Darfur by 44% because

security conditions had deteriorated. At the same time, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees declared that humanitarian conditions were worse than ever. Over the past few weeks, several NGOs have been forced to leave Sudanese territory, which has resulted in aid being denied these suffering people.

The lack of security that now characterizes Darfur is threatening to impede the work of humanitarian organizations. Half of Darfur's population needs humanitarian aid and protection.

The international community must take greater responsibility for protecting civilian populations and maintaining its support for the African Union Mission in Sudan. With only 7,000 people to patrol an area the size of France, the African Union has its hands tied, and in its current form, the African Union Mission in Sudan can do little to meet the needs of the people.

Community organizations must be able to reach people in need and provide them with the care they require.

More than 300 villages around Gereida have emptied since the end of 2005. The villagers, who were thrown out of their homes, are now living in crowded temporary camps near cities, where resources are far from adequate. The rapid growth of these camps is placing enormous pressure on supplies of water, food and health care.

The UN is threatening to suspend its aid operations and planning to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions. Unfortunately, now such actions would only make things worse for people who have already been hard hit.

In closing, we have to ask ourselves at this point how we can best help Darfur, how we can best get involved without making matters worse in Darfur and Sudan.

As Christophe Ayad said:

The word "genocide" carries such serious connotations that it must not be misused. Describing a situation as genocide when it is not is not a solution, and the word must not be used merely to mobilize support.

Some analysts say that using this term could even jeopardize the peace process that is under way and threaten ratification of the peace treaty that Khartoum and the rebels are about to sign.

In practical terms, using the word "genocide" will not enable the international community to act any more quickly than if we simply refer to "war crimes" or "crimes against humanity".

● (1925)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Chair, as the hon. member has said, we learned last week that the World Food Programme has been cut in half because of a shortfall in donations from countries in the international community. Sadly, hungry people are being deprived of nearly half their food. Not only has this Conservative government cut rations by three-quarters, but it has inherited a policy from its Liberal predecessors, which I would describe as ridiculous, requiring that half of food donations come from Canada. That requirement bothers me tremendously. It seems to put the business needs of Canadians before the needs of the people to whom we are giving.

Does the hon. member agree with me that we need to eliminate this requirement concerning the food rations that Canada provides to countries that need them?

Government Orders

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my colleague from Victoria for her remarks.

Indeed, my colleagues and I in the Bloc Québécois agree with any action to support international aid and humanitarian action in a country where there is a serious conflict at present.

In my speech I said it is important that the World Food Programme increase its involvement in terms of the aid it is currently providing in Darfur. I also mentioned the fact that Canada must raise its contributions to the World Food Programme.

• (1930)

[*English*]

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Chair, first I would like to say how disappointing I find it as a member of the House that the previous administration allowed our armed forces to become so deteriorated in numbers and in ability. With the situation in Afghanistan, it means that our capability to respond with troops to such an urgent need makes it very difficult right now.

Having said that, the comprehensive peace agreement that has been discussed tonight is certainly not working out as a peace arrangement for the people of Darfur. We know there is a war of attrition going on right now.

Senator Roméo Dallaire, the former general, who was in the gallery tonight, is still in the area. We have troops on the ground, about 32 CF personnel with UNMIS in Darfur right now and a few Canadian police officers. We do not want more Canadians to witness the kinds of atrocities that the former general witnessed in Rwanda and then have to come back having been unable to act.

In terms of the food crisis right now in the Darfur region, given the instability in the region, does the member have any hope that even if we do make more food available, it will actually reach the intended targets unless we provide a more stable land force of better equipped troops? Would she support the deployment of Canadian troops if we were able to find a small contingent at least to lead the world in supporting this troubled region? Would she support that type of action?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague opposite for his question and his request. Talks are underway, and the African Union has asked that the negotiations be extended. As I said earlier in my speech, the Bloc Québécois recognizes that the African Union is doing remarkable work at present in Darfur. At this stage in the talks, it is essential that we wait for the outcome of those negotiations.

On the question of the humanitarian aid being supplied in response to the current crisis there, it is imperative that more aid be provided to those people. Their survival and their ability to get through this is at stake. A population that has been fed can then implement measures to secure better health services and perhaps even basic education services. That is also made possible by the activities of community organizations on the ground.

I hope my answer has provided clarification of the Bloc's position regarding what is currently happening in Darfur.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Chair, it is rather difficult to speak about the situation in Darfur. We are talking peacefully and calmly in this House about thousands of men and women who are dying every day because they do not have anything to eat. Their food supplies have been cut off. They are also living in a war situation about which we apparently cannot do very much.

I find this very distressing. Of course we should support the pan-African forces in the field. But at the same time, is there no way for us to play a more active role, both in the negotiations and by sending troops so that this tragedy really ends? Does it matter that we feed these people more for a few days if, in the end, exactly the same thing happens as has been happening for so many years? People are dying before our very eyes.

Earlier, the hon. member across the aisle said that we did not want to send people to witness the tragedy that is unfolding. That is the question. We do not want to send witnesses; we want to send people who can take part in the search for long-term solutions.

We really need to take action in this matter with Rwanda in mind. It is most distressing to see us adopting more or less the same attitude. We observe the situation, we see that things are deteriorating, but we seem powerless to do anything that would really resolve the situation.

I know that it is very complex. But as Canadians, we can intervene more firmly with the various parties involved. We really need to instigate a movement that enables the local people to see that they have a future other than in the camps. In this kind of situation, they would truly be able to formulate plans for life rather than plans for death.

• (1935)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my colleague for her comments that supplement what I had to say this evening in the House. She also provided some possible answers to the question asked by my colleague across the aisle a few minutes ago. That is all that I could hope for in this regard.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Chair, one week ago, we stood in the House to honour the six million people killed in the Holocaust and the millions more whose lives were shattered.

On April 7, we marked the 12th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide in which the world turned its back on the atrocities, claiming the lives of 800,000 men, women and children.

Today, the House has a choice. We can choose to stand by and watch as yet another genocide unfolds so that some years from now those who follow us here can stand in their places and commemorate those who were lost. They can wonder why the world refused to act. Alternatively, we can commit ourselves to take action and to make the words "never again" resound with a ringing truth.

Government Orders

I want to commend the work of three Canadian groups, largely organized by young people, that have continuously spoken out against the suffering in Darfur: CASS, which is the Canadian Aid for Southern Sudan; STAND, Students Taking Action Now: Darfur; and SHOUT, Students Helping Others Understand Tolerance. Many of them were motivated by the words of Dr. Dror, a survivor from Sudan whose father was killed. She was in despair and told us all about this at a rally at Nathan Phillips Square only yesterday. She decided to turn her life toward trying to deal with the atrocities that were taking place. She began speaking with students about her experiences. They took up her cause and created some of these organizations. They handed out a green bracelet, which many of us are wearing now, and urged us to take action.

I hope the people who are watching this debate will support these students in their work and will visit their website called standcanada.org. I hope they will support the students who are calling on us to insist that our government take leadership now.

We could all stand to listen closely to the compelling case that these students are making and to the passion with which they seek to raise awareness in defending the lives that are at risk in Darfur. These students know that the young people in those camps and communities, which are under attack, do not have the luxury of thinking about what education they are going to get, or what they are going to learn in school, or whether they are going to get their assignment in on time, or what they are going to eat on that given day. In fact, they are struggling merely for their survival. These young Canadian citizens are calling on us to act and to do better. The test will be what happens following this debate.

As a nation, we could use our international influence to press the UN and countries around the world to take meaningful steps to stop genocide in Darfur. Two hundred thousand lives have already been lost. Two million people have been displaced. Let there be no doubt, what we are seeing in Darfur is genocide in slow motion.

● (1940)

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, Canada's approach must not be hesitant. The deadline imposed by the African Union on the warring parties—the date by which they must agree on security, power sharing and the distribution of wealth—has been pushed back by 48 hours. Nevertheless, even with the possibility of an agreement, no resolution can come about quickly without immediate international intervention.

[English]

The time has come for Canada to take a stand. The AU alone has been unable to compel the Sudanese government to end the violence. It will take a much larger UN-led international force to stand against the Khartoum regime's defiance.

How can we expect others to do so in our place? Our country has a proud tradition of working to make peace, of rebuilding failed and failing states. We must not now step to the sidelines and hope that other countries will take up the slack. It is time for the world to stop talking about the tragedy that is unfolding in Darfur, and it is time for action to stop this genocide.

[Translation]

New Democrats urge the government to use Canada's influence to insist that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council respect and support the right to protect.

Members of the Security Council, including China, Russia, France and the United States, must put an end to their self-serving delays and their lip service and act now to apply international pressure on the Khartoum regime to end the violence in Darfur by respecting the arms embargo mandated under Security Council resolution 1591.

[English]

Further, we believe that Canada must encourage the UN to consider the deployment of a UN-led peacekeeping force to join the AU in trying to stabilize and improve conditions for the people of Darfur. Beyond the UN, there are measures the government can take that will have an immediate impact.

The first step must be to increase the funding to the World Food Programme for emergency aid. I am sorry to say that funding for this program was slashed by the Liberal government from \$20 million in 2005 to just \$5 million in 2006. This can be corrected.

Second, Canada must strive to ensure that development is not diverted to the Sudanese government, but rather that it reaches the people in need. This country's record on foreign aid had been one of steady and shameful decline. That is why the NDP ensured the inclusion of half a billion dollars for foreign aid in Bill C-48, our budget amendment of last year, to help those suffering in countries such as Sudan. Those funds are now available and should be used.

Third, Canada must increase its direct aid to the African Union.

Finally, the government can take immediate steps to support target sanctions against government leaders.

● (1945)

[Translation]

New Democrats urge all members to fight on behalf of the people of Darfur. Let us be steadfast in our opposition to these atrocities. Let us not hesitate while still more victims perish.

[English]

New Democrats are standing up to stop the genocide in Darfur. We call on the government to join us.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would agree with the leader of the NDP. There is no question they are suffering in Darfur. That is why we have had rallies all across North America. I am having a rally in my city on May 13 to highlight what is happening in Darfur. Let there be no question as to whether there is suffering there. There is lots of suffering, and we need to act like he said.

Government Orders

However, at this given time, we have peace negotiations in Abuja. It is important to stop the killings immediately. To do that, both sides need to work together. The African Union has put out a comprehensive plan for both parties to come to the table. Hopefully, within the next 24 hours, they will do that and sign this comprehensive peace agreement. Hopefully, then, the killings will stop immediately. Both parties have to work toward that, while we carry on with the other international development issues about which the leader of the NDP has talked. We all support that.

Our ambassador is in Abuja with our officials, helping to come to a peace agreement. I know many people have said that they do not trust the government in Khartoum, but nevertheless we need to get the two parties together so we can take the next step. Does he not think we should support those talks very strongly?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Chair, the hon. member made the point that our ambassador is sitting at the negotiations as the discussions are taking place. This could be regarded as an important contribution, but I am not sure that it is really going to assist, in the direct way that is needed right now, those who are suffering the deprivation of food and being attacked in Darfur. More is needed than that.

Let me quote from Dr. Norman Epstein's speech made yesterday in Toronto, who stated that "Intervening in Darfur is not a question of right versus left. It is a question of right versus wrong". The great Martin Luther King Jr. stated:

We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.

Sitting at the negotiations, watching them take place, and giving some encouragement, of course, is something that Canada would be expected to do. We are glad that it is happening, but it also needs to be noted that negotiations many times have proceeded along these lines. Meanwhile, back in Darfur, people have continued to be attacked and starved. I think action is required on all fronts.

As Dr. Epstein said, we will not become silent. We cannot be silent. Our silence will come only when the genocide goes. That is what our citizens are saying to us. They organized a rally called "Scream for Darfur". It is a fairly extreme and strong sentiment, but it is because it is a desperate situation. We were asked by these young people to scream and to shout out for the voiceless victims in Darfur. It is a primal scream that outraged Canadians are giving to our government. As they said yesterday at the rally, "Mr. Harper, it's time to lead".

The Deputy Chair: Before I recognize the hon. member for Davenport, I would like to remind all members to please avoid naming sitting members of the House, but rather identify them by their constituencies.

The hon. member for Davenport.

• (1950)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I too had the pleasure and honour to be at that rally on Sunday with the leader of the New Democratic Party and other colleagues of the House. One thing became apparent, as the former speaker just said when he quoted from Dr. Epstein, that it is not a question of left or right. I am also not here to blame a government or past parties. The reality is that we have to appeal to all our sensibilities and to our humanity to

do something that is right for the people of Darfur. It was too late in Rwanda, but it is not too late for Darfur.

I was happy to see a massive contingency of youth at the rally that was called "Scream for Darfur". This rally was organized mostly by high school students with a keen sense of social justice and an understanding that continued silence is the equivalent of acceptance.

I want to take this opportunity to state my gratitude for having seen the power that our youth have to rally for important causes. The youth of Canada are literally screaming for us to stop this massacre. The member mentioned the African Union monitoring force in Darfur. Unfortunately, it is not empowered with the ability to intervene or to protect the innocent people of Darfur.

Would the member support empowering the African Union force to intervene or would he prefer to see a more international force involved in the conflict?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Chair, it was very moving to be there with these young people. It is not very often that high school students come out to a legislative assembly on a Sunday afternoon with a passion for justice and action on the part of their governments. It was quite a remarkable gathering. Many hundreds were there. I want to encourage, as the hon. member has in his remarks, those young people to keep up their work.

As I said to them in my brief opportunity to speak with them yesterday, one rally was probably not going to be enough. They would likely be called upon and would need to maintain the pressure to let more and more Canadians know about the need for them to speak up, so that those of us in this place can hear them and follow through on the action that is required.

The member has asked about the nature of Canada's involvement and assistance. We believe there should be a multinational engagement and that this should be ideally done with and through the United Nations. We have seen that the African Union has become overwhelmed in its efforts to bring stability, peace and protection to the area. It is time for the international community to stop dragging its feet and take action. Otherwise, we are going to be guilty of the offence, that was named by those who watched the Rwandan massacre taking place, of standing idly by.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am listening with interest as we debate the atrocities that we are seeing unfold before us. It strikes me as strange that we have not yet addressed the obvious facts that much of it, if not all of it, is a result of religious conflict.

I listened with interest too, to the Bloc and was reminded of Jefferson, of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We seem to have a desire in the House to export our democracy, but we have missed the obvious point that in order to do so, we must be prepared and we must be forceful in our ability to encourage other countries to also have the expression of religious freedom that we have in this country.

Government Orders

I would like to ask the hon. member, as we talk about it, will we have the courage to address the fact that much of the atrocities that are going on are as a result of the Muslim north and the Christian south? Will we be able to say to these other countries that we want them to have the same freedoms that we have here if we are to expand our democracy? Will we have that courage?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Chair, I will take issue with the way in which the hon. member has characterized what is happening in Darfur at this moment because what we see at this moment is essentially a racial conflict.

There are Muslims, who are black Africans, being attacked by Muslims of an Arab extraction. We must talk about the racism that is underlying this particular conflict. This is one of the reasons why the concept of genocide has been invoked to describe what is going on there.

We heard directly from those involved at the rallies that were held yesterday. I would certainly invite other hon. members to take the opportunity, if they can, to talk directly to some of these individuals who are organizing here, whose roots are in Darfur, whose roots are in Sudan, and who can help us understand the true nature of this conflict. We need the courage to act and to lead. That is what we need now.

• (1955)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Chair, I wish to inform you that I will share my time with my colleague from Calgary East.

I am happy to take part in this debate on Canada's role in Sudan. I feel that our involvement in Sudan is essential. My colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, has already spoken about our political and military actions. I will therefore limit my comments to humanitarian and reconstruction issues.

Sudan has the largest number of internally displaced persons, close to two million of whom are in Darfur. Most of these victims are women and children. The problem of access to these people is critical. If the humanitarian organizations cannot reach them, they cannot help them.

I am also concerned about the reduction of food rations recently announced by the World Food Programme, which affects mainly the Darfur region. CIDA has therefore decided to contribute—without waiting—\$10 million of the amounts announced at the Oslo Conference to support WFP efforts. We are urging other donors who have not already done so to respond quickly since the needs are urgent.

Canada has made some important commitments to Sudan. In March 2006, at the conference of donors that was held in Paris, CIDA reaffirmed Canada's commitment to Sudan and announced the payment of the entire \$40 million budgeted over two fiscal years. This contribution will enable the government of northern and southern Sudan to rebuild the country's infrastructures, notably in health and education.

In Oslo Canada also undertook to provide \$40 million for humanitarian aid, once again over two fiscal years. To date, over half of the amount promised for two years has been used in a single year. Of this amount, our government has dedicated \$16.7 million to food aid in Sudan. The \$10 million I already referred to is on top of this amount.

We are assuming our responsibilities, but humanitarian action is not limited to food. Accordingly, Canada has provided \$9.8 million to other humanitarian agencies for such things as improvement of health and access to drinking water. Finally, Canada will dedicate \$10 million to the consolidation of peace, mine disposal and promotion of good governance.

Although the situation remains critical, there are tangible results. For example, we succeeded in setting up 25 therapeutic feeding centres in Darfur. We have supplied essential medicines to some 500,000 women and children affected by the conflict in Darfur. Our aid will be used to provide access to water and hygiene services to about 25,000 Sudanese households. We have improved access to water supply and sanitation services for over 60,000 internally displaced people.

• (2000)

[*English*]

Our government and our partners support the efforts of the international community. We help Doctors Without Borders operate a series of fixed and mobile clinics throughout the north, south and west in the region of Darfur.

[*Translation*]

The support of the Canadian government for Oxfam Québec has resulted in a program promoting health, water and sanitation services in Kalma, southern Darfur, a camp sheltering 125,000 displaced persons. A good number of these activities directly target children, which is of particular interest to me.

I am proud of the work carried out by CIDA, which promotes gender equality in all its programs, and the Sudan conflict is no exception. Canada's aid contributed directly to guaranteeing the participation of Sudanese women in the Darfur peace talks. CIDA carries out field missions to ensure the proper coordination among all its partners and to optimize the effectiveness and the scope of Canadian assistance.

To conclude, as you already know, our government is determined to promote and defend abroad Canada's fundamental values—freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights. I am proud to reaffirm the commitment of our government which, together with its Canadian and international partners, is working to give hope for a better future to Sudanese men, women and children.

[*English*]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Chair, last week as a new MP I was very moved to see the eight Holocaust survivors who sat up there in the gallery and to whom we gave a standing ovation. The Holocaust was the tragic event that incited the world to say “never again”. Sixty years have passed since that statement was made and if there ever were a time to say never again, it is in Darfur. There may be no easy solutions to this issue, as we have heard this evening, but there are certainly avenues that we can and must pursue.

Government Orders

Canada can be a strong voice toward a solution and, with its middle power allies, can push the permanent Security Council members to abandon the stalling, cynical stand that they have taken, enforce the arms embargo and demand the Sudanese government accept a UN force to join the desperately overwhelmed African Union troops.

Would the hon. member agree that Canada can and should take such a leadership role in the global community or will we continue to take the very timid stand that we have taken so far?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, I do not know if for my colleague a timid stand is contradicted by the announcement of an additional \$10 million that I made this evening.

Canada has a leading role to play in providing assistance to Sudan. It intends to continue to help and is committed to providing \$40 million in aid to the people of Sudan. Over half of this amount has been paid. This evening, I announced an additional \$10 million in assistance. In my opinion, and in that of the government, this is not a timid stand.

[English]

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, while I thank the minister for her words, I have a question for her. We know that Canada played a major role in the fight against apartheid in South Africa and we are very much concerned about the fact that, at the moment, non-government aid organizations are leaving Darfur in droves. With the important work they do in improving the quality of life for the people living in Darfur and also in bearing witness to the atrocities committed, their work must continue. Their departure plays right into the hands of the Sudanese government and its continued attempt to terrorize the people of Darfur.

I want to ask the minister what the government is prepared to do to make sure that those NGOs stay there. Also, what are the funding mechanisms we can use? How else are we going to engage the international community to stop this genocide that is going on before our eyes?

• (2005)

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, Canada is indeed concerned about the Sudanese living conditions. We believe in the current peace process. For the time being and together with what is currently being done, we are providing humanitarian aid through various NGOs. We are following the process extremely closely.

[English]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have a question for the hon. minister. Canada used to spend \$9 out of every \$10 for peacekeeping. That figure has dropped to about 33¢ out of every \$10 we spend, outside of the country. Given the fact that we only have so many troops, as was alluded to, does she think that maybe it is time now to redefine our role outside of our country as far as troop deployment goes?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, our new government is looking at the aid it is giving populations in need. In the case of Sudan, we consider it urgent to advance the aid planned for the second half of

the year. That is why I was pleased to announce this evening that we will provide an additional \$10 million.

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, Canada is proud of our partnership with the African Union. We are helping to build the AU's capacity to develop effective mechanisms to deal with threats to peace and security in Africa. Its role in Darfur, leading international efforts to resolve this crisis, is an example of how our assistance is producing results.

As my esteemed colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, has noted, the key to any long term solution in Darfur and Sudan is sustainable peace. Canada is working closely with the African Union in Abuja, Nigeria, to facilitate the completion of a just and fair peace agreement between the government of Sudan and the Darfur rebel movements.

We are in Abuja providing diplomatic support for the important work of the African Union mediation team led by Ambassador Salim Salim of Tanzania. We are there because we know that Canada has an important role to play in helping to bring peace and stability to the people of Darfur. We are strongly committed to doing our part and have provided financial support for the talks and resource experts to meet the African Union's needs.

We are committed to ensuring that the process for implementing a peace agreement in Darfur is inclusive and respectful of all Darfuran communities. We have promoted the inclusion of good governance, respect for human rights and gender equality as the key components of a sustainable peace agreement.

The long term implementation of such a peace agreement will require a concentrated and sustained international effort to address the ongoing humanitarian situation on the ground. The ceasefire agreement signed by the parties to the conflict in the spring of 2004 is regularly violated. Civilians are often deliberately attacked. Humanitarian agencies are hindered from doing their work and, in some cases, even targeted by combatants.

That is why, in addition to our support to the Abuja process, Canada has tried to address the humanitarian crisis in Darfur through support to the AU peacekeeping operation. Along with the AU's other partners, we are providing the African Union mission in Sudan with essential tools to implement its mandate.

Government Orders

Canada has contributed \$170 million, making us the third largest contributor to the African Union mission in Sudan. More specifically, Canada is providing 105 armoured personnel carriers, 25 helicopters and two fixed-wing aircraft and the fuel to run them, to provide essential mobility to widen the scope of protection the African mission in Sudan can offer to civilians in Darfur, and is also providing military and police training and technical and expert support to respond to requests in areas of need as highlighted by the African Union.

At this time I wish to congratulate the Minister of International Cooperation, who has just announced an additional \$10 million contribution from Canada in response to the UN's appeal. That is how Canada is responding in its own way to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur.

The African Union mission in Sudan has been a groundbreaking exercise for the organization. AMIS has accomplished a great deal under difficult circumstances. Nearly 7,700 military and civilian police personnel are currently deployed in Darfur. Canada is pleased to recognize the considerable efforts of the African Union in fielding this complex and challenging peace operation. However, we are now ready to enter a new phase in our collective response to this conflict.

Canada welcomes the African Union's decision to proceed with the transition to the UN mission. The UN is already present in Sudan in a peacekeeping role in the south, supporting the ongoing implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement that ended the civil war. By transitioning the African Union mission in Sudan to the UN, the international community will consolidate its efforts in Sudan in one operation.

In conclusion, Canada is working closely with its international partners to promote a transition to a UN mission while ensuring that the African Union emerges stronger from its Darfur experience and is able to translate the lessons learned from this operation to the future of African Union peace and security engagement in Africa.

• (2010)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Chair, the situation in Darfur is truly horrific. We have listened to members on both sides of the House describe it in very graphic terms. It has also been described as a “genocide in slow motion”. It is clear that the funds that are being provided by the international community are totally inadequate to meet the needs of the people in Darfur.

I know that the Canadian Forces are extended right now in Afghanistan, but I believe that Canada must signal its commitment to sending troops so that both sides in Sudan, in Darfur, will understand that we and the international community are serious about ending this terrible conflict.

Does the situation in Darfur not warrant Canadian military intervention? Does the government not think that Canadians would and do want their government to do all that we can to avert a full-blown genocide? Only last week we all marked the commemoration of the Holocaust very seriously in this House and outside on the lawn of Parliament. We have an opportunity here to take action that will save lives and prevent this horror from continuing.

Does the parliamentary secretary not believe that it is important for Canada to now take a more active role in Darfur and support the African Union, which does not now have the resources to do the job that needs to be done?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, in answer to the member's last point, I would say yes. We are there supporting the African Union in its mission to ensure peace. At this time, it is very important that we give peace a chance, and right now, the peace talks that are going on in Abuja are the best hope for bringing about a very quick solution to this horrific problem in Darfur. Let me say that we agree there is a problem, a humanitarian crisis in Darfur. We are saying, “Let us give peace a chance”. Right now as we are talking that is the best hope for a quick solution to this problem, so that the killings can stop, Canada can go in with the humanitarian mission and all the missions, with the UN forces, to build up, as right now there is peace in south Sudan.

• (2015)

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to ask a question using a bit of a different lens. I would like to ask a question through the eyes of a child, our smallest witness to what is happening in Darfur. What we know about children and raising them well is that it is about raising healthy babies with love and early attachment, gentle touching, good nutrition, and gradual independence and so on.

When we look at what is happening to children in Darfur, we see the horrific circumstances in which they are living. While some parents there were being interviewed, children were given crayons and paper to play with on the floor. They were not given any instructions. Using their crayons, in the only language they had, not verbal language but “showing” language, those children showed the burning of their homes, the beating of their parents, and people being hungry. These were very crude drawings, but they were the language the children had, that the smallest witness had, to show us what was going on.

Let me say for the parliamentary secretary that I would ask for that visual vocabulary to be kept in the front of our minds because, despite three security resolutions, women and girls continue to be raped, water and food sources are being destroyed, and schools and hospitals are being burned to the ground. Children of 11 years of age are raising families. The needs of girl children in conflict and post-conflict situations are being totally overlooked. Even though they are victims, they are fighters, they are leaders and they are peacemakers who are often left to rebuild their shattered communities at the age of 10, 11 or 12. So through the eyes of those smallest witnesses, I would like to ask—

The Deputy Chair: Can the parliamentary secretary give a short answer to that long question?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Yes, Mr. Chair. We all know the crisis in Darfur. The Minister of International Cooperation has just announced an additional \$10 million to help the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. She has already outlined what CIDA has been doing on Canada's commitment to Darfur. Canada is there on the humanitarian crisis for the people of Darfur.

Government Orders

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Yukon.

I rise tonight to add my voice to those who are calling for the fastest possible transition from the AU observer mission to a United Nations led, full chapter VII, all necessary means approach to the humanitarian disaster in Darfur.

I would like to emphasize the fine work that has been done by Canadians in addition to the support that the minister and the parliamentary secretary mentioned that Canada is providing both in logistics and equipment as well as in humanitarian aid, but also in diplomatic aid. As has been noted, our ambassador to the United Nations, Allan Rock, is in Abuja now trying to assist those negotiations.

The current Government of Canada and the previous government have had the wise counsel of Senator Roméo Dallaire and Senator Mobina Jaffer, who are highly experienced in that area of the world, as well as Robert Fowler, ambassador for Africa and ambassador in Italy. This has certainly been a tremendous support for peace activities in that area, but it is not sufficient and we must do more.

I would like to use my brief time to talk about the beginning of the 21st century when there were two important changes in international criminal law which must be brought to bear in order to bring peace to this area. The first is the realization that over the last 100 years those killed in wars have shifted from 80% plus being members of military forces and 20% or less being civilians to where now, it is the reverse and over 80% of the victims of war are civilians. We have seen the growth in humanitarian intervention law around the concept of human security and moving away from the inviolability of state sovereignty and the Westphalia tradition. This is a major advancement.

We have seen post-Kosovo a commission that looked at the criteria that are necessary to support this type of humanitarian intervention. We have seen the responsibility to protect the commission of which the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore in his current profession was a member. It was passed by the General Assembly of the United Nations last September.

This is a responsibility of us all, to intervene against even the inviolability of state sovereignty if there is a humanitarian disaster occurring. This is certainly the situation that the world is facing in Darfur, where the government of Sudan is perhaps unable but certainly is unwilling to intervene to stop that disaster.

The other major change in international criminal law has been the sanctions, the growth of the body of law, and court actions against impunity for those who would brutalize their own citizens. Thirty years ago people like Idi Amin and Baby Doc Duvalier were given sanctuary in third countries just to get them away from brutalizing their own citizens. Now we have the International Criminal Court following on the experiences of the ad hoc prosecutions for Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia and Sierra Leone. We are building a whole body of international criminal law which Canada has been at the forefront of establishing through its leadership in the negotiation of the Rome treaty which established the court. There are now indictments being laid against perpetrators of these acts in Darfur. That is a major advance and we must follow through with it.

Let me just end by making the observation that the House commemorated the 60th anniversary of the Holocaust last week in serious and unified terms, but we also saw last weekend the world food program cutting in half its support for the victims in internally displaced camps in Darfur.

● (2020)

We have to remember those chilling words of Samantha Power who has said to us all that we cannot both say we will never forget and then at the same time say that there is not enough. There is enough. We need collective action. Canada has been at the forefront of work not only in Darfur, but also in the process that led to the peace in southern Sudan. We must do more however. We can do more. The circumstances have never been more demanding and right in front of us. We must complete this work that we have begun.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, my hon. colleague talked about chapter 7 of the UN. Chapter 7 calls for protection of civilians by use of force. It is already in the mandate that the AU has given to the AU peacekeeping forces. The problem is not chapter 7. The problem is the AU forces do not have the institutional capacity to police that area. They lack training. They lack the ability to enforce all these things. That is why the AU has agreed to go to the UN forces. Hopefully the UN forces will be going there soon.

Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that Canada has just announced a \$10 million contribution toward the humanitarian crisis as we are talking about the food one that my colleague just mentioned in reference to the cutting of rations.

I am calling on my colleague to tell the House that we need to stand behind the peace process that is taking place in Abuja. That comprehensive peace plan is developed by the African Union. We must understand that this is an African issue as well and that is why we are supporting the African Union. The African Union has the political credibility to bring the two sides together.

Does the hon. member think that is where a strong emphasis should be placed today for the peace talks that are going on in Abuja?

● (2025)

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Chair, of course we have to continue with supporting the peace process by all diplomatic means, as well as financial support for it. I am a very pleased to see that the current government has continued the important initiatives of the previous government in providing the logistical support, equipment support and financial support to the AU's force as well as the diplomatic mission.

We all pray that this peace process, which failed to reach peace through a negotiated settlement by its deadline last night and has been extended until tomorrow night, is successful. Even if it is successful, there is going to be a tremendous need in that area. It may well not be successful or it may fail. The member's question with respect to the Security Council resolution, chapter 7, has not been resolved as yet. It needs to be and it is to use all necessary means, which could be sanctions. It could be stopping of travel rights. It could be full invasion of a much larger, and I agree, supplemented force to the AU observer mission now.

Government Orders

We must go forward as Canada has done in all these areas, diplomatic, military, humanitarian and developmental. Even after peace is secured in this desperate region it will have to have support for capacity building as well and ongoing peace initiatives.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the intervention by the hon. member. I recognize him as an accomplished member and somewhat of an expert on law and certainly international law as well.

Our military has been underfunded for so many years under the previous administration. We are moving to help to rectify that. I hope the hon. member and others on his side are going to support measures that I trust will be in the budget tomorrow to help rebuild our military so we can play a bigger role in the world in situations like the one in Darfur.

One of the situations that has developed recently is the freezing of assets and travel restrictions on some of the people responsible for perpetrating the atrocities in Darfur. Does the hon. member think that Canada could be doing more? In the international community Canada could put a squeeze on that way.

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Chair, there must be a full range of approaches. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs has mentioned, the AU has not wanted non-African troops to be involved. That is not so much the problem.

It has been stated as well that Canada is the third largest contributor in terms of overall dollars, whether it is equipment logistics, humanitarian or food aid, whatever. Canada must move ahead on all these issues. A chapter VII Security Council resolution would assist all of the international community to put this whole range of pressures effectively on Sudan to try and end this humanitarian disaster.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Chair, there are 300,000 dead. Think how many people that is. We have great debates over several people dead. That is more than the population of most of the villages, cities and towns in Canada. It is hard to fathom. Two million people have been displaced from their homes. Food aid has been cut to 1,050 calories, about half of what a person needs, because people in the world are not donating enough food. Humanitarian aid is being kept away by the government in Khartoum. The UN Secretary General has said that this is the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

I want members of Parliament and those who are at home watching this debate to imagine a tribe of bandits swooping down on them tonight, taking over their homes, killing half of their families and driving the rest out into the desert with no means of shelter or subsistence. The civilized world cannot let this go on. Much more needs to be done.

I want to congratulate those who have worked so hard for years on this already, the member for Mount Royal, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Senator Jaffer, Senator Dallaire, and former Prime Minister Martin, whose actions have led to Canada having been one of the largest contributors to date in aid, troops and support.

I have never been so proud as I was last September at the United Nations when Canada won that great victory of the responsibility to protect. The United Nations and the whole world accepted that

principle to protect citizens when their own governments could not protect them from genocide. We need to use that moral authority. The world needs to use that moral authority to stop right now the murders and rapes in Darfur.

We have to save the people in Sudan in a way that does not lead to the same impressions that occurred in Iraq. It must not appear like an imperialist invading force which could then attract a whole bunch of terrorists from other places and create more problems. We need to do this by cooperating as much as possible with and sustaining, enhancing and supporting African organizations, African Union forces and the African Union. All the while we have to have the full weight of the UN forces under chapter VII behind us if need be.

This is a very complex situation. It is not simple. There are no parties that are entirely innocent and no parties that have been doing everything possible in the conflict to save human lives, to prevent humanitarian disasters and to prevent violation of human rights, such as rape.

The main reason I wanted to speak tonight is that for years I have been pushing our government, but at the same time, our constituents, Canadians, have been pushing us. In particular, Bill Klassen has been pushing me. I want to read what he has written to me so that Canadians get respect for the work they have been doing to push us to take action:

It seems obvious now that the presence of African Union troops in Darfur has not reduced the killing of innocent people by the Arab militia supported by the government in Khartoum. I think that it is time that the Canadian representative at the UN advocates condemning these atrocities as genocide and that a UN-supported force of sufficient size to be effective (20,000 troops?) be deployed. Some have suggested that these should come from nations in the region, rather than from European countries, the USA or Canada. I would support having Canadian troops there to help with the organization and direction of the intervention but substantial intervention is necessary, especially given the situation in Chad and refugees now fleeing back into Darfur.

I understand that Canada has reduced its aid level to one quarter of what it was under the previous government. If accurately reported, this is absolutely deplorable; the level of aid for Darfur from Canada should have been increased, not reduced!

I have not heard recently of any activity on Darfur by Senators Jaffer or Dalar [sic]. I trust they are still involved and working to resolve this sad situation.

Thank you for your continued concern and work on this matter.

This debate tonight is absolutely essential, as are all other efforts around the world. We have to open the eyes of the world so that people around the world give more food, give their governments the moral support to take strict action through the United Nations and to make the ideal of the responsibility to protect a reality in this world. If we do so, we will not only save thousands of lives in Darfur, prevent thousands of rapes and deaths from starvation but we will do the same in other spots in the world, lest we forget Zimbabwe, the Congo and Burma/Myanmar.

● (2030)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Chair, as others have said, UN officials describe the situation in Darfur as the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world today. People this evening have talked about the mass murders, the systemic rapes, a thousand villages torched and the more than 2.5 million displaced people, many still under attack in refugee camps.

Government Orders

The government of Sudan has clearly failed its people, so the international community, including Canada, must accept its responsibility to help protect the people of Sudan. Over the last three years the previous government has dragged its feet. Eleven years after Rwanda, have we really learned so little?

I ask the hon. member to clarify this. Does he believe that Canada should consider sending UN peacekeepers to bolster the troops offered through the African Union?

• (2035)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Chair, it is very disappointing that the member opposite would be playing politics with such an issue. As I mentioned Canadians, including Bill Klassen of my riding whom I just quoted directly, many members of Parliament and senators have worked so hard to make Canada the third leading country in the world in support to that area. Canada should be commended for the work, and the leadership of the previous government, under Prime Minister Martin, and all those who have worked so hard.

I also said much more needed to be done. In fact I answered her a question in my speech. I said we needed to use the full military weight of the UN, possible under chapter 7, which of course uses Canadian troops. Canadian troops are already there, but we have to do it in a way that we do not invoke a similar crisis in Iraq, that we do not appear as imperialistic invading armies, subsequently attracting terrorists from all over the world and making the situation worse. We have to work closely with African organizations, the African Union, African troops and still bring the full weight of the world, as the member is suggesting, and bring more food aid. We have to do much more to stop this tragedy immediately.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I asked very specific question earlier to which I did not get a response. We talk about chapter 7 and the United Nations forces and so on, and the potential for Canada to participate in that military force, with which we do not have to participate. Where does the hon. member see those troops coming from and, albeit under the UN flag, which country in the United Nations is equipped, trained and capable of leading that force?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Chair, the previous government two budgets ago has great increases in military equipment. In some areas we had the best equipment in the world. In some areas we do not have any equipment because that is not our strategic preference. In the budget after that, we increased the goal to 3,000 new troops.

The countries of the world have been very successful in peacekeeping missions, including Canada. They have very effective military leadership. They can and have prevented humanitarian disasters in the world, with great teamwork. They share the leadership.

In Afghanistan the leadership is transferred from country to country and has in many other peacekeeping and peace making conflicts in the world. I have no question whatsoever about the talent available in Canada and many other countries that do so much for peacekeeping. It takes the moral support of those countries to put the money, to put the diplomatic support, and give their government the moral support to take the strict actions they have to with the United Nations.

There are less important things happening in this world to which people can put their attention. When people are dying, being raped and are starving to death, I have no doubt we can do assist, and the resources are there. It needs the moral and the political support.

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin.

It is with great interest that I rise to participate in the debate this evening on the devastating state of affairs in Sudan, particularly in Darfur. I am also looking forward to hearing the views of my colleagues. We have already heard many of them from all sides of the House with respect to what is happening in that region and also with respect to the knowledge that these members of Parliament have gained through their great interest in what is happening there.

As we all know, the ongoing conflict has taken an enormous toll on the people of Sudan. With a population of approximately 42 million people, more than two million, mainly women and children, have died. Six million Sudanese have been forced to flee from their homes. In Darfur alone, it is estimated that two million people are internally displaced and more than 200,000 have fled next door to Chad.

Canadians are deeply troubled by the human suffering in Sudan and this concern is truly international. Canada must, therefore, continue to work closely with the United Nations and with the African Union to find a sustainable solution to this problem.

I am pleased to say that Canada is very much a part of the international efforts to secure peace and stability for the region and to provide much needed assistance that is saving lives.

Much of our current support is directed toward achieving a peace agreement in Darfur, one that is acceptable to all parties involved. For example, the Canadian International Development Agency has provided support for the comprehensive pre-peace agreement, an important initiative to stabilize the region and bring peace and prosperity, not only to Sudan but also to the African continent as a whole.

Last year, at the Oslo Donors' Conference on Sudan, Canada committed \$90 million over two years to support the implementation of this peace agreement. As the minister announced earlier this evening, it is also pouring \$10 million, as part of that agreement, immediately into helping the efforts of the world food program, help that is urgently needed to feed the people of Darfur.

We have been working with our partners to deliver humanitarian assistance to all parts of Sudan to address the needs of people affected by this civil strife.

Government Orders

In May 2005 Canada announced a further \$170 million in technical and military assistance in support of the African Union mission in Sudan. Of this, CIDA manages \$120 million used for helicopters and transporting troops and equipment for operations in Darfur, and to supply fuel for these aircraft.

As members can see, Canada is working hard to help the people of Darfur and throughout Sudan. These commitments are critically important and they will help to reduce violence, save lives and achieve peace and security in Sudan. This will in turn help to ensure international peace and security.

The road to peace and development in Sudan has been long and it has not been easy, but we must continue steadfast in meeting this all important goal. The people of Sudan will need our help and Canadians will be there to support them in their efforts to achieve peace and rebuild their country.

I am proud to say that the Government of Canada is fully committed to helping the people of Sudan, working in partnership with our Canadian and international partners.

● (2040)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, we have a moral duty to act to stop the carnage and unspeakable crimes that have taken place. We failed to act during Rwanda, the world failed to act during the holocaust that killed six million Jews, with crimes of indifference and silence. The often quoted axiom by Edmund Burke, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing", unfortunately still holds true today.

Since the outbreak of hostilities in 2003, the crisis in Darfur has resulted in 400,000 largely civilian deaths, the displacement of more than 2 million people and the suffering of millions more. The peace talks have dragged on for over two years, with no results, including today when the government of Sudan walked away from the negotiation table.

The previous government sponsored a document, "Responsibility to Protect", to the UN, which stipulates that if a sovereign state is unable or unwilling to protect its citizens from extreme harm, the international community must intervene.

Clearly in Darfur, would the member not agree that the threshold of this document has been met for a meaningful intervention?

● (2045)

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Chair, I would beg to differ with the comment about indifference. I think we learned from that disaster. What we learned is the fact that this country and many others through the United Nations, through our responsibility to protect, need to step up.

I mentioned in my speech how much we have committed. In fact, I emailed a friend of mine at the World Food Programme today to get a person to person feeling for whether it felt we were doing enough. That person's comment to me was, yes, Canada is one of the leaders. We were in fourth place as to our contributions to the World Food Programme. With the extra commitment of \$10 million, which the Minister for International Cooperation announced this evening, that increases us. In fact, it may take us up a level from that.

These people need that immediately. We cannot watch them starve. We are not being indifferent. We are stepping up and we are ensuring that they have food to eat. We are being part of the peace process. We are encouraging and working on that. This is a role that Canada can play. We have the expertise to work on that. Through this debate tonight, I hope we will come up with some better ways to participate in that peace making process.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to direct my comments and questions around our capacity to respond, and it is twofold. One is in the way of human resources, which has been referred to a bit tonight, and the other is in the way of financial capacity.

I turn to the estimates in the so-called blue book. On the pages that deal with foreign assistance, we see on page 1-17 that we are looking at an increase to CIDA and we are looking at a decrease of 38% in our international assistance to the transfer payments. That has to do with the fact that we had made some payments in forgiveness to the countries of Iraq and Montenegro.

What I do not see here, notwithstanding the fact that Sudan is referenced in the comments on CIDA, is the kind of commitment that we have seen to some of the other countries in terms of debt forgiveness. I have to question that and I look to tomorrow's budget.

However, we have a real dilemma as bystanders. We are bystanders in some ways because we do not have the human capacity and, what I see from the estimates document, we might very well not have the financial capacity.

I would like his comments on that, particularly on our financial capacity. Does he feel, having gone over the estimates in the blue book, that we are in a position where we can respond financially? Quite frankly, \$10 million is not enough.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Chair, it is unfortunate that we do not have more time to respond to questions.

Capacity certainly is an issue. I do not think anybody is going to argue the point that we need capacity to help these people.

Regarding the hon. member's question about the debt forgiveness issue, I think that is the next step down the road. These people need food right now. As I spoke about earlier, our contribution of an extra \$10 million is specifically for food so these people can continue to survive. Then we need to step in and expedite the peace process.

As a further step, we can then look at whether we address the debt forgiveness or how we further help these people. There is going to be a tremendous opportunity to help these people. There is a tremendous will in the Conservative government to increase aid. We spoke about it in our campaign and we will follow through on that commitment. It will be most interesting to see what our budget will bring for us tomorrow.

Government Orders

• (2050)

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Chair, this evening, in the debate on this very heavy subject of Darfur, I am grateful for the privilege to stand and have my voice counted for those who cannot speak for themselves today in that part of the world.

I had the opportunity last September to be in Khartoum and in Juba, Sudan in the south. Due to intermittent flights in that part of the world and arbitrary changes to the schedule, we did not quite reach Darfur but we did talk with many people who had been there, some of the aid groups, the various NGOs and so on, who told us about some of the horrific things that were happening in the Darfur area.

My concern for Darfur grows from the fact that if we do not resolve the major crisis in Darfur, there is a very good chance that the north-south comprehensive peace agreement will break down. I do believe the government in Khartoum is looking for the opportunity to blow apart that agreement.

What I heard over the period of time that I was in the Sudan was a growing concern. Other members who have followed this and monitored it closely and others who have been to that part of the world have obviously heard some of those reports as well. However I am encouraged by the fact that there is a growing will on the part of parliamentarians and a growing political will in this country for Canada to take a more decisive role in an international effort to stop the war crimes, the ethnic cleansing and the crimes against humanity.

I am also encouraged that our new Prime Minister raised this matter with President Bush in Cancun and that they agreed to work together on finding a solution. I am heartened by their discussion.

I am also grateful and encouraged by the fact that a large number of MPs from across party lines have called for more action. I am appreciative that the House is holding this debate tonight on Darfur as a result of the agreement between the House leaders in that respect.

It gave me hope when I heard the Prime Minister, in his speech on the Holocaust memorial and genocide, say that the world must never tolerate that happening again. It gave me hope because of the very serious situation in Darfur.

In his remarks of March 14 in Afghanistan, the Prime Minister said that we could not lead from the bleachers. I believe that with all my heart. I believe we have a country and a government that will be behind doing something better in respect to that part of the world. I want Canada to be that leader in the world at this point in time.

How Canada can do that is by starting to change our Sudan policy. Until this Parliament, Canada's Sudan policy was really that of a so-called constructive engagement in a previous regime and it simply has not worked. Before that carnage began in Darfur three years ago, more than 2 million people died and 4 million were displaced, driven from their homes in the oil fields of southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains.

The regime in northern Khartoum bears sole responsibility for that tragedy. The oil rich regime has killed and displaced its black African people with helicopter gunships and Arab militias. It has allowed its armed forces and militias to murder, rape and pillage with

impunity and then deliberately allowed the survivors to starve to death. This has gone on for a number of years while the world has looked away.

In the last century the world blinked at Nazi aggression in Europe and World War II followed. Will the world now blink again, this time as radical aggression in Africa is being unleashed in Darfur?

While some argue that the Darfur horrors do not constitute genocide, no credible voice would deny that war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity are occurring there. Therefore, we need to lead as a country.

World leaders called it a moral imperative and resolved to go into Kosovo in the situation there. If European civilians can be saved in Kosovo why can Africans not be saved in Darfur? I believe it is racism. It is an issue of black Muslims there. It is an issue of Arab Muslims up in the north and it is an issue of racism.

If the African Union in the coming days of the peace process cannot go ahead, then we need to seriously look at moving in, in some fashion, on that situation. The black woman who is being viciously raped does not care if it is an African or a white person who steps in to intervene and rescue her. The man who is being brutally beaten and tortured does not care about the colour of the skin, nor does a child being violently traumatized.

• (2055)

Canada needs to leave the bleachers. It needs to lead. I ask for our country to do that in this horrific situation in Darfur, Sudan on the continent of Africa.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I was with the member opposite at the Scream for Darfur rally that took place yesterday at Queen's Park. We spoke of the need to have an action plan, including the enactment of the UN chapter 7, the UN Security Council banning flights over Darfur, the need to hold the Sudan government accountable for the rape and killing of thousands, the need to provide humanitarian assistance and the need to hold China accountable.

Would the member opposite agree with the statements made at the rally?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Mr. Chair, as a member who was there the other day and heard the very passionate outpouring from a lot of youth from high school and colleges, as well as others, I agree with the sentiments that were expressed about the desperate need to move in respect to Darfur.

As has been said this evening, we do need to give the African Union a chance to lead. However the forces are under-resourced and they do not have the 20,000 that are probably required to be in that part of the world. We also have multilateral scenarios such as the UN's transition over from the Africa Union. If this situation is not resolved in a very quick timeframe, because we do not have much of a window, chapter 7 of the UN absolutely needs to be put into effect. This is a difficult thing to say but at the point where a country is actually killing its own citizens, some would say that it is giving up the sovereignty of its own country by way of the brutalization and killing of its own citizens.

Government Orders

Yes, if there is no action or remediation of this situation through the African Union or the UN in a transition, then we need to move in with chapter 7 in terms of getting a protection force on the ground in Darfur and in that part of the country.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to acknowledge the persistent efforts of my hon. friend from Saskatoon—Wanuskewin on this issue. I think he has been the most consistent spokesman within the government caucus for meaningful action to stop the ongoing genocide in Darfur. In fact, I believe it is mainly attributable to him that we are holding the debate tonight. I know he approached the government House leader with the initiative of a take note debate. I would like to commend him for his ongoing interest.

My friend opposite raised the question about the involvement of the People's Republic of China in Sudan in encouraging and supporting the regime. I wonder if the member could take the opportunity to comment on whether he thinks it is helpful that the PRC is the principal weapons supplier to the Sudanese regime and consistently vetoes virtually every resolution before the UN Security Council seeking meaningful action. Would he comment on whether this may or may not be linked to the extensive economic interests that foreign government has with the Sudanese regime?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for his encouragement and the passion that he and a number of knowledgeable members in the House have in respect of Darfur and to Sudan in particular.

There is no question that these economic interests are a big driver in terms of some of the awful atrocities and conflicts that go on. Someone put it very well in an article I read, where the point was made that the whole issue of China has probably not been given enough attention in respect of Sudan and Darfur because most of the weapons that are used to kill, rape, plunder and so on are made in Sudan in Chinese factories. We can be sure that China is involved in a very significant and serious way. It is the oil interest. Different countries around the world need oil as, no doubt, does Sudan. China has a major role in the terrible things that have gone on there by way of the factories it has built in Sudan and all the armaments that are then used against its own citizenry. It is an awful thing.

China is as guilty as can be in respect of its complicity and involvement for economic interests. The brutal inhumanity of individuals occurring there is, in large part, through it constantly vetoing the motions that come forward at the United Nations as well. It is well served by this member to highlight China's involvement in the atrocities over there.

• (2100)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Chair, I find this debate on the extremely important issue of the civil war in Darfur, with all the horrors it entails, to be emotional and difficult.

Every effort possible must be made and implemented to protect against ethnic cleansing, genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Jan Egeland, Kofi Annan's special UN envoy, said recently that since 2004 the three unfortunately distinctive factors that have made

this conflict in Darfur so remarkable in the past few years remain the same: the widespread atrocities against civilians, the cleansing of entire regions and the very difficult access for humanitarian relief.

Let me provide a few figures. Darfur has a total population of 6 million. Nearly 3 million people are affected by this conflict and nearly 2 million people have been displaced. There are 230,000 Sudanese refugees in eastern Chad—the number is between 180,000 and 300,000 people. Humanitarian aid on the ground deploys 14,000 workers. The presence of the African Union force charged with maintaining order and security counts 6,500 people. The numbers are only approximate. Although these figures speak volumes, money to feed the displaced persons and to help create other camps is horrendously lacking.

The figures I have state that between 2005 and 2006 the international community cut its commitment considerably. Members will have read, as I did in Saturday's *International Herald Tribune*, that the World Food Programme does not have enough money to maintain the rations at 2,000 calories a day. And there are 600,000 people the program cannot reach.

In many cases—they number some 600,000—the humanitarian workers no longer have access to certain regions. They need security. We are dealing with a conflict that is as violent as it is complex. How can I sum it up in just 10 minutes?

I will point out quickly that the backdrop is a war between northern and southern Sudan, which lasted over 40 years. When the leaders of northern and southern Sudan reached an agreement, they resolved nothing in the case of Darfur, which is in western Sudan.

At that moment, the war broke out again. The rebels in western Sudan wanted what the south had got and considered themselves entitled to, namely, participation in economic development, participation in political representation and, as people of Darfur, better access to Khartoum. This is an economic, social and political conflict. It is clear, however, that there are also ethnic elements to it.

• (2105)

Why? Because in order to protect itself from the rebels, the Khartoum government armed another militia called the Janjaweed. They are identified as Arabs, but in that country, Arab or non Arab makes no sense. This has developed over the years. It is largely cultural. I have tried to read all I can on the subject.

Still, the Janjaweed have burned the villages of the four or five or six different African tribes. Women and children find themselves at the side of the road with nothing. The area is scorched earth. There are no trees, nothing. Nobody runs away. Nobody hides. The earth is burned for many kilometres.

Government Orders

The rebels are saying that the needs of the people of Darfur have not been met. Time is passing. I mean that the 48 hours that the African Union has given the parties to reach an agreement are 48 crucial hours. That is what I know, and I know it the better for having heard it from the mouth of Javier Solana himself. Why is this crucial? Because if there is no peace, the international community—let us be clear—will be faced with a dramatic situation. If the crimes of all sorts continue, if there is no peace, the only thing that the international community can do will be to literally invade a country, Sudan, which is as large as Europe. Omar al-Bashir will never let himself be pushed around. He is afraid of meeting the same fate as Saddam Hussein or others.

Canada did well to send its UN ambassador to Abuja today. This peace must be given every chance to succeed. Does it mean that, after this peace is concluded, we will not need to send soldiers to Darfur? No. There are 10,000 UN soldiers there at the moment to maintain the agreement between north and south. Also, to ensure that it is possible for refugees to return to their villages, perhaps to rebuild, to ensure that people will be able to learn how to live together again without killing each other, an enormous peacekeeping force will be needed. However there is no question of “peace-making”. For that, war would have to be declared on Omar al-Bashir.

We are in a situation that is serious, but interesting at the same time. This is the first time that the international community is obliged to try to enforce the responsibility to protect. The first steps in that direction are supported by the existing forces. We are trying to get the parties to make peace themselves. There is no other way. When peace comes from external violence, even if that is sometimes unavoidable, it brings its share of serious consequences which make the future extremely difficult.

I dearly hope, with all my heart and all my being, that these two days can produce a peace. Next, the resources will have to be supplied. The African Union will have to stay there. That in any case is what the United Nations is planning. On September 30, however, the African Union will be reinforced and assisted by the United Nations, which will provide a larger force to ensure that the peace is fully established and that it lasts.

• (2110)

We have a collective responsibility. We cannot get out of this just with resolutions denouncing this or that. These are real people, real women who are being repeatedly raped, and then bayoneted to death. Children are being tortured, and the elderly are among the victims. There is real suffering, people dying of hunger because we are not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry, but time is up.

We will move on to questions and comments. The hon. parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Foreign affairs has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment.

I listened to the member from the Bloc who is a very passionate lady and very concerned about this issue. There is no question in anybody's mind that what is happening in Darfur is a serious humanitarian crisis, whether it is called genocide or whatever name we want to call it. There is a very strong desire to act to stop the killings. People want to go in there quickly. We have heard tonight all kinds of suggestions to stop the killing now, including military intervention.

The hon. member also talked about invading the country. The invasion of that country could have serious repercussions on the whole African continent. Africans would look at it in a very different manner. That is why it is extremely important that we support the African Union although we know it needs help.

As recently as a week ago the Tanzanian minister was here and he said the African Union could do the job if it had the capability. It is asking us to do the job. Canada has committed to do that, but it is a long term process. Everyone thinks we must move into Darfur now. Everyone thinks we must send in forces now, put on sanctions, all kinds of stuff. Nobody trusts the record of the Sudanese government based upon what is going on in Darfur. It is very difficult for the government of Sudan to have any legitimacy when it actually embarks on killing its own citizens.

Canada has spearheaded the responsibility to protect. However, the international community also has a responsibility to protect people from genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. This calls for enforcement action or military intervention when peaceful means have been inadequate. Right now peaceful means have not been exhausted in Darfur. We must be very careful and throw our support behind the peace talks that are going on right now in Darfur.

• (2115)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Chair, it does not happen all the time, but this time I agree with my colleague across the way. The new Government of Canada must throw its support behind the talks in Abuja. These talks have been facilitated by the international community, the United States and the European Union, which have worked together for once. The African Union, proud and cognizant of its responsibility, has become involved in the settlement process.

We must guard against taking a colonialist or neo-colonialist attitude. The African Union must be able to play the role it has taken on and obtain a settlement with the help of the other countries that are threatening sanctions, promising investment and bringing their full weight to bear on the process. I support that because everyone who wants to save these people's lives should hope for a settlement. Otherwise, the violence will continue. And when will it end? I repeat, what country will want to invade Sudan, a nation the size of Europe? Who will be the thousands of soldiers sent in to make peace?

I hope that the international community will increasingly be able to act on its commitment to protect against genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. But right now, we have to face reality. If peace does not come, will we be able to end the suffering of those who are suffering? The answer is that we will not, for a very long time.

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Chair, in my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster, there is a large Sudanese community from southern Sudan. These people, and many others across the country, are paying close attention to our debate here this evening because there is no doubt that Canada has a certain responsibility in the matter. No matter how you look at it, this situation is a disaster. There have been more than 200,000 deaths, villages have been ravaged, people tortured and killed, children kidnapped. This is, without question, a humanitarian disaster.

Canada has a major leadership role to play in helping the African Union. However, as we have seen, it has reduced its aid in terms of food supplies. This is where much of the problem lies. If our government fails to show leadership and does not fund humanitarian operations and the food aid desperately needed in Darfur, we will be shirking our basic responsibilities.

Canada has a role to play. I realize that we must help the African Union because assistance is urgently needed. I would like the hon. member to comment on this matter.

• (2120)

Ms. Francine Lalonde: As I said, Mr. Chair I agree wholeheartedly. If the African Union can help resolve this conflict, we should invest money, station peacekeeping troops and enforce the arms embargo. We need these measures now. We must keep pressing for those who have committed crimes to be punished. There are dozens of measures to put in place.

We must also loosen the purse strings. I heard that a member from Quebec, who is in charge of CIDA, announced an additional \$20 million. The numbers I was given yesterday mention that Canada contributed \$24 million last year and \$450,000 this year. We have to contribute cash; we have to dig deep for Darfur, northern Sudan and southern Sudan, because it is not over yet. We have to show that we can resolve these issues and help people find peace and security. This is a major challenge.

I would like to add that we have spoken of Darfur at far greater length than we did the Congo. There were 3 million deaths in the Congo, not 200,000. One of the positive effects of this conflict is that we are finally turning our attention to Africa. We have discussed Africa in the context of NEPAD, but this is not enough.

When I was teaching history several years ago, a famous French agrologist said that black Africa had gotten off to a bad start. And the end of its journey is no better than the beginning. But there are positive experiences and we must absolutely make massive investments so that countries can get back on their feet.

We did not talk about oil, we talked about the Chinese. Nevertheless, I recall that in this House I repeatedly asked the government in power about Talisman Energy. This Canadian company paid significant royalties to the Government of Sudan, which used them to wage war. Not in Darfur, but in southern Sudan. Fortunately, peace has been achieved since then, although the leader of the south is dead, and I hope that Sudan will be able to remain—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry once again, but your time has expired.

[English]

Resuming debate, the hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Chair, thank you for your excellent chairing of the events tonight in this incredibly important discussion and debate.

It is obvious that not only the people here on both sides of this chamber but people around the world are consumed with the frustration that surrounds this whole situation related to Sudan and Darfur. My frustration hit a peak when I was at the United Nations in a former iteration as opposition critic for foreign affairs a number of months ago. I was consumed and distressed by what was happening in Sudan and Darfur.

I had the opportunity, after a session where a number of us were presenting, to speak to the representative from Sudan, the representative from the Khartoum regime. I thought this would be a great opportunity. Obviously I knew I was not going to make a huge impact on his life with my plea for sanity and for opening things up for the African Union and other things. I was not going to insult him. I was not going to attack him. I was just going to make a plea from my heart, in a respectful way, for a consideration of sanity in terms of what was going on.

I approached him, introduced myself and simply said, “Do you have any thoughts on what we can do about the crisis?” He simply said two words that summed it up, in my view. He said, “What crisis?” He was the representative of the Khartoum regime.

So it is not difficult to tap into this vein of frustration that we feel around the world and here in Canada. I know what it is like to stand outside in the rain with students, as many of my colleagues have, as we have called out, certainly to the government of the day, but we were speaking out to anybody who was listening in terms of saying that something must be done, and to stand with people who stand far taller than I ever could in this debate, people like Justin Laku and others who continually go to that area of the world and come back with these distressing reports.

The frustration is extreme because of the déjà vu quality of what we are seeing. We are haunted by words. We are haunted by previous incidents, by our own General Dallaire in Rwanda begging the world community, saying, “Please, we have to do something or a genocide of untold proportions will unfold”. To see the United Nations paralyzed then and not able to do anything, and now to see this whole bad movie starting to circulate again, it is a tremendous, heart-rending anguish that is felt throughout the world community.

The will is there and the resources are there, but to this point, though we are recently encouraged and we hope there is going to be some substance to give us ongoing encouragement, it has been a very distressing time for the world community, although nowhere near as distressing as it has been for the four million people who have been displaced, for the families of two million who have perished in this conflict. We have no idea of what that is like.

Our nation, quite rightly, comes to a standstill when four of our young men return in coffins from a foreign field. We shudder to a stop at the thought of four lives being lost, and rightly so. It shows that we have no understanding and no concept of what happens to the soul of a country when two million have died, when four million have been displaced and they cry out to the world and all they hear are those deafening and excruciating sounds of silence. We have no idea of what that must be like.

It is important that we reflect on this. I would like to read a couple of quotations for members. One is a quotation that came in from Don Cheadle, the gentleman who played in the documentary movie *Hotel Rwanda*. He says, "Not since the Rwanda genocide of 1994 has the world seen such a calculated campaign of slaughter, rape, starvation and displacement as is happening right now in Darfur".

• (2125)

He goes on, stating, "In Darfur, government-backed militias, known collectively as the Janjaweed, are systematically eliminating entire communities and ways of life. Villages are razed, women and girls raped and branded, men and boys murdered, and food and water supplies targeted and destroyed...Hundreds of thousands have died. Millions more are at risk". It defies our imagination.

In terms of Canada's contribution, we have done things. Over the last few years there has been about \$170 million in aid, to go to some of the most basic things such as water wells and nutrition centres. And yes, we have been there with equipment, valuable and needed equipment for observers and forces to use. On a grand scale, \$170 million is still a lot of money, and on the other side of the equation in terms of what may appear to be smaller amounts, we have done things.

I would like to acknowledge tonight two RCMP officers, RCMP Corporal Barry Meyer, from the Sunshine Coast in British Columbia. He was deployed to Sudan on April 19. He will be joined by one other RCMP member, Sergeant Richard Davis from Ottawa, who will be deployed to Sudan in mid-May. We have to imagine this. We have to picture this: a grand total of two RCMP officers going to Sudan to somehow be involved in trying to have some influence on the policing forces in that particular regime. They are two Canadians of whom we can be proud. They are going into dangerous territory.

Two people is better than none, but two thousand would be better than two. That is why we are encouraging governments everywhere to respond as best they can. It seems there is finally some agreement from the Khartoum regime that the African Union can be acknowledged to come in there with resources: yes, with support and life-giving resources, and yes, we also have to face this reality, with troops.

I want us to pause for minute here, because some of the prevailing conditions in Sudan are not totally unlike what has been happening in Afghanistan. The order of magnitude is much greater in Sudan and Darfur, let us make no mistake about that, but some of the underlying conditions are the same. It is an incredibly oppressive regime, a regime that deprives people of their rights, a regime that kills and slaughters those who stand in its way, and a regime under which a people cries out to the world, asking us to please come and help them.

Government Orders

As Canadians, we realize this has to be a combination of food, water, teaching and policing. How are we going to react if we are also called upon for troops? The conditions are about the same, though on a greater magnitude of scale, let us acknowledge that, as they are in Afghanistan. Are we going to be willing, should it come to that? Should things go sideways, as they can in a situation like this, will we be willing to stand with not just our troops but our RCMP officers and others as they face what will be one of the most significant challenges of the 21st century?

I believe that Canadians will rise to the occasion. I believe Canadians want us to do this. I am encouraged that our Prime Minister is greatly burdened by this, along with our Minister of Foreign Affairs and colleagues on all sides of the House. This is not a partisan issue. We must act. We cannot let this go unnoticed. I will close with a quote from Nobel peace laureate Elie Wiesel, referring to victims of the Holocaust. He said in reference to this, and some members may have heard his comments recently, "Let us remember: What hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor but the silence of the bystander".

Let us not be bystanders.

• (2130)

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am very impressed and moved by not only the member's knowledge and desire to understand what is happening in Darfur but, in his analysis, to find out what our role would be if we were to actually send troops. That was what our colleague on this side was speaking about in terms of avoiding the kind of military intervention that is occurring in Iraq.

As I understand it, the most recent major condition that has been put forward by the Khartoum regime is the integration of the armed forces that would include rebel forces, those who in fact, as the member has outlined, are engaged in the kind of activity that we deplore.

I wonder if the member would outline what the two RCMP officers are doing and whether he sees a role that the Canadian military could play in terms of helping the Khartoum regime to meet that condition, which is the integration of the forces. It seems that is a major hurdle that has to be overcome. I wonder if the member would expand on that.

• (2135)

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Chair, restating just briefly, this is not, nor can it be, strictly some kind of military intervention. When we are dealing with forces as inhuman as the ones that are unleashed upon the people of Darfur, there obviously has to be a present force of some kind. If that means we need to help the African Union forces, then we need to give that consideration. However, there has to be a wide spectrum of intervention, including humanitarian aid and diplomatic presence.

Government Orders

I am glad the hon. member raised the issue again of the RCMP officers. The RCMP, up to 1995, led the world actually and was the first in terms of police forces going into these areas. There is a difference there obviously between soldiers. They have being able to have an influence by their presence and by sharing their experiences with those policing forces who are perhaps not used to basic respect for human rights. That is their overall job there, to be an influence, to share their experience, and to hopefully begin to change literally the mentality of policing forces that now exist. It has to be comprehensive. It cannot just be policing. It cannot be just military. It has to be a comprehensive approach.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to participate and put a question to the minister.

The minister mentioned standing with students who are concerned about what is happening and who are feeling very passionate about what is happening in Darfur and the crimes against humanity there.

In my constituency of Burnaby—Douglas at Simon Fraser University, an organization was formed called Canadian Students for Darfur. It was organized by the former president of the Simon Fraser Students Society, Clement Apaak. It now has members in over a dozen university, college and high school campuses across Canada, including Alpha Secondary School in my riding of Burnaby—Douglas.

Canadian Students for Darfur has worked with the Pacific Region of the Canadian Jewish Congress and Mr. Mark Weintraub, and the very small Darfurian community on the lower mainland of British Columbia to do a lot of public education and awareness and to have public demonstrations. They have entertained a number of very prominent speakers, including other members of the House.

They have put forward an agenda for action on Darfur. I wonder if the minister could comment on this agenda. They call for the supporting of the rapid transition from the current African Union force to a robust chapter 7 mandated UN protection force; the enhancement of troop support to allow for the civilian protection mandate to be achieved; the enforcement of the UN Security Council ban on offensive military flights over Darfur; support of the UN Security Council resolutions to bring the perpetrators of international crimes to justice before the International Criminal Court; disarming the militia groups collectively referred to as the Janjaweed; enabling the internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their homes; and monitoring and enforcing the arms embargo, mandated under UN Security Council resolution 1591—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I am sorry, in order to keep it within the confines of brief questions and comments I will have to cut the member off and allow the Minister of Public Safety to respond.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Chair, I can understand the member wanting to make known the key representations of those student groups. I met with a number of them myself, groups like that one and other groups.

What impressed me at the time last year when we were having meetings with these student groups, perhaps a little earlier in the cycle of the year, was that they were making these commitments and spending a lot of time not just holding press conferences and not just

rallying but they spent a lot of time even sacrificing their own exam time to really think through some of these issues at arm's length from parliamentary debates. They brought forward many of these ideas.

There is a place for an international court or international tribunal that would look at the war crimes that have been committed. I believe there could be a special designation of such an international court. I agree with the disarming of the Janjaweed and bringing some understanding to that regime if members of the regime would open themselves up to it; the definition of what a civil force is supposed to be, a civil armed force, and how it is to be subject to a ruling democratic regime that exists under the rule of law; the return of displaced people to their areas; and resolution 1591. Those are all particular resolutions of the student group that are worthy of consideration and support.

● (2140)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the comments of the Minister of Public Safety on this issue. I know he has had a long standing interest in this area.

The question I have is fairly simple. If we look at Khartoum's history with respect to the conflicts not only in Darfur but also going back to the conflict in the south that resulted in two million deaths and four million individuals displaced, we see a disturbing pattern of behaviour. Khartoum engages in false peace negotiations with the international community and then does everything in its power to obfuscate, block, prevent, and deter any kind of meaningful action on the ground to really stop the carnage that is taking place, aided and abetted by itself.

Therefore, even though this particular round of peace negotiations is taking place in Abuja as we speak, the problem I submit to the minister is that Khartoum, if history is an example of what we can predict in the future, will sign on the dotted line, but will simply not live up to the meaning and intent of that peace agreement on the ground. It has failed to do it for the last two years with respect to the peace agreement that it signed, allowed the Janjaweed to continue, continued supporting it, and continued to allow the human rights abuses the minister eloquently spoke about.

I think the comment, "crisis, what crisis" encapsulates everything in that small vignette that he had with a Sudanese official at the UN.

Will the Minister of Public Safety ask the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs that if Khartoum is not living up to the intent of the agreement that will be signed in Abuja and indeed the agreement that was signed more than a year and a half ago with respect to disarming the Janjaweed and calling it back and removing it out of Darfur, then the government will support the chapter 7 peacemaking initiative that is required on the ground to save the lives of the people there? A robust chapter 7 mandate will be required and will he ask for that UN peacemaking force to be assembled and deployed as soon as possible?

We both know full well, and he has spoken about it before, time is of the essence and action is required now.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Chair, in reflection on these good questions that have been raised by my colleague opposite, there are some cards, I believe, to be played here that maybe, as an international diplomatic community, we have not fully deployed.

Government Orders

I do believe that a chapter 7 possibility is there. There may come a time when we have to give that consideration. I am as disturbed and as pessimistic as he is about the past history of the Khartoum regime. Winston Churchill said, "We learn from history that we learn nothing from history". I like most of Churchill's proclamations, I would like them to stand, but I would like to see this one disproved.

Who would the regime listen to, really? Would it listen to Canada? We have two RCMP officers over there. We have sent resources. The regime has not really listened to us though. Who might it listen to? It might listen to China. China is very heavily invested in Sudan, in Khartoum. I might suggest that we could appeal to the diplomatic sense of China. I was able to share with President Hu Jintao, when he was here on his visit last year, that after 1945 China was made a member of the Security Council because other countries had a vision that China could be a stabilizing force in their part of the world.

I think we should be appealing to China's sense of destiny, if we want to call it that, to be a stabilizing force and put diplomatic pressure on the Khartoum regime. That is one of the number of diplomatic cards that could be played. I do not know if it has been fully deployed but it should be. After those type of things, we would have to stay open to the consideration of a possible chapter 7.

• (2145)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Brampton—Springdale.

There is no question that tonight we have heard a collective sense of urgency, a collective sense of despair, sorrow, even foreboding. This evening we are on the brink of either hope or disaster regarding the events that have unfolded. Some members talked earlier this evening about Rwanda, the Congo and Angola, where the world did not take collective action and in some cases when it did, it was too late.

Hans Morgenthau, the renowned theorist, talked about the state's act in the national interest. What is in Canada's national interest? It is in our national interest that there be an African solution to this problem and clearly we have a role to play. Historically, whether it is the present government in Canada or a past government, we have paid attention to this situation where we know that rapes, murders and destruction of whole villages occur. If these things occurred closer to home, we would have been called to arms, but do we have the ability to do so? We have ways through logistical support, diplomatic support, and economic support to deal with African states in the region.

We see the spillover in places like Chad. The crisis in Darfur is causing instability. That has significant implications for the sub-Saharan region. My colleague spoke earlier about the problem of a government in Khartoum, that even if we get an agreement, how will that agreement be implemented? How do we hold the parties concerned to fulfill that agreement?

Canada can play a role in supporting our African allies in this regard. The African Union wants to very strongly assert its role in this particular situation. As a central tenet of Canadian foreign policy we have always valued human rights. We are seeing the wanton destruction of human rights. A multilateral approach through the African Union and for those on the ground can play a very important role.

We have contributed over \$11 million, but money alone is not going to solve the problem. To get the collective will to implement any agreement will require severe monitoring on the ground. It will require troops on the ground. It will require that we hold those who sign any agreement accountable, not only to the people of that region, but to the international community as a whole. We have a responsibility along with our friends to ensure that.

There is no one in the House who is not prepared to step up to the plate and say that we and our allies can play a collective role through diplomatic and economic channels. The fact that we may have two RCMP officers on the ground at least demonstrates that for Canada this is not simply a Sudanese problem or a Darfur problem, but it is a problem of the world community. How we react on this type of issue sends a signal to other areas. In Africa Sudan is not the only issue or problem unfortunately.

We have the collective will and the ability to work with our friends in the African Union for an African solution. I certainly hope and pray that in the next 24 to 48 hours we get an agreement which we will be able to monitor and enforce, which is critical.

• (2150)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, we are hearing a lot of talk tonight and nobody is in disagreement about the depth of the problem in Darfur. Some people have seen it up close; some have not. Obviously we are all hoping for a peaceful solution to it. Whether we are optimistic or pessimistic about that individually, we each have our own views. Frankly, I am personally not terribly optimistic that in the next 24 to 48 hours we are going to see an agreement reached that will be lasting.

Obviously if the peace plan is approved, then we will give it all the support needed to help make it a lasting agreement. If it is not approved or falls apart, is the only option then to do a chapter VII invasion of Darfur and impose peace by force? Does my hon. colleague have any concept of how big a force it is going to take and how long it is going to take?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, I remember back in 1979 when the forces in Tanzania invaded Uganda and removed Idi Amin. Publicly there was condemnation by African leaders of the invasion of the territorial sovereignty of Uganda, but privately they were rejoicing that Nyerere's government had finally rid Africa of one of the worst blights, being Idi Amin.

The sensitivity is there about any kind of military operation. The question would be, if one does not have the political support of African states, what kind of composition of force would take place? It is very clear, as we have seen in other cases, that winning the battle does not necessarily win the war. I think it is a fair question, but it is very hard to predict the kind of force one would need, how long it would be there, what kind of stabilizing force would need to be there in the longer term and what kind of reconstruction would be needed.

Government Orders

There are great sensitivities. Before we invoke that we certainly need to look through the diplomatic channels at what would be the tools necessary in order to bring that about, if that were, and I would suggest probably, the last resort. At the moment, the African Union troops there need to have not only the diplomatic support but certainly the tools to carry it out. They cannot be sent in to do a job for which they are ill equipped.

It may be an issue that we may have to come back to. Hopefully we will not, but if we do, I think we have to look very carefully at what kind of composition and mandate we would be looking at.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Chair, we know that peace talks have failed seven times since August 2004. While all this talking is going on, people are dying in Sudan. People are being tortured by vicious warfare and women and girls are being raped. This cannot continue.

I was quite encouraged when I heard today that there would be a small investment of \$10 million. However, last year's investment was \$20 million for food aid and it was cut back to \$5 million. It is now back up to \$10 million, which is surely not enough.

Should we not immediately enforce the arms embargo in the Security Council resolution 1591, support targeted sanctions against government leaders? If we are not able to persuade China to cooperate in the Security Council so that we can have UN peacekeeping troops there, which is ideally the situation, should we join the African Union in Darfur given that there are not enough troops as they do not have enough funds to take appropriate action?

If the UN Security Council is unable to act, is there not a precedent to act outside the UN, such as in 1990 with Bosnia and Kosovo when we were able to save thousands of lives? Is that a direction the hon. member of Parliament would be interested in taking?

• (2155)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chair, we should enforce resolution 1591, definitely. I do not think there is any question that that would be a very important step. The issue, of course, as the member knows, is trying to get the collective will around that table to enforce it. That leads to the second part of the question, which is what is available outside the Security Council of the United Nations?

I believe very strongly that an African solution is only possible if the right tools are given to support the African Union and those forces there on the ground. Again, we talk about peacekeeping. I would suggest that the real word is peacemaking. As we have seen in other conflicts, the issue is not to go in and simply maintain a peace. It is to try to create one. This is very difficult. There are tools at our disposal. We will see what the next 48 hours bring. I would suggest that we will probably be back to revisit different options in the weeks to come.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I begin by commending and thanking the thousands of volunteers, organizations and individuals, in particular Students Taking Action Now: Darfur, or STAND, and the Save Darfur Parliamentary Coalition for the role they have played in ensuring that the voices of the children and the plight of women in Darfur is not forgotten.

As a nation, we cannot afford to forget that in another place in the world atrocities are occurring, which are truly unimaginable and for which there really are no words. Minute by minute children are dying of malnutrition, women are being raped, beaten and abused and young men are being lured into the culture of gangs, violence and the militia.

The United Nations has referred to the situation in Darfur as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. With almost two million deaths and four million people being displaced in Sudan, we have a responsibility to stop the genocide, to stop the atrocities and to stop this humanitarian crisis, which is occurring before our very eyes. We must take action now.

Canada has an international reputation of being a world leader for the promotion of peace, for humanitarian relief efforts and as a champion of human rights. The previous Liberal government had a commitment to put an end to the violence in Darfur. Canada was one of the top three donors upon the founding of Africa's made in Africa solution, committing over \$170 million. We subsequently made the largest single contribution upon the expansion of the African mission in Sudan, committing 7,700 personnel and 80 Canadian military and police personnel to help in the process of peace building, stability and poverty reduction. Despite all of this aid, World Vision Canada has reported that approximately 10,000 more people are dying per month. The world cannot afford to watch these human beings die.

Under our previous prime minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard, we championed the doctrine of responsibility to protect. We championed this cause in the global arena. It is incomprehensible that Canada would watch an entire generation being cleansed and wiped away.

We must protect the women and children in Darfur. We must protect the thousands of people who are dying, not with talk but with concrete action. We must be the champions of a United Nations peacekeeping mission that focuses on Darfur just like we were for the comprehensive peace agreement which was reached in 2005. Even if other countries on the UN Security Council are hesitant to move forward with a UN mission focused on Darfur and focused on achieving positive results for the people of Darfur, we must convince the countries on the Security Council that this is simply the right thing to do. We must send in our peacekeeping troops, if necessary, to protect civilians, to provide stability and to promote peace and order.

I call on our government to implement the 10-point agenda for action in Darfur, as proposed by the Save the Darfur Parliamentary Coalition. I call on the government to implement strict policy that will ensure and support the rapid transition from the current African Union force to a robust chapter 7-mandated UN protection force.

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We call on the government to enhance troop support to allow for the civilian protection mandate to be achieved. We call on the government to enforce the United Nations Security Council ban on military flights over Darfur, to support the UN Security Council to disarm militia groups, to enable internally displaced people to return to their homes.

We call on the government to implement the 10-point agenda for action because it is the right thing to do. The people of Darfur need us. This is not the time for us to play politics. We cannot stand by for the sake of diplomatic relations or even financial burden. We have a moral responsibility to save the lives of thousands of innocent people who are perishing.

As the Sudanese government and the rebel groups work with the African Union and burn the midnight oil to reach an agreement, we must ensure that all stakeholders hold the Sudanese government to account, that a peace agreement finalized will be honoured and will be the start of a process to provide the people of Darfur with hope for their families will be reunited, that women will be respected and that children can learn and become productive citizens and contribute to their communities so the people of Darfur have the peace and stability that they need.

• (2200)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Chair, we do want to focus on the future obviously, but my colleague opposite mentioned the previous government's approach to this issue. Could she tell us whether her colleague, the member for LaSalle—Émard, when he was prime minister, raised in either of his official visits to China or in the visit of President Hu Jintao to Canada the fact that the People's Republic of China was the largest supplier of armaments to the Sudanese regime, that it was the largest trade partner of the Sudanese regime and supplier of revenues through its energy activities in Sudan?

Did the former prime minister raise with his Chinese interlocutors the repeated Security Council vetoes and opposition from the PRC to any form of constructive resolutions to the Sudanese matter?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Chair, I know we must ensure that we, as parliamentarians, move forward and help the people of Darfur. What I can say is that during a previous Liberal government regime, the prime minister was committed, along with other parliamentarians in the House, to ensure that the people of Darfur had positive results, that we had a process for peace, that we achieved stability and that we provided an environment for children of Darfur to succeed.

We were one of the first countries at the table when the made in Africa solution of an African mission in Sudan was inaugurated in 2004, committing over \$170 million. Subsequently, when it came time for the expansion of this mission, we were one of the largest contributors of any other country. In addition, when the United Nations peacekeeping mission took place in Sudan, we provided personnel and assistance. We also had observer status at the sixth round of negotiations.

There has been an ongoing effort, in addition to the other moneys that were given for food and humanitarian aid. However, despite all this investment, there is still a substantial amount of atrocities occurring in Sudan and we must do more as a country and as a global society.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, we will take that as a no.

The hon. member mentioned, quite rightly, the responsibility to protect, and that is something we hear about often. Along with the responsibility to protect, we need to have something with which to protect.

I ask my hon. colleague whether the responsibility to protect should also include the responsibility to arm oneself, to be prepared and capable of protecting if it comes down to that. I am guessing she will say yes to that. Then I will ask her whether her party is prepared to support us when we expand the Canadian Forces and give it the capability to protect, which we have been lacking for the last many years.

• (2205)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Chair, I mentioned in my notes the 10-point action plan, which has been referred to and I think is being supported by all parliamentarians on this side of the House.

One of the first points was in regard to ensuring a robust chapter 7, which is mandated by the United Nations Protection Force. We will have to wait and see over the next 48 hours what the result of the negotiations are.

As I said in my speech, and I think I can speak on behalf of other colleagues on this side, we would be very strongly in favour, if required, of the deployment of troops to ensure the process of peace building, to ensure that we provide an environment for children to get educated and to succeed and to ensure that we protect women.

As a country, we have a tremendous reputation throughout the international arena for being peacekeepers and ensuring that we provide humanitarian relief and build nations. If it does come down to it, we will support troops in Darfur.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time tonight with the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Tonight, across the country, most Canadians are sitting in their living rooms, enjoying National Hockey League playoffs. They are cheering on their favourite team. In my province they are hoping to see a battle of Alberta. They are quite taken up with what is happening in the NHL.

Tonight, in the House of Commons, a number of people from all parties have gathered, and I am pleased to see that the majority of the ones here tonight are on the same page. We are debating perhaps one of the greatest disasters this planet has at this point in time.

In 1995 we watched as an atrocity took place in a country that perhaps in some ways was not a lot different than Sudan. Most of the world stood by and watched as 800,000 Tutsis were massacred in Rwanda. We talked about the atrocity. We talked about how horrific it was. We saw the pictures and we heard the stories of murder and ethnic cleansing. We said that somebody ought to do something about this. We felt agencies, such as the United Nations, should step forward, buy nobody did anything. We all recognized that someone should do something.

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Tonight, we debate another slaughter, a slaughter of innocent people, again occurring in Africa. This time it is in the Darfur region of Sudan. Again we hear Canadians and members in the House of Commons say that we should do something, that we have agencies in place to make a difference and to respond in times such as this.

Before the carnage really began in the area of Darfur, prior to 2002 or 2003, some reported that close to 200 million people were murdered in that region and upwards of three million or four million people were displaced. They have been driven from their homes in a country that, for all intents and purposes, is oil rich and should have all the resources to help its people. Yet we say that someone should really do something.

In the past three years the death toll in Darfur has reached between 300,000 and 400,000 people, depending on which statistics we look at. Men, children and women are being killed, and many other atrocities are taking place. We are watching people being moved, not just around the country, not just from one region to another, but into countries. They are migrating to Chad and other areas, looking for help.

We have put a great deal of hope in the people of Africa, that they would be able to respond to the disaster in their own continent. Perhaps too much has been put on the African Union troops. We see that effective answers to the crisis has not been forthcoming. Violations of international law and humanity are everywhere.

What needs to be done? Canada has played an integral role. We have brought dollars forward. We have made offers to that continent. However, the issue is still there.

● (2210)

It has been said that the world needs more Canada. Canada must step forward now.

I welcome and applaud the minister for appearing tonight and offering another \$10 million immediately to help offset the starvation that is going on right now. I know that the former foreign affairs critics brought this to our committee time after time. Our foreign affairs minister spoke tonight about this being one of the priorities, not only for the government but for other governments around the world.

I just want to say that we are prepared to step forward. We want to ensure that Canadians understand exactly how dire this is and put forward every resource we have.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am of the view, as I think all of us are tonight, that Khartoum is abjectly unwilling to live up to whatever peace agreement it signs on to. It has demonstrated this over a prolonged period of time in the conflicts in the south. It has demonstrated this repeatedly with respect to Darfur. It has failed to demobilize and to neutralize the Janjaweed that is engaged in the killing.

If the government in Khartoum fails to disarm, demobilize and stop the Janjaweed's actions in Darfur, is the member willing to ask his government to support the chapter 7 peacemaking engagement with a robust 20,000 person cohort to go into Darfur as soon as possible?

While the Minister for International Cooperation put in \$10 million, last year we put in \$20 million. The deficit with respect to the World Food Programme is \$500 million, which means that 3.5 million people will potentially starve to death. Will he support an extra \$10 million through CIDA's budget that will go as soon as possible to the World Food Programme?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Chair, I just want to acknowledge the work done by my colleague across the way. This has been an issue he has brought to the House many times.

First, we recognize that there is a mechanism in chapter 7 that says that if a country is unwilling or unable to protect its people, it then becomes the responsibility of the United Nations and other countries internationally to go in and ensure those things happen.

However, when do we move in? I know that Canada in the past has talked about providing troops, police, people and resources. In some cases Africa itself has said that it wants to ensure it does it in the most effective way but that sending white soldiers into Sudan may not be the most effective way.

Speaking for myself, I believe the first thing we should do is put pressure on every country we can to make things happen in that part of the world. If the United Nations believes that chapter 7 is the way to go, then Canada will stand there. However, until then, Canada needs to step up and, as the minister said this evening, it needs to pressure other countries as well, countries that might be able to have more of an impact than we do at the present stage with our two Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the other limited resources we have.

The second question was with regard to the extra dollars. Tomorrow is budget day and we will wait and see. From what I understood, the minister came forward tonight with \$10 million specifically for that. In speaking with the Prime Minister and the cabinet ministers on this side of the House, we are very much aware that Canada can do more, that Canada can have a greater impact and that Canada can respond in ways like providing dollars.

We have talked about the 0.7% in the past. All parties have talked about moving those dollars up, ensuring more is available and ensuring they are targeted to countries like Sudan and Darfur. I certainly would be supportive of moving in that direction.

● (2215)

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I stand tonight to speak about the horrendous situation in the Darfur region of Sudan. This is a speech I sincerely wish was not necessary but we can and must do something to stop the atrocities.

Men, women and children are being murdered, their villages plundered and burned. Hundreds of thousands have been driven into the desert to starve to death or die from disease. The latest estimates place the death toll at 200,000 and those driven from their homes to be over 2,000,000. Hundreds of thousands of Darfurians are now forced to live in disease ridden refugee camps. A lack of funds has caused the UN to cut food rations to 3,000,000 Sudanese in half.

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The UN concern about the situation in Darfur was strongly expressed on April 7 when UN Secretary General Kofi Annan spoke before the commission on UN human rights on the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. He said:

—the international community would have to take action if full access was not given to human rights and humanitarian workers. He noted that reports of the large-scale human rights abuses in Darfur: leave me with a deep sense of foreboding. Whatever terms it uses to describe the situation, the international community cannot stand idle.

Last Tuesday, I and many of my colleagues from the House, took part in the remembrance and wreath laying ceremony right here in front of Centre Block. We were remembering those souls who were lost during one of this world's darkest moments, the Holocaust. We cannot justify remembering one instance of man's inhumanity to man while turning a blind eye to another.

The entire international community is looking for ways to make a meaningful intervention in this issue. I am very happy to have had the chance to speak to this important issue tonight during this take note debate and we all look forward to the best possible way to find a solution to the horrible killings and the horrible situation that currently exists in Darfur.

Canada continues to remain very active in Sudan and plays an internationally recognized role in support of the African Union mission in Sudan and is among the mission's top three international donors. Canada has welcomed the AU's recent decision to support a transition to UN forces in Darfur. Perhaps if those UN forces are in Darfur we will have a situation that is better controlled than we have today.

It is my hope that we can make a stand as a country and as a free nation to help the people of Darfur, to recognize that their needs are there, that we are there for them and that Canada will continue to play the role that it has played for so many years and be there for any international crisis. It is more difficult for us to do that with the limited restrictions we have on our manpower and on our ability to supply equipment but I can guarantee that the Conservative government will stand behind the military of our country to build us back up to the international reputation that we once honoured.

I am hoping also that Darfur's situation will be coming under control shortly by the means that have been mentioned tonight by my colleagues. It is important that Canada play a role in pressuring other nations to do their part to make the situation in Darfur a better situation. We cannot stand by idly while millions of people are killed. We must stand up and I believe that our government will do so.

● (2220)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have been struck by some of the statements made, not just by the member but by others in the House about the incredible atrocities taking place in Darfur and the fact that more 1.8 million people have been cast out of their homes and the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people.

The UN, as we all know, has already identified 51 people to the International Criminal Court. The International Criminal Court is a body that, unfortunately, the U.S. does not recognize.

Canada, as we know, is not a military super power nor do we wish to be a military super power, but we are and can be a great moral power, a great force in the world.

Is the member of the government prepared to use our clout with our good friends, the U.S., and other world leaders, whether it is China or Russia, to influence them to ensure they are participating to end these incredible crimes that are taking place in Darfur?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Chair, I agree with the member. Canada is not a military super force but we are a humanitarian super force on the international stage.

In terms of our inability to be there for every conflict, we will be taking steps to remedy that. We had a reputation worldwide for being there for people who need us. I would like to see us restore that reputation as soon as possible. However I am not foolish enough to believe that it will happen overnight. It will take a number of years to undo the damage that has been done to the military over the last 15 years.

In terms of whether the government would use its influence as a country, I can point out to the member that the Prime Minister has already spoken to President Bush on this issue. We are behind the international effort to make certain that these kinds of atrocities are not allowed to continue to go on. We want to take the steps that are necessary to put the pressure on the countries that can influence the outcome and we want to do that in the most suitable way possible.

A lot of things must be considered when we look at this entire situation. I probably do not have to point out to the member that there are steps that have to be followed. We have to be invited.

We want the United Nations to participate in this situation because we believe that all of the countries in the United Nations are probably the best hope the people of Darfur have. It can count on Canada for what we can do but Canada's biggest influence will be our international influence, getting other countries on side with what we need to see happen.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, before the debate tonight I asked an expert, Bo Cuit, what he thought of this situation. Bo is an expert on this because he is a Sudanese refugee. Bo lives with my mother in the house where I grew up and has lived there for the last two years. He walked out of Sudan with his brothers, one who was a child soldier and saw things that we would never think of seeing nor experiencing.

I told Bo about this debate tonight and I asked for his advice. Bo is a young man of few words and he basically said, "Tell them that they do not want to have the same mindset and the same guilt that Bill Clinton has over Rwanda".

I wonder what the hon. member thinks of those comments. We are perplexed as to what to do but does the member not believe that this is a time for action and not to sit by and wait?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Chair, I believe the hon. member's question came sincerely from the heart. The comments that were made by his friend are valid comments. Those are things that person has lived through. It is experience that is speaking.

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I cannot actually comment on whether he is completely right or he is completely wrong, but I can add that in my own family, for example, my niece is one of many Vietnamese orphans who was adopted during the crisis in Vietnam. She has been a part of our family now for 30 years. She is extremely grateful for the kind of chance she has had in Canada. I believe that if we have an opportunity to give the chance to other people to come to this country for the freedom that we enjoy and, quite literally, take for granted, that we should offer those freedoms.

I hope we will find a solution to this problem but in terms of advising other nations, we can only influence them in ways that Canada is able to influence them. I believe we will have a very strong voice in that matter and I think we will be very successful in having some sort of resolution to this untenable situation in Darfur.

• (2225)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to say at the outset that I am very pleased to be splitting my time with the member for Sault Ste. Marie. During my years as a provincial politician I came to know this member when he was at Queen's Park, our provincial counterpart, as someone who is genuinely a champion of the dispossessed, the poor, the hungry, the homeless and the vulnerable. In the two years that I have been privileged to be in caucus with him here in the House of Commons, I have seen that his concern extends not only to people in his own backyard or his own constituency but literally to the global community.

We are here tonight to focus our concern on the horrors and the tragedy of what has been unfolding in Darfur and to the people of Darfur on the continent of Africa. It is very difficult for Canadians to even conceive of what it could mean to live in a country where people are experiencing three million to three and a half million people being literally displaced, hundreds of thousands of people murdered, countless numbers of women raped and children sexually assaulted, whole villages plundered and burned, and the horrors go on.

What is bringing us together tonight in this all party debate is addressing the question of what it is that we as Canadians can do, must do and should do in the face of this outrageous and horrendous situation that continues to unfold in Darfur.

I am going to say that it is not really accurate to say that Canadians have been insensitive or unresponsive to the situation. Tonight I want to particularly acknowledge the numbers of youth across this country who have been mobilizing around the horrors of what is happening in Darfur. This is very promising for the future of our country. In particular, I mention the constituency of my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas, where there is a very active chapter of a group called Canadian Students for Darfur. It is just one of a dozen or more such chapters on university campuses and in high schools across the country that have been shining the spotlight on Darfur.

In my own riding, I am very proud of the fact that there is a chapter known as Students Helping Others Understand Tolerance, SHOUT, a good acronym, because the students have been shouting out to plead the case of the people in Darfur. Again, it is one of many chapters across the country. These students have been focused on the

horrors of the Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda and pleading with the world to not turn our backs on the people of Darfur.

The reality is that even here within our own country we have seen not a robust response to what is happening and unfolding but actually quite a feeble response. I know that last year through the foreign affairs committee we were trying to make the case for the government to respond with a greater sense of urgency and with a more generous response in responding to the plea of the African Union. The AU said that absolutely it was its desire to be in the lead in terms of military intervention, but that it desperately needed more help with logistics, communications, equipment and so on, yet I think the response was extremely feeble.

We have heard today, and perhaps someone tonight can go beyond and clarify this, that the \$20 million for food aid in Darfur last year, which is a small enough commitment, was in fact reduced to \$5 million. There was some suggestion earlier tonight, and I was not able to be here, that there is an indication from the government that it intends to increase this amount, but this is only one of a multi-faceted series of measures to which we have to commit ourselves, measures to do with increased diplomacy, with humanitarian aid, and yes, measures to ensure the security that will stop the killings and make sure that people get the most basic requirements to survive the horror of what is happening.

• (2230)

I hope that as a result of this all party debate we can truly come together and stand together for a more robust, proactive response from Canada, including participation in a SHIRBRIG rapid deployment force, which after all was supposed to have been, from the lesson of Rwanda, what Canada, Denmark and the Netherlands agreed needed to be in place so that we could respond with urgency in such horrifying circumstances unfolding before the eyes of the world.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, the hon. member asked a question in reference to the food aid that was given. She said it has gone down from \$20 million to \$5 million. I wish to correct this and say that CIDA has pledged \$90 million in assistance to Sudan. This assistance is allocated as follows: \$40 million in food aid and non-food aid, including 60%, which is \$24 million in assistance to Sudan. Out of the \$40 million, \$26.7 million was dispersed in 2005 and 2006. Today, the minister of CIDA announced an additional \$10 million for humanitarian food assistance to the region.

This is what I would like to ask the member about, though. Today there is another crisis brewing next door to Darfur, in Chad, which is west of Darfur. If we are not careful, in Chad we could have another humanitarian crisis that would have a major impact. That is why it is critically important that we work with the African Union, have it take the lead and give it all our assistance in order for it to be there when this crisis takes place.

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I would agree that it has not happened so far, but Canada has already committed. Canada has supplied helicopters. Canada has supplied vehicles. Canada has supplied fuel. Now we are looking at working with the AU to have it bring in the UN forces that will work with the African Union. In the long term, Canada has already pledged to the African Union to form that rapid deployment the hon. member is talking about.

Therefore, yes, Canada is doing something over there, but we need to be very careful that we solve the problem, that we do not put in place a band-aid solution, because if we try a band-aid in Darfur we may have another crisis the country next door, in Chad. I would like to hear what she has to say about that.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chair, first of all, I am absolutely in agreement that the situation unfolding in Chad is very serious. I think Oxfam International and other NGOs have been documenting what a deteriorating situation this is; it literally spreads like a virus from neighbouring Darfur. We have to be very concerned about acting quickly and acting decisively.

I am a little bit nervous when I hear the member talk about how we have to be very careful not to just put a band-aid on the situation. When we are talking about a humanitarian tragedy of these monumental proportions, I think we have to respond to the urgency and the immediacy of the situation as well as work to try over time to figure out how to help a country that is literally in chaos, in a severely disintegrating situation, to get up off its knees and actually begin to be a functioning nation that can meet the needs of its residents.

I think we have to realize that our response has been inadequate. I personally congratulated the government last year when it appointed a task force consisting of a respected senior public servant, Robert Fowler, and two very respected persons in Senator Mobina Jaffer, who has done Herculean work on women, peace and security and as the peace envoy to Darfur, and also in General Roméo Dallaire. But I felt at the time that it was more an excuse for inaction, that it was not fair to put that task force in place without giving it the resources and ensuring that the mandate was there to respond in a robust way. The result is that the situation has deteriorated and the need is greater than ever.

• (2235)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this most important discussion here this evening.

I must say that one of the most profound moments in public life for me happened while I was a member of the legislature at Queen's Park in Toronto. I was at a prayer breakfast and listened to General Roméo Dallaire, now Senator Roméo Dallaire, tell his story about Rwanda and ask the question, "How do we value humanity?" We could see and feel the anguish in the man because he had been there. He looked the evil that is genocide in the face and asked that it never be allowed to happen again. He spoke of the lack of resources and the lack of political will in that situation.

We heard in this city and in this place last week the call of the Holocaust survivors asking us not to forget. There is a voice rising in the country that is reverberating around the world and that will not

be ignored. There was a scream on the weekend: "What price humanity?" It starts at the heart of Sudan itself.

I remember attending a small gathering in Sault Ste. Marie last year and listening to one Elizabeth Majok from the New Sudan Council of Churches. She was there under the aegis of KAIROS, touring Canada. She shared with us at that meeting that what Canada needs to do and what we need to do is:

—demand that the Canadian government, backed by the general public and civil society, move beyond merely working with the international community to demonstrating authentic leadership to intensify pressure on the Government of Sudan and other parties to conflicts in Sudan to pursue in good faith a comprehensive peace that builds on North-South peace and transition processes underway in Naivasha, Kenya;

urge the Canadian government to insist that any peace agreement, whether between North and South Sudan, or between the government of Sudan and the rebels in Darfur, affirms the principles of a just and enduring peace including human rights, justice, the right of self-determination, fundamental freedoms, pluralism, transparency, as well as addresses the root causes of the different conflicts in Sudan, demanding responsive and accountable governance, the existence of a vibrant civil society including churches, a meaningful constitutional process, and credible monitoring and guarantee mechanisms on the part of the international community.

Church groups are speaking out. I have with me a faith leaders' letter signed by 16 leaders of faith groups. They say:

As representatives of various faith traditions in Canada, we commend the Government of Canada for the significant contributions made to support humanitarian and relief efforts in Darfur, Sudan and to assist the African Union Mission in Sudan in its efforts to provide security. People of faith in Canada have worked in solidarity with the people of Sudan for many years, developing long partnerships and collaboration.

Canadians are looking to our political leaders to continue taking steps unilaterally, bilaterally and multilaterally, to protect communities under threat, boldly work with others to resolve the conflict, and restore peace and safety to the people of Darfur.

Therefore, as the crisis continues into a fourth year, we urge the government to include Darfur at the top of its international policy agenda, and take actions that would be effective in bringing peace and security to the people there. Thus we issue a call of deep concern to develop action to assist the suffering and vulnerable people in Darfur, Sudan.

This is signed by 16 faith leaders in our country.

As the leader of the NDP said this evening, groups are forming. There are SHOUT, CASS, STAND, and the Canadian Students for Darfur, founded at Simon Fraser University, now with chapters at 12 high schools and colleges across the country.

As my colleague from Victoria said earlier this evening, we can no longer be timid. The situation, genocide, calls for direct and immediate leadership. We cannot let the people of the Holocaust down. We cannot let the people of Rwanda down. What price humanity?

• (2240)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for his intervention, his comments, and also for sharing with us some of the thoughts and ideas from some of the faith groups across this country. I am sure a lot of these groups are tuned into this debate tonight and are proud of the fact that their names were mentioned and that their concerns are passed on.

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I have some concerns about some of the comments, not necessarily that the member made but that were made earlier, that we were not doing enough in actual food aid. I want to remind some members who may not have been in the House earlier that the Minister of International Cooperation announced an additional \$10 million in food aid. We were, before that, in fourth place as the highest donor of food aid. This is a critical factor in these people's lives to be able to actually stay alive.

We see how some of these people are starving to death and the lack of food is a very critical part of that. It is very important that we continue that aid. Comments were made earlier about the amount of aid that has actually happened and been delivered. We still rate Sudan as one of the top 25 priority countries and I think that is most important.

There have been some comments about the difference between peacekeeping and peacemaking. Until the government of Khartoum is willing to address these in a real manner, would the hon. member care to comment on how we can effectively make peace if the government involved is not willing to accept a peacemaking process?

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Chair, the member asks one of the central questions in this whole very challenging circumstance.

I do not think anybody for a second is saying that it is not complicated, but if we are truly concerned and want to make a difference, we must develop a strategy that is comprehensive, direct and active. We see governments going along the road, doing a little bit here and a little bit there in an ad hoc manner, while literally hundreds of thousands of people starve and die on a regular basis.

I want to answer the first question about the different information we are receiving regarding how much aid is actually going into food. The member for Halifax who spoke earlier, somebody who I do not think anybody here would question, who understands, has been involved in, knows about, and has spoken passionately in this House over a number of years now, told us that we were spending \$20 million. The former government brought it down to \$5 million. With the contribution tonight, we are now back up to \$15 million.

The member mentioned we are fourth in the world now. That is not anything to be proud of, in my view. Obviously, people in this area of the world, in the Sudan, in Darfur, are starving. Hundreds of thousands of them. We are not doing enough. We need to do a lot more.

• (2245)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to follow up on the member's remarks about faith groups. In my lifetime, I have had the opportunity to personally serve on a number of overseas short term projects which addressed human needs in developing countries. I have witnessed firsthand the plight of many of our brothers and sisters who through no fault of their own found themselves in extremely difficult circumstances.

It is true that for years now, our sisters and brothers in Darfur have been suffering in conditions of severe violence and starvation. In the meantime, Canada has been blessed with years of peace, prosperity and growth. I believe that because of this very privileged position,

we have a moral duty to share with those who face these extreme conditions.

Canada has already done a lot to alleviate human suffering by providing millions of dollars in emergency assistance, but in light of our current privileged position, I am thrilled to hear that we are committing an additional \$10 million through CIDA. One person cannot meet all the human needs and Canada cannot meet all the needs in developing countries, but we must do what we can.

I have a question for the previous speaker. Does he feel that the additional \$10 million in aid that we announced tonight through CIDA is a step in the right direction in addressing this humanitarian crisis in Darfur, and will this initiative actually give a message to faith groups that they too can come to the table in addressing that human need?

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Chair, I do believe that the \$10 million announced tonight is a step in the right direction. However, I also remind the member about the faith communities. I do not think there is a faith community out there that is not saying today that if there was a choice to be made between cutting taxes, particularly corporate taxes, and finding the money, so that we can have the capacity, and we heard a lot tonight about having the capacity to actually play a meaningful role in places like Darfur and soon to be Chad, then we need to be talking about responding to the faith groups when they say our priorities need to be different.

The member for Halifax tells me that on the eve of the 2000 election, the previous Liberal government gave a corporate tax break of \$100 billion. Imagine what we could do with \$100 billion today, in light of some of the very difficult circumstances we are confronting out there all over the world.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Mount Royal.

The present day hell of Darfur has its roots in the competition for scarce resources in the region. African farmers and nomadic Arab herders have been vying for what little sustenance the land can provide, and the creeping desertification of Darfur has exacerbated this competition. The Arab Islamic government has ignored threadbare Darfur's needs for decades.

In February 2003 Darfur insurgents attacked several army outposts to draw attention to their demands. Senior military officials in Khartoum, feeling emasculated by their failure to win the civil war with Sudan's Christian south, reacted in Darfur with ferocity. Villages were bombed from the air as Janjaweed militiamen moved in to rape, pillage, burn and murder. This hurricane of hatred led to more than 10,000 Darfurians dying every month for almost two years. The genocide had begun.

The fighting subsided when the African Union brokered ceasefire negotiations between Khartoum and the two main insurgent groups. On May 12, 2005, to alleviate the continuing suffering of the displaced in Darfur and to assist the work of the African Union peacekeepers, AMIS, the former Prime Minister dedicated \$192 million to the region. It could not have come at a better time.

In late September 2005, I travelled to Khartoum and then to Darfur on a self-financed fact-finding mission.

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In Darfur, as I listened to our soldiers, I grew increasingly proud of our military's conduct under extremely difficult circumstances. The direct consequences of Canada's military commitment to Darfur, the empowering of AMIS, is saving thousands of civilian lives weekly. While in Darfur, I was able to verify that attacks were coordinated by Janjaweed and Sudanese army forces. This knowledge was based on identification cards left behind after an attack. I had an opportunity to see the identity cards in question and these clearly established that the Janjaweed were in fact irregular Sudanese government forces.

Meanwhile, in the internally displaced refugee camps, the NGO community has been doing a phenomenal job. I found the people in the camps generally in good spirits. There were wells, schools and hospitals.

However, phase one of our involvement is only sufficient to protect the refugee camps and the areas around them. For the two million refugees to return to their destroyed ancestral villages, phase two will be required.

Phase two will not happen without the international community, the United Nations and Canada, stepping up to the plate to expand the peacemaking capability to encompass not only the refugee camps but the countryside from which the refugees were ethnically cleansed. All of us know that the solution is not for refugee camps to become a permanent fixture.

In phase two, the hell of today's Darfur will be solved on three levels: humanitarian, military and political. Although interconnected, each will require different tools. Humanitarian aid must continue to arrive. We cannot allow the beginnings of a genocide by a hurricane of hatred to transform into a planned starvation, genocide by attrition. Militarily, what is needed today is a 20,000 person strong UN peacemaking military force with a mandate to shoot back, and a no-fly zone.

Finally, along with our responsibility to protect, there should be a responsibility to rebuild. Politically, the AU sponsored peace talks must continue. Due to the political realities of Sudan, these talks may last as long as three to six years. Along with the talks, an international donors conference is needed to commit the resources to rebuild Darfur, a conference that would commit resources to build a civil society, the social, political and economic rebuilding of Darfur over the next decade.

While I was in El Fasher, Darfur, I visited a local hospital. As I stood in the hospital looking at the blood-soaked cots, I had a feeling of foreboding. The two Darfurian insurgent groups had splintered. While the refugees in the camps were mostly secure, an increasingly disparate number of armed groups in the countryside were filling the security vacuum. Concurrently, the Sudanese army and Janjaweed were attacking villages.

For once, let the rallying cry "Never Again" be a commitment of substance, not rhetoric.

● (2250)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, the member has been to Darfur and has seen first hand the crisis in Darfur. I was a little confused when he said he expects the peace talks to go on for almost

six years. That is a very, very long time. We are looking at a peace agreement that is happening now with concrete steps to be taken now to stop the killings that are taking place. I do not know what the member means by five to six years.

The AU has put forth a very comprehensive plan that takes a lot of things into account, human rights, development and everything. It is a comprehensive plan that we want both parties to sign ASAP, as quickly as tomorrow hopefully, so that the killings can stop, reconstruction can start and people can go home. That is what we are debating today, so I am a little confused by what the member means by five to six years of peace talks.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Mr. Chair, the member opposite said he was listening quite carefully. If he were listening, he would have heard three to six years as opposed to five or six. Notwithstanding that, yes, it will take time.

I am not referring to the killings. If he had listened to what I said, there are three component parts here.

There is the humanitarian component. A good first step today was the additional \$10 million, but compared to the commitment of \$192 million that the government of a year ago had made, it is 5% of that commitment. It is a good, first small step. The humanitarian component has to be taken care of. We cannot allow a genocide by attrition.

There is also a military component. We want to see 20,000 peacemakers, and I use that term quite specifically as opposed to peacekeepers, but the political negotiations for a solution will take a longer period of time. We will need to have patience and dedicate the resources. That is why I am calling for a donors' conference. We will not see permanent peace until we see a similar situation to what happened with southern Sudan. Those negotiations took almost three decades. This could take a lot less time.

If we take a look at the agreement that was put in place just over a year ago, within six years there will be a new Parliament. There will also be a new constitution. That is why I referred to three to six years. That is probably at the low end. There will have to be a long term commitment to resolve the big issue of resources. Otherwise there will be constant tension that could lead to conflict between the nomadic herders and the farmers.

● (2255)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank my hon. colleague and his assistants and members from all parties who have spent a lot of time on this issue. Parliament has worked very well on this particular issue which, as other members have said, goes beyond politics. I would also like to thank Leyla Di Cori and the Canadian Jewish Congress for their hard work. Above all else, as has been said before, I thank our Canadian Forces members who, out in the field along with RCMP officers, have done a yeoman's job under very difficult circumstances.

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In Sierra Leone the British went into a situation where rebels were slaughtering innocent civilians. Six hundred and eighty six troops went into Sierra Leone and they stopped the conflict cold. In this particular conflict, 20,000 troops have been asked for. There are a number of groups, including the African Union, which showed extraordinary maturity in giving this particular mission to the UN, but it does not preclude their actions.

Does the hon. member not feel that one of our roles should be to increase capacity within the African Union to work perhaps within a SHIRBRIG to enable a peacemaking force to get on the ground to save the lives of the innocent?

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: Yes, Mr. Chair, I believe that we should have another plan in place in case the United Nations does not step forward expeditiously.

We have shown, notwithstanding the denigration of the African Union AMIS forces that we have heard from the opposite side during the debate, that with the limited resources they had they did not fully stop the killing, but it went from 10,000 a month to perhaps 1,000 a month.

It is a terrible situation, but we would love to see for the long term the African Union method used throughout Africa's zone of conflict.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Chair, we meet this evening at an important moment of remembrance and reminder of witness and of the imperative for action, for we meet in the immediate aftermath of Holocaust Remembrance Day, whose enduring lesson is that the genocide of European Jewry succeeded not only because of the industry of death and the technology of terror, but because of crimes of indifference, because of conspiracies of silence.

We have witnessed an appalling indifference and silence in our own day to the unthinkable genocide in the Balkans and to the unspeakable genocide in Rwanda, unspeakable because the genocide in Rwanda was preventable. No one can say that we did not know. We knew and we did not act. In the same way that with respect to Darfur we knew and we know and we did not act, and we have not been acting sufficiently to arrest the killing fields. And so the moral injunction of never again has become tragically yet again, and again and again. The time has come, indeed it has past, to break down these walls of indifference, to shatter these conspiracies of silence, to sound the alarm, to scream as the students put it, to scream for Darfur.

I want to commend the students for taking the lead. As one of them put it yesterday, "The time for complacency, for gradualism, for foot dragging, for anything but overwhelming and immediate action is over".

What follows is a 10 point agenda for action where Canada, in concert with the international community, can exercise the necessary moral, diplomatic and political leadership.

One, there must be a transformation of the African Union mission, which has fought valiantly to carry out its peacekeeping mission, into a multinational peacekeeping and protection force, pursuant to the UN chapter 7 responsibility to protect mandate, to put an end to the crimes against humanity and in a word to save Darfur. Two, we must ensure that the prospective multinational protection force has

the necessary numbers, resources and capacity to fulfill and implement a robust civilian protection mandate. Three, we need to support and enforce UN Security Council resolutions to bring the war criminals to justice as a matter of priority and principle. Four, we need to enforce the UN Security Council resolutions banning offensive military flights which are responsible for killing fields as we meet. Five, the Government of Sudan itself is in standing violation of UN Security Council resolutions calling for the cessation of acts of violence, the banning of the offensive military flights, the enforcement of arms embargoes, the disarming of the Janjaweed, such that additional sanctioning measures under article 41 of the United Nations charter are necessary to hold the Sudanese authorities to account.

Six, there is now a desperate humanitarian crisis unfolding in Darfur, what I would call death by starvation, as a result of the announcement of cutbacks to rations by half, and this after the UN already 18 months ago characterized Darfur as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. The Government of Canada must take the lead to ensure that donor nations fulfill their pledges and that humanitarian assistance reach the victims. Seven, we cannot ignore the recent ominous regionalization and internationalization of the conflict including the dangerous Iranian-Sudanese nuclear collaboration axis, the role of China as paymaster and collaborator in the killing fields and the Chad connection. Canada in concert with like-minded nations must address and combat the growing regionalization and internationalization of the conflict. Eight, we need to support the peace process in Abuja, but not allow it to become a diversionary tactic or to allow it to pre-empt what otherwise needs to be done to fulfill our civilian protection mandate. Nine, we need to ensure the protection of the refugees and internally displaced persons is intensified, permitting them to return safely to their homes. Finally, we need to convene an urgent meeting of world leaders from the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union and NATO to draft and implement a save Darfur action plan.

In conclusion, let us resolve that never again will we be indifferent to genocide. Never again will we be silent in the face of evil. Never again will we acquiesce in the killing fields, not on our watch. We will speak, we will act, and we will make never again a moral imperative and a reality.

● (2300)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, the hon. member has a very distinguished record as a human rights protector, a human rights defender and a former justice minister of Canada.

Nobody can argue the fact that there is no crisis in Darfur. The crisis is absolutely very serious and demands urgent attention. He set out a 10 point plan.

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Given the situation in Africa, given that there are crises in the neighbouring country, there are crises in Congo, there are crises all across central Africa, it is incumbent upon us to assist the African Union to be the driving force.

Time after time I have heard “Africa for Africans” and “Africans must take the lead”. Yes, that is what we should do, although we recognize our responsibility to assist them and help them shoulder the load. In Darfur we have seen that not happening, henceforth, their request for UN forces to come in.

The comprehensive peace plan that is being discussed in Abuja, and Canada's UN Ambassador is there to assist that, is the first step, if it is implemented, toward the goal of achieving a sustainable peace in that region. The need for sustainable peace in that region is very critical in Africa.

Instead of his 10 point plan, would the member not say that Canada must stand behind the Africa Union's political will, that it may not have the military capability, but we should be out there to do that and let the African Union be the leader with us and all the donors assisting the African Union in achieving that objective?

• (2305)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Chair, nothing that I said was intended to diminish or in any way undercut the role and the importance of the African Union which has been valiantly seeking to undertake the peacekeeping mission.

The African Union itself has acknowledged that what is needed at this point is a more robust chapter 7 UN mandated civilian protection mandate, number one, and number two, that what is necessary are increased numbers, resources and capacity for the purposes of actually implementing a chapter 7 civilian protection mandate.

I might add that Canada itself can take the lead. We have a particular leverage that we can exercise. We have no colonialist legacy in Africa. We are respected among a large group of nations. We can take a lead morally, diplomatically, and politically with respect to these objectives. Even with regard to that more robust multinational civilian protection force, we can provide, in my view, as General Dallaire and others have said, a headquarters, brigades of 300 or 400 forces without diminishing anything in Afghanistan. We can provide CF-18 planes without diminishing anything we are doing in Afghanistan. We can make, even on that level, an important symbolic and substantive contribution, along with everything else in the 10 point plan.

With regard to the peace process in Abuja, and this is crucial, while we support that peace process and we have made an important contribution to it, it is now in its seventh round. It has dragged on for more than two years. There does not appear to be a resolution and even if there were, whether it could hold, because some of the Darfurian communities are not represented. Janjaweed is not represented. We could have a situation where that would unravel even if an agreement was reached. It should not detract at all from any of the other things that need to be done in order to save Darfur. That is why we are here this evening, to sound the alarm, to break the silence, to have an action plan to save Darfur.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Chair, I rise impressed by the participation of

members in this debate. I think it indicates that Canadians and our parliamentarians are seized of the urgency of the crisis, what I would personally call a genocide, in Darfur.

I know that bureaucrats, diplomats and countries at the UN are arguing over the application of the term genocide. In this instance it is self-evident. As the member for Mount Royal reminds us, we gathered in front of this place to mark the Yom Hashoah last week. Last week we also had a Prime Minister with the courage to join Canada's voice with those of certain other countries in recognizing the historical reality of the first genocide of the last century, the Armenian genocide.

In all these moments, in all these historic commemorations we always hear the repeated cry “never again”. Every time we hear that, we invite cynicism and skepticism. We invite a kind of total political cynicism because, as my colleague from Mount Royal points out, we have let genocide happen again and again in the past century. This is why this is a matter of moral and political urgency.

Speaking for myself and as a representative of my constituents, I will join with the voices of others here tonight to encourage the Government of Canada to take a leadership role internationally and, because of the prestige of Canada's name, to do all that can be done.

There is a debate about what can be done, in what sequence and with what speed. Let me remind us of the moral obligation here. We talk about numbers, about something like 215,000 Darfurians murdered, about another 200,000 dying from disease and malnutrition, the indirect consequences of these genocidal acts. Every one of those numbers represents individual human persons with an inviolable dignity, who have been either murdered or had their fundamental dignity unspeakably violated. For instance, UN reports indicate:

Between 5 and 7 March 2004, Sudanese military intelligence and armed forces officers accompanied by members of the armed militia, the Janjaweed, arrested at least 135 people in some 10 villages in Wadi Saleh province, in Western Darfur state... At least 135 men were then blindfolded and taken in groups of about 40, on army trucks to an area behind a hill near...village. They were then told to lie on the ground and shot by a force of about 45 members of the military intelligence and the Janjaweed.

I should mention, Mr. Chair, that I am splitting my time with the member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

In another instance in February 2004 there was an attack in Al-Fasher in north Darfur. In one case at least 41 school girls and female teachers were raped in the local school. Some of them were gang raped by at least 14 Janjaweed members, according to the testimony of survivors.

Some were abducted. Amnesty International met one of the survivors of this attack who said:

I was living with my family...and going to school when one day the Janjaweed entered the town and attacked the school. We tried to leave the school but we heard noises of bombing in the town and started running in all directions. All the girls were scared. The Janjaweed entered the school and caught some girls and raped them in the class rooms. I was raped by four men inside the school. When they left they told us they would take care of all of us black people and clean Darfur for good.

That is the reality with which we are dealing. It is not a garden variety political crisis. It is a genocide.

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To quote the Hon. David Kilgour, who more than any Canadian has pressed our national conscience on this issue, in his speech yesterday in Toronto he quoted a scholar, Gamal Adam, who said:

Since the 1990s, (Khartoum's) policy has aimed at relocating the indigenous ethnic groups of Darfur from their home regions and settling Arabs in their areas in order to accelerate 'Arabization'...It sent the Janjaweed to relocate the indigenous population and when individuals from (that) population organized themselves to defend..., the government (in Khartoum) response was the adoption of genocide because it was looking for a pretext for the destruction of the indigenous population of Darfur

• (2310)

Another African professor who visited Darfur recently noted that, "The Khartoum regime does not consider African Darfurians to be human beings". It is that kind of evil that lays at the heart of the matter with which we are dealing. I agree with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Government of Canada that we must do everything possible to encourage and facilitate the peace talks currently underway with respect to the status of Darfur.

However, it is reasonable for all of us to suspect the long established pattern of Khartoum to ignore its legal obligations and political undertakings. For that reason, I hope that we will find a national consensus for Canada to lead an international consensus to do what is necessary and what is responsible in the near future to stop this slaughter before it becomes uncontrollable.

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister in his final statement, in response to the horrific situation that we have been discussing, suggested what needed to be done. Does he concur with the 10-point plan, as referred to by the member on from Mount Royal, as an appropriate action plan that would lead to at least the immediate resolution to put a stop to some of the most serious of the problems such as rape and murder, while a process could then go on to deal with more of the negotiations required behind the scenes to bring law and order to the land?

• (2315)

Mr. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chair, I do not disagree with any one of the elements that were mentioned in the member for Mount Royal's 10-point plan. I see they had some slight variation from the 10-point agenda for action on Darfur from the parliamentary group concerned about Darfur. There are many different programs of action out there with many commonalities.

I have friends in Calgary who produced a three part plan for ending the Darfur genocide which includes: part A, the establishment of a no-fly zone over Darfur; part B, a three step sequence in which the key leaders and stakeholders in Darfur establish a legitimate and functional regional government; and part C, the constitution of an implementation force of combat ready units that will work in coordination with these key parties as well as with the African Union forces.

I also take to heart the exhortation of my colleague from Calgary East and parliamentary secretary to the foreign minister that this cannot be developed by European and western countries imposing a solution on the region. It is not just the complexity of the Darfur situation. It is the complexity of the entire central and east African situation which is at play here. It is whether we are going to allow

Africa to take ownership for and to be at the lead of resolving issues like this.

I do not pretend to have the perfect solution. No one does. All of these contributions, including the 10 points mentioned by my colleague opposite, constitute a sound basis for action, but Canada can do none of these things in isolation. Any one of these items require international cooperation and coordination at the United Nations and multilaterally. I would urge our government to pursue any or all of these approaches simultaneously, but to focus first on stopping the violence through whatever intervention can be realistically made. For instance, to urgently to enforce the no-fly zone in Darfur would be an obvious first action point.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, we do not like to see a UN peace making force, but should such a force not be sent, will the government commit to at least minimally continue with the enabling military resources we have provided to the African Union AMIS mission to date?

Having provided those resources for a transitional period and knowing and having learned the lessons of what was not going right and what we could improve on, will the government continue to provide the resources? Going forward, what would it do differently in providing those resources to ensure that the African Union peace making force was more effective?

Mr. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chair, I believe the answer to the first question is clearly, yes. The government intends to continue providing logistical support and equipment, including, I believe, the 105 Bison APCs in the region. It is with frustration that I note a lot of this equipment was offered to the African Union and not used as readily as we might have liked. There are capacity and training problems, as my colleague from Calgary East has pointed out.

We have had some equipment in the theatre for some time. After several months, it is only being used now. If there is more that we need to do to provide for the 7,200 African Union troops already in the theatre with the capacity and training to run the APCs, the helicopters and other equipment, then I am sure the government will be there to offer that support. I also would—

The Chair: Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but we do want his colleague, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, to have an opportunity for the full five and five. The hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Chair, I must say that I am really heartened tonight by the fact that all members on all sides of the House in Parliament have shown a deep concern for a bad situation in Darfur at this point in time. In my riding of Kildonan—St. Paul there are different faith based groups that are working very hard and rallying to send aid to Darfur. They have met with challenges over there as well. I must commend Canadians as a whole for the heart they have right now.

We remember the terrible Holocaust, the loss of life, and the pointless genocide that occurred with the Jewish people. We remember Rwanda. Unfortunately, we have many examples throughout history.

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Now, Canadians and parliamentarians, with one voice, are having a late debate tonight over our very deep concern about Darfur. We have heard about the work by many parliamentarians on all sides of the House in trying to come up with a solution. We know about the situation there and we want to do something about it.

Despite the presence of the African mission in Sudan, the security situation in Darfur continues to deteriorate. Furthermore, the tense security situation in Chad has the potential to further destabilize the already extremely fragile region. Right now, in Abuja, the peace process has recently gained momentum and we have a very few short hours left to find out whether this peace process will come to fruition.

Tonight, I was gratified to hear the Minister of International Cooperation in the House commit another \$10 million in aid for Darfur. This is a significant commitment over and above all the concerns that are voiced about the killings, rapes and terrible circumstances in which these people are living right now. It has touched the hearts of our nation. The world's eyes are now on Darfur and they are also on us, as Canadians, because our hearts are being taken to a country far away. We are reaching out and it seems like it is just next door. It is because we are so aware of what has gone on there.

Traditionally, Canadians have always been the peacekeepers of the world. In May 2005 Canada launched a major initiative to support AU efforts to resolve the conflict in Darfur, making Canada one of the top international donors in the world to that cause. There was \$170 million of logistical, financial and equipment support for the African mission in Sudan, including a provision for contracted helicopters and fixed wing aircraft. All these things were deployed to Darfur.

There was \$28 million of humanitarian assistance and government support through CIDA and \$20 million to support the Canadian diplomatic engagement and the support of the AU peace talks in Abuja. There were peacekeeping initiatives throughout Sudan, including \$500,000 to support the International Criminal Court to address war crimes and crimes against humanity.

We now hear on a daily basis about those continued crimes against humanity. This is what has touched the hearts on Canadian soil. We believe that children have a right to go to bed at night without fearing what might happen to them. We believe that women and men ought to be safe and fed. I will say with a very sincere heart that Canadians need to stand at the forefront, and help solve this problem and its immediate need.

• (2320)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Chair, I do not know whether the member or other members have had an opportunity to read a really excellent but horrifying op-ed article by Gerry Caplan, a Canadian with a great deal of experience in Africa and, in particular, an authority on the Rwandan genocide, who has been pleading the case of Darfur for several years now.

He talks about how the first and most obvious lesson from the unmitigated catastrophe of Rwanda in 1994 was the disheartening evidence that there was very little interest from countries that did not have a self-interest at stake in intervening in such a crisis.

He goes on to talk about how disheartening it is that the Security Council has been particularly unresponsive. I guess the suggestion would be that because there are not the same kinds of geopolitical or economic interests in Darfur by the members of the Security Council, they have been very unresponsive.

I wonder if the member might wish to comment on those two observations.

• (2325)

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Chair, I believe that in situations such as this one all of us feel very disheartened many times because we do not feel enough has been done. I think the common feeling is that we want things done a lot faster.

What I am heartened about this evening is that Canadian parliamentarians are standing together with one voice and saying that we need to address this immediate concern in Darfur. When the Minister of International Cooperation announced tonight an additional \$10 million, that was concrete evidence. We know that the feeding of these people and the solutions we want to bring to help Darfur are very apparent.

With regard to the peacekeeping process going on right now, we are sitting in a very tentative situation, just hoping and praying that it comes to fruition because after that we have to go on further and give additional support.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, sadly, once again the world stands in disbelief at one more example of the capacity of inhumanity in some human beings. This latest example is taking place at this very moment in Darfur.

The situation in Darfur at this very moment is so contemptible, so reprehensibly inhuman and so incredibly sad that the option of doing nothing is really no option at all. Whether or not the international community should intervene in Darfur should not be the subject of this debate. The subject of this debate should be on how we intervene and what is needed. The time for discussion on intervention has long since passed. It is now time for action.

The current government in Sudan continues to back the militia group known as Janjaweed in a scorched earth campaign to destroy those in the country who it sees as being disloyal to the regime. In Darfur, 400,000 people have been slaughtered and 1.8 million people have been displaced.

The Janjaweed have taken to poisoning the wells in the regions they destroy so that innocent survivors are slowly killed by poison or die of thirst in the hot Sudanese sun. We are talking about nothing less than a full-blown human rights catastrophe.

What is being done? The African Union has forces present on the ground but what is missing, I am sad to say, is the involvement of all of us, particularly the world community. Politics is at play here. China and Russia, which have important oil deals in Sudan, are loathe to see UN military intervention. NATO countries, including Canada, are so preoccupied with the war in Afghanistan that they can scarcely think to ask our population and military to support a war that does not affect their daily lives.

Government Orders

However, the time is now and we cannot wait another day. We must commit ourselves, not to the idea of power but to the power of ideas. We must forget geopolitical considerations, the spheres of influence and strategic interests. Rather, our call today is to see the faces of those who each day face the possibility of starvation, abuse and even death.

Their expressions may not be heard in audible tones but their call for help is deafening. It is a call we cannot ignore.

The Chair: It being 11:30 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, the committee will rise and I will leave the chair.

(Government Business No. 5 reported)

The Deputy Speaker: Consequently, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:30 p.m.)

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