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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, June 7, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, June 7, 2006

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday we will now have the singing of O Canada, led by the members of the parliamentary page program.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

HOCKEYVILLE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I extend congratulations to Barry's Bay, Ontario, in the central region, home of the Madawaska Valley Lumber Kings, for making it to the finals as a community that most demonstrates what it means to be Hockeyville in Canada. We can all do it today and vote for the Bay, Barry's Bay, that is, as Hockeyville Canada. I ask everyone to dial 1-888-459-2006 and help us make it official!

Deep in the heart of the Ottawa Valley, on the edge of Algonquin Park, Barry's Bay is located in beautiful Renfrew County, birthplace of the NHL. The Barry's Bay Hockeyville bid has been a team effort, with team captain Shaun O'Reilly ably assisted by a scoring lineup that includes Mike and Ann Papania, Patti Robertson, Glen Getz, Ron Tremback and Dave Shulist. This has been a community effort, with all of Barry's Bay in the stands cheering for the home team.

We want all of Canada to know that Barry's Bay is Hockeyville. Barry's Bay is a small community of 1,400, so we need Canada's help. We need Canadians' votes to make it possible. Everyone can dial 1-888-459-2006 for the choice of Barry's Bay. Canadians can vote the Bay and do it today, before midnight tonight, and Barry's Bay will be Hockeyville. Go, team, go.

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GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, who would have thought that we could find more "harpocracy" from the government? Alas, there is.

Day 101, paying \$624 million to lease the former JDS Uniphase campus, which was purchased for \$30 million by a real estate company on the advice of Mulroney Airbus lobbyists.

Day 102, the Minister of the Environment cancels a speech before the Canadian Federation of Municipalities at the last minute because the mayors support Kyoto.

Day 103, the Minister of the Environment learns from opposition that the funding for the Asia-Pacific partnership she touts as a made in Canada replacement for Kyoto has been cut by the United States Congress.

Day 104, walking away from Kashechewan leaders who demanded that the government uphold its commitments.

Day 105, and the saga continues.

Day 106, abandoning the Liberal funding commitment to move Kashechewan residents and improve housing.

Day 107, taking steps to expose Canadian business to foreign takeovers.

Day 108, endorsing secret testing of biometric identification tools on Canadian immigrants.

Day 109, cancelling a deal on hopper cars that would have benefited farmers.

Day 110, backtracking on election promises to purchase ice-breakers, upholding Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic.

I ask members to stay tuned.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ENVIRONMENT WEEK

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Environment Week encourages everyone to do something practical to protect our planet. This awareness has now spread through our community and internationally and goes well beyond the green activist movement. Most of civil society is now convinced of the need for action to reduce greenhouse gases.

Statements by Members

Our planet is heating up. That is why we must take action as soon as possible. We see the poles heating up, glaciers melting, sea level rising, heat waves, droughts, forest fires, an increase in violent meteorological phenomena and changes in biodiversity.

We invite the public to go to www.sauvonskyoto.org/english.htm and sign the petition calling on the federal government to respect the Kyoto protocol.

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[English]

WOMEN'S SHELTERS

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the YWCA released a report on June 1 that outlines the dire need for a national shelter strategy. There are too many women living in abusive relationships and too many women dying at the hands of their spouses. The report found that 77% of women in shelters were in serious or extreme danger.

Because resources are not available, many women are faced with an appalling choice: living in poverty or staying in an abusive relationship. This is a choice that no one in this country should ever have to make.

The need for a national shelter program is critical. Ten per cent of women who seek shelter are turned away due to lack of space. This year, in Ontario alone, 12 women have died at the hands of their partners or spouses. Even one is too many.

Women across this great nation deserve better. They deserve basic human rights: safety and protection. No one should ever be denied this.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just recently the Minister of Justice made an excellent presentation to our justice committee. He spoke of the generational changes that have taken place in our society. Today, we lock our doors, we are more watchful over our children, and we have to recognize new dangers such as swarmings, drugs and gangs.

Some of the Liberal members on the committee mocked this. They claimed we were practising the “politics of fear”, saying that if we simply maintained a balanced approach to justice, society would be just fine. No sooner were these comments made when, later that week, we all listened closely to the TV as it was revealed that an 11-year-old girl from Armstrong, B.C. was abducted by a transient.

Fortunately, due to the excellent police work of the local RCMP and the community, she was found alive. This story of an innocent child riding her scooter to the store to rent a video and being grabbed is not the “politics of fear”. This is reality today.

The only ray of hope is that our justice system is about to change significantly under this Conservative government. We have vowed to restore safety and security to our communities across the country. I know that Canadians are eagerly waiting for us to succeed.

● (1410)

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are more “harpocracies”.

Day 111, creates plum patronage position to stop patronage appointments, takes ball home when opposition will not play.

Day 112, calls his tax break “Canada's universal child care program”.

Day 113, turns Canada into a unilateralist power, breaks international treaties on climate change.

Day 114, shuffles military contracts to ex-lobbying clients of the Minister of National Defence.

Day 115, hunkers down in the bunker and calls it “open government”.

Day 116, will not take questions from the national media at his “transparency and accountability” announcement.

Day 117, cannot decide if families were consulted or not for repatriation ceremonies.

Day 118, shuts out Canadians from repatriation ceremonies.

Day 119, hires a convicted fraud artist to work in the PMO.

Day 120, rushes to sign the softwood deal that George Bush wants but few in the industry do.

There is more to come.

* * *

HOCKEYVILLE

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no question that McBride, B.C., located in my constituency of Prince George—Peace River and one of the 25 finalists in the CBC Kraft Hockeyville challenge, deserves the honour of being named Hockeyville Canada.

When 80% of the village's population showed up to participate in a community hockey event, it was obvious that McBride truly is Hockeyville. If that is not enough to prove McBride's unparalleled passion for hockey, the sidewalks were actually painted blue in honour of the local hockey team, the Blue Grizzlies.

Beyond its great taste in colour, McBride's Hockeyville video presentations are well worth viewing at www.cbchockeyville.com. I am confident that once Canadians experience this small glimpse of McBride's commitment to hockey and its unequalled community spirit, they will understand why the Hockeyville judges have been so impressed.

Before midnight eastern time tonight, people should cast their votes for McBride, British Columbia, Canada's one and only Hockeyville.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

MONSIEUR POINTU

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it was with sadness that we learned of the passing last night of Paul Cormier, better known as Monsieur Pointu. He was a prolific fiddler and with his favourite instrument he became a veritable musical institution in Quebec, France and throughout the world. He immortalized the *Mockingbird* reel and added his bow to many musical selections from Quebec, including Raoul Duguay's unforgettable hit, *La Bitt à Tibi*.

Wearing his bowler hat, turtleneck sweater and a huge flower on his lapel, he went everywhere, including two world tours with Gilbert Bécaud; between 1970 and 1978, they travelled across five continents. Who can forget his brilliant contribution to the success of *La vente aux enchères* by Gilbert Bécaud?

In 1974, the NFB produced an animated film about him that won a number of awards in London, Geneva, San Antonio and Bilbao.

The Bloc Québécois offers its condolences to the family and friends of Monsieur Pointu.

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[English]

HOCKEYVILLE

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is the final day of voting for this round in the CBC Kraft Hockeyville Canada challenge. I want to take this time to remind all the residents of Tobique—Mactaquac and people across Canada to support the hard-working team from Plaster Rock, New Brunswick, home of the official World Pond Hockey Championships.

Teams from all over the world come to Plaster Rock each year to experience the great hospitality on the Tobique River. This dedicated group of hockey fans has worked tirelessly to promote Plaster Rock, including raising money for a new arena that will open next hockey season.

Plaster Rock truly is Hockeyville. For more information in an easy link, visit www.mikeallenmp.ca. Good luck to Plaster Rock.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more “harpocrisy”.

Number 121: turn down the Governor General's request to go and support Canadian troops in Afghanistan.

Number 122: threaten to revoke the right of same-sex partners to marry.

Number 123: implement a GST reduction for low-income families that benefits the rich.

Number 124: plaster the websites of the non-partisan bureaucracy with Conservative propaganda.

Number 125: renounce the Kyoto protocol when the provincial premiers and the mayors support it.

Number 126: suspend mail delivery to 53,000 rural mailboxes.

Number 127: hire a former lobbyist as communications director.

Number 128: refuse to launch an inquiry into the leak of the Auditor General's report.

Number 129: claim that the Constitution gives the Prime Minister the right to hold cabinet meetings in secret.

Number 130: miss two deadlines to table a plan on the Kyoto protocol at the United Nations.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apparently the member for Mount Royal thinks that the member for Yorkton—Melville's opposition to the long gun registry should preclude him from being a committee chair. If the member for Mount Royal thinks that anyone opposed to the long gun registry should resign their position, he might want to check his own caucus.

For instance, the former Liberal cabinet minister, the member for Outremont, has publicly opposed the gun registry. Former Liberal cabinet minister, the member for Newmarket—Aurora, voted against the registry. Former Liberal parliamentary secretary, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, also voted against the registry. One Liberal leadership wannabe, the member for Kings—Hants, is on the record in the House as having voted against the registry and against funding for the gun registry.

Rather than shooting from the lip, perhaps the member for Mount Royal should check the record, get his facts straight and stop contradicting his own caucus if that is at all possible.

* * *

NOVA SCOTIA

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on June 13 Nova Scotians have a historic opportunity to elect a provincial government that will deliver on its promises.

Darrell Dexter's NDP team will give families the break they deserve, reduce health wait times, deliver affordable quality education, ensure dignity for seniors and all within their means.

The Prime Minister yesterday refused to pledge increased support for long term beds for Nova Scotia, or reduce pollution to protect today's families and future generations.

Desperate Nova Scotia Conservatives will do or say whatever it takes to avoid answering for their broken promises, but Nova Scotians know they can count on federal and provincial New Democrats to continue fighting for them.

Statements by Members

That is why on January 23, Canadians sent 50% more New Democrats to the House of Commons. That is why on June 13, Nova Scotians will dramatically increase Darrell Dexter's New Democrat team in the Nova Scotia legislature.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more “harpocrisy”.

Number 131: the environment minister praises the one-tonne challenge three weeks before cutting it.

Number 132: mislead Canadians by using absurd examples to support the government's claim that Canada cannot reach its Kyoto targets.

Number 133: ignore the United Nations protocol on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Number 134: gag a Conservative MP to prevent him from commenting on the government's gun registry policy.

Number 135: disclose refugee claimants' personal information.

Number 136: prevent cabinet members from exercising their fundamental right to freedom of expression, even when they have just spoken about issues of national importance.

Number 137: replace a comprehensive child care system with a tax cut that will cost twice as much.

Number 138: in a letter he signed, the natural resources minister praises the EnerGuide program a few weeks before cancelling it.

Number 139: mislead Canadians about the facts concerning carbon sinks and international trade markets.

Number 140: mislead Canadians about international support for the Kyoto protocol.

There is still more to come.

* * *

JONATHAN PEDNEAULT

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and proud to welcome Jonathan Pedneault to Parliament Hill today. Jonathan won the “MP for a day” contest in the Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher riding.

At 16, Jonathan signed up for the international studies program at Jacques-Rousseau high school. During the annual contest, he set himself apart from the other finalists by demonstrating his knowledge of politics and his exceptional interest in humanitarian aid and international diplomacy. He is also a co-founder of the Society for the Prevention of Genocide (SOPREGE) and has done an excellent job of documenting this issue. He even provided me with his own draft bill on genocide.

For two days, Jonathan and his mother will participate in various parliamentary activities that will enable him to discover what goes on behind the scenes in this world that may one day be his own.

Jonathan, on behalf of all of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I welcome you to Parliament and I hope that your time here will be a great learning experience.

* * *

● (1420)

[English]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are yet even more “harpocracies”.

Number 141, ordinary Canadians making \$80,000 a year.

Number 142, floor-crossing trade minister changes allegiance when he crossed the floor.

Number 143, fearmongering that crime is going up when actually crime is going down.

Number 144, having no plan of action to address the issue of climate change.

Number 145, the minister gets appointed to the Senate because he feels that he should not run in the election.

Number 146, a hypocritical trade minister shakes his head at the hypocrisy of the member who dares to criticize him.

Number 147, muzzling Conservative MPs once again on commenting on the same sex marriage of two Canadian Mounties in Nova Scotia.

Number 148, playing politics by favouring friendly media outlets and ignoring anyone else who writes against him.

Number 149, preaching about accountability while the Conservative MP from Calgary West is sued for wrongful dismissal and accused of improperly using public funds.

Number 150, introducing token Senate reform while breaking the Conservative promise to elect Senators.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues across the way for voting with the government yesterday. With the support of opposition members, the Conservative government's first budget passed with unanimous consent.

Canadians will be pleased that the opposition decided to support the budget. Parents will soon see the child care allowance delivered to their door. Because the budget passed, our farmers will see much needed additional funding. All Canadians will enjoy the reduction in the GST from 7% to 6%. Unlike the Liberal tax plan, this is a tax saving that affects every Canadian.

The opposition was originally opposed to the budget. We are not sure why as it contains so many good things for Canadians. On this side of the House, we are pleased that the opposition parties saw the light, reversed their position and offered their unanimous support to a budget that is good for all Canadians.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, previous answers furnished by the government in the House have studiously avoided the issues around the government's intent to proceed with the sole source contract in the United States for strategic airlift.

The Conservatives undertook to purchase such aircraft, and the Minister of National Defence clearly wants to purchase the American C-17 aircraft. The Chief of the Defence Staff has made it clear that the support of our troops in the field, in Afghanistan, requires tactical airlift, and Mr. Speaker and members of the House, they require it now.

Are we not now at the point where the Prime Minister is putting his political agenda ahead of the needs of our troops?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should know the government has taken no such decision and no such procurement has been undertaken. However, the government did outline in the campaign our intention to rebuild our armed forces after 13 long years of neglect, and we will do that.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us take the government at its word. Let us assume it is looking at such an aircraft. Let us establish the fact right now that if it does decide to proceed with those aircraft, they will be Canadian owned but they will be maintained as if they were American.

For all intents and purposes to the United States, they will be maintained when the Americans feel like, when they can fit them in, and they will take off from American bases when the Americans let them.

At least hypothetically, will the Prime Minister assure the House that any military aircraft purchased by Canada will be based in Canada, serviced here by Canadian companies and Canadian workers?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Leader of the Opposition is engaging in mere speculation. What I can assure the House is that everything the government does will be in the interests of building a strong Canadian armed forces.

[Translation]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat the question.

Will the Prime Minister assure the House that any aircraft purchased by Canada, regardless of type and regardless of their country of origin, will be serviced in Canada, under Canadian control, for the benefit of our aviation, our military and our aeronautics industry?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government does not intend to encourage hypothetical questions like that.

That is the former Liberal Party. The members opposite want to try to lobby National Defence on behalf of certain companies. It is the nature of the Liberal Party to constantly lobby.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a shame, but when we look in the dictionary under "lobbyist", we see the Minister of National Defence. Today we have a prime example of moving forward to the past.

Listen closely to what I am about to say in order to understand.

For large military procurements it is customary to have a day of exploratory meetings with the Canadian industry in order to gauge its capacity to provide the goods and services required at a reasonable cost.

In the case of the C-17s, this was never done. This shows how much disdain there is for the aeronautics industry and how much this is still kept secret.

Will the Minister of Defence hold this day of exploratory meetings with the industry?

[English]

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we look at these decisions, we make the decisions based on the priorities of the Canadian Forces. That is our first commitment. However, I can assure the member opposite that when a decision is finally made, it will be made in the best interests of the military, in the best interests of Canadians and in the best interests of the industry.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will explain what is going on.

The government was forced to change its communication strategy. Now it is trying to say it will acquire Boeing Chinooks. They are trying to show that the Chinooks will be serviced in Canada. In the meantime, the C-17s will be sent to the United States.

Can the Prime Minister guarantee that any military acquisition for Canada will be kept and serviced in Canada? Canada needs these spinoffs, period.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Bourassa asked a question and the Prime Minister rose to answer it. We have to be able to hear him.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member is talking about totally hypothetical questions. I can tell you that we are here because we want to achieve real results, not like the Liberal Party, which was unable to get results for our defence and our industries.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first it was ecologists, mayors and scientists, and now it is economists who are denouncing the Prime Minister for his position on the Kyoto protocol. Some 30 economists from Canadian universities are saying that the Canadian government will undermine the economy with a plan that falls short of its Kyoto targets.

What is the Prime Minister's reaction to this group of economists who are denouncing his made-in-Canada plan that does not respect the Kyoto protocol?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said several times, this government intends to pursue the reduction of emissions, as we did in the budget with our support for public transit and for renewable fuels.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in their letter, the economists assert that a made-in-Canada plan is doomed to failure both environmentally and economically if it does not take into account the international community.

Why is the Prime Minister so determined to go it alone, when he should be moving forward in terms of our Kyoto targets? I would remind the House that the Kyoto protocol is an international treaty ratified by 163 countries.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in spite of this, the major producers of emissions, such as the United States, China and India, have not set Kyoto targets.

If the leader of the Bloc Québécois is still suggesting that this government take billions of tax dollars to purchase other countries' pollution credits, that is something this government will not do.

• (1430)

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would say to the Prime Minister that the Bloc Québécois would not do that either.

The letter from these 30 economists does not stop there. The signatories state that the Canadian economy needs a clear signal because the current level of greenhouse gas emissions is no longer acceptable and this signal cannot be based on voluntary initiatives which have been proven to be ineffective.

Will the Minister of the Environment admit that resorting to voluntary initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is tantamount to telling polluters that they have the green light from the government to continue laying waste to our environment?

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We know the Liberal plan did not work so why would that member be supporting a Liberal plan that does not work?

We are committed to effective plans that work.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we do not support a Liberal plan. We support a bilateral agreement with Quebec.

Natural resources fall under provincial jurisdiction, hence the need for an agreement with Quebec to achieve the objectives of the Kyoto protocol.

Therefore, why does the Prime Minister, who says he respects jurisdictions, not use the \$2 billion already allocated in the budget to sign a bilateral agreement with Quebec which, unlike Ottawa, believes in the Kyoto protocol?

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the environment minister have made it very clear that this is a made in Canada plan that affects all provinces, all territories and the international partnership. We will have a made in Canada plan that is effective in all provinces.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to a plan for Kyoto, there is no made in Canada plan. We have been asking for it for weeks but it has not shown up.

Let me turn to the issue of softwood lumber because next week is the deadline for the softwood lumber ratification on the deal. We have an increasing number of companies that are expressing deep concerns, and no wonder. The draft treaty gives away our sovereignty by giving a veto to Washington on our resource policies. We now have companies in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec that are expressing their concerns.

Will the Prime Minister commit, when the treaty comes here for ratification, that the treaty will not sell out our sovereignty to Washington?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I will guarantee is that the agreement will enhance market access for Canadian producers in the United States. It will get \$4 billion of money that has been tied up in endless litigation back into the pockets of Canadian producers. That is why the vast majority of Canadian producers support the agreement and why this party will be supporting it when it comes to this House for a vote.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to the contrary. The proposed agreement restricts the access of B.C. resources to the United States market and allows 13 U.S. companies to hang on to hundreds of millions of dollars in illegal tariffs that they can use to attack us. Is that standing up for Canada? Absolutely not.

Is the government trying to browbeat the industry into supporting it by threatening to withdraw loan guarantees and litigation support if they do not back it up? I am asking the Prime Minister to stand here right now and say that these loan guarantees and the litigation support will be reinstated if the deadline is missed.

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member says may be the perspective of someone from downtown Toronto but the people who work in this industry and who run this industry want this agreement done and this government will be doing it.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is well-known in the defence department that the defence capabilities plan has been redrafted over 40 times as the Conservative political agenda is impossible to reconcile with the needs of the military.

While the troops in theatre have an urgent need for tactical airlift, the minister continues to focus on C-17s. It seems that Canada will end up paying for two fleets of aircraft when the military only needs one.

Why will the Prime Minister not intervene to end this conflict and save the taxpayers billions of dollars?

• (1435)

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in a previous answer to a question, no decision has yet been made on the issue of procurement.

However, I find it a bit rich for the member opposite, after 13 years of Liberal neglect and after he voted against supporting our men and women in uniform, to now have an interest in the military.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because the Prime Minister will not resolve this conflict between the military leadership and his Minister of National Defence, the ultimate losers would be the Canadian taxpayers as the government acquires a mixed fleet of aircraft.

Is the Prime Minister aware that his refusal to resolve this very important conflict will cost Canadian taxpayers \$5 billion in life cycle costs because of the need to maintain two fleets when only one is needed?

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again I find the question a bit rich coming from a member who procured the failed fast ferries.

Let me assure the member opposite that they can bluster and ask these questions until they turn a Conservative blue but the reality is that when a decision is made it will be made in the best interests of the men and women in uniform.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, can the Prime Minister confirm for the House that his Minister of National Defence was previously a lobbyist for Raytheon as well as General Dynamics Canada, two companies that manufacture military equipment?

[English]

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of National Defence has repeated in this House many times, he has complied

with all the requirements of the ethics office and he has great credibility when it comes to serving our men and women in uniform.

The reality is that he has over 30 years of experience and, as a brigadier general, we as a government are very proud to have him heading this file.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that the government is about to announce the purchase of three supply ships at a cost of \$2.1 billion. The two companies I mentioned are directly involved in the tendering process, giving rise to two conflicts of interest for the Minister of National Defence.

When will the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, responsible for the procurement process, finally decide to seek legal advice on the risk of legal action against the government by competitors disappointed in losing a contract to another competitor who previously engaged the services of a lobbyist, now the Minister of National Defence?

[English]

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has complied with all the rules. I will say to the member opposite that every step that needs to be taken to ensure the procurement is accurate, fair and transparent will be done.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in response to my question yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said, and I quote: “Mr. Lamy sees no problems with maintaining the Canadian supply management system within the WTO framework”. But the Director-General of the WTO said exactly the opposite.

Is it not worrisome to see the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food so blatantly ignore what Pascal Lamy really thinks of the supply management system?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did meet with Mr. Lamy last Sunday and I had a good frank discussion with him. I presented Canada's case to him and reiterated our support for supply management and for a very robust deal at the WTO that is in the best interests of the whole agricultural sector.

At his presentation at the UPA, Mr. Lamy was very clear that he believes a supply management system within the rules of the WTO is possible. I agree.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, someone should send the minister a copy of the speech Mr. Lamy gave in Montreal because he seems to have misunderstood it. Pascal Lamy came here to tell us publicly that the supply management system is interfering with WTO negotiations.

Oral Questions

Is it not the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food's duty to tell Pascal Lamy publicly that he supports maintaining supply management and will not budge an inch?

[*English*]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure. I thought I just said exactly that. We are supportive of supply management. We have been in the past and we will be in the future. If our support for supply management slows things down at the WTO it will slow things down at the WTO. We are not backing away from our support for the agricultural sector in this country.

* * *

● (1440)

[*Translation*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' at-sea observer program, fishing boats in Canadian waters are required to take on board an observer who monitors catch quotas and regulatory compliance. The industry pays two thirds of the salary of these observers, and the department pays one third. Now, the industry could pay the full salary, and fishers will have the right to choose the observer.

Does the minister realize that with this reform, the observer could be in conflict of interest because he will be not only fully paid by the fisher he must monitor, but also hired by that person?

[*English*]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, this program was initiated by the former government. We put the brakes on it because I believe, as the member believes, that observers on the boat should be independent. If they are controlled by the boat owner it is quite often who pays the piper calls the tune.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the proposed new system runs completely counter to the recommendations made by an independent, impartial expert mandated by the department to assess various options for revamping this program.

Is the minister prepared to announce publicly that he will abandon the integrity of the observer system simply to save a few dollars?

[*English*]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think I just did that. I agree with the member that the integrity of the program must be protected. The only thing that really bothers me is that we need to have observers and monitors in the first place which brings an added cost down to the fisherman. The only reason we have that is to ensure our fishermen live by the rules. If we can ever get to the day when people will fish according to the rules we will not want any of these.

INTERNATIONAL AID

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government may announce this afternoon a multi-million dollar investment to improve the quality and strengthen the capacity of an early learning and child care education system in Egypt. We have no objection to this CIDA initiative. As a matter of fact, we support it.

If the government can properly support early learning and child care in Egypt, why has it cut \$5 billion for such services here in Canada, tearing up good and valid agreements with 10 provinces? Why is federal funding for childhood development rights in Egypt good for Egypt but wrong in Canada?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Kitchener Centre has asked a question and she is clearly waiting to hear the reply. With all this noise, nobody can hear a thing. The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has increased money that is being put in by the federal government toward child care in this country.

Besides the quantity, there is also a qualitative difference. The government believes that it should support the children of this country. Watching the Liberal leadership race, the Liberals think the children should be supporting the politicians.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I know it is Wednesday, but we must have some order. This is question period; it is not a hockey game.

The hon. member for Kitchener Centre has the floor.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the government is offering Canadians is bus fare, not child care.

The initiative in Egypt aims to increase access, improve the quality, and strengthen the capacity of early childhood development in that country. Some 300,000 children could benefit and that is wonderful news.

However, these were the same objectives espoused by the former Liberal government in its child care agreements with our provinces.

Will the government now follow the very good example that it has now set in Egypt, reverse the notices of cancellation, and reinstate Canada's intergovernmental agreements with the provinces?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what distinguishes the government's plans is that under our child care plan, every single child and every single family benefits. By the way, that is \$1,200 for every child, not \$5,400 from every child.

Oral Questions

•(1445)

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what does the Prime Minister have against downtown Toronto?

Canada's potential as a world leader in green technologies seemed limitless. However, thanks to the government's failure to invest in these technologies any illusion of environmental leadership quickly evaporated.

Incentives for wind power production more than quadrupled Canada's capacity since 2004. It also encouraged provinces to come forward with plans to see production increase another 10 times.

This initiative has now been scrapped along with hundreds of millions in provincial funding to promote a greener economy. My question is simple, why?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member that the Liberal environmental record over the last 13 years was abysmal on every single facet. The government has not cancelled the program as the hon. member has suggested.

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a tax credit for bus passes is not enough to reduce emissions, neither is setting biofuel targets without any federal support for research and development. The minister should know this. If the minister does not know it, the Prime Minister certainly should.

On May 29 economists wrote to the Prime Minister asking him to ensure that Canada benefited from the economic, environmental and health advantages of Kyoto.

Why has the government not put any incentives in place to secure Canada's environmental and economic success in the new economy?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has done a lot.

In fact, earlier last month, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Minister of the Environment, and I met with provincial members from all 10 provinces. Every single province was very supportive of our biofuel initiative.

The government is moving forward with projects that will actually have an impact on the environment and help every single Canadian, unlike the record of the old Liberal government.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are working to safeguard Afghans' security. The Bloc voted against this mission a few weeks ago. Yet the member for Saint-Jean commended Canada's contribution in Afghanistan.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs explain to the Bloc members why our Canadian armed forces are in Afghanistan?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Saint-Jean knows what Canada has accomplished in Afghanistan because he recently travelled there. As he himself said, we must prolong our mission there because, despite the progress that has been made so far, there is still a lot to do.

Like him, I think that it is vital to stabilize this country and that we cannot let the Taliban re-establish their training camps. I hope that his colleagues will adopt the same point of view as him: that we must support the important objectives Canada is working toward in Afghanistan.

* * *

[English]

CHINESE CANADIANS

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Chinese Canadian workers helped build the railroad that united Canada. Their only reward was a racist head tax and the Chinese Exclusion Act. For decades families were separated. There was a lot of hardship and suffering.

In 1984 former MPs Margaret Mitchell and Dan Heap, New Democrats by the way, asked Parliament for an apology and redress.

Many head tax payers are old or have died since then. How much longer will surviving families have to wait for justice and reconciliation?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the House knows, the Prime Minister and the government have committed to apologizing to the Chinese community. That commitment will be fulfilled as soon as possible.

•(1450)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister must know that most of the original head tax payers have died waiting for justice. She must also know that many families faced the great pain of separation. In fact, some of the wives committed suicide because of loneliness and despair. Many children never got to know their fathers.

Will widows be treated the same as head tax payers? Will surviving family members see their fair compensation so healing can finally take place?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the House knows, the government took immediate action and held cross-country consultations with the Chinese community. We heard many stories.

In fact, that member offered her support for the government in any action that it would take. As I have said, we will be fulfilling the commitment for an apology in the House with an appropriate acknowledgment.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during yesterday's question period, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said that his government supported the supply management system at the WTO negotiations. However, he also said that when we defend supply management and lose the vote 148 to 1, Canada's position is untenable.

Can the minister tell us clearly how he intends to defend the supply management system at the WTO?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our negotiators are at the WTO right now and the Geneva negotiations are ongoing. We are in constant contact with that team of negotiators to ensure that they represent the interests of the entire agricultural sector.

It is important that we are in the room to do that. We will be ensuring that when the decisions are being made that Canada is not on the outside looking in. We will be in there, scrapping on behalf of supply management and the rest of the agriculture sector.

[Translation]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no response.

On May 17, the western ministers of agriculture asked the government to reconsider its position on market access for sensitive products. Canadian producers prefer a balanced approach, in other words, negotiating access to international markets and defending supply management.

Is the government prepared to defend supply management, or will it drop this system, which successfully supports our Canadian communities, in favour of multinational interests?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said over the last couples of days, of course we support supply management. We have heard from the western premiers and many other groups that are more interested in the export side of the agricultural industry.

The hon. member is correct, it is a balancing act. We have to represent both. We have to go to Geneva and ensure that we come home with a deal that is in the best interests of the entire agricultural sector. We are not going to pit one sector against the other.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that in fact is what is happening by statements from members opposite, one sector is being pitted against the other.

We will give the minister another opportunity to clear the confusion. Will he commit clearly today that he will put forward the balanced position, the Canadian position, that all producers can benefit?

Second, will he direct our negotiator to stand firm on achieving a sensitive products category, so that supply management is in fact maintained?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the member is talking about the right balance, the balance that we have taken to Geneva. While we are in the discussions right now, we are talking about sensitive line protections, trying to get enough sensitive lines in order to preserve and protect the supply managed system.

The hon. member is right, we must have a balance. We are doing that, seeking that at all times, getting market access, reducing foreign subsidies, and domestic support that distorts trade. We want a good deal at the WTO because a good deal there is a good deal for Canadian agriculture.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I noticed the minister did not mention protecting state trading enterprises.

The government is intent on destroying the Canadian Wheat Board as the single desk selling agency for western wheat and barley. This is a system that maximizes returns back to primary producers rather than to the multinational grain trade.

Will the minister assure us that any proposed changes to the mandate of the board will be a decision of western grain farmers, by plebiscite, on a clear and honest question?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the campaign, there was a clear and honest question put forward. We said at the time that our party believed that there was a good future for the Canadian Wheat Board. It involves dual marketing, more Canadian farmers having a choice, and that is a decision that should be made here in Canada, not at the WTO.

* * *

● (1455)

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development will debate a Bloc Québécois motion recommending that the government vote in favour of the United Nations draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Can the minister confirm whether Canada intends to vote in favour of this United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, or whether it intends to join the United States, Australia and New Zealand and vote against it?

[English]

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people is an indepth document that is also a work in progress. We are giving it our focused attention and consideration.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the first 100 days have passed and now it is time to deliver the goods. The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities promised to support moving the Museum of Science and Technology to the Outaouais, but now he is trying to renege on that promise. During the last election campaign, he said over and over that the Outaouais would not be forgotten. He seems to have forgotten his first promise already.

Will the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities use his influence in Cabinet to support moving the Museum of Science and Technology to Gatineau as he promised? Yes or no?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. Obviously he was referring to our government's first 100 days.

It is too easy to say that we have resolved the UNESCO issue, which people had been demanding for many years. We also resolved the issue in the Quebec City region. We worked hard with the federalist government in Quebec City. We have an excellent working relationship with them. Not only did we resolve these matters, we also resolved the softwood issue, which that government chose to ignore.

The opposition will see us achieve even more over the next 100 days.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party's campaign policy manual made a commitment to establish an independent judicial inquiry into problems surrounding B.C.'s Fraser River sockeye salmon stocks. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is very much aware that these stocks had great difficulties, which caused great concern in British Columbia.

I have a question for the minister. When can we expect the government to appoint the much anticipated judicial inquiry and will he tell the House what will be included in the mandate of the inquiry?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me tell the member that any commitments we made during the election campaign, if he is using his checklist like the rest of those members, will be fulfilled, and that commitment, like all the others, will be fulfilled in time.

* * *

GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party, as we know, is well known for using public

funds for its own party's benefit. However, we say taxpayers' money should be spent wisely and transparently for the public benefit.

My question—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert has the floor. We will have a little order so we can all hear the hon. member's question.

Mr. John Williams: Telling the truth makes them a little testy, Mr. Speaker.

Does the President of the Treasury Board have any plans for the management of grants and contributions to ensure openness, transparency, accountability and proper supervision without endless red tape for the recipients?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Edmonton—St. Albert for all of his work as chair of the public accounts committee.

This government intends to follow through on the work to ensure there is more transparency in terms of grants and contributions. The web of rules put in place by the previous Liberal government has had a crippling effect on non-profit organizations, a crippling effect on our hard-working public servants. Yesterday we appointed a blue ribbon panel to dismantle the terrible regimen put in place by the previous regime.

* * *

● (1500)

HEALTH

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was revealed earlier today that Health Canada officials sent a document supporting the use of 2,4-D, a dangerous pesticide, to an industry group that is currently lobbying the government to allow the use of this chemical in residential neighbourhoods. Health Canada is in the middle of a safety review of this product, a review that is supposed to be impartial.

My question for the Minister of Health is, how can Canadians have faith in the system meant to protect them from dangerous pesticides when the government's own officials appear to be collaborating with companies that use and distribute these harmful pesticides?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the House that certainly the initial investigation reveals that a document was inadvertently sent out. We continue the investigation.

Let me agree with the hon. member that it is unacceptable to send out documents that are not meant to be sent out and we will continue the investigation.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 2,4-D is banned in most major Canadian cities and in the province of Quebec. It has been linked to cancer, neurological damage and reproductive problems, but Health Canada did not even contact leading researchers before distributing this report and deciding whether the pesticide is safe.

Routine Proceedings

What action will the Minister of Health take to ensure regulations regarding the health and well-being of Canadians are objectively based on scientific research and not biased by industry lobbyists given that they turned down the pesticide regulation put forward by the NDP?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, or should know, the document that was released was a series of talking points. It was not a scientific investigation. It was not a scientific document.

I will tell hon. members in this House, and I hope the hon. member agrees with me, that we should make the decision based on science, based on the advice of the best experts to protect the health and safety of Canadian citizens. That is what this side of the House agrees with. Certainly, we do not agree with rhetoric. We agree with action to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our country has been riveted by the arrests of 17 individuals suspected of plotting an attack on Canada. Canadians of Muslim faith are concerned about their safety and security. Acts of violence have already occurred in Toronto.

[*Translation*]

I would like to know what the government is planning to do to guarantee the safety of the Muslim community and to ensure that these events do not reflect badly on our multicultural society. My Muslim constituents are expecting the government to show some leadership on this issue.

[*English*]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I share the member's concerns. Because of that, and even before the events of last weekend took place, across the country many individuals, groups and organizations, many supported by the government, have been working in a very close and collaborative way with communities of faith and various cultural communities letting them know that we are on the alert when it comes to security for people who want to hurt Canadians.

Whether we are talking about the cross-cultural round table, whether we are talking about the various groups that reach out to these communities in terms of physical security and in terms of support for their communities, we are there as a government.

* * *

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nuclear energy is a sound source of energy for Canada. There needs to be a clear plan for the decommissioning and cleanup of old sites.

Unlike the past Liberal government that chose to ignore key environmental issues such as the cleanup of toxic sites across Canada, this government has a plan.

Would the Minister of Natural Resources tell us what this government is going to do to ensure the proper cleanup of decommissioned nuclear sites?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for her hard work on this file.

I am proud to be part of a government that has announced \$520 million to clean up the nuclear legacy liabilities and contaminated sites as part of our environmental stewardship.

Atomic Energy Canada Limited is well known for its research and also the research on medical isotopes which every single Canadian supports. We are also proud that Dr. Patrick Moore, co-founder of Greenpeace and chief scientist and chair of Greenspirit Strategies has endorsed this government's plan.

* * *

● (1505)

[*Translation*]

PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in our gallery of Djibril Yipène Bassolé, Minister of Safety for Burkina Faso.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Further, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Tom Christensen, Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation for British Columbia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

DEFENCE CONSTRUCTION CANADA

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I wish to table in the House Defence Construction Canada's annual report on compliance with the Access to Information Act and Privacy Act.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 26 petitions.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

The committee has considered the matter of the acquisition of significant property and has agreed to report it.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Whereas women's salaries are still lower than men's, even though pay equity is guaranteed by section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act; whereas in 2003 women working full time year round in Canada earned only 71% as much as men occupying similar positions; whereas this reality is even more pronounced among women of colour, immigrant women and women with disabilities and aboriginal women; whereas in June 2001 the departments of justice and labour set up a working group on pay equity that submitted an exhaustive report in May 2004, entitled "Pay Equity: A New Approach to a Fundamental Right", containing 113 recommendations; whereas thousands of women are still waiting for justice; the Standing Committee on the Status of Women recommends that the government consider preparing and bringing in before October 31, 2006 a bill on pay equity.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 92(3), the committee recommends that Bill C-291, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (injuring or causing the death of a child before or during its birth while committing an offence) be designated a non-votable item.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the associate membership of committees of the House.

• (1510)

If the House gives its consent, I move that the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Cambridge have the unanimous consent to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Routine Proceedings

PETITIONS

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present again a petition to the House that calls upon Parliament to immediately halt the deportation of undocumented workers and to find a humane and logical solution to this situation.

I was at an event over the weekend for FCJ Refugee Centre, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary. The men and women at that centre do a fine job dealing with refugee issues. They have great concerns and want to express to the House their utmost concerns about the treatment of undocumented workers. They also ask the government to find a humane solution to this situation.

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the family farm operates to the benefit of all Canadians. These petitioners ask that Parliament recognize the crisis that exists in the entire agrifood industry in Canada. They also ask that the Canada Ontario BSE recovery program be extended and funded to treat fairly and equally all those suffering as a result of the single found case of BSE, which is still affecting farmers.

CANADIAN FORCES

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of over 1,200 residents in my community.

The petitioners call upon the Minister of National Defence to expedite the Canadian Forces Housing Agency's analysis of housing needs of 17 Wing in Winnipeg in order to release surplus homes at the former Kapyong military base to Canada Lands Corporation as quickly as possible so they can be put to use for families in need in the city of Winnipeg.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present a petition signed by a large number of residents of Frontenac County and also from the surrounding areas, including the beautiful city of Kingston.

The petitioners draw the attention of the House to the treatment of Falun Gong practitioners in China, particularly with reference to the illegal and inhumane harvesting of organs from Falun Gong practitioners at a number of camps throughout China, the largest of which is code-named Camp 672-S and is said to hold over 120,000 people.

The petitioners ask the Canadian government to strongly and publicly call for an independent investigation into these allegations of death camps in China and call for the end to the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners.

FISHERIES

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to present a petition from constituents in my riding concerning the fishery.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners call upon the government to immediately implement adjustment measures to adjust the crisis in the fishery. These measures include early retirement, economic diversification and training programs.

I fully concur with the position of my constituents and I hope the government will respond favourably.

LABELLING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am not pleased to present this petition. Nor are the Canadians, who signed it, pleased that we have to raise this matter in the House yet again. This pertains to fetal alcohol syndrome.

The petitioners call upon the present government to do what the previous government failed to do, despite a vote in the House, which was passed almost unanimously, to have labels placed on all alcohol beverage containers warning women that drinking during pregnancy can cause serious harm.

These petitioners are tired of asking governments to do what Parliament has willed. They call upon the present administration to do precisely that and ensure that all alcohol beverage containers, whether they are wine, beer or liquor, have warning labels that say precisely that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause birth defects.

• (1515)

HOUSING

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk, I am presenting a petition from the Harmony United Church in Oshawa. The 35 petitioners request that the Government of Canada consider supporting the Amik affordable housing project.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by 134 British Columbians. The petitioners call on Parliament to recognize pre-born children as separate victims when they are injured or killed in the commission of a crime against the child's mother.

This pro-woman proposal recognizes the grief that women experience when their children are harmed or killed. Research clearly shows that women are at greater risk of violence when they are pregnant.

The pro-woman, pro-child proposal would add another deterrent against boyfriends, partners, husbands and others who may be tempted to harm women because they are pregnant.

CANADA POST

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition on behalf of Canadians.

The petitioners say that the federal government is allowing Canada Post to close post offices in spite of a moratorium on closures in rural areas and small towns. They also say that public post offices connect communities throughout this vast land, helping us to overcome differences and distances.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to instruct Canada Post to maintain, expand and improve its networks of public post offices.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present another petition to the House from people in my area who are very concerned about the government's plan to kill the national child care program.

The petitioners, among other things, call upon the Prime Minister to honour the early learning and child care agreement in principle and to commit to funding for a full five years.

I thank Pat Hogan for her ongoing work on this front, but more particularly for a lifetime of work in the not for profit child care sector. She has been a real champion. She is very concerned and has done a lot of work to get these signatures.

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition here today on behalf of a coalition that wants Canada Post to respect the moratorium on post office closures in small towns and rural areas. This petition was submitted to me by Cynthia Paterson, a kind woman who is a member of the coalition and who started the petition.

I am pleased to table it here in the House on her behalf and on behalf of everyone who would like to see small, rural post offices respected and see them remain open.

* * *

[*English*]

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, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 14 and 15.

[*Text*]

Question No. 14—**Mr. Bill Siksay:**

With regard to the Canadian Armed Forces presence in Afghanistan: (a) how many humanitarian, restoration or development construction projects has the Canadian Armed Forces participated in during its deployment in Afghanistan; (b) how many have been completed; (c) how many are currently under construction; (d) what is the specific nature of these projects; (e) what are the locations, by province or region, of these projects; and (f) how many of these projects have subsequently been attacked or damaged by insurgents or others, and, of those affected or damaged, how many are under repair, damaged and waiting for repair, destroyed, intact but unused, or intact but being used for purposes other than originally intended?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is as follows:

a) During its deployment in Afghanistan, between October 2001 and May 2006, the Canadian Forces have participated in 404 restoration or development projects.

b) 332 projects are deemed completed.

c) Approximately 72 projects are at various stages of completion.

Routine Proceedings

d) The nature of these projects includes: community water access; medical facility renovation; medical equipment provision; medical supplies provision; road construction; bridges construction; school construction; school supplies; fire hall construction; support to non-governmental organizations; small business case development; widow training programs; water infrastructure; sanitation projects; provision of quality of life supplies; support to Afghan national security forces; support to orphanages; playground construction and renovation; miscellaneous.

e) The Canadian Forces projects were centered in and around Kabul and Kandahar city areas.

f) Though not all projects are surveyed on a regular basis to confirm their serviceability there is no evidence or reports of any of these projects being attacked by insurgents.

Question No. 15—**Mr. Bill Siksay:**

With regard to the Canadian Armed Forces presence in Afghanistan: (a) how many persons taken prisoner or detained by the Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan have been turned over to (i) Afghani officials, (ii) American officials, (iii) officials of other countries or organizations; and (b) how many of these persons remain in custody?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, due to operational requirements and taking into account section 15(1) of the Access to Information Act, information regarding the current status of detainees apprehended by Canadian Forces elements in Afghanistan, as well as to which authorities these individuals were transferred, is not releasable to the public.

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[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 13 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 13—**Ms. Dawn Black:**

With regard to Canada's commitments in Afghanistan: (a) what is the estimated cost of Canada's continuing commitments; (b) what is the current command structure of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan, particularly their relation to United States of America (USA) forces; (c) what is the total number of Canadian soldiers present in Afghanistan at the moment and how will this change over the next 12 months; (d) how will force levels change over the next decade; (e) how does the government see the mission in Afghanistan aligning with Canada's role in the world; (f) is the government aware of the conditions in USA-controlled and Afghanistan-controlled detention facilities in Afghanistan, and, if so, what has the government determined about the conditions; (g) has the government sought assurances from the USA regarding the treatment of prisoners who are handed over to USA or Afghan forces; (h) does the government believe that the Prisoner Transfer Arrangement signed on December 18, 2005 by the Chief of Defence Staff prevents the onward transfer of prisoners to countries other than Canada and Afghanistan; (i) have foreign forces ever surrounded Canadian encampments or bases with anti-personnel land mines; (j) are Canadian bases surrounded by any anti-personnel landmines that have been left from previous conflicts in Afghanistan; (k) how long does the government expect the Canadian military presence in Afghanistan to last; (l) does the government have any plans for further debate in the House of Commons regarding the deployment in

Afghanistan; (m) does the government have any plans for a vote in the House regarding new deployments in Afghanistan; (n) are Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan part of the American Operation Enduring Freedom; (o) will Canadian Forces in Afghanistan come under North Atlantic Treaty Organization command, and, if so, when will this happen; (p) does the government believe that the current mission has a United Nations mandate, and, if so, how was it achieved; (q) has the government considered a possible renewal or modification of the Canadian mission, once current commitments have been fulfilled; (r) what is the date on which Canada will have to notify NATO if it wishes to make commitments past February 2007; (s) has the government considered building a joint detention facility with the Netherlands to hold prisoners; (t) have Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan been instructed to uphold both the spirit and the letter of the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel land mines; (u) has the government created an exit strategy for our deployment; (v) if we continue at current force levels in Afghanistan, what would be the number of deployable troops available to the Canadian Forces, both at home and abroad, over the next five years; and (w) what is the expected wear on equipment if a long-term mission is taken on?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Hon. Raymond Chan (Richmond, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday I rose on a point of order to bring to the attention of the House that Notice of Motion No. P-7 for the Production of Papers referred to a document to which the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister claimed to be referring to in question period almost a month ago. If the parliamentary secretary were telling the truth, the government must have the document at the ready.

I cannot understand, at the time when I brought this up, that the hon. member was not aware of what I was talking about. I expect that a week later he would understand, and I hope the document would be produced as soon as possible.

● (1520)

The Deputy Speaker: I trust that the government will consider itself properly admonished on this. However, I might also tell the hon. member that his point of order probably would have been better made under Notice of Motions for the Production of Papers. We are on Questions on the Order Paper, but the government can certainly take it as having been advanced in that context.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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 Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***CRIMINAL CODE**

The House resumed from June 6 consideration of the motion that Bill C-10, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (minimum penalties for offences involving firearms) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-10, a government bill that is allegedly designed to provide additional security to our population by introducing additional mandatory minimum sentences for a number of crimes, particularly those where guns are used in the commission of a crime.

In the last election my party was quite clear about the need for additional action on the part of all levels of government to try to eradicate the use of guns in our cities and towns from any illegal use whatsoever. My party will support the bill at second reading and then send it to committee. I have to make it very clear that we have severe reservations about the adequacy of the bill in combatting the specific problem of the use of illegal guns in crimes.

I want to credit the attorney general of Manitoba for giving what I thought was a very clear analysis of what is necessary to fight the use of weapons in the commission of crimes. Mr. Mackintosh drew a picture of a three-legged stool. I do not think I am putting words in Mr. Mackintosh's mouth, but he said there were three components to fighting this type of crime, the major one having programs in place to prevent the crime from ever happening.

I have practised law for a long time, including criminal and family law. I saw a lot of victims. I can say honestly that never ran across victims who, if given a choice between not having had the crime perpetrated on them, which oftentimes resulted in severe injuries, or sending the perpetrator to prison for a long time, would not choose prevention. They want these crimes to be prevented from ever happening. No matter what the penalty might be to the perpetrator, they will not get their health back. They do not recover psychologically from the trauma of the abuse.

Our number one priority for the governments, whether provincial or federal, should be to approach the issue of crime from a prevention standpoint.

The second leg on that three-legged stool is enforcement. Criminologists will tell us that one of the greatest ways to prevent crime is for individuals to know they will be caught. That means in high crime areas, in particular, we need to step up enforcement and put more police officers on the street. They should not be put in offices or in a lot of cases even in cars. They are needed on the street.

Provincial governments suffered significant cuts to their transfer payments by the Conservative government of Mr. Mulroney, the Liberal government of Mr. Chrétien and the member for LaSalle—Énard and the current government. They are still trying to recover from those cuts.

● (1525)

The provinces had to cut all sorts of services, including any that would have required the augmenting of police services at the provincial level. They passed a number of those cuts on down to the municipal level where most of the law enforcement in this country takes place.

We need to have more police officers on the street. It is interesting to see that in the government's budget this spring, although the government blew its horn about hiring 1,000 new RCMP officers, the budget does not address street crime at all for at least a number of years. We are probably short about 1,500 RCMP officers right now. We can only train, educate and prepare RCMP officers at the rate of about 1,200 a year. It is quite some distance before that will have any impact at all.

Where the real impact could be felt and be felt very quickly would be to move money to the provinces, which the government did not do in the budget, and allow the provinces to spend the money on enforcement by hiring more police officers and putting them on the street, particularly into areas where there are high crime rates.

The third and, I have to say, the least important leg on that stool is the legislative one. I call it the denunciatory factor. It is society saying that they condemn serious crimes and proposing harsher penalties to convey that message. When that is done we must be very careful because in order for it to be effective we can only do it when there is a serious crisis and it is tailored to that crisis. We have two reasonably good experiences of this in Canada. One is the experience we have had with impaired driving.

If we go back 20 years and look at the attitudes of the legislature, the courts and, yes, even the police and society generally, we were much more permissive about impaired driving as a result of alcohol or drug consumption and I think even more callous about the consequences.

However, about 20 years ago we began to change. Over that period of time what did we do? We introduced the mandatory minimum penalties for impaired driving but, more important, groups such as MADD, our police forces and a number of non-profit agencies came together and spent money to convince society of the negative consequences. It did have an impact, as did, to a small degree, the additional penalties that we brought to bear.

We had similar success with domestic violence. Most provinces over a period of about 20 years began to compel their prosecutors and police officers to treat domestic violence seriously, to lay charges and not withdraw charges, and to take control of the situation. By any standard that has had an effect.

Corresponding with that, although it was not in the form of mandatory minimum, there was a change in attitude by the judiciary to impose more severe sentences. Together, that combined campaign had the desired effect of reducing the rate of domestic violence. We certainly have not cured it but it has had an impact.

I believe we can learn from those experiences when we look at the crisis that faces us with regard to gun crimes. We know the abuse of weapons is particularly concentrated in our major cities. The first thing we need to do is to do an analysis of why we have the problem and it needs to be concentrated in our major cities. For instance, the murder rate in our major cities runs anywhere from 200% to 400% higher than in the country as a whole for our suburban and rural areas.

● (1530)

The second thing we need to look at is the nature of the crime. In the case of Canada, what has changed over the last five or six years? We have had an increase in the number of guns, handguns in particular, but rapid fire guns. These are all restricted or illegal guns. They would never be registered as legal guns. Those guns are being smuggled into Canada in much higher numbers. We are getting this information from both our federal and provincial police forces.

The increase in volume is particularly severe because organized crime, biker gangs in particular, have taken control of it. It is estimated to be running anywhere from a 100% to a 1,000% increase in guns coming into Canada illegally.

The RCMP tells us that the increase in guns has come about because organized crime gangs are smuggling drugs, marijuana in particular, from Canada into the United States. The organized crime gangs made a business decision, if I can put it that way, that it did not make sense to send the container to the U.S. full and then bring it back empty. About five or six years ago they began to fill those containers with illegal weapons, brought them back into our cities and sold them on the streets of our major cities. Smuggling at the organized crime level has had a very serious impact.

We need to look at the legislation and ask whether it responds to the crisis we are faced with. Does it target in a limited fashion where the real problem is? Does it draw too broad a scope? Is it driven, as I believe in terms of the specific provisions, more by ideology than by an evidenced-based approach?

Let me answer those questions. It does draw too broad a scope. Including the number of crimes where the government is imposing mandatory minimums, one has to suggest, would not be targeted well enough.

We had a proposal in our platform in the last election to specifically target the smuggling, importing and exporting of illegal weapons. We presently have a mandatory minimum of one year on most of those offences, if not all of them. We were proposing in our platform to increase that to four years. We are now targeting directly the biker gangs and that conduct of smuggling weapons into this country illegally.

The legislation is not targeted enough. It is so broad that the denunciatory factor gets lost. It is also limited, not only in that section but in others where the government has imposed mandatory minimums or is proposing to impose mandatory minimums where it will not have any impact whatsoever.

As parliamentarians and legislators, we must be careful in our approach to this issue. We can approach it ideologically by ignoring the facts and the evidence. We can make ourselves feel good and convince the country that we are doing something meaningful but

Government Orders

that does not protect our society or individuals. We need to know that what we are doing will work but the bill does not take us there.

The bill has some real risks, which I will address fairly quickly, the first one being the effect of mandatory minimums, especially used in this scope.

● (1535)

We must appreciate that the Criminal Code already has mandatory minimums for about 60 to 70 crimes. The present bill would add about 20 to 30 more. We would be approaching close to 100 crimes involving mandatory minimums. All the studies I have seen tell us and should tell this legislature that if we do not target it or use it selectively it loses its impact. We are very close and, in fact, I think we have crossed over that line.

What the NDP would support in a very limited scope of mandatory minimums is really minuscule compared to what is proposed in the legislation.

Let us talk about the problems with mandatory minimums. It shifts the role that has traditionally been played by the judge in determining what is an appropriate sentence to the prosecutor. The prosecutor, by determining what charges will be laid and pushing for convictions, will determine the length of a sentence.

However, because of the cost, a great number of our prosecutors are caught. Even if they want to pursue more severe penalties, they know the defence lawyers and the accused will hold the process up by seeking a long trial and the crown attorneys have limited resources. They can afford to take only so many 20-day to 60-day trials.

Our system functions on the basis that somewhere between 90% and 95% of all criminal charges will be dealt with by way of guilty pleas. If that balance is upset, the costs are driven up dramatically. The crowns know that, the defence lawyers know that and most hardened accused know it. The process ends up with the lawyers plea bargaining so that the serious crime is not the one for which criminals plead guilty. The penalty imposed is less than what might have been imposed under a system where there were no mandatory minimums. Therefore, the extensive use of mandatory minimums is self-defeating. We end up with fewer convictions and lower penalties.

We need to look at how we use incarceration. I argue that the way we have to do that analysis is to look at societies that are similar to ours but which have lower crimes rates. We need to look at how they deal with their criminal law and the rate of incarceration.

We should do an evidence-based analysis and forget the ideology, the feel good thing of, "Yes, I am out here. I am real macho. I am going to get tough on crime and send all these people to jail". We hear that from the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice. However, if they really understood the system they would get off the macho trail and just look at what actually works.

Government Orders

We would look at other countries, such as those in western Europe which, overall, have significantly lower crime rates than Canada, both for murder and serious violent crime, and they have lower incarceration rates. Canada's incarceration rate, according to the last figures in 2002, was at about 116 per 100,000 population. In western Europe, Australia and New Zealand the average runs from a low of about 60 up to the high 90s. All the countries we would like to compare ourselves to, and we do regularly on all sorts of other social programs, have an incarceration rate that is 20% lower than ours and, in some cases, as much as 50% lower.

The one country in our close allies that is the exception is the United States. Its ratio of incarceration is 702 per 100,000, almost seven times higher than ours, with a corresponding crime rate that is four, six and eight times higher than it is in Canada in spite of some of the figures we hear from the government party.

At committee, the NDP will be moving significant amendments to the bill to bring it into line with what we had promised to do during the election. We will be calling for support, although I am not really expecting any from the government, but from the opposition parties to get the bill into shape where in fact it would protect Canadians and obtains results for them.

• (1540)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder about the member's closing remarks. When he says they are going to do this work in committee, does that mean he will be voting to get the bill to committee?

As for my question, I would like the member to comment on the root causes of crime and some of the things we can do. I work on the justice committee with him. He is a very good member and I know that he has some background in this.

On September 11, I was in Washington when the planes hit. An hour after that, I said to the press that we had to look at the root causes and work on them as well. At the time, the Conservatives said that was nonsense, that those people were just criminals and should be put in jail, but I notice that the justice minister did say they have to work on that.

I would like to know if the member thinks there is evidence of support for that. When the Conservatives take away \$1.8 billion from aboriginal education and the Kelowna accord, does that help? If there is no money for youth workers and if there is no more money for policemen on the beat to work with the youth, does that help? If the Conservatives remove \$10 billion from early childhood development and take away the choice of those parents who want that extra developmental assistance for their child, and if they increase the tax rate for low income people from 15% to 15.5%, does that help remove the root causes of crime? If they remove the low income young child tax credit, does that help develop a good, healthy background where there is religious tolerance and a good family to grow up in?

I would like the member to talk about the root causes of crime and what can be done so that we never get to the situation of having to incarcerate people for long periods of time, which has been proven not to work.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the member for Yukon obviously must have come in a bit late. I indicated at the beginning of my speech that our party would be supporting this bill to go to committee at second reading.

To answer his basic question about the root causes of crime, I have to say that the government in some respects is repeating—and again, because of its straight ideological approach on this issue—the mistakes that have been made at the provincial level in a number of provinces.

I think of the Mike Harris government in my home province. Immediately after he was elected for the first time, his government slashed social welfare spending. It slashed all sorts of programs, including a couple of programs that provided shelters for women and children who had been abused as a result of domestic violence. It was a wide sweep.

Quite frankly, to some degree what Ontario and Toronto in particular now are seeing are the consequences of that. The victims of those cuts were in their early adolescence. They were in their early teen years. In disproportionate numbers, they are committing those crimes on the streets of Toronto right now.

Let us go to the other major cities where the murder rate and the violent crime rate are so high, including your home city, Mr. Speaker, and Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver. Let us compare them to Montreal and Quebec City. We find that the juvenile crime rate, the young offender crime rate, is significantly higher in every one of those major cities and significantly lower in Montreal and Quebec City.

What happened? At the same time that the cuts came out in Ontario and from the Klein government in Alberta, the Province of Quebec did not cut. It stood up and in effect defended the use of legislation. It did not impose penalties. It put in place programs to head off those young people from getting into crime and drugs, and it worked.

• (1545)

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today and ask a couple of questions of my friend. I noted his comment that our incarceration rate is 20% higher than that of some other countries. First of all, I wonder if he noticed the geographic differences. Australia and the United Kingdom are actually surrounded by water and do not have the United States right next door, which of course has the largest gun owner population in the world.

I had an opportunity to attend law school in Australia and volunteered some of my time in Australian jails. I can say with certainty, after being a criminal lawyer in northern Alberta and spending considerable time in Australia, that they are very different systems. They are very different places, and indeed, the people are different. I am wondering if he would comment on that.

Government Orders

Some years ago I had a client who had been caught with a loaded .357 Magnum under his car seat. When he was stopped by the RCMP, the weapon was found. He came before the court. He received a 30 day conditional sentence for carrying that loaded weapon under his seat. Would the member comment on whether or not he thinks that is sufficient time to deter that gentleman from doing it again?

I am a gun owner, but when the law came into effect, I turned in my .38 special, which had a short barrel, to the RCMP for destruction. I felt it was not appropriate to have it at that time. I was not a target practice shooter. I wonder if he would comment on that.

We are different countries and we require different things. We need to make sure that those people who are going to commit crimes and carry weapons such as these, which have only one purpose, do serious time in order to deter them from doing anything again.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I will limit my comments to deterrence as a general answer, but I will say this. Regarding the .357 Magnum, I cannot answer that question, nor could anyone else, without knowing all the facts. Is two and a half years enough? Is four years enough? Is six months enough? I do not know. That is one of the problems with mandatory minimums. If we do not have a full assessment of the case in front of us, if we do not have all the facts, we should not be making a judgment call.

On deterrence as a whole, we know it does not work. If someone is high on meth, do we really think that person is going to think about getting a month, six months, two years or 10 years? People do not think of it. For most crimes involving guns, very little thought goes into it. Oftentimes it is a quick reaction, or passion, or is driven by peer influence, especially with the gangs in the major cities.

The one exception, and it is why we think we should concentrate on this, is the organized crime bosses, mid-level or up. They are the ones who understand that if they are involved and convicted of an organized crime they are going to jail for a longer period of time because of these changes in the law.

If we do the same thing with regard to the importing and the smuggling of weapons, they are the ones we are going to go after. As for the mule who is carrying them across, it does not give us very much to catch that person. We have to get the people further up. They do understand. They do the analysis. It is a very small group of criminals. They are the ones we should be targeting because they are the only ones that this kind of legislation works against.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I also work with the hon. member on the justice committee and respect him and his work. I look forward to working with him in the future. I understand from his speech that it was because of his leader's position that he is now talking about four year mandatory minimums in regard to this very restrictive and ideologically driven piece of legislation. Four years is what the previous Liberal government chose as its time limit as the mandatory minimum, this being a floor.

However, this bill has seven year mandatory minimums and even 10 year mandatory minimums. I would like the member to comment briefly on what happens in the sentencing principles of our Criminal Code with the proportionality situation that is the major sentencing principle.

I also would like him to briefly discuss something he did not cover in his speech, which is the different use in this legislation between long guns and restricted or prohibited firearms, which generally are short guns although there are some automatic weapons that are long guns. In these terms, I am referring to shotguns and rifles that are not sawed off. Has he noticed any discrepancies in this piece of legislation that he would be concerned about?

• (1550)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member for London West, especially the last part of it, as I had run out of time and wanted to point out what I see as a real failure in this legislation.

During the election, I was at the funeral of a young woman police officer outside of Montreal. She was killed by a long gun. This legislation does not impose mandatory minimums for the use of long guns in such crimes. It does so for restricted weapons only. The minister has tried to explain this to members of my party and to me, but it makes no sense.

Let us take just this one statistic. Of all the police officers who have been killed in this country in the last 20 years, more than half of them were killed by long guns, not handguns. There is no question about the fact that in the last few years the use of handguns has gone up, but there is absolutely no explanation for or logic as to why we would not have that kind of provision in the bill extending to both, to the long guns as well, as opposed to just restricted weapons.

In terms of the proportionality argument, again I did not have time to get to this in my main address, but I have serious doubts about whether the 10 year mandatory minimum would survive a test in our courts under the charter. The courts have made it quite clear in a number of decisions up to this point, including all the way up to the Supreme Court, that they would tolerate seven year mandatory minimums in very limited cases. That seems to be the top end. Ten years is over the top.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mississauga South.

Just about 40 years ago Canada espoused for itself the goal of building a just society, characterized by truth, fairness, equality of opportunity, and a high degree of social cohesion.

Despite 40 years of mostly progressive social policy at the federal level and a decrease in the general crime rates, we are today debating a piece of legislation meant to crack down on crime and to get tougher on criminals.

The Conservative government does not expect this legislation to deter people from committing crimes. In his budget speech the Minister of Finance admitted as much when he allocated more money to the correctional system to accommodate "the expected increase in inmates" that would result from his law and order agenda.

No, Bill C-10 is not going to prevent crime. It is not going to deter criminal activity. The government does hope it will take some criminals off the streets and keep them in jail longer. It hopes that removing the bad apples citizens will feel safer and less fearful.

Government Orders

The general public is naturally fearful of violent crime, particularly when innocent bystanders are its victims, but that natural fear is exacerbated and extended by the culture of fear in which we live. On television most serious drama revolves around violent crime, whether it is *Law & Order* or *Da Vinci's Inquest*, murder is usually at the centre of the plot. Even newscasts are filled with crime, terrorism, war and all the accompanying death. Journalists and editors admit making decisions about publication by the code "if it bleeds, it leads".

In addition to this encompassing fear, citizens are also caught in a clash of values as they teach their children not to shove or hit to solve a dispute. Adults are solving disputes by bombing and destroying whole cities full of people. As teachers lecture that each person is unique, special and deserving of respect, our own Chief of the Defence Staff states publicly that his soldiers are trained to kill and will go after the "scumbags". It is hard to find respect in that statement.

The contradictions are endless between the values taught by parents, teachers and clergy, and the behaviours observed by adolescents and young adults. Is it any surprise that they are confused about right and wrong?

They see many people whose lives are characterized by vice rather than virtue, and they see those people achieve great wealth and fame. Steroid using professional athletes, drug using entertainers, and money stealing business leaders seem to have lives of ease and pleasure and celebrity. And our media does seem to celebrate these lives of the rich and famous, no matter their route to fame.

We both celebrate wealth and we accommodate the wealthy with friendly tax policies. Between 1986 and 2000 the incomes of the wealthiest 1% of Canadians rose by a whopping 65%, an average increase of \$157,000 a year. During the same period, welfare recipients in Alberta saw their incomes drop by 38%, from \$14,000 a year to a shameful \$8,800.

While young Canadians may be mainly unaware of these statistics, they do have eyes that see increasing numbers of homeless people begging on the streets and they see more monster homes at outrageous prices advertised in the newspapers. They question what they see. They ask, is this fair? Is this just?

I ask, will Bill C-10 help us create a more just society for all? Will the bill bring Canadians together to build supportive communities? I think not.

Bill C-10 is built on a faulty premise, that is the good versus evil vision of the world. In this world people whose behaviour causes harm are identified as evil. The role of justice is to keep our good society safe from this evil.

● (1555)

Even in our good society there have to be some bad people who need to be corrected through punishment. This good versus evil theory encourages quick fixes, such as removing the bad apples to keep the rest of us safe. It leads us to think crime is only the result of a few evil persons and implies that we collectively bear no responsibility for what goes on in the hidden corners of our communities, and that individually we have no connection

whatsoever to it. According to this theory we could eliminate crime by isolating all the bad people in jail.

Over the last 30 years North America experienced a doubling and a tripling of incarceration rates, but this had absolutely no effect whatsoever on the amount of crime processed by the state. It appears that as we put away more and more bad apples, a constant stream of fresh apples spontaneously began to rot. Increased incarceration rates did not reduce crime, but did create a tremendous amount of suffering for a rapidly increasing number of prisoners, most of them young males.

The government is obviously committed to the good versus evil vision of the world and the removal of the bad apples methodology, even though it has not been proven to bring about the desired result of safer streets and a more cohesive society.

Instead, the result will be more Canadians in jail for longer periods. Longer sentences will increase the rate at which released prisoners who have served their sentences are inclined to reoffend. The longer they have lived inside the unique and brutal culture of a prison, which some call criminal school, the more difficult it will be for them to adjust to the norms and expectations of mainstream society when they come out.

Who will these new inmates be? Aboriginal people make up only 3.3% of the Canadian population but make up 21% of admissions to provincial custody and 18% of admissions to federal custody. I predict that with the 1,000 more RCMP officers announced in the budget that this overrepresentation of aboriginals in prison will at least continue but will probably increase.

Another group I worry about is visible minority youths in cities. Why? Because one can predict the potential for criminal activity by examining the social determinants of criminal behaviour.

The first determinant is family poverty. Family poverty results in a poorer health status, less optimism about life, less self-confidence and less resiliency to setbacks. The second determinant is a lack of parental involvement and supervision. Parents working very long hours to make ends meet and therefore are not around for the kids. Nobody is at home to help them with homework et cetera. This leads to the third determinant, a lack of success in school and little engagement with extracurricular arts or sports activities. Without classroom or sporting field success, these kids have little chance of feeling included in the school community.

In Ontario the strict rules around behaviour in school expanded the social exclusion already felt by some who were struggling there as they were struggling in life. Once expelled, these children found there was still no one at home and no space for them at school. Everybody needs to feel included somewhere, and in Ontario, during the Harris government years, these abandoned young people found their somewhere on the streets.

Government Orders

Now we have Bill C-10 brought to us by the same sponsors who brought us the Harris education policies. When they would not put money into educational supports for struggling young people, they sewed the seeds for the crop of desperate young people we have today. Now Canadian taxpayers are being asked to pay for the harvest in more correctional spaces for the expected increase in inmates. The price tag for this? It will cost over \$80,000 per year for one federal inmate.

In Australia and in the southern United States mandatory minimum sentences overcrowded the prisons and required the building of new ones. After some years of experience taxpayers are lobbying their governments to end mandatory minimums as they have proven to be too expensive and they have not reduced crime rates.

When other jurisdictions have tried a justice strategy and it has failed, why would we try now? When it would result in more Canadian graduates of crime school re-entering our society later, why would we implement it? Have we learned nothing from the studies that show that punishment and retribution are less successful and more expensive than upfront social investment?

Bill C-10 adds to the climate of fear. Its terms dictate that Canada will never achieve the just society envisioned by Trudeau. As one Canadian, I will never stop trying to build that just society and therefore I will be voting against Bill C-10.

• (1600)

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member could comment on a particular story that I would like to tell.

I have a nephew who is an aboriginal Canadian, actually a treaty member of a band in northern Alberta and a good friend of mine. While I was practising criminal law in northern Alberta, he had occasion to put together about two pages of rap sheets, something in the neighbourhood of between 8 and 12 or 14 criminal convictions. Finally, thank God it happened, he went to jail for two and a half years for a simple assault. As anybody would know who has been involved in the criminal system, that is very serious time.

He went in as a 120 pound crack addict and came out as a 200 pound strapping young man who today has a job, and a family of four beautiful kids living with him. Thanks to the day the judge who sent him away to jail for some serious time for a serious crime. so he has a life today.

I talk to that nephew of mine once every week or two and he is a totally contributing member of our society. I am so proud of that person. I am also proud of that judge for sending him to jail.

I would like the member to comment on that aboriginal nephew of mine from northern Alberta.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca has such low standards.

Everyone who deals with human beings knows that addiction to illegal substances or mind altering substances is an illness, that once the addiction kicks in, these are people who need help.

It is very sad to think that the only place this particular individual could get help was in a jail cell. In my view, it is an indictment of our society that we do not provide the help and health restoring situations for people like that, so that they can come back and fulfill their promise without living in the misery of a jail, excluded from society and given little hope.

Having said that, it seems that it did work for this person, but I, for one, aspire to a much better social support system, rather than throwing these poor, miserable souls in jail.

• (1605)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on the last exchange. In the exact case that the Conservative member just gave, this particular bill, Bill C-9, would have exacerbated that situation and may have prevented that success story.

We will incarcerate more people under this legislation. As the justice minister suggested, it would cost about \$250 million out of the system, money that could be used for healing, for working on drug addiction and on anger management.

I have visited our prisons. I hope all members will. There were inmates, young aboriginal people most of them, who wanted more services, more education, more anger treatments, and more treatment for drug addiction.

If there is already not enough treatment, how will taking another \$250 million out of the system help, especially when prisons will be overcrowded even more by incarcerating more people? I just wanted to make that point.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for raising this point because all taxpayers should be concerned about the allocation of their money.

Our current Minister of Finance was part of the team that decided to remove from schools all the support, the psychologists, the social workers, the nurses, et cetera, so instead of having one of those professionals per school or per couple of schools, there was one for 30 schools. If a person seemed to have trouble in school and the teachers could not find out why, they could not get a psychologist to come for a full year. That meant the child slipped behind and could not be treated. That was in Ontario.

I say this for the benefit of my colleagues from other provinces. I want to warn them about the placement of tax dollars into things like corrections because the investments have not been made upfront.

I cannot help but mention, not to connect it to corrections, but the whole idea of social investments is to build the strongest and healthiest people who can reach their potential. That is one of the reasons why the people on this side of the House, actually the majority of the House, feel so badly that after 30 years of working to build a child care system, where every child could have early learning opportunities, the government chose to throw out those spaces. Not for every child, but for those children whose parents choose it.

Government Orders

Mr. Brian Jean: One in twenty.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: No, there are many more waiting for those spaces.

The government never gets in at the bottom level and puts the money in where it is needed for investments. Instead, it comes in at the rear end and puts money into correctional spaces when it could be too late.

I am happy to hear that the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca has one success story from our jails, but I think there are probably many more sad stories and many of those could be avoided by investments at the front end of a child's life as opposed to the back end.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to add my comments to the debate on Bill C-10 on the subject matter of mandatory minimum sentences.

I doubt that there is a member in this place who would not generally agree with the premise that the punishment should fit the crime as a general principle. Add to that the aspect of whether there are circumstances in an individual case which may distinguish it from another case which is the same crime but we have some different facts on the table. I think that members will be aware of a number of cases where there are some circumstances that may be exacerbating and some may even be mitigating. It is for this reason that I am not going to support this bill. I want to amplify some of the reasons.

The former minister of justice will be addressing the House. We are going to hear that there are a couple of analyses of case studies which have been used to justify moving toward these mandatory minimum penalties to a greater extent and members are going to find it quite interesting that these were not interpreted correctly. In fact they would argue strongly against the implementation of stronger mandatory minimums. I hope that members will be present for that speech from the hon. former justice minister.

There has been some question, and I hope it is not the case, about whether or not the judiciary of the courts, the crown attorneys and our justice system generally have been doing the job for us. I hope that members do not believe for a moment there is a reason to be concerned or a suggestion that we have lost confidence in the judiciary and the Supreme Court, which has opined on most of these issues, including mandatory minimum penalties.

One of the things I found interesting in this debate is there seems to be this illusion that there are no mandatory minimum penalties under the current Criminal Code, and that somehow Bill C-10 is going to bring in these tough new mandatory minimums. I cannot count the number of speeches that have already been given that have listed the 42 mandatory minimum penalties that are already under the Criminal Code.

I am not sure if Canadians really understand that there already are penalties. They deal with the full range of the areas about which probably most Canadians would be most concerned. They relate not only to things like impaired driving, betting and bookmaking, but also to high treason, first and second degree murder, the use of a firearm in an indictable offence, and the list goes on.

There are also 10 listed offences that include mandatory minimums related to firearms. Firearms is one of the areas which is emphasized in this bill, particularly as it relates to gang use. They include use of a firearm in the commission of an offence causing death, manslaughter, attempted murder, causing bodily harm with intent, sexual assault with a firearm, aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, robbery, extortion and hostage taking. Certainly there is no debate with regard to these serious crimes.

As I looked at some of the transcripts of the debate, the justice critic for the Liberal Party wrote a legislative summary which I would commend to all members of the House to look at carefully. It is a very difficult bill to read. We have to put it in some context and the context she has put this in would help all hon. members to understand where we might be going here.

One of the key points to know is that this bill is actually going to create new levels of mandatory minimum penalties. It is going to increase them, and with the first set of offences concerning serious offences which are committed with a restricted firearm, one of the things we learn is that under the bill, firearms will not include long guns. I do not know why that is the case.

● (1610)

Back in 1993 when I came here and registration of long arms became an issue, criminal offences committed with long guns were in fact almost as great as criminal offences with handguns and restricted weapons as they now exist. Since that time, the crime rate with long arms actually has gone down very substantially. That should be encouraging to all members with regard to the progress that has been made in terms of ensuring that firearms are used by people who are properly trained, know how to store them properly and transport them properly and use them in a responsible fashion.

I also believe that kind of education process that has been going on for over a decade has led to a greater confidence level in terms of the general population knowing very well that owning a gun is a serious responsibility. This bill has a flavour of inflexibility and I must admit it was concerning to me to find out that in fact the Supreme Court itself has opined on mandatory minimums, particularly increases.

The Supreme Court struck down a seven year mandatory minimum penalty for importing narcotics. The Supreme Court also upheld the constitutionality of a mandatory minimum penalty of four years for the use of a firearm and criminal negligence causing death. The case was the Queen v Morrissey. The Supreme Court commented in that decision on the negative effects of mandatory minimum sentences for introducing rigidity into the sentencing process. What it really gets down to is the issue of proportionality of sentencing. That is the issue we are really talking about.

We cannot suggest there are no mandatory minimum penalties. I have not heard too many people talk about the deterrence side, but I am not sure whether that is totally relevant because we are talking about crimes for which there is a comprehensive approach to deterrence and certainly the potential penalties are not going to be something that we would rely on totally.

Government Orders

In the remaining time that I have to speak, I want to cite one further example of a situation which I feel would cause me some concern with regard to the rigidity of introducing greater levels of mandatory minimum penalties. It has to do with the population in Canada's jails today.

A research study was done collectively by the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. They found that approximately 50% of inmates in provincial jails suffered from alcohol related birth defects. In fact, the former minister of justice of the past government actually confirmed that in federal institutions across the country, approximately 40% to 50% was reflective of the prison population.

When I started off my speech, I talked about whether we should have the punishment fitting the crime. As a general principle, that is a starting point, but are there circumstances in which there would be some difficulty? In a situation where people have mental illnesses or alcohol related birth defects and are put into prison, especially for an extended period of time notwithstanding the crimes that have been committed, their affliction does not allow them to be rehabilitated. Rehabilitation of people with mental illness is not applicable. They should not be in the jails in the first place. They should be dealt with in proper institutions which are going to help them and their families to cope and to deal with their problems.

I know the courts are becoming more and more educated about the incidence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It is a very serious situation. It is a very significant portion of our population. Indeed, many of these people have committed some of the crimes for which this bill purports to have greater levels of mandatory minimum penalties. I am not sure that it is appropriate. I believe there are circumstances. I believe this bill should probably also cover long arms. I believe that the constitutionality of this bill is going to be challenged by the Supreme Court, if not by the Attorney General.

For those reasons, I will not be supporting Bill C-10. Notwithstanding my belief that the punishment should fit the crime, the circumstances certainly must be taken into account.

• (1615)

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question regarding a comment which it seems I have heard 100 times from the opposite side of the House.

If long guns are used in the commission of a crime, people will be charged and it will come under the auspices of Bill C-10. I would like to know why the member and others of his party continually say that if a long gun is used, it will not come under Bill C-10. Why do they say that? It is not true.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the basic reason is it is not the same penalty for a long arm. It is handled differently than a restricted firearm. That is the answer.

• (1620)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the member for Mississauga South, he reminded me of the recent election campaign when I went door to door, as did everyone in the House. I listened to many Canadians who did want change to mandatory sentencing with regard to firearms related crimes.

Considering the member's view on long arms and his discussion of fetal alcohol syndrome, I am a little surprised and perhaps he could explain to the House why he would not be prepared to send Bill C-10 to committee to review it and consider amendments.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, my simple answer to the member would be that the bill in essence creates a rigidity within the sentencing regime which is not reparable. It is the fundamental principle of the bill. That means, for the hon. member's interest, that if the bill is passed at second reading, those principles then become enshrined and cannot be changed at committee.

The member should understand that once we give second reading approval, the approval in principle for the bill is locked in and what a committee can do is very much restricted.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Mississauga South mentioned statistical data saying that long gun crime had gone down. I was wondering if the member could table that in the House because that is not my understanding of the statistics.

Also, the NDP member who spoke earlier suggested that long arm guns had killed half of the police officers, or something like that. Automatic weapons are long arm guns. They are included in those statistics.

I worked in the trenches. I was a criminal lawyer. I worked for the other side of justice. I believe that this legislation is necessary and it is long overdue. It will solve some problems. It is not going to solve all of them and certainly we have more of an obligation to society than what we are putting forward as a culture, but this will be a good first step to solve it.

It was mentioned earlier by a member opposite that said TV has changed our culture. I remember when I was in Australia, and I mentioned it earlier, every day for the first week I was on the beach because I love the beach. Then all of a sudden within a month I did not go to the beach at all. Within three years I probably showed up there once every two or three months.

The reality is people get desensitized. That is what happens with judges. We can see statistics that show when they become judges they are hard; they are fast. They make sure that the person does time for crime. Unfortunately when they hear that every day, just like when people see murders on TV, just like when people go to Australia and see the beach every day, they become desensitized.

That is why we as a group, as a body of Canadians, must represent those people back in the constituency who want some answers and want some changes. This bill will do that. This will set a template for judges to follow and make sure the judges follow the guidelines of Canadians.

I would like the member opposite to comment on the desensitization of judges.

Government Orders

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, from the member's own mouth, the idea that I referred to of whether or not there was a respect for our judiciary, obviously the member has decided that the judiciary is not doing a good job for us. He is implying somehow that the bill is going to do something new. It does not do anything new. All it does is introduce additional levels of mandatory minimum penalties. They already are there.

The Supreme Court of Canada has opined on this issue. It takes away from the fundamental principle of proportionality of sentencing. It takes it out of the courts' hands.

If the member has lost confidence in the judicial system, he should support the bill and take the sentencing out of the hands of the judges. If he supports proportionality, if he supports a system which takes into account the circumstances on a case by case basis, whether it be someone suffering from an alcohol related birth defect or other mental illness, and the member is shaking his head. When 40% to 50% of the people in the jails of Canada suffer from mental illness or other alcohol related birth defects, he cannot shake his head and say it is not applicable. There is nothing more applicable in this case than fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East, EnerGuide program; the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie, passports.

• (1625)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour, as the member of Parliament for Parry Sound—Muskoka, to address the House and to speak to Bill C-10 introduced by my colleague, the Minister of Justice, on May 4.

As we on this side of the House know, the bill proposes to tackle gun violence in a manner that is specific. The specific focus is on gang and gang activity.

Canadians in my riding of Parry Sound—Muskoka, from Parry Sound to Dorset, from Port Loring to Honey Harbour are all too familiar with the reported stories of gangs engaged in turf wars, often in public areas where innocent bystanders are shot in the crossfire.

The police also relate incidents of illegal gun trafficking, for example, handguns being rented out for the night from the trunk of a car and illegal guns traced back to the United States origins being smuggled into Canada.

We recently discovered, on a farm outside of London, Ontario, eight murdered men who were reportedly members of a notorious biker gang, which brought to the forefront the whole spectre of organized crime in Ontario. However, that particular rural spot could have been any other place in Canada. It could have been just outside of Bala in my riding or just further south in the riding of my colleague from Simcoe North, somewhere out of Orillia.

While this particular crime has stunned all Canadians, communities and provinces have faced organized crime and the fear and terror it brings, unfortunately, for some period of time. For instance, the province of Quebec has long faced reported violence stemming

from Outlaw motorcycle gangs, including biker wars over control of organized crime and the illicit drug trade.

Gang and gun related crimes have an impact on the Canadian way of life, on the safety and well-being of our communities and on the livelihood of our businesses. This type of violence has absolutely no place in our children's schoolyards, in our communities, in our cities and throughout our great nation.

Bill C-10 seeks to crack down on gangs and guns. It seeks to make gang members who use guns accountable, once and for all, for their crimes. The use of a gun in a crime that relates to a criminal organization would result in mandatory minimum penalties. I speak in favour of that. Police report that the firearm of choice for street gangs and drug traffickers are handguns or other restricted or prohibited firearms. This is supported by available data from Statistics Canada.

In the homicide statistics for 2003, the Canadian Centre for Justice statistics focused on the characteristics of homicide incidents in Canada and found that gang related homicides increased. While the centre explained that some of the sharp increases are due to changes in reporting practices, there has been a notable increase over the past decade since the collection of this kind of data commenced.

In 1993, for instance, there were 13 victims of gang related homicides, 13 too many. However, in 2003 there were not 13 gang related homicides, there were 84. Victims of gang related homicides accounted for approximately 15% of all homicides. We know the targets are not just gang members. Innocent bystanders killed as a result of gang and gun related crimes are victims as well. How can we forget the Toronto Boxing Day shooting spree that resulted in the tragic death of 15-year-old Jane Creba?

All of us were on the campaign trail at the time but I am sure every member of the House heard people in our constituencies, at the door, at the coffee parties and at all candidates meetings expressing sorrow for Jane Creba's needless death and demanding that the next elected member of Parliament in each of our constituencies took this issue of gang related gun violence seriously.

• (1630)

I heard the message at every campaign meeting I had in Bracebridge, Huntsville, Parry Sound and Gravenhurst, as I am sure every member heard it in their respective constituencies. This innocent girl was caught in the crossfire of a gun battle on the busiest street in Canada and on the busiest shopping day of the year in broad daylight. The most common motive underlying gang and gun related homicides was reported to be the settling of accounts. Drug debts, turf wars, revenge and arguments were other common motives.

Government Orders

The homicide survey also found that the proportion of handguns used in firearm related homicides continues to escalate and that the types of firearms used during the commission of a homicide have changed over the past three decades. This is what the hon. member was talking about earlier. These are the statistics. Prior to 1990, rifles and shotguns were more commonly used to commit homicide. However, beginning in the early 1990s, the proportions began to dramatically reverse. By 2003, 68% of firearm homicides were committed with handguns. The survey further reported that most handguns used to commit homicides were not registered. This should come as no surprise.

Although these statistics relate specifically to homicides, Canadian crime statistics from the Canadian Centre for Justice statistics show similar proportions of handguns being present in other violent crimes as well.

I do not need to remind the House that handguns are restricted firearms. Few Canadians are authorized to possess handguns and yet they continue to be more prevalent in violent gun crimes. Handguns, illegal restricted firearms, are the first choice weapon for criminals who want to advance the interests of their criminal organization.

While the overall firearm crime rates have decreased in Canada over the last three decades, it is not true when it comes to the proportion of violent crime committed with handguns or other restricted or prohibited firearms.

Gang and gun related crimes are an issue for all Canadians. It happens too often. One life lost to gang and gun violence is one life too many.

I come down on the side of my constituents in Parry Sound—Muskoka to say that it is time the House tackled this problem directly and Bill C-10 would do precisely that. The bill encompasses the firearms most commonly used in violent crimes and the offenders involved in gangs. The bill also targets other serious firearm related crimes of increased concern to law enforcement officials, such as the theft, trafficking and smuggling of guns, the illegal possession of a gun or if a person is already prohibited from possessing firearms.

Bill C-10 sends a clear message to those who use handguns and illegal weapons to commit crimes that their actions will result in real penalties. These penalties would escalate in the event that a prior offender chooses to use a handgun or a restricted weapon for further crimes. The bill also assures Canadians and my constituents of Parry Sound—Muskoka that the government is committed to creating safer streets and stronger communities.

I urge all members of the House to support the bill.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Health is here I would like to take the opportunity to ask him a few questions about health, the number one issue affecting Canadians, no doubt, as it relates to the bill.

As the minister mentioned, people are shot in our country and are then met with the health care system. As the minister knows, the waiting lines in our emergency departments are extremely long.

I have two questions for the minister. First, is he prepared to meet with his provincial counterparts on how the private sector and public sector can work together to support the public sector?

Second, will he work with various other health care professionals to establish a national medical manpower strategy for Canada? As he knows, we have a major deficit in terms of our physicians, nurses and other health care professionals who are growing older, as we too grow older.

The first question concerns working with his provincial counterparts to develop a national medical manpower strategy and the second one concerns developing a strategy to ensure the private sector supports the public sector and does not erode it.

• (1635)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca started out by announcing that his questions were not relevant to the debate and proceeded to prove it. The Minister of Health is free to answer the questions if he so chooses but the questions were not about the legislation at hand.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I think if you were to look at *Hansard* you would find that the questions in my preamble related to the relevance of my questions to the bill at hand, not the irrelevance.

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, I stand in this place this afternoon as the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka. I would say to the hon. member that of course we are working with our provincial and territorial counterparts on wait time reductions and wait time guarantees.

However, if the hon. member wants to reduce wait times in trauma units, pass Bill C-10. If he wants to reduce the amount of crime and violence that is hurting, maiming and killing our men, women and children, pass Bill C-10.

I stand here today, not as the Minister of Health, but as a father, as a husband, as a son of a mother and a father and as someone who represents my community of Parry Sound—Muskoka, to say, pass Bill C-10.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is the Minister of Health not somewhat naive in believing a law will solve the problem of gangs?

It is true that we had problems with gangs in Quebec. He mentioned it earlier. However, we solved them without enacting a law. Since we succeeded without the proposed legislation, what is the usefulness of this law?

He gives us examples of carnage in Toronto. Can he promise us today that there will be no more carnage in the streets because of his very effective law?

He speaks of weapons smuggled into Canada. It would be better to talk about establishing a police force to patrol the entire border rather than banning weapons and imposing longer sentences.

Government Orders

My question for the minister is as follows: does he believe that he can really reduce the crime rate simply by increasing sentences? Is this not 17th-century thinking?

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, I know that we are in the 21st century. At this time, in our country, it is important to first protect our citizens. It is imperative that we have laws to deal with the challenges of gangs and crime. We must have effective laws with minimum sentences.

That is what this bill is all about and our government supports this strategy. It is my belief, and my hope, that this bill will bring about improvements to counter crime, protect our citizens from gangs and crime, and provide better protection for our society.

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier I gave a speech in which I talked about the relevance of mental illness and alcohol related birth defects in the context that some 40% to 50% of the inmates in the prisons of Canada suffer from those symptoms, which require something different than rehabilitation as prescribed in our jails.

Is the Minister of Health aware of some initiatives within the judicial system that takes cognizance of the realities of alcohol related birth defects? Are persons, who are put into that environment, taken care of in an appropriate fashion given their condition and is this appropriately reflective in the kind of sentencing the judicial system is handing out?

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, I am aware of some of the latest trends in rehabilitation dealing with FASD. In fact, it has been the federal government's position for some time that additional research should be funded through CIHR on the impacts and potential amelioration of FASD issues.

We, on this side of the House, believe the first obligation of any government is to protect society from criminal behaviour, from gang and gun related crimes. This bill is about getting that protection in place because it is not there now. After that protection is in place, there are many tools available to us, as a society, to deal with individuals who are taken away from society and incarcerated to protect society. Then we can deal with the other questions of how this individual came to be in a life of crime. There are probably as many reasons as there are criminals.

I heard the hon. member's speech and I listened to it very closely. I would encourage the hon. member to do the right thing and protect society first by supporting Bill C-10. That will enable us to do our job as parliamentarians. Then we can deal with some of the issues that he cares about when it comes to the perpetrators of crimes in our society.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech given by the Minister of Health. I share his goal of having a peaceful society where our families, the public, our fellow Canadians live in safety. We agree on that point. However, I do not share his opinion on how to achieve that. As you know, if this bill were implemented, about 300 more people would be

incarcerated in federal penitentiaries and about 4,000 more in provincial institutions.

Of course, with more people incarcerated, we would come closer to the American standard. Far more people are incarcerated in the United States than in Canada.

Does the minister believe that the United States is safer than Canada? Are cities like Los Angeles, New York and Chicago safer than our cities because more people are in prison?

As well, he is not taking into account the proven fact that prisons are crime schools. Very often, young offenders learn how to commit other crimes when they go to prison for the first time. They are better criminals when they are released from prison, so they naturally return to a life of crime. I would like the minister's opinion on that.

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

I repeat that it is important to have laws in place to protect Canadians. In my opinion, that is the main challenge facing this House. Of course, this bill may lead to more incarcerations, because we have to protect Canadians. If we need more resources for incarcerations, I am prepared to find funding to protect Canadians. I think this meets a social need.

• (1645)

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today on Bill C-10.

First of all, I would never have dared to rise in this House and express my party's position without having discussed it in advance with my colleagues, including the hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, who chairs our caucus and is a very learned man. He is so learned in fact that he has been given the important responsibility of sitting on the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament, a kind of crossroads for information. I want to take this opportunity to thank him, and I am sure that my colleagues will want to join me in doing so.

Let us get down to the matter at hand. I have consulted, of course, with my colleagues and read the jurisprudence. I even went and found information beyond what was available in caucus. The conclusion that we must draw, unfortunately, is that this is a very bad bill in every way.

I am sure that, insofar as crime is concerned, there is not a single member of this House who is not concerned about the safety of our communities. Not one member of this House wants to live in communities that fail to value safety, peace and civic-mindedness.

There are various levels in criminality. Earlier, I was sorry to see the health minister, himself a former member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, confusing certain levels. This causes misunderstandings, which I would like to clear up right away.

Government Orders

In 1995, the Bloc Québécois, this formidable instrument, was concerned about a new phenomenon: the fight against extremely well organized crime. The hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, who is a very learned man, as I said, will remember well. Back then, there were 33 outlaw motorcycle gangs in Canada's big cities. Some of them were in Montreal, including the Bandidos, the Rock Machine and Hells Angels.

There was an entirely new phenomenon: these biker gangs worked through delegation. It was not the gang leader, Maurice "Mom" Boucher, who would give the orders and do things for which he could be put on trial. There was a whole chain of delegation, with the result that it was impossible to dismantle these gangs.

At the time, Michel Bellehumeur of the Bloc Québécois worked with me and other members of our caucus. Since then, Mr. Bellehumeur has been elevated to the bench. The debate was non-partisan, since everyone shared the same concerns. At the time, the first bill was Bill C-95. It introduced a new offence, which was added to the Criminal Code, namely, membership in a criminal organization. This included all sorts of terms and conditions that need not be listed here. That is not what we are talking about today. We must not confuse the levels.

In 1995, Allan Rock was justice minister. I am not sure whether this conjures good or bad memories for my colleagues in this House.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Réal Ménard: I believe my colleague has good memories, but it depends on one's outlook. At the time, Allan Rock tabled Bill C-68, which, all of a sudden, added minimum sentences for offences committed with a firearm. For example, a four-year minimum sentence was imposed for each of the following: manslaughter, using firearm in commission of offence; attempted murder, using firearm in commission of offence; causing bodily harm with intent, using firearm in commission of offence; aggravated sexual assault, using firearm in commission of offence.

At present, there are approximately 15 offences in the Criminal Code which have existed for the past decade and for which mandatory minimum sentences already exist.

•(1650)

We do not dispute the fact that crimes committed with guns are something to worry about. The Bloc Québécois does not dispute the fact that we must curb, even eradicate, gun trafficking. What we have difficulty with is this.

When the Minister of Justice appeared before the committee that I am a member of to defend his interim supply, I asked him quite directly a very simple question. For a decade now, we have had mandatory minimum sentences for the use of firearms. I asked him whether he had any empirical or scientific studies that would show us the impact of implementing these mandatory minimum sentences in the Criminal Code. Amazingly, the minister, and I do not doubt his good faith, was unable to cite a single study. The same was true when I met with senior officials, who were all very nice. We are not trying to show bad faith or impugn motive. But why were they unable to cite any studies? Because the Department of Justice did not conduct any.

I do not mind being asked, as a legislator, to take what are considered the most effective means to address this phenomenon of committing any number of offences with guns. However, I would expect to be asked to do so on the basis of convincing and conclusive evidence.

That is the problem with this government. It is deeply ideological, but in an unhealthy way. We are all driven by ideologies. We all have convictions. There are some things in public life that are more important to us than others. However, we must show some scientific rationality or, at least, some rationality with a few scientific aspects.

I cannot support the addition of mandatory minimum sentences simply for the principle of it. I want Bill C-10 to be fully understood. It affects the following eight offences in the Criminal Code: attempted murder, discharging firearm with intent, sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, kidnapping, hostage-taking, robbery and extortion. Minimum sentences already exist for these offences, whether for three years, five years or whatever. It is already in the Criminal Code. Anyone who reads the Criminal Code will see that minimum sentences exist for each of these offences.

Bill C-10 proposes that three year sentences be increased to five, five year sentences to seven, and seven year ones to ten. Thus, mandatory minimum sentences are being made stiffer for no reason other than wanting to crack down on criminals. That is what is unhealthy. Naturally, we want offenders to be prosecuted and we do not want them to use firearms to commit crimes.

I would like to begin with three comments. Such an ideology suggests that we are living in a more violent society. When the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie appointed me as justice critic, after thanking him and vowing to do my best to be equal to the task, the first thing I did was to look up the crime statistics. I was listening to the speeches of ministers and other members of the Conservative Party, and I had even read their electoral platform. To listen to the Conservatives, one would think that society is more violent than ever, that crime has never been so widespread and that crime rates are on the rise.

•(1655)

When we make the effort to look up the statistics, however, we can see that overall, from 1991 to 2000, the crime rate dropped by 26%. And these are not statistics compiled by researchers for the Bloc, the PQ or some lobby group. These are statistics from Statistics Canada or Juristat.

Government Orders

Moving to what is termed violent crime, for the sake of clarity, for Statistics Canada, violent crimes include murder, attempted murder, assault, sexual assault, kidnapping and robbery, all of which are intrinsically worrisome. Hon. members will agree that these are no small crimes. The fact of the matter is that, from 1992 to 2004, the number of violent crimes diminished from year to year. It was simple enough; I made a table. So, from 1992 to 2004, violent crime diminished, 2003 being the exception, since nationally, three provinces which shall remain unnamed saw their crime rates increase. Nevertheless, from 1992 to 2004, violent crime overall diminished.

When the minister appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, I asked him to table his statistics. I told him that we are all intellectuals, well-educated, open and pretty nice, so surely we could compare our statistics. I told him that perhaps I was mistaken and had interpreted them incorrectly. The minister did not table them. Yesterday I rose on a point of order and asked the minister to table them. When he appeared, he had the statistics with him and could have tabled them there and then. Three weeks after he appeared, members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights are still waiting for those statistics. The Minister of Justice had the clerk tell us that it was a big job and would take a lot of time. But the minister had them in hand.

I am going to use the conditional. I have some doubts. I would suspect that the minister does not wish to table his statistics because they do not support his point of view, which is purely ideological. I can assure you that the Bloc Québécois will not allow the Minister of Justice to masquerade as George Bush just to please his constituents. We will be a little more demanding than that.

That said, we do not support Bill C-10. I would remind the House that in 1995, a certain number of minimum sentences were already added in the case of offences for which the minister would like to see increased sentences. More fundamentally, this leads us to consider carefully and decide whether, in our justice system, the use of mandatory minimum sentences has a deterrent effect. We must ask ourselves what a minimum sentence is.

A minimum sentence means that, during a trial by jury, nothing is left to the judge's discretion. In fact, the jury decides whether the defendant is guilty, but who decides on the sentence? Unlike the French system, it is not the jury but the trial judge. The judge has heard and seen the evidence and heard the witnesses. A criminal trial can last up to four weeks. It is very meticulous. The rules regarding evidence are very strict. This bill sends a message to trial judges that, although they are responsible for administering the sentence, we, as legislators, want to force them, with their hands tied, in one direction or another.

In the past, with some notable exceptions, we have not supported minimum sentences. My predecessor, the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, was well-liked in this House.

● (1700)

He was our justice critic. I hope one day to be his equal in terms of his knowledge and dedication. Everyone liked the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. He was the one to suggest to our caucus that minimum sentences be imposed for cases of child pornography, for example. However, the Bloc Québécois is

generally not in favour of the idea of establishing minimum sentences. We are not convinced that they are effective.

In the mid-1980s, the government established a commission of inquiry, the Archambault commission, mandated to review the principles of sentencing. It is quite significant that this commission did not recommend minimum sentences, except in the case of murder which carries a sentence of life imprisonment. The Archambault sentencing commission did not recommend mandatory minimum sentences for any other crime.

I repeat: it is somewhat pathetic and somewhat sad. I have friends on the government side. In fact, I have only friends and no enemies in this House, and I am proud of that. However, I must remark that the Conservatives find themselves on the slippery slope of ideology. Once again, this bill is the direct result of the government's desire to please its electoral base—western Canada—which finds security in the idea that the longer the sentence, the safer our society. Unfortunately, it is an intellectual trap.

I use the example of the United States which resorts to incarceration quite a bit. In Canada, according to the latest statistics I consulted, 116 individuals per 100,000 inhabitants are jailed. Do you know what the rate of incarceration is for the United States? Over 700 per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to 116 per 100,000 in Canada. Yet, when we look at the rates of homicide and violent offences we realize that the number of prison sentences is higher.

I would like the cabinet to think about that. I am asking the President of the Treasury Board to reflect on this issue. I know that the latter, in his own way, is a humanist. He is conservative, very conservative, overly conservative, excessively conservative. However, he is my friend. I am asking him to think about it. Is there a relation between incarceration and the safety that our communities wish to achieve? All criminologists and academics have reflected on this question.

As recently as last week, I had an initial meeting with representatives of the defence attorneys association. This is not a group that could be accused of being partisan. It is made up of lawyers who study the law and sentence administration as objectively as possible. Did you know that the association strongly opposes bills C-9 and C-10? I must say that if we listed all the people who oppose these bills, we would see, as I have seen, that it is much longer than the list of people who support the bills.

Everyone in this House knows what I am like and that I am a cooperative sort of person. But I will not be able to push this bill through quickly in committee. The Bloc Québécois will have to do its work. Unfortunately, we will ask to travel, to hear witnesses and to investigate. Amending the Criminal Code is no small matter. It must always be balanced. We cannot take it lightly.

● (1705)

I was told that in the government back rooms, they wanted the bill passed before St. Jean Baptiste Day. That is certainly foolhardy. It presents a problem, because I do not think that the committee can work under pressure, as that would be totally incompatible with the seriousness expected of parliamentarians.

Government Orders

The Bloc Québécois will therefore be unable to work so that the bill is at the report stage by St. Jean Baptiste Day. We know that this year, June 24 will reflect Quebecers' hopes and aspirations. It is not only an opportunity to hold a cabinet meeting, but it is also an opportunity to remember how Quebec is a nation and how Quebec will one day be a sovereign country, on an equal footing with English Canada. That is the meaning of our national holiday. And that is what all Bloc Québécois members will have in mind as they celebrate on June 23 and 24. Of course, we will remain very open to any wishes anyone might want to extend to us on that occasion. But let us not digress from the meaning of the bill. Let us stick to the basics.

In addition to the eight offences that the government proposes to create with Bill C-10—and for which there are already minimum sentences that the government wants to increase from three to five years, from five to seven years and from seven to ten years—it is creating two new offences.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker, if it is not something—
[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I apologize for interrupting the hon. member, but it is time for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Wild Rose.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will make this short, as I see that other questions need to come from our group. I found one comment in the member's speech really interesting. He talked about "those guys from the west" who are really weird thinkers in terms of dealing so harshly with criminals. I thought that was a really interesting comment.

The other thing I keep hearing all the time is that we are seeking a balance. I would like his definition of a balance. I will give him mine. It would about 5% for the criminal who attacks our innocent people, which would include all the basic rights that he is entitled to under the Constitution, and about 95% to protect our society from people like that, who continually make dangerous situations.

That is my definition of balance. Would the member agree with my definition or is that just another western version of being off balance?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, the only certainty I have in this House is that the hon. member is not unbalanced. Everyone who has rubbed shoulders with him knows that he is not unbalanced. He is an engaging fellow with a biting sense of humour. He has obviously found some people to applaud the fact that he was not the justice minister, but unbalanced he is not.

This being said, it is not westerners who are being called into question but the electoral base that the Conservative Party wants to win over by creating the impression, with no scientific evidence, that there is a connection between sentencing and recidivism rates. There is no such connection. I look forward to seeing the studies that will show this when the minister appears to defend bills C-9 and C-10.

Our hon. colleague asks us to be balanced. In my view, the best balance is when people who deserve to be put on trial are put on

trial; when people who deserve a chance to be rehabilitated have that chance; and when people who cannot be rehabilitated are sanctioned appropriately. This has always been the position of the Bloc Québécois, and we think that it is balanced.

• (1710)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe the member said he was going to vote to send the bill to committee. Could I just make sure that the Bloc Québécois will be voting for this at second reading? Is that what he said? I just am not clear. Could he clarify whether the Bloc will be voting for or against this?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, we will not vote to refer this bill to a committee at second reading.

Without the amendments we want, we will not vote in favour at report stage.

We will also not work in this hasty way, which reminds us of the German proverb to the effect that speed is the enemy of wit.

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the comments by the member. I heard him speak about statistics and say that the statistics actually indicate that crime is going down in the country. Would the member elaborate on that and perhaps let us know why he thinks this is in fact the case? Maybe we should be doing more of that as opposed to what is being proposed here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is quite right. In general, crime is going down, violent crime too, and there are two reasons for that.

The first is demography. There are more and more older people in our society, and they are not much inclined to violent crime.

The second is the reason that should most give us pause to think things over, and it is that the economy is doing rather well. In general, there is a correlation between economic downturns and crime: when the economy is doing well, there is less crime.

I think that these factors should be taken into account.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague on his speech. He made me think of something which I would like him to comment on.

Systematically increasing sentences will result in additional costs to the penitentiary system. In turn, this will mean less money available for rehabilitation. So, this will strengthen the vicious circle of crime school.

Would it not be better to stick to the existing rules, which have brought about the reduction in crime clearly described by the hon. member?

Government Orders

Is it not important to stress that imprisoning offenders year after year is a very expensive proposition? In addition, rehabilitation will be less effective inside than if a judge had found them eligible for conditional sentences, which have been discussed as part of another bill. Today, we are at it again.

Does this proposal not have a very negative effect on the funding allocated to prevention?

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, as we have become used to from the hon. member. He is totally right. Keeping someone in detention costs a minimum of \$100,000, as compared to between \$12,000 and \$13,000 for those allowed to serve their time in the community. This is something we have to think about. My colleague from the Quebec City area will probably want to give it some thought.

It is very important to point out that many people view prison as a great school for crime. I am not saying that it is necessarily so, but that is certainly a very wise statement. The greatest contradiction in the Conservatives' position is that they want to combat crime, but they want to do so by ensuring that there is a maximum of weapons in circulation.

One of the best ways to combat organized crime is probably with a functional, controlled gun registry. That is what my colleague from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin and the leader of the Bloc Québécois have called for repeatedly.

• (1715)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am curious. I have practised as a criminal lawyer in the past and several times today I have asked questions in the House when I just could not help it. I practised as a criminal lawyer for 10 years and I must tell members that many times I saw criminals, and I say criminals, laughing as they walked out of the courtroom. They were laughing at the inability of the court to give them a sentence. It was shameful. I was embarrassed with the results that I saw many times.

I have two questions for the member. I think the member's attitude and the attitude of all the members of the House who are opposed to Bill C-10 would change if it were their daughter, mother, father or son who was killed as a result of walking down a street and being the subject of gunfire that they had nothing to do with.

First, what better suggestions does the member have on how to curb the increase in gun violence? Second, how many more innocent victims must die until there is enough evidence to convince him?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, while I have a great deal of respect for the member, surely you will agree that his question smacks of demagoguery. Unfortunately, that kind of talk will get us nowhere.

If somebody tried to kill one of my loved ones, or hurt them in any way—obviously I would never want that to happen, but it has nothing to do with the bill before us. What we are saying is that the Criminal Code already contains provisions for incarcerating people who commit crimes with firearms. Mandatory minimum sentencing

does not stop people from committing these crimes. When a person commits a crime, they are not deterred by minimum sentences, but by the real possibility of ending up in court. This is not about innocent victims.

Is my colleague holding American society up as an example? Does he think we should resort to incarceration as much as they do? In the past two years, Americans have jailed 717 people and 723 people per 100,000, yet there are three times more murders in the United States than in Quebec. Does the member agree that his logic breaks down completely here? Mandatory minimum sentences and more people in jail do not make for a less violent society.

If he were to ask me what we can do, I would tell him that I would be most interested to hear about the Conservative government's strategy for fighting poverty.

Next week, I will table an anti-poverty bill, which I hope will receive the support of all of my colleagues in this House. Canada is the only jurisdiction that does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of social condition. Eight provincial governments have it, but the federal government does not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member, but his time is up.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Mount Royal.

[*English*]

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Brant.

Safe streets and safe communities are the shared aspiration of all Canadians and the common objective of all parliamentarians and parties. No political party can claim that it alone speaks or cares for the safety of all Canadians or that it alone is legislating for that purpose.

Indeed, in the matter of combating gun and gang related crime, the Liberal government tabled legislation in November 2005, then known as Bill C-82, that proposed 12 amendments to the gun control provisions of the Criminal Code and which was part of a five point strategy to combat gang and gun related crime, including: first, tougher laws and proportionate penalties; second, more effective law enforcement; third, heightened recognition of the needs and concerns of victims; fourth, the prevention of crime through a hope and opportunity package; and fifth, civic engagement.

The government's crime control policy contains some of these features, but it mentions nothing about civic engagement and it understates the case with respect to a hope and opportunity package and crime prevention. I intend to focus my remarks on the legislative remedy the government proposes, Bill C-10, and the exaggerated and excessive mandatory minimums around which it is organized.

It is important to note that there are already 20 gun related mandatory minimums in the Criminal Code. Those who argue that mandatory minimums were an electoral deathbed conversion of the Liberal government ignore the fact that it was a Liberal government which in 1995 initiated these very 20 gun related mandatory minimums, and that in November 2005, on behalf of the government and pursuant to the recommendations of the provincial and territorial attorneys general—what I might say was an exercise in open federalism—we then recommended modest increases to mandatory minimums in matters relating to trafficking and smuggling of firearms and the like.

The question, then, is this. What legislative remedy constitutes an evidentiary based, principled and effective approach to combating gun related crime and helping to secure safe streets and safe communities and, in that context, is distinct from what might otherwise be regarded as an ideologically based, politically motivated and ultimately ineffective approach to crime control?

Let us begin by looking at the evidence, indeed, looking at the particulars of the alleged evidence that was invoked by the justice minister himself with respect to justifying this legislation. I am now citing from the justice minister's remarks on May 7:

Gun crimes have been reduced dramatically in those jurisdictions that targeted those gun crimes through mandatory minimum prison sentences. The experience of a number of states, a number of studies, demonstrate that—Boston, [Massachusetts] Virginia, Florida, New York and other jurisdictions consistently demonstrate that.

Let us now look at the facts, because the facts have evidence to the contrary. With respect to Massachusetts, in his 2003 testimony concerning sentencing reform proposals, William J. Leahy, Chief Counsel for the Committee for Public Counsel Services for Massachusetts, said that mandatory minimum sentencing “has proven to be a public policy nightmare: ineffective at preserving the public safety, and recklessly wasteful as fiscal policy”. A 2004 report from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Corrections Reform, in a section on minimum mandatory sentences, states, “Quite simply, based on what we now know about reducing re-offense, this is a recipe for recidivism rather than a recipe for effective risk reduction”.

With regard to Florida, the minister appears to have based his conclusion on a 2005 press release from the Florida Department of Corrections claiming that the state's 10-20-life program has had impressive results. The facts, however, are otherwise. A 2005 study by the University of Florida attributes any decrease in crime to the national decrease in crime that began before the law took effect, noting also that there was a greater drop in crime before the law went into effect.

We find the same thing with respect to Virginia and with respect to New York state. Time does not permit me to go ahead and cite in both those matters, but the principle remains the same. There is no evidentiary based justification for the kind of excessive and exaggerated mandatory minimums as are set forth in this bill.

● (1720)

This brings me to look at the situation in terms of other evidentiary approaches. It is not only that the evidence from the very American jurisdictions that the justice minister relies upon demonstrate the exact opposite, but even the academic studies that

Government Orders

he relies upon, such as the highly regarded work by Thomas Marvelle and Carlisle Moody, also conclude otherwise than that of the justice minister, who sought to rely on this study for his evidentiary based approach.

Indeed, the vast preponderance of studies in every jurisdiction have concluded that mandatory minimums are neither a deterrent nor are they effective. That includes the American Sentencing Commission and the Canadian Sentencing Commission, the American Bar Association and the Canadian Bar Association, the early comprehensive study by the Royal Commission for the Revision of the Criminal Code in 1952 and the more recent studies by the Law Commission of Canada; and includes comprehensive studies by the international expert, Professor Julian Roberts of Oxford University, the exhaustive comparative study by Professor Thomas Gabor, University of Ottawa and Nicole Crutcher, Carleton University, as well as the 1999 research report to the then Solicitor General of Canada, which after surveying 50 studies involving 300,000 offenders, concluded that longer incarcerations were not associated with reduced recidivism. In fact, the opposite was found. Longer sentences were associated with a 3% increase in recidivism.

Bill C-10 is not only not evidenced based legislation, but it also marginalizes the principled approach to sentencing policy introduced by the enactment of section 718 of the Criminal Code, the most comprehensive sentencing reform ever enacted, which includes a composite set of sentencing objectives, and is organized around the proportionality principle, namely, that the sentence must be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and to the responsibility of the offender; and which incorporates, by reference, the individualization principle, the appreciation that every crime has a different set of circumstances and every criminal is different. The judiciary must be allowed the necessary discretion, which Parliament intended, to invoke and apply this principled and just approach to sentencing, including also the principle of restorative justice in that regard.

This leads me to the third consideration, and that is whether mandatory minimums are in fact effective. When we look at it, what we now know, as a result of all the evidence based inquiry, is that mandatory minimums also have adverse and prejudicial fall-out for the criminal justice system. One might call it the law of unintended consequences, which includes that they increase the prison population, resulting in increased prison costs to the taxpayer, and opportunity costs, as less funds are available for law enforcement, community programs and crime prevention while not bringing about the desired objective of safe streets and safe communities.

Private Members' Business

The prosecutors may stay or withdraw a charge or negotiate for a lesser charge because the MMs are too harsh. The decisions may move from the judiciary to the prosecution and result in fact in lower conviction rates. Where a mandatory minimum charge is maintained and the accused has less incentive to plead guilty could lead to increased trials and more costly trials. Arrest rates, charges, plea bargains and convictions have actually declined with mandatory minimums while the trial costs have increased.

Mandatory minimums have an adverse impact on minority defendants, in particular on aboriginal defendants who are already overrepresented in the criminal justice system, and on aboriginal women who have been increasingly overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Mandatory minimums become the sentencing ceiling for the offence rather than the minimum, achieving the exact opposite of what sound public policy would wish.

As the Canadian Bar Association summarized in 2005 in that regard after a survey of all the evidence:

Mandatory minimum penalties do not advance the goal of deterrence...do not target the most egregious or dangerous offenders...have a disproportionate impact on minority groups...and subvert important aspects of Canada's sentencing regime.

It is not surprising that Professor Anthony Doob asked plaintively in 2001, "Why are we still discussing whether Canada should have mandatory minimums?" He repeated that again recently. Professor Marie-Andrée Bertrand, referring to Bill C-10, after examining it, said:

•(1725)

[*Translation*]

This is a catastrophe. She said, and I quote, "No fewer than 24 new offences will be subject to four years of imprisonment. This is a catastrophe".

[*English*]

In conclusion, this legislation is an ideologically inspired, politically motivated and ineffective approach to combating crime. What is needed is an evidence based, principles based and effective approach that would realize our shared objective of safe streets and safe communities.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to admit to the House that I am a bit confused. I do not know whether it is flip or flop with that member.

I sat in opposition for the longest time and heard the member say that he was against mandatory minimum sentences. However, just before the election and before his then government was toppled, all of a sudden he turned on a dime and his party was for minimum sentences, as were members of the NDP.

First, once and for all, could the member tell us, now that we are not about to go to the polls, if he is for or against mandatory minimum penalties today.

Second, if we read the offences that are contemplated to be covered by the bill, they include attempted murder and discharging a firearm with intent. Could the member tell us why he is siding on the side of the people perpetrating these offences and not on the side of protecting victims, victims like Jane—

•(1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Mount Royal.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I am referring to three approaches to the whole question of mandatory minimums. The first is an evidence-based inquiry. Studies show that they are neither a deterrent nor are they effective. The second is a principled approach, and I have shown that it marginalizes, if not undermines, the proportionality principle which is at the core of the sentencing principles in the Criminal Code. The third is are they effective? I have shown that the evidence discloses the fact they may have adverse impacts.

As I have constantly stated, in the matter of gun related crimes, we enacted 20 mandatory minimums in 1995. In that particular instance we felt the evidence on the specificity of gun related crimes allowed for modest approaches to mandatory minimums, not exaggerated and excessive approaches to mandatory minimums.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from June 1 consideration of the motion that Bill C-294, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (sports and recreation programs), be read the second time and referred to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-294 under private members' business.

Call in the members.

•(1750)

[*English*]

Before the taking of the vote:

The Speaker: Since this is the first recorded division on private members' business, I would remind all hon. members that the division will be taken row by row, starting with the sponsor then proceeding with those in favour of the motion, beginning in the back row of the side of the House on which the sponsor sits.

[*Translation*]

Then, after we have gone through all the rows on this side of the House, the hon. members on the other side of the House will have their turn, starting again with the last row. Those opposed to the motion will be called in the same order.

•(1800)

[*English*]

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

(Division No. 15)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Angus
Atamanenko
Bagnell
Baird
Barnes
Bélanger
Bellavance
Bernier
Bezan
Black
Blais
Bonin
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brisson
Brown (Barrie)
Brown (Barrie)
Brunelle
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Casson
Charlton
Chow
Clement
Comartin
Cotler
Crowder
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cuzner
Davidson
Day
Del Mastro
Deschamps
Dewar
Dhalla
Doyle
Duceppe
Easter
Epp
Faille
Finley
Flaherty
Folco
Freeman
Gallant
Gauthier
Godin
Goodyear
Grewal
Guay
Guimond
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Hubbard
Jean
Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kotto
Laforest
Lake
Lauzon
Layton
Lee
Lemieux
Lévesque
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Maloney

Ablonczy
Alghabra
Allison
Anders
André
Asselin
Bachand
Bains
Barbot
Batters
Bell (North Vancouver)
Benoit
Bevington
Bigras
Blackburn
Blaney
Bonsant
Boucher
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinoooge
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrier
Chan
Chong
Christopherson
Coderre
Comuzzi
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cummins
D'Amours
Davies
DeBellefeuille
Demers
Devolin
Dhaliwal
Dosanjh
Dryden
Dykstra
Emerson
Eyking
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Fontana
Galipeau
Gaudet
Godfrey
Goldring
Gourde
Guarnieri
Guergis
Hanger
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Holland
Jaffler
Jennings
Kadis
Karetak-Lindell
Keeper
Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise
Lalonde
Lavallée
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lessard
Loubier
Lunn
Lussier
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Manning

Private Members' Business

Mark
Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Matthews
McCallum
McGuinty
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merasty
Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nadeau
Neville
Norlock
Oda
Owen
Paquette
Patry
Petit
Plamondon
Prentice
Priddy
Rajotte
Redman
Reid
Ritz
Rota
Russell
Savage
Scheer
Scott
Shiple
Silva
Skelton
Solberg
St-Cyr
St. Amand
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Tonks
Turner
Valley
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Warkentin
Watson
Williams
Yelich

Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
Mayes
McDonough
McGuire
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Menzies
Merrifield
Minna
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nash
Nicholson
Obhrai
Ouellet
Pallister
Paradis
Peterson
Picard
Poilievre
Preston
Proulx
Ratansi
Regan
Richardson
Rodriguez
Roy
Sauvageau
Savoie
Schellenberger
Sgro
Siksay
Simard
Smith
Sorenson
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Steckle
Strahl
Szabo
Temelkovski

Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Vincent
Warawa
Wasylycia-Leis
Wilfert
Wilson
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NAYS

Members

Brown (Oakville)— 2

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

● (1805)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 6:05 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

*Private Members' Business***DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT**

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.) moved that Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is an important bill which I hope we will have the opportunity to debate thoroughly over the next hour and that members will see fit at the end of the hour's debate to support the bill. It is a bill about accountability and transparency, favourite buzzwords of members opposite. The bill is a challenge to the government to come good on its rhetoric.

In the last Parliament the foreign affairs committee moved the following report:

We are writing to urge you to introduce legislation which establishes poverty reduction as the aim for Canada's Official Development Assistance (ODA). A legislated mandate for Canada's ODA would ensure that aid is provided in a manner both consistent with Canada's human rights obligations and respectful of the perspectives of those living in poverty.

I submit that Bill C-293 does exactly that.

We are not, however, simply urging more dollars be spent. Those dollars must also be spent effectively and in ways ensuring more accountability. In our view, this legislation should include an unequivocal statement of purpose that poverty reduction is the central lens through which Canada's aid program should be delivered. Key elements of a legislated mandate must include mechanisms for monitoring; accountability and reporting to Parliament; and enhanced public transparency. Such legislation would increase the effectiveness for Canada's aid contribution of aid spending, a more focused accountable approach to more and better aid.

That was the 12th report of the committee. When it submitted the report, it referenced a letter that was signed by the then leader of the opposition, now the Prime Minister, the then and current leader of the Bloc Québécois, and the then and current leader of the NDP.

[Translation]

Subsequently, the House adopted the 12th report of the committee, and referred to a letter signed by the then leader of the opposition, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the leader of the NDP.

• (1810)

[English]

I am quoting directly from the letter:

To accepting and to act upon the near-unanimous recommendations of Committee witnesses—

It is not just the committee's report. It is based upon the near unanimous recommendations from the witnesses who appeared before the committee from 2003 to date. It goes on:

—to honour the Millennium Development Goals and to commit immediately, through a plan, to increase Canada's aid budget by 12 to 15% annually to achieve an aid level of 0.5% of Canada's Gross National Product by 2010 and 0.7% of Canada's GNP by 2015;

The letter also says:

To improve our aid effectiveness by strengthening the partnership with civil society, both in Canada and overseas;

To introduce legislation prior to the next federal budget which establishes poverty reduction as Canada's Official Development Assistance (ODA) goal, as outlined in the historic February 17, 2005 letter from all Opposition Leaders to the Prime Minister, to ensure that aid is provided in a manner consistent with Canada's human rights obligations and respectful of the perspectives of those living in poverty.

This bill cannot be about more aid as that would require a royal recommendation, but it can be about better aid, more focused aid. I respectfully submit that is exactly what this bill is about.

[Translation]

This bill cannot deal with an increase in development aid as this requires a royal recommendation. However, this bill does deal with improving development aid.

[English]

The scheme of the bill is to set up an advisory committee which shall advise the minister of his or her development assistance. The committee will hold a candle, so to speak, to the ODA proposals and ask the minister three questions. The first and most important question is, does the ODA contribute to poverty reduction? The second question is, does it take into account the perspectives of the poor? The third question is, is it consistent with Canada's international rights obligations?

The idea of this bill is to bring focus to poverty reduction consistent with Canadian values, foreign policy and international human rights standards.

[Translation]

The purpose of this bill is to concentrate on reducing poverty and promoting compatibility with Canadian values, foreign policy and international human rights standards.

[English]

At one level it may be argued that this bill is so vague that one could drive a Mack truck through it. On the other hand, one could expect that the government, or more accurately the department, would probably say that it hamstring the minister.

[Translation]

It could be argued that the bill is too vague to carry out the changes required to improve development aid. For its part, the government, specifically the department, will attempt to show that the bill will handcuff the minister needlessly.

[English]

My argument is that it does neither. It does not hamstring the minister and it is not so vague as to be useless. I am trying to ensure that our ODA is not merely flavour of the month. It seems to me that if the committee were to force the minister to justify his or her proposed aid in light of the three questions I read, it would actually help the minister avoid the flavour of the month pressures.

Private Members' Business

Any minister, whether a Liberal minister or a Conservative minister, has all kinds of requests for ODA. Every request seems to be more compelling than the last request. In my view, the minister now has the perfect response and the perfect response is this legislation. Effectively, ministers would be able to say that they are legislated by this bill to answer three questions before this advisory committee. They, therefore, cannot divert their ODA money to things such as security interests, anti-terrorism initiatives or other foreign policy initiatives no matter how worthy.

Canada cannot be all things to all people at all times. From time to time others have made the observation that from time to time we are frequently nothing to everybody. From time to time we have depleted our budgets on peripheral issues and not been as effective as we could have been or should have been.

We know that civil society is crucial to the delivery of aid. If it were not for organizations such as World Vision Canada raising matching funds and developing donors, our effectiveness would diminish substantially. That is why Bill C-294 has received such wide support.

The Canadian Council for International Co-operation and my friend Gerry Barr have been of tremendous help. Literally dozens of letters and dozens of e-mails testify to the importance of the bill. In fact, quite a number of my colleagues over the course of this day and previous days have come up to me and said that they support this initiative in part because of the letters, e-mails and telephone calls that they have received.

Bill C-293 is at the top of mind for many Canadians and many Canadian organizations. There are 178 MPs in this House who signed the reduction of poverty initiative, making poverty history. They signed a much more comprehensive document. One element of that comprehensive document had to do with accountability for aid. There are 178 MPs that appear on the face of it to be behind this initiative. Behind those 178 MPs are literally thousands of Canadians.

Bill C-293 also enjoys the support of the NDP. The hon. member for Halifax has a similar bill and I assume she will be speaking in favour of this bill. The member for Prince Edward—Hastings of the Conservative Party has a bill of similar nature and principle which tries to achieve the same purpose. I am given to understand that the Bloc may also have a similar bill for consideration shortly.

We also have the report of the foreign affairs committee and the concurrence of the House in the last Parliament. Finally, we have a letter sent to the former Prime Minister signed by all three opposition party leaders including the current Prime Minister.

Where is the resistance? I think we would find some bureaucratic resistance to this private member's bill calling for transparency and accountability. Clearly, it limits bureaucratic ability to direct aid, aside from an accountability to this committee.

There will be arguments that it requires a royal recommendation to give a per diem to committee members. God forbid that we should offer to pick up the expenses of these self-sacrificing Canadians.

●(1815)

Then we will hear bureaucratic-speak such as “We need to get this right and we need to do this carefully”. That is bureaucratic code language for “Let us bury this private member's bill in la la land in the hope that Parliament will dissolve prior to royal assent”.

Then we will hear arguments like “We do not like petitions from non-citizens telling us that aid is being given in a fashion inconsistent with the purposes of this act”. Heaven forbid that the recipients of the aid should actually have some say about how it is being used.

Then we will hear arguments about the definition of aid, whether we should use the OECD definition or a made in Canada definition. I can just see Stephen Lewis rolling his eyes as we speak saying something like, “Oh my goodness, people are dying and you are arguing about definitions”.

There will be other arguments, some even sincere and frankly would lead to an improved bill, but mostly the arguments from the government's side will be designed to sideline the bill. It seems to me that a government that prides itself on transparency and accountability is being supremely hypocritical by not supporting this bill.

I would like to end by quoting from a report called “Establishing a legal basis for Canada's official development assistance”, written by Vicky Edgecombe in January 2005. She ends her report, which I would recommend for members to read, in this fashion:

If legislation regarding Canada's ODA were to incorporate the above-mentioned recommendations, it would help to set Canada apart as a leader among OECD nations. In effect, it would demonstrate that Canada is serious about addressing global poverty as the overriding development objective in the 21st century.

I therefore leave members with this question. Does Canada want to be a leader on this issue or does Canada want to be a follower?

●(1820)

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. On Wednesday you invited comments on whether Bill C-293 requires a royal recommendation.

This is a separate matter from the stated purpose of the bill, which all members would agree, that foreign aid should support international development and the values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights abroad. However, the bill as drafted raises important procedural issues.

Clause 6 would oblige the Minister of International Cooperation to establish an advisory committee for international development cooperation. Subclause 6.(3) states that the committee shall consist of up to 20 members. Subclause 6.(7) provides that the members will be paid remuneration and expenses for their services in amounts that the minister may set. These provisions have financial implications.

On February 8, 2005 the Speaker ruled on a similar case in which additional commissioners were added to an existing commission. In particular, Bill C-280, in the 38th Parliament, which provided for additional appointments to the Canada Employment Insurance Commission, was found by the Speaker to require a royal recommendation.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-293 would create an entirely new committee and the appointment of its members would similarly require a recommendation. I note that in the February 8, 2005 ruling the Speaker stated:

Where it is clear that the legislative objective of a bill cannot be accomplished without the dedication of public funds to that objective, the bill must be seen as the equivalent of a bill effecting an appropriation.

I note that clause 7 of Bill C-293 would provide for any resident of a developing country to petition the committee outlining the deficiencies in Canada's development, seeking corrective action, and require the committee to process that petition. It would also require the minister to respond to that petition stating:

—any corrective action required by the competent minister and the period within which the action shall be taken as well as the facts and reasons on which the competent minister's decision was based.

This means that in addition to the remuneration of the advisory committee members, Bill C-293 would cause new expenditures in two ways.

First, a new advisory committee, and the support of that committee, would be an entirely new function not authorized under existing legislation.

The committee would clearly require funding in order to fulfill its statutory responsibilities, which would include: receiving, recording and forwarding petitions, in subclause 7.(2); making any examinations and enquiries necessary to monitor ministers' replies to petitions, in subclause 7.(6); and preparing and submitting annual reports to the minister, in clause 8.

Second, the bill would impose new statutory responsibilities on ministers, which would require new expenditures, including: sending an acknowledgement and reply to the petitioner and the committee, in subclauses 7.(3) and 7.(4); and creating and submitting reports which are newly required by this legislation, in clauses 9 and 10.

The Speaker has, in past rulings, emphasized that a royal recommendation is required for a new and distinct expenditure which falls outside existing departmental responsibilities.

I submit that Bill C-293 would create a new statutory requirement for monitoring ministerial decisions on development assistance through petitions and for legislatively required responses.

I would note that Canada currently provides development assistance to over 150 countries. Creating an advisory committee allowing any resident of those countries to petition the government and requiring the Minister of International Cooperation to provide a detailed response to such residents would mean significant changes which would have important financial implications for the government.

In addition, the statutory requirement for the Minister of International Cooperation and the Minister of Finance to prepare reports on their activities and operations under this bill would be an entirely new function as some of those reports would be on activities newly required by Bill C-293.

The government supports the use of international development assistance in reducing poverty abroad and improving international human rights.

However, as I have indicated, the bill as drafted has financial implications which require a royal recommendation and, therefore, the bill is not procedurally in order.

• (1825)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as predicted in my speech, the government will try to derail this bill, and of course, this is the first salvo in its exercise.

It is a premature point of order, I respectfully submit, since the Speaker is not obliged to make a ruling until this bill arrives back in the House. So all of the comments, some of which might even have a scintilla of merit, are entirely premature and can be dealt with at another time in another place. I would respectfully ask you, Mr. Speaker, to rule this point of order out of order.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to have the member's opinion but the fact is that the bill can be repaired either at committee or at report stage. Right up until the end of third reading the minister can walk into the House and provide a royal recommendation, in which case the Speaker will not be not be making a final determination until the end of third reading.

Notwithstanding that the member would like to rule it out of order, it is not in his purview and therefore it is not a point of order.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is profoundly disappointing to think that some of the most important collaborative work that I have seen happen in this Parliament and at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development could be reduced to procedural points of order so totally designed to derail this important debate.

As has already been pointed out, this matter of a royal recommendation does not have to be ruled on until the bill comes back to the House for third reading. More important, this is a very destructive attempt to ignore the fact that government members have already been told in committee that the sponsors of the two identical bills that are before us have indicated that they would be extremely open to amendments that would deal with the problem that has now arisen. This is a pure obstructionist tactic.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make it abundantly clear that I support the comments made by the member for Mississauga South and the advice you gave at the outset of this session that royal recommendations would be stayed until at least third reading. I understand the position taken by the government. I sat in that position not too long ago. We did not have a problem with this issue.

I think the House should be guided by the wisdom of your initial decision, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I thank all members for their submissions. I understand that the Speaker has taken many of these arguments into account. He has already indicated that a definitive ruling on the procedural admissibility of this bill will be made before the question is put at third reading.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Given that today's debate is about the second reading of the bill, the matter may proceed.

The honourable Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation.

• (1830)

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood and I have had some deep discussions about this issue and he knows full well that most members, if not all members in the House, feel very strongly about the need for Canada to make a commitment to helping people less fortunate than us. We would like to see this go forward.

However, in an honest response to this private member's bill, it raises some very serious questions. I respect the fact that some of the NGOs and very respected NGOs have played a part in drafting this private member's bill. My great concern is that it does not address the participation and involvement of those NGOs that this government would like to see. In my view this was completely left out.

Could the member comment on why that very critical part of the delivery of aid was left out of this private member's bill?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the appointment of the committee, there is no restriction on who the minister may appoint. The minister may or may not appoint representatives of NGOs. It is entirely up to the minister at the time. I am not quite sure whether that addresses the specific question.

If the member is asking whether there are any restrictions on NGOs to deliver aid, if the ODA goes through the committee and meets the three-fold test that I talked about on the reduction of poverty, there is no restriction on any NGO being able to participate in that. I cannot see how the bill would be restrictive in any fashion to any NGO, either operating or contemplating the operation, as long as the ODA meets the three-fold test.

The member has acknowledged the huge support in the House for this bill and I would encourage the hon. member to consider letting the debate collapse so we can get it to committee and discuss these points on a more intimate basis, shall we say.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like some of the member's thoughts on accountability. The bill refers to the "competent minister", an "advisory committee" which will advise the minister in the exercise of his or her powers, and "development assistance", meaning official development assistance as defined by the OECD.

With all these layers of responsibility and direction, who does the hon. member see as being accountable under the bill?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, any minister who is responsible for delivering ODA would be an accountable minister. On the face of it, it would be the CIDA minister because the CIDA minister delivers most of the aid for the government.

However, the Minister of Finance also delivers aid in a certain manner as well. His ODA deliverables have to flow through them. Frankly, there are other ministers who do deliver small envelopes of ODA and they would be the accountable ministers. We phrased it that way because we did not want it limited to the CIDA minister.

The second issue has to do with the OECD and it has a longstanding definition of what constitutes poverty, which is the definition we adopted. I am a little open on that idea, although I am a little worried that if we change definitions to in house definitions that those in house definitions will be stretched and the gut purpose of the bill will be circumvented. If the gut purpose of the bill is poverty alleviation, then I do not want to use definitions to effectively circumvent that issue as well.

• (1835)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the proposals in Bill C-293, an act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad.

Development assistance is an integral part of our international policy and the government places a very high priority on ensuring its effectiveness and efficiency and increasing accountability for results.

As an early demonstration of our commitment to international development assistance, the government has already increased Canada's international assistance budget by \$320 million in the budget of 2006.

Development is a unique challenge and success requires vision, long term programming and the careful management of programs for country-wide improvements. It also requires support for change, strengthening governance, respect for the law and human rights.

Canada is recognized as a leader in the development community. To continue to lead, we must ensure that real results from our assistance flow to poor people in developing countries.

We need clear and precise objectives for Canada's development assistance program. In addition, we must provide clear direction for all government departments and agencies involved in disbursing Canadian development assistance and ensure coherence across government so that we speak with one voice and deliver one coordinated development assistance program.

I congratulate the hon. member for tabling a bill that focuses on the reduction of poverty and sustainable development. However, while Bill C-293 is well intentioned, it does not adequately address the issues to which I have referred. In fact, Bill C-293 would undermine Canada's ability to set its own agenda for its development assistance program.

It does that in several ways. First, under clauses 3 and 4 of the bill, it clearly states that development assistance is defined by the development assistance committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. While Canada is a proud member of the OECD and respects internationally agreed upon definitions for development assistance, any definitions to be legislated must be wholly Canadian.

Private Members' Business

Second, Bill C-293 would require the government to establish an advisory committee that would provide advice to the Minister of International Cooperation, as well as review and report on Canada's development assistance program. However, the advisory committee is flawed.

The mandate of the committee would place it in an unavoidable conflict of interest. For example, the committee is to advise the Minister of International Cooperation on the exercise of his or her power and then subsequently review and report on its own advice. This is a conflict of interest.

Furthermore, the government is committed to increasing accountability for all of its programs and it is essential that any organization, body or individual with authority or influence over government programs be held accountable, especially to Parliament as the final custodian of accountability for the Canadian people. The proposed committee demonstrates no such accountability.

Third, the bill establishes a formal process for individuals in developing countries to petition the Government of Canada directly should they believe that the development assistance being provided to their country is inconsistent with the purposes of the act. To formalize in legislation such a petition process would be costly, complex and cumbersome.

We currently have systems in place to address concerns that foreign citizens may have, either directly to our ministers or through our missions abroad.

The legislation would not only undermine Canada's sovereignty, but it would escalate administrative and financial costs and lengthen the time between consideration and approval of projects and programs and their actual implementation.

• (1840)

There are likely to be hidden costs, both in time and in money, associated with the establishment of the advisory committee, the petition system and the reporting requirements. The impact of these arrangements on programming within developing countries is real. The impact on aid effectiveness could only be detrimental.

This government is committed to working with developing countries to give them and their citizens the tools they require to address their development needs. To this end, we are embarking on a process to renew partnership programming. Through their linkages with the citizens of developing countries, Canadian non-state actors from civil society and the private sector have provided a bridge to the ultimate beneficiaries of Canadian aid.

This initiative aims to: first, clarify the role and contribution of Canadian partners to international development; second, examine aid effectiveness principles; third, strengthen accountability and results in partnership programming; and fourth, reflect Canadian values in international development cooperation.

This government recognizes the value and the expertise that Canadians have and can provide in our efforts to help the world's poor. This minister is working to ensure that they play a significant role in Canada's development assistance policy. In addition, we are looking at mechanisms to strengthen accountability and transparency

and will ensure that they are consistent with the federal accountability act that is currently before the House.

We welcome the spirit and the intent of Bill C-293, but the bill will fail to deliver what is required: a clear focused mandate for Canada's development program, a well-defined accountability for those charged with delivering that mandate, and the ability of Canada to work directly with our developing country partners to set an agenda that meets their needs and respects the wishes, desires and trust of the Canadian people. This is a flawed bill put forward for good reason and we recommend to the House that it not be adopted.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in today's debate on Bill C-293, an act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad.

The basic purpose of this bill is to ensure that international assistance is used to eliminate poverty, which the Bloc Québécois fully subscribes to. We feel it is essential that the principle of eliminating poverty be enshrined in law.

Furthermore, I want to remind hon. members that last November we introduced Motion M-308, calling on the previous government:

[to] increase Canada's international assistance through a commitment firstly to increasing in a stable and predictable manner amounts for government development assistance ... and secondly by enshrining in law that the mandate and purpose of government development assistance is poverty reduction.

International assistance is a major issue and a daunting challenge. The Bloc Québécois has always been in favour of a greater and more effective increase in development assistance. What is more, with what is currently happening in various corners of the globe, where millions of people have been rocked by natural disasters, unending political conflicts, famine and the spread of deadly disease, we must act and Canada has the means to do so.

It is obvious that in a context of increasingly serious and persistent needs, international assistance must be allocated fairly, but must also be allocated in a way that is maximized, effective and sustainable.

There must also be greater transparency in how assistance is managed. Indeed, in her February 2005 report, the Auditor General of Canada raised some shortcomings in CIDA's management, namely in the verification and transparency of the assistance allocated.

The more effective the assistance, the greater the chances of reducing poverty and achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals, to which Canada is a signatory.

We have often pointed out in the House of Commons that one of the ways to fight terrorism is to intensify cooperation and more specifically international assistance. Poverty is the most significant weapon of mass destruction on the planet. It is also fertile ground for terrorists, which is why it is so important to increase international assistance and to promote solid and effective cooperation.

Private Members' Business

However, this assistance has to be used for humanitarian purposes and not for national security purposes. Since the events of September 11, 2001, there seems to be some pressure on countries to allocate some of the assistance they receive to security measures and to fighting terrorism. These objectives are highly commendable, but international assistance is not the right vehicle.

For example, the Canadian Press reported recently that if Afghans want to receive Canadian aid, they have to cooperate with national and military forces to protect their village. Imagine, we are in effect asking the civilian population to take up arms, and we are blackmailing them to boot.

The CIDA projects were not created for these purposes. The funds must be used to rebuild Afghanistan and provide the people with a livelihood.

There are other examples of aid projects that are not meeting their intended objectives. Take Palestine, for example. Much of the money intended for the Palestinians is being withheld by Israeli banks, which deprives the population directly.

When the ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation withdrew Canadian aid from the newly elected government of the Palestinian territories, the agreement was that the Canadian government would keep on providing humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people through UN agencies and non-governmental organizations. Only direct aid to the new government was to be suspended. But the reality is quite different. Aid to NGOs is being maintained, but evidence suggests that it is not reaching its destination.

An entire population is being held hostage. Not only do the Palestinians live in a very difficult political situation, but they also have serious problems making a living. Many young people cannot even go to school anymore. Canada is helping to mortgage future generations.

The Bloc Québécois denounced the Canadian government's position, deeming its decision premature.

We all agree that we need to take a cautious and strict attitude toward Hamas, but we have to honour our commitments of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people.

● (1845)

We stigmatize everyone working directly or indirectly for the Palestinian government, but that does not make them terrorists. We must distinguish between those who live in Palestine and those who live for terrorism.

The Bloc Québécois believes it is vital to be certain that aid is really being used efficiently and for the purposes for which it is given.

Bill C-293 attempts to correct these problems by giving any resident of a developing country who believes that the development assistance being provided to that country is inconsistent with the purposes of this act the opportunity to make a petition in writing to an advisory committee specifying the deficiencies to be corrected. These two parts of the bill should be subject to in-depth analysis by the parliamentary committee.

I am concerned about the mandate, the composition and the cost of setting up and running this advisory committee. I am also concerned about the role of parliamentarians.

With respect to petitions, I am somewhat puzzled as to how useful this provision would be and exactly how it would be used. As worded, the provisions in the bill require the advisory committee and the minister to follow up on such petitions. That is fine.

However, returning to my two previous examples, this means that several millions of people could technically complain, all at once, about the misuse of Canadian aid, since it clearly indicates "a resident". That also means that, between the time when the petition was sent, when the minister replied and indicated the corrective action he intends to take, and the time when any action will actually take place, several months will have gone by and several thousands of people will likely die in the meantime. Malnutrition shows no patience with young children, nor does an epidemic, not to mention other the other problems they face.

I am not at all convinced that the use of petitions is appropriate. Would it not be preferable for CIDA to respect its commitments and to take the necessary measures to ensure close follow-up of the projects and their effectiveness? That agency already has the structure in place to fulfill that role. Someone will have to convince me that this is the best possible way to help these people and to ensure the effectiveness of aid.

Furthermore, I would like to underscore the importance of subjecting all forms of aid to international standards in terms of human rights, another fundamental aspect of international cooperation. We must also apply the principle of sustainable development. If we want to eliminate poverty, we must do so with a sustainable, long-term vision.

I would now like to turn to the crux of the matter, namely the budget for humanitarian aid. In the past, we asked the previous government several times what it really intended to do to bring the amount of aid to the level required to meet the millennium development goals.

One might agree with the principle of a bill to enshrine poverty reduction as the ultimate purpose of international aid, but that is not enough. We must ensure that all millennium development goals are addressed and met. The word "poverty" therefore has to be interpreted in the broadest sense, which also implies being able to obtain health care, get an education and live in a healthy and sustainable environment.

However, for all the millennium development goals to be met, in addition to legislation, we need to substantially increase the budget for development assistance. Unfortunately, the first Conservative budget did not fill the bill and failed to show any real intention to meet the international aid target of 0.7% of GDP by 2015.

Private Members' Business

I will remind the hon. members of this House, and the Prime Minister in particular, that, in February 2005, a letter signed by the three opposition leaders was sent to the Prime Minister of the Liberal government, asking him to pass legislation making poverty reduction the ultimate purpose of government development assistance and urging him to implement a strategy promoting a steady and foreseeable increase in development assistance. They were also calling for a substantial and immediate increase of the aid budget.

It is apparent that the Prime Minister has difficulty putting his words into action.

● (1850)

In conclusion, this bill's goal is fundamental. However, some aspects of the bill will need to be considered in greater detail at committee.

[English]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak briefly to this private member's bill, Bill C-293, introduced by my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood. I congratulate him for having introduced this bill entitled “an act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad”.

I will be supporting the bill. This will not surprise anybody because it is a replication of a bill that I had already introduced six weeks ago in the House.

I am profoundly disappointed, actually very dismayed, by the way in which the government has chosen to deal with the bill before us. It is a huge violation of the spirit of cooperation and collaboration that was shown both in the foreign affairs committee over a period of more than two years of work around overseas development assistance issues and in the House. On June 28 last year, members voted unanimously to support a recommendation from the foreign affairs committee. I want to read part of that into the record. It stated that Parliament:

—introduce legislation...which establishes poverty reduction as the priority for Canada's Official Development Assistance (ODA), as outlined in the historic February 17, 2005, letter from all Opposition Leaders to the Prime Minister, to ensure that aid is provided in a manner consistent with Canada's human rights obligations and respectful of the perspectives of those living in poverty...

That was a genuine expression of a point of view brought forward again and again by witnesses before the foreign affairs committee, literally over a period of two and a half years. The first of those witnesses to appear was on April 1, 2003. It was the special envoy for HIV-AIDS in Africa, Stephen Lewis, who serves under the UN Secretary-General. We had a continual flow of recommendations around this essential topic.

What is very disappointing is that we have not seen tonight in this debate a reflection or a continuation of that spirit of cooperation. It is absolutely in order. In fact, it is the responsibility of each and every one of us as private members to bring forward the different points of view that one will reflect upon and express on any bill that comes before us. It is heart-breaking, if we look at all the work done by NGOs, particularly the umbrella organization for the 100 or more NGOs, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation. Also many witnesses came before the committee in the belief that Canada

wanted to re-establish itself as a leader with credibility around overseas development assistance.

The CIDA minister appeared before the foreign affairs committee yesterday. I received a letter from her yesterday, after a four month delay since I wrote to her urging urgent action on this matter. All indications from the government on this are very disappointing, in fact I would say alarming. It is its intention to take us backwards instead of moving forward on something around which there was an astounding consensus at the foreign affairs committee and in the House.

A constructive action that could have been taken tonight would have been to indicate that this matter is worthy of examination by the foreign affairs committee, with a sense of urgency that is appropriate given that a whole year has passed since Parliament spoke with one voice to say that we should move forward on this.

● (1855)

Instead, what we have heard is a bunch of procedural argument, all of which could have been addressed in a meaningful debate at the committee level. Frankly, it was even more disappointing to have heard from the minister that she would begin to look at some of the ways that we could improve our aid delivery and our accountability. At some future date, heavens knows when, we might actually begin to see some progress from the government. It is very disappointing.

I meant what I said on this floor on May 1 when I introduced the companion bill to one now before us. I pleaded with the government to make it its own and scrap the private member's bill if it were so inclined. However, for heaven's sake, move on this issue. Millions of people are dying unnecessarily of hunger and disease because of the grinding poverty in which they are living.

Canada is a contributor to those killer conditions. Instead of the Liberal government moving us forward with a level of overseas development assistance that would allow Canadians to hold their heads up high, it took us from 0.5% of ODA assistance, which was in place under the previous Conservative government, back to where it was at .23%.

We have no indication whatsoever from the government that it intends to move on any of the recommendations that were brought forward unanimously by the foreign affairs committee and unanimously endorsed in the House on June 28, 2005.

I still plead with the government to realize that the appropriate sense of urgency with which this matter should be addressed would be for the bill to go to committee at the earliest possible time, where it could be debated and amendments proposed. I know the member for Scarborough—Guildwood has indicated, as have I, that each of the points raised are legitimate points that can be addressed and around which some flexibility is appropriate.

Although I think it is clear that an advisory council is an important part of this, the bill does not require a royal recommendation. It says the advisory council “may” receive remuneration. It is up to the minister to decide on that. Therefore, that could be addressed.

There has been another issue raised, but I am will not go into the obstructionistic procedural posturing that we have heard from the government side tonight. It is extremely disappointing. I think Canadians applauded spirit of cooperation, which is desperately needed by people around the world who are suffering from the most degrading poverty on earth. We owe it to Canadians and to those suffering from global poverty, in the spirit of the make poverty history campaign and in the spirit of the work done over a two and a half year period, to move ahead and deal with the bill at committee at the earliest possible date.

If the government cannot bring itself to do that, because it wants to be the sole author of an appropriate bill, then in the name of heaven let us agree and commit ourselves to fast track a bill that the government would introduce so we could then get on with taking action.

I do not know how else to do this but to plead with the government not to make all Canadians and parliamentarians look ridiculous by obstructing and blocking progress on something so urgent to the most desperately poor people of the world.

● (1900)

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to echo the comments made by colleagues in the House in support of what is a very important initiative, an initiative that I believe unites Canada in a common purpose and focuses in an accountable and transparent way its aid development around the world.

I thank the hon. member and my colleague, who once shared part of my riding or I shared part of his, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood. He has taken a very important step toward focusing Parliament toward commitments that have been made, not only by colleagues in my party, but very clearly, as suggested by the hon. member for Halifax and earlier by the member himself, by Parliament. Parliament should proceed at the earliest opportunity.

Based on the letter from February 17, 2005, all three then opposition leaders, now one Prime Minister and two opposition leaders, made it abundantly clear where they stood on ensuring that CIDA moneys were focused on poverty elimination. It is not lost on Canadians, on civil society and on the efforts made in the past that on this day alone one-third of the people who will die in this world will die as a result of poverty, the result of neglect and starvation.

It is extremely important that Canadians understand what this debate is about. It is not at this stage increasing the funding. It is targeting the funding.

I also want to compliment not only my colleague, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, but also the hon. member for Halifax who quite rightly, in what was a tornado of events in June 2005, brought Parliament together to ensure that the government and Parliament would agree to the target of .07% in terms of our obligations of international development. We know where this Parliament stands.

I want to point out that the letter was signed by the leader of the Bloc Québécois, who is still here, the leader of the New Democratic Party, who is still here and the leader of the opposition of the Conservative Party, who is now Prime Minister. There are two points

Private Members' Business

that the now Prime Minister, then opposition leader, made. I will read this into the record.

We are writing to urge you to introduce legislation which establishes poverty reduction as the aim for Canada's Official Development Assistance (ODA). A legislated mandate for Canada's ODA would ensure that aid is provided in a manner both consistent with Canada's human rights obligations and respectful of the perspectives of those living in poverty.

To reiterate that, the Prime Minister also said:

We are not however simply urging more dollars be spent. Those dollars must also be spent effectively and in ways ensuring more accountability. In our view, this legislation should include an unequivocal statement of purpose that poverty reduction is the central lens through which Canada's aid program should be delivered.

That does not just bind us in the House of Commons. I respectfully submit that it binds the Prime Minister. Regardless of the procedural tactics not to deal with this and concerns about who is going to handle this or that, I can tell the hon. parliamentary secretary this. He sat on the same foreign affairs committee that recommended this a little earlier and he is now the parliamentary secretary responsible for CIDA. He will remember the RADARSAT issue in which we could not figure out who would be responsible for making decisions.

Those are decisions that could be made with the expertise that we have in committee and the engagement of civil society and of witnesses. It seems to me to be abundantly clear and plain to everybody who is listening today that all parties have agreed in one form or another to the need to pass the bill. It is my view that the initiative by the member, supported by so many members of the House of Commons and now supported by the right hon. Prime Minister, make it incumbent on the Prime Minister to accept this.

However, let me go one step further. The Conservative Party in a number of initiatives agreed, not only obviously with their leader, but if I am not mistaken with their own policy platform, their resolution of March 2005, a mere month after. I know many hon. colleagues in the Conservative Party, who are here today, will remember that they voted for the following:

A Conservative Government will introduce legislation that will...define a legal framework for Canada's Official Development Assistance (ODA) envelope of spending. This legislation will include a clear mandate for development assistance; mechanisms for policy coherence, monitoring, accountability and reporting to Parliament; and enhanced public transparency.

● (1905)

We are not debating that. We agree with that, but we find now that the Conservative parliamentary secretary has argued against himself, not only against the wisdom of his leader, who is now Prime Minister, but apparently against the convention of his own party.

I would suggest that as opposed to simply pointing fingers, we could get a whole lot more done if Parliament were prepared here and now—I am not going to do it, but I want acknowledgement from hon. members—to refer this to the committee immediately. We are allowing this to go an hour in a month and another hour in another month, and we may not even get to this until November. Who do we betray? Who do we hurt? We are hurting people who know that one of the strongest elements of how Canada presents itself in the world is with respect to how it treats the most vulnerable people, regardless of their credo, their nation and their circumstances.

Adjournment Proceedings

We cannot do everything. It has become abundantly clear, certainly in my time in foreign affairs, that our greatest talents, our greatest efforts, and ones which we are greatly acknowledged for, lie in our ability to help the people in the world who are vulnerable, regardless of their circumstances, and who, through no fault of their own, may very well die today or in the next few days, poverty being the basis on which other diseases and problems occur.

It seems to me that Parliament must debate but it must also act. The wisdom provided by my hon. colleague, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, cannot be gainsaid. I think we all have an obligation to remind Canadians of the things we want to accomplish. Considering the spirit of the bill, not only is it about focusing, but it is also about transparency, accountability and input from the NGOs and organizations that do so much.

We can obviously take time to amend this bill in committee, as that is of course the purpose of committee, but I would launch a challenge to all members of Parliament to find it within themselves to see this bill for what it is. It is a true testament to an issue whose time has come, not in terms of engagement of hostilities but in fact to offer to the rest of the world, as some other leading nations are today, the issue of putting a priority on the reduction of poverty first.

Not nine months ago, Parliament did indeed do that. Regardless of the political circumstances that existed at the time, we made it abundantly clear on all sides of the House that it was important, thanks in many measures to the member for Halifax, to support a resolution to ensure that we look at global poverty reduction but that Canada also respect its commitment.

As for working in the department, I understand that there may be concerns about protecting certain interests within the department and having the flexibility of saying that we use CIDA to obtain different policies which might have the effect of furthering Canada's interests. One person talked to me a little earlier about the questions of security. Some talked to us about questions of Canada's priorities, which have nothing to do with poverty reduction or security, necessarily, but which might somehow encumber the government in terms of its flexibility.

I realize that this is an important imperative, but it is not an imperative that stands in the face of dying children and people who, through no fault of their own today, by the misfortune of living in another part of the world as a result of war or strife, or as a result of nations that fail to protect people's human rights and dignity, are left in the position where they have no alternative but to hope that the Parliament in Ottawa, Canada, today will get it act together collectively and make sure that its best efforts in terms of resources are placed on the people who need it most.

I do not know what credos we share, and I do not know what backgrounds we have, and I am not exactly sure of differences in terms of our policies and philosophies, but helping the most vulnerable and ensuring that Canada puts its best foot forward is, I believe, something that we all share in common and that we as a Parliament have a duty to do and to enact.

I want to say this and I encourage members on this side of the House to do the same. I agree with what the Prime Minister said on February 17, 2005. I agree with the leader of the Bloc Québécois. I

agree with the leader of the New Democratic Party. It is good to talk about these things, but I think we have come to a point where we must act now, we must act purposefully and we must act in the most important crisis facing the world today, which is clearly the reduction of poverty.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1910)

[English]

ENERGUIDE PROGRAM

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, consistent with the issue of poverty, I want to point out that I have asked the Minister of Natural Resources to clarify why his party did an about face within a very short period of time. It accepted Bill C-66, which extended the EnerGuide program to help individuals, particularly those on low incomes and seniors, like my constituent Maggie Robertson who, over a month after the announcement was made, had been told she would not be eligible for the program as a result of a cut in the budget. It has still not been confirmed whether she has in fact received this.

I find it unacceptable that a government that campaigned on transparency and accountability would be so callous as to axe the EnerGuide program for low income households of \$550 million as well as deep cuts to the EnerGuide house retrofit incentive program.

It is important for people to understand that this is not just a question of helping people make the updates that are good for them in terms of bringing their costs down as a result of energy costs that are spiralling out of control. It is also about putting these individuals in a position where they can actually contribute to reducing greenhouse gases and to try to find ways in which to help Canadians who have done so much to build this nation.

It seems to me that for the minister to somehow suggest that because of the audit process being some 50%, which it is not—it is 12%—that we should not have some kind of accountability to measure what is being invested, is, in my view, an abdication of the government's responsibility to taxpayers.

I am waiting for the Minister of Natural Resources to tell the House if he is prepared to live up to the commitment and tell Canadians why, in the first instance, he broke a promise and why he was not prepared to stand up for Canadians and, despite the unanimous consent of the hon. members in the Conservative Party, why the government felt it was important to cut this program.

I have more items I would like to introduce which go hand in hand with the 85¢ a litre and the cut in the GST but I will give the Minister of Natural Resources or his representative, the hon. parliamentary secretary, the opportunity to answer. I think they have some explaining to do and they have to explain that to the 150,000 Canadians who are basically left in the dark and left in the cold.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1915)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Paradis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to reply today to the question asked by the honourable member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley on May 12.

The honourable member was concerned about the EnerGuide program and other programs implemented by the previous government to deal with climate change.

I would like to remind the honourable member that the Minister of Finance has committed \$2 billion to the environment and energy efficiency in the budget tabled a few weeks ago. In that budget \$380 million is allocated to the climate change program. It is a significant investment.

We believe that such an investment would be put to better use and give better results than the moneys spent by the previous government. Our government is committed to pursuing new avenues in the area of climate change policies. We want to establish a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, a plan that will take into account the economic, social and environmental context of our country. We want to establish a plan to ensure that we have clean air, water, soil and energy for Canadians, and an effective and realistic approach to climate change issues for Canada. It is not enough to follow in the footsteps of the previous government, that is, to make an international commitment without adopting a plan to implement it and without determining the repercussions for Canada. We have seen the results of that approach.

Several years after the Liberal government brought in programs and spent hundreds of millions of dollars on climate change initiatives, we are still a long way from producing meaningful results and honouring our commitments.

The Liberals were aiming at a 6% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Today, Canada's emissions are 35% above that target. It is time to restructure our climate change programs. It is time for practical solutions.

The budget contains \$380 million for climate change initiatives. This is the same amount the previous government allocated. But now we have to find the best way to use that money to have the greatest impact on climate change. Some existing programs can be tailored to our strategy. In other cases, though, we will have to see whether taxpayers' money can be better used to support the new strategy. All the climate change initiatives are being reviewed to ensure that they produce real results for Canada.

After examining the EnerGuide for houses retrofit incentive program, the government concluded that taxpayers' money could be better used and allocated to initiatives that will have a greater impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

As a result, the program ended at midnight on May 12, 2006. Homeowners who had an evaluation performed under the EnerGuide for houses program still qualify for a grant provided that they make the residential energy upgrades and meet all the program requirements by March 31, 2007.

The government is working on a new strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The various ministers responsible will announce specific initiatives in the weeks and months to come. The House will see the wisdom of investing in programs that will have a real impact on air and water quality and energy efficiency for Canadians.

[*English*]

Hon. Dan McTeague: That is not good enough, Mr. Speaker. That party supported this program. Those members supported it unanimously. This has saved Canadians over \$650 million net. It is a program that has proved to be successful on a number of ideas for Canadians, with average help of \$750 a year for people who truly need it.

Even the member for St. John's East, back in 2003, said in a question to the House:

In order to qualify for a grant, however, a homeowner must have an evaluation done of his home by an authorized agent. There were no authorized agents in place in Newfoundland and Labrador in August. There are none now...will the minister put an authorized agent in place—

The Conservatives knew about it, but what has happened is that there has been a bit of a bait and switch program going on here. They did not cost out their election promises, and as a result, they have cut a very good program. They have cut it deeply and have hurt the very Canadians who not only are making a contribution to energy reduction, but are helping to stave off cold winters. This program was able to help them during difficult times.

This is a very callous idea from a minister who clearly cannot articulate why he did it. He was told to do it and unfortunately many Canadians are suffering as a result of it. Shame on that. When is the minister going to stand up and tell us when this program is going to be reintroduced immediately to help those he has left high and dry?

•(1920)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Paradis: Mr. Speaker, we are in the process of developing a plan to reduce greenhouse gases that will meet the particular needs of Canadians.

In the meantime, the government manages some 95 different programs that address climate change. These programs will continue in the current fiscal year and temporary financial assistance will be available. The ministers concerned will make relevant announcements on specific programs.

From the beginning we realized that some programs were not achieving the desired results. The One Tonne Challenge, for example, is a marketing campaign that was implemented by the previous government. We do not want to adopt that approach. We want to use taxpayers' money in a way that will achieve the best results. We want to implement more effective and efficient programs to reduce emissions. We will continue to review current activities and support those that work.

Adjournment Proceedings

Furthermore, we are planning to add new activities that will help improve performance for all Canadians. We are committed to establishing a strategy that will ensure the quality of air, water, soil and energy for generations to come, and we will follow through.

[English]

PASSPORTS

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for being here this evening to answer my simple question.

Members have had the privilege of acting on behalf of their constituents when they needed urgent passports. These urgent passports were normally required when there was a sickness or death in the family and the passport was needed within a 10 day period. Individuals living in northern and rural areas however have no ready access to a passport office.

I know that individuals living in an urban area would normally receive their passport in 20 days, but this service is not available to those individuals living in remote areas. The government has set up an office through Service Canada in my own community. I am really concerned about individuals living in northern and remote areas who have to drive sometimes 8 to 12 hours to get to the closest passport office. These individuals can no longer get support from their members of Parliament.

I do not understand the change in policy that the government has brought forward. I wonder if the government understands the impact this policy is having and its discriminatory nature. I believe this is now creating a two tier system, one for constituents who live in large centres where there is a passport office nearby and one for constituents who live in northern and remote areas who do not have a passport office. Somebody in a big centre like Toronto can just jump on a subway, catch a bus or take a taxi to a passport office, whereas those individuals living in remote areas face greater difficulties.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could inform me as to whether or not the government understands the difficulty this has created. I wonder if it has come up with any resolution to this problem.

The minister suggested that I bring all of my cases to him, and I have brought a couple in the last few weeks. I was hoping, in the weeks since I asked my question, that perhaps there would be some clearer understanding and some policy changes made. I was also hoping some direction would be given to members who want to serve our constituents in this way.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Sault Ste. Marie for bringing this issue to Parliament. As members of Parliament we both know how important it is to assist our constituents when they are dealing with federal government issues. I am very happy to note that he is working very hard for his constituents. The member has highlighted an issue that he says is creating some problems.

Last April the Auditor General in her report on passport services, which was tabled in Parliament, specifically raised the importance of

further analyzing security and privacy issues in regard to the services provided by members of Parliament.

In direct response to this observation, a new policy guideline regarding the roles and responsibilities of members of Parliament and the passport office were introduced on April 1, 2006 to address increased security and privacy requirements.

Since September 11, 2001 we all know that security has been highlighted due to the threats from terrorists. As Canadian passports have become attractive to those people, we naturally have had to introduce these new security measures, as has been pointed out by the Auditor General.

Passport Canada values the services provided by members of Parliament and is committed to working with MPs to provide services to Canadians. Passport Canada has a section dedicated to ensure that service requests from members of Parliament are actioned effectively and efficiently.

The normal standard of service for an application submitted through the office of a member of Parliament is 20 working days. For exceptional cases where a passport is required in less than 20 working days for humanitarian and compassionate reasons or imminent travel business, members of Parliament are to contact the MP section of Passport Canada during normal working hours. After hours, emergency services are available through a network of duty officers.

Passport Canada will take appropriate action on a case by case basis to assist any Canadian who legitimately requires a passport on an urgent basis regardless of where they reside. These cases are exceptional and will be dealt with accordingly. Past history has shown that these cases represent less than 1% of requests received through members of Parliament.

It is important to bear in mind that even in exceptional cases, a personal appearance before a Passport Canada officer is an integral part of the security and integrity of the passport issuing process. This measure is intended to authenticate the identity of Canadians applying for a passport and to reduce the risk of identity fraud by allowing for an immediate and thorough verification of the identity.

Each member of Parliament has been provided with a comprehensive guide to assist with processing passport applications.

A Passport Canada guide for members of Parliament is available. Detailed information of the service locations can be found in this guide. Information on passport services provided by members of Parliament is also available on the Passport Canada MP website. An information session hosted by Passport Canada for members of Parliament and their staff has been held and more sessions will follow.

I would like to assure the member that our objective is to improve security while maintaining the level of client service through multiple business channels. Passport Canada continues to be committed to—

● (1925)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed in the answer. It does not sound like the government fully understands the inconvenience that this will create for literally thousands of people, particularly constituents in the rural, northern and remote areas that many of us in this place represent. We are trying to help our constituents get the services that are available to literally millions of Canadians who happen to live in larger centres where there is a passport office.

I understand the security issues. We hear about them here all the time. However, security should not always trump our need to provide service to our constituents who are upstanding law-abiding Canadian citizens who simply want the same service that others are getting.

The requirement that a person appear in person before a passport officer to get an urgent passport is inconsistent with the process that is in place. Every year thousands of people mail in their applications and documentation and receive their passports through the mail and there is no requirement for a face to face meeting with anybody. I do not understand where in that instance it is okay, but in the instance where—

•(1930)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, in brief response, I am sure the member does not want us not to follow the Auditor General's recommendations. She has raised the concern of security and the concern of verifying the information.

With regard to the member's concern, it would be best for all Canadians that we all work together to address the issues that have been raised and to come up with a satisfactory answer so that we can provide services to his office and to his constituents.

It would be better for all of us to have a dialogue to see how members of Parliament can resolve the issue, but take into account the other issues highlighted by the Auditor General, such as security.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:31 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, June 7, 2006

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Hockeyville	
Mrs. Gallant	2061
Government Policies	
Mr. Merasty	2061
Environment Week	
Mr. Lussier	2061
Women's Shelters	
Mrs. Mathysen	2062
Justice	
Mr. Thompson (Wild Rose)	2062
Government Policies	
Mr. St. Amand	2062
Hockeyville	
Mr. Hill	2062
Monsieur Pointu	
Mr. Sauvageau	2063
Hockeyville	
Mr. Allen	2063
Government Policies	
Mr. LeBlanc	2063
Firearms Registry	
Mr. Casson	2063
Nova Scotia	
Ms. McDonough	2063
Government Policies	
Mr. D'Amours	2064
Jonathan Pedneault	
Ms. St-Hilaire	2064
Government Policies	
Ms. Dhalla	2064
The Budget	
Mr. Batters	2064

ORAL QUESTIONS

National Defence	
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	2065
Mr. Harper	2065
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	2065
Mr. Harper	2065
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	2065
Mr. Harper	2065
Mr. Coderre	2065
Mr. Hiebert	2065
Mr. Coderre	2065
Mr. Harper	2065

The Environment

Mr. Duceppe	2066
Mr. Harper	2066
Mr. Duceppe	2066
Mr. Harper	2066
Mr. Bigras	2066
Mr. Warawa	2066
Mr. Bigras	2066
Mr. Warawa	2066

Softwood Lumber

Mr. Layton	2066
Mr. Harper	2066
Mr. Layton	2066
Mr. Harper	2067

National Defence

Mr. Dosanjh	2067
Mr. Hiebert	2067
Mr. Dosanjh	2067
Mr. Hiebert	2067
Mr. Proulx	2067
Mr. Hiebert	2067
Mr. Proulx	2067
Mr. Hiebert	2067

Agriculture

Mr. Bellavance	2067
Mr. Strahl	2067
Mr. Bellavance	2067
Mr. Strahl	2068

Fisheries and Oceans

Mr. Roy	2068
Mr. Hearn	2068
Mr. Roy	2068
Mr. Hearn	2068

International Aid

Mrs. Redman	2068
Mr. Harper	2068
Mrs. Redman	2068
Mr. Harper	2068

Natural Resources

Ms. Stronach	2069
Mr. Lunn	2069
Ms. Stronach	2069
Mr. Lunn	2069

Afghanistan

Mr. Lauzon	2069
Mr. MacKay	2069

Chinese Canadians

Ms. Chow	2069
Ms. Oda	2069
Ms. Chow	2069

Ms. Oda	2069
Agriculture	
Mr. Thibault (West Nova)	2070
Mr. Strahl	2070
Mr. Thibault (West Nova)	2070
Mr. Strahl	2070
Mr. Easter	2070
Mr. Strahl	2070
Mr. Easter	2070
Mr. Strahl	2070
Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Lemay	2070
Mr. Bruinooge	2070
Museum of Science and Technology	
Mr. Nadeau	2071
Mr. Cannon	2071
Fisheries and Oceans	
Mr. Matthews	2071
Mr. Hearn	2071
Grants and Contributions	
Mr. Williams	2071
Mr. Baird	2071
Health	
Ms. Priddy	2071
Mr. Clement	2071
Ms. Priddy	2071
Mr. Clement	2072
Public Safety	
Ms. Folco	2072
Mr. Day	2072
Nuclear Energy	
Mrs. Gallant	2072
Mr. Lunn	2072
Presence in the Gallery	
The Speaker	2072

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Defence Construction Canada	
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	2072
Government Response to Petitions	
Mr. Lukiwski	2072
Committees of the House	
Government Operations and Estimates	
Ms. Marleau	2073
Status of Women	
Ms. Sgro	2073
Procedure and House Affairs	
Mr. Goodyear	2073
Motion for concurrence	2073
(Motion agreed to)	2073
Petitions	
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mr. Silva	2073

Agriculture	
Mrs. Gallant	2073
Canadian Forces	
Ms. Neville	2073
Human Rights	
Mr. Reid	2073
Fisheries	
Mr. Russell	2073
Labelling of Alcoholic Beverages	
Ms. Wasylcia-Leis	2074
Housing	
Mrs. Yelich	2074
Rights of the Unborn	
Mr. Vellacott	2074
Canada Post	
Mr. Dewar	2074
Child Care	
Mr. Savage	2074
Canada Post Corporation	
Mr. Laframboise	2074
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	2074
Questions Passed as Orders for Returns	
Mr. Lukiwski	2075
Motions for Papers	
Mr. Lukiwski	2075

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Criminal Code	
Bill C-10. Second reading	2076
Mr. Comartin	2076
Mr. Bagnell	2078
Mr. Jean	2078
Mrs. Barnes	2079
Ms. Brown (Oakville)	2079
Mr. Jean	2081
Mr. Bagnell	2081
Mr. Szabo	2082
Mr. Thompson (Wild Rose)	2083
Mr. Marston	2083
Mr. Jean	2083
Mr. Clement	2084
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	2085
Mr. Ouellet	2085
Mr. Szabo	2086
Mr. Carrier	2086
Mr. Ménard (Hochelaga)	2086
Mr. Thompson (Wild Rose)	2089
Mr. Bagnell	2089
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	2089
Mr. Crête	2089
Mr. Jean	2090
Mr. Cotler	2090
Mr. Batters	2092

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Income Tax Act

Bill C-294. Second reading 2092
Motion agreed to 2093

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. McKay 2094
Bill C-293. Second reading 2094
Mr. Lukiwski 2095
Mr. McKay 2096
Mr. Szabo 2096
Ms. McDonough 2096
Mr. McTeague 2096
Mr. Menzies 2097

Mrs. Hinton 2097
Mr. Menzies 2097
Ms. St-Hilaire 2098
Ms. McDonough 2100
Mr. McTeague 2101

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

EnerGuide Program

Mr. McTeague 2102
Mr. Paradis 2103

Passports

Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie) 2104
Mr. Obhrai 2104

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