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Monday, June 12, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, June 12, 2006

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

• (1105)

[English]

The Speaker: It being 11:05 a.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

TRENT-SEVERN WATERWAY

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should consider the advisability of evaluating the future of the historic Trent-Severn Waterway, one of Parks Canada's National Historic Sites, and its potential to become: (a) a premier recreational asset; (b) a world-class destination for recreational boaters; (c) a greater source of clean, renewable electrical power; (d) a facilitator of economic opportunity and renewal in the communities along its 386 km length; and (e) a model of environmental sustainability.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex for seconding this motion.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to outline my reasons for sponsoring Motion No. 161, a motion that, if adopted, would ask the government and specifically the Minister of the Environment to consider evaluating the future of a unique and historic asset, the Trent-Severn Waterway, a national historic site that belongs to the people of Canada and is managed for them by their federal government.

The need for this evaluation is compelling, but before I speak about that need, I first would like to provide some perspective and history.

The Trent-Severn system is a 386 kilometre long inland waterway, running from the Bay of Quinte on Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay on Lake Huron. It connects many communities of 1,000 people or more and includes the major centres of Peterborough, Orillia, Kawartha Lakes and Quinte West, as well as Barrie and other large communities on Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay.

For navigation and recreational boating, it operates 44 locks, one marine railway and 39 swing bridges. The system includes 160 dams and control structures that manage the water levels for flood control and navigation on lakes and rivers that drain approximately 18,600 square kilometres of central Ontario's cottage country region, across four counties and three single-tier cities, an area that is home to more than a million Canadians.

The system has no fewer than 18 hydroelectric generating facilities, with a capacity to contribute an average of 100 megawatts of clean, renewable power each and every day. To put that in perspective, it would be the equivalent of a 300 turbine wind farm or about 20% of one of the four big units at the coal-fired Lambton Generating Station.

As a historic canal, the Trent-Severn makes an important ecological contribution through the protection of wetlands, the attention to water quality and the preservation of habitats for many aquatic species and many species at risk.

The Trent-Severn protects important elements of our history and culture, including first nations cultural sites dating from 6,000 years ago and the historic features and remnants of 19th century settlement in this part of Ontario.

The Trent-Severn makes a valuable contribution to the economy, attracting thousands of recreational boaters and millions of visitors each year to its lock stations, campgrounds and public sites. In fact, for every person who visits the system by boat, there are five who are land-based visitors.

The Trent-Severn recorded approximately 150,000 lockages last year, down from its peak of 250,000 in 1990. Up to 1,000 community businesses thrive on serving the residents and visitors to the lakes and rivers of the Trent-Severn. Indeed, many of the communities exist because of the very recreational and retirement lifestyles associated with these shoreline communities. Services to the recreational boating public and other visitors include many rural-based small businesses, from fuel, storage and repairs to food service, outfitters, attractions and retail outlets.

The Trent-Severn offers the landscapes, rivers and lakes of central eastern Ontario, which stretch from the granite outcroppings and windswept pines of the Canadian Shield and Georgian Bay to the rolling hills and drumlins of Northumberland County. These beautiful natural features have made these lake areas popular for cottages and camps since the late 19th century, with many being converted into year-round homes for increasing numbers of Canadians.

Private Members' Business

The vision of an inland navigable waterway linking Lake Ontario with Georgian Bay was first inspired by early 19th century settlers who worked to establish the first wooden lock in the heart of the Kawartha Lakes, at Bobcaygeon, in 1833. They did this to access lumber markets to the south. It would take another 87 years to complete the waterway.

Construction on the system was sporadic in the early years until the re-elected government of Sir John A. Macdonald got behind the construction of a system in a more robust way between 1883 and 1887. Construction continued annually, except during World War I, until the system was fully connected for navigation across 386 kilometres by 1920.

• (1110)

During the late 1800s, the golden age of steamboats and resorts made the lakes of the Trent-Severn Waterway a hub of tourism in the province. All visitors arrived by train to destinations like Lakefield, Lindsay and Severn Bridge.

Since 1920 the system has served primarily as a destination for recreational boating, but due to its series of dams, locks and bridges, it remains today an essential infrastructure for roads and railways, water level management, flood prevention, and shoreline and aquatic habitat protection.

The Trent-Severn has been managed and regulated under the Parks Canada Agency Act since 1970. The historic canals regulations of the Department of Transport Act provide the regulatory framework for the management of the system in accordance with the historic canals policy of the government.

Currently the Trent-Severn's operating costs are about \$9.5 million per year. It collects revenues of close to \$4 million annually, leaving a net cost to the government of about \$5.5 million per year, but these costs do not include capital repairs and replacement costs, which have varied from \$2 million to \$5 million per year over the last decade.

This gives us some idea of the size, scope and the complexity of the Trent-Severn Waterway. As we might conclude, the waterway reaches well beyond what one would typically think of as a historic site. It is much more than a historic archive and, as I will explain in a few minutes, I believe it has the potential to make a far greater contribution for the investment that Canadians make toward it each and every year.

Why should the government be undertaking an evaluation or review at this time? First, the Trent-Severn, as I mentioned, is the steward of important shoreline and aquatic habitat across 4,500 kilometres of shoreline. This is an area of the country that is now facing enormous pressure for shoreline development. The original designers of the system could not have imagined the waterway supporting this kind of growth and activity, and the waterway is a prime source of drinking water for hundreds of thousands of people who live or cottage along its shores.

Second, the smaller rural communities along the system's path are experiencing shrinkage in economic opportunity as their primary job base in tourism, manufacturing and other commercial enterprises adjusts to the realities of consolidation and economic realignment.

The recreational boating industry, which accounts for about \$11.5 billion in GDP annually and 84,000 jobs nationally, is growing, yet lockages on the Trent-Severn have declined by almost 70% since its peak in 1990. For many of the communities along the waterway, this represents a missed opportunity.

Third, the waterway has the potential to produce up to 50% more hydroelectric power. That is a clean, renewable source of electricity with no environmental degradation. I do not need to remind hon. members just how important this consideration is, especially with the government's commitment to enable a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and pollution.

Finally, the Trent-Severn has the ability to provide a unique destination for outdoor recreation and the exploration of our history and culture for the growing urban populations that live within one to two hours' drive from its many sites. The waterways and rural roadways that lead to these sites offer a great outlet for healthy water and land based activities such as canoeing, kayaking, hiking and cycling.

Canada is not alone with its large and historic canal system. Other jurisdictions like New York state and Scotland have revitalized their historic canals to provide, in addition to their historic, navigational and recreational value, a tremendous impetus for economic renewal in the communities along those canals.

As an example, the New York state canal system offers a glimpse of what the future of the Trent-Severn could be. New York state undertook to revitalize its canal in 1996. Since then it has invested in the upgrading, infrastructure and marketing. It has developed a water and land based trail and an environmental greenway for residents and has established new rules for land use and development along the shorelines. Those investments came only after a very thorough examination of the New York canal system with a view to its full potential.

• (1115)

The New York canal revitalization program has been underway for over 10 years but it has been so successful that this year the canal has completely waived the user fees for recreational boats on the system. The canal has become, in a sense, an economic generator of its own making while staying true to its mandate of historical preservation, environmental protection and enhancement.

I am not suggesting that we replicate what Scotland or New York has done. I cite these as examples of how the Trent-Severn Waterway, a government asset worth an estimated \$1.7 billion, could become a net contributor for Canadians, both environmentally and economically. We need to examine that potential first before any conclusions are drawn, before any speculation occurs and, most important, before any new public expenditure is considered.

I would not want to speculate on how the government might guide such an evaluation in the future but I do believe that a process could be initiated to collect relevant data, consult with stakeholders and engage the province of Ontario and local governments for their participation and interest.

Private Members' Business

In conclusion, an evaluation would help the government to consider the future of the system and its potential to contribute to the health and well-being of Canadian citizens through recreation, to the appreciation of our history and early settlement, to clean renewable energy, to the economy and job creation, and to the protection of sensitive environmental features.

The Trent-Severn Waterway is a complex and multi-faceted resource, a jewel in the crown of the federal government, and it could be an even greater asset to Canada and to Canadians when we address the question of its long term sustainability. Canadians expect their government to manage these treasures in the public interest, and this waterway, with its 19th century design and control systems, begs a closer examination and, in keeping with its potential, I believe a renewed mandate.

The waterway has existed and served citizens and visitors well for over 150 years. There is no doubt that the process to consider what lies ahead for the Trent-Severn will not be easy. It will take time and it will take foresight. Implementing any plan for the waterway will take even greater amounts of determination and patience. These are the kind of qualities and ingenuity that the original designers and builders of the waterway had many decades ago. We would do well by their example.

I encourage all hon. members to support the motion and I look forward to their questions and comments.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during his speech the member indicated that the peak economic contribution of the Trent-Severn Waterway was about 20 years ago. I wonder if the member could advise the House whether some of the reasons have been identified for the declining performance in terms of the economic opportunities there.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. While there has been a decline in the number of lockages on the system, as I referenced in my remarks, the number of boats on the system has increased over the last decade or more from about 40,000 to 60,000. What we are seeing is a decline in the degree to which boaters on the system become transient.

Boating recreation is very much one component of the system. As we look ahead to what the system might be, the key issue is how to accommodate the Trent-Severn to become a broader base of recreational benefit for Canadians but at the same time doing that in an environmentally sustainable way.

● (1120)

[Translation]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to the remarks of the hon. member for Simcoe North. He seems to be very aware of the situation.

Here is my question. I will preface it with an excerpt from page A 1 of the January 6, 2006 issue of the *Midland Free Press*. It reads as follows:

[English]

On local issues, the president of Bayview-Wildwood Resorts said he'll work to have Lake Simcoe listed as an area of concern, making it eligible for federal funding.

[Translation]

On the member's website, it says:

[English]

[He] is the 5th generation of the [family name] family to own and operate a tourism business on Sparrow Lake since [the family first built the present inn] in 1884.

[Translation]

I would like to ask the hon. member if he still has ties to the Bayview Wildwood Resort or if any ties he had to that industry have been severed since January 6, 2006.

[English]

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member speaks of a family business, a heritage that I have and have had for five generations. I mentioned that our family settled in this area and was one of the first settlers to operate one of the steamboats on this system way back in about 1874.

I have spoken in terms of the potential of this system. I would say to the hon. member that this is an area of Ontario that represents almost a million people who are affected by a 386 kilometre long waterway.

Many small communities from Georgian Bay to Northumberland county have a stake in the future of the system. It reaches far beyond what I or my family might have done in terms of our own business on Sparrow Lake.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Trent-Severn Waterway is an issue of great importance in my riding. Peterborough actually has the world's tallest lift lock and it operates on the Trent-Severn Waterway. We have seen declining boating numbers coming through the city of Peterborough and it has led to some hardship in our tourism industry.

I commend the hon. member for bringing the motion forward because it is a matter of great importance to central Ontario. Does the member believe that investment into the waterway would provide a return, not only to the communities directly around the waterway, but to Canada as a whole?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right and I welcome his support for the motion.

As has been demonstrated by a strategic look at how historic canals have contributed to the local economy, this has been done in New York and in Scotland where the revitalization of these canals over a long, methodical and thoughtful approach has contributed substantively to the local economy. It has created the impetus for renewal in the very small communities that dot the waterways along the shoreline.

We would need to look at this in a very cautious way. I think this is a very long term process. The evidence exists to suggest that this would be the kind of investment that would clearly benefit Canadians in the long term.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion. I was drawn to it for a particular reason. About two or three years ago I started an outdoor caucus which grew to be very strong. It is amazing how many members of Parliament have a significant interest in the outdoors, not only boating and fishing, but camping, hunting and the like. This is, as the member described in his motion, a premier asset of Canada.

I thank the member for Simcoe North for raising the issue because it is the kind of issue that demonstrates the need for parliamentarians to have a longer term view of the priorities and the necessities for us to ensure that these premier assets that we have and manage on behalf of all Canadians continue to flourish and continue to provide the kinds of accesses for visitors, domestically or from abroad, to enjoy and for their families to enjoy for many years to come.

In Motion No. 161 the member asks for a review by Environment Canada on evaluating the historic and cultural background of the Trent-Severn Waterway and tries to link that into, not only a matter of maintaining the historic and cultural base, but also to ensure it remains a premier recreational asset and a world-class destination for recreational boaters. This has a significant economic impact.

The member also calls for a greater source of clean energy. The member indicated in his speech that there were a large number of hydro generators already there and that there was some potential. Who can deny the need for us to continue to look at the opportunities for renewable clean energy sources? It is an important opportunity.

The facilitator for the economic opportunity, I think the New York case is an excellent case to show that a canal system of 575 miles and about 175 years old when it actually was first set up has become a real economic gem and in the context of maintaining an historic character to it. There is a fine balance here, which the member covered well in his last point about promoting environmental sustainability. However I do not think many Canadians understand what the terminology means.

I see the member smiling and I suspect we have some work to do. I suppose for a lay person it might be simply to describe it as we want to ensure we leave this as good if not better than when we got it from an environmental perspective. Environmental degradation is a serious problem in our society as we have often seen.

I asked the member a question a little earlier about the performance. The member indicated that the peak performance was back in 1990 and that it has not achieved those same kinds of levels since then.

When I worked within the outdoor caucus, we had briefings from fishers and anglers and some of the hunters groups. One of the things they wanted to impress upon us was the enormity of the economic impact of recreational activity, such as boating, fishing, camping and so on.

Everyone thinks that if they want to go fishing all they need is a fishing rod or something like that. It is a lot more than that. Everyone who wants to go fishing probably wants a fishing jacket and a hat. They might want to rent a boat or buy a boat. They may want to stay at a lodge. If we were to talk about the condition of the lodges in our recreational areas in some of the non-urban centres, they are

suffering. I raise this issue because I wanted to place it on the record in the hopes that Environment Canada will see it.

● (1125)

The anglers and hunters made a presentation to us in which they said that immigrants to Canada in the last 10 to 20 years often have come from countries that do not have water systems, that do not have lakes, rivers and canals. Therefore, those people have no knowledge about recreational fishing, boating and camping or about buying a trailer or a tent and sleeping bags. We should consider the ripple effect, the economic impact.

One challenge is to make sure that the infrastructure is in place. It is also going to be extremely important to ensure that the targeted market is expanded to embrace people in Canada who have not had their first taste of the outdoors. That is extremely important. Sometimes when people are asked about this, they do not have a clue about where to start.

For people who have come to Canada from an African country or somewhere like that, and have never fished in their lives, it is a foreign concept to them when somebody says that fishing is relaxing and is part of the great outdoors. Where would they go? How would they know how to do this? There is a significant opportunity here but it is a long term strategy because it involves establishing a culture of welcoming people to experience something new. The hunters and anglers were bang on in their presentation.

There is no question that 9/11 has had a very significant impact on that entire industry. The season following 9/11, people found substitute activities which were quite satisfactory for their needs. As a consequence, we have not been able to get people back in the same numbers. Every time we make a step forward, something like that makes us take a step backward.

There are many elements to this debate. It is extremely important that members understand it is not just about someone saying, "Here is an area where they seem to be doing pretty well; they just want a bit of money to make it nice". This could be one of the most substantive projects and a model for other areas of Canada not only in terms of environmental sustainability but in terms of showcasing some of the richness of Canada to our visitors and to new Canadians.

I thank the member for bringing forward the motion. I am certainly going to support it because I want to encourage Environment Canada to get together with stakeholders. This is going to involve not only Environment Canada but certainly the province, regional governments and private investors. The New York canal system is an excellent example of where the private sector has played a major role in financing the infrastructure and sharing in the wealth. At the same time it has bought in to the environmental sensitivities. We have to make sure that the waterway does not become a carnival atmosphere but is a peaceful retreat that many Canadians and visitors to Canada can enjoy.

This may not be the most glamorous subject to have come before the House, but we know how long it takes to build a hospital, an airport, or highways. Planning is necessary and we need to engage all stakeholders. Someone has to take the lead and it looks as if it should be Environment Canada.

With the right indication from Parliament, a dialogue will start to put the focus on the Trent-Severn Waterway. This may lead to the most extraordinary advancements to have been seen in many decades, an investment to benefit Canadians for generations to come.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I unfortunately have to introduce a note of discord with respect to the statements made by the previous speaker and the hon. member who introduced the bill. I have absolutely nothing against the river in question, or tourist development in general. The hon. member for Simcoe North, who introduced the bill, is very familiar with the region and the industry. He was involved with various tourist development organizations in the region: the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, Resorts of Ontario, Tourism Ontario and the Huronia Tourism Association. The problem I see, however, is with the fact that, as he told us, since 1884 his family has owned and operated tourist facilities located in the area directly affected by his bill. When I put my question to the hon. member, I was hoping he would give me a different answer.

I will remind you, Mr. Speaker, and the hon. member through you that, as we speak, his party which boasts about being whiter than white has a bill before a parliamentary committee of the House, namely Bill C-2, the accountability bill. Under this bill, any public office holder, minister or parliamentary secretary is prohibited from placing themselves directly or indirectly in a real or apparent conflict of interest situation. Granted, members of Parliament are not included.

So, theoretically, under Bill C-2, the hon. member has the right to present us with his sweet little bill. He would have it nice and neat, he wants everyone to come, everyone to say it's great. However, he is respecting neither the electoral platform of his party nor the spirit of Bill C-2, which would have all members demonstrate that they are in no way in a conflict of interest when they vote or when they table a bill. In any case, I hope that that is what the bill says, that is, that it concerns not just ministers and parliamentary secretaries, but MPs as well.

If the hon. member wishes to table a bill to improve the environment, the tourism industry, or whatever else in the administrative region he represents, he is entitled to do so. That is what all of us do here, in this chamber, when we want to improve the situation in our riding. That is the rare privilege we are afforded by a private member's bill.

Nonetheless, if I am the owner of a hotel on the edge of the St. Lawrence River in Repentigny, and through a private member's bill I ask the government for money for a feasibility study, perhaps my neighbours in Berthier, Montreal or elsewhere along the St. Lawrence would be justified in claiming that I am using my privilege as an MP to obtain money for my hotel on the river's edge. The people who would tell me that or who would tell the population that would be right. This is true for all members of the House, but above all for a member who represents the party that says it wants to be whiter than white. I have nothing against this hon. member, personally; I am just getting to know him today.

Private Members' Business

However, the question can be asked: is this hon. member respecting the spirit of Bill C-2? That is my first question. Did he ask the current ethics commissioner whether he had the right to table such a bill? That is my second question. If I am told that the answers to these questions is yes and that I am mistaken, fine! Earlier, however, when I asked the hon. member if he was still the owner of a hotel affected by the bill, he told me he was. So if there is no problem, there is at least the appearance of a problem.

In January 2006, he said quite frankly on the front page of his paper that with respect to local issues, he would work in Ottawa to put forward a project for Simcoe Lake, to which the federal government might contribute financially.

• (1135)

On his own website, he says that his family owns Bayview Wildwood Resorts Limited, and that he is vice-president of The Cottages, a family business going back five generations.

According to a company brochure, Bayview Wildwood is located in a beautiful setting on the Trent-Severn Waterway and has a great view of the lake. It sounds like a very nice countryside tourist destination.

All members of this House would like for more tourists to visit the area by boat, for the Canadian tourism industry to flourish, for everyone to be happy, for the unemployment rate to drop below 1% and for everyone to have jobs. That said, we cannot presume to use our privileges as parliamentarians to support an industry that has been in one family for five generations.

The motion states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should consider the advisability of evaluating the future of the historic Trent-Severn Waterway, one of Parks Canada's National Historic Sites, and its potential to become: (a) a premier recreational asset;

How much will that cost?

(b) a world-class destination for recreational boaters;

Why is this not being done elsewhere in Canada? There are tourists in my colleagues' ridings. I could ask the federal government, in the form of a private member's bill, to conduct a feasibility study for the Théâtre Hector-Charland in my riding. I could thus ensure the development of the theatre in order to increase the number of visitors to this major tourist destination and increase business next year. If I owned that building or the business, I am sure that my party's whip—a man who I greatly respect—would warn me that I would be in a dangerous position, being judge and jury for my own bill. That is where the problem lies.

(c) a greater source of clean, renewable electrical power;

How much money has the federal government invested in hydroelectric resources in Quebec compared to what it has invested in nuclear energy in Ontario and in what is happening in Newfoundland? A member has tabled a bill because he owns a hotel. The Liberal member that preceded him said that business has gone down a little. He is therefore asking that a feasibility study be conducted so that his hotel can be a little more profitable.

Private Members' Business

Someone has already tried that. That someone was the member for Shawinigan. It was called Shawinigate. He also sold his golf course—I do not know if there is a golf course on the member's hotel property—he signed it over on a restaurant napkin and sold it. The RCMP has been investigating this matter for who knows how long.

If the member unequivocally states that he definitely did not table the bill for his own or for his family's personal gain, if he affirms that he is in complete agreement with the accountability bill tabled by his party, that is Bill C-2, and that the ethics commissioner said he could table his bill without reservations, then the Bloc Québécois will reassess its position on whether or not to support this bill.

In principle, the bill in general is good; however, we must be prudent when we are the judge in our own case. That is what happens when we are elected. We must consider our personal affairs from a different perspective. We must not become the main lobbyist for our own company. The term lobbyist is very popular among my Conservative friends.

If light is shed on these points, if we respect Bill C-2 and the conflict of interest code for members of the House of Commons, if the ethics commissioner confirms that there is no conflict of interest, then we shall see whether or not we will support this bill. However, what appears to be just apple pie is much more than that. We would like further information on this matter.

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the motion brought before us encouraging the government to engage in an evaluation of the Trent-Severn Waterway is one that is certainly attractive to support and one that I would support.

I must admit that I am disturbed by the information that has come out this morning from my colleague from the Bloc with regard to the member for Simcoe North who has moved this private member's motion. There appears that there may be the potential for a conflict between his personal financial interests and the outcome of this evaluation. Presumably, if it is a positive evaluation of additional work required and money being spent by the federal government, he and his family might benefit. I think it might behoove him to follow the advice from our colleague from the Bloc and investigate the propriety of this, in terms of him moving the motion, with the Ethics Commissioner.

Having said that, with regard to the merits of the motion itself, this evaluation appears to be a very attractive approach. I have been on the Trent-Severn Waterway a number of times over the years, at a number of different locations, vacationing with my family, and one can see the potential there.

As I was doing some of the background research, I was disturbed at the reduction in the use of the waterway by private and recreational boaters. I think that fact alone would militate in favour of the evaluation being done.

It is an extremely important waterway, from the perspective of our historical heritage and culture. There are any number of sites along the waterway that teach us a fair amount about our first nations, our aboriginal population, and early European settlement and commercial developments that occurred in various spots along the waterway.

As I mentioned earlier, from my own experience as a tourist and from a recreational standpoint, there are some great advantages of the waterway if one is interested in that, whether one is fishing, boating, or just out for some time in quiet areas of parkland, all of which are along this substantial stretch of waterway. One can again see a real potential for further development. The comments we heard from the member for Mississauga South were interesting, from the standpoint of economic and environmental sustainability, the two going hand in hand.

From an environmental standpoint one could see that, where the human footprint has been applied to the natural environment, additional development could occur without that footprint being expanded whatsoever.

Within those limits, we would like to say it would be possible to do that, which would allow greater access by more tourists, more people engaging in recreational activity and the potential for additional commercial traffic along that waterway as well.

I believe, from minor assessments I have done, that it would be possible to expand services already in existence without expanding the human footprint and damaging the natural environment. That makes it very attractive.

In terms of the economic opportunities here, it begs the question and hopefully, if this evaluation does go ahead we would be looking for partners. Obviously, the province of Ontario is potentially a significant beneficiary here for the production of hydroelectric power if nothing else, but also the economic activity that would go on would benefit the residents of the province and would generate revenue for the province.

• (1145)

If the evaluation does go ahead, if we do an in-depth assessment both from an environmental standpoint and an economic standpoint, the province of Ontario would be invited to join in funding that and creating the mandate for that study along with Parks Canada or whatever department from the federal level would be involved.

In addition, clearly the private sector has a role to play here. It will, to a great extent, be the major beneficiary if there is further development, expansion and improvements along the waterway. That has certainly been the experience from what I have been able to read in New York State and what I have observed in both England and Scotland where they have done a significant amount of work to enhance the attractiveness of the use of their canal system.

In both those countries, the private sector, whether it be tourist lodges, boaters, or people who sell equipment for recreational purposes, all do benefit. Again, both in terms of designing the study, the assessment and paying for it, the private sector certainly has a role to play. I can see at the end of the day that all three, the province, the private sector and the federal government, would be involved designing the study, so that the mandate is clear, the scope of the study is clear, and that it covers all of the points that each one of those partners would be interested in having covered and also assisting in the funding of it.

Private Members' Business

I wish to comment regarding the point about hydroelectric power. When we consider what we are facing nationally in terms of energy shortages and looking for clean alternative fuels, there is an existing system that could be further developed with what would appear to be no additional damage to the natural environment. A substantial increase in megawatts would be produced from that system. It seems it is one of those we should be getting onto right away. Maybe that should be one of the early parts of the study, so if there are developments that could be conducted, if there are enhancements that could be made to the plants, we should be moving on that as quickly as possible.

It is interesting that one of the first plants that was developed privately back around 1910 is at Big Chute along the waterway. It was one of the first plants that was bought by Ontario Hydro, called the commission at that time. It was in effect one of the initiators of the grid that we have across the province of Ontario which for a long period of time has been a major source of economic activity.

It is interesting that Ontario Hydro started to acquire those private plants, one of the substantial ones at Big Chute. It is still there. It is still operating, from what I understand not at its peak efficiency and that enhancements would allow it to expand, as would be the case in a number of the smaller plants along the waterway. It would appear that we could double, perhaps triple, the amount of hydro that is created from the waterway if we modernized and expanded within the scope of not causing any environmental damage. That would be available to the communities on the waterway throughout the whole stretch.

Let me conclude by urging the mover of this motion to investigate my concern about the potential conflict. I would also urge the government to respond to the motion, not just by accepting it in its general format but by seriously studying the availability of funds and the wisdom of putting funds behind this type of study. It would have to be a substantial study to cover the whole waterway and to cover all of the issues that crop up. It would appear there is a very strong potential here for economic development, the betterment of the environment, and one that we should be pursuing as a government.

• (1150)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak today to Motion No. 161 introduced by the hon. member for Simcoe North. I want to thank him for his work on this important issue on the future of the Trent-Severn Waterway.

The waterway has a special meaning for all Canadians. Its full title is the Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site of Canada, and its designation as a national historic site bespeaks the fact that the waterway has genuine national historic significance and helped to shape the history of our country.

The waterway is a place of great natural beauty as well. The splendour and variety of its scenery is one of the waterway's greatest assets. For example, a boater travelling northward from the Bay of Quinte through the Trent River Valley will pass through lush farmlands, marshes rich with wildlife, and waterfalls and rocky gorges.

Rice Lake, with the distinctive teardrop-shaped drumlins that form its islands, marks the start of the Kawartha Lakes region. Shorelines

blaze with colour in the fall, and so it goes with scenery and features of equal quality for nearly 400 kilometres, all the way to Georgian Bay.

The Trent-Severn Waterway is a rich tapestry woven with many of the stories of Canada that define us as a nation. It is a story of transportation. Native people have travelled the waterway lakes for thousands of years and archeological sites found through the area point to the importance of this transportation and migration route.

Samuel de Champlain travelled these waters, as did voyageurs. The waterway has seen the transport of great rafts of timber cut by loggers who were hurling down the pine and the romance of steam-powered excursion boats.

It is a story of sustenance, of courage and endurance, and of the evolution of Canada's economy, from ancient aboriginal fish weirs to early agricultural and lumbering economies, to the dams and the mills that were built to power industry, and that morphed into power generation and the birth of the industrial economy. The Mnjikaning fish weirs are a fascinating example of the ingenious technologies for survival developed by native people a millennia ago, and are a national historic site in their own right.

It is story of the engineering creativity and adaptation that were part and parcel of Canada's development, of canal locks that are almost a century and a half old, two ingenious and breathtaking lift locks, one of the world's earliest concrete arch bridges, and more. The Peterborough lift lock alone is a sight to behold. It is an engineering marvel, an elevator for boats that lifts and lowers watercraft a spectacular 19.8 metres and is yet another national historic site.

The concrete arch bridge near Bolsover is one of the earliest examples of this type of structure. It is a story of our political evolution with chapters that speak to the Family Compact, Upper Canada, Macdonald and Laurier.

The waterway's four national historic sites offer unprecedented opportunities to tell these stories to Canadians and to guests from around the world. Some 8 million to 10 million people live within a two to three hour drive of the waterway and there are some 50 million people only a day's drive away. New Canadians, particularly from the greater Toronto area, make up a significant segment of the waterway's visitation. What a wonderful opportunity the waterway presents to help them get acquainted with their new country.

In the same vein, hundreds of thousands of school children live along the waterway. Given Parks Canada's mandate for education, the waterway has exciting potential to make Canada's history come alive and become real for these children. Parks Canada has an opportunity to tell the waterway stories and to engage Canadians in their history.

Moreover, this government wants to foster a culture of heritage appreciation in Canada. To do this, we need to ensure that our history is protected and preserved, and this means that from a practical point of view, we need to reflect on which governance and operational models will permit Parks Canada to focus its mandate and expertise on the Trent-Severn Waterway, so that its marvellous tales of Canada can be told to present and future generations.

Government Orders

It is important to begin by understanding what makes a historic site a national historic site and what Parks Canada's mandate is for overseeing our nationwide system of national historical sites.

• (1155)

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada has been at work since 1919. It is made up of respected historians and specialists from every province and territory of Canada, and it works closely with Parks Canada to promote and protect Canada's heritage.

One of the board's most important responsibilities is to make recommendations to the Minister of the Environment, who is responsible for the board and for the Parks Canada Agency, regarding the commemoration of people, places and events of national historical significance. Since the establishment in 1919, the board has designated more than 1,800 people, places and events as being worthy of commemoration. The total includes a country wide family of 155 national historic sites administered by Parks Canada, which stretches from sea to sea to sea.

Let us consider for a moment the challenges facing the Trent-Severn Waterway. The essential infrastructure of the waterway has been deteriorating and in places is badly in need of repair and rebuilding. That includes bridges, canal locks and dams. Some of these generate hydroelectricity and some are for water and flood control purposes.

Some have asked, is it not the responsibility of Parks Canada to fix the waterway? That is a good question. The Trent-Severn Waterway was built over several phases of early construction in 1833 and opened to navigation in 1920. Parks Canada assumed control of the waterway only in 1972. This included all responsibilities for water management and shoreline development.

The federal government's jurisdiction for the waterway rests primarily in the historic canal regulations, as mandated under the Department of Transport Act. To put it simply, the federal government owns the waterbed of the navigable waters and that is it. The present management structures for the waterway and its associated governance date back to the turn of the century and they emphasize navigation.

The legislative and regulatory framework, under which Parks Canada holds its present responsibilities, never envisaged the present conditions of exploiting growth and use of the waterway. Nor was it designed to cope with them. Moreover, let us take a brief look at Parks Canada's mandate for national historic sites. Its primary mandate under the Parks Canada Agency Act is:

To foster knowledge and appreciation of Canada's past through a national program of historical commemoration.

Parks Canada has a very specific mandate to protect culturally significant resources, ensure public education and understanding and to provide for first class visitor experiences.

The waterway is not a national park, so Parks Canada does not have the authority to treat it as a national park with regard to safeguarding environmental quality. Parks Canada has a mandate to foster heritage appreciation across Canada and to ensure that visitors to our national historic sites have a high quality experience.

Asking the agency on its own to maintain and restore one of Canada's major and most complex waterways over which many jurisdictions have powers, is asking too much. The challenges facing the waterway simply cannot be addressed by one jurisdiction. We would be limiting ourselves only to the tools within Parks Canada's toolbox for maintaining national historic sites.

The way forward, with regard to the Trent-Severn Waterway, is clear. Its problems must be clearly defined and then addressed through a collaborative effort of all stakeholders.

I am very optimistic about the future of the Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site of Canada. Many people and non-governmental organizations are hard at work already doing their part with great community spirit to preserve the waterway and its heritage for the benefit and enjoyment for future generations.

One organization, in particular, I want to acknowledge and thank is the Friends of the Trent-Severn Waterway, who deeply care about the waterway's future. If all the partners and stakeholders come together and embrace their responsibilities, the waterway will remain a living, vital resource that includes individual property owners, the business community, hydro operators, municipalities, the province and the federal government.

By supporting the motion, we can support and start to focus high level and strategic attention this issue in a way that develops ownership by key interests in the future of the waterway. I encourage all members to support the motion.

• (1200)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business is now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from June 9 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.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): When the House last discussed Bill C-10, there were five minutes remaining in the period of questions and comments for the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Winnipeg Centre for his remarks on Bill C-10 last Friday. I know he had some very interesting things to say.

I have some concerns about Bill C-10 and the approach of the government. To deal with crime, it sometimes appears to me that the government wants more people in jail and an expansion of the prison system.

Government Orders

I know the member for Winnipeg Centre talked about a more holistic approach, a more multi-faceted approach to crime prevention, which was evident in his community of Winnipeg. In my community of Burnaby, the Burnaby Restorative Action Group is trying to take that kind of an approach to solving some of the crime issues in our society.

Could the member expand further on the work being done in Winnipeg on this more holistic approach to crime prevention?

• (1205)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right. At the end of the hours allocated for debate on Bill C-10 on Friday, I was trying to share with the House some of the innovative ideas that the NDP government of Manitoba had been introducing in seeking to address these criminal justice issues.

I went through the importance of opportunities for youth. Much of the activity or the irritant bothering people in the inner city of Winnipeg is seen to be youth gang related. The attorney general of Manitoba, the Hon. Gord Mackintosh, has talked about a three-legged stool in criminal justice issues. He has said that one of the key legs is economic opportunities for youth, a sense of involvement, a sense of inclusion. This is key and instrumental in satisfying the concerns of people and safety issues.

Another key leg on this three-legged stool is a newly developed idea that has recently been introduced into law in Manitoba. My colleague from Burnaby—Douglas and my colleague, the justice critic for the NDP, from Windsor—Tecumseh may be interested in knowing more about this. We are trying to make it so that crime does not pay.

In that vein, we have introduced legislation where the government can seize the proceeds of crime, which it deems or considers to be proceeds. If the provincial government can demonstrate to a judge what it believes to be proceeds of crime, then there is a reverse onus situation. People holding that property would have to demonstrate, beyond reasonable doubt, that they did not purchase the products with the proceeds of crime. This has been a powerful tool. It reverses the burden of proof and the onus.

Let me give an example of a recent case. A known patch member of a motorcycle gang was living in a \$600,000 to \$700,000 house, which in Winnipeg is an expensive house. That would be a couple of million dollars by Toronto standards. The driveway was full of power boats, motorcycles and all the toys and luxury items that one could possibly imagine. Yet there were no visible means of income for the past many years.

The question was put to the individual whether he had won a lottery or had inherited money from a rich uncle who passed away. He was unable to demonstrate, in any way, where the money had come from to allow him to live in such a luxurious setting.

The government had pretty good evidence that the items were purchased from proceeds of crime, but not quite enough to charge him criminally. Roughly \$600,000 worth of material things, luxury items, were seized. That money is dedicated to further enforcement. It does not only go into general revenue. The money goes into policing and catching more people.

If crime is not profitable, there will be less crime. This is another tool in the toolbox of law enforcement officials that puts the burden of proof where it belongs, on criminals to prove that they purchased the products, the bling bling, through legitimately earned money and not the proceeds of crime.

I would like to add that to the mix for the consideration of all members as we address this pressing issue.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are here today to discuss Bill C-10, mandatory minimum sentences and their effectiveness.

Every MP in the House wants to make Canada a safer place to live. I am sure no one would debate this point.

It is good that we are having this debate on mandatory minimums now because they could have a major effect on making our society more or less dangerous. This debate gives all MPs a chance to review what the experts have had to say, what experience has shown and what the facts are. I had no opinion coming into this debate so this review is important to me.

From some of the research, it has quickly become evident that mandatory minimums do not work. Our prison system is overburdened. Individuals are being let off when they should not be. Long incarceration is not helping our prison system. Those who vote for the bill will be making Canada a more dangerous place to live and will be putting our law-abiding citizens at risk. I will go into more details on how this will happen later on in my speech.

Criminologists, judges and prison wardens have told us that mandatory minimums do not work. Let us look at some of that evidence, some of which we have heard from previous speakers, particularly the former minister of justice.

Let me quote from the Conservative justice minister a few weeks ago on CTV's *Canada AM*. He said, "The evidence in Canada is not particularly persuasive one way or another". Doob and Cesaroni said in 2001, in the *Osgoode law journal* that "All Canadian commissions since 1952 have suggested abolishing mandatory minimums".

What about around the world? "The story of the failure of mandatory penalties is at least three centuries old" said Michael Tonry in "Crime & Justice: A Review of Research", University of Chicago Press 1992.

Let us look at the United States, which is often referenced with respect to mandatory minimums. When it brought in the three strike law for mandatory minimums, in some states it was applied stringently, in others it was hardly used at all. The sentence did not affect deterrence. It was no more a deterrent when it was applied as compared to when it was not. Doob and Cesaroni said that the three strike legislation was a spectacular failure.

The American Sentencing Commission, the Canadian Sentencing Commission, the Canadian Bar Association and the American Bar Association have all concluded that mandatory minimums do not work.

Government Orders

Perhaps the Prime Minister and justice minister should have paid more attention to the Australian delegation. Let me quote some Australian facts. The Australian governments responsible for those mandatory minimums “have effectively conceded that mandatory sentences have no deterrent effect, and that there is a need for judicial discretion and the more vigorous use of diversionary schemes and alternative strategies”. Those are the tools that Canada has used to reduce crime so much in recent years. This quote came from Doob and Cesaroni, “Mandatory Minimums, U of T, March 16, 2001.

Even the five studies referred to by the justice minister himself have indicated that the minister is flat wrong.

I would like to quote a summary on mandatory minimums. “Reams of studies show that the Tory approach is expensive and futile”. That was Dan Gardner in the Ottawa Citizen on May 11. I could include the leader of the NDP in that.

It is not just judges, experts, the facts, the research, the criminologist and the wardens who believe mandatory minimums do not work. Canadians believe this also. “When given the ability to make a more thoughtful response, the public is clear. If a person has to choose between building more prisons or investing in alternatives to imprisonment or in crime prevention, prisons lose the vote”. This was by David Garland in “The Culture of High Crime in Society”, British Journal of Criminology 2000.

• (1210)

Now that the facts are clear, Parliament should do the right thing. I will assume it was an honest mistake when the justice minister said on CTV's *Canada AM* that that is not the experience in many other jurisdictions where targeted mandatory minimums have had a huge deterrent effect. Study after study, some of which I quoted, say no, that is not the case. In trying to find a few that supported his case in spite of the overwhelming majority against it, the minister and the department dug up only five studies. When those studies were analyzed by Dan Gardner, it was found that none demonstrated the huge deterrent that the minister claimed. In fact, one of them, the most recent high quality review, proved outright that the minister was wrong.

It would be a very serious offence to mislead Canadians and Parliament. It is a great honour and responsibility to be a minister. I therefore call on the minister to do the right thing and apologize for the error.

The facts are quite clear. Mandatory minimums do not work. To vote for this bill would ultimately put more dangerous criminals on the streets and would make the streets less safe for Canadians. I will outline 10 reasons.

One, the millions of dollars that would be spent on incarceration which does not work could be spent on hiring more police officers.

Two, the millions of dollars could be spent on stopping illegal guns at the border.

Three, judges would lose the flexibility to sign the optimum rehabilitation sentence which would most likely protect citizens in the long run. This has a particularly prejudicial effect on aboriginal

people, as a much higher proportion of the population in prisons is aboriginal.

People have to remember that virtually all inmates are released from prison. We have to look at what their status will be and what ability they will have not to reoffend when they come out of prison.

Four, mandatory minimum sentences would add to the overburdening of the prisons and would stress already insufficient rehabilitation budgets.

Five, it would dilute the addiction treatment which is available in prisons.

Six, it would reduce the anger management therapy which is so badly needed in prisons.

Seven, overburdened prisons would reduce the academic and technology training and apprenticeship training to help people fit back into society.

The millions of dollars that would be saved by not incarcerating people because it would not be effective could be invested in the treatments I mentioned in reasons four to seven. The money could be invested in many crime prevention programs which have proven to be effective in reducing crime in Canada.

Eight, it has been proven that people who stay in prison are less likely to reintegrate into society and are more likely to reoffend. In fact, the studies done in Canada by the solicitor general showed a 3% increase in recidivism. Often we are hardening criminals by leaving them in prison longer. This is particularly true for northerners. In the remote communities because people are sent such a far distance to jail, they lose the support from their families. They are therefore more likely to have a worse outcome as opposed to fitting into society and being healed and cured.

Nine, judges and prosecutors would recommend probation or lesser sentences when the person should receive a harsher sentence than that, but the mandatory minimum sentence might be too harsh for the crime.

Ten, judges and juries would accept more plea bargaining or not convict at all instead of forcing an unreasonable sentence on a person, thus making the streets less safe, according to a Department of Justice firearms task force report.

A Conservative member made a very cogent comment on the bill last week. To paraphrase what he said, he asked what if it was the wife or daughter of a Conservative member, or an NDP member, I would add, who was injured or attacked by a criminal on a street that had been made more dangerous for one of the 10 reasons that I mentioned if we vote in favour of this bill? For parliamentarians who carefully and professionally study the facts, the answer will be easy and they will vote against the bill, but there will be some soul searching—

• (1215)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I was trying to give the member notice when there were two minutes, one minute, and 30 seconds remaining in his time, which has expired.

Government Orders

[Translation]

The hon. member for Ahuntsic.

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as a criminologist who specialized in street gangs, it is a pleasure for me to speak on this bill. It is therefore from the standpoint of a criminologist, and not that of a politician, that I speak today.

As a criminologist, unfortunately I cannot say that this is a great bill. I really wish I could have said it was, but I just cannot. I think that all of us in this House want to combat crime and make Canada and Quebec safer, but the reality is that crime cannot be wiped out. Crime is a social phenomenon that is part of any society. To say that minimum sentences and building prisons would wipe out crime would be deceitful.

It is important to understand that repression is but one approach among many. There are many different ways to deal with crime besides building prisons, increasing law enforcement personnel, stiffening penalties and imposing minimum sentences. It can be done through prevention and rehabilitation.

Any good criminologist will tell you that prison is a school for crime, where inmates hone their skills. It is also a place for rehabilitation. We must therefore be more nuanced in our approach to this extremely complex phenomenon.

In the United States, we have a fine example of crime suppression, that is, of employing a get-tough approach to crime management. We can see that the crime rate in that country is not declining. Is that the road to follow? In my opinion, the answer is no.

It is very important to understand that in crime management—or in sentence management—we are not executioners. I believe we are no longer living in the Middle Ages. We are not executioners, we are legislators. Therefore we must produce intelligent legislation—or at least try to do so—and not base ourselves on the *lex talionis* of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Sentencing must be fair, intelligent and above all individualized; it must not be based on emotion.

Before getting to the heart of the subject of this bill, I would like to speak to you about street gangs. Street gangs frighten us. We are all afraid of them, both the population and the police who cannot manage to resolve this problem. So what are we doing? We are reverting to a kind of witch hunt accompanied by get-tough measures. Why? Simply because we are afraid of street gangs.

It is important to understand that to counter society's feeling of insecurity and fear—legitimate fear—we have to inform that society and not use its fear to control it. Whatever we think, that is what is happening now in the United States, under the concept of terrorism.

I will take this opportunity to offer an example of positive action to combat street gangs. I offer this information to the population of Ahuntsic. We will be holding an information forum on street gangs on June 17, from 12:30 to 5:30 p.m. at the Ahuntsic CEGEP. All sorts of people will be coming to speak about this phenomenon and demystify it. Here is one productive way to combat street gangs and recruitment to them.

In addition, prevention with young people is crucial. We have to prevent this recruitment. A great deal of this is already being done,

by numerous organizations. Within the police itself, social and community officers are going into schools to talk about street gangs. However, let us ask ourselves this question. How do we react to the fact of a government investing \$20 million in prevention and \$1 billion in suppression? It is incredible!

There is one important thing. When we talk about gangs, a small group of young people displaying criminal behaviour does not constitute a street gang. There are major gangs, which are very well organized. These are involved in narcotics trafficking and prostitution. They make millions and billions of dollars a year, and have very close ties to organized crime. These gangs use the sweat and blood of children to sell their dope and execute contracts to kill people. That is clear.

But are we going to go after these children or are we going to go after these adults 25, 30 and 35 years old who are filling their pockets and own big houses and Hummers?

• (1220)

We need to think about what we are going after.

An 18-year-old, who has reached the age of majority, is incarcerated in the Leclerc detention centre. He is a very proud member of the Crypts. Where is he placed? With the Hells Angels at the Leclerc detention centre. Great. We are furthering his education. That is the reality of life in prison.

Repression poses another problem, and that is racial profiling. Of course, we have the profile of a typical gang member: black, Arab or Latino, wearing jeans backwards and a red or blue bandanna. In crime repression, we have to be careful not to get into racial profiling. Ethnic origin does not mean street gangs. This is very important. However this is not how we perceive street gangs today.

I am giving the example of street gangs to show that this bill will not address the phenomenon of street gangs. We have to deal with the root of the problem. Sure, we can exercise repression and arrest adults. But we need to think about prevention for minors and youth.

One nonsensical aspect of this bill made me laugh. On the one hand, the government wants to eliminate the requirement to register hunting rifles. On the other hand, it wants to exempt hunting rifles from this bill.

Yet 35% of homicides committed with firearms involve hunting rifles. Do members know that from 1994 to 2003, 67% or two thirds of homicides involving children and youth that were solved were committed by a family member?

In addition, 76% of murder-suicides that occurred between 1961 and 2003 involved family members and were usually committed with a firearm. Of course, 38% of children between 7 and 17 who are murdered by a family member are killed with a firearm.

Firearms are the weapons most commonly used in spousal murder-suicides and are used in 64% of murder-suicides committed by male spouses.

Government Orders

We are not talking about street gangs, but ordinary citizens at home with their family. That is one thing. As well, I do not believe that these people collect handguns. I think that they collect hunting rifles. We therefore have to ask ourselves questions about that.

I wonder what this government really wants. Does it want to reduce crime? Does it want to drum up business for the firearm and maybe the hunting rifle lobbies? Are we sending gang members the message that they should use hunting rifles because that way they can slip through the loopholes?

With its repressive approach, this bill is not good as far as crime is concerned. This cocktail of minimum sentences cannot produce the results the government is seeking. It is legitimate and it is fine; we all want to reduce crime. However, we will vote against it; at least I will.

I would like to make one small clarification, though, because it is something I feel strongly about. There is one form of crime for which I am in favour of minimum sentences, namely sexual assault. I am totally in favour of a minimum punishment in such cases. This is not with a view to repression, however, but to rehabilitation.

I worked with sex offenders for a long time, and I know that an individual who goes into prison and comes out without following any programs or treatment, or without any psychological follow-up, is very dangerous. An individual who goes into any penitentiary spends from six to nine months in a regional reception centre. He is subsequently sent to another penitentiary. Once there, the individual must think about whether he really wants to follow a course of treatment. It may take three, four, five or six months, even a year. Then the treatment is one year long, with follow-up inside or outside. Do we think that a sentence of two years plus a day will enable a sex offender to be rehabilitated? In my opinion, no. I have seen it, I have been through it, and I have worked with these people.

What I can say, though, is that we cannot cure a sex offender. We can only help him to control himself and make him less dangerous. So there has to be a minimum sentence for this type of offence, in light of the time it takes to administer the sentence in prison.

• (1225)

As we can see, the Criminal Code is extremely complex. We cannot amend it indiscriminately. It is important to amend it intelligently, carefully, and to base our struggle against crime not only on repression, but rather on rehabilitation, integration in the labour market and prevention, in addition to combating poverty and intolerance.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to use my period for comments and questions to finish the last bit of my speech and ask the member if she agrees with what I am about to say.

As I was saying, for parliamentarians who carefully and professionally study the facts, the answer will be easy, and they will vote against the bill, but there will be soul-searching for some, for Conservative members and for the leader of the NDP who may have jumped to apparently reasonable conclusions before having all the facts.

This will be a very challenging moment for them. We will all wait to see what choice they make. Will some members be no better than a lynch mob or a flat earth society pretending to be uninformed and fanning the destructive fires of rumour and revenge? Or will they—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, as interesting as I find the comments from my colleague from Yukon in hearing the rest of his speech, I wonder what bearing it has on the speech in terms of questions and comments of the other valid points that my colleague—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): We are in questions and comments. The hon. member is making a comment and presumably will ask the other member what the tie-in is. He has already announced it.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the reason why what I am saying is very appropriate is that the member who just spoke was making supporting statements to everything I am saying now, and I think she is going to agree. I am asking her, based on what she said, which is very similar to what I said on rehabilitation, et cetera, if she agrees with me.

I have just two more sentences. Will the leader of the NDP and the Conservatives make this decision not based on the facts or will they live up to the great NDP tradition of supporting holistic approaches to rehabilitation and judges' professionalism in designing the most effective remedies to keep our streets safe? Who among the Conservatives, with the highest degree of knowledge, professionalism, evidence, study and thoughtfulness, will have the moral courage to vote to make our streets safer as the evidence and the facts dictate by voting no? I wish them courage in their deliberations.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak for the other parties. I can only speak on behalf of my own party or myself.

My statement was very clear: I think that this bill is fundamentally bad. Repressing crime is neither the most useful nor the most efficient way to fight it. We have seen proof all over the world that this approach does not work.

Unfortunately, crime scares us and gives rise to very primal human emotions: vengeance, retribution, our inner executioner. That is understandable. We experience these feelings when we watch TV and see a sexual predator get off after molesting several children. That is normal and I understand it.

I understand that this party, the Conservative government—and it looks like the NDP is on board too—has this need for retribution. However, we must ask ourselves what we want. We want to protect our society, our people, our children, our women, our spouses, our siblings, our parents, and our elderly.

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With that in mind, what is the best way to reduce crime? Repression has its place, of course, but it must not always be the first option. We must find a fair balance between prevention and rehabilitation. When I say repression, I am not talking about punitive repression, but about incarceration for the purpose of rehabilitation. That means that prisons must be more than just walls. We must invest money in programs offered in prisons. That is what we must do. We must also be careful. Programs for women are not the same as programs for men. We must be careful about that. There are women in Joliette who do not have all of the programs they need.

We must therefore invest money in the right things: prevention, rehabilitation, education and employment. The latter is very important. Why would a young person decide to go make \$6,000 a week in a certain neighbourhood, which I will not name here—

• (1235)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, often the best of intentions go awry. Unintended consequences and terrible results can come from acts that were seemingly simplistic. Such is the case with Bill C-10.

The thinking behind this bill is certainly simplistic enough: jail the bad guy and crime disappears. The unfortunate part of Bill C-10 and its companion piece, Bill C-9, is that this is the only idea the Conservatives have had about justice: the start and the end of crime is prisons and nothing else.

As Canadians, we abhor crime and violence, and rightly so, but we also denounce injustice and inequality. Our concept of Canada as a just society demands nothing less. However, there is injustice in Canada, social injustice, and it is etched in the history of our aboriginal people.

In a response to one of my questions, the Minister of Indian Affairs said that the first agenda he dealt with was the advancement of social justice for aboriginal people. I would suggest that either this is clearly not the case or the rest of cabinet did not get that memo.

Bill C-10 is a case in point. It talks about crime and it hits all the good fear buttons, but the justice minister is not looking at a holistic approach, a consultative approach or a community-building approach to eradicating crime in aboriginal communities.

The bleak numbers in a study released last week by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics have depicted this history as incredibly brutal and harsh for all aboriginal people. Aboriginal Canadians have the terrible distinction of being more likely to be victims and more likely to be jailed than non-aboriginal Canadians.

The study reveals that 40% of aboriginal people over the age of 15 reported being victims of crime in the 12 months prior to being interviewed for the study, which is 12% higher than non-aboriginal Canadians. Aboriginal people were twice as likely to be repeat victims, three times more likely to be robbed, assaulted or raped, and three and a half times more likely to be the victims of spousal assault.

On reserve, the reality for many aboriginal people is even worse. Compared to national averages, aboriginal people on reserve are eight times more likely to be assaulted and seven times more likely to be sexually assaulted.

These are unfortunate realities. Therefore, the first question is this: has incarceration been the solution? Has locking up and throwing away the key been the answer?

These numbers persist despite the fact that aboriginal people have an incredibly higher rate of incarceration. In fact, although aboriginal people make up only 3% of the Canadian population, they made up 20% of the provincial inmates and 18% of the federal inmates.

In Saskatchewan, this number explodes. Although aboriginal people are approximately 11% of the population in the province, they comprise 80% of the people in jails.

The situation is so grim, in fact, as stated by Larry Chartrand, head of the aboriginal governance program at the University of Winnipeg, that young aboriginal people “have a greater chance of landing behind bars than graduating from university”.

Let me repeat that: young Canadian aboriginal people have a greater chance of landing behind bars than graduating from university, and this in Canada, the home of the just society.

There is no mystery to these terrible numbers. These studies lay out stark terms. They list a number of factors that have been associated with higher rates of victimization and offending. On average, aboriginal people are younger. Their unemployment rates are higher and their incomes lower. They are more likely to be involved in crowded conditions. They have a higher residential mobility. Aboriginal children are more likely to be members of single parent families.

In spite of noticeable improvements to education levels, there is still a noticeable education gap between aboriginal people and non-aboriginal people. The gaps in education and employment opportunities are reflected in the aboriginal people who are in these correctional institutions. Three-quarters of incarcerated aboriginal adults have not completed their secondary school education. Also, aboriginal Canadians were less likely to be employed at the time of incarceration.

There is a problem that needs to be responded to. Therefore, we have a second question. Will mandatory minimum penalties and more jail time address or improve these statistics? The answer, very clearly, is no.

• (1240)

My colleagues have surgically dissected the justice minister's sparse evidence rather easily. The reality is that the justice minister has no evidence to support Bill C-10. In fact, various studies have demonstrated that tougher penalties do not deter crime. Evidence suggests they increase reoffending and recidivism by 3%.

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Furthermore, as one of my colleagues stated, the law of unintended consequences kicks in, with increased prison populations, an increased aboriginal population in prison, increased prison costs for taxpayers, and decreased spending on other aspects of the justice system, the net effect being no improvement to ensuring safer streets and safer communities.

Saskatchewan's justice minister has voiced his concern that the Conservative measures will result in yet an even higher percentage of aboriginal people in jail. Saskatchewan has worked hard to address this issue. The concern is a reality. The Library of Parliament has noted that Australian studies have shown that mandatory minimums have a disproportionate effect on aboriginal offenders.

The 2003 study by the Northern Territory of Australia showed that 73% of all people subject to certain mandatory terms were indigenous. This study concluded that "the length of the minimum sentence was not an effective deterrent for the population known to have been subject to mandatory sentencing" and that "available data suggests that sentencing policy does not measurably influence levels" of crime. In fact, Australia went as far as to repeal this legislation in 2001.

There are more concerns than the major issue of disproportionate impact that these laws will have on aboriginals.

There are concerns about wrongful conviction through plea bargaining, because some accused individuals may have a fear of being faced with a justice system unfamiliar to them.

There are concerns about an added stress for an already overcrowded and under-resourced legal aid system.

Finally, there is the grim spectre of individuals being hauled to an overcrowded prison that is bursting at the seams with lifelong criminals and thinly stretched correctional service officers.

Saskatchewan's justice minister has called the Conservative approach "not focused or strategic". He summed up his feelings by saying, "I don't think any of this has been thought out".

If the federal justice minister were truly interested in dealing with crime and particularly the terrible toll it has taken on aboriginal people, he would do well to reference the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and any number of the over three dozen judicial inquiries, commissions and reports that have been completed over the last two decades. They have all arrived at the same conclusions: focus on the root causes; focus on restorative and rehabilitative measures; and empower aboriginal communities to deal with their own justice issues.

A way to ensure that we can respond to this challenge is to empower aboriginal communities to deal with justice issues at their level. For example, there is the MKO model in northern Manitoba. Aboriginal communities can adapt policies and strategies to build a justice system within the principles and procedures of the existing Canadian system. Aboriginal people have not had experience dealing with the justice system. Rather, they have experienced dealings with the legal system, focusing on punishment and no restorative and preventive resources.

The Conservative government moved further toward a one size fits all approach and "father knows best" attitude that has been the

case far too often. Aboriginal communities must be allowed to develop a justice system that respects their culture and history, encourages healing and erases the victimization and exclusion that has occurred for so many years.

Mr. Chartrand, the head of the aboriginal governance program at U of W, whom I quoted earlier, had another suggestion for the government to combat this tragedy: it should rethink its Kelowna accord commitments. When the government heard these numbers of victimization and incarceration, it dismissed the Kelowna accord yet again and said that the government will commit more money and set its own course. The government just does not get it.

Were my people clamouring for the Conservatives to renegotiate Kelowna? I have not heard one word of that. As a matter of fact, we have heard outcries for the government to move forward, but we should not be surprised that the government has taken these actions. Bill C-10 and Bill C-9 unfairly target aboriginal people.

Let us look at the record. On child care, there is no provision for aboriginal child care or early learning. On taxation, there is increased income tax for those with the lowest incomes, which is the case for most aboriginal people. As for health wait times, aboriginal people cannot even get access to primary health care. On accountability, Bill C-2 promotes the stereotype that first nations are not accountable. On safer streets, we see the evidence that this will increase incarceration rates for aboriginal people and will provide no support for preventive measures.

I call upon the government to live up to our reputation as a just society.

• (1245)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to what the hon. member had to say and I agree with many of his points but I do not think he was speaking to Bill C-10. As we know, Bill C-10 sets out mandatory minimum sentences for violent crime.

I recently had an opportunity to tour Warkworth Institution and I must say that the federal system of prisons is quite effective in rehabilitating prisoners and making them better members of society. Only by getting into the federal system will they have this opportunity.

Furthermore, I think the member is speaking to the failures of the previous government, and I condemn the previous government for the conditions that currently exist in Saskatchewan in the provincial system of prisons. Is the member not speaking of the failures of the previous government and not the initiatives of this government?

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Speaker, I do not think anybody should aspire to get the help they need in a prison system. The whole intent of a justice system is to ensure we provide the necessary social safety net to prevent them from getting there in the first place.

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The previous government worked extremely hard to address these issues and initiated a five point strategy: one, tougher laws and proportionate penalties; two, more effective law enforcement; three, recognition of the needs and concerns of victims; four, crime prevention; and five, civic engagement.

We all know for a fact that the Kelowna accord, although not related to Bill C-10, was significant in its impact to focus on prevention and to move toward healthier communities and safer streets.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening with some interest, especially to the Liberal side talking about crime and prevention.

We keep hearing that the studies prove that mandatory minimums do not work. However, a study done by Thomas Gabor of the University of Ottawa states quite the opposite. I could quote some others. I could quote Solzhenitsyn, who also writes in one of his books, I believe *The Gulag Archipelago*, that severe punishment worked well within the Soviet system. I am not advocating the Soviet system but there is enough proof out there.

We are seeing a shift that seems to imply that we are looking now at strictly rehabilitation. Is prison not part of punishment too? Are we not recognizing that when people break the law they must pay the penalty?

My question is not necessarily for the hon. member but for members of the Liberal Party. Are we are not engaged in another process here, the process of when somebody breaks the law there is a result and a consequence to it?

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Speaker, last week my colleagues went through all the studies and the Canadian Bar Association stated in 2005:

- 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....
- subvert important aspects of Canada's sentencing regime....

That speaks to his second point, which is that there is a difference between a justice system and a legal system. A justice system upholds the proportionality of the crime and takes into consideration all aspects of what occurred during the process of that crime. A legal system serves to punish. We need to reconcile the two and work very closely with that.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to what my hon. colleagues who preceded me had to say. This time I am obviously going to try to plead not before a judge but before my hon. colleagues across the way because—in view of the bill that was just introduced—I think they need more information.

I have 23 years of legal experience and, as a criminal defence attorney, have represented all sorts of individuals who were caught up in the legal system and found themselves behind bars serving sentences of various lengths. In introducing this bill, my hon. colleagues across the aisle have forgotten a basic principle of our legal system. I mentioned it during oral arguments when Bill C-9

was introduced: there is a place for suspended sentences. I will say it again in order to be crystal clear. If I pound away long enough on that nail, hopefully it will eventually sink in.

The basic principle of any criminal justice system is individualized sentences. In plain English, this means that every individual who appears before a court for sentencing must receive a sentence that fits the individual, is tailored to him, and strikes a balance between rehabilitation and the risk of recidivism.

This is not what Bill C-10 will do if, unfortunately, my hon. colleagues across the aisle decide to pass it with full steam ahead. The great legal principle is that when an individual appears before a court because he has committed a crime, the emphasis is not on punishing the crime but on punishing the individual who committed it. Who is he? What is his background? Did he plan the crime? Is it a heinous crime in the eyes of the legal system, one that society abhors? When all these distinctions have been duly weighed, the court passes sentence.

What they really want with this bill is to take sentencing out of the hands of judges. They want to put a straitjacket on them. For such-and-such a crime, there is such-and-such a penalty. Violent armed crimes are heinous in their eyes and merit a prison term. That being said, though, the sentence still has to fit the individual before the court. We must make sure he understands that the crime he committed is unacceptable to society and must not be repeated and we must make sure that he does not do it again.

What my colleagues opposite want is a system that will allow us to put in jail anyone who has committed a crime using a firearm, and throw away the key. If that key is found in a year, good; if it is found in three years, too bad. That is the easy solution. We cannot let such a measure go through. Rehabilitation is a right in our country, as the Supreme Court reminded us on several occasions.

It is quite surprising that someone would mention a study done at the University of Ottawa. I heard that earlier. I invite my colleague who cited this study to go back and read the whole study, not just the part that he likes. With all due respect, he will see that this study refers to many other studies that show beyond a reasonable doubt that minimum prison sentences are useless and do nothing to reduce the crime rate. And we have proof of that.

● (1255)

In the United States—because our colleagues opposite like comparisons with that country—in 2003, the homicide rate was 5.69 per 100,000, compared to 1.73 in Canada. It is easy to understand. In the United States, the right to bear arms is enshrined in the 2nd amendment to their constitution. What do people do with a firearm? They solve their problems.

In Canada, I hope we will be intelligent enough to understand that problems are not solved with firearms. And this is not from me, but from the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada who stated in the Quebec City newspaper *Le Soleil*, on May 5, 2006, which I think is not too long ago, that he recognized the fact that there is no Canadian study showing the benefits of the new measures based on minimum sentences in the fight against crime.

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Here is what will happen. I know, because I did it when I was a criminal lawyer. What did we do? Let us take an example, armed robbery, or an easier case: assault with a weapon. This is how we do it: we meet with the accused client. We know from the outset that we are looking at a minimum sentence of three years. What do we do? We tell the Crown prosecutor that we are prepared to plead guilty to a charge of assault causing bodily harm if the Crown withdraws the minimum sentence of imprisonment. If the Crown refuses, fine. We suggest that the Crown call all its witnesses, because—as we say in legal jargon—we will make them prove every element of their case, and the case will last two or three years.

This has led to what is called plea bargaining. That is what we are preparing to do, and it is what our friends across the aisle—colleagues for whom I have great respect—will be legitimizing: plea bargaining in the extreme. Otherwise, they had better appoint a lot of judges, fill the prisons and build bigger ones, because this is going to be a long process. That is the problem.

In this bill and in Bill C-9, we are no longer talking about rehabilitation; we are talking about penalties and punishment. I personally believe that this is not what Quebec and Canadian society is all about. We do not put punishment above all else. Rehabilitation is very important. An individual who is sentenced to imprisonment will be returning to society one day. We have to prepare for when that happens.

I will conclude by telling you about some people I know very well because I have also represented clients in Aboriginal communities. My colleague from the Liberal Party who spoke before me in fact said it: there is a serious problem in the Aboriginal communities. And this kind of bill is not how it is going to be solved.

How is it that my friends across the aisle have not included hunting guns, long arms, in this bill—it is strange that they are not talking about them. They are talking only about handguns, when we know that in Canada, 35% of crimes are committed with hunting guns.

I will stop here, and I will be pleased to answer questions from my colleagues.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue for a very enlightened and passionate speech. Clearly, he is coming from an informed point of view, from his personal background in the criminal justice system in the province of Quebec. I am sure that his reasoning applies to all regions of Quebec.

He had very strongly held views that simply applying longer prison sentences in and of itself is not a sufficient deterrent. What would be a deterrent then because we have been wrestling with every aspect of the criminal justice system to make our streets safer? It was only in the catastrophic event that led my party to agree in theory at least with mandatory minimum sentences in cases where a violent crime has taken place with the use of a gun.

However, the shock of the incidents to which I am referring has been such that the Canadian public is demanding some extraordinary measures. They are seized by this issue in a way that I have never seen before. Overwhelmingly, when I canvassed the constituents of

my riding, by a factor of five to one, the number one top of mind issue is to make our streets safe. They told me to go to Ottawa and do whatever I can, so that they can send their children to the corner store to buy a quart of milk without worrying about their safety. That is how extreme it is in the inner city, in the core area of the city in which I live.

I loath the idea of the heavy-handed enforcement crime and punishment model that would contemplate locking up more people and throwing away the key, but I am convinced that we are doing a disservice to Canadians if we do not at least acknowledge the severity. The severity of the crime deserves a serious enough punishment to be a genuine deterrent.

I am proud that in the province of Manitoba we have a multi-faceted approach, a very sympathetic approach to the causes of crime. I believe that chronic long term poverty is surely one of the most obvious root causes of crime, but also the cause and effect situation. If longer sentences are not a deterrent, what does my colleague propose would be a proper deterrent?

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for my colleague, but I would reply to him that there is what happens before the crime and what happens after.

With regard to what comes before the crime, in Canada the solutions are education and fighting poverty. Personally, I find it disconcerting to see children who are 10, 11 or 12 years old out and about in our cities at 2:30 a.m. on a Friday or Saturday. Someone, somewhere, is not doing their job. That comes before the crime. They get mixed up with a certain group and they pick up their ways. Where are the parents? It may not be appropriate to speak of this during a debate on the bill, but I am slipping in this question to my colleague. I have already asked this in court about one of my clients.

After the crime, the individual has to be punished, because there must be a punishment. I believe—and have always believed and will continue to do so—that the punishment must be appropriate for the crime and for the individual. It must allow them to return to society. They cannot be hit over the head at the beginning with a sentence of four years. I agree that there are heinous crimes, but it is very important for sentences to be individualized by a judge. Yes, there are street gangs. But we must not confuse the issue. We must attack the problem of street gangs with appropriate programs.

I am speaking on behalf of all citizens. We know that 35% of crimes are committed with hunting weapons. What will we do with a bill such as this one? Therein lies the problem. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. And repression is definitely not the answer.

[*English*]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address Bill C-10, an act to amend the Criminal Code with respect to minimum penalties for offences involving firearms. All Canadians should take an interest in this proposed legislation because a safe and secure quality of life is something we all desire.

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As a member of Parliament from the greater Toronto area, acts of violence in our cities and communities must be addressed in a firm and direct manner. Two questions, therefore, immediately come to mind. What are the best ways of dealing with violent acts once they have been committed? What is the best way to prevent violent crimes from occurring in the first place?

Generally speaking, the primary objectives of Bill C-10 are to increase mandatory minimum prison sentences for people who commit serious or repeat firearm offences and to create a new offence for breaking and entering to steal firearms. In the past election, my opponent from the Conservative Party attempted to score cheap political points by exploiting the unfortunate victims of crime in our community.

With callous disregard for the feelings of the family and friends of victims, in many instances victims themselves, this person also made vague references that the Liberal Party was somehow soft on crime. I must admit that I was a bit shocked in the first instance by what was essentially a desperate attempt to score political points, but more so by the fact that this particular candidate serves as a Crown counsel and should have at least some grasp of legal history in this country.

The fact remains that it was the Liberal government in 1995 that initiated mandatory minimum sentences for gun related crimes in the first place. In fact, the very first mandatory minimum sentence legislation for firearm offences dates back to 1977, again by a Liberal government. It is also a fact that it was the Conservatives who essentially killed Bill C-82 last November when they triggered an election.

Bill C-82 proposed 12 amendments to the gun control provision and was part of a five point strategy to combat gang and gun related crimes that included: first, tougher laws and proportion penalties; second, more effective law enforcement; third, heightened recognition of the needs and concerns of victims; fourth, crime prevention; and fifth, engagement of local communities. Unfortunately, the piece of legislation that we now have before us has been assembled in a haste to satisfy the Prime Minister's narrow political agenda.

As an accountant by trade, I prefer to look at the facts rather than listen to empty slogans from the Conservatives. It is a fact that the justice system in Canada has always dealt with violent crimes based on the fundamental principle that a prison sentence must be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and degree of responsibility of the offender.

In this country, we employ judges for the express purpose of passing sentences based on the particular circumstance of each individual case. Judges take mandatory minimum sentences into account, but they are given the discretion to vet longer prison terms depending on the severity of the case. If we were to continue to exaggerate minimum sentences as Bill C-10 intends to do, we would in fact be removing more powers from judges to use their own discretion.

Let us look at the facts. Over the past decade there was an average of 1,300 deaths involving firearms per year in Canada. Homicides accounted for only about 15% of all firearm deaths, suicide a remarkable 80%, and accidents about 5%. In 1996, 49% of all solved

firearm homicides involved acquaintances, 18% involved a spouse, 22% involved other relatives, and 11% were killed by strangers.

• (1305)

Clearly, people are more likely to be killed by a firearm by someone they know rather than by random acts of violence. In fact, a Statistics Canada report found that from 1974 to 1992 a married woman was nine times more likely to be killed by her husband than by a stranger.

I find it even more disturbing that long guns are the most common type of firearm used in spousal homicide. Over the past decade 71% of spousal homicides involved rifles and shotguns, 24% involved handguns, 4% involved the use sawed off rifles and shotguns, and 1% involved other firearms.

I find it shocking that one of the first acts of the Minister of Justice is to remove long guns from the gun registry. Clearly, the government is attempting to approach justice reform in a very hasty way and hence I am pleased to speak against Bill C-10.

• (1310)

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the hon. member says that it is this side of the House that is making politics out of the issue. Quite frankly, it is the other way around.

I have some knowledge and history of law enforcement, about 30 years of it. By suggesting that a mandatory minimum sentence somehow encourages a judge to give someone a lesser sentence than having no sentence guidelines seems quite incredible and does not make a lot of sense to me.

My riding is mainly rural which is an hour and a half down the road from Toronto. The people do not view these things as something foreign to them. They view it as their neighbours, friends and relatives who are in a city that has experienced, in the past few years, a marked increase in violence and particularly gun violence. It is not violence with long guns. It is violence with handguns.

The whole intent of this legislation is to dissuade people from anti-social behaviour by increasing the penalty and therefore keeping them ever mindful that if they commit a serious crime with a handgun they are going to go to jail for a long time.

I ask the hon. member, who is living in the greater Toronto area, how can she say that she best represents her constituency by saying that a minimum mandatory sentence is not what the average person in her riding would feel is appropriate?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, mandatory minimum sentences are already in existence and Bill C-10 is a haphazard attempt to bring in politics rather than good policy. My constituents and the area of Toronto are very concerned about how we address the issue of crime, youth being involved in violent acts and hence, how we make our streets safe. The root cause of violence most times has focused on youth being unemployed, underemployed, and not having the ability to participate in extracurricular activities.

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In Ontario under Mike Harris, the after school programs were cut and there has been a real correlation between the amount of gang violence and after school programs being cut. Therefore, we must look at the root cause, and get youth employed and involved in other recreational areas. In my riding that is what the youth are demanding.

It was unfortunate that the NDP also worked with the Conservatives in bringing down the government which had the strategy for youth unemployment, and youth and gang violence.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her comments this afternoon. I share her concern that the Conservatives have somehow forgotten the use of long guns and the important part that long guns play in crime statistics in Canada. I share her disbelief that long guns would be left out of this important legislation.

It seems to me that is a fatal flaw in the legislation. Why would we leave out a weapon that is responsible for so many of the crimes when we are apparently trying to address the whole issue of the seriousness of gun crime that is committed in Canada? I wonder if the member would comment further about the failure of the Conservatives to include long guns in this legislation and why they decided to do that.

• (1315)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. Statistics from the justice department indicate that 71% of spousal homicides involved rifles and long guns.

As I stated, Bill C-10 is a hastily crafted bill. It has not been well thought through. It has the sniff of politics rather than good policy. It is important that we understand that good politics do not make good policies. Hence, it is very important to revisit this bill to ensure that the appropriate measures are taken, that we do not take away from the judiciary its right to make decisions.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-10, a bill that is somewhat controversial here in the House and certainly within the New Democratic Party.

We support sending the bill to committee for potential amendments. In the election campaign we supported the idea of stronger mandatory minimum sentences for some offences. Part of our three pillar approach to crime is firm punishment and deterrence through legislation and regulation and much stronger sentencing provisions for crimes involving guns. There is some merit in Bill C-10 so we will assist in moving it forward to committee where we can look at it as a whole. One of my colleagues spoke to the hasty nature of this legislation and I do not doubt there are elements of that.

The NDP would like to see enhanced resources for enforcement combined with a political commitment to foster collaboration between various law enforcement agencies. This is another very important part of our approach to crime. We do not see this represented in Bill C-10.

The third pillar of our approach speaks to the overdue and essential investments in crime prevention, communities and youth. This is not represented in any way in the legislation. In committee we will be looking at whether the bill is worthwhile in its present form, whether it can be amended, and whether it should be made into

law. In many ways there are restrictive elements in the bill. We have to be careful how we set up our laws.

In northern parts of the country someone may break into a cabin and take a firearm and use it for subsistence hunting not knowing that an offence has been committed and could be subject to three years in jail. Hunting is part of northern culture. In an urban area someone might break into a house to take something that is required to stay alive. This has to be taken into consideration when we are dealing with the north, the aboriginal and traditional communities across Canada.

Judges have to look at the facts of a case. We have to ensure that the laws will not send to jail people who do not need to be there. We have to ask whether putting people in jail will serve society. The precautionary principle works both ways. We do not want to put people into the criminal justice system who do not need to be there. Putting them in jail could lead them to reoffend after they are released. These are fine institutions of criminal learning that we have for jails across the country.

• (1320)

These are important considerations. Precautionary principles work both ways in justice. In a lot of cases we have to give judges the room to judge the case on its merits. In some cases the law is quite straightforward. The possession of automatic weapons, handguns and assault rifles are not traditionally used for hunting or for any kind of peaceful purpose. They are not part of a peaceful society, the way long guns and shotguns are. The NDP has no trouble supporting stronger mandatory minimums for those types of offences. They should not be around in peaceful society. They should not be used for illegal purposes in a peaceful society.

The NDP has already said it would support that part of the bill. We approached the Canadian people in that regard. I would want us to follow through on the policies that we presented in the election process. I encourage all parties to do the same.

There are many other things that Bill C-10 does not do. The bill does not address the 101 issues raised by the NDP in our crime platform. We consider them to be essential elements of any true programs for crime and punishment.

In this House, as in the last election campaign, there is not a lot of talk about how we could reduce and prevent crime. That is a tragedy. We have avoided the discussion of our drug laws. In many cases drugs are the prime drivers of violence and criminality in communities across the country. The new government has taken an even harder line than the last Parliament. This is a problem. This approach will not work for Canadians. It will not make our streets safer. It will not solve a problem we have been choosing to ignore for many years.

The NDP is supporting Bill C-10 at second reading so it will be sent to committee. What happens with the bill is very much up to the committee and the good work of the members involved there.

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• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his speech, the member mentioned that there were several flaws in this bill but, despite these flaws, he is willing to support it and refer it to committee.

Does he think one can draw a parallel between the exclusion of hunting weapons from this bill and the desire of the government to abolish the gun registry, particularly for hunters?

[*English*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out, our policy calls for mandatory minimum sentences on the use of handguns, assault rifles and automatic weapons, those firearms that have no place in a peaceful society. I come from a rural northern riding where firearms have a place in a peaceful society. They are a part of the everyday lifestyle of many people.

When I go into a small community like Fort McPherson and an elderly person hands me a letter he has received from the justice department stating that he has committed an offence because he has not registered his rifles, this elderly person is concerned. He does not see it as appropriate and I do not see it as appropriate that we have restricted the use of firearms through the registry, where we were trying to establish something that really was already there.

Interestingly enough, when the police talk about their statistics of how many times they use the gun registry every day, that same sort of behaviour would have been there when we used to have the firearms acquisition certificates. They also would have identified whether there were firearms in a particular home, as the police wanted to know. The question of whether one person has a certain number of firearms that are designed for peaceful purposes is sort of a moot point in most northern and rural communities. It is important to know who has firearms and that is a distinction.

Within this bill, the thought that we would be upping the penalty for people in possession of firearms that are used for the purposes of subsistence, such as hunting and those sorts of things, in my riding just would not wash.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his statement concerning the fact that many people who possess firearms possess them, not only to make a living, but to hunt as a peaceful endeavour.

I also want to advise the member that according to the Criminal Code, if someone breaks into a place for the purposes of staying alive, in other words the person's motorized snow vehicle freezes up on a lake and the person is about to die because of the cold, and the person breaks into a cottage in order to get warm or to eat, that is not a crime. The same defence would be there for someone who needed a firearm in order to stay alive and had to commit that offence.

This bill would not change that defence at all. However it does say that if a firearm is used in the commission of an offence, a person is in possession of a firearm in order to commit an offence or a person steals a firearm to commit an offence we have upped the ante because we have found that having a firearm for a negative purpose has very serious repercussions in society.

I would just ask the member to comment on that end of the defence with regard to subsistence and know that the bill would not interfere with that.

• (1330)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, that is a good example of how the law does not apply but I am sure that when it comes to the enacting of a law such as this, there will be other examples where the life and death situation might not be so grave, and if a person breaks into a cabin it might be for some lesser purpose but still not a purpose for which we would want to put them in jail for three years.

It goes back to my main point, which is that in all of this we should let the judges judge the cases. We must be very careful when we are dealing with mandatory minimums and taking away conditional sentences, which is why the New Democratic position is pretty firm on the very selective use of mandatory minimums.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-10. I will begin by saying that I believe all members and all political parties are concerned about crime. In fact, the Liberal Party takes the safety and security of Canadians very seriously.

We introduced legislation in the last Parliament to address some of the current concerns. We increased spending on policing and especially on the broader issues related to terrorism over the last number of years. We set up procedures for various police jurisdictions in Canada and across our borders internationally to work better together.

Through the development of the Department of Public Security, we ensured that all the security, the police and the border related agencies, came together for better protection of public security and improved coordination between those various agencies.

I gave that little bit of background to reinforce the fact that as a party we believe strenuously in fighting crime and utilizing all the best tools and approaches available to do so. I will be opposing the bill. With this bill I expect some government members, probably many, will say that those who oppose the bill are soft on crime. However, that is not the case at all.

Those of us who are opposed to Bill C-10 want to have an evidence based approach to changing the justice system and to ensure at the end of the day that we have better results. I just do not believe that Bill C-10, the way it is currently drafted, really cuts it.

The question really is whether Bill C-10 is the step forward that the Minister of Justice claims it can be. I sincerely think not.

As with so much that the new government has brought forward, the intent of Bill C-10 may be fine but the design of the legislation is such that it would not achieve the intended results. I think it could make things more difficult by ending up at the end of the day spending more money on building more prisons, more infrastructure and not dealing effectively with policing, rehabilitation and crime prevention.

Government Orders

I believe the government has taken a very simplistic approach to a very complex problem. There is an old saying, "don't let the facts get in the way of a good story". I think that is what is happening with the approach that the Minister of Justice is taking with Bill C-10, and that does worry me.

Legislation should be evidence based. The Minister of Justice has failed to bring forward evidence on this bill in a comprehensive way that would lead at least myself and, I think, many others to support the bill. The Minister of Justice seems more intent on having the language sound right than on designing the legislation in a way that would lead to those intended results.

The legislation caters to the view that there is a massive increase in crime when actually the evidence, the statistics, would show otherwise. That is not to say that there is not serious crime in the country, there is. We could all pick an instance, blow it out proportion and almost make it into a movie. Those people affected by crimes feel very aggrieved, and rightly so. We have a responsibility as a country to see that justice is done, but would Bill C-10 deal comprehensively with the concern of those crimes? I most definitely think not.

● (1335)

In Bill C-9 and Bill C-10 we see a certain amount of Americanization of the Canadian justice system. I have had the opportunity to see both systems and our justice system is vastly improved over the one south of the border. We have less crime in Canada. We have greater rehabilitation and far fewer jails per capita. We have fewer repeat crimes and there is greater safety on our streets. We can ask any citizen which cities they could walk into and feel relatively secure and they would say Canadian cities. Our system of justice is far less costly than the system south of the border.

Does Canada's approach to crime need to be improved? I would say that it certainly does, but Bill C-10 is not the answer, at least not in whole. I could support some parts of the bill but I believe overall the bill is seriously flawed.

Do mandatory minimums have a place? Many critiques over the last 50 years would say no and many would say they do not. Personally, I believe they do in some instances but not with the kind of simplistic blanket treatment that the bill proposes.

The issue can be dealt with in other ways. I can give an example of where I think judges were lax and where the justice system is currently soft, and that relates to the marijuana grow operations in British Columbia. Police officers and the RCMP will tell us about going into marijuana grow operations, taking them down, putting their lives on the line to deal with the problem and that before they go to the office the next morning the people they charged are out on the street. That is wrong and it should not happen.

I know we are not supposed to criticize judges but I did this while I was in the position of solicitor general and I maintain to this day that in too many instances in the province of B.C. the judges are soft on marijuana grow operations. However, there other ways of dealing with the issue than mandatory minimum sentences. In those instances in British Columbia where it relates to marijuana grow operations, the intent of the law is not quite being followed. There is

too much softness. The judge would have to explain his or her reasons for not imposing the maximum sentence that is in the law.

The bill is terribly flawed. I had hoped to quote the member for Mount Royal when he said that Bill C-10 was not evidence based legislation but I see I am out of time. I would refer members to the remarks by the member for Mount Royal in which he gave a very good legalistic argument in terms of why Bill C-10 cannot be supported as it is currently drafted.

● (1340)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague made a few valid points. I would agree with him that there are instances where the justice system has been soft on grow operations and I would like to see that halted as well.

What we are really talking about in Bill C-10 is justice. Somehow that has been lost in the whole conversation. We have families, victims and citizens crying in the streets and asking why this is being allowed to happen, why criminals are getting off so soft and why are we not dealing with this. Bill C-10 seeks to deal with it. We are standing up for our citizens and trying to make their streets safe.

Why is the hon. member not delivering what our constituents are demanding, which is justice?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, as I said during my remarks, when we, as members of Parliament, try to debate a bill to get the best legislation possible and put in place a bill that would achieve the intended results, then there a legitimate basis for doing that. We have supported mandatory minimums in place. In some instances, we have brought them in.

Under Bill C-10, the government is extending those mandatory minimums to unreasonable levels. The result at the end of the day will not be what it intended to achieve. I think it will cost the system more money. As a result, we will not have the money to put the human resources in the streets to deal with crime. The government will not have the money to do the kind of crime prevention that needs to be done.

Because we are opposing the bill for a better approach, the member is saying that we are soft on crime. We are not. We believe there is a better way of doing things than the approach taken by the government, which is Americanizing the Canadian justice system, a system that has proven not to work as effectively as the Canadian justice system.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the member for Malpeque, is a former attorney general. I do not have to tell him that sentencing has more than one purpose and one goal.

The first element of sentencing has a punishment and a consequence element to it. However, there is also a rehabilitation element, hopefully. If these people will be on the streets again some day, we want them to get the services that rehabilitate them. The third point I want to dwell on is that there has to be a deterrent factor.

Government Orders

I come from the riding of Winnipeg Centre. On a hot summer night, there is gun play every night. Kids, with a cavalier attitude toward guns, use them more and more frequently. Families will not sleep in the outside rooms of their houses; they sleep in the inner rooms. They are worried about a stray bullet coming through their houses.

From a deterrent point of view, what is wrong with mandatory minimum sentences in a crimes committed with guns, a violent crime perpetrated on the streets of Winnipeg where a gun is used?

We want the message out there that there is a deterrent so kids will take it more seriously. Instead of fooling around with guns in the back lanes, we want them to know that there is a serious consequence to that in my riding.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, if there is any member in the House with whom I am absolutely surprised, it is the member for Winnipeg Centre. He continually compromises his principles to get in bed with the Conservative Party of Canada. There are mandatory minimum sentences right now in terms of gun crimes. He knows it, but he wants to stay in bed with those folks over there.

If you would go out there and tell your constituents about those mandatory minimums and the deterrents, then he would be doing something. He abolished the principles of the NDP Party long ago to get in bed with the Conservatives.

Tell the public the facts on Bill C-10. Do not misrepresent them like the member for Winnipeg Centre is doing.

• (1345)

The Deputy Speaker: I would just remind the member for Malpeque to not let anger get in the way of using the third person.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Surely there is some obligation for hon. members to stay away from complete fabrications and untruths. Is there nowhere in the rules or Standing Orders that one has to tell the truth from time to time? Is there nothing barring somebody like him from standing and making an insultingly, completely—

The Deputy Speaker: It sounds to me more like a point of debate.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to resist getting into that pushing and shoving match which we just witnessed. I want to get to the issue of sentencing, as we debate Bill C-10.

As we all know, Bill C-10 bulks up the number of mandatory minimum sentences that would be in the Criminal Code. While there is room in every Criminal Code for some mandatory minimums, the easiest one is the sentence for first degree murder, which has a mandatory minimum sentence of life, at least in our country. Other countries have other penalties.

We are not really debating whether there should be a mandatory minimum sentence in place for any particular crime. We are debating the extent of those mandatory minimum sentences.

I used the term that the current bill bulks up. It really does bulk up or materially increases the number of mandatory minimum sentences that would be in the Criminal Code, if the bill passes, with particular

reference to firearms offences. At the end of the last Parliament, an attempt was made to increase, by a small margin, the number of mandatory minimum sentences associated with the criminal use of firearms. In fact, the House passed a bill only within the last few years which did precisely that.

When I looked at the data, I came across what I thought was an interesting perspective on crime statistics. It has to do with how we look at crime statistics across the country. Although I have had many occasions to look at statistics over the years, I had not noticed any of this before. Members may or may not relate to this.

I represent a Toronto area riding. When I looked at the crime statistics for the Toronto area, the census metropolitan area called the CMA, the Toronto CMA was number 26 on a list of 27 Canadian metropolitan areas for crime. That means there are 25 other municipalities in Canada that have crime rates in excess of that in Toronto for the timeframe that ended with the year 2004. I thought that was peculiar. I would have thought the big cities would have had the highest crime rates. It turns out I am wrong.

Toronto was 26 on a list of 30 for criminal statistics kept by police forces across the country. Those are reliable statistics, too, but vary slightly from Statistics Canada. I will mention some of the places that were near the top of the list. This is not for the purpose of maligning these communities. A problem with crime in Canada is a problem for all Canadians as well as the communities involved. All five of the communities with the higher overall crime rates, Regina, Saskatoon, Abbotsford, Winnipeg and Vancouver, were all cities removed from the eastern part of Canada.

If I were an MP coming one of those communities, I would be telling the House that there is a relatively high crime rate in my community and that we have to do something about it. If I come from a community with a lower crime rate, I will say that there is a crime problem but we have to look at it in perspective. I had always been curious as to why there was a difference in perspectives among members of the House when it came to the current data.

Perhaps that is part of the explanation for communities that have higher crime rates. I am not talking marginally higher, I am talking double and triple the rates in some of the other eastern Canadian cities. If I were to be representing a high crime community, I would be pulling the chain a lot more firmly in terms of getting an appropriate response to dealing with those crime levels.

• (1350)

I want to point out that the sentencing regime, the sentencing used for both the cities with the lower crime rates and the cities with the higher crime rates is the same. Therefore, I do not think we can say it is the sentencing that is responsible for the higher crime rate.

We might also want to say that it is not the sentencing which is responsible for the lower crime rate. However, we are talking about material differences in crime rates, but the same sentencing regime.

Statements by Members

We ought to look at the real crime data. I will ask members to look back 15 years or more to a report of a committee of the House, the justice committee. It was chaired by Dr. Bob Horner. At that time we looked at the crime rates in the United States of America. It had the highest imprisonment rate of all the countries where there was data on incarceration.

Looking back at our report, we said that if locking up all those who violated the law contributed to safer societies, then the United States should be the safest country in the world, which it was not. The U.S. Senate judiciary committee agreed. Using 1990 data, it said that the United States was a world leader in reported murder, rape and robbery rates. Yet it had the highest incarceration rate. The higher incarceration rates did not noticeably improve, in any way, the risk and crime rate levels in the United States.

At about the same time, it is true that the crime rates in Canada were relatively high. They had gone up, the prior 10 years leading up to 1991. Starting in 1991, the crime rates began to drop, and they have been dropping ever since in Canada, not because of the Horner report and not because of what Parliament did or did not do. Looking back, it probably had a lot to do with the sociological factors that caused crime.

I would love an opportunity to go into those today. I will not have a chance. I will simply make two or three points.

First, I believe enforcement is a major component of reducing crime. I think that has been proved in the community I come from. It is being proved now as police and prosecutors are learning how to do better enforce.

Second, crime prevention initiatives have payoffs, but it involves the long run. Factors that give rise to crime are poverty, physical and sexual abuse, illiteracy, low self esteem, inadequate housing, school failure, unemployment, inequality and dysfunctional families. These have all been identified as the root causes of crime. Increasing mandatory sentencing does not address any one of those at all.

That is with regret. That is why I am having difficulty with a wholesale entry in mandatory minimum penalties. I could accept that there would be a few serious crimes where society had an interest in increasing, the denunciation factor, the desire of Canadians to say that this offence is so serious that we have to attach a mandatory sentence, a one-off. However, the bill does not do that. It takes a whole file, a whole truckload of offences and creates mandatory minimums. I suggest that is not the way to go.

I encourage us to continue the debate here or at committee. Let us look at the sentencing principles contained in the Criminal Code. They are well enunciated. They were established by the House approximately 12 years ago. They are very good and they speak conceptually against the concept of mandatory minimums.

• (1355)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question to ask the member opposite based on what I have heard.

Everyone who commits a crime in Canada is a product of some exclusion of society. Therefore, it is justified that they are able to commit these crimes and we should all feel sorry for them.

If someone were to commit a sexual offence, aggravated sexual assault with a firearm, be convicted under the change in law and not able to commit another offence for five years, would the member feel good about telling the parents of a young daughter from his constituency that the individual was locked up for five years and not on the street able to do it again? That would be five years for an offence like that where victims would have some feeling of retribution and a sense of justice for the crime committed against them.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member takes the slam the cell door closed and throw away the key approach. I think every sentencing decision is based on its own merits and we rely on judges to do that with the general direction of appeal courts.

However, as a parent I would be concerned about any crime, but let me put this back to the member as a scenario. With the proposed mandatory minimum sentencing, what if a very well intentioned Crown prosecutor decides he or she wants to take a guilty plea to a lesser included offence? Instead of getting the mandatory minimum which the member would like to see, we end up taking a summary conviction plea or another lesser included offence and we end up without the mandatory minimum at all.

By imposing mandatory minimums across the board, defence counsel and Crown attorneys across the country will attempt to both use the higher penalty to induce plea bargaining and an attempt to avoid incarceration rates that will come with that.

As sure as night follows day and day follows night that will be a consequence of ratcheting up the mandatory minimums. I do not mind if the person culpable of the offence outlined by the hon. member is put in jail for five years or ten years provided that is a fair sentence determined by a court after a fair trial determined by a judge. I am happy to see the person put away for a long time, but not just on this chart of lock'em up and throw away the key approach that seems to be contained in the bill.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

LEUCAN

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, June 11, the head office of Leucan in Montreal and nine regional committees simultaneously held the third provincial head shaving challenge. The event was an unprecedented success. In total, 4,700 people had their heads shaved, raising a record \$2,200,000.

All the money raised thanks to the generosity of Quebeckers and the involvement of numerous partners, personalities and participants will go to the organization, to promote healing and well-being among children with cancer and provide support for their families.

I would like to thank my special advisor, Norm Vocino, for his involvement and the Conservative caucus and staff for their generosity.

* * *

• (1400)

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Toronto newspapers recently reported on the case of Leslie Hoogland, a former Toronto high school teacher, who was convicted of possession of over 2,000 pornographic pictures of Toronto area under-age boys. He had also hired child prostitutes in the Toronto area.

For these heinous crimes against children, Madame Justice Faye McWatt gave him a two year conditional sentence, including one year of house arrest. How does a sentence like this send a message of denunciation and deterrence? It does not.

It is sentences like this, for crimes against children, which cry out for reform of conditional sentencing. Bill C-9 would address these irresponsible sentences imposed by judges since we cannot count on them to self-regulate their use of conditional sentences. Passage of Bill C-9 cannot come soon enough for the exploited children of Canada and the world.

* * *

[Translation]

BAHA'I COMMUNITY

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees all people freedom of religious expression.

The people in the Baha'i community in my riding and elsewhere in Quebec and Canada are very concerned about the persecutions of members of the Baha'i faith living in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In addition to being persecuted, they are being deprived of the most basic rights, such as the right to higher education for young people and the right to own property.

Baha'is seek only the unity of humankind, the equality of men and women, the reduction of the gap between rich and poor and the elimination of racial, religious and social conflict. For this they are tortured, raped, killed and stripped of their property.

I ask the Government of Canada to take the necessary steps so that the international community condemns this intolerable situation.

* * *

[English]

RURAL COMMUNITIES

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the process of the renewal of northwestern British Columbia, we are learning important lessons on how diverse groups can come together with common interests to achieve incredible things. The good news is we are turning a corner in northwestern British Columbia.

Statements by Members

Here are a few examples. First, the expansion of the Prince Rupert container port could only have happened because government, workers, community groups and investors took the time to work together for a common purpose.

A few months ago, the sinking of the *Queen of the North*, a tragedy on all accounts, also delivered incredible results with a unifying spirit from the people of Hartley Bay and Prince Rupert who went out to save all those passengers.

Most recently, there was the phenomenon called Hockeyville in which my community placed in the top five across this nation. It brought together groups that never sat together at tables before. I would like to offer my congratulations on behalf of the people of Smithers to Salmon River, Nova Scotia for being named Hockeyville Canada.

We all know that rural communities contribute in a vital way to Canada. It seems that we also have a lot to teach our urban cousins on how to get things done.

* * *

MICK HERTZ

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the sacrifices of a career are not the greatest an individual can make, they are sacrifices nonetheless. For many, a career requires absence from the special occasions at home.

Today, I join with my community in mourning the passing of a local hero, Mick Hertz, a mentor and teacher at Kenaston School. His commitment to education and deep faith made him a beloved member of our community. He will be greatly missed, especially by his wife Paddy, his children Mike Jr., Regan, their families, and youngest son Nathan.

Today my youngest daughter Ivana turns 17. As an MP since 2000, this is not the only special occasion in her life I would rather have been there more. From afar, I simply say Happy Birthday Ivana Melissa Ann. I thank Ivana, her sister Elaina, her fiance Brian and my husband. Though I know I was needed there, my family has given me their unwavering and unconditional support and understanding.

Happy Birthday Ivana and God Bless. I know that God is with our community today.

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PROSTITUTION

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians we have a lot to be proud of, but we must take responsibility for the not so great. It is shameful that with all we know that the continued abuse and victimization of women and children exists in our society.

[Translation]

The sex trade creates many victims. Some people from my town see this every day. People are fed up with seeing drug and prostitution paraphernalia littered through their neighbourhoods and have taken matters into their own hands by creating a group called Residents Against Street Solicitation.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

It is known as RASS, Residents against Street Prostitution and Solicitation.

I call on the government to stand up for women and children, and provide more resources and social programs to women in need.

Prostitution is a problem that illustrates the social inequalities between the sexes. The government wants to protect men with guns, but is doing very little to assist women and their families. If it is not right for our daughters, mothers or our wives, it is not right for any woman.

* * *

●(1405)

EDUCATION

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to acknowledge the many outstanding graduates in my constituency of Kelowna—Lake Country.

This has been a milestone month for education as we are celebrating the first ever graduating classes of two new post-secondary institutions. On June 3 Okanagan College held its first ever spring convocation: 209 students graduated with diplomas, while 142 students were given degrees.

On June 9 the University of British Columbia welcomed over 450 new alumni, as graduating students participated in the first graduation ceremony at UBC Okanagan.

In addition, over 1,357 grade 12 students will have high school diplomas conferred upon them. While I would like to congratulate all the local high school students for reaching this great accomplishment, I would also like to send special congratulations to my wonderful daughter, Ashley, who graduated on Saturday from Kelowna Secondary School. Enjoy your prom tonight, dear.

On behalf of the constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country, we applaud all the recent graduates and wish them much success in all their future endeavours.

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*[Translation]***MISTISSINI RESERVE**

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week, 3,200 residents of the Mistissini reserve had to leave their homes when forest fires were engulfing the area.

During my visit there on June 8, I could see that the residents of Mistissini handled this situation with great patience and calm.

I want to commend the Red Cross teams and all the volunteers from Chibougamau and Mistissini who received the people of the Mistissini community and offered them food, lodging and support.

I applaud the tremendous effort by the municipal emergency preparedness organization for their coordination and hospitality during the evacuation. I also want to thank the forest rangers for their

work, which allowed the Mistissini residents to go home with complete peace of mind.

I am very proud of the people of my riding for supporting one another.

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*[English]***AGRICULTURE**

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past few months I have been asked many times why I focus so much on farmers and foods. That is a good question and here is my answer.

First, farming is a primary industry. As such, farmers create new wealth that is recycled many times throughout the economy. In other words, every farm that survives and prospers helps to support many other businesses and jobs in our rural communities.

Second, I recognize that it is farmers who produce the food that our families eat. In fact, every meal we have ever eaten originally came from a farm somewhere. After 60 years of plentiful food in Canada, I guess it is easy to forget that simple fact.

Third, Canadian farmers desperately need more advocates right now. It would take 10 minutes just to list all the challenges they face, let alone describe them.

One of the things I have learned in life is that we must focus to be successful. I know that there are many worthy causes in social, economic and foreign policy before Parliament. However, the place where I want to play a leading role is standing up for Canadian farmers and food.

* * *

*[Translation]***CARTIERVILLE**

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to draw the attention of the House and all Canadians to the 100th anniversary of Cartierville, which I have had the honour of representing with great pride for 10 years now—one tenth of its existence.

Cartierville was named not in honour of Jacques Cartier—although that is not much of a stretch since Cartierville is on the St. Lawrence seaway, which was discovered by Jacques Cartier—but in honour of Georges Étienne Cartier, one of the fathers of Confederation. In 1906, Cartierville became a village. In 1912, Cartierville became a town.

[English]

In 2002 the borough of Ahuntsic Cartierville was created.

[Translation]

Cartierville has maintained its rural roots despite the railroad and urbanization. We can go canoeing there, or fishing—although I do not recommend eating the fish too often—or go for a hike in the woods. The Rimbaud and Belmont parks are there, as are the Saguenay woods.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

Cartierville also has a multicultural population that is very active. I would suggest that the government look very closely at the sports centre project that would be very good for the population of Cartierville.

* * *

• (1410)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government places the protection and the promotion of freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law as central to our international agenda. We are greatly concerned with the recent deterioration of human rights in Syria and Egypt.

In Syria, voluntary association and community activists, intellectuals and other citizens are being arrested as they promote human rights and seek to build the democratic opposition. We expect Syria to respect international human rights law and to move forward with democratic reforms.

In Egypt, we are concerned that disciplinary measures have been taken against two judges, that excessive force has been used against protesters, and that the opposition leader, Mr. Ayman Nour, remains incarcerated. Our embassy has led international efforts to visit and support Mr. Nour and will continue to do so. We are also disappointed by the decision to renew the state of emergency for a further two years despite earlier promises to bring it to an end.

We call upon other countries to stand up for freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law as fundamental values that can no longer be trampled upon.

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NORTHERN ENERGY

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, northern Canadians face the highest energy costs in this country. One of the ways these costs can be reduced is to replace imported fossil fuels with renewable energy.

For example, the community of Wha Ti is developing a run of the river mini hydro project which, when completed, will eliminate the need for diesel-powered generators. This will reduce the energy costs to this community significantly, and for generations ahead.

NWT's diamond mines would benefit from the surplus electricity from the Talston River hydroelectric project, replacing polluting diesel fuel transported on ice roads.

In addition to small scale hydro, other forms of renewable energy being considered by northerners are wind, solar, biomass and wood pellets.

However, to realize these initiatives, northerners need the federal government to support them. That will allow these developments to occur. Such support will help northern residents reduce energy costs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build long term self-sufficiency.

PATRICK FORTIN

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Patrick Fortin. Patrick was born on June 26, 1978, a severe hemophiliac. To manage his bleeding disorder, Patrick required biweekly infusions. As a result of contaminated blood, Patrick was diagnosed HIV positive in February 1986 at the age of seven.

A talented athlete and gifted musician, Patrick enjoyed life to the fullest. His positive outlook, courage and determination in the face of adversity inspired everyone he met. At every birthday and each full moon, Patrick had only one wish: a cure for AIDS. Unfortunately, Patrick passed away before that cure was found.

Yesterday the inaugural Run Walk 4 Patrick took place in North Bay, attracting over 500 participants. Patrick would be proud that through his enduring spirit we continue to raise HIV-AIDS awareness and funds for a cure.

On behalf of all hon. members, I would like to congratulate Patrick's parents, Christine and Christian, his family and all organizers for hosting such a worthwhile event.

Patrick was with us for only a short time, but for those of us who knew him, our lives are forever changed.

* * *

*[Translation]***WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOUR**

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today we are commemorating the fifth World Day Against Child Labour. This year's theme is "Together we can do it!"

As we speak, children are being forcefully recruited to take part in armed conflicts; others are being killed, tortured or sexually exploited.

Globalization has aggravated poverty significantly in some developing countries, where children are left to fend for themselves and forced to work full days often in dangerous conditions.

In 2004, the International Labour Organization estimated that there were 218 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 working. In 2002, the International Labour Office estimated that 8.4 million children were victims of illicit activities.

Thanks to the francophone section of Amnesty International and to Children's Care International, we are tabling today a petition with over 12,000 signatures calling on Canada to promote the convention to ban the worst forms of child exploitation.

Through a sense of solidarity and humanity, the Bloc Québécois is denouncing injustice committed against children worldwide.

Oral Questions

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Canadian Wheat Board to learn at first hand the challenges facing Canadian wheat and barley growers as they market their products to the world.

It is important for government to remember what a farmer controlled Wheat Board means and not attempt to intervene in the decision of its future. A survey conducted last March showed that almost nine out of 10 farmers say that any decision to end the Canadian Wheat Board single-desk marketing system should be made by farmers, not by the federal government.

To disempower farmers is to undermine a longstanding relationship of trust and cooperation. "Farmer controlled" means that the farmers decide the future. To dismantle the Wheat Board is to seriously undermine the economy of downtown Winnipeg.

All parties must move thoughtfully, understanding the full implications of the decisions made.

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●(1415)

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this weekend 11 wannabes gathered for the first Liberal leadership debate. After such a boring and visionless showing, let us call them Waffley, Blurry, Burny, Shakey, Lefty, Yappy, Five-Hole, Who, American Nomad, Shouty, and Doc. Let us discover some of their real identities.

Waffley is the ethically challenged member from Kings-Hants, who cannot decide what position he has on policies like Kyoto. Blurry, the member from Vaughan, objected to debating health care, and no one knows where he stands.

People are still wondering if Burny, the member from Vancouver Centre, is still seeing burning crosses in Prince George. We also have Shakey, the member from Eglinton—Lawrence, who denied he was shaking down elementary kids for \$5,400 campaign donations.

Five-Hole is the member from York Centre, who is about as comfortable in this leadership race as he is out of net. American Nomad, from parts unknown, the member from Etobicoke—Lakeshore, bragged about his ignorance of the equalization formula.

If this is the best the Liberals have to offer, Canadians can expect the Liberal Party to be in opposition for a long, long time.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Canada-U.S. relations, Canadians want their government to show the skill

and the will to stand up for Canada. We want to be good neighbours, but not sycophants.

The softwood lumber deal now being rammed down our throats is a classic case of the Conservatives trying to appease their Republican idols and getting a bad deal in return. Why did the Prime Minister let the U.S. off the hook on its NAFTA obligations and why did he settle for what in real terms is just more than 50% of the illegal American duties?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the accusations of the member of the opposition are ridiculous, of course. This is a good deal for our softwood industry and a good deal for Canada. That is why the vast majority of the industry supports it. It is why the provinces support it.

We will wait and see what the position of the Liberal Party will be when we bring the final text to the House of Commons.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government clearly believes that any deal is better than no deal. At every turn, the Conservatives want to please their Republican idols. They want us to live our lives just like them, but that is not what Canadians want. Canadians want to stand up for Canada.

The Prime Minister once said that he would not agree to anything short of a 100% rebate of the softwood duties taken from Canadians illegally. What changed his mind and why did he give up?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians were tired of from the previous government was grandstanding on Canada-U.S. relations in ways that got absolutely no benefits for our industry.

We have a strong deal, a deal that not only benefits the industry and our regions but puts that party to shame.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, giving away half the store is no way to succeed.

This softwood deal provides open access only if market conditions of two months ago continue to prevail, but already those conditions have changed. The threat of new duties and export quotas is looming. Some deal: its shelf life lasted about seven weeks and its best before date is now at hand.

Is the unseemly rush to finish the deal and get softwood legislation done in June not just a clear admission that the government will impose export taxes as early as this summer to satisfy its Republican idols?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to correct several pieces of misinformation. To start with, under this deal our producers will get back 80% of the duties that have been sitting in the pockets of the Americans while the Liberals were in power. I do not know where the Liberals get their numbers.

Oral Questions

We know what they did to the softwood lumber industry in this country and we know that the only people they speak for are people like the member himself, Liberal lawyers who want to keep this litigation going on forever. We want the industry to benefit.

• (1420)

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister of International Trade knows that our softwood lumber producers are facing export charges of 10% as well as a ceiling under the softwood lumber deal.

Since April 27, lumber prices have dropped nearly 10%, from \$379 to less than \$330, with this price remaining subject to export charges. Given that new housing construction in the United States is forecast to decline by 12% this year and by another 8% in 2007, how much should our producers expect to be paying in charges at the border during the first year of this bargain-basement deal?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised by the short memory of the some of the members opposite. I recall only too well when a decidedly inferior deal was sitting on the table and we could have heard the panting around the block of the people who wanted to buy a deal at any expense.

This softwood lumber agreement provides predictability, it provides security and it provides for a rebirth and a growth of the Canadian softwood lumber industry.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with my question, I was hoping to elicit an answer, not a partisan tirade.

Our producers are continuing to have to cope with a high dollar, a declining demand and a government that abandons them when the time comes to enforce the provisions of NAFTA and assert Canada's sovereignty over its industrial policy.

I asked a specific question, and I certainly would like to get an answer. How much will our producers have to pay at the border during the first year, if the government agrees to export charges of 10% to 15% and ceilings that could easily remain in place for several years?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if that hon. member knows what lumber prices are going to be doing in the next 6 to 12 months, he ought to be out in the futures market making \$1 million.

In the meantime, the alternative to this very positive, constructive deal will be continued litigation. It will be duties payable to the U.S. treasury. It will be money flowing out of Canada. It will be more harm, more bleeding, more jobs lost and the softwood lumber industry and all the affiliated industries will be hurt beyond repair.

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the report that the Commissioner of Official Languages delivered last May pursuant to a Bloc request for an investigation, she informed us that the Canadian Forces have been flouting the Official Languages Act since 1970, in other words for more than 30 years.

How can the government justify before the francophones of this country the fact that for 30 years, no one in the federal government, neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals, has been able to enforce the rights of francophones in the Canadian Forces?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the leader of Bloc is misrepresenting the position of the defence department. We will be bringing out a strategic language policy within the next few months that will give objectives of this department to achieve, which will satisfy these requirements.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of work to be done because no less than 68% of the bilingual positions in the Canadian Forces are filled by unilingual anglophones.

How does the government intend in its strategic plan not only to quickly correct this injustice but also to apologize to francophones, whose rights have been trampled by the Canadian Forces for 30 years?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister just said that the government intends to bring out a strategy in this regard.

For my part, I would add that the worst possible policy for francophones outside Quebec and francophones in the Canadian armed forces is certainly the separation of Quebec from Canada.

• (1425)

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a real scandal that has hurt francophones in the Canadian Forces. Despite negative reports by different commissioners of official languages in 1977, 1981, 1989 and 1993, no chief of staff has ever done what was necessary and the forces have never complied with the act.

What quick, vigorous action does the minister responsible for the Official Languages Act intend to take in order to force the Canadian Forces to comply with the act for which she herself is responsible?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate our government's unwavering commitment to the linguistic minorities of Canada.

That being said, I would tell my hon. colleague from the Bloc that he should speak with his own colleague, the member for Papineau, who just last week at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages expressed her scorn for anglophone colleagues who are making an effort to learn French.

Oral Questions

In my view, the Bloc Québécois is proving once again that it is not inclusive and not open-minded toward people who are making an effort to learn French.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is a sad answer when we are talking about a situation that has gone on for 30 years.

The Commissioner of Official Languages recommended that, beginning in 2007, the Canadian armed forces should no longer promote general officers who fail to meet the linguistic requirements.

In view of the fact that many of them are already in positions that they should never have been offered if the Canadian Forces were complying with the act, does the Minister of National Defence intend to take strong action to implement this recommendation of the official languages commissioner?

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again the member from the Bloc misrepresents what is going on in the military. In fact, in the military, francophones are represented in a higher proportion than in the overall population. We are going to implement our strategic language plan, which is coming within the next few months and which will satisfy these requirements.

Let me remind the questioner that the Liberals were in power for 13 years and they did squat.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been over a month since the Prime Minister received a letter from Canada's top climate change scientists calling on him to take action on the environment. The letter stated, "There is increasingly unambiguous evidence of changing climate in Canada and around the world".

Just today we heard that the federal government's own scientists are considering walking away from their careers because the government puts politics over science.

Could the Prime Minister tell us, does he believe in the science showing the growing effects of climate change and if he does not, what information is he using to refute that?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has already taken strong measures on climate change. The minister has been clear that later this year she will be bringing forward a clean air act to deal directly with pollution. Those will be coordinated with further actions on climate change and on greenhouse emissions, such as support that we have already done, such as support for public transit and support for renewable fuels. Once again I would like to thank the NDP for supporting those measures in the budget.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have to say that Canadians are still waiting to see this plan that is talked about every day. We have seen no shred of evidence of it. The government is still listening to the oil industry when it needs to listen to the vast majority of the scientific community, indeed listen to its

own officials. The only people who do not believe the science are the big polluters and the people on the government's front benches.

I ask again, when will the government stop debating the science and start tabling a plan to tackle climate change? Canadians want a commitment and they want to hear about a plan, not more talk from the government.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the only one who has raised the debate about science in this Parliament is the hon. member.

This government is proceeding. That is why as I said we are proud to have undertaken actions and to have the support of the NDP for those.

There are things we will not do. For example, the hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, an aspirant to the Liberal leadership on the weekend, says that we need some form of carbon tax, I guess some kind of new national energy program. That is something this government will never do.

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● (1430)

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more ignorant comments from a cluster of Republican congressmen are hurting Canada. This time John Hostettler proclaimed that south Toronto is crawling with terrorists. I do not know if he is referring to Centreville or the swans at Ontario Place, but I do know that he chairs a subcommittee looking into border issues and unfortunately, his views carry weight.

What is disturbing is the Prime Minister's silence. He is refusing to stand up for Canada and to challenge these wild assertions.

Why is the Prime Minister so afraid of displeasing his Republican idols? Why does he refuse to stand up for Canada?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the Prime Minister has stood up for Canada on this issue, we have now had very clear statements of support for our border integrity and also the process we are using to develop alternative documents. Those statements have come from the White House, from the President, from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, from Secretary of State for Homeland Security Michael Chertoff.

One congressperson making wayward remarks is much like Liberal MPs used to do in making extreme remarks in their time of tenure.

We have commitment from the highest levels that the process on our borders is based on integrity and on good security and it is going to remain that way.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, simply ignoring this issue is not going to cut it. The unchallenged comments that are filling U.S. airwaves are threatening to choke our border. They threaten billions of dollars in tourism and trade. The government is doing nothing but sending love notes from our ambassador.

In fact, the silence from the Conservative government has allowed the U.S. administration to say that it will not delay new passport laws.

Why is the Prime Minister not lobbying the U.S. administration to support the bipartisan Senate bill? Does he not care, or does he lack the guts to challenge his American heroes?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a result of the Prime Minister raising this issue and continuing to make it a priority, an amendment has been passed in the United States Senate delaying this whole process yet further, giving even more time for the good initiatives of members of this party. Members of this party are on to this issue and have more time to make their case and continue the support that we have. Very clearly it was articulated again this weekend, alternative documents are going to be acceptable. We are just working through the process of what those should be.

Ignorant comments, whether they are from a congressman or from a Liberal MP, do not help the process. The member should tune in to what is going on and support what we are doing.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member seems to have misunderstood the question in English, so I will ask it again in French.

Unjustified and preposterous comments are endangering our relations with the United States. While the United States paints a ridiculous picture of our immigration system, our Minister of Citizenship and Immigration remains silent. His inaction has not gone unnoticed in Washington. The Americans have announced that they do not intend to delay the implementation of new border security measures.

Why has the minister remained silent?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last weekend the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, said again that he will support the process that we have undertaken. That is very clear. I do not understand why the member keeps repeating comments made by a member of Congress who lacks the information. We have the information and we have the support of the U.S. administration to continue this process.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House started talks with U.S. authorities a long time ago. Nevertheless, I would like to ask a supplementary question.

The Canada-U.S. border is the linchpin of the most important trade relationship in the world. Every day, more than \$1.9 billion dollars worth of goods and more than 300,000 people cross the world's longest undefended border. Making passports mandatory would be bad for business, industry and tourism.

When will the minister stop taking orders from his Republican idols? Will he defend Canada's immigration and border security systems?

•(1435)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member's statement that free trade with the

United States is important. More than 85% of our trade is with the United States.

That is why members of the U.S. administration have assured us that they will work with us to create a process to develop trade and continue trading freely, which will be good for our citizens and good for business.

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OIL COMPANIES

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Industry said that the Bloc wanted gas prices to be regulated. Hon. members know this is the responsibility of Quebec and the provinces. That is not what we are asking him.

Nonetheless, one of the reasons for the increased price at the pump is the significant increase in refinery profits, which are increasing for all oil companies at the same time and often coincide with an increase in the price of crude.

The recent Competition Bureau investigation aside, how can the minister explain that the oil companies are taking advantage of the increase in the price of crude to increase and justify their huge refinery profit margin?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague should know that the price at the pump increases and decreases according to international price fluctuations and the price per barrel of oil. It should be noted that today, the price at the pump is 30% lower than it was in the 1980s, when the Liberal Party implemented the national energy program.

The price is quite high again these days, but it fluctuates. The most important thing for us is that we will cut the GST on July 1, which will have an impact on the price at the pump.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the previous government and the current Conservative government never agreed to take measures to limit increases in the refinery profit margin, which, in 2005, saw price variations of over 700%.

Why does this government refuse to protect consumers? Why is it siding with the major oil companies at the consumers' expense? What is behind all this?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not right to say that this government prefers one industry over another. In the last budget, we implemented tax cuts for all industries in Canada. We cut capital gains taxes. We cut the GST; a cut that will be implemented shortly, on July 1. This will have repercussions on consumers. We are quite pleased with this record.

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HEALTH

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Oral Questions

The price of nitric oxide, which is used to treat babies with respiratory problems, has jumped 400%. By approving only a single product, Health Canada has eliminated competition overnight, which has caused the price to jump.

How can the minister explain the fact that the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board has allowed the price to increase by 400%, knowing of the monopoly held by the American company?

[English]

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board is an independent quasi-judicial agency. Its mandate is to regulate the prices of all patented medicines pursuant to the Patent Act and to ensure they are not excessive.

I understand that the prices, with regard to this material, are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Since it is an arm's length body, we will be watching, but it is independent from the government

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in November 2004, the Europeans faced the same problem, the same price increase for the same product, and they did not hesitate for an instant before taking action. They launched inquiries into the drug industry's abuse of its dominant position.

This government has been in power for four and a half, nearly five months. The problem is not a new one. When will the government follow the European example and protect consumers?

[English]

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, this is a quasi-judicial agency and should it find that the price of patented medicines sold in Canada is excessive, it has the power to roll back the price to the non-excessive level and to collect any excess revenue that may have occurred.

That is the process and we will follow that process.

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• (1440)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has refused to engage in any debate in the House regarding the C-17 purchase. However, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, appearing before the defence committee, made it seem a fait accompli.

Would the Minister of National Defence inform the House and his colleague, the foreign minister who should be interested in the sovereignty of our country, whether it is true that these aircraft would be maintained and repaired by the Americans and would not be able to fly where the Americans would not want them to fly?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no decision has been made on equipment. When a decision is made the House will be informed if it is in session and the public will be informed of that decision.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, considering the serious questions parliamentarians must ask

concerning the purchase of the C-17, could the Minister of National Defence commit to announcing the airlift acquisition only when the House is sitting so we can ask those questions on behalf of all Canadians, including the 75,000 aerospace workers in Canada?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really must be dealing with the Forest Gump of critics.

The government will make a decision on any aircraft or any other purchases when it is appropriate and then the decisions will be announced.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bush government wants to officially stop purchasing Boeing C-17 planes by 2008. It wants to free up funds for its own priorities. Clearly, Washington no longer needs Boeing C-17s.

However, Congress and military lobbyists—people who the current minister knows very well—want to apply pressure to continue procurement representing \$3 billion per year and 30,000 jobs in 42 American states. Washington needs help.

Has the Prime Minister already discussed the purchase of these planes with his patron and mentor, President Bush? If yes, what has he promised him?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. We have never discussed these purchases with the United States. These are our decisions alone to make.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I imagine that on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, the Minister of National Defence watches *Republican Idol* rather than *Canadian Idol* or *Star Académie*.

Even the United States will stop buying the C-17 after 2008, as mentioned recently in a Pentagon report.

Given that the Conservative government is preparing to hand over \$4.5 billion to our southern neighbours and that, to my knowledge, the only person here who salivates at the mention of the Pentagon is our current Minister of National Defence, will the latter choose to protect Canadian interests or to help his Republican idols?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many times I have to say this but we have made no decision. However, I want to point out that in 13 years the previous government only approved three projects: used submarines, light armoured vehicles and the maritime helicopter. That is the performance of that government.

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CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the previous Liberal government we saw waste, corruption and the misuse of taxpayer money.

Oral Questions

Canadians are pleased that this government is working to put in guidelines that will clean up the mess left by the Liberals. One such change is to restrict to \$1,000 the donation that an individual can make to political parties. Corporate and union donations will be banned completely.

There are Liberal members, such as the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, who are now complaining that this is somehow a direct attack on the Liberal Party.

Could the President of the Treasury Board explain to the opposition and to Canadians why these changes are necessary?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as its first piece of legislation, the government is trying to clean up the ethical mess left by the previous administration. One of the best ways to do that was to limit individual contributions to \$1,000 and ban corporate cash, union donations and, most important, ban the type of shakedown of children we have seen from members on the front benches of the Liberal Party.

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• (1445)

LOBBYISTS REGISTRATION ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has belatedly realized that the revolving door between his transition team and lobby firms is wrong.

Why does he not apply that same cooling off period to his war room veterans, people like Reynolds, Norquay, Baran and Boessenkool. It seems that they slammed the door shut only after all their inside buddies were firmly set up in the big lobby firms.

The Conservatives said that they would put a stop to the Liberal legacy of political influence peddling. Why are there such glaring inconsistencies in the application of Tory principles when it comes to lobbying?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his hard work on getting Bill C-2 through committee so we can have real accountability mechanisms in place as soon as possible.

The bottom line is that the Prime Minister made real and meaningful commitments to stop the revolving door between government and lobbying firms and that is exactly what we have done in Bill C-2.

For the first time ever, there will be a five year ban. We promised to include unpaid advisors and, with the amendments proposed by the government, Bill C-2 would do exactly that.

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CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that Apotex is not the only corporation playing fast and loose with the Canada Elections Act.

We have now learned that the TD Canada Trust has seen fit to pull a volpe and violate the donations limit of the act. These people must think that illegal is just a sick bird.

I would like to ask both the Liberals and the Conservatives if they intend to give these donations back but I know I am not allowed to. Instead I will ask what the government intends to do to ensure both the spirit and the letter of the law are respected when it comes to donations under the Canada Elections Act.

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first thing the government wants to do is to get the federal accountability act passed into law so we can end these big \$5,000 contributions and cap the amount at \$1,000 to ensure there is not just integrity but that honest government is seen to done by the Canadian people.

That is something we committed to do, that is something we have before the House of Commons today and that is something we will ask the House to consider before we adjourn for the summer break.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, government MPs have been critical on the creation of the International Criminal Court, demeaning its usefulness because countries such as the United States and China do not support it. This is at a time when the court is prosecuting some of the world's most violent despots.

Does the government fully support the International Criminal Court, yes or no?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very supportive of international efforts to bring international lawbreakers to justice.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will assume that is a no.

The National Rifle Association has met with a number of Conservative MPs on a particularly important issue, the creation of a UN treaty on small arms and light weapons which would be negotiated at the United Nations in a couple of weeks.

This treaty is critically important for keeping arms and weapons out of the hands of violent criminal groups and terrorist organizations. Will the government send officials from foreign affairs to the UN meeting in New York in two weeks to support the creation of an international treaty on light weapons and small arms?

Mr. Peter Van Loan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is very concerned about the flow of small arms as they have a habit of destabilizing troubled spots in the world, particularly in poverty stricken and conflict ridden places. Obviously we are interested in whatever measures can be taken to stop this destabilizing flow of weapons. We will be looking at participating and whether that is appropriate in terms of a small arms treaty.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health seems to be preoccupied with his ownership in a drug company while Canadians wait for doctors, wait for health care services, wait for CT scans and wait for MRIs. The minister has put forward absolutely no action plan to implement a wait times guarantee. Rather, he has blamed the provinces for his distraction telling them “to get off the pot”.

When will the minister take his own advice and get to work on reducing wait times for Canadians? What is he waiting for, the next shareholders meeting of Prudential?

• (1450)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has worked very hard on wait times. It was this party that brought forward the wait times guarantee in the last election.

As Canadians know, this government will follow through on all its election promises unlike the previous government. Unlike the previous government's promise to get rid of the GST, our government will follow through on our promise to introduce a wait times guarantee.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is sad is that the government has not followed through on its priority to address health care. It was our Liberal government that invested \$42 billion over 10 years to reduce wait times in this country.

What I find disappointing is that the Conservatives do not realize that an ownership of 25% in a drug company that they regulate is a conflict of interest. The Conservatives always seem to get disappointed when we highlight yet again another harpocracy.

Will the Prime Minister ask his minister to sell his shares in a drug company in a field that he regulates? When will the Prime Minister—

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her mean-spirited question.

There is a process in place whereby members disclose to the Ethics Commissioner all their interests and the members on this side of the House abide by all the directions from the Ethics Commissioner.

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[*Translation*]

CHILD LABOUR

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is the World Day Against Child Labour. More than 12,000 people have signed a petition asking the government to promote the International Labour Organization's Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. The Liberals did nothing to solve the problem.

Does the present minister intend to act in the immediate future, and how?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in answer to my colleague's question, I admit that I am always surprised to see how much interest the Bloc Québécois members can take in everything that Canada does on the international scene. I appreciate that.

With respect to this day, the World Day Against Child Labour, our country, Canada, is a world leader. Other countries very often follow our lead. We have adopted Convention 82, and we ratified it at the International Labour Organization in 2000. What the member is talking about is another convention that we have not signed. However, if she asks me a supplementary question, I will answer.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is strange that the Minister of Labour would say that Canada is a leader at the international level, because it has not yet signed the treaty regarding the minimum age for the employment of children. The International Labour Organization has in fact received written commitments from 145 countries, but not from Canada.

While Quebec and the provinces have already established that age in their legislation, what explanation is there for why Canada is still not among those 145 countries that have signed the International Labour Organization's Convention 138?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has not ratified “article” 138 of the international labour convention concerning the minimum age for children. And the reason is very simple: we must take what the provinces want into account.

At present, we have examples of what the member is talking about. For example, in some provinces, McDonald's hires young people 12 to 14 years old to work in their restaurants. In my opinion, many parents would be very disappointed if that were prohibited. When we talk about the abuse and exploitation of children in employment the situation is very different in Canada.

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[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the security situation in Dili has deteriorated significantly. Recently 600 soldiers were dismissed because there were complaints of discrimination, which has triggered the current crisis. On May 30, the president declared a 30 day state of emergency in Timor-Leste.

In light of the recent developments, there are concerns that the country could descend into civil war. In recent years Canada has provided security assistance and election monitoring.

It is clear that Canada has shown a leadership role in Timor-Leste in the past. Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell the House how Canada is responding to the present crisis?

Oral Questions

•(1455)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are extremely concerned about the situation in East Timor. We agree with the hon. member on the other side that the situation calls for attention. Canada is working with its partners to ensure that all parties come to the table and that a peaceful resolution is made there.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the record of the Liberals on the environment is all over the map. Their last environment critic voted against Kyoto and said that the agreement was basically written on the back of an airplane napkin on the way to Kyoto. The current critic says that we will not be able to meet our Kyoto targets by the deadline for compliance. Now the Liberal leadership candidate for Etobicoke—Lakeshore is suggesting that Canada impose an economically devastating carbon tax.

Could the natural resources minister tell us what the government's position is on carbon taxes?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore is now suggesting a carbon tax on Canadians. Not only does the old Liberal Party want to spend billions of dollars buying hot air credits in Russia, to add insult to injury, it wants to impose a new carbon tax on Canadians to pay for Russia's hot air.

The last time the Liberals introduced a national energy policy it was an unmitigated disaster.

This government will work with every Canadian and stakeholder to ensure that we get achievable results. We will not look for disaster solutions like the old Liberal tired governments.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite a snag on the weekend, the government is moving ahead with its softwood sellout at breakneck speed. British Columbia negotiators are being asked to sign off on language so quickly that there is not the time to assess the long term effects. This industry is the lifeblood for communities in my riding and across Canada.

Could the minister explain why, with so much at stake, he is putting the Prime Minister's July 6 photo op with George Bush ahead of the economic survival of our forest communities.

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that we are having discussions, finalizing the legal text of this framework agreement, which was made possible because of the hard work and the goodwill earned by the Prime Minister with the President of the United States.

She also knows well that we are working to ensure we get this deal right and that we are looking at how to help producers in her riding.

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a bad deal for Vancouver Island and it is a bad deal for British Columbia. It is nothing short of a sellout of Canada. In this agreement Canada gives, the Americans take and the government rams it through in time for a July 6 photo op.

We give over our right to set our own forest policy to Washington and Washington takes \$1 billion in illegal tariffs. Talk about standing up for Canada.

Could the government tell us when the agreement will be brought before the House and what contingency plans it has if the agreement is defeated in Parliament?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems to believe, like the rest of her party, that the way to help the softwood lumber industry is to continue litigation, to have more court cases brought by American protectionists to attack Canadian producers.

What the agreement does is constrain the U.S. protectionists' ability to attack our industry. We will get the deal brought before the House when we get the right deal.

* * *

FISHERIES

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in recent months, a number of factors, including a strong Canadian dollar, influence from offshore processors and a reduction in some quotas have placed significant pressures on the fish processing industry in Atlantic Canada.

When the current Minister of Fisheries and Oceans was on this side of the House, he pushed the government to introduce a retirement plan for older fish plant workers. Now that the minister holds the power, when will he introduce the retirement program, and not retraining program, he demanded while he was in opposition?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the one thing the hon. member should know, if he were on the committee as long as I was, which he was, is that the retirement package will come under the minister responsible for employment. Consequently, that minister will decide when and if a retirement package will be put in place.

The government has already committed to look at the plight of the older worker, which was a request from members on this side and our friends in the Bloc. I have not heard too much coming from that side to help the older workers or to help the industry in which they work.

Routine Proceedings

● (1500)

JUSTICE

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government promised Canadians we would get tough on crime. While the Liberals took a soft approach to justice, we will do all we can to ensure safety and security in our communities.

The DNA data bank is an essential investigative tool for law enforcement agencies. Could the justice minister tell us what he has done to ensure the DNA data bank remains a vital resource?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his work on this file.

Last week I tabled legislation that will make the DNA data bank a more effective criminal justice tool. Now a DNA order will be automatic, without exception, for 16 serious crimes. Murder and conspiracy to attempted murder will be included in a list of offences that require DNA samples. This simplifies the DNA rules so that police and crown attorneys have a lower administrative burden when it comes to obtain and process DNA samples.

These changes make this tool even more valuable and effective, and this bill is one more way in which the government is making Canada a safer place to live.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite numerous election promises by the Conservatives to keep the postal sorting station in the Quebec City area open, that station and its 100 or so employees have been abandoned. As we speak, the close down process has started.

This government is very quick to abandon not only the citizens of the greater Quebec City area, but also its promises. Time is running out.

Will the government reconsider the decision to close down this postal sorting station and finally listen to the people of the area affected by this closure?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the members of Parliament and ministers from the Quebec City area did fulfill their election promises by thoroughly reviewing and examining the closure issue.

I am very proud of the work accomplished by my colleagues from the Quebec City area. They have, in fact, obtained from Canada Post that no employee or manager will lose their jobs and that the quality of mail delivery in that area will be improved. All our members from Quebec are pleased with the assurances that have been obtained.

* * *

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec government just made an offer to Groupe Le Massif, in Petite-Rivière-Saint-François, for its

tourist recreation development project in Charlevoix. The promoter, Daniel Gauthier, has given himself until June 30, 2006, to meet all of the conditions necessary to complete his \$230 million project, which should create more than 600 permanent jobs. One of those conditions is financial support from the federal government.

With less than 20 days until his deadline, will the government finally state its intentions with regard to this file?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed, this is an important file. We have indicated to Mr. Gauthier, the project promoter, our interest in supporting it.

However, we cannot always give away sums of money just like that, as much as we would like to. Economic Development Canada has rules that I must follow.

Nevertheless, in the next few hours, we will make a formal offer to the promoter. We hope that he will consider it, bearing in mind the budget constraints facing us, as well as the criteria concerning regional economic development and the infrastructure program.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Speaker: I have the honour to table the Strategic Outlook for the 39th Parliament, dealing with House of Commons administration.

[English]

I also have the honour to lay upon the table the House of Commons report to Canadians for 2006.

* * *

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 eight petitions.

* * *

● (1505)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

[Translation]

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

[English]

In accordance with its order of reference, on Monday, May 1, your committee has considered Bill C-3, An Act respecting International Bridges and Tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another act, and agreed, on Thursday, June 8, to report it with amendments.

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology in relation to the Investment Canada review of the Xstrata/Falconbridge merger proposal

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NATIONAL HOCKEY DAY ACT

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-321, An Act respecting a National Hockey Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce in the House an act entitled “An Act respecting a National Hockey Day”, which is seconded by the member for Cape Breton—Canso.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Salmon River, Nova Scotia for winning the Kraft Hockeyville contest last night. It was a very interesting exercise that the Kraft Hockeyville went through. I think most Canadians were very pleased with it, particularly those communities that participated in the contest. It demonstrated the great commitment Canada has to the game of hockey.

The act respecting a day of recognition for hockey, which would be celebrated on the third Friday in February, would designate a day of recognition to commemorate the sport of ice hockey. This day would also strengthen women's and children's involvement in the sport, encourage the participation of citizens and their communities and provide for a stronger identity shared on a national level.

The idea for a national hockey day grew out of the Hockeyville contest and came from the village of O'Leary, which managed to make it to the last five communities in the contest. I wish to congratulate it for their idea.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

Routine Proceedings

That in relation to its study on the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan, members of the Standing Committee on National Defence be authorized to travel to National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa, on June 15, from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee members.

• (1510)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Joliette for supporting this motion, which is asking the government that the first report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, presented on Thursday, June 8, 2006, be concurred in.

As usual, the Bloc Québécois is standing up for Quebec's milk producers. We have been working for a long time on the issue of milk protein imports. In committee, my colleague from the Bloc Québécois and myself decided to give priority to this motion regarding milk protein imports from various places, particularly Europe and New Zealand. These imports cause serious market distortions in Quebec and in Canada to the detriment of milk producers.

I want to thank my colleagues from the Liberal Party and the NDP who voted in favour of this motion. As a result, the committee adopted a very specific and very clear motion regarding milk protein.

I will read to the House the committee recommendations on this issue:

1. That, since all the parties support supply management, the government take immediate action to strengthen import control measures, which are crucial to supply management, by limiting the importation of milk protein concentrates and any product specifically designed to circumvent the supply management rules.

2. That the government adopt regulations that would classify all milk protein concentrates, regardless of their protein content, under tariff line 0404, or a tariff quota to be negotiated.

3. That the government invoke Article XXVIII of the GATT where necessary in order to cap imports of milk protein concentrates by immediately launching negotiations with its trade partners and by amending its tariff schedule through a legislative measure adopted by Parliament.

That is what was requested by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. As I said, the vote was split. Unfortunately, the government in power, the Conservative government, through its members on the committee, refused to protect the interests of dairy producers in Canada and Quebec. I hope that the Conservatives will correct that today, since I expect they will be able to participate in this debate.

I would like to give a brief historical overview of the milk protein concentrate issue. Since 1994 and the Uruguay round, Canada has consistently tried to limit the importation of milk proteins. Negotiations were underway at the WTO. Milk protein concentrates were classified under tariff line 0404. So far, so good.

Routine Proceedings

In 1996, Canada successfully defended its position before the NAFTA panel as well. The problem arose shortly after, when the Canada Border Services Agency classified one milk protein concentrate, known in more technical terms as PROMILK 872B, under line 3502, which is tariff free. That made a huge difference, because the manufacturers of this milk protein could then export it without any tariff being applied. This meant that processors could take advantage of low prices to use more and more of this milk protein.

Obviously, milk protein imports rose in the wake of this decision by the Canada Border Services Agency. I have always said that the decision was a mistake. In 2003, the agency reviewed its classification and admitted that there was a problem and that it had been a mistake to classify that protein under tariff line 3502. PROMILK 872B was reclassified under line 0404. That had been Canada's intention all along, except during the brief time when the decision was made to change the classification.

Of course, the company that manufactures the protein contested the reclassification. The Canadian International Trade Tribunal decided in the manufacturer's favour, and the decision was upheld in January by the Federal Court.

We could lay down our arms and give up the fight, because a court ruled following the decision by the Canadian International Trade Tribunal. Milk protein would then be able to enter Canada and Quebec without problem and without tariff. But this would seriously threaten the whole supply management system. I will come back to this in a moment.

We know that 40% of farm income in Quebec comes from supply-managed industries. That is why it is so important for the Bloc Québécois and all my colleagues to protect the supply management system.

• (1515)

Canada lost a right it had negotiated at the WTO and always defended. What should we do at a time like that? We should stand up and make a decision. If we have the political will to defend our farmers, we will simply classify milk proteins under the proper tariff line. That is how a responsible government should act. This was not done, but it must and can be done. That is the beauty of it, and that is why we are making this motion.

The government, in cooperation with all the members of Parliament, can make a decision today that milk proteins will simply be classified under the tariff line they have always come under, except during the brief time when the Border Services Agency made that mistake, as I said earlier. Other countries do this. The Americans, correctly, do not hesitate to limit milk protein imports. Canada can follow suit. There are solutions. I mentioned them when I listed the recommendations we made in the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

It is rather unfortunate, but milk and cream are being replaced more and more by milk proteins in cheese, yogurt and ice cream. How can this be remedied? Simple political will could allow this motion to be adopted. Clearly, this would be the first action to take. Besides, this is what Agriculture and Agri-food Canada officials who appeared before the committee have said. The government can take

action to limit milk protein imports, if it wants to. Nothing is stopping it. The government has the right and the duty to control milk protein concentrate imports and has several options in terms of how to do so. Those options are indicated in the motion, as I said a few moments ago.

Pursuant to section 13 of the Customs Tariff, the minister can in fact modify the list of tariff provisions to change the tariff item number. Our interpretation is that of the Fédération des producteurs de lait du Québec who say that this could be modified simply via regulation, namely, a government decision that does not even require the support of Parliament. Others say that legislation must be passed. Not everyone agrees on which action to take. However, if that were the case, there would be no problem and I would like to assure the government of the Bloc Québécois' support. If the government were to decide to use that channel to modify this tariff line, all 51 Bloc Québécois members would agree, with no problem.

The government could also have recourse to article XXVIII of the GATT to negotiate a tariff rate quota with its trade partners. Canada would reserve the right to add tariff rate quotas, even in cases of failed negotiations with its partners. Has article XXVIII ever been used? Yes, by several countries. In the agriculture sector, the most recent example that comes to mind is the European Union, in 2002, concerning wheat and barley. At that time, European Union countries simply decided to protect their wheat and barley producers, which they successfully managed to do.

Article XXVIII of the GATT can be used, but there are consequences. Once negotiations with our trading partners have taken place under this article, we accept a 10% increase in imports. Therefore, it is not necessarily the first option we should resort to. We would prefer a government decision through regulation to prohibit or at least limit milk protein imports. Still, if necessary, we should not hesitate to use article XXVIII of the GATT. It is meant to be used for that purpose and it is totally consistent with WTO rules. We are not inventing anything by using this article; we are simply protecting what we have.

Our failure to do anything would obviously have serious consequences. Supply management is threatened. That is what I wanted to talk to you about earlier. There are three pillars to supply management: setting prices, limiting production through quotas and, of course, limiting imports. Therefore, if we weaken one of these pillars—let us take imports for example since that is what we are discussing here—we are compromising the whole supply management system in Quebec and in Canada.

Milk protein imports might replace over 25% of protein contained in milk that is produced here. That is what will happen if we do not act fast, if this government does not have the political will to protect what we have. The more milk protein we import, the more worthless milk powder will be produced, since processors will continue to use milk fat.

• (1520)

This huge quantity of milk powder is impossible to manage. Obviously, all this will cause a collapse in the price structure.

Furthermore, each tonne of milk protein concentrate replaces 2.6 tonnes of milk powder.

Routine Proceedings

Imports cost \$235 million in 2005. This is an increase of \$60 million over 2004. We are talking about no less than \$5 million a month. That is what it cost milk producers in Canada.

In Quebec, they are talking about a loss of revenue of \$70 million. We can imagine what that represents in the dairy products sector, a loss of revenue of \$70 million.

As I was saying, we estimate that, if the government goes on doing nothing in this file, milk producers will be facing serious economic consequences of some \$500 million a year.

Supply management enables producers to make a fair income from the market without subsidies. During negotiations at the WTO, lots of countries have suggested or supposed for a long time that Canada is subsidizing its milk, poultry and egg producers, because of the supply management system in place. That is totally wrong.

Up to now, Canadian governments have always defended the system, but they are hesitating a little more now. All we have to do is look at the questions being put in the House to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food since the beginning of the session, to realize what serious concerns there are. We need only think back to the arrival in Montreal, barely a few days ago, of the Director-General of the WTO, Pascal Lamy. He said that Canada should make concessions on its supply management system so that negotiations could conclude. The whole burden of proof, the whole weight is now on Canada's shoulders. I think that is a lot to bear, when more than 150 countries belong to the WTO. I think that the other countries also have a lot of concessions to make before being able to ask us to disrupt our supply management system.

Also, in addition to avoiding subsidies, the system benefits consumers. They are provided with a basket of quality products that are among the least expensive in the world. A survey, which I can quote here and which has been done 18 times since 1997, shows that dairy products cost 16% less here on average than in the U.S. This system must absolutely be protected.

Speaking of consumers, one may wonder if they are paying less, given that imports of low-cost milk proteins are coming into the country. Unfortunately, the answer is no; consumers are not even benefiting from this.

I can return to the example of one of the great battles of the Bloc Québécois, on butter oils in ice cream. Imports of butter oils used in making ice cream rose 557% between 1997 and 2002. That cost Quebec milk producers alone more than half a billion dollars. That is not negligible and the government of the time did nothing to prevent these butter oil imports which were coming mainly from the United States, as opposed to milk proteins which came mainly from Europe.

All you need to do is go to the supermarket to buy good ice cream and carefully read the label to find out the ingredients. If the ice cream is made with modified milk ingredients, it is sacrificing the taste of real ice cream, which should be made with cream. There are still a few Quebec companies, such as Laiterie de Coaticook and Laiterie Lamothe et Frères, that make excellent ice cream with cream, but this is unfortunately no longer the case with most of the ice cream we find in our grocery stores.

The irony in all this is that the ice cream made by Laiterie Coaticook or Laiterie Lamothe et Frères is not more expensive than the ice cream made with modified milk ingredients. On the other hand, the other day in the grocery store I saw that a big multinational has decided to play the marketing card and offer an ice cream made with real cream. In addition to real cream, it contains modified milk ingredients, but the cream is there. This was indicated on the ice cream carton, but believe it or not, this ice cream costs a lot more than the other ice creams. That represents added value for this multinational, which uses it for marketing purposes; in reality, we could quite easily make all of our ice cream with good cream. Obviously, our dairy producers and consumers would be the winners if this happened.

Consumers are increasingly conscious of the issues.

● (1525)

On the butter oil issue, we did a lot of awareness raising with dairy producers.

I know that, just about all over Quebec, dairy producers have recently been going to grocery stores handing out leaflets to tell people what they could find in dairy products such as cheese, yogurt and ice cream. People are increasingly aware, and they are reading labels more and more.

The only thing is that, as I was saying earlier, in marketing matters, there is always some arrangement that can be made, some way of getting around the way things are done, particularly the way a product is presented. When that happens, people can sometimes become a little confused about ingredients. But still, they are increasingly aware of what is happening, even on the international level.

I just recently read a news release, dated June 12, about the Canadian dairy, poultry and egg sectors. These are the people who are part of supply management in Canada. The release refers to a survey Léger Marketing was recently asked to do.

This survey shows that:

—85% of Canadians agree that the federal government should support the supply management approach in the dairy, poultry and egg sectors. —98% feel that it is important to ensure Canadians have a stable supply of foods produced in Canada; 95% of respondents agree that family farms are an important part of the economy for rural communities; and 83% agree that supply management is a better approach than taxpayer-funded subsidies to ensuring an adequate quality of life for agricultural producers.

These numbers are interesting. They show that people are becoming more aware of how our system works.

Again from the news release:

The Canadian dairy, poultry and egg industries bring in approximately \$7 billion in agricultural revenues, generate \$39 billion worth of economic activity and provide jobs for several hundred thousand Canadians throughout the country.

These are very interesting statistics. As I said earlier, this is a very recent news release dated June 12, which is today. That is the consumers' perspective.

Routine Proceedings

The milk protein importation issue has also generated a lot of support for dairy producers in Quebec and Canada. In April 2005, Quebec's National Assembly adopted a motion to support Quebec dairy producers in their struggle for adequate controls over the importation of dairy ingredients. The motion received unanimous consent from the National Assembly. A few months ago, I read in the newspaper, *La Terre de chez nous*, that Quebec's Minister of Agriculture was asking the federal government to act on this issue.

In May of that year, dairy producers gave bags of powdered milk to the Prime Minister of the day. Members of the Bloc Québécois, myself included, also took bags of milk to the Minister of Agriculture's office. People even built a wall of bags of milk in Montreal. These symbolic actions sent the message that bags of powdered milk had become worthless because of growing milk protein imports.

At the time, people wanted to use Article XXVIII of the GATT to limit milk protein imports. This issue has been dogging us for some time. Last January's Canadian International Trade Tribunal decision has made this urgency an emergency.

Other support includes that provided by 63 dairy processors. Finally, 75% of Quebec's processors, including the Agropur cooperative which processes over half the milk, support the milk producers' efforts. My colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue gave me a letter from the Amos cooperative, a processor in that region. I would like to quote from the letter. I will explain to a certain extent why even processors are supporting dairy producers in this situation:

—we hereby wish to inform you that the cooperative unreservedly supports the cause of our producers who, at present, are fighting to re-establish a tariff that would have our processors use, first and foremost, protein produced locally.

● (1530)

Given that this directly affects farm income and, consequently, the purchasing power of our major customers, you will understand that we in turn, as input suppliers, are suffering from the effects of this practice.

That is very explicit. I hope that Parliament will carefully consider this matter. We must absolutely protect our supply management system. As mentioned earlier, one of the pillars of supply management is limiting imports. That is what the government is being asked to do today.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from the Bloc, the agriculture critic, for his intervention today in bringing forward the motion from the agriculture committee.

The Government of Canada, the Conservative Party of Canada, fully supports our dairy farmers. There is no question that they have gone through some tough times with BSE and from the increase of the amount of imports that have been coming in through real protein concentrates. Instead of imports coming through as fluid milk, which is what was in our original trade agreements, we now have a more difficult situation. We have a number of derivative products from milk flowing into the country, which is no doubt upsetting the balance in the way we manage our supply managed industries.

We have a problem and we recognize that. Our concern is the timing. I talked about this at the agriculture committee. We have a

problem with timing in bringing forward this motion. Right now, invoking an article 28 under the GATT really would be an irritant at this delicate stage of the negotiations we are in at the World Trade Organization.

There is no doubt that we have to be at the table through these WTO negotiations, as our Minister of Agriculture has said numerous times, to represent our supply managed industries, whether it is milk producers or poultry producers. We have to be there defending their interests at the table. I fear that if we were to come forward with an article 28 we may irritate our trading partners exponentially, which would make it more difficult for us to do a good job of protecting supply management in the current discussions at the WTO.

I want to ask my colleague from the Bloc if he would care to comment on this whole issue of timing, of dealing with this sensitive issue and trying to get the most out of the WTO for our producers, proceeding and making the appropriate changes under the new WTO agreement that hopefully is coming forth, and then providing the tariffication we require to protect supply management.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks and his question.

I was already aware that he thought the timing for introducing this kind of motion was bad. His colleagues in the Conservative Party said the same thing at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

The reason I have done it is that I think exactly the opposite. In my opinion, this is very good timing, because the situation is urgent. We are asking the government to fix a situation that has persisted since an error was made by the Border Services Agency. Before that, since 1994 at the Uruguay Round, Canada had always defended the idea that imports of milk proteins could be limited.

We would fix this situation by passing this motion today. The more time goes by, the more imports we allow in, and the more difficult it will be to reach an agreement with trading partners and to limit imports of milk proteins, particularly if we are using article XXVIII of the GATT. We have to act immediately. There absolutely has to be the political will.

The witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food argued that if the political will existed, a government could protect its interests. That is what we are asking for today. There is a serious risk that the entire supply management system will be undermined. I have given examples that show this quite clearly. That is why now is the time to introduce a motion of this nature, so that our milk producers will ultimately be able to get back the situation that had existed since 1994.

Routine Proceedings

• (1535)

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased with the remarks by the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, but I am concerned about what the member for Selkirk—Interlake had to say. He leaves the impression that as a representative of the governing party he is more concerned about the irritants toward other countries than he is toward the very substantial irritant to our supply management system and how that in fact is undermining the supply management system.

The member spoke a bit about the balanced position that Canada has at the negotiations in terms of supporting our export oriented commodities and also in supporting our supply management system and allowing it the vehicle, under WTO, to operate.

My question for the member is about the fact that there seems to be a view held by some of the exporters and some in the industry that through our supply management system we do not allow imports. In fact, we do. We allow substantial imports. I just wanted to mention that. The fact is that right now Canada imports, under dairy, 6% of the market, 5% in terms of the eggs and turkey industry, 7.5% in terms of chicken, and 21% in terms of hatching eggs. The United States, on the other hand, which everybody believes is a free trader, allows only 2.75% access for dairy.

Therefore, we are in fact working within the rules in allowing imports, and if other countries would allow even 5% imports, it would really open up the market for cheese, by about 77.5% worldwide. We are doing our part within the supply management industry.

As for my question, with these milk proteins, what is happening is that industry is importing in other ways, getting above and beyond the 6% of market and having an impact on our dairy industry. I wonder what the member's thoughts are on that.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member very much for his remarks. I also thank him for the support he has expressed, both in committee and here in the House, today. I invite all his colleagues and our colleagues in this Parliament to be here when it comes time to vote, at the end of the afternoon, so that we can pass this motion to protect our milk producers.

The member mentioned a fact that is often ignored when we are talking about the dangers of restoring the situation, so as not to offend or inconvenience our trading partners. What my colleague from Malpeque has just said is entirely true.

On average, in all supply managed industries, we already accept 5% imports from WTO member countries. As for the other countries, their markets are more or less open. I am talking mainly about the countries of Europe—the European Union—and the United States, whose markets are 2.5% open. And so when Pascal Lamy, Director General of the WTO, or when those countries tell us that supply management is a problem and we have to make compromises, my answer is that when the European Union and the United States open their markets to the level that ours is open—which is, on average, 5%, as I said—then we can sit down at a table and talk, and negotiate. Right now, we are not at that point.

We are only asking the other countries, the European Union countries and the United States, to reduce their subsidies, and they make a big deal about it. We know that the Doha Round has gone on for quite some time. As we speak, the Doha Round was actually supposed to have ended, but that is far from being the case. Negotiations are continuing, because the Americans, in particular, are kind of circumventing the process. Instead of reducing their subsidies, they would like to put them in different coloured boxes, so they can conceal the fact that they are subsidizing their agricultural production heavily.

As a result, when that is done, when the other countries agree to what we have already agreed to, we will be able to sit down and talk with them.

• (1540)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska on his vigilance. Last fall, it was a Bloc motion that stopped the other half of the government from dropping supply management. The motion was passed right here. Since it was an election period, the Liberals and Conservatives had to do the same as we did. It was the Bloc that raised the issue then, and today it is still the Bloc Québécois that is bringing back this motion.

I want my hon. colleague to answer the following. It is astonishing that the Conservative government, which claims to defend the agricultural community, is ultimately taking a position that is contrary to Quebec and Canadian agriculture. How can that be? This seems unacceptable to me.

I congratulate the member on having raised this issue in the House. I hope that we will adopt a position in the House that will force the Conservative government to get a grip on itself, this government that is sacrificing the farming community.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague. I know that he has the interests of the farmers in his riding and throughout Quebec at heart. That is why the Bloc Québécois took action.

During the election campaign—or during certain question periods—our opponents in the government said that the Bloc Québécois has never done anything for agriculture. I do not blow my cool very often, but I did during one question period when a Conservative member from Quebec said that the Bloc Québécois could not do anything.

The supply management motion that my colleague is talking about was tabled in the House last November by the Bloc Québécois. It enabled supply management to survive, no less. The reason is simple: Canada's chief negotiator, Mr. Steve Verheul, feels bound by this motion. That bugs and annoys him, but one thing is sure: the farmers of Quebec and Canada—I met some in Toronto from New Brunswick—thanked the Bloc Québécois for its good work.

The Bloc defends the interests of Quebec, but when that helps other farmers too, we are happy to do so. I would have a hard time understanding how the party in power, which voted for that motion, could vote against the motion tabled today in the House.

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Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak to this motion in the House of Commons.

I would like to begin by reiterating the words of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, who has emphasized the firm and unflinching support of the present government for supply management.

The system has served milk producers and processors well for many years and will continue to do so.

That is the crux of the matter, that is, support for supply management and the best approach to take in this connection.

Defending supply management represents a priority for this government. Why? Because supply management is an appropriate and efficient approach to take in agricultural production.

Not only does supply management enable producers to get a fair return on the market, but it is also ensures reliable quality and supply for consumers. Supply management is also a means of providing everyone in the value chain with a means of enabling them to collaborate and make shared gains.

It has been shown over the years that supply management makes it possible to achieve set goals. Of course it has evolved and been reinforced over time so as to support the interests of producers and consumers.

Supply management was the choice of milk, poultry and egg producers, and I can affirm that it is also the choice that Canada will firmly continue to support.

Let us look now at the action we have taken.

The present government is fully aware of the concerns of Canada's milk producers concerning imports of milk protein concentrates. This is why the issue is one of the government's big priorities.

The government has taken action to ensure that imports of milk concentrates containing up to 85% protein are subject to tariff quotas.

As for concentrates containing over 85% protein, we are keeping a very close watch on the situation. To date nothing indicates that there will be a rise in imports in this category.

In addition, the present government firmly believes that this question must be followed up in a spirit of collaboration, not of confrontation.

This is why the minister has invited sector leaders to form a task force in which all industry stakeholders can get together and consider not only specific questions concerning milk protein concentrates, but also long-term prospects with a view to boosting growth in the dairy sector.

The issues and challenges facing the dairy industry in Canada cannot be dealt with unless producers and processors work in close cooperation.

To that end, the executives of the Dairy Farmers of Canada and the Dairy Processors Association of Canada have accepted the minister's invitation. They have undertaken discussions for the purpose of developing a joint position for answering those questions and getting the dairy industry growing again.

The minister assigned the following tasks to the working group: develop a strategy to promote growth in the industry; develop joint positions relating to standards for the use of milk and milk ingredients; address the questions of price setting and profitability; and determine how the industry and the government can combine their efforts to draw up plans that will enable them to meet other challenges in future, including the repercussions that the WTO negotiations may have.

The best way to solve these problems and many others is for producers and processors to work together.

There is no doubt that considerable pressure is being brought to bear on the dairy industry in Canada at present. Processors have concerns about the stagnant or declining market for dairy products, their capacity to develop new products and technologies that will help to develop markets.

Producers' concerns focus on questions like the recent quota reductions, the size of the skimmed milk surplus and the associated costs, the erosion of domestic markets under the effects of imports of certain dairy products, and the pressure that Canada is currently under in the WTO negotiations.

● (1545)

As well, producers and processors are concerned about the continuing decline in milk consumption and about problems caused by prices and profitability. Milk protein concentrates are only one of the many difficulties that the industry is facing at present.

The best way to deal with problems in the industry, in the interests of both parties, is to sit down at the same table and find realistic solutions. This is by far the most desirable approach, because it allows us to find solutions that suit both parties. It is preferable to settle our domestic differences this way rather than to take the issue of concentrates to the WTO.

The government is well aware that the industry recommends invoking article XXVIII of the GATT, so that the government could impose a tariff quota on milk protein concentrates with a protein concentration higher than 85%. That approach would have serious repercussions that we must weigh very carefully. I will explain why.

First, invoking XXVIII could be negative in terms of Canada's ability to pursue its broad trade objectives at the WTO. We are at a delicate point in the Doha Round negotiations right now. In other words, from a strategic point of view, this is not the time to initiate that kind of process.

The government is of the opinion that Canada can better defend itself and support the interests of dairy producers and, in fact, the interests of the entire Canadian agriculture sector, by preserving its credibility and its influence in the negotiations.

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Some major member countries of the WTO have warned Canada against invoking article XXVIII at this stage of the negotiations, that is, that it could seriously undermine our credibility and influence.

If the industry presents a united front and works to achieve a common objective, it will be able to meet the shared challenges more effectively. To do that, we will continue to work closely with the industry, in order to resolve the question of milk protein concentrates. More generally, we are also planning to pursue consultations with the supply managed industries regarding Canada's participation in the WTO agriculture negotiations.

The WTO agriculture negotiations have reached a delicate point in Geneva. The government is continuing to work closely with supply managed industries and with all industries, as the negotiations progress.

I know that the supply managed bodies have taken an active part in the process, and I would point out that their firm commitment to this is greatly appreciated.

This kind of joint effort is important for Canada, and it is also important that the other WTO member countries see it.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food continues to work closely with all stakeholders in the agri-food sector, including the sectors under supply management, and is exchanging information and analyses on the main issues in order to flesh out Canada's negotiation strategy.

I want to assure you that this close working relationship will be maintained as the negotiations proceed.

Canada is a firm believer in the merit of the WTO process. We are confident in the process and our negotiating team has our unreserved support. We believe that, through the WTO, we can make the rules of the game fairer at the international level by eliminating export subsidies, substantially reducing trade-distorting domestic support measures, and greatly improving access to foreign markets.

We are determined to defend our interests and obtain the best possible results at the WTO for the entire Canadian agricultural sector.

At the same time, there is no question that the key issues essential to supply management are under substantial pressure at the WTO negotiations.

● (1550)

We must keep in mind that the other 148 member countries of the WTO are prepared to accept at least some tariff reduction and some increase in tariff quotas for all sensitive products.

We have expended a good deal of effort defending the elements we consider important to our supply management system, but we are under enormous pressure and no other country supports our position. Whatever the case, we will continue to vigorously defend our interests. We must also dismiss any idea of abandoning or simply withdrawing from the WTO process.

Canada will not be withdrawing from the negotiations, as the Minister has clearly indicated. We have to sit down at the table to

negotiate an agreement that is beneficial for our export-dependent sectors and to defend our supply-managed sectors.

The second reason I am opposed to the use of article XXVIII of GATT at the WTO is that it would not be effective in putting an end to imports of protein concentrates from the United States and Mexico. Those imports would in fact be authorized under NAFTA, and we fear that they will continue. However they would no longer be coming from overseas, but from our neighbours to the south.

At least two major plants in the United States are manufacturing protein concentrates. These could easily fill the void created by the absence of imports from New Zealand and Europe.

The other risk, if Canada decided simply to stop these imports from all its trading partners, would probably take the form of a trade challenge from the United States. We all know how much the Americans like our supply management system. Not only might they challenge on this particular issue, but they could also take advantage of the opportunity to re-start old battles that we already won. This could mean greater risk for the entire supply managed sector. That is why the minister has advised us to play it safe.

In conclusion, I would like to add that the government is convinced that the best solution is for the working group to get together and formulate what will be needed to help strengthen the supply management system and dairy sector of the future to ensure a healthier, more stable agricultural sector.

We are confident that the working group will come up with practical solutions that will make it possible to avoid the risks and dangers to which we would expose ourselves if we took this issue to the WTO.

The best solutions to these challenges will be those that dairy producers and processors come up with together. The working group is exactly the right body to find solutions that are acceptable to all parties.

We will be very happy to learn the results of their work in the near future.

Finally, the essence of supply management, historically as well as under current conditions, is in the cooperation of all the links in the value chain, especially producers and processors, who work together to provide consumers with quality products.

It is thanks to this spirit of cooperation that supply management works well. In my view, the working group will be imbued with this same spirit in its formulation of realistic solutions that serve the interests of all the stakeholders in this sector.

● (1555)

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the problem with the speech of the member we have just heard, who is also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, is that he affirms on one hand that his government wishes to defend the supply management system, and on the other he says that nothing needs to be done regarding milk protein imports.

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He also talks about contradiction. I do not see any contradiction between the ministerial decision to set up a consultation between milk processors and milk producers, and WTO negotiations, the possible government political will to use Article XXVIII of the GATT or proceeding by regulatory means to limit milk imports. All that can be done at the same time. But the member sees a contradiction in that.

So my question is as follows: why does he see a contradiction between the minister's request to milk producers and processors to sit down together—a quite proper and praiseworthy initiative—and his government's willingness to take action? I would also like him to tell us if he will vote in favour of today's motion by the Bloc Québécois. When this motion was submitted to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, he voted against it. This was a big surprise to Quebec's milk producers, since he himself is a farmer. Some citizens in his own riding even telephoned me to ask what their member had done. Since he is also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, those people thought it was a mistake.

So I would like him to remedy the situation today and to state before these farm producers, these milk producers, all those in Quebec, and those in Canada therefore that he was mistaken and that he truly intends to defend the interests of milk producers in Quebec. This is a member for Quebec. We do not expect anything less from him.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, in my remarks I explained why it was important not to invoke article XXVIII, since it would no doubt be ineffective in the short term.

I thank the member for his question, but I am convinced that the farmers and milk producers in my riding are well aware of the problem and the very delicate situation at the WTO at present. As my dear friend from Richmond—Arthabaska said, the milk producers in my riding are very worried and have shared their concerns with me. They have a very good understanding of the situation at present.

Of course, the Bloc Québécois could help us by toning down their motion. If we have problems at the WTO, I hope that the Bloc Québécois will bear the responsibility for what could happen at the WTO.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a timely debate on a timely motion, certainly one that has a lot of farmers sitting on the edge of their seats as they anticipate the outcome at the WTO. We are constantly hearing the same refrain that we must not enter into this territory because we might somehow jeopardize the ongoing talks.

It is incumbent upon the government to act on behalf of these farmers. The supply managed sector in this country, both the dairy and the poultry sectors, have been very cooperative in allowing their product into this country, as the hon. member for Malpeque has already stated. If this product were allowed into other foreign countries, we would hear a great deal of unnecessary argument put forward for not allowing us this debate today.

How do we find the balance between what we want for the supply managed sector? We know what happened with butter and the

impact it had on the manufacturing of ice cream in this country, and now we have milk protein supplements and their impact on other dairy products.

How are we going to mesh this difference between what CAFTA wants, what the trade alliance people of this country want, and what the supply managed sector wants? Who is going to win? How do we manage to find a common ground where both of these areas can be winners when this is all said and done? We are looking for long term benefits for farmers in this country, not short term benefits.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question. Negotiations are still under way at the WTO, and we cannot negotiate publicly at present. His question is a legitimate one, and I think that our negotiators will work under the best possible conditions to defend supply management and achieve the best balance for Canadian producers.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière that I too come from a riding that has dairy farms. Some of these milk processing farms are currently on the brink of declaring bankruptcy because they are going through extremely tough times. When he says this will be done in the near future—his words—he is not being sensitive to the producers who are currently losing their farms because milk proteins continue to flow into Canada.

I would like to ask the hon. member why we cannot use article XXVIII to change things when all the other countries are doing so at the WTO. The United States are currently challenging WTO clauses. Why is the hon. member so determined for us not to talk about because negotiations are underway? When there are negotiations at the WTO, it is vital that the House know what the government wants to do.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat my answer.

I mentioned in my speech and to my hon. colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska earlier that countries like the United States and Mexico are not subject to article XXVIII of the GATT. Milk proteins could therefore enter quite easily through these two countries. Article XXVIII would not be effective and would be inappropriate at this time.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the parliamentary secretary's remarks. If I have ever seen a government try to straddle a barbed wired fence, this is certainly it. As the member from the Bloc Québécois said, the Conservatives are really straddling the fence and trying to talk from both sides of their mouth at the same time.

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The parliamentary secretary went to great lengths to leave the impression that all other countries are opposed to Canada's position. The member knows that is not the case. The member knows that not all countries are opposed. There may be somewhere around 20 opposed to our position. However, the great majority of the countries are not opposed nor are they in favour. They are just not taking a position. For that, roughly 100 countries or so, the government should be working to bring them inside to explain how supply management would be good for them.

Will the parliamentary secretary tell us just what is the government's strategy in trying to gain a sensitive products category at the WTO, like the previous minister was trying to negotiate? And gaining good favour in doing it, by the way. Will the member outline the strategy in that regard, so that we can in fact win the round at the WTO and maintain that good system that we have in Canada that should be a model of rural development for the rest of the world?

• (1605)

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, our government can only negotiate in public existing WTO details of agreement. This would place Canada in a position of weakness, which would be very harmful to Canadian producers. Our government's goal is to have the best possible solutions that are well balanced and promising for the future of our agriculture—a good vision for the future, which the previous government never gave us.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am indeed pleased to speak on the motion by the member for the Bloc Québécois. The motion before the House calls upon the government to join with the opposition parties and stand behind our supply management producers.

I am really amazed by the government changing its tune from what it said it would do during the election. This is what the Conservative election platform said with respect to supply management. It stated:

A Conservative government will:

Ensure that agriculture industries that choose to operate under domestic supply management remain viable.

That sounds good. The platform went on to state:

Canada needs efficient production planning, market-based returns to producers, and predictable imports to operate domestic supply management systems.

Yet, and this is where the real concerns come in, there is another document by the Conservative Party, signed by the current Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs in February 2004. It stated:

A Conservative government will ensure that any agreement which impacts supply management gives our producers guaranteed access to foreign markets, and that there will be a significant transition period in any move towards a market-driven environment.

That is really sliding away from protection of supply management and how the supply management system operates. That is really suggesting that the Conservatives would go to an open market marketing system and have a transition period so that the supply management system could figure out what to do with itself in that time. At the end of the day, though, producers would be in an open market marketing system at the mercy of the multinational corporate

sector, which many of the other commodities are at the moment, and that is why they are in such great difficulty.

This statement clearly will result in the undermining and destruction of supply management. Neither the Prime Minister nor the foreign affairs minister repudiated this statement. There is an opportunity for members opposite, for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food or indeed his parliamentary secretary, to do that today. We will see if they will. We will give them the opportunity to come clean on where the Conservative Party of Canada really stands with respect to the supply management industry.

With respect to supply management, then, the system was the result of government and farm organizations realizing that to stabilize the Canadian industry, to ensure security of supply and quality, and to provide the basis upon which the primary producer would realize an adequate income, a system of supply controls, reflecting demand, would prove to be the best course of action. In other words, through the Canadian milk supply management system, it is effectively figured out what market demand will be in the country and then production is matched to meet demand.

That is why this discussion is so important. We allow, as I said earlier, 6% imports of dairy products. That is factored in. The opponents of supply management talk about supply management being absolutely protectionist. It is not. We allow 6% imports of dairy products into this country. The Americans allow only 2.75%. Canada is much more open in dairy than are the Americans, and far, far more open than are the Europeans.

However, with respect to the current motion before the House, with milk protein able to come in through other ways, we as an industry cannot really know how much of that market is going to be displaced or how much of the product is going to require disposal through the skim milk powder disposal system. It jeopardizes that supply management system.

• (1610)

That is why this motion, put forward in concurrence with what the committee did the other day, is so very important.

As for allowing this situation to continue, let us go back to when supply management first was brought in. We were not technologically advanced then. Milk was milk was milk. The quota system basically was based on butterfat. Now the technology is there to break milk down into various components. The industry breaks it down into various components and ingredients. Violating the intent of the system, it is imported and basically it is remanufactured it into cheese or ice cream or whatever. This has an impact on the original design of the supply management system.

Basically the system is one that I think we should be presenting to the rest of the world as a rural development policy. It is a system that makes sense for sensitive products, and every country has sensitive products. It is a system that provides reasonable returns for efficient producers and a high quality product to consumers at reasonable prices. Let us look at our prices for dairy products in Canada. Sometimes they are a little higher than those in the United States, but on average they are lower. As a result, our producers are able to invest capital in their industry because they know that if they are efficient they are going to have reasonable returns.

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Why do we think Canada is recognized as having among the best breeding stock in the world in terms of the dairy industry? Because for decades dairy producers have been able to invest in the genetics and the breeding stock to build that herd, that is why. They knew they would make reasonable returns on the sale of their milk, so as a result, we built one of the best and high quality genetic breeding stocks in the world. That stock is in demand.

There is a problem with the United States at the moment, in that it will not take cattle over 30 months. The government has failed absolutely to address that problem with the U.S. Farmers are suffering as a result of that border restriction.

On the mad cow situation, the Americans said long ago that they would abide by the science, but then there was another animal with the disease found in B.C., just as there have been more animals with the disease found in the U.S. Then Congress puts a little pressure on the administration and it goes against the basic agreement that it would allow live cattle over 30 months in by June. As a result, Canadian dairy, beef and breeding stock producers suffer again and the government opposite sits on its hands because it does not want to challenge its good friend, George Bush. Who suffers? Producers suffer.

How important is the supply management sector? Supply management generates over \$7 billion in farm cash receipts a year, accounting for 20% of Canada's total agriculture receipts. With an average age of 47, dairy, poultry and egg producers can see a future that allows them to raise their families and make a living in rural Canada.

The stability of supply management allows producers with young families to contribute to rural development. Canadian dairy, poultry and egg producers use over \$3.1 billion worth of feed per year. Milk, chickens, turkeys and eggs produced in Canada support jobs in over 1,100 processing plants.

Again, the pressure from our trading partners is to move Canada further away from these institutional structures that have benefited consumers and producers to those that favour unfettered trade. We have seen the kind of money that we have had to put out as government in the last number of years to those commodities that trade in a so-called unfettered market, and it is anything but unfettered.

• (1615)

The fact of the matter is that producers in Canada are competitive and they are efficient, but they cannot compete against the treasuries of the United States and the European Community. It is very difficult to compete against trade law that allows Brazil and Argentina and other countries to use low wages, poor environmental standards and poor land policy in the production of their products.

The whole system at the WTO needs to be revamped, but it needs to go further than what is currently on the table, because if we really are going to have a level playing field, then we have to include labour, labour standards, safety of workers, environment and land use. If we had that and no competition in international subsidies from some of our trading partners, then there is no question about it, Canadian producers would be at the top of the line.

Recent surveys found that close to 90% of Canadians surveyed believe that we as a country should be producing food domestically to meet Canadian needs. The assumption by some is that to continue supporting supply management the consequences are that Canada prevents imports and prevents access to Canadian markets. I want to make a point on that. The fact of the matter is that this argument that Canada does not allow imports in its supply management sector is very, very faulty. I know that the government opposite has fallen for that argument. It believes that supply management is protectionist.

Let me read some figures for the members. Canada imports 6% of its market in dairy products, 5% for eggs and turkey, 7.5% for chicken and 21% in hatching eggs. The United States, as I said earlier, allows only 2.75% access for dairy. Europe allows only 0.5% for poultry. When we figure it out, if all countries provided the 5% access that we do, overall trade in the global community would increase by these figures: a 77.5% increase in cheese, a 114% increase in pork, a 152% increase in poultry, a 50% increase in wheat, and a 92% increase in beef.

The problem is not Canada and Canada's supply management system, even though some perceive it to be. It is not the problem. This clearly shows that the position the previous government had taken in negotiating a sensitive products category made absolute sense, because other countries have sensitive products.

As for the Conservative government, we wonder what it is doing. The parliamentary secretary said earlier today that the Conservatives are really standing on the fence. They are trying to leave the impression that they are doing something when they really are not doing much at all.

In testimony before the Senate agriculture committee on May 11, the president of UPA made the following observation with respect to the Canadian Wheat Board and the future of supply management. Mr. Pellerin said:

If you attack the Canadian Wheat Board, in the end you will attack those types of central selling desks. That is the final objective of the free marketers...

I make that statement because we know very well what this is all about. In fact, I believe the parliamentary secretary said that the Minister of Agriculture is going before the agriculture committee tomorrow to talk about why he wants to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board. That is what it is all about.

• (1620)

The Conservatives talk about dual marketing but there is no such thing as dual marketing when it comes to single desk selling. We either have single desk selling or we do not. If we do not have single desk selling then the Canadian Wheat Board will not have the opportunity to maximize returns back to the primary producers.

Routine Proceedings

In response to a question in the House on the government's position at the WTO on state trading enterprises and the Canadian Wheat Board, the Minister of Agriculture gave a very confusing answer and left unclear what its real position was. I mention that because if the government is sincere about the supply management system, which is what the motion is about, it should show us its unequivocal support for the motion and then we will see what happens at the end of the day. When we look at some of the other positions it is taking it is not really all that strongly on side.

Consumers have also consistently maintained a serious concern with respect to the quality of their food. A recent survey for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada found that 38% of consumers were concerned about the presence of GMOs in their food and that 49% were concerned about the presence of hormones in their food. An effort by the pharmaceutical company, Monsanto, in the mid-1990s to introduce the growth hormone RBST for use in dairy cattle to increase milk production was opposed by the dairy industry, and with good reason. One survey found at the time that if this hormone were introduced into Canada, 34% of consumers would lessen their purchases of milk and dairy products.

The point I am raising is the whole strategy at that time was to increase milk production when we did not need to increase milk production. We were meeting our domestic demand. The dairy industry strongly opposed it and the dairy industry, along with ourselves, won the day and prevented that system from coming forward. It shows the kind of support I think there is for the supply management system.

Support for the supply management system was again demonstrated in November 2005 with the unanimous passage of a motion in the House of Commons supporting the current supply management system at the WTO.

A prominent United States agriculture economist has found in a recent study, "Rethinking U.S. agriculture policy", reported by the Agriculture Policy Analysis Centre in 2003 at page 15, that:

The traditional role of the federal government was to do for agriculture what it could not do for itself: manage productive capacity to provide sustainable and stable prices and incomes. Supply management policies have historically prevented chronic over production and depressed prices.

What that statement clearly shows is that many people understand that the supply management system prevents the manipulation of producers and countries one against the other. It empowers farmers to manage their own industry by matching supply to meet demand. The supply management system is under such attack at the WTO because the multinationals do not like that system. They want to be able to manipulate, manoeuvre and abuse and to buy cheap and sell high.

What worries me about the government's waffling on this motion and the fact that it is not taking a very clear stand at the WTO is that it will open up our supply management system to problems in this country and the ultimate losers will be our supply management producers and Canadians as a whole.

If we could gain the support of the government for the motion, although it would not be absolute that it is solid at the WTO in terms of its discussions and that it is absolutely solid in support of supply

management, it would be an indication that it is moving ahead a wee bit.

• (1625)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that in 2005 all parties agreed to support supply management, and this party truly does support supply management.

I also find it interesting that for 13 years the Liberals had the opportunity to do things about supply management and article XXVIII and yet they stood back and did nothing until they were out of power. Now that we are in power, they seem to think that everything should be done in 100 days.

I can say that many things have been done in the first 100 days. One thing about this government, as opposed to the previous government which tended to put programs together in a piecemeal opportunity and which talked about the CAIS program, a program built to help the government and not farmers and build on ad hoc programs, this government will deal with agriculture and the industry in the best way we can. We will deal with supply management, and not piecemeal, in support of that type of a motion, those types of things that will disseminate and pit one industry against the other.

We want to deal with supply management by sitting with the processors and the producers to ensure we move ahead in a proper and formal manner.

I would suggest that not everyone in the supply management system agrees that we should be dealing with this. Why is this government so intent on moving ahead on one issue within supply management and not looking at the industry as a whole?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I know the member made a slip when he said "this government". I know he wishes we were the government, as do we, but we are not.

I need to make a point on this 13 years in which, yes, we formed the government. International trade, as the member knows, is 149 countries and we worked pretty consistently toward a solution at the WTO.

I want to make a couple of points which the minister and the Prime Minister fail to mention consistently. When the previous government was in power, producers had the highest payments in Canadian history. The previous government balanced the books and left the present government with a huge surplus. Never before has a new government come to power in such good fiscal shape.

What did the Conservatives do for the farm community with the surplus? Absolutely nothing. They announced in their budget more money but the more money they announced in the budget was actually less money than was committed by the previous government.

Routine Proceedings

They talk about immediate cash for farmers but there was no immediate cash for farmers by the spring. However they did announce, which went through the House the other day, a \$100,000 cash advance for farmers, which is a loan. Farmers cannot borrow themselves out of debt. I wish the government would realize that. It needs to give them some assistances in terms of payments to their commodities.

At the WTO at least this government was negotiating, negotiating tough and a sensitive products category in there to protect supply management and believed in state trading enterprises, which the government obviously does not do.

•(1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for his defence of supply management.

I am glad he brought up the topic of the Conservative Party's election promises. Indeed, during an election campaign, there is no great commitment involved in showing support for the supply management system, in making promises in that regard and including them in an election platform. With this motion, the Conservatives are now being tested to see if they will really protect the supply management system.

We debated this motion in committee. We heard arguments from all sides. However, I would like to return to the fact that the hon. member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière said earlier that this motion presented a contradiction. He feels that this is not the right time to table it, while consultations are being held with dairy producers and processors at the minister's request. I would like to ask the member, who has already been part of a government, how this constitutes a contradiction.

I see another contradiction, which is as follows. The Canadian International Trade Tribunal has been mentioned. We heard this argument in committee. This tribunal made a decision and so did the Court of Appeal. We are more or less bound by that decision. It is interesting, because the decision is unfavourable for us. Political will could easily correct the situation, which, I would remind the House, is the result of a mistake made by the Canada Border Services Agency approximately 10 years ago. It is an unfavourable decision and no one really wants to move on that side.

Furthermore, a decision was also reached in another file—a decision that is in our favour—namely, in the bicycle file. In that regard, the Canadian International Trade Tribunal is allowing Canada to tax discounted bicycles, cheap bicycles imported from Asia, while the government and even the industry minister, who has a factory in his own riding, decided to do nothing in this file. That is a glaring contradiction. I would like to hear what the hon. member has to say about this.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that the Conservative Party left the impression during the election campaign that they would support supply management. However, contradictory statements have been made about the agreement between the

now Minister of Foreign Affairs and the current Prime Minister which should cause the supply management industry to worry.

If we were to support the concurrence motion it would send a clear signal to the rest of the world that all four parties in this House are united in terms of our strong and unequivocal support for the supply management system.

We heard the discussions at committee and, yes, some on the industrial side are worried about how they would remain competitive if the tariff line were changed, and I understand those worries. However, I do not understand why the government always sees fit to put pressure on the producers instead of on the industry. If we were to support this resolution today I think it would take some of the pressure off producers and show them that we are solidly behind them. It would then require the Industry to come to the table with more willingness to compromise and maybe more willingness to support us in terms of our endeavours at the WTO.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with probably 90% of what my colleague said, everything but the fearmongering for which his party is famous.

I am concerned that the motion involves the issue of milk protein concentrates. I also am concerned that we are taking one issue, out of the thousand other issues that are being debated at the WTO, bringing it to the floor of this House and debating it as though the negotiations will now be done on a one by one basis here on the floor of this House.

Now that the member for Malpeque has agreed that this issue, which is being debated on the floor of this House, is part of a much larger picture, is he proposing that other issues at the WTO should also be brought to the floor of the House? His government never brought individual WTO issues to the floor of the House but now he is suggesting that is the way business should be done.

•(1635)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, if we want to talk about fearmongering, we should go back to the last House of Commons, back to the language used by the then opposition party. If medals were given out for fearmongering, the former Reform Party, the Alliance Party and then the CPC would have won those medals. They would be over at the Governor General's receiving them hand over fist for the fearmongering they pursued.

On the question the member raised, through the motion, we are trying to give the government the chance to show some backbone to the rest of the world that it is with the Canadian supply management industry in its endeavours in negotiating at the WTO.

An hon. member: Where were you?

Hon. Wayne Easter: The member asked, "where were you?" A motion was passed unanimously. I mentioned earlier the sensitive products, the state trading enterprises from the proposition of strength, which we negotiated. We are trying to assist the government, to give it the information base so it can show that it is strong, that it has some backbone to stand up for the supply management industry in the country.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sharing my time with the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River. For the next 10 minutes, I will tell the House why I feel we must stand up for the rural community, for the farm community that is supported and works within the supply management sector.

The debate is very timely in the sense of the urgency, given that we are now in the WTO discussions. We need to remain at the table. I think all parties in the House would agree we cannot abandon the issue.

It is also important to recognize that farmers need to have an ally. If farmers do not have the government in their corner, pray tell, who else can they go to? Who else is there fighting for them? We know the volume of trade Canada does in agriculture has doubled over the last 13 years. We have gone from \$12.5 billion to about \$26 billion today. Who has become rich? I believe the multinationals, the large corporations and traders in agriculture have made money. The farm gate has seen very little of those dollars.

When farmers continually buy at retail prices and continually sell at wholesale prices, it is very difficult for me to understand why society cannot realize why farmers are in difficulty today. The supply management sector depends upon this protection, but I see it as no more protection than what the auto industry or the pharmaceutical industry have in how they operate their business. Many industries today simply do not produce a product if they cannot sell it at a profit.

For the most part, farmers cannot put a price on their product, a price that will give them a profit. Within the supply managed sector, they can receive a return which guarantees them some element of protection because the cost of production is included.

It is interesting that we should talk about this today. The dairy industry has recently concluded a study which shows that it costs less to produce a litre of milk than it did seven years ago. What other industries today show those kinds of efficiencies, more milk per cow, butter fat at levels that we have not known before, doing things we have been unable to do in previous times, the genetics in our country? It is unfortunate for those who have developed those genetics in their breeding lines. At this moment, they are unable to sell their breeding stock because of the embargo against us from the United States.

However, those farmers are still surviving and have a lot of optimism. I think they constantly wonder whether the government will be there for them and whether there will be a supply management sector after this round of negotiations has concluded?

We know there is a lot of pressure from the government side, from the free traders, those who believe we should trade away everything we have as a raw product. It does not matter about the farm gate because there will always be farmers and people who produce product that will in the end fill the coffers of big business.

I would like to think that we are here, all parties of all stripes, to defend those people who do things they feel are important, and that is to feed the people of this nation. I am a farmer and I represent a purely agricultural riding. Not only do we have dairy and poultry producers, and a great many of them, we also have grains and oilseeds producers and other commodities.

I am not here defending supply management at the expense of another industry. I simply want to let my constituents and people across the country know that some members in the House who understand agriculture.

● (1640)

I have done a considerable amount of questioning, as I go around the country. I have asked people what they believe is the real cause and essence of our problem today. I have not heard consumer groups say that they pay too much for milk or eggs, or that farmers get rich at the expense of the consumer.

People today have choice and we have allowed them that choice. We have those who choose to buy organic products. They have the ability to buy those products from the shelves of our large stores. I believe it is important that we encourage this industry. We also have people who want to buy organic milk, and we have that commodities.

If we want to understand where we need to go in the future, we need to understand that, as a nation, we have a responsibility to feed our people. If we want to continue to feed our people, then we must do it in such a way that everyone understands who puts the effort into this food product available.

Even though there may be some differences, from time to time, on matters of political principles, it is important that together we, in the House of Commons, stand with Canadians. It is important that we support the motion that we go to the WTO and be prepared to put forward article 28. This is something we have hesitated to do for a long time, but the hour is late and we must move rather quickly. We need to move now to ensure that those farmers in the dairy and poultry businesses know we support them. We need to protect our farmers, particularly those in the supply management sector.

I would encourage everyone to take note of this. We know this is serious. We know butter oils created a tremendous problem in the manufacturing of ice cream in our country. Now milk protein supplements are causing great problems with the manufacturing of cheese, replacing what would be normally milk products with other products, which allow them to make these products. It is all done in the name of the almighty dollar.

I would encourage all of us to stand together and support this matter, which is of the utmost importance to our supply management sector.

● (1645)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question for the member is the same one I asked his colleague a few minutes ago.

I appreciate the member's comments. I know he has given it a lot of thought. My riding has a lot of supply managed commodities and farmers in it. They are looking very closely at what is happening in Geneva right now.

However, I will get back to the motion. It deals specifically with milk protein concentrates. We are taking one small, although significant, issue out of a large variety of issues that are being negotiated at the table at the WTO and bringing it to the floor of the House to be debated. My question will be the same as I directed to the member for Malpeque.

Routine Proceedings

Is it the member's position that every issue being debated at the WTO should be brought to the floor of this House?

This is not about protecting supply management. Our party policy stands for supply management, for strengthening supply management. Our campaign promises revolved around that. Our government policy is that. We put \$1.5 billion into agriculture in our last budget. It is not an issue of protecting or supporting supply management. That should be beyond debate here. This government supports it, but why take one issue, which is being debated at the WTO right now, out of context and bring it here? Is that what the member's plan is for all of other issues that are being debated right now in Geneva?

Mr. Paul Steckle: Mr. Speaker, I suppose that question could be asked of the Liberals on many occasions, but certainly on the matter of article XXVIII as it relates to the milk protein supplements.

This is something the Liberals were asked to address eight or nine months ago. The dairy industry came to us and we gave the same reasons as are being given today. We felt it was premature at that time. We still had some time to go. There was a time element that had to be expended and we felt we should address that. We have now gone beyond that time and there appears to be a greater urgency for doing so.

I do not believe we can bring every element of the debate into the House in terms of the negotiations in Geneva, but I believe this is one that we need to. We did not deal with this matter very effectively with butter. We know what happened in that industry. We lost the ice cream industry. How long are we going to stand by and let the importers bring in product? The processors are involved in this too, obviously. They are the reason we have this problem.

Do we really care about Canada? Do we really care about what goes on in rural Canada today? We could import everything we want. There is very little we cannot import from other countries, but I believe it is very important as a country to stand behind our rural industry. It is time for us to move and time to take action.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, I am a farmer. I used to deal quite extensively with the dairy cattle industry and dairy farmers when I was a dairy cattle buyer before the devastation that BSE brought and limited the amount of market access we had for our high quality dairy genetics that we have in Canada.

There is no doubt that the Conservative government is fully behind our supply managed commodities, dairy, eggs and poultry. We are with them 100% and we know those industries want to get a successful resolution at WTO.

There is some concern about the milk protein concentrated importations that are coming in that went up exponentially during the time that the Liberals were in power. I can assure the member that we are going to deal with this. One of the ways that we are going to deal with it is through the joint committee of dairy farmers and processors that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food put together to find a resolution.

Does the member think it is a good idea for us to allow time for this committee to work and come to a resolution that then would be brought before the House for debate rather than talking strictly about this motion that we have right now?

• (1650)

Mr. Paul Steckle: Mr. Speaker, I am not privy to the composition of that body that is bringing forward the study, but I presume that most of them are dairy producers or at least are involved in that sector.

I would expect, if I know that industry well enough, that they will probably conclude that the action being taken today is appropriate. That may very well be one of the things we are doing. If they come forward and suggest that we not go in this direction, I suppose then it is our duty as a committee, if that is what we are going to hear in the House, to make a determination of whether we know better or they know better. That is something we will have to determine once that decision is made.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): 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 Chambly—Borduas, Employment insurance; the hon. member for West Nova, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this debate is truly interesting because it does represent not only the dairy industry as the point in question but it comes down to not only producers and consumers questioning whether butter tarts should have butter in them, whether cheese should not be described as a cheese-like product, and whether milk should not be described as near-milk or ice cream as almost ice cream.

Indeed, in my riding the Thunder Bay Federation of Agriculture has presented several petitions and cases noticing the 2.65% cutback in milk quotas and only a .015% increase in the price of milk. They are still expected to somehow cope not only with these negotiations at an international level at a city far away from all of us but right there on the farmstead.

At the agricultural committee several other parties and the government were there and heard this case. It comes down to how we actually manifest milk protein concentrates and what the impact is on a daily basis. Well it comes to a loss of approximately \$2 million a month for our dairy industry. As this continues, clearly that cannot be sustained.

Routine Proceedings

Members of the House would be well advised to know that when these people come to us, they are not coming as some kind of ill-informed protestors. There is hard research. These are people who care deeply about the future of our country who provide good food and good product to Canadians. When we find out that every time MPCs replace 2.6 tonnes of skim milk powder, we can see the immediate impact in a very physical kind of way. Are we finding now that MPC imports are constituting some kind of breaking point for supply management? The question is, do we go on pretending that it is not something to be concerned about or do we respond?

I believe that the motion before us is our opportunity, as a trigger, to emphasize to the farming community that we are responding very directly in a caring way and that this message is something that we take very seriously. There is a point that will come eventually, as these imports continue unabated, that the milk price structure in Canada may collapse and that is a fact.

When people who have been doing research on this and follow it, if not daily, hourly, tell us that, I am certain that they have concerns. Therefore, it is our duty as elected representatives to respond. In the agriculture committee, when we heard these presentations the committee decided in a vote to bring it to the House because it had now reached that level of concern.

A question was asked earlier about the other components of the industry. It was concluded in committee to support the dairy farmers. This would lend credence to their case in their discussions and negotiations with other aspects of the industry, including the consumers. In this way they would know the state of the industry at this time.

When we look at what is happening, we cannot at any time weaken our government's position. Unfortunately for the government, the Conservatives voted against supply management and against the dairy farmers in committee. That is the message that I have been receiving from farmers, so when I hear appeals from all four parties here in the House that this issue be addressed in a non-partisan manner, I am quite willing to join that and really want to do it.

● (1655)

I hear flimsy things blaming the previous government for all the ills. After six months people are asking where are all the miracle cures that we were proposing for the past number of years because they are not happening? This is not a simple issue. It is complex and difficult.

Last year the previous government set record payments for agriculture in the farming community. Farmers know what was done for them last year. When the present government says that, it loses all credibility. It is amazing what happens. We cannot pull the wool over the farmers' eyes. They feel it daily and they understand immediately the impacts of these decisions.

When we pushed again in the agriculture committee to get the money for the grains and oilseeds people earlier this spring, the minister actually claimed last year's money from the previous minister was the rescue money. Farmers know exactly what is going on; these people will not be taken in.

We have to understand that when things like the Wheat Board come up simultaneously with the concerns of the dairy farmers, they are asking what is really going on here. If the government claims to be in support of supply management, why is it not adamantly standing up for them? When it claims to be in favour of the Canadian Wheat Board, why is there a private member's bill that would destroy it?

We get calls from all over the country. I find it quite amazing the number of provinces that have called me, being from Thunder Bay—Rainy River in the heart of Canada. It is an interesting receiving point for these things, but primarily it is because of my role as a member of the agriculture committee. I am impressed by the high level of awareness and understanding in the rural communities on this issue and all of its complexities.

The farmers know, as we speak here, who is really going to be supporting them. Therefore, when members ask us to say, no, let us not really trouble our American neighbours as they flood our milk industry, dairy farmers are perplexed. To a large extent they are waiting to see what will happen, but I know that they are quietly angry and feeling deceived that the members they had theoretically supported at the ballot box are now abandoning them.

I have to face these people straight on in my riding. They come to see me in my office or I go to see them at the farm gate or in their agricultural society meetings or in the western part of the riding with the Rainy River Federation of Agriculture. They know exactly what the price of milk is per minute. They know the impacts of all these legislative things and what they can do. They know how many tonnes are coming in and they know how it affects them each and every day as they try to produce a quality product for Canadians.

Each and every one of us here has to deal with this and has to answer to the farming community. In the agriculture committee I asked a question of those people who were speaking for us in Geneva and at all these other trade talks in different places. I asked them if they truly, not just from an international trade standpoint, believed that supporting the Canadian farm industry was the main reason that they were going to bat, that they were going to negotiate, and that they were going to speak for all those farmers with passion, determination and a commitment.

● (1700)

This was not just academic. We wanted them to take the economy of the Canadian dairy and farming industries to heart. We wanted them to believe in the industries and to represent their interests in supply management with a fervour and a passion.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do take issue with one of the member's points. He said that in committee we as the government voted against supply management.

I believe that is a misstatement and it is incorrect. If he were to go back and check his notes he would see that it was not a vote against supply management but a vote against this particular motion.

Routine Proceedings

I would recommend, request and ask the member to read that motion again to the House so Canadians throughout the country will know exactly what the government voted against. He will find that what we voted against was taking one small, although important, aspect of the WTO negotiations and debate it here on the floor of the House out of context with the rest of the WTO negotiations.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member for Abbotsford has just confessed that the party he represents voted against supply management at the agriculture committee. I will confirm that is what happened at committee.

The point of principle was whether they were or were not in favour. When the motion was presented, clearly—

Mr. Ed Fast: Read the motion.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: I was there and I saw it happen. I do have the motion in front of me.

I just want him to know that in point of principle, which is what we do with these decisions, that is what happened. Very clearly, the government voted against supply management and in no uncertain terms.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Kenora—Rainy River.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is just Kenora. After many decades of being Kenora—Rainy River, it was hard to accept, through the redistribution, the loss of that part of the riding. The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River now has all the farms and I have all the rocks left in northern Ontario.

The hon. member spoke of negotiating right from the farm door and he spoke of the loss to the dairy industry. As he travels around the riding and is on the doorsteps of the farms, how much is the concern growing about the changes in the dairy industry? How much anguish is being created? What are the people saying when they are right on the doorsteps? They want to know about these changes. They want to know about the future of the dairy industry. What did he hear right at the farm level?

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Mr. Speaker, when the farm groups come to us or when we go to them as individuals, they are imploring—I will not say they are begging. There is such a deep concern. I will try not to overemphasize that or embellish it in any way but each and every dairy farmer talks about this issue. They work so hard as it is. I do not know where they get the time to do the lobbying but they are worried about the future of providing a quality industry. They are in it because they believe in Canada and they believe that providing a first class safe product is what is the best thing for Canadians.

When we meet them we realize they are great families that keep this country solid. I cannot help but be impressed each and every time by the depth of their sincerity and the need for us to respond in an immediate and positive way. That is what compelled me and, I am certain, everyone else on the committee, except for the government, to support them.

•(1705)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is quite clear that the opposition parties are in favour of the motion and the government is not and therefore I ask that you seek unanimous

consent to carry the motion on division and then we can get on with orders of the day.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the request by the member for Selkirk—Interlake?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the main issue facing us today is that dairy producers are being hurt by the importation of milk protein concentrates. The reason for this is that they are classified as proteins and not milk products. Eighty-five per cent of these milk protein concentrates are over the protein content and in this case 87.5% are pure protein which allows them to enter without tariffs. If the protein content were lower, there would be certain tariffs.

The committee recommended that:

—all milk protein concentrates, regardless of their protein content, under tariff line 0404, or a tariff quota to be negotiated.

One kilogram of this milk protein concentrate, which I believe is coming in from New Zealand and the European Union, equals 2.5 kilograms of displaced milk concentrate. This means it is more efficient for our processors to import this protein thereby giving producers two and a half times as much milk protein concentrate but they are not sure what to do with it. I think this is the key.

I am encouraged by the fact that the Minister of Agriculture asked producers and processors to get together to try to come to an acceptable solution that would benefit both of them. However, if we allow unlimited milk protein content, or MPCs, to enter Canada, this could in the long run destroy our whole supply management system.

[*Translation*]

The government says that it wants to protect the supply management system. It must have the means and the solutions to do so. Our nation's identity is at stake. We developed and implemented the supply management system. It is a part of the agricultural sector that gives producers the opportunity to earn a bit of money. If we don't protect it, we will see the slow death of the supply management system.

I have noted the following. It seems to me that Canada sometimes hesitates to protect our particular programs at the WTO and under NAFTA. We are told that we must not create precedents, but it is possible that we are alone in not attempting to do so. There are already precedents. There are governments that do their utmost to protect their agriculture industry and above all their producers. That is our duty.

[*English*]

If we do not stand up for our dairy producers in this case we will see a slow erosion of supply management. I am encouraged once again by the government's stance that it wants to protect supply management. If we bow to international pressures and we modify it a little bit then what is the stop them? What is to stop other trading partners, such as the Americans, through the WTO to make an effort to get rid, for example, of our Canadian Wheat Board?

Routine Proceedings

Any changes to the Canadian Wheat Board should be made by the farmers and not by governments, whether this one or any other government, and especially not by international organizations such as the WTO.

The three western provincial governments recently stated that we must modify supply management to increase our market access. Interestingly, I was just at a meeting of the trade committee and we were talking about market access and how it affects supply management. Specifically, they want us to increase our TRQs from the current 5%.

Apparently, if this were done this would somehow gain more market access in spite of the fact that there are heavy government subsidies in agriculture in the European Union and the United States. What we should be doing at the WTO is getting other countries to increase their TRQs to the 5% that was agreed upon in the Uruguay round. The TRQs in the European Union, for example, for pork, which is their sensitive category, is 0.5%.

That does not help our pork producers who want to export to the European Union. Somehow we are being asked, if we do not protect our supply management at the World Trade Organization, to increase the quotas for other countries to export their produce to our country and that somehow this will help us get more access to world markets. I do not think the two are tied in.

What we are talking about today is one small aspect of supply management, one small aspect of agriculture that we as Canadians have developed. This is one system that actually works and where people actually make money. It is very important in this case for us to be very careful before we fool around with the system.

I want to emphasize that we can fight for better access to world markets at the WTO table but this should not be at the expense of one segment of our farmers, those who are part of the supply management system. We know that farming is in a state of crisis and we are looking at different ways of solving the crisis. We need steps to remedy the situation.

The answer to helping our farmers is not by slowly eroding one part of the agriculture industry that works for us. While it may seem sort of far away somewhere in Geneva, this one point with regard to milk protein concentrates could be what starts this snowball rolling. I think we need to be very careful at how we approach the situation.

Once again, I am encouraged by the Minister of Agriculture and the fact that we are standing up for this system at the World Trade Organization. It is a system that works and it does not cost the taxpayer any money. Other countries are aggressively protecting their agriculture.

● (1710)

[Translation]

Thus, our initial position should be very strong. Our country has distinctive elements, such as supply management and our Canadian Wheat Board. It is up to us to decide the future of our agrifood industry.

In my opinion, what is most important is that we are responsible for protecting Quebec and Canadian producers at all costs. That is our duty.

Today, the supply management system is at risk. Tomorrow, it could be the Canadian Wheat Board. In the end, it may be our Canadian identity.

[English]

By standing up and working together with our primary producers in this instance, and by our friends all across Canada, we are not only protecting agriculture but we are standing up for our rural way of life which is under threat, through the World Trade Organization, by multinational companies which are under threat by other trading partners, such as our friends to the south who want us to disband different programs that we have.

Therefore, it is our duty to work together with the producers and the processors to protect supply management by ensuring that milk protein concentrates do not hurt the livelihoods of those producers, specifically in Quebec and Ontario.

● (1715)

[Translation]

It is our duty to stand firm.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the entire debate. I find it interesting. The members from the Conservative side continue to drift back and forth into a discussion about support for supply management, but I am pretty sure, from the members' comments, that it was a show of a lack of confidence in the supply management system and that the real agenda is changes to the supply management system.

Having said that, I formerly was the parliamentary secretary to the minister of public works and government services, who also had responsibility for the Canadian Wheat Board, and I know quite a bit about that. I find it very interesting to note that the member very clearly has stated that the intent of the government is to put on pressure to basically eliminate the Canadian Wheat Board.

This causes me great concern, because that tends to favour some at the expense of others. If producers are close to the border, chances are they have opportunities to market their products across the border at the expense of those who have significant transport issues with regard to marketing their grains and seeds.

Since he raised it and he knows very well that the board of directors is made up of the producers, and the board of directors is not calling for the dissolution of the Canadian Wheat Board, It is probably incumbent upon the member to explain why he feels the Canadian Wheat Board is going to benefit our farmers.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, so far we have seen, and the survey has said, that 88% of producers/farmers want to retain the Canadian Wheat Board. They want to have a say in the future of the Canadian Wheat Board. We have to listen to them and make sure that they are the ones who will decide what the future of the Wheat Board will be.

Routine Proceedings

So far it has worked to keep the prices our producers get at a fairly high level. The Canadian Wheat Board, as a single marketing agency, has been able to seek out markets throughout the world, as we know. It has worked in the best interests of farmers, and the idea of somehow instituting a dual marketing system probably will not work. It will turn into an open marketing system.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague on his speech. I appreciate working with him, because he was appointed as his party's critic for agriculture and agri-food.

I would like to come back to what I have heard Conservative members saying today and also what we heard in committee about invoking article XXVIII of GATT. The Conservatives tell us that invoking this article would create a problem with the United States and Mexico because NAFTA would take precedence.

However, Canada's milk producers received a legal opinion that mentions—and this is easy to check—that in 1996, two years after Canada succeeded in negotiating the power to limit milk protein imports at the WTO, the United States called for a NAFTA panel to contest what Canada was trying to do with regard to milk proteins. Canada won. That is completely in line with that we have always said. Canada has always defended this issue because, historically, we have always been able to limit milk protein imports.

I would like to ask my colleague what he thinks about this situation and particularly this argument that, in the end, does not hold up because, since 1996, Canada has won over the United States. If the United States or Mexico ever wanted to contest anything, we would come back and say that for 10 years we have had this panel decision that protects us.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Generally speaking, from what I can see, Canada is sometimes too timid. We have to be bold and have political will if we want to protect the supply management system. We must do so at all costs.

I agree with my hon. colleague about the producers and the legal opinion they received. We have to be strong and protect our own sector, regardless of what happens to other countries. We have to protect our own producers, not the producers in the United States or the European Union.

● (1720)

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's speech and his comments on this issue. It is quite a big issue in my riding of Tobique—Mactaquac, where we have a number of dairy producers.

The concern I have with the motion as it is presented right now goes to one of the points the member made in terms of standing up for the entire industry, which we are trying to do at the WTO. When we talk about putting this strictly around the concentrates, are we getting ourselves to a point where we are going to be raising motions and negotiating this one motion at a time over a period of two to three weeks? What kind of mess is that going to get us into? Or is it? I would ask the hon. member for his comment.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have heard this at least three or four times today. My understanding is that the motion we are debating is a motion to concur in a report of the Standing Committee of Agriculture and Agri-Food of the House of Commons, and that it is in fact the first report. If that is the case, maybe the member would like to rephrase the question about what exactly the House is debating today.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, it may seem that it is not worthwhile doing this, but when we start attacking a system that is in place, it does not take much to get it going, to start poking away here and to leave it to the WTO or other discussions. I will repeat that I think we have to show that we have a will to fight for all of our agricultural producers. In this case, it happens to be those in the dairy industry, which is part of the supply management system.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I think it is clear that all members in the House are behind supply management and I thank all members for their comments. I am wondering as we go through this discussion if in fact the motion, as was raised on this side, actually has support at this time. In terms of supply management, have the farmers of Ontario actually given their support to this motion in respect of its timing on one issue? I ask that question of my colleague.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the producers in Ontario and Quebec support the motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by congratulating the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska on his work, on introducing this motion in the House, and especially on asking me to second it. I am proud to do so.

Contrary to what a Conservative member was saying a little while ago, this is the right time for the motion. For too long and on too many occasions, the government—whether that of the previous Liberals or the current Conservatives—has claimed that it could not defend managed supply, have assistance programs in the apparel and textile sector, and do something to save the bicycle industry because the time was not right. They claim that something is happening now at the World Trade Organization and we cannot frustrate our trading partners. If we did, they would take a dim view of Canada, and that would weaken our negotiating position.

Let us look at the facts. They did not have any plan to help the apparel and textile sector. The Hong Kong meeting was, at best, a continuation of the work. No major progress was made. In the meantime, we have lost a tremendous number of jobs in these sectors and are still doing so. Still there is no assistance program.

It is the same in the bicycle industry. They do not want to antagonize China and Vietnam, with the result that nothing is done. They are prepared to sacrifice our industries for some alleged progress in trade agreements. We know that the WTO is currently deadlocked, not only in agriculture but in other areas as well. Nevertheless, they still say that the time is not ripe yet to help an economic sector or an employment sector in Canada.

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I have been listening to this argument for as long as I have been here: it is never the right time to introduce a motion defending anyone in Canada and Quebec.

In actual fact, passing this motion, like the one last November 22, would send a clear message at a time when the director general of the World Trade Organization, Mr. Pascal Lamy, is talking about a deadline of maybe July 31 to reach an agreement on agriculture.

It is important for the House to reaffirm its support for supply management, especially in relation to something new. It is obviously not directly a question of supply management in this debate but rather of a flaw in the Canadian customs system that makes it possible for milk substitutes to enter freely and undermine managed supply.

If this motion were adopted by this House—I hope and think it will be—not only would we be sending a clear message about this very specific issue of milk proteins, but we would also be sending a very clear message to the entire international community that our supply management system is very important to us. There is room for negotiation on various aspects. However, there is no room for compromise on the pillars of this system. We will try to sort out the necessary adjustments with the others.

I want to remind hon. members that the World Trade Organization is responsible for controlling international trade relations. It is not there just to outright lift restrictions on all trade relations. That is true for agriculture, culture and for other areas. In that respect, too often people think—I get the feeling this is the case for the Conservative party—that the equation is as follows: the World Trade Organization equals excessive easing of restrictions on trade. That is not it. The World Trade Organization is there to civilize trade and ensure that disputes are resolved without applying the might is right rule. That does not mean we necessarily have to end up with agreements that further ease restrictions on trade. This is particularly true when it comes to agriculture.

We would not be having this debate if, on January 31, the Federal Court had not confirmed the decision of the Canadian International Trade Tribunal opening the Canadian market to imports of milk protein concentrates. As hon. members know, for supply management to work, imports have to be highly regulated. Under this system, supply meets demand and price is agreed upon with processors and producers to ensure suitable income for agricultural producers. However, in order to be able to adjust supply to demand, we must ensure that the Canadian and Quebec market is not invaded through the back by foreign imports.

● (1725)

There was a real weakness there, which has been exposed in this House several times.

We are all well aware that new technology has made it possible to break milk down into several parts. Instead of importing milk into Canada, we are importing milk proteins. We can import butter fat and completely reconstitute milk from a number of products not currently covered under tariff lines.

Dairy producers have asked, and rightly so, that milk protein concentrates be considered as dairy products, just like milk, and be subject to tariff lines and quotas. This is not yet the case. In this

respect, I must say that the federal government has not fulfilled its part of the social contract because—it must be said—supply management is a social contract wherein each party has certain responsibilities.

As we all know, when there is a surplus, producers are required to absorb it. Currently, given that there are no import quotas for milk proteins, these surpluses are growing and posing a real threat to supply management.

For example, we are told that in cheese production, milk protein concentrates could replace up to 25% of Canadian milk proteins. That will make for a very significant shortfall.

I remember that in a previous debate, someone stated that this type of import could cause losses amounting to \$175 million for Canada and about \$70 million for Quebec producers.

There is another aspect I think deserves some emphasis. Not only has this loophole weakened the supply management system, it has also undermined an agricultural development model, which is far more serious. If this system falls apart, we can say goodbye to family farms. Proof of this can be found in Australia and New Zealand. When they dropped the existing regulatory structure, which was not exactly like supply management, but quite similar, the number of farms shrank. Apparently, only industrial-scale farms were able to survive in that market.

For example, whereas the number of farms was declining by 1% to 2.4% in the years before deregulation in 2000-01, the rate of decrease in the number of dairy farms—I am still talking about Australia—went from 8.2% to 6.7%, 3.6%, 9.8% and 3.7% in the five years that followed deregulation. From nearly 14,000 in 1994-95, the number of dairy farms declined to just over 9,000 in 2004-05.

This is a societal choice that is being compromised by the federal government's inertia. This was true in the case of the Liberals, and it appears, unfortunately, that it is still true in the case of the Conservatives.

Judging by some members' remarks, we cannot say that we are going to drop supply management. Those members have voted on several occasions, as we have, to maintain supply management.

During the election campaign, the current Prime Minister promised to maintain this system. As I said when I began my remarks, the government will simply say that this is not the right time. But I think it is the right time. Management of the World Trade Organization is exerting an enormous amount of pressure on all the countries—not only Canada, but the European Union and the United States as well—to reach some kind of agreement by July 31.

Routine Proceedings

In my opinion, passing this motion would send a strong message from all members of this House to the international community that we have a system that works well. Everyone agrees. We have a system that requires border control, first of quotas, then of quota-free tariff lines, and we have to maintain that system because it is our model of agricultural development.

For some time now, I have heard members referring to isolation, and that bothers me.

● (1730)

When he appeared before a committee, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, in answer to a question from the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, said that we were isolated. Are we that isolated? Of course, economically, Canada does not have the same dimensions as the European Union or the United States. When the Americans defend the Farm Bill, are they isolated? No, they seek to obtain the best for all their farmers, as we do during negotiations. When the European Union defends its subsidies and its domestic support, do we say that Europeans are isolated? No, we say that they defend their model of agricultural development that is the Common Agricultural Policy, the CAP. It is totally normal.

When it is Canada's turn to defend its farmers, then it is awful, because it seems that Canada will get isolated. I think that the government is playing on words. Wanting to defend agriculture and producers, particularly when it comes to the supply management system, will not lead to isolation. It is simply doing the work that it has to do as a responsible government. In this case, it is defending Canada's national interests. Indeed, Canada is not a nation; as you know, the Canadian territory is comprised of several nations. However, it defends what it has to defend and it will find the compromises that are necessary. However, shady deals are not acceptable.

It seems that the Conservative government clearly refuses to support the motion. That is the impression I get. I hope that at the end of the day, after our debate, the Conservatives will change their minds. It seems to me that there is nothing contentious about the motion. I will read the motion adopted by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food because I think it is important:

1. That, since all the parties support supply management, the government take immediate action to strengthen import control measures, which are crucial to supply management, by limiting the importation of milk protein concentrates and any product specifically designed to circumvent the supply management rules.

If we really want to keep the supply management system, we should come quite easily to an agreement.

2. That the government adopt regulations that would classify all milk protein concentrates, regardless of their protein content, under tariff line 0404, or a tariff quota to be negotiated.

I remind you that as far as I know, the Americans use that process. If the government does not want to do that and prefers to involve the whole House, very well. Then, legislation like that mentioned in the third part of the motion would be needed:

3. That the government invoke Article XXVIII of the GATT where necessary in order to cap imports of milk protein concentrates by immediately launching negotiations with its trade partners and by amending its tariff schedule through a legislative measure adopted by Parliament.

That goes to show that there are options. What may be lacking is the political will. As I indicated earlier, we are probably going to be

told that the problem is not that the government does not want to ensure that all the conditions are in place for the supply management system to be maintained, but that the timing is not right. Those of us who have participated in negotiations in the past know that the timing is right to send a message, if we do not want to give the impression, as we did on the softwood lumber issue, that we are prepared to settle for a bargain basement deal.

The Americans heard clearly. Today still, we know that negotiations are conducted based on the framework agreement and that a deadline has been set. The matter has to be resolved by a given time on a given date. Canada is the one setting this deadline for itself. So, what happens? The Americans sit and wait. As the deadline nears, the “bananisation”, to use the word coined by Mr. Parizeau to describe the action of causing oneself to slip on a banana peel, intensifies, as we put pressure on ourselves. That is precisely what we are doing right now by saying that Canada is isolated.

I think that it is important to remember something else. Before the election, the Bloc Québécois held, here in Ottawa, a working meeting between the Union des producteurs agricoles and all the embassy and consulate representatives to explain what supply management is all about. It is a fact that some do not understand what it is about. They think that it is a subsidized system. They heard about it from the Americans, who said it was not a very good system, or from the Australians or New-Zealanders.

If they were presented with the nuts and bolts of this system, I am convinced that a fair number of developing countries which want to have their own agricultural model could find in it a system they could adopt to have human-scale farms.

Naturally, we were once again told that New Zealand and Australia once had similar systems, which they abandoned, and that was for the best.

● (1735)

I will read a small excerpt from a document written by Daniel-Mercier Gouin, an economics professor at Université Laval. He said, in the conclusion of one of his studies on supply management, that:

New Zealand's experience can be enlightening. The deregulation gradually implemented in this sector in New Zealand between 1985 and 1993, which has since become total, does not seem, at first glance, to have benefited consumers with regard to prices...

We hear that type of comment often. Furthermore, Mr. Gouin said:

Nor only did consumer prices increase more than anywhere else [Australia, the United States, the Netherlands, France and Canada, over an extended period], but the increase was the most dramatic for fluid milk, which in 2002 was priced at four times its 1981 level.

The consumer would not come out as a winner in deregulation.

I know the Conservative government does not want to deregulate, but allowing these substitutes, the milk proteins, to enter is causing us to deregulate this sector.

Mr. Gouin goes on to say:

Nor did deregulation in this sector benefit New Zealand dairy producers, who lost the market powers they held through the regulatory mechanisms that administered the farmgate price of fluid milk deliveries.

Who benefited? The distributors did—not the consumers.

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We can even come back to another Canadian example that has been cause for much debate in this House. During the mad cow crisis, when we were forced to dispose of surplus cull meat, I never saw the price of beef go down. At home I do the grocery shopping. There are some people who pocketed the profits, but it was not the agricultural producers or the consumers. It was the middleman.

Behind this desire to deregulate, there is the reality that this would benefit neither consumers nor agricultural producers. Consequently, it seems to me that our parliamentary responsibility is to defend the interests of the majority, that is of both consumers and agricultural producers. To that end, and in order to find the right system, we must do more than just pay lip service to the protection of our supply management system—we must take appropriate action. We must take action at the WTO, we must take action in Canada, we must take action in this House.

I believe that the government should give a very considered response to the committee's question and, as I stated, review the possibility of adopting a regulation to again classify protein concentrates under tariff item 0404, or returning to this chamber and invoking article XXVIII of the WTO. It is allowed, as you know. As the member for Richmond—Arthabaska mentioned earlier, a special NAFTA group has already examined the validity of this step.

Thus, there are no technical barriers; it is simply a question of political will. There are solutions. I would like the government to change its position somewhat.

I will close by mentioning the surveys. Some may say that agricultural producers will obviously defend their system because it provides them with a reasonable income. It is also true that the opposition parties will support it because 40% of Quebec's agricultural income is derived from supply management. For us, it is an important sector and, in addition, people have placed their trust in us and hope that we will defend them. But a survey of 1,500 Canadians conducted between May 15 and May 21, 2006, by Léger Marketing revealed that the majority were in favour of the results of supply management or of the system itself.

In closing, I have a statistic that I find fascinating. Fifty per cent agreed with keeping supply management and 35% said they were somewhat in favour of it. We know that the concept of supply management is not always readily understood and that, as I mentioned, it should be explained more. So, just imagine if the Conservative government were to take to the road to explain the benefits of supply management to the international community and to Canadians. The approval rates for supply management would easily be in the neighbourhood of 90%.

• (1740)

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his excellent speech. He stood up for supply management and for this motion, which I will support with great pleasure. I imagine that all members will support this motion.

The member now hears government members say that they support the supply management system. However, he should not forget, and nor do I, that that has not always been the case. One could not count on the members from the old Reform Party to stand up for supply management. Now, they support the motion. I thank

them and commend them. All members and all Canadians must be on the same side to ensure that supply management is maintained.

He spoke very well about the elements or the messages sent. We are sending a strong message to the international community saying that all Canadians support this system, which is very beneficial for consumers, as he mentioned.

We are also sending a message to our government. The government says that it wants to respect the will of the members of Parliament. The committee is sending the government a very strong message, and we support this message. Better still, this is a message for the farm families and the communities who rely on agriculture.

In my riding, the supply managed sectors of agriculture are doing particularly well, be it poultry or dairy products. But the young generation is concerned. People are asking what will happen at these negotiations. I think that it is important to use article XXVIII to support the three pillars. All members must send a strong message to the international community.

• (1745)

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to know that the Liberal party will support this motion. The hon. member is entirely correct: not only is this a message from Parliament to the international community and to the entire Canadian population, but it is also a message to reassure our farmers.

I will quickly read the first paragraph of an article by the president of the Fédération des producteurs de lait du Québec, Mr. Marcel Groleau. This week, the title of his column is “A disturbing situation”. Here is an excerpt:

While we were waiting for the Doha round of the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations to conclude, the issue of limiting the importation of subsidized milk ingredients, without tariffs, became more serious earlier this year. In fact it became so serious that it can be called an unprecedented crisis, and it can only be remedied by legislative or regulatory action by the Canadian government.

The president of the Fédération des producteurs de lait du Québec would not alarm its members without good reason. In my opinion, his appeal is very clear. I imagine that this is also true across Canada. As such, this appeal requires immediate action.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the Bloc Québécois wants to defend supply management. Our government also defends supply management. Defending supply management inevitably means defending the Canadian federation.

I do not know how my hon. colleague could explain to Quebec dairy producers, in the event that their dream one day comes true, that they are not part of the Canadian federation, that they have 37.6% of Canadian quotas and will lose a third of their quotas. How would he explain that to Quebec producers? It is unthinkable.

Routine Proceedings

We need Canadian unity in this file and we need unity within this House. Canadian agriculture is going through a very critical time. The Bloc Québécois will have to bear the responsibility for what happens.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, this will give me the opportunity to explain the approach of the Quebec sovereignist movement to the parliamentary secretary. Obviously, he does not know what it is.

Now that we have organizations such as the World Trade Organization and agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, political spaces no longer have to correspond to economic spaces.

Why was Canada created? Because the British Empire wanted to ensure that all its colonies would be both a pool of natural resources and a market outlet. It built a railway and ensured that development would occur from the east to the west, while Quebec's natural development would have occurred from the north to the south.

Now that we have these international agreements, now that there will be more of them and now that we agree on negotiating them properly—we do not want to negotiate at any cost—political spaces can correspond to national solidarity spaces. There is a reason why, since the creation of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, the number of sovereign states has been constantly rising on the planet.

It is no longer necessary to have a market that corresponds to our political space. We can have a political space that corresponds to our aspirations and we can trade with the whole planet.

• (1750)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. Let us put aside the political issue and get back to agriculture.

Does the member think that we could have access or continue to have access to the WTO market without changing the supply management system? We always talk about market access and the supply management system. Could we have both at the same time? I would like him to explain this to me.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question, which seems to me very important.

In my view, there is no contradiction between Canada's position on preserving its supply management development model and the fact of calling for the abolition of export subsidies.

The supply management system creates no distortion on the international agricultural market. We decide to produce for our domestic market; we do not export. As we know, until just recently dairy producers exported about 5% of their production.

The WTO decided that this was not acceptable because prices were not quite the same as those at the international level. So the dairy producers themselves decided to stop exporting to foreign markets.

Thus we create no international distortion. The American subsidies, on the other hand, create major distortions, and the

Europeans subsidize their agriculture and export all over the world. That is not what we are talking about.

I do not think there is any incompatibility between the Canadian position of abolishing export subsidies and the position of maintaining supply management.

As I was saying in my speech, one thing has to be very clear: agriculture is central for every society. That is true of Canada as it is of Latin America, Africa and Europe. It must be possible to maintain an agricultural system that corresponds to one's vision of things.

A solution must be found. For example, I have been told that if 6% to 8% of our tariff lines were for the purpose of protecting sensitive products—which would be supply management products—we might have a way out. Calling for 7% to 8% of tariff lines to protect our supply management does not seem unrealistic to me. The Americans are asking this for cotton, sugar and other products. They have the right to do so, it is completely normal, and no one says they are isolated, because they are big.

On the other hand, if we are able to enter into alliances with others who will also protect distinct characteristics in agriculture, I think we will be able to arrive at a very good outcome in the Doha round, one that respects supply management and our own domestic agricultural development. This is true for Canada and it is true for Quebec. It is also to the benefit of all developing countries, since they are in fact the ones that are paying the costs of these export subsidies.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely grateful to my colleague from Joliette for his support for this motion, but more importantly for the excellent lesson he has given us today so that we are able to understand the situation properly. We have been listening to one of our most valuable spokespeople, who is in fact the international trade critic. In that capacity, he went to Hong Kong in the middle of the election campaign to defend the interests of the agricultural producers of Quebec.

I would like to put this question to my colleague from Joliette, who talked about being isolated. On November 22 of last year, when the Bloc Québécois motion affirming that no compromise should be made regarding supply management was passed, I think that Canada was isolated. In Hong Kong, in front of all the other WTO member countries, Canada was the only one to offer a vigorous defence of supply management, thanks to the Bloc Québécois motion. My colleague was there and I would like him to tell me about it. I can say that during the election campaign we received very positive messages from our agricultural producers in this regard.

How is being isolated, being the only one taking a position, a position of weakness? Today, as we speak, right now in June, that motion is still in effect and carries weight with the other countries. All we did was put our foot down and say that we were adamant about protecting our system. In fact, as my colleague said, the other countries do this when it comes to other issues, or on agricultural questions, but based on how they operate.

Routine Proceedings

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food should not be expressing any concern about the possibility that we will some day find ourselves the only ones who want to protect a system. On the contrary, we must not react to this with fear. We must put our foot down, show some backbone and defend the supply management system as the dairy producers of Quebec are asking be done.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I again want to congratulate the member for Richmond—Arthabaska. I think he was not here when I congratulated him at the beginning of my first speech. So once again, I congratulate him on this motion and on all the work that has been done.

I think that we would be doing the government a favour if we passed this motion. When they were in Hong Kong, and this was indeed bargained hard, and a compromise was sought at all costs because no one wanted the conference to be a failure, our two Liberal ministers at that time—one has been defeated, the other is still with us—were able to say that the House of Commons had passed that motion unanimously. It had to be understood. As well, we were in an election campaign. This put pressure on them, but also on all of the others to understand that they could not go against a unanimous position taken by the House.

In my view, when the motion was passed unanimously by the House, it strengthened Canada's bargaining position and that made the job of the Minister of International Trade and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food easier. I therefore call on the Conservative members to use their common sense and help themselves by voting for the motion.

● (1755)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to speak to this motion today and I thank the member for Richmond—Arthabaska for raising this question in the House.

As a member of Parliament, I represent a riding with an important agriculture industry, particularly in the dairy sector. In the whole south coast region of Quebec, in Montmagny, L'Islet, Kamouraska and Rivière-du-Loup, there is an important dairy production. There are also chicken and egg producers. Thanks to supply management, a stable and strong economy was established. This is the most important regional economy stabilizing factor we have. It has allowed us to develop a market for hardware stores, to maintain our villages alive and to help the next generation to take over, although it is difficult in agriculture. This is an important part of the economy.

Today, we are living a replay of last fall. At that time, the Bloc Québécois had introduced a motion in the House to ensure that our negotiators, before and after the elections, would protect our management supply system. The position of Canada had to be in favour of maintaining the supply management system. As my colleague from Joliette just said in his speech and during the questions and comments period, we were successful in our attempt. We were able to obtain the unanimous support of the House on this matter.

Up to now, there is an important difference. We will probably vote on this motion at the end of the debate. The three hours of debate will end soon, then we will have a vote. I invite the people from all agricultural areas of Quebec and Canada to check how their member

of Parliament will vote. It will be a good test to determine if their member of Parliament is trying to represent their riding in Ottawa or if he or she is trying to represent Ottawa in their riding.

I know people in my riding who will be listening and watching to see whether the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, for example, defends the farmers in his riding or the federal negotiators instead. We will see when he has to meet with grassroots unions or the UPA members in his riding. Undoubtedly there will be unanimity about the need to ensure that our system is properly protected.

This motion that was made by the member for Richmond—Arthabaska and is now before us was also adopted by a parliamentary committee. A majority of members of the committee voted in favour of it. As far as I know, only the Conservative members opposed the motion and took another position. I do not know exactly which members were present. There may have been more members from the west or perhaps members who are less aware of the issue of supply management and the need to protect products, as mentioned in the motion.

Here, all members will be able to vote. We will all be sufficiently informed. All the Conservative members from Quebec will vote on this motion, and that will have a huge impact. Not only would they be going against the position all the producers support, but they would also be diluting the message this House sent last fall. Voting against the motion will amount to saying that supply management can perhaps be watered down, that Canada can agree to put this issue on the table.

Canada does not have to take such a position in the negotiations that are under way. This House must send a clear message to the government that a committee report was adopted by the House and that the members now want the government to act on the recommendations in that report. That is how we would like to see today's vote go.

In order for people to have a clear understanding of what is involved, let us set aside the mechanics of the motion. Ingredients used in milk production, ingredients in the product, the milk, are currently being imported in large quantities, because we did not make the right decisions in the past. We have a tool—article XXVIII of GATT—that we can use to correct that error. That is the message we are sending with this motion. I will read an excerpt from the parliamentary committee report:

1. That, since all parties have expressed support for supply management—

You see the link. I will continue to read from the recommendation:

—the government intervene immediately in order to maintain the control measures, which are a main pillar of supply management, by limiting imports of milk protein concentrates and all products designed specifically to circumvent the rules of supply management.

● (1800)

When the Conservatives voted against this motion in committee, is it because they repudiated the position of all parties concerning supply management? Is it because they thought the situation was not all that serious and that it was not important? If that was their attitude, today's debate here in this House has shown Conservative members that their attitude in committee was wrong. This situation must be rectified via the present debate.

Routine Proceedings

I remain hopeful, given that, last fall, when we voted on supply management, the Bloc Québécois introduced the motion at the beginning of the day, the other parties rallied together over the course of the day and, in the end, we achieved unanimity, which allowed for negotiations with a firm, solid position and concrete results. I hope to achieve that result here again today.

It is important to understand that this responsibility must be shared equally by people who live in urban areas and those who live in rural settings. Milk is produced, chickens are produced and eggs are produced, all in rural settings. Lastly, production allows for a pricing system that is reasonable, acceptable and that provides sufficient revenue for farmers.

I call upon all representatives in this House, whether they represent an urban or a rural riding. It is important to make the government understand that people do not want the opinions of negotiation experts or bureaucrats. They want the people who represent them to vote to protect their interests. Let us do it so that next weekend, when we go back to our ridings, our voters can say that they are proud of the result of the vote on the motion and of the proposal and they can say that the person they elected voted in favour of the Bloc's motion and the position of the Standing Committee of Agriculture and Agri-Food to close the door to the importation of products that disrupt the milk market.

Everybody must understand that so that we can adopt a motion that will give the expected results. The message we sent last fall has been well understood: we all wanted the supply management system to be protected. However, if we choose the opposite direction and if the Conservative members vote against the motion, we can be sure that that message will not fall on deaf ears at the negotiating table. It would almost be like following up on the visit the chief executive officer of the WTO, Mr. Pascal Lamy, made last week, when he told the Canadian government, Quebecers and Canadians that they will have to accept some changes to the supply management. By voting against the motion, the government would look as if it were saying to Mr. Lamy that, after his visit, it decided to follow suit and weaken its own position, and that it is opening the door and that the next time, it will yield. That is the message the Conservative government is sending. I personally think that we must avoid, at all cost, sending such a message.

This has an impact in our regions: agricultural producers earn a bit less, so people are forced into disputes with each other because imports are shrinking their market share. Agriculture is already in a difficult position, what with the mad cow crisis, debt and rising interest rates. This is an added difficulty.

Last weekend, I went to talk to people at a supper in an agricultural area. I had a heated discussion with people on the one hand, who love agriculture and have dedicated their lives to it, and those on the other hand, who have dedicated their lives to it and found it very difficult. The latter found that conditions for agricultural producers left much to be desired.

Last week, I also went to the Montmagny agricultural exhibition. While talking to the people there, I sensed their pride in having a strong agricultural community. I also recognized the need for their elected representatives in the House of Commons, the Quebec National Assembly and elsewhere to stand up for agriculture and,

especially, to ensure that the regions are in good financial health. In rural areas, when agriculture begins to suffer, the whole environment starts to fall apart.

● (1805)

People are leaving the region. Families are losing control of their farms, and we are moving toward the industrialization of agriculture, which is not necessarily the best path to take.

By introducing this motion in the House today, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska has succeeded in bringing about this debate. At the end of the debate, there will be a vote. I hope that the Conservative members will have taken the time to read the text of the motion so that they have a good understanding of what is before us. It is vital that we close the door on anything that could weaken supply management. This is our first test. I urge the members of this House to vote for the second motion the Bloc has presented on this issue in less than a year.

We are the ones who introduced in the House a motion that is essential to the development and maintenance of a good, solid, rural and agricultural economy. I thank the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, who has enabled us to fight this battle that, in the end, will benefit all of our regions.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has the support of the Liberals. The speech of the member for Malpeque was tremendous. We have always been big supporters of supply management.

First, does the member see any difference in the scenarios in eastern Canada, which includes Quebec, and western Canada? Are there different environments or is the system of supply management just as valuable?

Second, the Conservatives constantly suggest they support it, but does the member think, through their actions, they are 100% committed and demonstrated that in actions?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, in international negotiations, the Canadian government has maintained the balance required to ensure that we are successful in the end. This balance is achieved by protecting the supply management system. We must stand our ground. Today, we must not send the message that will otherwise be given by the Conservative members—that they would be ready to open the door slightly— if they do not support the Bloc Québécois

I am somewhat surprised by the second part of my colleague's speech. I did not hear any support in the words of the parliamentary secretary. I am thinking of the committee vote where the Conservatives indicated they were against the position adopted.

That is why we are debating the issue in the House today. This situation must be clarified and the correct facts put forward in order to know where everyone stands. Do we or do we not support agriculture in Quebec and supply management in Canada? Do we wish to adopt measures that will weaken the negotiating position of the Government of Canada or do we wish to take action that will demonstrate that we stand by our position and our willingness to act?

I invite the Conservative members to reflect on this and I will close with the following question: will they vote as members who represent Ottawa in their ridings or as true representatives of their ridings in Ottawa?

• (1810)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the division bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: A recorded division stands deferred until the end of government orders tomorrow, Tuesday, June 13.

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here signed by constituents in the city of Abbotsford in support of legislation similar to a bill that was tabled by the member for Vegreville—Wainwright.

The bill addresses the issue of violence against expectant mothers. It would create two offences where an expectant mother and her unborn child are injured or killed by another person. The petitioners support the legislation that is presently before the House, Bill C-291.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

CHILD EXPLOITATION

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a petition signed by more than 12,000 people, calling on the Canadian government to promote International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

These petitioners are telling us that the countries that ratified the convention should enforce it, and those that did not should sign it.

This joint initiative of Children's Care International and Amnesty International is also designed to raise public awareness of the worst forms of child labour, which include slavery, prostitution, and work that is likely to harm the health or safety of children.

I therefore lay these signatures upon the table.

[English]

ALASKA HIGHWAY

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to introduce a petition pursuant to Standing Order 36(6). This petition is signed by many constituents from Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, Fort Nelson, Wanawan, Pink Mountain, Charlie Lake, Cecil Lake and many other communities in northern Alberta. These petitioners wish to draw the attention of the House to the fact that between kilometre 133 and the town of Fort Nelson in my riding, the Alaska Highway is the responsibility of the Department of Public Works and Government Services Canada, and that while the economy of our region in northeastern British Columbia is doing very well, the heavy traffic, in particular the logging and oil field trucks, is creating a dangerous situation in the deterioration of the Alaska Highway.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to immediately direct PWGSC to allocate funding and resources to build passing lanes on the Alaska Highway between kilometre 133 and Fort Nelson.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise in the House today and present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Wetaskiwin, many of whom live in the Lacombe, Black Falls and Bentley area, which calls upon Canada to become more accepting of refugees and to play an international leadership role in addressing issues in other countries that lead to people having to leave their homes, and to strengthen our ability to accept refugees in a fair, just and expedient manner.

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present another petition on the issue of a passenger freight train for the Gaspé.

I will point out that these 700 petitioners, whose names are being added to numerous others, ask that rail passenger and freight service be maintained and enhanced in the Gaspé, which involves the acquisition of the Matapédia-Chandler line as well as Via Rail's capital and operating budgets.

Government Orders

•(1815)
[English]

MARRIAGE

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to rise today to present a petition from my riding of Cambridge. These petitioners call upon the government to use every means necessary, including invoking section 33 of the charter, the notwithstanding clause, to ensure that the definition of marriage remains that of one between one man and one woman.

DELTAPORT

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from residents of Delta concerned about the expansion of Deltaport. They are concerned that air quality in the neighbourhood would suffer if the port were to expand and they are concerned about the noise and glare from the port, the loss of wildlife habitat and the impact of the increased transportation in the community.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed 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.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on 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.

The bill is, I suppose, in furtherance of one of the government's priorities: to get tough on crime. I believe I am speaking for all parliamentarians when I say that we do want safe streets and communities. Certainly I agree with that statement. However, I cannot agree with the provisions of this bill.

At our disposal as parliamentarians we have a number of tools dealing with crime. This bill is analogous to taking a sledgehammer out of the toolbox when a hammer should be and leaving four other relevant and applicable tools in the toolbox when they should be used in this whole issue of crime prevention and elimination.

As parliamentarians, we make laws, which are the standards that we ask citizens to apply in their day to day lives. In a lot of instances,

laws are not followed, which of course leads to the second issue of what happens when the law is not followed, and that of course depends on the severity of the particular law, regulation or rule.

When a serious offence occurs the person is charged, he goes to trial or pleads guilty, and he is sentenced. This sentencing process that we are talking about is an important issue.

Before I became a parliamentarian, I practised law for 25 years. I have been involved in many sentencing issues, both as a prosecutor and as a defence lawyer. I can say right now that sentencing is an extremely complex issue. It involves the accused, the accused's family, and the victim of the crime, as well as society in the larger issue. I can tell members right now that no two cases are alike. A lot of people would like to make a very simple statement that they can make one rule which would involve every sentence that a particular judge has to deal with, but that is simply wrong.

There are certain principles that have to be followed in a sentencing process. The first one, of course, is proportionality. The sentence has to be proportional to the gravity of the offence. The protection of the public, of course, is a very important principle. Everyone is concerned about retribution: that the accused serve a sentence based upon the gravity of the crime, of course, and the possible rehabilitation of the offender.

These principles are all codified in section 178 of the Criminal Code. We as a society leave the actual sentencing up to the judge. The sentence has to be done according to the principles, but again, as I said, no two cases are alike. At the end of the day, when all is said and done, we have to leave some discretion to the judge.

Can the system be improved? Of course it can and that was the reason why the previous government introduced Bill C-2, which did increase certain sentences but dealt with a lot of other issues and the whole issue of crime and crime prevention.

When Bill C-10 came before the House, I listened to the debates, read a lot of the background materials and, at the end of the day, I have concluded that it is the wrong approach.

First of all, I look at what the experts are saying. Our society is not inventing the wheel here. A lot of people study these issues. Here, in Europe and in the United States, they study what works and is effective and what does not work. Almost exclusively, the experts who have studied these issues have come to the conclusion that mandatory minimum sentences in offences like these are not the way to go. That is the position of the Canadian Bar Association, the American Bar Association and most criminologists. Again, I read what they have to say.

•(1820)

The second question I asked myself was if it was effective. What disturbed me the most in the debate was the comments from the justice minister when he introduced the bill. He referred to studies in Massachusetts, Florida, Virginia, New York and other states. I did not, but others probed into these studies and determined the results of the studies indicated that they were the exact opposite to what he said in the House.

When we do something like this, we are talking about the law of unintended consequences. We are dealing not with a minimum; we are dealing with a ceiling. We are dealing with more trials, more prisons and more costs to society. Then we have to ask ourselves the basic question. Could the money be spent more efficiently and more economically?

One additional item that concerns me and disturbs me is the whole issue of minority groups. Perhaps one statistic could put the whole debate in perspective with respect to this issue.

At some point today, an aboriginal child will be born in Canada, probably in your own city of Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker. According to the statistics, that aboriginal child has a more likely chance of going to prison than going to college. I do not even have to say any more about how the sentencing system and our justice system have treated minorities in our country.

Then it is easy to say if that does not work, what does work? I believe effective sentencing works. We all have to strive toward that. I will not stand in the House and say that the system is perfect. It needs improvement. Perhaps the most important thing we should be looking at is more effective and increased law enforcement.

We have to look, as parliamentarians and as a society, at the causes of crime. What causes people to breach the law? Is it education? Is it poverty? Is it health? These are all factors that have to be taken into consideration as society tries to deal with this problem. I should add too that there are some alarming statements made by certain people in the media, but I believe most people know that crime is in the decrease in Canada.

The issue of civil engagement and crime prevention have to be taken into consideration when we move forward on this issue.

I read the legislation. As I stated, the issue of trying to tie the hands of the judges, which in effect creates a ceiling, not a minimum sentence, is the wrong approach. I do not support it. Most people in the field of sentencing and in the field of criminology do not support it.

I believe we should go back to the drawing board. We should come forward, using all tools at our disposal, tools regarding a more effective and increased law enforcement, the causes of crime, issues we can deal with in society to prevent crime, issues that should be dealt with as a package.

I do not support the bill in its present form. I support the concept of lessening criminal behaviour and I support the principle of safer communities and safer streets, but this is not the way to go.

• (1825)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the remarks of my hon. colleague. I would like to have his opinion on the following. Minimum sentences tie the judges' hands. We in the Bloc Québécois believe that they do so unnecessarily because, in our opinion—and I am sure that my hon. colleague is thinking along the same lines—judges remain in the best position to determine what sentence is the most appropriate in light of all the facts of the case. They hear evidence and submissions. They, better than anyone else, should

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know what sentence would be the best. With this bill, the government would be taking this discretion away from judges.

The second point on which I would like to hear my hon. colleague is the opinion of all crime experts that the use of minimum sentences does not lower the crime rate or the recidivism rate. That is a major reason to oppose Bill C-10.

I would like to hear my hon. colleague on these two points.

[English]

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the premise of each of the questions. We are tying the hands of the judge if we adopt this legislation.

The whole issue of sentencing has been developed over hundreds of years. Again, I am not going to say it is perfect, but it is based upon certain principles. There are about five or six principles that the judge has to consider, and they are codified in section 108 of the Criminal Code.

The judge is a lawyer and is trained. More important, the judge has heard all the evidence dealing with the particular offence, heard the record of the accused, probably received a psychological assessment on the accused and has received a victim impact statement. For us, as parliamentarians, to later tie the hands of judges and say what they can or cannot do is wrong.

I will conclude with two quick comments.

Again, no two cases are alike. No one in this House, or in any House, should say that they are wrong or that they do not know what they are talking about.

My learned friend spoke about the specialists. I have read a lot of the reports. I have heard the debates here. My learned friend is quite correct. All the people who study these issues state clearly and unequivocally that the mandatory minimum is not effective. That is the reason why we should not pass this legislation.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1830)

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on June 1, I had the opportunity to ask the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development two questions regarding pilot project no. 6, which added five weeks of EI benefits in regions with 10% unemployment

This pilot project was launched by the previous government on June 4, 2004. It ended on June 4 of this year.

The current government therefore renewed this pilot project with two criteria. The first concerns regions where there is seasonal work and the second is that regions must have an unemployment rate over 8%.

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There are 23 targeted regions. Some of them are in Quebec, but the Montreal area was completely overlooked. Yet, it has an unemployment rate of 9.4% and also meets the criterion of providing seasonal work. In the hospitality industry alone, the number of seasonal workers totalled 73,500 last year.

Thus, for my first question, I would like to know why Montreal was excluded.

Furthermore, the minister tells us that the purpose of pilot projects such as this one is to test the effectiveness of the pilot project itself.

I would like to inform this House that this sampling gave very positive results. The Employment Insurance Commission of Canada assessed the success rate with respect to the target objective: 98% of the people affected by seasonal employment were entitled to this benefit, proportionally to the number of weeks they had accumulated.

My second question is the following: why did the minister renew this pilot project for only 18 months and not as part of all the other EI benefits? We absolutely do not understand it. We must look at why it was renewed for only 18 months.

My third question is: given that there are surpluses in the EI fund and that sums were diverted from it to the tune of \$50 billion, then the cost of the program cannot be an issue since it would cost a maximum of \$100 million if it were implemented in all the regions. Furthermore, the EI fund generates surpluses itself and always operates on the basis of an annual budget of \$16 billion. Therefore, \$100 million out of \$16 billion is very little.

In closing, I would like the minister to respond to these three questions: why was this pilot project not adopted permanently? Why was it not extended to Montreal? Why was the experience as assessed not taken into account?

• (1835)

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to provide the answer requested by the hon. member on the extended EI benefits pilot project.

This represents a continuation of the previous pilot that will provide more information about the labour market effects of the initiative, while continuing to respond to the needs of seasonal gappers on an interim basis.

Seasonal work presents unique challenges for individual Canadians. Often these individuals face a limited working season, sporadic work durations and, in many rural areas, a lack of off-season alternatives.

To address this issue the government has announced the extended EI benefits pilot project, which will provide access to five additional weeks of benefits to EI claimants, up to a maximum of 45 weeks of benefits. This project will continue to test whether providing additional weeks of EI benefits will help to address the annual income gap faced by seasonal workers whose weeks of work and EI benefits are not sufficient to provide income throughout the year, and have any adverse labour market effects on other EI claimants.

The extended EI benefits pilot will run for 18 months, offering the same level of benefits, in all the same employment insurance economic regions originally included in the increased weeks of employment insurance benefits pilot project, with the exception of three regions where economic conditions have strengthened significantly over the past two years. By retaining the same regions, we will ensure we have the information necessary to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the pilot in those regions.

The extended employment insurance benefits pilot project is good news for seasonal workers. It demonstrates the effectiveness and flexibility of the employment insurance program in meeting the needs of Canadian workers. It also demonstrates the government's commitment to exploring solutions to address the unique needs of individuals who are employed in seasonal work.

During the course of the extended employment insurance benefits pilot project, the government will have the opportunity to gather more data and gain a better understanding of the project's effect on the labour market, while continuing to provide seasonal gappers with access to additional weeks of benefits.

I wish to stress, however, that this is an interim measure and the government's priority continues to be helping Canadians participate in the labour market.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, that is the problem. It is another interim measure. While this was an experimental measure, over the last two years that it was applied it gave meaningful results recognized by the minister and the Employment Insurance Commission. It is hard to understand why it was not adopted permanently.

The parliamentary secretary is not answering my question. Why was Montreal not included? Montreal has dozens and dozens of seasonal workers. In the hotel industry there are some 74,000 seasonal workers. The unemployment rate is greater than 9%—more specifically it is 9.4%. Why did this not apply to Montreal?

In closing, does the minister intend to vote with us on Bill C-269? This will bring order to all the pilot projects that always make seasonal workers uncertain about where they stand, make them subject to interim measures and leave them without any income, in most cases, during the period commonly known as the gap.

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, the regions where economic conditions have strengthened significantly over the last two years have not been included in the new pilot project.

Turning to the subject of older workers, I would like to point out that many older workers are employed in seasonal industries and this pilot project will continue to offer them assistance. In addition, as promised in the Speech from the Throne and delivered in the budget, the government will undertake a feasibility study of measures to help displaced older workers. This includes the possibility of income assistance and retraining.

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In undertaking these and many other measures, we are demonstrating our commitment to assisting workers and strengthening Canada's labour market.

• (1840)

ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, well maintained, safe and efficient wharves set a fishing community apart. They can make the difference between a prosperous and a marginal season and it is imperative that the Government of Canada develop and maintain a responsible policy to manage these wharves and protect a way of life.

In opposition it seemed that the Conservative government recognized the importance of maintaining our wharves and protecting a way of life. In fact, the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley was particularly vocal about this issue and the community of Digby in my riding was one of his favourite topics of conversation. It seemed that he could hardly speak to a reporter without attacking the Liberal government for having divested ownership of the Digby Wharf to the Maritime Harbours Society. Now that the Conservatives are sitting on the other side of the House, they are silent on this issue.

I recognize that the situation in Digby is not the fault of the government but it alone has the capability of fixing the problem. However, the minister prefers to play politics rather than do the right thing.

I would like to speak about the Digby Wharf in a bit more detail. In 1999 the Department of Transport transferred ownership of the wharf to the Maritime Harbours Society, along with \$3 million for the upkeep and maintenance of the facility. This transfer has been a dismal failure.

Seven years later, the wharf is in a state of dangerous disrepair and serious allegations have been raised about the use of the funds by the society. After several years of legal proceedings between the Maritime Harbours Society and the Department of Transport, the arbitrator has finally reported his findings and has found no wrongdoing on either side, although he did point to a very poor contract by the federal government.

With this process completed, there is no longer any reason to delay returning control of this wharf to a community that depends on it for its livelihood and yet the government continues to do nothing, preferring to play politics with the issue. The government would rather blame the previous government for its mistakes than take responsibility and fix the problem.

When the Conservatives were in opposition they said that they would take quick and immediate action to resolve this situation. During the election they repeated that promise and yet five months into their mandate they have done zero.

A month ago I raised the issue in the House and asked the minister when he would take action on this file. I asked him to return control of the wharf to the people of Digby and to ensure that his government invested the necessary money to protect fishing and the regional economy.

Instead of addressing the root problem of this issue, the minister chose to play politics at the expense of the people of Digby. He stood in the House and accused me of not doing anything over a 13 year period. I have only been here for five years and when the decision was made on the Digby Wharf it was a Conservative who represented West Nova. The minister owes it to the people of Digby to take action on this file and return control of the wharf to the people of Digby.

When will the minister do the right thing? When will the government assume ownership of the wharf and invest the necessary money to ensure the safety of the fishing fleet and the long term economic sustainability of this region?

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer the question on behalf of the minister. I can say that playing politics is the expertise of the party opposite. After five years as a member and never having raised this issue before, I wonder why the member expects us in 103 days or 108 days to get it done when he himself had well over five years to try.

I am pleased for the opportunity to discuss this issue and answer the concerns raised by the hon. member for West Nova regarding the Port of Digby because there is nothing more important to the minister than this port.

In October 1999, Transport Canada actually transferred the regional-local Port of Digby in Nova Scotia to the Maritime Harbours Society in an effort to solve the issues that were plaguing it at that stage, which is what we see today. It was transferred pursuant to Transport Canada's port divestiture program, which is what the federal government has been doing for some time.

The Digby Harbour Port Association did not avail itself of the opportunity to take it over at that time. However, that does not mean a good idea has to go to waste today. The transfer included a \$3 million contribution that was to be used exclusively for eligible expenditures directly related to the port's operation and management.

My understanding, which was brought forward by the member, is that the arbitrator found that there was no malfeasance and no problem with what actually took place with the \$3 million contribution from the federal government at that time.

However, following the transfer, public concerns were raised concerning the management of the contract and the accountability of the Maritime Harbours Society. This was with respect to the operation of the port and the way federal contribution funds were spent.

As a result, Transport Canada entered into a lengthy process of audits and legal proceedings to ensure we could find out what was going on. This led to the arbitration and to the result that nothing bad took place. The department took these allegations very seriously and wanted to ensure these funds had not been used for any other purpose other than for what they were intended. It is for that reason that Transport Canada used all the legal recourses that were available under the circumstances to get to the bottom of it and find out what was going on.

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The dispute with the Maritime Harbours Society concerning the use of the contribution funds provided when the Port of Digby was transferred is now concluded, as the member knows. The arbitration is on the Transport Canada website and I welcome anyone watching today in TV land to take the opportunity to look at the arbitration decision.

The Maritime Harbours Society now wishes to sell the Digby Fisherman's Wharf to the local community. The potential sale of this wharf by Maritime Harbours Society to the Digby Harbour Port Association would consist of a private sale between two parties, and this government does not interfere in a private sale between two parties unless our help is requested.

However, due to the contractual obligations of the initial transfer from Transport Canada to the Maritime Harbours Society, it still requires ministerial consent. Prior to the last election, the minister granted that approval to facilitate the ownership of the port by a community group.

I myself have issues with wharves in my riding and I can assure the member that this government and the minister will do all they can to help the community group and the people of Digby.

Concurrently, the minister made a proposal to release the Maritime Harbours Society from certain other contractual obligations. As the member knows, a lot of money is left over. The minister has stated publicly that he would honour this commitment. Department officials have met with the Digby Port Harbour Association as recently as April 5 and I assure the member that those meetings are ongoing.

I would like to reiterate that the solution for the Port of Digby's future has come from a local source. The minister and this government encourage that local source to get involved so it can take place.

● (1845)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, the member's answer highlights the problem. In the five years that I have been here I have worked with three different transport ministers and have watched each of them try to resolve this problem by waiting for the legal ramifications, legal studies and arbitration to be done. The Department of Transport always advised the minister on which direction to take, as it is advising the minister now.

The answer in Digby is for the Department of Transport to take over the wharf and to turn it over to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which agreed in 2005 to take it over and manage it under a harbour authority, like every other fishing harbour in the community, which is what Digby actually is. It should never have been at

Transport Canada. That would be the ideal answer, with the support of the federal government.

The problem is that the Minister of Transport is getting his advice from the people who made the mistake. They are the ones who are representing the minister in these discussions with the Maritime Harbours Society. They would have to admit infallibility and I do not see that happening very soon. That is why I encourage the minister to appoint an independent group, an independent body, an accountant or a lawyer, to do these negotiations with the Maritime Harbours Society, someone who has nothing to protect and has an unbiased nature in representing the government. Surely there is a Conservative accountant or lawyer somewhere who can do that work. That would help.

I have heard the member's previous answers to what the needs of western Atlantic Canada are, which is to move everybody to Alberta. The herring fleet, the scallop fleet and the lobster fleet cannot make it up the Athabasca River. They need the Digby Port. It is a fishing port and it always has been.

I would encourage the member and the minister, as I have done in private conversations, to go outside of the department and get independent advice. This is not a problem that was caused by the minister but he can resolve it and I would be pleased to work with him to do so.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, the department transferred the port, along with a substantial financial contribution, to the Maritime Harbours Society, which is a private entity that deals with this matter. We are prepared to help facilitate the transfer to the local port authority and the government would be prepared to do that. That is how the government sees its role in this particular move.

As far as my personal belief on how Canadians should have the ability to move, I do not have a problem with the charter. If Canadians want to move from one part of the country to the other, like many of my friends and relatives moved to Newfoundland to build some oil refineries and work in the oil industry, that is their right under the charter.

Does the member have a problem with the charter and the ability of people to move from province to province?

● (1850)

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 6:50 p.m.)

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