



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 141 • NUMBER 045 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Wednesday, June 21, 2006
(Part A)**

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, June 21, 2006

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[English]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. member for Kitchener Centre.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ROV TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to commend the White Rock ROV Chix. This group of enterprising young ladies built a remote operated vehicle to compete in the marine advanced technology competition in Seattle in May. Their hard work and ingenuity paid off as they took first prize in the Pacific Northwest regional competition. The team of Madeleine Gawthrop, Lindsey Gorman, Caroline Dearden, Rebekah Pickard and Jessica O'Sullivan beat eight other teams.

The Chix now have the honour of representing their region at the world championships being held in Houston, Texas, at the NASA space center. These home-schoolers demonstrated innovation and rugged determination and stand as fine examples to all young Canadians.

I would also like to congratulate the White Rock Heritage Christian School team of Peter Zielke, Guido Worthman, Kye Seo Hwang and Matthew Stevens for its impressive third place finish.

All the best to the Chix in Houston. We are rooting for them.

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NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, National Aboriginal Day is a day that Canadians celebrate the contributions of first nations, Métis and Inuit Canadians.

Today I would like to recognize the tremendous contributions made by the people of the Kenora riding. I would like to recognize Grand Chief Arnold Gardner for his tireless work on behalf of the Treaty 3 communities. He continues to highlight the obstacles that his people face to achieve equal standing in our community. He is a dedicated and well-respected leader.

I would also like to recognize Grand Chief Stan Beardy, who represents communities within Treaty 9 that have particular challenges with remoteness. He has fought to have their voices heard in Ottawa and he has persevered to achieve the results for his people.

I have been fortunate to have their guidance and, as such, I have gained a greater understanding of what we as a nation must strive for: respect, trust and above all equality.

I represent members of 41 first nations and Métis communities, and I would like to offer my best wishes for their celebrations.

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[Translation]

MULTINA

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to a large company in the riding of Drummond. Multina specializes in manufacturing seats for recreational vehicles, components for public transit vehicles, and foam and composite products.

A recent KPMG/Ipsos Reid survey of 250 of Canada's most visible business leaders showed that Multina is among Quebec's most respected businesses.

In addition, the company received an industry achievement award from the Réseau industriel Drummond for its contribution to the region's economic development.

Multina is a marvellous example of how dynamic businesses in the Drummond riding can be, and I am proud to have the opportunity to talk about it today.

Congratulations to the company, its management team and all of its employees on their excellent work.

Statements by Members

[English]

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we honour 10 years of celebrating National Aboriginal Day in this country and celebrating aboriginal people.

Yesterday the government announced the appointment of Wendy Grant-John, a special representative for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. That is a positive message to first nations.

Ms. Grant-John has been a strong voice for aboriginal people and particularly for women. Aboriginal women have made progress in our country, but there is a very long way to go.

The Government of Canada has a role to play. Aboriginal women are still disproportionately victims of spousal abuse. Far more than many women in other parts of the country, women of all ages in the aboriginal community live below the poverty line.

They are forced to raise their families in crowded homes and unsafe conditions, often as many as 21 people in one house. They lack even the basics, like safe drinking water.

Aboriginal people are owed the resources and capacity for women to raise families in safe, healthy environments, and to take their place at the decision making tables. Canada's New Democrats will stand beside aboriginal people in their struggle for equality.

* * *

● (1405)

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks Canada's 10th National Aboriginal Day. From sea to sea, from north to south, many celebrations are underway.

Right here in the nation's capital, there is a gathering of some 300 first nations, Inuit and Métis, pastors, leaders and community members. The First People's Summit is an assembly of leaders who desire to see the spiritual well-being and the moral integrity of Canada preserved, enhanced and promoted.

These original and host people are praying for and working quietly with determination to see progress in biblically based reconciliation. Their desire is to see healing and unity in Canada between all people, nations, churches and governments, and to cultivate true peace and prosperity throughout our land.

Today representatives from first nations, Inuit and Métis communities will sign a historic document entitled the "Covenant of the First Peoples of Canada".

Inscribed on the Peace Tower are the words, "Where there is no vision, the people perish".

I wish to draw this event to the attention of all members and commend the participants in this historic gathering for their vision and commitment to bring blessing, reconciliation and spiritual renewal to Canada. It is National Aboriginal Day. We have a reason to celebrate.

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the 10th anniversary of National Aboriginal Day, a day when Canadians from sea to sea to sea celebrate the culture and achievements of Canada's aboriginal people: Inuit, first nations and Métis.

As I look back and see how far Nunavut has come since April 1, 1999, I am so proud of my territory and the people.

However, it is imperative that the federal government act on the Berger report regarding the Nunavut land claim implementation and the Kelowna accord.

The federal government must act on the housing crisis facing Inuit as well as health and education issues. By not doing so, Canada fails in its very real obligations to Inuit and puts the honour of the Crown at stake. The failure to act by the federal government fails not only Inuit but all Canadians.

I wish all Canadians a very happy National Aboriginal Day, a wonderful Canada Day, and a safe and enjoyable summer.

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NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, aboriginal people have played vital roles in the defence, economic prosperity, and the cultural richness of our nation, both before and after Confederation.

As fur trade partners aboriginal Canadians helped build Canada's first economic engine in Montreal and helped generate the wealth that led to the establishment of Canada's first bank.

All Canadians should be proud of their accomplishments and acknowledge how important they remain to the economic, social and cultural well-being of Canada's future.

Today is June 21, the summer solstice, a day aboriginal people have long celebrated. It is also the 10th anniversary of its official designation as National Aboriginal Day.

I encourage all Canadians to participate in activities taking place this day from sea to sea to sea in celebration of the important place aboriginal people hold within the fabric of our society and of this land.

Let us share in the celebration.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC FILM INDUSTRY

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 1996 the federal government created the Canadian Television Fund to provide financial assistance to the television and feature film industry and to support production in Canada and Quebec.

Statements by Members

On the heels of unprecedented growth in the film industry in Quebec within Canada, the federal government slashed the fund. In 2005, it was cut by \$37 million despite its recognized importance and effectiveness.

In light of the fact that its performance has exceeded all expectations, it is vital that Quebec receive its fair share of the funds allocated to the industry. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women must ensure this and take action to increase the limits on funds available to francophones.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women is meeting with the Quebec coalition today. Let us hope she finds some political courage and takes advantage of this opportunity to take concrete action in line with the federal government's stated policy of openness. To do otherwise would be to show that there is no place for the Quebec film industry in Canada.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

**MEMBER FOR EDMONTON—MILL WOODS—
BEAUMONT**

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday night I went to an Oilers game at Rexall Place, something I had done literally hundreds of times over the past 10 years working for the team.

This night was special though as it was game six of the Stanley Cup finals. I stood beside the Prime Minister and, with a choir of 17,000, sang a spine-tingling version of O Canada.

The Oilers played the best game I had ever witnessed them play, winning 4-0, and I commented to wife that it was one of the most remarkable nights of my life.

However, the absolute highlight, the one thing I will always remember, came when we pulled up to the house and I saw my seven year old speck of a daughter jumping up and down for joy in the front window, because her daddy was home. I tucked her and her 10 year old brother into bed, and got to spend about seven more hours with them on Father's Day before climbing on a plane to come back here for the eighth time out of the past nine weeks.

As parliamentarians we are blessed with the opportunity to represent Canadians and to make decisions that will shape the nation. We all work extremely hard and are able to do so because of the sacrifice of the families we leave back home.

Today I want to recognize and thank my wife Debi, son Jaden and daughter Jena, along with the family members of every one of my colleagues on either side of the House.

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NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in recognition of National Aboriginal Day I wish to take this opportunity to remind the Conservative government of its moral obligation to the first nations in this country and to uphold the

historic Kelowna accord that was reached last fall between our aboriginal people and 14 governments across Canada.

Unfortunately, this Conservative government and the current Prime Minister have chosen to turn their backs on the first nations by failing to uphold the Kelowna accord.

The former Prime Minister, the right hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, has taken the unprecedented step of introducing a private member's bill in this House in order to keep hope alive for our aboriginal people. The Kelowna accord is a comprehensive 10 year \$5.1 billion plan to achieve a clear set of goals and targets.

The Conservatives inherited a very healthy fiscal balance sheet from the previous Liberal government. There is simply no excuse in this day and age to deliberately ignore the plight of our aboriginal people.

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LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is June. School is out and it is report card time. It is only fitting then to deliver a report card on the Liberal's first semester in opposition.

In math, the Liberals get an F for failing to understand that slashing the GST plus tax credits equals \$20 billion more in the pockets of Canadians.

In geography, the Liberals get an F for forgetting where Afghanistan and our courageous troops are.

In history, the Liberals get an F for repeatedly forgetting their 13 year record of waste, mismanagement and corruption.

In science, the Liberals get an F for greenhouse gas emissions that are 35% above 1990 levels, not 6% below as the Liberals promised.

For attendance, the Liberals get an F. Apparently 11 Liberal leadership wannabes and their minions prefer playing hooky to representing their constituents here.

For attention, the Liberals get another F. It seems Liberal MPs just cannot resist their daytime naps in QP.

No wonder Canadians keep telling the Liberals to go stand in the corner.

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FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I will be delivering more than 800 postcards to the Prime Minister's Office from the residents of Alberni Valley on Vancouver Island.

Their message is clear. Logging practices in the Alberni Valley are completely unsustainable and are causing deep concern to loggers, mill workers, environmentalists, first nations and local business. The future of our economy is on the line.

We are asking the Prime Minister to preserve and strengthen the surplus test on export of raw logs from lands in B.C.

Oral Questions

Approximately 1 million cubic meters of wood provide 790 full time processing jobs. With 2.5 million cubic meters of logs exported last year from private lands in B.C., the federal government allowed approximately 2,000 jobs to disappear. Many communities in my riding are also suffering as truckload after truckload of raw logs is exported.

That is why I am pleased to support the Save Our Valley Alliance as we work together to ban raw log exports and keep jobs in Canada.

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[*Translation*]

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this 10th annual National Aboriginal Day, I would like to draw the attention of the House to a first nations community in New Brunswick, the community of Elsiebogtog, which sorely lacks adequate housing.

In fact, Susan Levi-Peters, Chief of the Elsiebogtog Nation, wrote to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians. She asked him for 500 new houses but will receive only five.

We know that aboriginal housing is not a priority for this government. The funding promised in the Conservative budget is simply an allocation and totals \$1 billion less than what would have been invested under the Kelowna accord.

This is an insult to aboriginal Canadians.

* * *

•(1415)

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, June 21 marks the summer solstice, the longest day of the year, and more importantly, National Aboriginal Day.

I am pleased to remind the House that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended a National Aboriginal Day in 1995. In 1996, June 21 was declared the first National Aboriginal Day.

For the past 10 years, we have been celebrating the important contributions made by first nations peoples. For decades, even centuries, we have benefited from their assistance in our everyday lives. June 21 offers an opportunity to acknowledge the exceptional contributions made by the first nations, Inuit and Métis to Quebec and Canadian society.

Aboriginal nations have a place of honour in our history and the Bloc Québécois would like to emphasize the importance of their contribution to our society.

Enjoy the festivities, my dear friends.

[*English*]

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, National Aboriginal Day is the perfect time to underline the key role the aboriginal people and the Aboriginal Pipeline Group must play in any development of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline.

The government must take necessary steps to ensure aboriginal people are fully consulted and included in all aspects of the development and management of the project. Areas such as skilled trades training and post-secondary education will be particularly important to create high value, sustainable employment opportunities for aboriginal peoples.

Forty percent of the Mackenzie Valley project traverses the Deh Cho lands. Recently they rightly expressed disappointment and frustration with the latest land claim offer made by the federal government.

Canada must remove impediments from the development process and negotiate in good faith a settlement acceptable to all parties. Regrettably, the Mackenzie Valley project is on hold while industry reassesses its cost projections upward from \$7.5 billion.

We look forward to the day when this project can be implemented and the benefits fully shared with Canada's aboriginal peoples in the north.

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AIR-INDIA

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Supreme Court Justice John Major launched the commission of inquiry into the investigation of the bombing of Air-India flight 182.

This bombing was the worst terrorist attack in Canadian history. The families of the victims have a right to answers about this senseless slaughter. Canada must demonstrate that, as a nation, we have learned from our past mistakes and that we will work to identify terrorist threats before more Canadians become innocent victims.

The government will leave no stone unturned in the search for justice for the Canadians who have suffered as a result of this terrorist attack. The inquiry reflects the government's commitment to fighting terrorism at home and abroad.

On behalf of the Conservative government, I welcome to Ottawa today the families of the bombing of Air-India flight 182.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister was on this side of the House, he repeatedly called on our government to respect the will of Parliament. "This is a minority Parliament", he lectured us. The government must listen to all parties in the House.

Oral Questions

Yesterday, Parliament clearly and forcefully expressed the will of the Canadian people. It wants the Conservative government to honour Canada's commitment to our aboriginal people, as agreed to in the Kelowna accord.

On this National Aboriginal Day, is the Prime Minister's idea of respect for the will of the House and for our aboriginal people to turn his back on the most significant opportunity for progress in our lifetime?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. The government is proceeding with aboriginal people to address their priorities.

Let us compare 13 weeks of Conservative government action to 13 years of Liberal empty promises. Drinking water standards, the Liberals dodged it, we did it. The Indian residential schools compensation, they delayed it, we did it. A claims offer to the Deh Cho, they ducked it, we did it. The process of matrimonial property, they would not proceed, they ducked it, we did it. That is what we are going to see from the Conservative government.

• (1420)

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that response is totally in keeping with the government's lack of respect for anybody other than itself. It is not the hallmark of its thing.

The Kelowna agreement was a solemn pledge on behalf of the people of Canada, on behalf of our aboriginal people. It was not a political accord. It was not a partisan electoral issue. It was a response to an enormously important problem in our country. To break this pledge is to dishonour Canada and to add to our first nations peoples sense of betrayal in the country.

In the absence of the Prime Minister, will the minister please, in the name of all that is just, honour Canada's obligations enunciated in our fully funded aboriginal Kelowna accord?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us carry on with the comparison: \$300 million for northern housing, they did not, we did; \$300 million for off reserve housing, they would not, we did; \$500 million for the Mackenzie Valley socio-economic fund, they would not, we did. I could go on.

The Liberals 13 year record is one that is appalling, shameful and devastating.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister is hard of hearing.

The Kelowna accord represented a consensus. The governments representing all political parties in this House signed the accord. All the parties represented, even the Conservatives in the provinces, signed the accord. Furthermore, this accord resulted from a number of consultations, when we listened to the solutions coming from aboriginal Canadians.

Rhyming off a list like the minister did is not worthy of this House. It is not worthy of a government that is proud to have an aboriginal population that wants respect and support.

Where is the \$5 million we promised to our first nations peoples in this country?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not have any lessons in morality to learn from the Liberals.

We will take action against aboriginal poverty. We will take steps with regard to the systematic funding needed to improve the quality of life of aboriginals.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is National Aboriginal Day. And, yet, this government is providing very little reason for the first nations communities to celebrate.

While age-old diseases are making a comeback within certain aboriginal communities—I am talking about the cases of tuberculosis in Garden Hill, Manitoba—the consequences of the negative actions by this government are worse than if it had done nothing at all.

Why did this government renounce the signature of the previous government at the bottom of the Kelowna accord, which allocated \$1.3 billion to prevent situations like the comeback of tuberculosis in Garden Hill?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not what the budget says. The budget of this Conservative government indicates that \$300 million is earmarked for housing in the North and that \$300 million is earmarked for off-reserve housing. The budget also allocates an additional \$150,000. That is \$1.75 billion in all. That is what we have done.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if it is a question of \$5 billion for aboriginal peoples or \$5 billion for the GST, I choose the health of aboriginal peoples.

The infant mortality rate for native communities is 20% higher than for the rest of the Canadian population. The incidence of type 2 diabetes is three times greater and the suicide rate, in certain communities, is ten times higher than in the rest of Canada.

The Kelowna accord was a first step towards addressing these problems as it provided \$870 million over five years for the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, and a further \$445 million to increase the system capacity.

Can the current government inform us of its concrete alternative solution—?

• (1425)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario.

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that there are some very serious problems in aboriginal communities. We must take up these challenges and find other solutions ourselves, which requires much financial assistance and additional costs.

Personally, I support another solution to the problems of aboriginal peoples because the Liberal solutions have been catastrophic for aboriginal health.

* * *

VISIT BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO QUEBEC CITY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the eve of Quebec's Fête nationale, the Prime Minister has decided to hold a cabinet meeting in the national capital. We can assume, then, that the Prime Minister accords some importance to this holiday. If Quebecers have a national holiday, it is because they see Quebec as a nation.

Since the Prime Minister considers it important to be in Quebec City for the Fête nationale, does this also mean that he recognizes that Quebecers form a nation?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is true that the Prime Minister and the entire cabinet will be in Quebec City on Friday. You have also seen in the newspapers that the Prime Minister will be in Beauce to celebrate the Fête nationale with the people there, who are great federalists and believe in a proud Quebec in a united Canada.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is all well and good. I do not dispute that. I have this question for the minister. We recognize, and rightly so, that the Acadians form a nation and the first nations are nations. Both sides of this House recognize that.

Since we recognize that aboriginal peoples and Acadians form nations, which I support, can the minister clearly tell us whether he recognizes that, by the same token, Quebecers form a nation?

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister for Sport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are focusing on the things that matter to Canadians and Quebecers living in Quebec. We are focusing on ensuring that the Government of Canada is relevant in Quebec, that federalism works for Quebecers.

Our belief is that Quebec is stronger within a united Canada. That is exactly the kind of policies the government has acted on and will act on in the coming months.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will be in Quebec City for the Fête nationale, but unfortunately, everything Quebecers hold dear seems unimportant to his government. The Kyoto agreement is a priority for Quebecers; his government has struck Kyoto from its agenda.

His government plans to abolish the gun registry, which 76% of Quebecers support. Antiscab legislation is a reality in Quebec but not in Ottawa because of his government.

Given this context, how can the Prime Minister justify telling Quebecers that his government shares their priorities?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been very clear right from the start. We have concentrated on the five priorities that we talked about in the last election. I am very pleased to say we have made tremendous progress on all fronts. I know that is important not just to Quebecers but to all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is more. Other issues that are very important to Quebecers have received no more than a passing glance from his government.

Limiting imports of milk by-products is a priority for agricultural producers, but it will never happen because his government does not believe in it. Older workers need help, but the government has not made any POWA announcements. The softwood industry needs loan guarantees urgently, but his government refuses to give them.

How can the Prime Minister claim to be on the same wavelength as Quebecers when what is important to them is not important to his government?

● (1430)

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the hon. member lives in a world where she believes that everything is wrong. That is not the case. We have been emphasizing those things that are important to Canadians, and they are important to Quebecers as well. We have made tremendous progress. The hon. member should celebrate that this coming weekend.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP moved a motion before the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development, calling for the resignation of the Minister of the Environment.

The government claims that this is a confidence matter. Once again, as in the case of Gwyn Morgan, the Prime Minister is blinded by partisanship. His minister does not understand the need for immediate action. Climate change is an important file that requires immediate attention.

Why does the Prime Minister want to force an election because of his incompetent minister?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made it clear that after 13 years of Liberal waste and mismanagement on all fronts, including the environment, this government is focused on accountability on all fronts, particularly on the environment because the environment is something that Canadians care deeply about.

This government is concerned about the health of Canadians. Canadians have asked us to protect their health. Those are the measures we are taking every single day in government.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Platitudes, Mr. Speaker. The minister should resign if she is not going to act. That is all there is to it.

She does not understand climate change, but there is another minister who has been briefed on climate change. The Minister of National Defence has been told by his officials what impact climate change is going to have on the Northwest Passage. Government documents obtained by the NDP say this: "If the current rate of ice thinning continues, the Northwest Passage could be open to more regular navigation by 2015".

That is only nine years away. Does the government not realize that climate change impacts not only the environment but also our sovereignty?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whether the ice melts or does not melt in the north, we will continue to protect our sovereignty. That is why we are investing in the military. That is why we are going to ensure that the air force, army and navy are able to operate through the north and enforce our sovereignty.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on National Aboriginal Day, the government has once again abandoned aboriginal Canadians. Canada took the lead in developing the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous people. Now, when it is time for the government to support it, the government rejects it.

Adopting this resolution would be a sign that the government values the rights and the contributions of aboriginal Canadians. Why does the government continue to abandon Canada's first citizens? Why does the government not think that Canada's indigenous people should have the same rights and the same privileges as all Canadians?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a continuation of Liberal hypocrisy, empty promises and rhetoric. The member knows full well that no previous government of this country has ever supported that draft declaration. She knows full well that it is inconsistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is inconsistent with our Constitution. It is inconsistent with the National Defence Act. It is inconsistent with our treaties. It is inconsistent with all of the policies under which we have negotiated land claims for 100 years. That is Liberal hypocrisy.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know the Conservative government was a huge disappointment to aboriginal Canadians. In fact, it completely left out the Métis.

Worse yet, there was no mention of the Métis in the throne speech. There was no mention of the Métis by the Indian affairs minister at the aboriginal affairs committee. On top of that, the Conservatives killed the Kelowna accord which had tremendous opportunity for Métis people.

Perhaps certain advisers to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development have told them the Métis do not exist. Let me say that they do exist and they are proud to be Métis. When will the government start treating Métis as a priority?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well that the budget contains \$300 million for off reserve housing for native Canadians.

I will not stand in the House and take any lectures from the Liberals on aboriginal policy. That is the party of empty promises. That is the party that stood by while aboriginal Canadians drank water contaminated with E. coli. That is the party that stood by while native aboriginal women could not sleep in their own beds because they have no matrimonial property rights.

For 13 years of shame, the Liberals have been slammed by the Auditor General and Amnesty International. I will not take it.

● (1435)

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I called on the hon. member for Labrador.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, this is the most attention a Métis will get from that government.

It is National Aboriginal Day, a day to celebrate. Yet aboriginal people are crying shame on the Conservatives, shame for killing Kelowna, shame for opposing the UN indigenous race declaration, shame that the Conservatives do not consult with aboriginal people.

Premier Williams said that the Prime Minister agreed to finance the Lower Churchill hydro project and the Conservatives have not consulted with the aboriginal people in Labrador. Before signing a deal, will the government in its shameful way consult with the Inuit and Métis to resolve outstanding legal issues and ensure all residents of Labrador benefit from this resource?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think today we are actually talking about Liberal shame. The former leader of the Liberal Party describes the Liberal record as shameful. One of the current leadership candidates describes it as devastating.

There is lot of noise and sputtering from the other side of the House, which is the Liberals choking on their own record of shame.

Oral Questions

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on June 15 the Minister of Indian Affairs claimed that the procurement strategy for aboriginal business continues to be government policy.

Perhaps he should speak to his colleague, the Minister of Health, whose communications director said that the health department would not respect this federal policy, in place since 1996.

Would the Minister of Health please clarify for us whether his department will respect the mandatory set aside program for aboriginal business?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think all members of the House realize that I cannot get into any details on procurement, but indeed, as the hon. member no doubt knows, we want to ensure that aboriginal Canadians wherever they live get the best health care from the best sources available with the best health outcomes.

That is the strategy of this government when it comes to aboriginal health care.

* * *

[Translation]

SECURITIES INDUSTRY

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, more than anything, Quebecers hate being ripped off. They are very attached to their securities commission, which is rightfully theirs under the Constitution.

How can the finance minister justify to Quebecers his plan to bring together the entire securities industry under a single, Canada-wide commission, in Toronto, when this does not fall under his jurisdiction by virtue of the Canadian Constitution?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the issue is as part of our economic federation whether it is in the best interests of Canadians across Canada to have one common securities regulator. The issue is not whether it needs to be a federal regulator or a regulator that is created by the provinces.

The point of the discussion which we hope to have with the finance ministers and the ministers responsible for securities regulation next week when we meet together is to address that issue in terms of making sense of our economic federation and protecting investors in Canada and having adequate enforcement, whether it is in our best interests to have one common securities regulator.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Constitution is clear: securities are a provincial jurisdiction.

How can the federal government try to convince Quebecers that the Quebec securities commission is not working and that control should be centralized in Toronto when, according to the OECD, our existing system is the second best in the world? Could it be that the minister's perception is clouded by his desire to favour Toronto?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker. I want to favour Canadians. I want to protect investors who invest in RSPs, who invest in pension plans, who invest directly in the market. There is a significant market in Montreal in the derivatives section that can certainly be accommodated in our discussions.

As I say, the point is not a provincial jurisdiction point. The point is the best interests of Canadians who need protection in our securities markets.

* * *

● (1440)

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Canada has stated that it is withdrawing its support for the proposed United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, although the international community has been working on this declaration for 20 years. The vote will take place on June 29 in Geneva.

How can the government explain Canada's about-face when the secretary general of Amnesty International states that it is difficult to imagine that a worse problem could exist with no will to solve it after so many years of work?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's question, but I do not agree with him.

The proposed wording is incompatible with our Constitution, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, various Supreme Court decisions, the National Defence Act and federal policies on aboriginal land claims and self-government.

We must work with other countries and the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to improve the drafting of such a declaration.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I invite the minister to reread article 45 of the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which reads as follows:

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act contrary to the Charter of the United Nations.

What, then, is the explanation for the radical shift to the right, if it is not Canada's desire to align itself with the United States and Australia, disregarding the tradition of dialogue with and openness to aboriginal peoples that Canada and Quebec have maintained until now?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of some importance. Let us ensure that the public record is clear on this matter.

Oral Questions

The draft declaration has never been supported by any previous government of this country. There is no change of policy in that regard. It is not supported by the Australians. It is not supported by New Zealand.

It is contrary to or inconsistent with the Canadian charter, with our Constitution Act, the distribution of powers. It is inconsistent with previous decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada and very inconsistent with the National Defence Act and the treaties and policies under which we negotiate treaties.

This is a draft which requires further work. That work is under way. We support a final text as long as it is improved.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been almost two months since the Prime Minister announced his softwood sellout, but the fallout continues.

Industry is revolting to save itself. Premiers are feeling betrayed. We are now getting details of a leaked letter from the Bush administration to its lumber lobby confirming that the real goal of the U.S. is to completely hobble the Canadian forestry sector for at least seven years.

Will the Prime Minister admit today that his grand proclamation in April was akin to erecting a mission accomplished banner on an aircraft carrier before the job was actually done?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the softwood lumber discussions are proceeding extremely well. Provinces are very supportive.

The so-called letter that is being referred to was an undated, unsigned letter. It has no status whatever in the discussions that are ongoing on softwood lumber.

I can tell the hon. member that his region, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies and the west and B.C. are going to be much better off under this softwood lumber agreement than under any other alternative.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under this so-called deal, at current softwood lumber prices our producers will face up to 10% duty with an export cap. That is not free trade. That is not fair trade. In fact, it is much worse than the illegal status quo.

Negotiators have now left the table and there is no plan to comply with NAFTA.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing, support our Canadian industry now and guarantee that NAFTA and Canada's sovereignty will be protected if he goes back to the sellout table?

• (1445)

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, never has the softwood lumber industry been better and more strongly supported than by this Prime Minister and this government.

I want to remind the hon. member that no regions would have to accept an export tax of that level. They could opt for a different option and they would be facing a much less severe duty and a much less severe export tax. It would create much greater stability and much more predictability in this industry.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Washington last week the Minister of Industry met secretly with the president of Boeing's defence division and with top representatives of Lockheed Martin, a potential bidder on the tactical airlift purchase.

By meeting with these companies secretly, the minister has opened up our country to legal challenges for years to come. Why was the Prime Minister blind to the fact that these meetings take away the integrity of what must be an open, transparent and competitive process?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was in Washington last week and am pretty proud to have had a first meeting with my counterpart. We had discussions about the security partnership and the prosperity partnership.

Also, I had some meetings with the aerospace industry. Those were very profitable meetings. As is usual for the Minister of Industry, I have to meet my counterparts and also meet industry. I did that at the beginning of this mandate and I am going to follow that to meet the industry stakeholders.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I imagine the industry minister's knees must be sore, what with all the negotiating in Washington.

In a public relations strategy and, let us be honest, in an attempt to hide the facts, the Minister of Industry secretly met in Washington with directors from Boeing and Lockheed Martin to make us forget the total lack of transparency in the C-17 issue.

The Conservatives are now getting ready to announce more military procurements. The agreement allegedly proposes that maintenance of the tactical helicopters and aircraft over a 20-year period will be assigned to the industry, but through a competition run by these two U.S. companies.

In addition to giving up Canada's security and sovereignty, is the Minister of Defence now preparing to leave our procurement policy to the Americans? Is that what he is saying?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): First of all, Mr. Speaker, any decision taken by this government with respect to defence equipment will be in the interests of the military, will serve the needs of Canada's security and will also provide industry with plentiful benefits. We will always, when we acquire equipment, have it sovereign, under our control, and we will manage the equipment.

*Oral Questions***GOODS AND SERVICES TAX**

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government delivered on its promise to reduce the GST from 7% to 6%. After crossing the floor to a party that once campaigned on scrapping the GST, Liberal leadership hopeful and member for Kings—Hants now says he wants to increase the GST.

Can the finance minister tell this House and leadership candidates opposite why the GST reduction is good for all Canadians?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that July 1 will be a day of mourning for the members of the GST club opposite. That is the day the rest of Canadians will be celebrating the 1% reduction in the GST, which will come into force on July 1. I understand that the bill is passing through the Senate today.

I thank the members opposite for permitting the budget bill to pass through the House on unanimous consent. It gives me a warm feeling of collegiality at the end of the session.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the United States activated their so-called missile defence shield for the first time. This is another step in this alarming arms race. Canadians are strongly opposed to an arms race in space.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether Canada is still refusing to take part in the missile defence shield?

Does Canada reject the concept of weapons in space?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can certainly confirm to the hon. member that Canada is in no way, shape or form embarking on any further discussions with the United States of America on ballistic missile defence.

I can tell her, as she is probably already aware, that the former ambassador of Canada to the United States, Frank McKenna, has urged all members of the Liberal Party and Liberal leadership contenders to take a look at this issue, so perhaps they will pronounce themselves on it in the near future.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just like Frank McKenna, more and more Liberals now want Canada to join the missile defence madness.

New Democrats are focused on the World Peace Forum in Vancouver, but the critical question is which side the government is on. Is it for peace or for an escalated arms race? According to the Department of National Defence, the relationship between Canada Command and the U.S. Northern Command will deepen integration. Is the government joining the missile defence program by stealth, just like documents from DND seem to indicate?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is for peace. We are always for peace. We have made no changes to the previous government's policy with

respect to ballistic missile defence. There have been no changes. We recently had a Norad agreement, which added maritime surveillance but did not make any other changes, so we are in a status quo.

* * *

[Translation]

FINANCE

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the last time the Conservatives took office, the International Monetary Fund sounded the alert because the Canada Pension Plan was not viable. Then the Liberal government secured the Canada Pension fund for the next 75 years. Today we are hearing that the Conservatives want to tinker with this plan.

Will the Minister of Finance really jeopardize the pensions of future generations?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for raising the IMF issue. The report the IMF did with respect to our budget and our efforts on the Canadian economy was quite complimentary last week.

On the issue he raises with respect to the CPP and the QPP, that is an issue we referenced in the fiscal balance paper that was published with the budget. I am sure the hon. member has read it. It is an issue of intergenerational equity with respect to taxation, which we do intend to discuss with the finance ministers next week when we gather.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, such a vague answer is totally unacceptable when it comes to the security of the pension system of Canadians. The Liberal government fixed that system for 75 years. The rumour is in the *Globe and Mail* this morning that the government is tinkering with a system that is not broken.

Will the minister confirm to seniors and near seniors today, not at some future meeting, that he is not going to tinker with a pension system that was resolved for 75 years by the former government?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): What we are not going to do, Mr. Speaker, is what members opposite did when they were the government, and that is to have these surprise surpluses and then interfere in provincial jurisdiction and meddle in provincial jurisdiction with these surprise surpluses that were not authorized by Parliament.

What we are going to do is look at the issue of intergenerational equity and ask how we can more fairly distribute that surplus over the generations in Canada so that young people are treated more fairly than they were by the members opposite when they were the government.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and his parliamentary secretary publicly confirmed the 75:25 distribution of Government of Canada jobs between Ontario and Quebec, in the national capital region. Yesterday, at the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, the Conservatives and the New Democratic Party amended a motion so that the 75:25 policy would in future refer to square footage rather than individuals.

Can the Prime Minister tell us which warehouses, with no jobs, does he intend to transfer to the Quebec side of the national capital region?

• (1455)

[English]

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the motion was tabled in committee but has not been voted on yet. The policy position of 75:25 is a policy that was put in place by the previous government. It is something that we recognize as important for the region and important for the country, and it is a policy that we are going to honour.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is mistaken because the amendment was voted on and accepted. Since the Minister of Public Works and Government Services is not a member of Parliament and his parliamentary secretary is not present at the cabinet table, can the Prime Minister tell us why his government will advertise for only ten days a call for tenders to relocate the RCMP in the next six months, knowing full well that Minto is the only corporation capable of qualifying?

Why does his government not wish to obtain the best terms at the best price without lobbyists and while respecting the 75:25 policy?

[English]

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the former JDS Uniphase building, this government decided to go to a new competitive open process and that is exactly what we have done.

With regard to the 75:25 policy, unfortunately I cannot educate my colleague in 30 seconds on what the policy is, but I know that he is going to have a briefing very soon from the Department of Public Works. When he gets that briefing, he will understand this policy much better.

What is interesting is that he is condemning a policy that was put in place by the former Liberal government. It is very interesting. Now that he is on the opposition side, suddenly he has a backbone and is opposed to a policy that he was championing just a few months ago. We are going to get done what the Liberals failed to do, which is what is right and which is the 75:25 policy and good value for taxpayers.

[Translation]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is going to Quebec City for Quebec's Fête nationale and this will be a good opportunity for him to give the residents of that city a few explanations.

Could the minister responsible for the regions of Quebec explain to the citizens of my region why, despite promises from the Conservatives during the election campaign, she did not lift a finger to prevent the closure of the mail sorting centre in Quebec's national capital region?

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the people of Quebec City can be very proud of my Conservative colleagues in the House who have expressed this issue to the minister and brought it forward to me. They have worked very hard on this issue and they continue to work very hard to represent the people of Quebec. They have fulfilled their election promise. They have assured this House that there will be no jobs lost and the quality of service will actually be improved. We should be very proud of our Quebec MPs from the Conservative side.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Prime Minister scoffed at his Liberal predecessors for not even being able to get a bridge painted, the Quebec bridge to be exact.

Does he intend to take advantage of his trip to Quebec City to explain to the people why, five months after his election, his government is still no better at getting the Quebec bridge painted?

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would seriously suggest that my colleague should read more newspapers because the bridge is built, it is painted and it is working fine.

These Conservative members are doing very well in Quebec at representing the people of Quebec and making sure that Quebecers get what they need.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Do we want a radical fundamentalist takeover in Somalia? Does the Prime Minister need to see images on our front pages of human carnage and children with distended bellies to act? In February, Canadian parliamentarians sent an appeal to the Prime Minister to call an international donors conference for Somalia to organize a rapid reconstruction team.

Oral Questions

After four months of repeated requests and Conservative inaction, what does the Prime Minister have to say to the anguished hundreds of thousands of Somali Canadians?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has proceeded with more than \$35.1 million to the World Food Programme, WFP, to countries in East Africa and the Horn that have been affected by drought and food shortages. The hon. member would know that included a \$4.5 million commitment to Somalia.

This government, obviously, remains very concerned, along with all members present, about the drought. We continue to monitor the situation closely and we will continue to figure prominently in the recovery and the support of the people of Somalia.

* * *

• (1500)

FISHERIES

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Fraser River in B.C. represents one of Canada's most sensitive salmon fisheries.

Recently it has come to light that the previous Liberal government was planning to reduce enforcement on the Fraser River. As we know, Canadians expect our fisheries to be protected against illegal fishing. Canadians will be relieved to know that this government is committed to doing just that.

Could the fisheries minister tell us what steps he has taken to increase enforcement on the Fraser River?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new member is certainly a fast learner. He is right when he says that the former government was going to reduce the number of fisheries officers. He is also right when he says that the fishery needs protection.

We will be spending \$2.4 million, not only to reverse the decision made by the former government, but to add a significant number of extra fisheries officers on the river so we can have a stable fishery this year, which is lauded, by the way, by most of the groups that are looking forward to a good year on the Fraser River.

* * *

CHINESE CANADIANS

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Sunday was Father's Day but many Chinese Canadians never knew their fathers because of the racist head tax. Very few of them could celebrate Father's Day because their fathers died waiting for an apology and redress.

A few minutes ago I welcomed a trainload of very frail seniors who have arrived in Ottawa looking for justice at last, but justice without compensation for families there is no reconciliation. It will not work.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing tomorrow and offer compensation to Chinese head tax payers' descendants?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that tomorrow will be a historic day for the Chinese community and all Canadians. This

Prime Minister and the government will fulfill their election promise. An apology will be made in the House and we will be addressing appropriate acknowledgement.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in October of last year a letter was sent to Joyce Carter, who is a widow of a war veteran in Cape Breton. In the letter the Prime Minister states that a Conservative government would immediately extend the veterans independence programs for all widows of all veterans regardless of the time of death. However, we hear from Veterans Affairs Canada that may not be so.

I want to give the Prime Minister and the government an opportunity to look at the camera, talk to Joyce Carter through the media and tell her that we will immediately extend the VIP program for all widows of all veterans regardless of the time of death.

Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first thing we want to clarify is that the letter was not written by the Prime Minister.

In terms of the Department of Veterans Affairs, we will be spending an additional \$350 million this year alone, which is \$350 million more than the previous government.

One of the first things I did as minister was to initiate a health care review. The information from that health care review will be the knowledge base that we will use as we move forward to continue to improve services for veterans and their families, and that includes widows.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week Canada was missing in action at a UN contact group emergency meeting on the crisis in Somalia, which did not meet about the drought but about the looming civil war.

The Somali transitional government has 17 ministers and parliamentarians with Canadian passports and hundreds of Somali Canadians are volunteering on the ground. The Conservatives have abandoned them and have missed a chance to show international peace building leadership.

Civil war and famine are at Somalia's gates. Will the foreign minister at least engage with the UN emergency contact group and the AU peacekeeping mission?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is, of course, engaged in this process. We called immediately for a ceasefire and we urged all parties to fully respect their obligations under international law, including the full protection for aid workers and their safe and unimpeded access to the needs of the people of Somalia. We have also called for an end to the occupation of a major hospital operated by the Somali Red Crescent Society.

Canada has been there. We have been involved. We will continue to do so and continue to aid this wartorn country. We will continue to do as much as we can in concert with other international partners.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1505)

[Translation]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed from June 20 consideration of Bill C-2, An Act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

The Speaker: It being 1:05 p.m., pursuant to the order made Tuesday, June 20, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions on the motions at the report stage of Bill C-2.

Call in the members.

[English]

Before the taking of the vote:

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think if you were to ask you would find unanimous consent to amend Motion No. 30, which will be voted on in short order. I move:

That Bill C-2, in Clause 315, be amended by replacing lines 19 to 21 on page 207 with the following:

“provincial government or municipality, or any of their agencies;

(c.1) a band, as defined in subsection 2(1) of the Indian Act, any”

The Speaker: Is it agreed that Motion No. 30 be amended as outlined by the hon. President of the Treasury Board?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 1.

• (1515)

[Translation]

The House divided on Motion No. 1, which was agreed to on the following division:)

Government Orders

(Division No. 25)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Arthur
Asselin	Bachand
Baird	Barbot
Batters	Bellavance
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Bigras
Blackburn	Blais
Blaney	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boucher
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Brunelle
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin
Carrie	Carrier
Casson	Chong
Clement	Crête
Cummins	Davidson
Day	DeBellefeuille
Del Mastro	Demers
Deschamps	Devolin
Doyle	Duceppe
Dykstra	Emerson
Epp	Faille
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Freeman
Galipeau	Gallant
Gaudet	Gauthier
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guay	Guergis
Guimond	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Komarnicki
Kotto	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laforest	Laframboise
Lake	Lauzon
Lavallée	Lemay
Lemieux	Lessard
Lévesque	Loubier
Lukivski	Lunn
Lunney	Lussier
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Malo	Manning
Mark	Mayes
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Mourani	Nadeau
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Ouellet
Pallister	Paquette
Paradis	Perron
Petit	Picard
Plamondon	Poillievre
Prentice	Preston
Rajotte	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Roy	Sauvageau
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shipley	Skelton
Smith	Solberg
Sorenson	Stanton
St-Hilaire	St-Cyr
Storseth	Strahl

Government Orders

Sweet	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
Trost	Turner
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Vincent
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Williams	Yelich— 174

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	Angus
Atamanenko	Bagnell
Bains	Barnes
Beaumier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bevington
Black	Blaikie
Bonin	Boshcoff
Brown (Oakville)	Byrne
Chamberlain	Chan
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coderre
Comartin	Comuzzi
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davies
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dosanjh
Easter	Eyking
Folco	Fontana
Fry	Godfrey
Godin	Goodale
Graham	Guarnieri
Holland	Ignatieff
Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Keeper	Khan
Lapierre	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
MacAulay	Malhi
Maloney	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Matthews	McCallum
McDonough	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Merasty
Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nash
Neville	Owen
Pacetti	Patry
Peterson	Priddy
Proulx	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Rodriguez	Rota
Russell	Savage
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sgro
Siksay	Silva
Simard	Simms
St. Denis	Steckle
Stoffer	Stronach
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks	Valley
Wappel	Wasylycia-Leis
Wilfert	Wilson
Wrzesnewskyj	Zed— 116

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 1 carried.

The next question is on Motion No. 3.

[English]

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all parties and I think if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of the vote just taken to the motion now before the House, with Conservatives voting yes.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting against the motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, my Bloc Québécois colleagues will vote in favour of this motion.

● (1520)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the NDP members vote no to this motion.

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I vote yes.

(The House divided on Motion No. 3, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 26)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Arthur
Asselin	Bachand
Baird	Barbot
Batters	Bellavance
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Bigras
Blackburn	Blais
Blaney	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boucher
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Brunelle
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin
Carrie	Carrier
Casson	Chong
Clement	Crête
Cummins	Davidson
Day	DeBellefeuille
Del Mastro	Demers
Deschamps	Devolin
Doyle	Duceppe
Dykstra	Emerson
Epp	Faillie
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Freeman
Galipeau	Gallant
Gaudet	Gauthier
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guay	Guergis
Guimond	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Komarnicki
Kotto	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)

Government Orders

Laforest
Lake
Lavallée
Lemieux
Lévesque
Lukiwski
Lunnay
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malo
Mark
Ménard (Hochelega)
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Mourani
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Pallister
Paradis
Petit
Plamondon
Prentice
Rajotte
Richardson
Roy
Scheer
Shiple
Smith
Sorenson
St-Hilaire
Storseth
Sweet
Basques)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Warkentin
Williams

Laframboise
Lauzon
Lemay
Lessard
Loubier
Lunn
Lussier
MacKenzie
Manning
Mayes
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merrifield
Mills
Nadeau
Norlock
Obhrai
Ouellet
Paquette
Perron
Picard
Poilievre
Preston
Reid
Ritz
Sauvageau
Schellenberger
Skelton
Solberg
St-Cyr
Stanton
Strahl
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Turner
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Vincent
Warawa
Watson
Yelich — 174

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Atamanenko
Bains
Beaumier
Bell (North Vancouver)
Black
Bonin
Brown (Oakville)
Chamberlain
Charlton
Christopherson
Comartin
Crowder
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
Dewar
Dhalla
Easter
Folco
Fry
Godin
Graham
Holland
Jennings
Kadis
Keeper
Lapierre
LeBlanc
MacAulay
Maloney
Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Matthews
McDonough

Angus
Bagnell
Barnes
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bevington
Blaikie
Boshcoff
Byrne
Chan
Chow
Coderre
Comuzzi
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cuzner
Davies
Dhaliwal
Dosanjh
Eyking
Fontana
Godfrey
Goodale
Guarnieri
Ignatieff
Julian
Karetak-Lindell
Khan
Layton
Lee
Malhi
Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McCallum
McGuinty

McGuire
McTeague
Minna
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Pacetti
Peterson
Proulx
Redman
Rodriguez
Russell
Savoie
Scott
Siksay
Simard
St. Denis
Stoffer
Szabo
Temelkovski
Tonks
Wappel
Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj

McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Merasty
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nash
Owen
Patry
Priddy
Ratansi
Regan
Rota
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Silva
Simms
Steckle
Stronach
Telegdi
Thibault (West Nova)
Valley
Wasylycia-Leis
Wilson
Zed- — 116

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 3 carried.

The next question is on Motion No. 6.

*[English]***Hon. Jay Hill:** Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of the vote just taken to the motion now before the House, with Conservatives voting yes to the motion.**The Speaker:** Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?**Some hon. members:** Agreed.**Hon. Karen Redman:** Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting against the motion.*[Translation]***Mr. Michel Guimond:** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of this motion.*[English]***Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Speaker, members of the NDP are voting no to the motion.*[Translation]***Mr. André Arthur:** Mr. Speaker, I will vote in favour of this motion.

The House divided on Motion No. 6, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 27)***YEAS**

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
André
Asselin
Baird
Batters
Benoit
Bezan
Blackburn
Blaney

Ablonczy
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Arthur
Bachand
Barbot
Bellavance
Bernier
Bigras
Blais
Bonsant

Government Orders

Bouchard	Boucher	Bains	Barnes
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz	Beaumier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)	Bell (North Vancouver)	Bevington
Brunooge	Brunelle	Black	Blaikie
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Bonin	Boshcoff
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin	Brown (Oakville)	Byrne
Carrie	Carrier	Chamberlain	Chan
Casson	Chong	Charlton	Chow
Clement	Crête	Christopherson	Coderre
Cummins	Davidson	Comartin	Comuzzi
Day	DeBellefeuille	Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Del Mastro	Demers	Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cuzner
Deschamps	Devolin	D'Amours	Davies
Doyle	Duceppe	Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dykstra	Emerson	Dhalla	Dosanjh
Epp	Faille	Easter	Eyking
Fast	Finley	Folco	Fontana
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty	Fry	Godfrey
Fletcher	Freeman	Godin	Goodale
Galipeau	Gallant	Graham	Guarnieri
Gaudet	Gauthier	Holland	Ignatieff
Goldring	Goodyear	Jennings	Julian
Gourde	Grewal	Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Guay	Guergis	Keeper	Khan
Guimond	Hanger	Lapierre	Layton
Harper	Harris	LeBlanc	Lee
Harvey	Hawn	MacAulay	Malhi
Hearn	Hiebert	Maloney	Marleau
Hill	Hinton	Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Jaffer	Jean	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Masse	Mathysen
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Komarnicki	Matthews	McCallum
Kotto	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	McDonough	McGuinty
Laforest	Laframboise	McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Lake	Lauzon	McTeague	Merasty
Lavallée	Lemay	Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Lemieux	Lessard	Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nash
Lévesque	Loubier	Neville	Owen
Lukiwski	Lunn	Pacetti	Patry
Lunney	Lussier	Peterson	Priddy
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie	Proulx	Ratansi
Malo	Manning	Redman	Regan
Mark	Mayes	Rodriguez	Rota
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Russell	Savage
Menzies	Merrifield	Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Miller	Mills	Scott	Sgro
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)		Siksay	Silva
Moore (Fundy Royal)		Simard	Simms
Mourani	Nadeau	St. Denis	Steckle
Nicholson	Norlock	Stoffler	Stronach
O'Connor	Obhrai	Szabo	Telegdi
Oda	Ouellet	Temelkovski	Thibault (West Nova)
Pallister	Paquette	Tonks	Valley
Paradis	Perron	Wappel	Wasylycia-Leis
Petit	Picard	Wilfert	Wilson
Plamondon	Poilievre	Wrzesnewskyj	Zed- — 116
Prentice	Preston		
Rajotte	Reid		
Richardson	Ritz		
Roy	Sauvageau		
Scheer	Schellenberger		
Shiple	Skelton		
Smith	Solberg		
Sorenson	St-Cyr		
St-Hilaire	Stanton		
Storseth	Strahl		
Sweet	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les		
Basques)			
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)		
Tilson	Toews		
Trost	Turner		
Tweed	Van Kesteren		
Van Loan	Vellacott		
Verner	Vincent		
Wallace	Warawa		
Warkentin	Watson		
Williams	Yelich- — 174		

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	Angus
Atamanenko	Bagnell

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 6 carried.

The next question is on Motion No. 14.

*[English]***Hon. Jay Hill:** Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of the vote just taken to the motion now before us, with Conservatives voting no to the motion.**The Speaker:** Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?**Some hon. members:** Agreed.**Hon. Karen Redman:** Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting in favour of the motion.*[Translation]***Mr. Michel Guimond:** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of the motion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the NDP will vote in favour of the motion.

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I will vote against the motion.

(The House divided on Motion No. 14, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 28)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Barnes
Beaumier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bellavance
Bevington	Bigras
Black	Blaikie
Blais	Bonin
Bonsant	Boshcoff
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brown (Oakville)	Brunelle
Byrne	Cardin
Carrier	Chamberlain
Chan	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coderre	Comartin
Comuzzi	Crête
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dosanjh	Duceppe
Easter	Eyking
Faillie	Folco
Fontana	Freeman
Fry	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godfrey
Godin	Goodale
Graham	Guarnieri
Guay	Guimond
Holland	Ignatieff
Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Keeper	Khan
Kotto	Laforest
Laframboise	Lapierre
Lavallée	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Loubier
Lussier	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Matthews	McCallum
McDonough	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merasty
Minna	Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau	Nash
Neville	Ouellet
Owen	Pacetti
Paquette	Patry
Perron	Peterson
Picard	Plamondon
Priddy	Proulx
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Rodriguez
Rota	Roy
Russell	Sauvageau
Savage	Savoie

Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sgro	Siksay
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Cyr
St-Hilaire	St. Denis
Steckle	Stoffer
Stronach	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Tonks	Valley
Vincent	Wappel
Wasylycia-Leis	Wilfert
Wilson	Wrzesnewskij
Zed- — 165	

Government Orders

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Arthur	Baird
Batters	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Boucher	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clement
Cummins	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Doyle
Dykstra	Emerson
Epp	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauson	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Manning
Mark	Mayes
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Pallister
Paradis	Petit
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Rajotte
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shipley
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
Trost	Turner
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Williams
Yelich- — 125	

Government Orders

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 14 carried.

[English]

The next question is on Motion No. 20.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of the vote just taken to the motion now before the House, with Conservatives voting no to the motion.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting in favour of the motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois will vote against the motion.

[English]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, members of the NDP are voting yes to the motion.

[Translation]

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I will vote against the motion.

(The House divided on Motion No. 20, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 29)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	Angus
Atamanenko	Bagnell
Bains	Barnes
Beaumier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bevington
Black	Blaikie
Bonin	Boshcoff
Brown (Oakville)	Byrne
Chamberlain	Chan
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coderre
Comartin	Comuzzi
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davies
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dosanjh
Easter	Eyking
Folco	Fontana
Fry	Godfrey
Godin	Goodale
Graham	Guarnieri
Holland	Ignatieff
Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Keeper	Khan
Lapierre	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
MacAulay	Malhi
Maloney	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Matthews	McCallum
McDonough	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Merasty
Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)

Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nash
Neville	Owen
Pacetti	Patry
Peterson	Priddy
Proulx	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Rodriguez	Rota
Russell	Savage
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sgro
Siksay	Silva
Simard	Simms
St. Denis	Steckle
Stoffer	Stronach
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks	Valley
Wappel	Wasylycia-Leis
Wilfert	Wilson
Wrzesnewskyj	Zed- — 116

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Arthur
Asselin	Bachand
Baird	Barbot
Batters	Bellavance
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Bigras
Blackburn	Blais
Blaney	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boucher
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Brunooge	Brunelle
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin
Carrie	Carrier
Casson	Chong
Clement	Crête
Cummins	Davidson
Day	DeBellefeuille
Dei Mastro	Demers
Deschamps	Devolin
Doyle	Duceppe
Dykstra	Emerson
Epp	Faille
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Freeman
Galipeau	Gallant
Gaudet	Gauthier
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guay	Guergis
Guimond	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Komarnicki
Kotto	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laforest	Laframboise
Lake	Lauzon
Lavallée	Lemay
Lemieux	Lessard
Lévesque	Loubier
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	Lussier
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Malo	Manning
Mark	Mayes
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills

Government Orders

Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Mourani
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Pallister
 Paradis
 Petit
 Plamondon
 Prentice
 Rajotte
 Richardson
 Roy
 Scheer
 Shipley
 Smith
 Sorenson
 St-Hilaire
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Basques)
 Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
 Tilson
 Trost
 Tweed
 Van Loan
 Verner
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Williams

Nadeau
 Norlock
 Obhrai
 Ouellet
 Paquette
 Perron
 Picard
 Poilievre
 Preston
 Reid
 Ritz
 Sauvageau
 Schellenberger
 Skelton
 Solberg
 St-Cyr
 Stanton
 Strahl
 Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les

Thompson (Wild Rose)

Toews
 Turner
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Vincent
 Warawa
 Watson
 Yelich— 174

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 20 lost.

[*English*]

The next question is on Motion No. 12.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of the vote just taken to the motion now before the House, with Conservatives voting yes to the motion.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting against the motion.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois will vote against the motion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the NDP will vote against the motion.

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I will vote in favour of the motion.

(The House divided on Motion No. 12, which was negatived on the following division:)

(*Division No. 30*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
 Albrecht
 Allison
 Anders
 Arthur
 Batters

Ablonczy
 Allen
 Ambrose
 Anderson
 Baird
 Benoit

Bernier
 Blackburn
 Boucher
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Bruinooog
 Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
 Carrie
 Chong
 Cummins
 Day
 Devolin
 Dykstra
 Epp
 Finley
 Flaherty
 Galipeau
 Goldring
 Gourde
 Guergis
 Harper
 Harvey
 Hearn
 Hill
 Jaffer
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lauzon
 Lukiwski
 Lunney
 MacKenzie
 Mark
 Menzies
 Miller
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Paradis
 Poilievre
 Preston
 Reid
 Ritz
 Schellenberger
 Skelton
 Solberg
 Stanton
 Strahl
 Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
 Tilson
 Trost
 Tweed
 Van Loan
 Verner
 Warawa
 Watson
 Yelich— 125

Bezan
 Blaney
 Breithkreuz
 Brown (Barrie)
 Calkins
 Cannon (Pontiac)
 Casson
 Clement
 Davidson
 Del Mastro
 Doyle
 Emerson
 Fast
 Fitzpatrick
 Fletcher
 Gallant
 Goodyear
 Grewal
 Hanger
 Harris
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Hinton
 Jean
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Lemieux
 Lunn
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Manning
 Mayes
 Merrifield
 Mills

Norlock
 Obhrai
 Pallister
 Petit
 Prentice
 Rajotte
 Richardson
 Scheer
 Shipley
 Smith
 Sorenson
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Thompson (Wild Rose)
 Toews
 Turner
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Williams

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
 Angus
 Atamanenko
 Bagnell
 Barbot
 Beaumier
 Bell (North Vancouver)
 Bevington
 Black
 Blais
 Bonsant
 Bouchard
 Brown (Oakville)
 Byrne
 Carrier
 Chan
 Chow
 Coderre
 Comuzzi
 Crowder
 Cullen (Etobicoke North)

André
 Asselin
 Bachand
 Bains
 Barnes
 Bell (Vancouver Island North)
 Bellavance
 Bigras
 Blaikie
 Bonin
 Boshcoff
 Bourgeois
 Brunelle
 Cardin
 Chamberlain
 Charlton
 Christopherson
 Comartin
 Crête
 Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
 Cuzner

Government Orders

D'Amours	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dosanjh	Duceppe
Easter	Eyking
Faille	Folco
Fontana	Freeman
Fry	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godfrey
Godin	Goodale
Graham	Guarnieri
Guay	Guimond
Holland	Ignatieff
Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Keeper	Khan
Kotto	Laforest
Laframboise	Lapierre
Lavallée	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Loubier
Lussier	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Matthews	McCallum
McDonough	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merasty
Minna	Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau	Nash
Neville	Ouellet
Owen	Pacetti
Paquette	Patry
Perron	Peterson
Picard	Plamondon
Priddy	Proulx
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Rodriguez
Rota	Roy
Russell	Sauvageau
Savage	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sgro	Siksay
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Cyr
St-Hilaire	St. Denis
Steckle	Stoffer
Stronach	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Tonks	Valley
Vincent	Wappel
Wasylycia-Leis	Wilfert
Wilson	Wrzesnewskyj
Zed — 165	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 12 lost.

[*English*]

The next question is on Motion No. 29.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I think you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of the vote just taken to motion now before the House, with Conservatives voting no to the motion.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting in favour of the motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, my Bloc Québécois colleagues will vote in favour of Motion No. 29.

[*English*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, members of the NDP are voting yes to this motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I will vote against the motion.

(The House divided on Motion No. 29, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 31)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Barnes
Beaumier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bellavance
Bevington	Bigras
Black	Blaikie
Blais	Bonin
Bonsant	Boshcoff
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brown (Oakville)	Brunelle
Byrne	Cardin
Carrier	Chamberlain
Chan	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coderre	Comartin
Comuzzi	Crête
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dosanjh	Duceppe
Easter	Eyking
Faille	Folco
Fontana	Freeman
Fry	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godfrey
Godin	Goodale
Graham	Guarnieri
Guay	Guimond
Holland	Ignatieff
Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Keeper	Khan
Kotto	Laforest
Laframboise	Lapierre
Lavallée	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Loubier
Lussier	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Matthews	McCallum
McDonough	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merasty
Minna	Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)

Nadeau
Neville
Owen
Paquette
Perron
Picard
Priddy
Ratansi
Regan
Rota
Russell
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Silva
Simms
St-Hilaire
Steckle
Stronach
Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks
Vincent
Wasylycia-Leis
Wilson
Zed — 165

Nash
Ouellet
Pacetti
Patry
Peterson
Plamondon
Proulx
Redman
Rodriguez
Roy
Sauvageau
Savoie
Scott
Siksay
Simard
St-Cyr
St. Denis
Stoffer
Szabo
Temelkovski
Valley
Wappel
Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
Arthur
Batters
Bernier
Blackburn
Boucher
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Chong
Cummins
Day
Devolin
Dykstra
Epp
Finley
Flaherty
Galipeau
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Harper
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Jaffer
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Mark
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Paradis
Poilievre
Preston
Reid
Ritz
Schellenberger
Skelton

Ablonczy
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Baird
Benoit
Bezan
Blaney
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Doyle
Emerson
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Gallant
Goodyear
Grewal
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lemieux
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Manning
Mayes
Merrifield
Mills
Norlock
Obhrai
Pallister
Petit
Prentice
Rajotte
Richardson
Scheer
Shiple
Smith

Government Orders

Solberg
Stanton
Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Yelich — 125

Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Turner
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Williams

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 29 carried.

[*English*]

The next question is on Motion No. 30, as amended.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, once more I think you will find unanimous consent of the House to proceed with applying the results of the vote just taken to the motion before the House, Motion No. 30, with Conservative members present voting in favour.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting in favour of this motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, my Bloc Québécois colleagues will support this motion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the NDP members will vote in favour of this motion.

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I will vote in favour of this motion.

(The House divided on Motion No. 30, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 32*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Angus
Asselin
Bachand
Bains
Barbot
Batters
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bellavance
Bernier
Bezan
Black
Blaikie
Blaney
Bonsant
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brown (Oakville)
Brown (Barrie)
Brunelle
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie

Ablonczy
Alghabra
Allison
Anders
André
Arthur
Atamanenko
Bagnell
Baird
Barnes
Beaumier
Bell (North Vancouver)
Benoit
Bevington
Bigras
Blackburn
Blais
Bonin
Boshcoff
Boucher
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Byrne
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cardin
Carrier

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1530)

[Translation]

ETHICS COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 28 of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, it is my duty to present to the House the report of the Ethics Commissioner on an inquiry in relation to the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

* * *

CANADIAN FORCES HOUSING AGENCY

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, two copies of the 2004-05 annual report of the Canadian Forces Housing Agency.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, during question period the veterans affairs minister said that a letter that I quoted was not signed by the Prime Minister, but I would like clarification for the House and the government that if a letter is signed on behalf of the Prime Minister, does that not still constitute a commitment from the government in terms of the VIP program?

The Speaker: I am sure that the hon. member would like to get an answer to his question which really is a question. I would suggest he do it tomorrow in question period rather than on a point of order, because I do not think he has raised a point of order, but rather a matter of discussion or debate as to what constitutes an obligation of the government.

* * *

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 four petitions.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, a report of the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group at the Canadian-American Border Trade Alliance Conference: The Canadian-U.S. Border — A Unified Focus, held in Ottawa, Ontario, on April 30 to May 2, 2006.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and

Routine Proceedings

Technology in relation to the challenges facing the Canadian manufacturing sector.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the seventh report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on the issue of the division of matrimonial real property rights on reserve lands.

When married couples divorce in Canada, the division of matrimonial property is determined in accordance with provincial laws. Provincial laws do not apply to the division of real property on reserve lands, however. Because there are no federal provisions in the Indian Act or elsewhere that govern the division of matrimonial real property on reserves, people residing on reserves cannot use the Canadian legal system to resolve such property disputes. The committee heard that this situation, compounded by a lack of housing on reserves, forces many women to leave their reserve communities when their relationships break down.

In this report the Standing Committee on the Status of Women recommends a process to ensure that the voices of first nations women as well as first nations leaders are heard and respected as the government moves forward to find concrete solutions to this human rights violation.

I am very pleased to see that the Conservative government is now following the previous program that the Liberal government had put forward.

• (1535)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs on the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, titled "Striking a Blow for Democracy: Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution".

As a refugee from that era, when I read the November 26, 1956 issue of *Hansard* it really brought back memories of the country I left.

The response of Canada was incredibly exemplary. On a per capita basis, Canada took in the highest proportion of the 200,000 Hungarian refugees who fled after the revolution. Canada took in 37,000 people.

Beyond this, the treatment of the Hungarian refugees also signalled that paradigm shift in the policy of the government in dealing with refugees. We saw examples of that in the African, eastern European, Indochina refugee movements. Clearly, we very much are at the forefront in dealing with refugees.

The minister of immigration of the day, Jack Pickersgill, is held with great love by all Hungarians for the efforts he put forth in securing their passage here.

Routine Proceedings

Beyond the revolution itself, it really started to represent the first crack in the iron curtain, seeing the freedoms in the revolutions in eastern Europe, and the coming down of the Berlin wall. It is something that really strikes at the very basic desires of all people, that is, democracy and freedom.

This will be a year of commemoration and celebration and of giving thanks to Canada by Hungarians and their children for the hospitality Canadians have shown us.

Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions with all parties and I think if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for concurrence in the report.

Therefore, I move that the third report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration be concurred in.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member there will not be any problems with that. Certainly, the Hungarian revolution is one of the turning points of the 20th century. I was only about four years old, but I remember at a very early age the first group of refugees who came to Niagara Falls and being informed of those refugees whom Canada welcomed. It certainly was a continuation of Canada's welcoming of refugees to this country.

It is very significant what took place after the Hungarian revolution as well. That particular incident became an inspiration for all those who were trying to throw off the yoke of communism, whether it was Czechoslovakia a few years later, or the Solidarity movement in Poland, it showed the way, that there were people in eastern Europe who were not prepared to accept their domination by anyone.

That particular movement became an inspiration, quite frankly, for all who came after that. Those individuals in eastern Europe and indeed freedom-loving people around the world can look to that moment 50 years ago when a group of individuals within Hungary stood up to the oppression that they were suffering.

Of course a report of that nature would receive unanimous consent and certainly the consent of the Conservative Party.

• (1540)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas who worked very hard on the committee, the New Democratic Party supports this motion.

I also wish to bring to the attention of the House my gratitude because my own father-in-law is Hungarian. He was born on the Pest side of Budapest. He came to Canada in 1952 ahead of the invasion of Hungary.

On behalf of my father-in-law, we thank the hon. member and my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas and all members who support this motion.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Kitchener—Waterloo have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this concurrence motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

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

The committee has considered the matter of the implementation of accrual based budgeting and appropriations and has agreed to report it. We will be doing a thorough study of this issue in the fall.

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), the committee discussed the issue involving His Excellency, Mr. Abdou Diouf, Secretary General of the International Organization of la Francophonie.

[English]

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, two reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The sixth report is on Chapter 5, Management of Programs for First Nations, of the May 2006 report of the Auditor General of Canada. The seventh report is on Chapter 8, Revenue Canada, Collection of Tax Debts, of the May 2006 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

The committee is requesting a government response to both reports.

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-338, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (procuring a miscarriage after twenty weeks of gestation).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Mississauga South for seconding this motion.

I am placing before the House today a bill which is long overdue. It is not only a pleasure but an honour to introduce a legislative package that seeks to respond to the Supreme Court's 1988 appeal to Parliament to establish a legal framework to replace the system struck down by the Morgentaler decision. Since then, Canada has been the only developed nation in the western hemisphere with absolutely no law governing abortion.

While the bill would not remove a woman's access to abortion, it would seek to make certain that any decision to terminate a pregnancy be taken prior to the fetus attaining its 20th week of gestation.

I trust that at some point we will have fulsome debate on this matter in the House and bring our laws to a standard similar to those of other countries where the protection of the unborn is given its due status.

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-339, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (exclusion of income received by an athlete from a non-profit club, society or association).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Winnipeg North for seconding the introduction of my very first private member's bill.

It is an act to amend the Income Tax Act to exclude income received by an athlete from a non-profit club, society or association.

We all know that athletes have difficulties making ends meet while they pursue their athletic goals. Many not for profit clubs, societies and associations try to help out and provide some income for athletes.

When income is declared by athletes, however, it can jeopardize scholarships and other opportunities amateur athletes can have because it is seen as being paid. The bill would allow up to \$8,000 per year received to be tax free and also would be retroactive.

I look forward to the support of my colleagues in the passage of this important bill.

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

* * *

• (1545)

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-340, An Act to change the name of the electoral district of New Westminster—Coquitlam.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a private member's bill to have the name of my riding changed so that it includes the historic and vibrant city of Port Moody, which has been dominated by two events: the 1858 gold rush on the Fraser River and the 1886 arrival of the first transcontinental train across Canada.

I believe it is very important for everyone to see themselves reflected in the names of ridings in the House of Commons. I ask that members support my bill to include the city of Port Moody in the riding of New Westminster—Coquitlam.

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

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-341, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (military dependants).

Routine Proceedings

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am please to reintroduce the bill which seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act to fully include the dependants of Canadian Forces personnel within the special voting provisions designed to take into consideration their relationship or their relocation away from home communities in the service of their country.

Currently under the act, members of the armed forces, including reserves, are permitted to have their votes counted in their normal home electoral constituency simply by filling out a special residency form.

However, their spouses and other dependants who accompany them on their postings have no such choice and must vote in the ridings in which their partners have been posted.

The purpose of the bill is to remedy this unfairness.

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-342, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (travel expenses).

He said: Mr. Speaker, how many Canadians, prior to choosing a travel destination, even consider travelling to a Canadian destination? The purpose of the bill is to make that decision a much easier one for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to present a bill to amend the Income Tax Act (travel expenses). This bill provides a maximum deduction of \$1,000 from a taxpayer's income in respect of the expenses of purchasing tickets for the taxpayer or members of the taxpayer's family for travel by airplane, train or bus if the travel involves crossing at least three different provincial boundaries.

[*English*]

As former chairman of the finance committee, I had the opportunity to travel across Canada and I wondered how many Canadians get to visit all corners of this vast country of ours.

The bill will have Canadians thinking about choosing travel within Canada first, and second, the bill will promote national unity by allowing Canadians to learn more about their fellow citizens.

It can only have a positive effect on local economies. With additional money spent during these trips, this private member's bill would be revenue neutral for the finance department.

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: Mr. Speaker, following consultations with my colleagues from all political parties, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

Routine Proceedings

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should designate August 23 as International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition.

This day of commemoration is intended to etch the tragedy of the slave trade in our collective memory so that we remember all these human dramas that marked the lives of millions of people around the world.

• (1550)

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to advise the member that there has been no unanimous consent. There have been some discussions, but it has not yet gone to all parties. I have made it clear that we are prepared to support this motion if there is also an NDP motion dealing with recognition of Filipino Canadians. There is no unanimous consent and the member is aware of that. We need to have—

The Speaker: It is clear there is no consent, so the Chair will not put the motion to the House at this moment.

* * *

PETITIONS

IRAQ

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I introduce a petition on behalf of almost 1,400 residents from northeastern Ontario.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to demonstrate its commitment to international law and the treaties to which it is a signatory by making provisions to give refuge to those who refuse to serve in Iraq, a war which many have deemed illegal under international law.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of Ms. Caylan Ford and Falun Gong practitioners in my constituency and around Calgary.

The petitioners call upon the Canadian government to urge Chinese authorities to open facilities for international inspection to allow the international committee to investigate the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China and to release any or all illegally imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners.

PEACE TAX

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce three petitions today.

The first calls upon the Government of Canada to establish peace tax legislation to recognize the right of conscientious objectors to not pay for the military, but to apply instead that portion of their taxes that would have been used for military purposes toward peaceful non-military purposes within the powers of Parliament.

There are some 40 pages of signatures, and I hope the Government of Canada will give it consideration.

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I seek leave to introduce a petition that calls upon the Canadian government to hold public hearings to gather information, expert advice, and opinions from knowledgeable Canadian and Afghan

citizens on how best to use military and other forms of Canadian involvement in Afghanistan for the creation of a stable, democratic and self-sustaining state.

The petition states further that public hearings be followed by a full debate and vote in Parliament on the extent and nature of Canada's commitment in Afghanistan.

TRADE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure in tabling a petition concerning the proposed Canada-Central America free trade agreement.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to make public the full text of that proposed agreement to ensure that any trade negotiations between Canada, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua guarantee the primacy of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights over neo-liberal trade laws, and to commit to wide-ranging public consultation and parliamentary debate before any such agreement is adopted.

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of a number of constituents in and around Fredericton recognizing that the Government of Canada has traditionally supported and enhanced mail delivery in all corners of the country.

The people of Canada require their mail in a timely and efficient manner wherever they might live. Accessibility issues are particularly important to seniors, sick and shut-ins, and people with disabilities.

The petitioners call upon the House and the minister responsible for Canada Post to maintain traditional mail delivery and service instead of implementing changes that are causing people to travel long distances from their homes to receive their mail.

• (1555)

[Translation]

REFUGEES

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in my own name and that of the hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges, the petition "Lives on Hold" signed by nearly 4,000 people. This petition calls on the government to establish a process to facilitate the granting of permanent residence to persons who have been in Canada for more than three years and who are from countries on which Canada has imposed a moratorium on removals.

Following the events of World Refugee Day yesterday, it is high time that Canada boost its international image and act in a humane manner.

FALUN GONG

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition, signed by 200 of my constituents, concerning Falun Gong.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

REFUGEES

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to a) welcome a stranger in need and significantly increase the number of refugees that Canada accepts annually; b) lift barriers that prevent refugees from reaching Canada; c) provide international leadership to address the causes that force people from their homes and prevent them from returning; d) reform Canada's refugee and immigration program to ensure that full access to the due process and fundamental justice; e) speed the immigration process while reuniting refugees and their families; and lastly f) take further measures to help newcomers integrate into Canadian society.

VIETNAM

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am standing on behalf of people who have presented a manifesto on freedom and democracy in Vietnam on April 8, 2006. Some 118 democracy activists in that country signed a petition.

They are basically asking that Vietnam go from a monolithic one-party non-competitive system where the Vietnamese communist party has its absolute power enshrined in article 4 of the Vietnamese constitution to a pluralistic multi-party system with healthy competition.

These are people asking for freedom of information and opinion; the freedom to assemble, form associations, political parties, vote and stand for election; the freedom to participate in independent labour unions; and the freedom of religion.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present two petitions. One is presented on behalf of Vietnamese Canadians who are calling on our government to recognize those brave Vietnamese who stood up for freedom and democracy in Vietnam. They ask for the same rights that we are able to have and freedom of expression to join a labour union, freedom of association and religion.

I would be honoured to present this petition on their behalf today.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I have is on behalf of those Canadians who would like to see the elimination of the administration fee, also known as the head tax. They would like to see not just the fact that it has been recently reduced but that it should be eliminated.

CHILD CARE

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past few months the constituents in my riding have expressed serious displeasure with the performance of the new Conservative government. In light of that I have three petitions I would like to present to the House which have been signed by many constituents in my riding of Mississauga—Brampton South.

The first petition is regarding their desire to see the government honour the national early learning and child care agreements that were signed with all 10 provinces.

TAXATION

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): The second petition, Mr. Speaker, asks the government not to cut the GST at the expense of raising the lowest tax bracket from 15% to 15.5%. Many constituents have expressed time and time again that they cannot comprehend why the government would increase income taxes.

UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the third petition asks Parliament to halt the deportation of productive, undocumented workers.

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the honour of presenting two petitions today. The petitions are on behalf of a number of citizens of Regina, many of whom are in my riding of Palliser.

In the first petition, the petitioners wish to call to the attention of Parliament the following: public post offices connect communities throughout this vast land, helping us to overcome differences and distances; and public post offices play a key role in our social and economic lives by providing the infrastructure that healthy communities need to thrive and businesses need to grow. They call upon the Government of Canada to instruct Canada Post to maintain, expand and improve its network of public post offices.

• (1600)

REFUGEES

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the second petition, also pursuant to Standing Order 36, the petitioners wish to call to the attention of Parliament that Canada is a land of hope for newcomers, and particularly refugees, and that Canadians are proud of our multicultural society.

They call upon Parliament to welcome the stranger in need, to significantly increase the number of refugees that Canada accepts annually, to lift barriers, to provide international leadership, to reform Canada's refugee and immigration program, to speed the immigration process in reuniting refugees and their families, and to take further measures to help newcomers integrate into Canadian society.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents with respect to beautiful Hatley Park, one of Canada's historic treasures. This petition is signed by 466 people who are opposed to the restriction of free public access to this national historic site by fencing off the grounds and charging admission.

I am pleased to report, though, that I met with the Minister of National Defence just this week on this matter, and I have his assurance that he will explore funding options with his colleague, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, to prevent the nickel and diming of our residents at a place that is a tremendous source of pride for Victorians.

Routine Proceedings

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Victoria, who are insisting that the government honour Canada's commitment to the Kyoto protocol and exceed our Kyoto targets by reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by the year 2050. This petition is spearheaded by the B.C. Sustainable Energy Association, a non-profit coalition of citizens. I add my voice to those of the 122 petitioners.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two more petitions that I am pleased to present on behalf of my constituents. The first is from constituents who strongly voice their opposition to Exercise Trident Fury, held this past May, and who continue to oppose any future exercise. The petitioners therefore ask the government to cancel any future exercise similar to this one.

The second petition also is in opposition to Exercise Trident Fury. These constituents understand the need to properly train and prepare our military personnel. However, they object to the total flaunting of militarism that constitutes propaganda for war.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the last petition that I present on behalf of my constituents is with respect to the human rights of Falun Gong practitioners. The 349 petitioners are particularly troubled by brutal violations of human rights of Falun Gong practitioners. They ask the government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We are supposed to have brief summaries of the petitions. Members are not to engage in long speeches.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

HEALTH

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, it is my pleasure to present a petition prepared by the mother of an autistic child in my riding, Madawaska—Restigouche. This petition is signed by many people from my riding and elsewhere in New Brunswick.

It is high time that children with autism receive the same services as other children across Canada, whether in Alberta or New Brunswick.

Applied behaviour analysis is a very effective way to help children with autism. It also helps children improve their behaviour, language and social skills. It is therefore important to include this treatment in the Canada Health Act—which is what this petition is asking—so that it can be offered to all children with autism, in every Canadian province.

[*English*]

MARRIAGE

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House today to present a petition on behalf of the people of Kitchener—Conestoga in the greater Kitchener-Waterloo area. The petitioners are asking Parlia-

ment to use all possible legislative and administrative measures, including invoking section 33 of the charter if necessary, to preserve and protect the traditional definition of marriage as between one man and one woman.

• (1605)

CHILD CARE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present six more petitions from people in my community of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour who are very concerned about the government's plan, or what they perceive to be a lack of a plan, for child care. They would want me to remind the House that although this session may be coming to a close, the fight for quality, universal, accessible, developmentally based child care will go on.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege today to present a petition with regard to child care. The petitioners from the province of Manitoba, the riding of Churchill, the town of Cranberry Portage, call upon the House of Commons to support an appropriate and adequate national child care program. The petitioners state that the national early learning and child care program and the agreements that were negotiated in good faith are imperative to support families, families with special needs children, child care staff and the country in general. They believe that the \$1,200 allowance is not a child care measure.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present three petitions. The first is from residents of the Vancouver area who are very concerned about Canada's role in Afghanistan and call upon the Government of Canada to remove soldiers from Afghanistan immediately.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents in the Vancouver and Victoria area who are very concerned about the practices in China against Falun Gong members. They call on the Prime Minister and the Canadian government to take investigative measures around the mass killing and organ harvesting in China and expose what is happening there.

CRTC

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is from petitioners who wish to have the CRTC decline the application of 9 TV channels that are directly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party and stop them from being allowed to broadcast here in Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Unfortunately, the time for presentation of petitions has expired.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am the last person in the House who would like to present petitions today. I ask for unanimous consent to present my position.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues in the House for giving me the time to do this. I have three petitions to present.

The first one calls on Parliament to hold, as soon as possible, extensive public hearings to gather information, expert advice and opinions from knowledgeable Canadians and Afghan citizens on how to best use our military and other forms of Canadian involvement in Afghanistan for the creation of a stable, democratic and self-sustaining state.

CRTC

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition calls upon the government to urge the CRTC to decline the application of broadcast public notice from the CRTC proposing 9 TV channels directly controlled by the Chinese government, the Communist Party, and not allow them to be broadcast here in Canada.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my third petition urges the Prime Minister and the Canadian government and our Parliament to condemn the Chinese Communist government's regime and crimes against the Falun Gong practitioners, to stop mass killings and organ harvesting in China, and to expose what is happening there.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me say once again what an admirable and fine job you are doing sitting up there in that big chair. I know that both your parents, and of course your wife and your young son, must be extremely proud of you.

The following questions will be answered today: Questions Nos. 25, 27, 32 and 35.

[Text]

Question No. 25—**Ms. Denise Savoie:**

With regard to the 2006 Census of Canada: (a) what are the precise terms and conditions of any contracts between the government and Lockheed Martin Corporation or any of its subsidiaries; (b) will Lockheed Martin Corporation or any of its subsidiaries have access to confidential information collected in the Census from Canadian citizens or Canadian residents; (c) what guarantees, if any, does the government have that absolutely none of the information collected in the 2006 Census will be subject to access by the United States government or any of its agencies through the United States Patriot Act of 2001; and (d) is the government aware of any other private information that the Canadian government and its agencies collect that would be subject to access by the United States government or any of its agencies through the United States Patriot Act of 2001; and, if yes, what specific information?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is as follows: a) Statistics Canada has a current contract with Lockheed Martin Canada and subcontractors, IBM Canada and Transcontinental Printing Canada. The contract has three phases. Phase I and II have been completed. Phase III is current. Phase I was for design and planning of the system solution for the 2006 Census (\$500,000). Phase II analyzed the results of the 2004

Routine Proceedings

Census Test and the viability of implementing and operating the proposed system solutions for the 2006 Census, \$20 million. Phase III is the scale-up, development and testing phase of the 2006 Census Outsourcing Project. Phase III has a time span of approximately 27 months and a cost of \$40.5 million.

The scope of work covered by Phase III of the contract is:

1. to print questionnaire packages;

2. to deliver systems (hardware and software) for Statistics Canada employees to operate and support:

a Data Processing Centre to capture, edit and code completed Census questionnaires;

a secure Internet application for respondents to complete and return their Census questionnaire on-line;

a telephone help line and edit follow-up application from Statistics Canada's call centres

3. to provide, under the provisions of Statistics Canada's security policies, assistance as required to Statistics Canada's system administration and support team;

4. all processing of completed Census questionnaires (electronic as well as paper) will be conducted exclusively by Statistics Canada personnel in Statistics Canada (STC) facilities. No contractor personnel will ever have access to or be in possession of completed Census questionnaires. No confidential Census responses will ever leave Statistics Canada's secure facilities.

b) No. Lockheed Martin Corporation or any of its subsidiaries will never have access to confidential information collected in the Census from Canadian citizens or Canadian residents.

Census information is, at all times, under the complete care and full control of Statistics Canada employees. The questionnaires and data are handled and processed exclusively by Statistics Canada employees, in Statistics Canada facilities, which are isolated from any external networks. Statistics Canada has taken a number of important safeguards to protect the privacy and confidentiality of Census responses. The contractor developed systems as well as the facilities in which they are housed have been independently assessed by IT security firms, accredited by the Communications Security Establishment, and the process was overseen by a Task Force headed by the former Auditor General of Canada, Mr. Denis Desautels. The report from the Task Force "2006 Census Information Technology Security Verification Task Force Report" summarizes: "We conclude that the data to be gathered during the 2006 Census using the contractor supplied systems will be secure. Based on the work performed and to the best of our knowledge, it would be practically impossible for the contractors involved in the Census project to intentionally or otherwise access Census data. In addition, we can report that the overall security posture for the Census applications and the physical facilities where Census data will be collected and processed has been further strengthened as a result of the three security audits."

Routine Proceedings

c) Absolutely none of the information collected in the 2006 Census will be subject to access by the United States government or any of its agencies through the United States Patriot Act of 2001. All census databases, facilities and networks containing confidential data are physically isolated from any networks outside Statistics Canada. Therefore, even if a request were ever to be made by an external authority to any contractor for confidential data, it would be physically impossible for a contractor to comply, given that they are never in possession of census responses.

d) All data collected by Statistics Canada are not subject to access by the United States government or any of its agencies through the United States Patriot Act of 2001 given that they are never in possession of Statistics Canada data.

Question No. 27—Ms. Alexa McDonough:

With respect to Canadian funding of Venezuelan non-governmental organizations: (a) has the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provided funds to Súmate, a Venezuelan non-governmental organization, and if it has, what is the total amount of funding in each of the following fiscal years: 2001-2002; 2002-2003; 2003-2004; 2004-2005; and 2005-2006; (b) will CIDA be funding Súmate in the current fiscal year; (c) how many meetings or consultations has it held with Maria Corina Machado and Alejandro Plaz; (d) what is the purpose of funding Súmate; and (e) has the government assessed whether Súmate has achieved the stated goal(s) for CIDA's funds?

Hon. José Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, the answer is as follows: a) Canada supported a project with Súmate in 2005-06; through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) in Venezuela; Canada provided a contribution of CAD\$22,000 to a project which had a total budget of CAD\$ 55,000.

b) There is no planned funding for Súmate in 2006-07.

c) For all organizations receiving CIDA funding there are regular meetings with representatives in the context of follow-up on project activities. Most of these meetings are held with the Canada Fund Coordinator.

d) In the evaluation of this project, Canada considered Súmate to be an experienced NGO with the capability to promote respect for democracy, particularly a free and fair electoral process in Venezuela. The project goal is to allow Súmate to develop a follow-up and evaluation system to measure democratic principles in Venezuela.

e) The final report for the project is due July 1, 2006; the assessment on achievement of project results will be done at that time.

Question No. 32—Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:

With respect to the calculation by the Department of Finance of the loss of federal revenue from corporations converting to income trust structures: (a) what is the total reduction in federal revenue in foregone corporate income tax as a result of corporations converting to income trusts during the fiscal years 2002-2003, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005; (b) what is the projected loss in federal revenue for the fiscal years 2005-2006 and 2006-2007; and (c) what is the projection of the total reduction in federal revenue from foregone income tax as a consequence of the increase in the dividend tax credit announced by the Minister of Finance on November 23, 2005, to lessen the attraction of income trust conversions?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is as follows: a) It is estimated that federal tax revenues in 2004 were \$300 million lower than they would have been if FTEs

flow-through entities, which include income trusts and limited partnerships, were structured as corporations. These estimates were based on financial statements of FTEs for 2004 and involved many other parameters that are outlined in the Department of Finance's consultation paper: "Tax and Other Issues Related to Publicly Listed Flow-Through Entities" released on September 8, 2005 (see http://www.fin.gc.ca/toce/2005/toirplf_e.html). Comparable estimates are not available for years prior to 2004 because of the significant data and estimation requirements including the need to review FTE financial statements for prior years. Data and methodology issues are outlined in detail in Section 5 of the consultation paper.

b) A reliable projection for future years is not available because such an estimate depends on a number of very important factors that are difficult to forecast. The challenges with making projections are outlined in Section 5d) of the consultation paper. These include, among other things, the potential growth of the FTE market and the proportion of FTEs owned by Canadian tax-exempt investors such as pension funds.

c) Budget 2006 estimates the cost of the enhanced gross up and dividend tax credit for dividends paid by large corporations to be \$375 million for 2005-06 and \$310 million for 2006-07.

Question No. 35—Mr. Bill Casey:

With regard to the Federal Ocean Energy Working Group (FOEWG): (a) which departments, agencies, or Crown corporations have representatives on the FOEWG; (b) how many representatives from the various departments and agencies make up the FOEWG in total; (c) how many times has the FOEWG met since its formation in 2005; (d) which department, agency, or Crown corporation is responsible for the funding and organization of the FOEWG; (e) what is the mandate of the FOEWG; (f) does the FOEWG have an official relationship with similar provincial organizations such as the Alternative Energy & Power Technology Task Force in British Columbia; (g) are there representatives from provincial or territorial governments in the FOEWG and, if so, how many; (h) what is the total amount of funding that has been distributed to the FOEWG to date; and (i) what are the long-term priorities and goals of the FOEWG?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is as follows: a) The working group's members are representatives from federal departments and agencies, including laboratories and regional development organizations, whose mandates address ocean or ocean energy whether from an R&D, commercial, policy or environmental perspective.

Members are: Atlantic Canada Opportunity Agency, Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans, Industry Canada, Natural Resources Canada, National Research Council (Canadian Hydraulics Centre and Institute for Oceans Technology), Western Economic Diversification.

b) There are currently 38 members on the FOEWG.

c) FOEWG has met five times since its inception in April 2005.

d) FOEWG is chaired by Natural Resources Canada, Office of Energy R&D. There is no funding per se attached to the FOEWG; the Working Group relies on in kind value through the time and efforts of its members.

e) FOEWG's mandate is to assess through information gathering, the potential contribution of Canadian and international ocean energy technology to the Canadian renewable energy supply; and help create a policy advisory body and technological framework for Canadian renewable energy from oceans.

f) FOEWG does not have an official relationship with similar provincial organizations such as the B.C. Alternative Energy & Power Task Force. FOEWG's relationships with the provinces have been through meetings and discussions with governmental representatives such as with Nova Scotia's Departments of Natural Resources and Energy, New Brunswick's Department of Energy, and British Columbia's Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources. This last April, FOEWG organized a meeting between its members and representatives from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to discuss potential collaboration on ocean energy projects; and to present the federal capabilities and interests in ocean energy, whether from a technical perspective or a regulatory and environmental one. FOEWG is planning a similar endeavour with British Columbia in the near future.

g) FOEWG is only comprised of federal representatives. However, FOEWG anticipates that through the above mentioned and forthcoming collaborative work, federal/provincial sub groups will be formed.

h) As mentioned above, FOEWG is not a funding program but has been instrumental in securing \$250K for two studies in 2005 06 from the Technology and Innovation R&D funds: the first year of a three year resource assessment (last two years unfunded as of yet), which would lead to an interactive web based ocean energy atlas similar to the Wind Atlas; and a multidimensional study that includes a technology review, a supply chain analysis and an environmental scan of both the regulatory framework for ocean energy projects and their environmental impacts.

i) FOEWG' long term priorities and goals are to:

—Foster technological development and develop Canadian capacity

—Coordinate federal S&T efforts and interests in ocean energy

—Develop synergies and partnerships between federal departments and agencies, and with provincial governments

—Ensure that projects and initiatives are complementary to avoid duplications or overlaps

—Increase communication across departments and agencies, and serve as a tool to inform upper management of federal ocean energy activities.

[English]

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Sheer): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. P-6, in the name of the hon. member for Malpeque, is acceptable to the government, and the document is tabled immediately.

That an Order of the House do issue for a copy of the report prepared by the Canadian Transportation Agency and submitted to Transport Canada on March 29, 2005, regarding the transfer or sale of the government grain hopper car fleet to the Farmer Rail Car Coalition.

• (1610)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is it the pleasure of the House that Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. P-6 be deemed to have been adopted?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I ask that all other notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Hon. Loyola Hearn (for the President of the Treasury Board) moved that Bill C-2, An Act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre.

They all said it could not be done. All the experts, all the pundits—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Excuse me. In order for the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board to split his time with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, it will require the consent of the House. Does the House give its consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I thank the chamber for its generosity.

Government Orders

As I was saying, they all said that it could not be done. All the punditry, the experts and the folks around Parliament Hill said that it was too ambitious a task, that it was too big, too strong and too tough, that the Prime Minister's timeframe to have the accountability act passed through the House of Commons before summer was impossible.

The Prime Minister set that goal after having introduced the accountability act as his first legislative priority. Tonight, with the agreement of the House, that promise will have been kept. Not only could it have been done, it will be done.

We are talking about the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history. It will ban big money and corporate cash from political campaigns. It will protect whistleblowers against bullying. It will end the revolving door between lobbyists and ministers' offices. It will bring into force a director of public prosecutions, who will seek out and prosecute those who defraud Canadian taxpayers. It will ban political patronage with a public appointments commission. It will broaden access to information far beyond what we have ever seen from any previous government, into Crown corporations, foundations and broader and deeper into the federal bureaucracy.

These are seminal changes in the history of our democracy. In the passage of this law, we are making Canadian history.

It is important to thank those who have been involved in this process, people from all parties who rolled up their sleeves and put party differences aside in order to support the swift passage of this law.

I would like to mention some of them, who sat on the special legislative committee responsible for this legislation: the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe; the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine; the member for Vancouver Quadra, whose notable experience in his home province of British Columbia as an ombudsman and a deputy minister brought a wealth of expertise to the committee; the member for York South—Weston, a true gentleman, a learned, former municipal politician, brought plenty of insight to the law; the member for Repentigny and the member for Rivière-du-Nord, deux député du Québec; and the member for Winnipeg Centre.

The member for Winnipeg Centre, for example, despite his notorious stubbornness, achieved exactly what he set out to do. He was not willing to move or budge on his objectives and in the end he got pretty much every objective that he sought to achieve. The member is responsible for introducing roughly 20 amendments to broaden access to information. His amendments will take access to information far beyond the scope that had ever been seen before. He also brought in a sweeping amendment that would introduce the public appointments commission, which is intended to ban political patronage. The accomplishments of the member for Winnipeg Centre cannot be forgotten. Despite the fact that he and I disagree on almost every issue, his accomplishments are undeniable.

I would like to thank the member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, who brought a wealth of expertise and experience to the committee and helped us get the job done. The member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works, was integral in seeing this

passed. The member for Fundy Royal and the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, with their legal backgrounds, were integral in seeing the success of the bill. Finally, I would like to thank the chair of the committee himself, the member for Dufferin—Caledon.

All of them deserve a big round of applause.

What has this law effectively changed in our democracy? I would like to expound upon my earlier summary.

To begin with, it bans big money and ends corporate cash from political campaigns. It will limit to \$1,000 the amount of money that any individual can donate to a political campaign and it ends the practice of corporate and union contributions.

● (1615)

There was a time when big corporations and powerful interests could buy influence from political campaigns by making tens of thousands of dollars in donations. There was a time when individuals, who were moneyed and powerful, could do the same. Those days are gone. The act would ban that practice and limits political financing to \$1,000, which would have the effect of forcing political parties to inspire everyday, middle class Canadians in order to win their donation as opposed to catering to the interests of the moneyed, powerful elite.

Second, it would bring in ironclad protection for whistleblowers. Those whistleblowers who see wrongdoing in the government would have the legal authority to disclose it to an independent watchdog, who would carry out a fulsome investigation. That investigation would result in a report to this Parliament, so that all eyes would see if wrong has been done. If whistleblowers experience reprisal, if they lose their job, if they are pushed out, if their pay is cut, if they suffer professionally, they would have the ability to go before a panel of independent judges, who would have the ability to restore them to their previous employment and give them all that was taken away.

These judges would also have the authority to punish those bullies at the political bureaucratic level who have intimidated whistleblowers. From now on, with the passage of this law, bullying a whistleblower will be punishable by two years behind bars, and it becomes a criminal offence under statutory law.

These are very real steps that have never been taken before by any previous Parliament.

We will end the revolving door between lobbyists and ministers' offices with this legislation. The Prime Minister went above and above demonstrating that the bill was not about partisanship, when he insisted that the provisions banning people who have worked in ministers' offices from becoming lobbyists for five years would apply also to those people who worked on his transition team.

Now those people who work on his transition team are Conservatives. They are supporters of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has said that this does not matter. Political allegiance should have no bearing on the law. In order to create a level playing field, the Prime Minister insisted that they, too, be restricted from lobbying for five years while they endured the cooling off period, which all other public office-holders and their staff must endure.

Government Orders

Finally, if public office-holders, ministers or parliamentary secretaries, meet with lobbyists, the date and time and frequency of those meetings must be published on a public website. That means everyday Canadians would know which moneyed interests had met with political decision makers. If, for example, a large corporation received an apparently unacceptable government subsidy and it was the result of intensive meetings between a minister and that corporation, the public should know that those meetings went on. That is what this bill would do. It would ban political patronage and it would extend access to information to crown corporations and dozens of foundations

With that, I would like to close with a quote because some have talked about the ups and downs of this committee. As my hockey coach used to say, "It doesn't matter if it was pretty. If the puck is in the net, it's a goal". This is a goal for all Canadians.

I conclude with this quote:

It's not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or when the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worth cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who at the worst if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.

• (1620)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague across talked about the bill being a seminal development. I believe there are some good things in the bill, but I disagree with him that it is a seminal development.

There are good developments and the best is making deputy ministers accountable to Parliament for the administration of their departments. There are some bad developments as well such as all the officers of Parliament. It is basically outsourcing our role as parliamentarians. Parliament is the institution of accountability. We should be keeping the executive to account, not some officer of Parliament.

Since the government came to power in February, there have been major steps backward. I have witnessed the Prime Minister, despite promises and votes and speeches he made before, appoint chairs of committees. Those chairs are not accountable to Parliament; they are accountable to him.

In his campaign literature, the Prime Minister promised free votes, except on the throne speech and the budget. That is not the case. It is throne speech, budget and government priorities.

He talked about patronage, yet the very first thing he did was appoint his co-chairman to the Senate and then the Minister of Public Works.

The member opposite talked about goals. Would it not be a goal for the government to strengthen Parliament, to give more resources to committees, to make it accountable so it can hold the executive to account?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has strengthened Parliament. Contrary to the words of my distinguished colleague, he has not appointed chairs to committees. Those chairs are elected by Standing Order. They have always been elected and

we have continued in that practice. It is impossible for him to appoint a chair because none of the committees have a majority of Conservatives on them. Therefore, it would have to be through the consent of at least one or two opposition parties to choose a chair.

Let us get right down to brass tacks here. Members across the way said, only months ago, that this law was so enormous and so consequential that it could not conceivably be passed through the House by summer. Now they say that it was really no big deal. The reality is, it has been a big deal. It is a seminal event in the development of Canadian democracy and it was done because of the commitment of the Prime Minister, even though most experts said it could never be done within this timeframe. I am very proud of that.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of important points I would like to make.

Before the election, my predecessor, Mr. Broadbent, put forward an ethics package that talked about public appointments and the need to deal with lobbying. I am glad to see this in the bill because there was a lot of malfeasance there. There were contingency fees, people entitled to entitlements, et cetera.

One of the things we need to take pride in, as he mentioned, is the public appointments process. That is something we laid down as a marker.

Does my hon. colleague believe our work is finished? There are a couple of areas that I think we still need to move on, such as access to information and more transparency. I would like to get my colleague's feedback as someone who participated each day on the committee on Bill C-2 and knows it fairly well. Are there other areas he believes we can go further?

• (1625)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, there is no denying the essential role that the member for Ottawa Centre played in the development of this bill. He was regularly at committee and showed tremendous interest in whistleblower protection, a fact which is congruent with the thousands of public servants who live in his constituency. He deserves a lot of credit.

I believe our work must go on. There is a lot more to do. However, at this point, we should take a moment to celebrate the extraordinary accomplishment that the bill represents. When it was first announced, most people said it would never pass through the House of Commons. Never did anyone outside of the Prime Minister believe that it could pass through the House of Commons before summer. Here we are today, within hours of passing the accountability bill. This is an extraordinary accomplishment. It is an accomplishment for which credit is owed to many members of the House from all sides. It was achieved in a minority Parliament, and we should all be proud of what it has done.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand in the House today and speak to what I feel is one of the most important pieces of legislation that Parliament has seen in many years, which is the federal accountability act.

Government Orders

Before I begin I want to underscore the comments by my colleague from Nepean—Carleton and thank all the members of the legislative committee that sat and worked so diligently, so hard and so many long hours to ensure the bill was brought before Parliament for approval.

Again, without referencing all of their constituencies, as my hon. colleague before me just did, let me say a very heartfelt thanks to all the members. It was a pleasure for me to sit on that committee and a real honour for me to interchange ideas and have a dialogue with all my colleagues, many of whom, quite frankly, from time to time I disagreed with, but it never stopped my respect for them and my sincere belief that their desire to see the best bill possible was unqualified.

I thank them so very much for allowing me the privilege of watching them at work. I have said this in other forums, at media events and talk shows, I honestly believe this is how a minority Parliament should work.

I think we have proven without a doubt to all Canadians that if the intentions of a minority Parliament are pure and the motivation is sincere it can work to the benefit of all Canadians. I think there is no better example than the legislative committee and this bill that we will be passing in the House within hours to demonstrate to Canadians that minority Parliaments can work on behalf and for the benefit of all Canadians.

I also want to give sincere thanks and acknowledgment to the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, the member for Nepean—Carleton, for a job well done. This was a massive undertaking by anyone's standards. The parliamentary secretary did yeoman work in shepherding the bill from the government's perspective through the legislative process and through the committee.

Without the member, he who did most of the heavy lifting from the government's side, I do not think that we would have been successful in reaching a satisfactory conclusion with all members of the opposition and all members of the committee.

I want to talk a little about the bill itself and some of the things that it brings to the benefit of Canadians. My colleague before me spoke very eloquently about many of the benefits that Canadians will receive as a result of the bill's passage.

The primary purpose of the bill and the essence and the spirit of the bill is to bring more accountability obviously to government. It would allow the public to see into the inner workings of government where they could not see before. I think that transparency is as important, if not more important, than the accountability provisions contained in the bill.

For too long Canadians have been telling me and, I am sure, parliamentarians of all political stripes that politicians are crooked, that they are doing things behind closed doors, that we do not know what they are doing and that they are probably on benefiting themselves and their friends.

That is not true. However, until such time as we can provide the transparency to Canadians to allow them to see the inner workings of government and to gain information on how government works, they

will continue to have those misconstrued ideas about parliamentarians.

The reason that Bill C-2 came to light, or the genesis of the bill in fact, which, frankly, was one of the darkest chapters in Canadian parliamentary history, was the sponsorship scandal.

I have spoken before in this chamber and have said that I do not believe there is any member in this chamber who is a crook, is deceitful or is trying to abuse his or her parliamentary privilege. However, we all know about the sponsorship scandal, which was a sordid chapter in Canadian parliamentary history.

• (1630)

I think it is evident to Canadians that because of the sponsorship scandal and the fact that Justice Gomery was able to uncover all these illegal and illicit manoeuvres by people in positions of trust and power, we needed to do something as a Parliament to ensure those types of actions never occurred again.

While I firmly believe that all members of this chamber would never attempt anything like we saw in the sponsorship saga, I believe we need to put in controls, provisions and processes to give confidence to Canadians that this type of action will never happen again, which is exactly what the federal accountability act would do.

Is it perfect legislation? Certainly not. I do not know if there has ever been any perfect legislation that has been designed, drafted and passed by Parliament, but it goes a long way to assuring Canadians that the type of actions and the type of corruption that we saw unfold during the sponsorship hearings will not happen again.

Controls are now in place to prevent that from happening again. Thanks to the good work of all members of this chamber who had the sincere motivation to ensure this bill prevented that type of abuse, Canadians can now rest assured that the bill, when passed, will take care of business in terms of providing the true accountability to all Canadians that they deserve.

I want to point out a couple of things that other members in this chamber have been speaking to because, frankly, I believe they have been giving a bit of a misinterpretation of what the bill does and does not do. I have two points in particular.

The first point has to do with registration fees for conventions for political parties. We have heard on many occasions members of the Liberal Party say that the provisions in the bill target the Liberal Party to prevent them in their efforts to hold a successful leadership campaign.

Government Orders

I will admit that there are provisions in the bill that state that convention fees should be considered contributions or donations. However, only the costs of the convention that are over and above the costs associated with the convention should be considered a donation. In other words, if the registration fee for delegates to attend any political party's convention was \$1,000 but the costs associated with putting on that convention were, hypothetically, \$300, then the \$700 over and above the hard cost of the convention would be considered a donation. That is the way it should be and the way it has to be. If the cost of conducting the convention was only \$300 but the political party received \$1,000 in registration fees, clearly the \$700 difference would be a donation and should be considered a donation.

What we are hearing from the opposition is that the provisions are punitive and that the Liberal Party is being unfairly targeted. However, the way to get away from that is to merely set the registration fee to cover the hard cost of the convention. If a \$1,000 registration fee were set by the Liberal Party and if the hard costs of that convention were \$1,000, there would be no contribution or donation incurred by the individual. I believe what they have been saying has been a bit of a fallacy and I wanted to correct the record because we are not targeting the Liberals. These rules would apply to all political parties.

For those people who have said that we have not given the bill enough time and enough due diligence, I would point out that a motion carried in committee was that we would sit the entire summer if that is what it took to pass the bill. The reason we are here today and the reason the bill will be assured of passage tonight is not because of any movement from the Conservative Party of Canada to rush the bill through Parliament. It was the free choice of committee members.

• (1635)

Today will be an historic day for all Canadians and it is a day Canadians should be applauding. We finally have a true accountability act for the benefit of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was very interesting to listen to my hon. colleague from Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre.

I would like to ask him two questions. The first question concerns the fact that the Conservatives and the NDP voted against an amendment to establish the minimum age required to legally contribute to a political party. This amendment was proposed by the Liberals, with the support of members from the Bloc Québécois.

In Quebec, at the provincial level, for nearly 30 years, the Election Act has set out that a person must have reached the age of majority, 18 years, in order to make a financial contribution to a political party.

I proposed an amendment myself. Nevertheless, the Conservatives and the NDP raised quite a fuss about a candidate for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada who had accepted legal donations from youth under 18 years of age. The Conservatives said it was unacceptable and that it never should have happened, even though it was legal. The candidate returned the donations. I myself tabled an

amendment to establish the minimum age as 18, and the Conservatives voted against that amendment.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague how he can reconcile his party's position when they say it is unacceptable and inappropriate to accept legal donations from young people under 18 and that the candidate should not have accepted the donations, with that same party's position when it voted against the amendment that would have established the minimum age to make a donation to a federal political party as 18 years.

Will he explain to Canadians and Quebeckers how he can reconcile those two positions? Or is this simply partisan politics?

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that my colleague is talking about partisan politics because she is a past master at performing the art of partisanship at committee.

In terms of all committees, ours was no different. Some clauses were supported by some members in some parties while other clauses were supported by other members. We win some and we lose some. In the particular instance to which the hon. member has referred, a number of amendments came forth at committee that purported to deal with the underage donation. Some were forwarded by the Liberal Party and some by the NDP. If I recall correctly, I believe the Liberals voted against the NDP amendment and the NDP voted against the Liberal amendment.

She talked about the position of the Conservative Party in that we found it reprehensible that one of the leadership candidates for the Liberal Party accepted donations from children. I agree. It is reprehensible but not because of the children making donations. In this particular case, 11-year-old twins gave \$5,400 each, apparently of their own free will and out of their own bank accounts, to a leadership candidate.

I would defy the member opposite to find one Canadian who truly believes that those two 11-year-olds gave money out of their own bank accounts. What probably happened was that the parents gave money through their children, which is a violation and that is why it is reprehensible. It is reprehensible to have a third party donation and, more than that, it is illegal.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Explain why you voted against the amendment.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Obviously the member does not want to hear those words because one of her own members, a leadership candidate, has done this, but that is why the Conservative Party took the stance we did. It is reprehensible and every Canadian I know will agree with that, with respect.

• (1640)

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the House for unanimous consent to split my time with my hon. colleague from Mississauga South.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is there unanimous consent for the member to split his time?

Some hon. member: Agreed.

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Hon. Stephen Owen: I am delighted to stand today, Mr. Speaker and colleagues from all parties, to address Bill C-2 at third reading.

First of all, as I said in our leading speech when the bill was first debated, we generally support the accountability act. In fact, in most areas of Bill C-2, it adds to and builds on a number of major issues that have been promoted by the Liberal government over the last 10 years. Of course, one of these was the most dramatic change in political financing in Canadian history, which was former Bill C-24 which passed and came into effect over two and a half years ago. Bill C-2 builds on it further and that is a good thing. We have to be careful in that area that we do not go too far and inhibit the free speech of Canadians, but generally that is certainly a continuation of something that the former Liberal government brought into effect.

The bill is also a continuation around the powers of independent officers of Parliament, such as the independent Ethics Commissioner brought in by the previous Liberal government who has served, I might say, with distinction.

The lobbyist registration rules are being tightened up in this bill and that is a good thing. I will speak in a moment of how they could be even better. That is something that progressed steadily over the last 10 years under the previous government. The bill also extends the powers of the Auditor General which I think all in the House believe is a good thing. We are very much in favour of the direction in which this bill is going.

I thank the member for Nepean—Carleton and the member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre for their remarks in support of the members of the committee, myself included, but I think it is important for all members of the House to understand something that the hon. member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre stressed. It is that members of the House are honourable, that public servants in Canada are honourable and that we need the requisite support of Canadians in believing that to have our democracy really work in a healthy way and not simply be looked at in a cynical way. I simply quote from Justice Gomery's first report, his fact finding report. He said at page 3:

Canadians should not forget that the vast majority of our public officials and politicians do their work honestly, diligently and effectively, and emerge from this inquiry free of any blame.

I do not say that to try to avoid the responsibility of the government at the time, of which I was a part, but I say it so that we keep this in balance and in perspective and that we do not sully our own reputations as public servants and politicians from all parties who, in the words of Mr. Justice Gomery, are honest, diligent and effective in their work. That is what we need to stress to Canadians, even while we find wrong, we admit fault and we put in new mechanisms to ensure that it will not happen again.

When we say that on this side of the House we support the general aims of the accountability act, it is a qualified support. We recognize that accountability is a work in progress. It has been going on for a long time. Often we hit bumps in the road. We learn some things; we do things better. I think there are many good steps forward in the bill. There are some things still to be done or things that could be corrected and we will be working to continually improve it, even while we support the bill.

Let me mention Motions Nos. 1, 3 and 6 which were passed this afternoon which relate to the autonomy and independence of the House of Commons and members of Parliament. We received testimony from the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel at the Bill C-2 legislative committee that there were a number of difficulties with the way the bill was drafted.

The most serious difficulty was one that was unconstitutional. That was the part of the bill that called for secret votes to approve officers of Parliament. As a committee we took that as being unconstitutional and inappropriate and we agreed to remove that. That was an excellent collaborative response to an extremely important bit of advice from the Law Clerk.

● (1645)

There were other aspects that the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel expressed concerns about, not because they are unconstitutional, but because they were against the traditional autonomy and independence of the legislative branch from the judiciary and the executive branch. Of course the three branches of government in our country under our Constitution which adopts the British parliamentary system are immensely important to the strength of our democracy. While the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel said that it was possible for Parliament to counteract that or give away some of that autonomy, he felt it might weaken the strength of Parliament over time with respect to its independence and autonomy.

Motions Nos. 1, 3 and 6 were passed today quite constitutionally, but went against that advice. That is something members of the House on all sides will have to watch very carefully as we go forward to make sure that we are not eroding those essential three autonomous independent pillars of our democracy.

I would also like to comment briefly on the open government act. Over a year ago, a House of Commons committee invited the Information Commissioner to come up with recommendations for reform of the system after 23 years of experience with the Access to Information Act. The reforms are with respect to some of the basic principles of access to information.

One is that public information is owned by the public and should be accessible by the public. Another one is that exemptions carrying on from that should be limited. In the basic principles he brought forward in the open government act, not only should it be accessible and only have a few exemptions, but those exemptions should have to be discretionary and should have to pass an injury test, that even though they may be within the exceptions in the act, they do not cause injury to the person who might be protected, whether it is a private citizen, a commercial entity or another government. Even if there were injury, there would be a public interest override which is immensely important.

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Those were in the open government act recommended by the Information Commissioner last fall. They were reviewed, debated and endorsed by the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. Then the Conservative Party, which was in opposition at the time, put that in black and white in its election platform, that the whole open government act would be included in the accountability act as the first act of a new Parliament if the Conservative Party formed government, but it has not included that. That is work for all of us to do to ensure in the fall when we further consider access to information that those important principles are enhanced.

The third area I would like to talk to briefly is the addition of new agencies of government to provide for greater accountability. I have no doubt these are well meaning but they do have the danger of adding new levels of bureaucracy and process to a system which needs air, needs light and needs to be fair. I think we all agree that the size of government is something we should be reducing and making more effective rather than simply adding to it to deal with another problem. Three of these areas deal with immensely important issues but there are institutions of government that could have taken on those mandates.

I speak first of all of the reprisal tribunal. That is fine but we do have the Canadian Industrial Relations Board which could have been asked to take on that role.

With respect to the nominations committee, there is very good legislation in the bill now which we support, but that could have been done by the Public Service Commission.

With respect to the director of public prosecutions, this country has one of the finest prosecution services federally and provincially than anywhere else in the world. To my knowledge, there has never been a suggestion, certainly in the modern history of Canada, that our federal prosecution service is not acting impartially within that special independent role of the Attorney General. The director of public prosecutions as a new entity is really not necessary. We could have improved the transparency around directions for an Attorney General and Minister of Justice but a new process was not necessary. That was certainly the way we looked at it.

• (1650)

I thank members on all sides of the House for their work at committee. It was a noble purpose, this bill. There were many things that were appropriate to begin with. There were many that could be strengthened and were strengthened by collaboration in committee. There are some aspects that still need to be addressed as this work in progress works to the benefit of all Canadians.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Vancouver Quadra for taking the lead on this piece of legislation on behalf of the official opposition.

The committee has gone through a very unusual situation in that it was a legislative committee. It heard an enormous number of witnesses. From those witnesses came the widely held opinion that the process was too hasty, that it was a little sloppy, that a lot of details were not covered. Many of the witnesses who wanted to reappear to give more fulsome input into some of these important areas were not given that opportunity. When those things happen, when things are rushed, mistakes are made and things get sloppy.

This bill is probably one which we will have to revisit often to fix some of the deficiencies within it.

We say prayers in the morning that we make good laws and wise decisions. It appears that this is a law that is moving in the right direction, and we support many aspects of it, but I am not sure that it was given the kind of diligent study that the House of Commons should have given it.

I would ask the hon. member if he would comment on those allegations.

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, certainly this is a difficult balance. This is an immensely complicated bill with many clauses affecting many other pieces of legislation.

I must say that many of us had some real misgivings with the speed with which it was travelling through the process and the time that was limited for certain witnesses. I can quote two in particular, but many made similar observations, and without passing judgment on them I think they speak for themselves. I will just quote their observations.

One is Arthur Kroeger who is the dean of the bureaucratic core, having been deputy minister in a number of very senior portfolios over the years. He certainly expressed the opinion that the complexity and length of this bill should be given very careful consideration and that all the time that could possibly be used should be used to avoid any unintended consequences given the bill's complexity.

The other key person who commented on this is Ken Rubin, who is perhaps, outside of information commissioners themselves, one of the most knowledgeable people on freedom of information issues in our country. He felt the same thing, that he did not have enough time. He thought that the access provisions needed much more work and improvement.

They are people who are speaking from an independent point of view. We should all take note of their concerns as we diligently go forward to ensure that this act, if it is not as good as it can possibly be now, becomes so.

• (1655)

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Vancouver Quadra and I congratulate him on his able performance at the special legislative committee on Bill C-2. He led a team of four Liberal members of Parliament and gave us some wise counsel and leadership, and I would like to thank him for that. However, I do have a couple of questions.

He was asked by our colleague from Mississauga South about the pace at which the committee dealt with Bill C-2. The Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons made the point that people had said that the bill could not get through the House before the summer recess. It has been done and this is a great achievement.

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I do not wish to speak to whether or not Bill C-2 is a good bill in its actual state. What I do wish to ask the member is did the committee allow a fulsome presentation on the part of the witnesses who are experts who came before the committee?

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my very dear colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine for her participation in the committee and her strong support for our team.

We certainly heard from many witnesses that they were frustrated by the short period of time that they had to participate in the committee's deliberations and give evidence. We heard from some as well who would have liked to return and have been asked to return but who did not have the chance.

When we weigh these things out, we have to be careful as parliamentarians to always do two things: first, ensure that we move things along as quickly as possible, particularly issues that deal with fundamental principles, as this act does; and second, ensure we do not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Please accept my apologies.

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 Skeena—Bulkley Valley, the Environment; the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche, Supply Management.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-2 is intended to address principles that all Canadians and all parliamentarians share and that is a wish for openness, transparency and accountability in our government institutions. Bill C-2 has made some progress in this regard, but at the same time, there has been a fair bit of hyperbole about how far it goes and how effective it will be.

We heard some suggestion from the previous speaker that there was some haste in dealing with this bill at committee stage and that some mistakes have been made. As the legislation continues after third reading, some serious questions will need to be addressed and this House may have to address them itself.

Just to give the House an idea of how open and transparent the government wants to be on this, I would like to read into the record the entire speech of the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board leading off the debate at report stage yesterday. He said:

Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the occasion to speak to these motions. I think most members of the House will agree that these amendments are largely technical in nature and fix the minor problems that the committee was not able to address.

I would invite any comments and questions from members across the way but I do not see these as being particularly controversial.

He had 10 minutes to speak at report stage and that was his entire speech. He had an opportunity to advise all hon. members, who were going to be asked to vote on important motions to amend the bill, as to the rationale for seven motions that were put forward by the President of Treasury Board just 12 hours earlier. We did not see those motions until the morning of the debate. This shows maybe a symptom of the wish for the government to have and to engage all parliamentarians on the importance of Bill C-2.

In the parliamentary secretary's speech he characterized people who donate money to candidates or political parties as big money and big corporate cash. To characterize those who participate and who support the democratic political process as somehow being a bad thing is quite unfortunate.

When Bill C-24 passed in this place with the support of all parties, the limits to donations were set at \$5,000 for an individual and \$1,000 for a corporation or a union. Is there anybody who honestly believes that someone who makes contributions at these levels has significant influence on the government? Of course not. They were fair and reasonable limits.

This bill says that a small businessman will not be allowed to make a contribution through his company to a local candidate who has worked hard for industrial or regional development or for improvements in the economic climate that will affect that individual's business or industry. Suddenly, anybody who is involved in a corporation is somehow supposed to be a bad person.

The parliamentary secretary also said that because of influence peddling somehow Bill C-2 would clean up the process. There may be some unintended consequences here. I would like to give the House an example.

For a member of Parliament such as myself to run in an election my spending limit is somewhere around \$80,000. About 60% of this can be received through the Canada Elections Office, but half of it has to go to the party. This means I will have to raise \$56,000 to run an average campaign to get to the over 50,000 homes in my riding. This is about \$1 a home, not an exorbitant amount of money. Now I am going to have to raise \$56,000, but I cannot get more than \$1,000 from any one person.

• (1700)

We know some people are prepared to support the democratic process, but all the government has really done is force members of Parliament to get larger numbers of individual donors for this process. It is not enhancing the democratic process in terms of providing information to Canadians about the platforms of one's party, about a member's contribution as a past MP or what a person can do for new candidates.

This is not over. There are no transitional provisions in this with regard to the effectiveness or effective date of the changed limits on political donations. The way it sits right now the in force date would be basically the date of proclamation after royal assent. It means that it would be effective, theoretically, for the calendar year 2006.

The Chief Electoral Officer has indicated that should this bill pass in this form at all stages, including the Senate, and receive royal assent, in order for him to enforce the act he will have to go back and force people to get back some of the money they donated under the former law. This is a big problem. I can speak quite a bit more about it, but I just raise it. This is one issue that will have to come up.

Everybody who talked about it in committee was basically saying that the only way one can effectively control this matter and do it in a way which is the least disruptive to Canadians is to have the effective date of the change of the levels of political donations to be January 1 of the coming year. That way there will be no confusion or disruption to the overall process in a taxation year.

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If one is going to be truthful and plain in disclosing what this bill really does, the parliamentary secretary maybe missed a couple of points. He said that this is a seminal event with the hyperbole about how all of these wonderful things are going to happen. He talked about whistleblowers and that the government is going to do this and that. That is not in this bill.

The creation of the Public Service Integrity Officer, the fact that there are reprisals as defined, the fact that there is a process, the fact that the anonymity is going to be protected, and the fact that there are all kinds of remedies available are in Bill C-11. Bill C-11 was passed in the last Parliament and received royal assent last November. If the government were absolutely committed to transparency and openness and an ethical approach to governing, Bill C-11 would have been proclaimed and there would be a law in force in Canada.

We could have that position filled. We could have had that kind of protection for employees already, but the government still has not done it. Why? There is one reason and it is totally political. Basically, the government wants to say that Bill C-2 is the bill that does this and somehow take credit for what parliamentarians worked on for three years.

When Bill C-2 becomes law in Canada, it will also enact Bill C-11 because Bill C-2 in fact makes some consequential amendments to Bill C-11. It tidies it up in a few areas which allows the government to say it has done this. It has not done it. The parliamentary secretary in fact misled the House as to what Bill C-2 does.

Then there is the Lobbyist Registration Act. After all of the foofaraw about people on the transition team not being able to be registered lobbyists for five years, what did the government do? It turned around and made amendments at report stage at the very last moment that established certain criteria, when the commissioner for lobbying has all kinds of latitude to make exceptions to the rules. With all of those problems, the government said it was going to tighten up on the lobbyists. Then it loosened it up.

What about the public appointments commission? Does everyone know what the bill says about the public appointments commission? The bill originally said:

The Governor in Council may establish a Public Appointments Commission consisting of a chairperson and not more than four other members.

That is all the bills says. It says it "may". It did not say it "will".

The opposition worked very hard and got the criteria put in with the details of what the commission will be able to do to bring transparency into the appointments process. What did the Prime Minister say immediately after it passed in committee? He said that he did not care because he would not appoint a commissioner and then we would not have anything.

• (1705)

The bill does absolutely nothing for the public appointments process. We will be reverting to Treasury Board guidelines, which have been updated in the last Parliament and have served us very well in providing for that.

Finally, with regard to the Access to Information Act, the bill is a failure in improving the accessibility of Canadians to information on their government. The Information Commissioner himself said that. I

know all hon. members will want to look for other opportunities to ensure that important acts, such as the Access to Information Act, get the necessary amendments to make us truly open, transparent and accountable.

• (1710)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the comments of the hon. member indicate that he will vote against the accountability act. All the member has done is rail against the act.

I cannot help but compare the member's comments to the comments of his colleague from Vancouver Quadra. His colleague was cogent. He colleague understood that this was a major step forward in restoring accountability in government. His colleague also understood that further improvements could be made in the future.

All I hear from that member is complaint after complaint. It sounds as though he is against accountability.

The member mentioned in his reference that mistakes had been made. I do not know where he gets that. I certainly understand that each of the four parties in the House had an opportunity to submit amendments. Some of the amendments were supported and some were not. That is the political process.

However, I do not know where the member gets it, that somehow the process has failed. I sense from the members of the House that there is a consensus that Bill C-2 needs to move forward. Canadians are demanding it. We have come from 13 years of corruption and the undermining of the ethical framework of government.

Is the member going to support the legislation when it is voted on later tonight?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member does not know anything about the act. He certainly does not know anything about what has happened in the House because there is no vote tonight.

I might as well use the rest of time maybe to carry on with some other comments. The member for Vancouver Quadra spoke, he mentioned the haste in witness testimony from Mr. Arthur Kroeger and Mr. Ken Rubin. We have to take the bill at its face. The intent of the bill is good, but it has some problems.

I know that in committee the NDP and the government voted the same way throughout the whole process. Then the Conservative chair of the committee turned around and voted with the government. Every amendment, which tried to be put through in the committee, even setting the age of 18 as being the lowest age at which someone can make a political contribution, was opposed by the government.

When the member wants to suggest that somehow I have a problem with the act, I do not. I want the bill to pass because that is the only way I can get my Bill C-11 in action. Then we can get protection for public servants who are in jeopardy of reprisal if they bring allegations of wrongdoing to the proper attention. That was one of the most important elements. It was done in Bill C-11. It was not done in Bill C-2.

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Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member for Mississauga South heard the scuttlebutt from other members of the committee, such as the esteemed member for York South—Weston, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, the member for Vancouver Quadra and myself, who all served on the Liberal side of the committee studying Bill C-2. I am sure he heard the story of how the government proceeded with sections of the act relating to the Auditor General's provenance over aboriginal groups, first nations and aboriginal peoples and the first nations that are self-governing.

I am sure the member was told that the government determined and described that the follow the money principle of the government over there, which means taxpayers of Canada want to know what is done with their money with respect to aboriginals and first nations. I am also sure the member was told how offensive that was to aboriginals and first nations and to this side. This side brought forward the amendment that got the government's claw off the first nations and aboriginals funds, which are theirs.

What are the member's comments on that?

• (1715)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member has expressed it very well.

The opposition has limited tools with which to work, but with the little it had, it achieved a number of important amendments to the bill. However, there is more to do on Bill C-2 and related issues. The Liberal Party is very much supportive of openness, transparency and accountability in government, but we also have to make good laws and wise decisions.

This law is not as good as we could have had it, had the government cooperated more fully with the opposition to ensure that all the work was done properly. In this case, it was not.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak for what I believe is the last time about Bill C-2. We have discussed Bill C-2 frequently, at length and in detail, and we have analyzed it from every angle. Today, we have before us the final version with the amendments made at third reading.

With the permission of this House, before I speak directly about Bill C-2, I will talk about its origins and what brought us to this point today, when we are discussing Bill C-2 at third reading. What prompted this bill?

We could talk at length—and we have—about the sponsorship scandal. A few years ago, thanks to the invaluable work of the Auditor General, people became aware that, unfortunately, some people had misappropriated taxpayers' money to try to buy the hearts and minds of Quebecers. I am not talking about the majority of public servants, but certain people. Today, justice is taking its course.

At the time, the Liberal government made a token effort to correct these deficiencies, for which it was itself responsible, having created the culture of entitlement. At that point, three interesting and important tools were put in place. First, there was the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons and Bill C-24, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act

(political financing). There was also Bill C-11, the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act.

Earlier the hon. member for Mississauga South indicated how important Bill C-2 is. It is a step in the right direction. It reaffirms existing rules, but does not reinvent the wheel.

In its legislative framework, this bill includes previous important legislation such as Bill C-11, the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act. For roughly a year this bill was put on ice. It had gone through all the legislative steps and in short order could have protected public servants who witness wrongdoings. This was delayed strictly for political reasons and that is sad. We could have enacted Bill C-11 as soon as the Conservative government took office. This would have provided a safety net, perhaps imperfect, but a safety net nonetheless that public servants did not have until now. This was delayed and that is sad.

What were the Conservatives trying to achieve when they introduced Bill C-2? One of their objectives was to restore public trust in politicians and in Parliament. We believe this objective will be met.

However, when the Liberals introduced the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons—they may not have been the right ones to do so—their objective was to restore public trust in politicians and Parliament. When the Liberals introduced Bill C-24, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act (political financing), it was to restore public trust in politicians and Parliament. When the Liberals introduced Bill C-11, the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, it was to restore public trust in politicians and Parliament.

When other provincial legislatures introduced similar measures, it was to restore trust. When other countries introduced similar legislation, it was also to restore trust. When we look at whether this objective has been met where similar legislation has been introduced, we come to the unfortunate conclusion that no, it has not. In countries where legislative measures on ethics and transparency like this exist, there is still a large gap between the will of the politicians and public trust in them.

• (1720)

It is my hope that this bill will somewhat correct this perception. However, much more will have to be done to that end. In fact, the government also will have to do a great deal more to correct this perception.

When the sponsorship scandal broke out, the Auditor General stated that all the rules had been broken. That means that there were rules, that they were in place but that the Liberal government decided to circumvent them.

Government Orders

The Conservative government is proposing new rules. Will it respect them? Therein lies the problem. A plethora of rules can be put in place but without the tools or the political will to ensure compliance, the message that we wish to give to the public—the desire to address the problem and restore trust—will be lost. At the first infringement by the Conservative government of its own law, trust will be further undermined and it will become even more difficult to regain it.

Earlier I referred to a private members' bill tabled by the member for Simcoe North, if my memory serves me well. This bill called for government investment in an Ontario waterway in order to revitalize tourism and so forth.

The member who tabled this bill owns the main hotel located in this tourist area and he is asking for the government to invest in his tourist industry. It seems that he is not covered by Bill C-2. That is what we were told. In fact, it seems that he is complying with the bill because it refers to ministers and parliamentary secretaries.

We have often seen people bending the rules. The government must ask its members to respect the letter and the spirit of the law, which states that they must have no real or perceived conflicts of interest. It is important for ministers and parliamentary secretaries to respect this law. Moreover government members of Parliament must also abide by it and ensure that their conduct does not give rise to a real or perceived conflict of interest.

I opened the door for my colleague—I believe he is the new member for Simcoe North—by suggesting he check with the President of the Treasury Board to see if he was respecting the spirit of the law. If he did check with the ethics counsellor, and if his bill does not place him in a conflict of interest, then the Bloc Québécois is prepared to re-evaluate its position. We are not accusing the member of a conflict of interest. We are just saying that it bothers us to see this kind of bill introduced just as the Conservative government introduced its bill on transparency and accountability.

I think I have shown pretty clearly why the Conservative government introduced the first bill of the 39th Parliament, Bill C-2: for political reasons, among other things, and for honourable reasons too, I hope.

Bill C-2 was discussed in special committee, in legislative committee, actually. Thanks are in order with respect to the legislative committee. I would like to thank all of my colleagues from all parties who contributed to improving Bill C-2 in committee. At times, there was some political posturing from the Liberals, the Conservatives and the NDP. Not all members were necessarily on the same wavelength. Some sharp remarks were made.

We all knew there was some jockeying for political position during committee meetings. Once the work was done though, I am sure that we all recognized our collaborators' efforts and qualities. I really wanted to emphasize that. Finally, I must highlight my colleague for Rivière-du-Nord's contribution. She was there during the committee's long working hours.

● (1725)

I would also like to mention the work done by two people in particular. It is sad, because I am going to forget other people, but I want to mention Annie Desnoyers and Dominic Labrie. They are

thorough, hard-working Bloc Québécois staff, and they supported us—and put up with us—throughout the review of Bill C-2.

Now I would like to talk more specifically about Bill C-2. The Bloc is in favour of the bill, as you know from our presentations and our support for the amendments. It is important to remember that ethics were central to the most recent election campaign, when the Liberals were thrown out of power, especially in Quebec. We took part in the Gomery commission, which produced a number of recommendations that must now be implemented and are included in part in Bill C-2. Not all of the recommendations are reflected in the bill. Notably missing are the ones concerning the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

An hon. member: It had to be improved.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: We improved it during the 40 hours a week we sat in committee.

I would like to talk about what the Bloc Québécois gained. The Bloc is happy to see that some of its proposals were incorporated into Bill C-2. The bill was flawed. We worked to make it better, and we made some progress. All the parties can congratulate themselves on that. The Bloc's gains include the requirement that Elections Canada appoint returning officers on merit. My colleague from Québec, our whip, had already introduced a bill on merit appointments of returning officers, something we managed to obtain in this bill.

Initially, the bill said that the Chief Electoral Officer could appoint the returning officers in our ridings. We amended this proposal, stating that the Chief Electoral Officer could choose or appoint them, but only after a competition based on merit. We think that the worst situation was where the governor in council appointed his buddies as returning officers. This is rather strange in a modern democracy. But requiring the Chief Electoral Officer to appoint returning officers on merit, after a competition—something he had been requesting for a long time—will make for greater impartiality during elections, and this is one notable gain for the Bloc Québécois in Bill C-2.

Independence of the lobbyists registry is another gain. We will have a lobbyists registry with an independent commissioner. That way, they cannot divert the focus by appointing people who are in complicity with the government. Political party financing legislation is another major gain. The Conservatives told us, kindly and candidly, that they wanted to use as a model the Quebec political party financing legislation, which was introduced by the Parti Québécois in 1977, if my memory serves me correctly. Some 30 years later, the federal government says it wants to use it as a model. This is a fine victory for the Bloc and a fine victory for Quebec.

An hon. member: And for democracy.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: And for democracy, indeed.

Private Members' Business

The powers of the Auditor General have been strengthened. Since the sponsorship scandal, everyone is aware of the reputation and respect that the Auditor General enjoys. Bill C-2 strengthens her powers by giving her oversight over a greater number of crown corporations and agencies where the federal government invests money.

The Bloc Québécois is pleased to see that some of its proposals have been retained. I am referring to the secret ballot in particular. In Bill C-2, everyone would have been appointed by secret ballot. It is normal for the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the House to be elected by secret ballot. It is a parliamentary tradition. However, appointing everyone by secret ballot would diminish the independence of every independent officer of the House, and the current process for appointing independent officers—

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member.

[English]

It is now 5:30 p.m. and we will proceed to the consideration of private members' business.

The hon. member for Repentigny will have seven minutes left in his speech when the House resumes debate on Bill C-2.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.) moved that Bill C-253, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of RESP contributions), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. government House leader is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order concerning Bill C-253, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of RESP contributions) standing in the name of the member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge. While the intent of the bill is to alleviate the tax burden for individuals who contribute to registered education savings plans, it is my submission that Bill C-253 contains specific provisions that would effectively increase the amount of tax payable by the taxpayer.

If I am correct, the bill should have been preceded by the adoption of a ways and means motion and is therefore improperly before the House.

Two of the amendments proposed in the bill are amendments to section 146.1 of the Income Tax Act, which sets out RESP payments that are to be included in computing a taxpayer's income for a taxation year.

Subclause 2(5) of the bill would add a paragraph (c) to subsection 146.1(7.1) that would require refunds of payments made in respect of any contribution paid by a taxpayer to be included in computing a taxpayer income per taxation year. Subclause 2(6) of the bill would repeal subsection 146.1(7.2) of the Income Tax Act, which excludes certain amounts received under RESPs as income for a taxation year.

Taken together with paragraph 56(1)(q) of the Income Tax Act, which identifies amounts to be included as taxable income under section 3 of the act, these amendments would effectively increase the amount of tax payable by the taxpayer.

Citation 980 of the sixth edition of Beauchesne's states:

A Ways and Means motion is a necessary preliminary to the imposition of a new tax, the continuation of an expiring tax, an increase in the rate of an existing tax, or an extension of the incidence of a tax so as to include persons not already [tax] payers.

In other words, any measure that would have the effect of increasing the tax burden on an individual should be first preceded by a ways and means motion.

[Translation]

Although the general purpose of these bills is to reduce the tax burden on individuals, this legislation should not evade the requirements of a ways and means motion.

[English]

The 21st edition of Erskine May states at page 730:

To escape the rules of financial procedure, a scheme for the alleviation of taxation must not include any incidental increase of the burden upon any taxpayer, however indirect or relatively insignificant that increase may be.

I therefore submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that Bill C-253 is improperly before the House, and if you agree, I ask that the bill be stricken from the order paper.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for getting the name of my riding right and also for preceding the Chair in pre-empting his comments as to the receivability of the bill.

I have had perhaps as much experience as any member in the House on private members' business. When a bill is presented, it must satisfy two tests, such that your own legislative counsel has been involved with this, Mr. Speaker. Number one is the constitutionality of the bill, on which clearly the bill qualified, and number two, of course, is to ensure that the legislation itself does not require a royal recommendation.

Based on this and the ruling that you made in respect to May 31, 2006, I am going to read this into the record:

Where it seems likely that a bill may need a royal recommendation, the member who has requested to have it drafted will be informed of that fact by the legislative counsel responsible for drafting the bill. A table officer will also send a letter to advise the member that the bill may require a royal recommendation.

Should the member decide to proceed with the bill and select it for inclusion...

Members may then make submissions regarding the royal recommendation and, if necessary, the Chair will return with a definitive ruling later in the legislative process.

Mr. Speaker, you said:

Private Members' Business

There are a number of bills on the order of precedence which cause the Chair some concern. At first glance, certain provisions of these bills raise questions about the need for a royal recommendation.

I will not exhaust the list, but they are limited to Bill C-292, Bill C-257, Bill C-293, Bill C-286, Bill C-269, Bill C-284, Bill C-278, Bill C-295, Bill C-303 and Bill C-279.

Nowhere in that have the table officers or the legislative counsel been concerned about this bill inviting a question of royal recommendation. What the bill in fact does is provide ample opportunity to reduce for most people the burden of student loans. As a result of that, it is faithful to the existing Income Tax Act.

I point out that if there is any question with respect to taxation, it is already contained within the Income Tax Act as it relates to a withdrawal by a subscriber or a refund in payments; it is subject to a 20% penalty in addition to the regular tax payable. This proposed legislation does nothing to change that and therefore does not invite a question of a royal recommendation.

What is important is precedents, Mr. Speaker, not only by your ruling very recently, but if the hon. member wishes to go back to October 16, 1995, I would ask the hon. member to listen to this very carefully. When Bill S-9 came before the House it was ruled by you, Mr. Speaker, on that date that the bill did not appropriate tax revenue but rather exempted or reduced taxes otherwise payable. I will read this into the record:

The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader noted in his intervention that Bill S-9 is not a bill for appropriating any part of the public revenue or for any tax or impost and therefore does not require a royal recommendation. There will be no expenditure of public funds—

Which of course is contemplated in this bill.

—though money already collected from Canadian citizens pursuant to the tax laws of Canada may be refunded.

As the parliamentary secretary pointed out, the repayment of tax revenues already received is not an appropriation of public money.

Mr. Speaker, I turn your attention to Marleau and Montpetit, at page 711, under the financial procedures section:

A royal recommendation not only fixes the allowable charge, but also its objects, purposes, conditions and qualifications. An amendment which either increases the amount of an appropriation, or extends its objects, purposes, conditions and qualifications is inadmissible on the grounds that it infringes on the Crown's financial initiative. However, a royal recommendation is not required for an amendment whose effect is to reduce taxes otherwise payable.

Given that ruling by your Chair and your more recent ruling, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the bills that caused difficulty, and notwithstanding the opinion of the House leader of the Conservative Party, who has referred to this not only to myself but seems to have done it with the hon. member for Bourassa last week on his bill with respect to Kyoto, it seems to be a tried and true measure to try to avoid important legislation that can be derived from private members' business.

I would suspect that given previous rulings and the wisdom of your legislative counsel, Mr. Speaker, the bill is very much in order, and I do wish to proceed, with your help, in getting the bill on its way to help students in this country.

• (1735)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Friday we had a similar situation on Bill C-288, in which the

government House leader rose and made argument with regard to the necessity for a royal recommendation. Today we have another intervention by the government House leader laying out some arguments on Bill C-253, which will be debated shortly.

In both cases, the Speaker, in his earlier statement, identified for the House and flagged 10 of the 30 bills on the order of precedence as likely requiring royal recommendation. That provides an opportunity for members who are in that situation to determine whether there is a way to remedy that requirement, whether it be at committee stage or at report stage, to ultimately get a royal recommendation, which is one of the reasons that the Speaker also indicated that he would not make a final determination until the point at which a vote on third reading will be called.

Under the circumstances, where the government House leader is dealing with bills that have not been flagged already, pursuant to the procedure that has been outlined by the Speaker's office, I would appreciate it if direction could be given and that there can be assurances that should the Speaker's office find that there was some error with regard to the flagging that should have been done but was not done, that the members would be appropriately notified of the basis for that, and that members of the House be given an opportunity to make further representations with regard to the argument that has been made by the government House leader once we can see the details of the arguments that have been made.

• (1740)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, first, I apologize to the mover of the bill. The name of his riding is in fact Pickering—Scarborough East. I just want to correct the record on that.

I think I have made it very clear, and I am sure the blues will back me up on this, that this is not a question of royal recommendation. It is the need for a ways and means motion. It is on that basis that I intervened.

Most of the comments were directed with respect to royal recommendations but I made it very clear that the bill needed a ways and means motion to proceed and that therefore it should be struck on that basis.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear where the hon. member is going. If he had taken the time to read the bill, as the legislative counsel has done, I want to make it abundantly clear to him that the tax payable is negated by the initial tax credit.

Mr. Speaker, your legislative counsel looked at this and examined all of the concerns, whether it be a ways and means or whether it be a question of royal recommendation. I merely wanted to point out to the hon. member and to the Chair above all that I am governed by the wisdom of the Chair and I stand by the wisdom of the chair, which is why the bill is in fact receivable. I would like to proceed with debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The Speaker has already indicated that a definite ruling on the procedural admissibility of this bill will be made before the question is put at third reading.

[Translation]

Since today's debate is on the second reading of the bill, the matter can proceed.

Private Members' Business

[English]

The House will now proceed to the debate on private members' business.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for allowing that and being consistent in your ruling. I realize this will not be an easy bill but behind the bill comes the challenges, not only for the Department of Finance but, I suspect, for the entire economy.

Bill C-253 is an act to amend the Income Tax Act which will deal with the amendment to the Income Tax Act to allow contributions to registered education savings plans to be tax deductible. It would come as a surprise to many Canadians it currently is not the situation.

Is it any wonder today that students face the kind of debt situation that they are now seeing at a time when manufacturers and others around the world are demanding that Canada do better in order to provide a more skilled workforce and more vibrant economy to meet the challenges of a modernizing economy against a highly competitive world.

The bill provides a regulatory regime similar to that of RRSPs and it also has built in penalties and guidelines to prevent the RESP from being used as a tax shelter, as some will indicate, instead of its sole purpose of generating funds to be used to pay education costs.

I would like to speak about the rationale of this bill. Nothing is more important for the future prosperity of our great nation than having a highly educated workforce. However, the reality is that contrasted against the backdrop, with soaring tuition costs at universities and colleges, these are creating concern that post-secondary education may soon only become the purview of the wealthy.

This, in my view and I think in the view of most Canadians, indeed the constituents in my riding and ridings across Canada, is simply unacceptable as it would place Canada at a considerable economic disadvantage, both domestically and in the international marketplace.

It is very clear that it is not just students who know this and businesses. I would like to refer to some of the comments that were made today coming out of the industry committee's report which it tabled earlier today. It reflects on how manufacturers are responding to this.

According to a survey conducted by the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters in 2003, more than 40% of manufacturers say that skill shortages are seriously constraining their ability to improve business performance and grow. About 17% of those surveyed indicated that skill shortages pose a major constraint on their ability to develop and commercialize new products. Finally, slightly more than 25% report that a lack of skilled and experienced personnel is a challenge that will fundamentally change the nature of their business over the next five to ten years.

It is clear that Canada must do more to motivate younger people and to provide Canadians with an opportunity where they can best meet that. We can talk about assistance for students who are at the very low end of the economic scale, through no fault of their own,

who can get access to higher education to better themselves. We can talk about wealthy students for whom any education anywhere they want to go is no object.

We are dealing with a fairly large middle class in this country with a hodge-podge of programs that simply cannot make the grade. Many of them choose not to go to university or college, or to get a diploma, a certificate or a degree. As a result of that, the singular loss of an 18 or 19 year old and his or her ability to get access to higher education is not just a loss for that individual but it is indeed a loss for our country. Our ability to attract investments and, most important, yes, for the finance department and the bean counters to generate revenue for the next 30 or 40 years, we want to look at it from a selfish point of view.

As I said earlier, this issue is not confined. It is simply a question of whether the finance department thinks it is a good idea or a bad idea and whether it is concerned about the loss of revenue. If we are going to navel gaze and look at today, I suggest that if we cannot plan 10 years from now and give our students an opportunity to get access to higher education and allow universities to bring people in to pay the kind of resources, to pay for the kind of personnel and to pay for the kind of expertise that will make our universities and colleges and our certificate granting institutions the best in the country, then this country will fail the next generation.

In the absence of a hodge-podge of programs that exist, this bill simply provides the best step forward with resources that are already available to all Canadians who pay taxes and who may want to direct to a loved one, a family member or their sons and daughters the opportunity to gain access to a better job through access to higher education.

To contrast the difficulty we currently have, 27% of Canadian families have an RESP to help pay for their children's education. One major reason for this relatively low percentage is the financial burden placed on families to maintain an RESP.

● (1745)

Regardless of the long term benefit, RESP contributions require after tax monthly family income. Some families are simply unable to afford the minimum monthly contribution, usually \$100.

Making contributions tax deductible, as the bill proposes, offers families incentives and financial assistance to create and manage an RESP. In addition, making contributions tax deductible not only provides a means to help address educational costs, it will impact on lessening post-graduation debt which often is a debilitating financial drain on the graduate.

There is no doubt that the need for higher learning cannot be gainsaid. According to Statistics Canada, in today's labour market two out of three jobs require more than a high school education. Post-secondary graduates, according to the same institution, have a high employment rate, are less vulnerable to economic downturns and they receive higher incomes which, for the Department of Finance, which I am sure is listening today, also means generating more revenue.

Private Members' Business

I want to talk about measures for preventing the RESP from being a tax shelter. It has been raised by my hon. colleagues and I am sure others that this might somehow see itself as a shelter. Let me read into the record what the bill would do.

When contributions to an RESP are withdrawn either by the subscriber or the beneficiary, this is referred to as a "refund of payments". Payments of investment income made out of an RESP to a student beneficiary are referred to as "education assistance payments", EAPs. Payments of investment income made out of the RESP to the subscriber, in the event that a student does not, or is unable to, attend the post-secondary education are referred to as "accumulated income payments".

At present, and this is a point that I made to the hon. House leader, EAPs and AIPs are taxed under section 146.1(7) and (7.1) of the Income Tax Act, but a refund of payments is not taxable under section 146.1 since contributions are made from after tax income.

The bill inserts a refund of payments into one section, 146.1, and repeals 146 (7.2) which would make a refund taxable when withdrawn. After Bill C-253, the EAPs and AIPs will continue to be taxable when withdrawn.

To ensure that the RESP is not used as a tax deferral vehicle, the AIPs are subject to part X.5 penalty tax under section 204.94 of the Income Tax Act. If the AIP is withdrawn by a subscriber in the event that the child does not attend the educational institution, the accumulated income payment will be subjected to a 20% tax in addition to the regular tax payable.

There is a lot here as to whether or not one can reasonably conclude this would be a tax deferral. In fact, it is an opportunity with some fairly strict guidelines and a substantial firewall.

The high cost of education, and again I will use Statistics Canada as a source, average undergraduate degrees almost doubled, from \$2,023 in 1993-94 to \$4,000 in 2003-04 and is expected to hit nearly \$8,000 by 2012.

Increases in tuition fees are partly responsible for increases in student debt. The average amount owed to student loan programs by university graduates increased 76% between 1990 and 2000.

One-third of students who left before graduating in 2002 did so for financial reasons. That is the gap. That tells us exactly what is occurring right now because young people, students cannot make the grade. This financial barrier, notwithstanding all the programs that are there, federal and provincial, simply does not meet the test of ensuring that those who want an education and who have the means of obtaining a higher education cannot do it because there are financial impediments. It is important for us to understand this.

It is projected that by 2010 a four year degree could cost in excess of \$100,000, in residence. In 2002, with only 50% of children under 19 having an average of \$8,600 put aside for them by their parents for their entire education, this represents a significant savings shortfall. According to Statistics Canada, parents who expected their child to receive grants for post-secondary education based on financial need saved significantly less.

The interesting part of this is that almost one-third of all children who are 19 had parents who expected them to receive such

assistance even though it is likely that many will not. With respect to saving for a child's education by others, grandparents and other relatives, few actually do so.

• (1750)

Under the existing program, notwithstanding the generosity of the 20% top up, in 2002 only 14% of children had savings plans established by persons other than parents.

Where does that leave us? It leaves us with a large question on student debt. These loads are rising. According to Statistics Canada, bachelor graduates in 2000, with student loans owed on average 76% more than their 1990 counterparts after adjusting for inflation. A similar increase in student debt over the same period was found for college graduates. I can go over the list of people. Only one out of five graduates, who owed money, was debt free two years after graduation. On average, of graduates still owing money, only 25% of their debt had been repaid.

We have talked a bit about the question of royal prerogative, and I will not debate that point. It was made abundantly clear by yourself, Mr. Speaker, that this matter was never signalled or flagged for that reason. What it does is it responds effectively to a number of foreign organizations that are concerned about the current status of education.

My province of Ontario has decided to lift the freeze on tuition fees. Students are going to find it very difficult, earning \$8 or \$9 an hour, to earn enough money to pay a \$7,000 or \$8,000 tuition base for five credits per year over four years, and that is if they are lucky enough to find a job for a three month period. They may have to live in residence and have other incidental costs. Notwithstanding the government's budget, which allocated a small credit for books, there will be a substantial shortfall.

Others have suggested that we need to do more, and that includes the Governor of the Bank of Canada. At Humber College on March 30, 2005, David Dodge suggested that we needed a system of incentives for continuous learning and upgrading of skills and an infrastructure that delivers the training. This has always been important, but as I mentioned earlier, it will be particularly important in the next two decades as the labour force growth in Canada slows.

We are on the precipice of a significant and dramatic change in our demographics, and this is clear. Right now about one in eight Canadians is aged 65 years or older and therefore drawing a pension. By 2026, in 20 short years or less, this ratio will be one in five.

We have a challenge ahead of ourselves and it must be met with a robust attempt by Parliament and, I hope, the government. I suspect it will not support this, if not for the fact that it is concerned about the short term loss of expenditure.

Private Members' Business

The Governor of the Bank of Canada went on to say, "The first step to improving skills is to build an excellent infrastructure for early childhood development, feeding into a school system that effectively teaches basic skills". He went on to point out that Canada's concerns must be founded on three global trends: technological change, globalization and demographic shifts.

Contrast this with what manufacturers are saying and with the heavy debts that students are currently incurring, it appears to me, and I think to most reasonable onlookers, that the existing situation is not tenable.

To ask our students to take on a burden and to ask government to cover the costs of those burdens in terms of loans, when an existing facility exists right now through the income tax system, seems to me, and I think to most reasonable people, an opportunity not for the government to go out and spend money, but to review the programs it has and channel much of that effort toward depriving itself of a bit of revenue in order to achieve a long term objective. If we look at where we are going with this legislation, it provides us with ample opportunity to ensure that Canadians have what many others around the world seem to get.

Long before manufacturers decide to hop on a plane and make their future investments in China, or in Brazil or in India, because of the quality and level of education, it is incumbent for our future programs, for the prosperity that we have in this nation, that we at least give students a fighting chance. In the absence of no existing programs in our country to address the fundamental needs of so many students with a large level of debt, this is an important step toward ensuring that Canada has a vital, vibrant skilled workforce. To do that, let us give Canadians and their families the tools to do it. Let us support the bill.

• (1755)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member's speech. He is very passionate about this issue. I can tell he cares a great deal about our students, and that is important.

The member seems to indicate in the absence of programs. The RESP program already exists and there are incentives in the it. In fact, we have seen this program grow by sevenfold since 1997, so people are using it.

In its budget, the government provided significantly more availability to student loans. It has provided tax credits, invested in infrastructure at universities, and we are moving toward assisting the provinces in other ways.

While I appreciate the motivations of the bill, I question whether it is useful in any way.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Peterborough for complimenting Liberal initiatives, but I suspect that if the hon. member looks at 1998, 27% take-up is insufficient. That means that 73% of students cannot or do not have the capacity to use the existing RESP system. It has been condemned by students. It has been condemned by the Fraser Institute. He should speak to students in his riding. Whether it is Sir Sandford Fleming College or Trent University, students, like my nephew or others who I know, say there are tremendous impediments in the possibility of going those

universities or colleges to get the kinds of degrees and education they need.

If the hon. member took a bit more time to look at the way in which the income programs work, it is not based merely on the income of parents or whomever. The needs test is much more prohibitive. As a result of that, students are not only winding up in debt, but one-third of the students right now cannot finish their education because they cannot afford to continue, notwithstanding available programs.

The Liberal Party may have built the base, but it is now time for Parliament to go one step further to meet the challenges of a globalized economy. Fisher Gauge in his riding is looking for skilled workers and cannot find them. People, with meagre salaries, cannot afford to pay tuition for four or five years. It should be obvious to the hon. member, and in particular to his riding, why the bill is necessary.

Ask the middle class people in his riding what they think about this, those who pay taxes, if they could direct a portion of that to give their young kids an opportunity to higher education.

• (1800)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. friend's remarks. In a previous life, I sold RESPs. I have never heard anybody condemn the RESP program. Would people like more to be done? Absolutely they would.

However, I would like to ask three maybe slightly technical questions. I may have missed it in his earlier remarks. Is the hon. member suggesting we retain the Canada education savings grant, as well as making contributions tax deductible? Are we talking about tax deductibility on a limit of \$2,000 that currently qualifies for the CESG or on \$4,000 that is allowed to be put in every year? Has the hon. member costed out what this would cost, in terms of revenue to the government?

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, I compliment the hon. member for Edmonton Centre on his questions.

The hon. member will know that the current RESP system provides an incentive of up to 20%. Our government proposed 30% and 35%, which passed just before the last federal election. This is to help students who have a much more difficult time of getting in the system. It provides plentiful opportunity for some students to take advantage of this.

However, I want to underline this for the hon. member. The contributions that people make and the incentive that the government gives only comes after they have paid their taxes. This in fact is a deduction from their taxes. Hard-pressed families, who are trying to make ends meet and who want the young ones to do very well, will have an opportunity to do so.

Private Members' Business

An average family making \$45,000, \$55,000 a year, paying \$10,000 income taxes, may be able to take a portion of that, up to \$18,000, although it is not likely they will do that, and over a period of time up to \$42,000. It is similar to the system under RRSPs. They can achieve that goal simply by continuing their job. If they pay taxes, they can direct some of those taxes as a tax credit to do something that is not just good for themselves and good for their families, but ostensibly for the well-being sustainability of our future economy.

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to bill, sponsored by the hon. member for Pickering—Scarborough East. I want to applaud his concern and his actions with respect to affordable education.

It is important and I agree with his comments about our need to ensure we continue to have a very strong knowledge based workforce and affordable education. I only wish the member had been as passionate back when his government sharply cut back funding for post-secondary education and started us down the path of high tuition and increasing student debt. Here we are today. We need to examine the provisions of this suggestion and whether this is the right way to go.

The bill proposes major changes to provide a more favourable tax treatment to registered education savings plans, RESPs. More specific, the bill would make RESP contributions deductible, in addition to very low taxation of the growth of the RESP on the other end. It would increase limits on contributions as well to the same level as those applying to RRSPs. We have looked at these measures very carefully. The goal is the same, to have affordable post-secondary education and the lowest possible student debt.

The examinations suggest that these measures are really not the best policy direction at this time, given the assistance that is already in place for this purpose. In fact, there really is no evidence, and the member did not bring forth any evidence, to suggest that existing measures in support of post-secondary education savings are inadequate. In fact, he pointed out that nearly one-third of Canadian parents already were accessing the RESP for the benefit of their children. I think most parents find that very adequate.

I want to explain how the current RESP regime works for Canadians watching this debate. It already provides considerable assistance to parents and grandparents to save for their children and grandchildren's post-secondary education.

Currently, up to \$4,000 can be contributed annually to RESPs for each beneficiary. I did not hear the member explain why ordinary families could, under any circumstances, contribute more than \$4,000 a year. That is a lot of money to almost every family in the country. The amount of \$4,000 can be contributed each year, to a lifetime maximum of \$42,000 per beneficiary.

These contributions are not deductible, but there is no tax payable when the contributions are withdrawn for the beneficiary's post-secondary education.

The amounts invested in RESPs grow tax free. As a result, the assets grow much faster than if they had been saved outside an RESP. When the investment is taken out, it is taxed in the student's

hands rather than the contributor's hands. This means that savings in an RESP results not only in deferral of tax on the investment income, but when the income is taxed, it will be taxed almost always at a very low rate, since full time students generally pay little or, more common, no income tax.

In addition to this generous tax treatment, the government provides the Canada Education Savings Grant, which is an additional contribution by the taxpayers of Canada to each and every RESP. It makes registered education savings plans even more attractive. Under this grant, the government provides 20% of the grant up to \$2,000 of contributions for a child under the age of 18. That grant is annual. There is a lifetime maximum grant of \$7,200.

• (1805)

In addition, to help promote more saving by low and middle income families, this grant on the first \$500 of savings is 40% for families with incomes below \$36,000 and 30% for families with incomes between \$36,000 and about \$73,000. This gives extra incentive to the broad base of Canadian families for savings in an RESP.

This grant grows tax free within the education savings plan. It is not lost. Even if a family for some reason cannot contribute in a particular year, there is flexibility so that families can catch up on missed contributions but still receive the yearly grant.

Taking into account the tax deferral, the Canada education savings grant and the fact that most students pay little or no tax, saving in a RESP often earns a higher rate of return than saving for retirement in an RRSP.

This tax assistance for education savings plans costs the Government of Canada about \$130 million a year in forgone revenue and about half of that amount to the provinces. In addition to the \$130 million in forgone revenue, over \$440 million is provided for the grants that I spoke about. That was in the year 2005. The federal government already provides over \$570 million per year in savings assistance for post-secondary education just through this program alone. There are many other programs as well. There is over half a billion dollars already in this plan.

This bill proposes to make contributions to RESPs tax deductible in the future. The contributions would be taxed in the hands of the contributor when they are withdrawn rather than be tax free to the contributor as is currently the case. The Canada education savings grant would still provide the grants on the first \$2,000 in contributions. The contribution limits would be raised to be the same as RRSPs. Under this bill contributions could be up to 18% of earned income or up to \$18,000 in 2006.

There are three main concerns with this proposal and I would like to go through each of them. First, there is really no evidence that the current plan is not working well for Canadians. If one reads the bill, one would be tempted to believe that the existing plan is not very generous and that Canadian parents are not saving enough for their children's post-secondary education. It is quite the contrary.

Private Members' Business

With the current education savings plan's limit, saving \$2,000 annually in a child's RESP means that almost \$75,000 could be available for that child's post-secondary education by age 18. About \$95,000 would be available if a parent contributed the current \$4,000 limit annually until the \$42,000 lifetime limit was reached. That is a considerable amount of money for each child's education.

To put things in perspective, this is more than the annual cost of a typical undergraduate program today, including tuition, books and living expenses for someone studying away from home. Right now the cost is about \$18,000 a year, or \$72,000 for a four year program. This means that existing RESP limits are adequate and do not need to be raised.

Are parents saving for their children's post-secondary education? I am happy to confirm to members of the House that contributions to RESPs have tripled since 1998. In 2005 the total contributions to RESPs were roughly \$2.4 billion. In fact, total assets held in RESPs have skyrocketed to seven times their value nine years ago. It is very clear that the RESP regime is working.

It is also a concern that parents and grandparents on pension or investment income would no longer be able to make a contribution.

• (1810)

In addition, there are the technical problems that I talked about. Someone who has only one child can save as much as someone with five children. Someone with more children cannot save any more under this plan.

We need to continue with the measures that governments have brought in and that we brought in in the last budget to assist students. There are problems with the member's proposal and I have outlined them. I would ask my colleagues in the House to consider very carefully following the government's lead in not supporting this bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise here today as deputy finance critic for the Bloc Québécois and as a young critic.

Generally speaking, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of reducing the tax burden on the middle class. It is therefore not against the idea that taxpayers who make contributions to an educational savings plan should receive a tax break.

In my short speech, I will identify a few flaws in the bill; however, we believe that the proposed measure is nonetheless very commendable. The flaws will have to be fixed, however, and clarifications about the bill must be provided before we can confirm our support later on in the legislative process.

It would also be wise to consult experts to get an idea of what such a measure will cost, as well as its social, economic and tax implications.

We see the advantages of this bill, which seeks to target a certain class of taxpayers that is often neglected and that already sacrifices more than its fair share, namely, the middle class. This will no doubt be popular with parents and grandparents who could benefit from lower taxes when they pay into an RESP for their children or grandchildren. I would be willing to bet that, if this bill were passed, more and more people would want to take advantage of this program

and that, in the case of people who already have RESPs, they would want to contribute even more generously.

That said, as I mentioned earlier, we have some reservations about this bill. The first is its potential cost—it could become a very expensive proposition. For example, the existing Canada education savings grant program cost the federal government \$318 million in 2000-01 when the grant applied to only 20% of the first \$2,000 in contributions to an RESP. That means that over \$1.5 billion was contributed that year, representing the minimum amount that taxpayers could have deducted from their taxes. Today, this amount is undoubtedly much greater taking into account inflation, the annual ceiling that has risen to \$4,000, and the fact that if the terms of the plan are more generous many more people will want to enrol.

Clarifications are required about the intent of the bill. It seems to be modeled after the registered retirement savings plan in that unused deductions under the RESP can be carried forward and applied to future income tax returns. However, an RRSP is not a contract like an RESP. The taxpayer is not bound to put aside money for an RRSP; there is only the opportunity to do so up to a fixed amount based on previous income and a fixed ceiling. However, with an RESP contract, contributions must be made, generally on a monthly basis.

Thus, it is difficult to understand how a taxpayer could have unused deductions unless he can claim the contributions in the fiscal year of his choice, which the current bill does not seem to allow.

It is also difficult to understand the purpose of and the reasoning behind the mathematical formula used to calculate unused deductions. This formula adds the RESP ceiling amount to unused deductions and excludes contributions to the RESP. It is difficult to understand the logic of this calculation, unless it is an attempt to go beyond the ceiling or to artificially increase it for the purpose of deducting contributions.

Under the present legislation, any excess contribution made into the plan in respect of a beneficiary is taxable, except in certain cases of transfers from one RESP to another. This could result in the imposition of a tax penalty on all subscribers as long as they do not withdraw that amount. Since the bill does not repeal the sections that impose these penalties in cases of excess amounts, there is a contradiction between the current legislation which imposes penalties on the one hand, and this bill which would permit tax deductibility on the other.

There is another thing we have a lot of difficulty understanding. That is the connection the bill makes in clause 4, which permits the tax deduction, between the excess amount of the contributions an individual has made over a fiscal year or in the first 60 days of the following year, and the portion of his contribution that he deducted from his income tax for a preceding taxation year.

• (1815)

This bill seems to assume that the portion in question is an excess amount, which might not be the case.

Private Members' Business

With regard to the definitions in this bill, it says that a taxpayer may deduct the lesser of the following amounts: the amount, if any, of the contributions made in 2007 and in the first 60 days of 2008, or the deduction limit.

Next, it defines the excess amount as the lesser of the following amounts: the sum of the payments exceeding the deduction limit, or the excess amount accumulated in preceding years.

On the one hand, the excess amount is defined as the excess contributions for the current year plus 60 days of the following year. On the other, it is defined as the excess of the amounts accumulated in preceding years. I grant that this is rather technical, but I am not mistaken: there seems to be a contradiction here in the bill, which will certainly require some work in committee.

In paragraph 146.1(1), the bill also repeals the definition, in monetary terms, of the annual limit of the registered education savings plan, but does not replace it with another limit. It does not say that the minister will be able to set this limit, which leads us to believe that the present limit will apply. In that case, there is no explanation of why the bill proposes to repeal the paragraph that currently sets the limit.

One may also question the equality of opportunity available under this bill to families with higher and lower levels of income. Because of the weight of that 18%, we will find ourselves in a situation where farmers with low incomes will not be able to benefit from the deduction limit, while those with a higher income will. Finally, 18% seems to us an arbitrary percentage under the circumstances. It would be interesting to see in committee where this percentage comes from.

In socio-economic terms, and particularly for Quebec which has opted to make higher learning accessible by keeping tuition fees below the Canadian average, the enthusiasm of Quebec households for the RESP may be not as great as it is elsewhere. It will certainly be necessary to take account of the societal choices that Quebecers have made, as they are already paying a good deal for their children's education, more through income tax than through personal contributions.

The Bloc has a number of improvements to propose to this bill. It will be necessary to clarify the more technical aspects I referred to earlier. We also propose a non-refundable tax credit instead of a tax deduction. That would surely be less generous and hence less expensive for the federal government than the deduction now being proposed, the costs of which are unknown.

The bill could also establish an income cap beyond which a taxpayer might not benefit from the measure. That cap could fluctuate according to the number of beneficiaries, that is, children, in a family within the same RESP.

Finally, since married and common-law couples are almost four times more likely to contribute to an RESP than single parents, a special provision could be made for those couples.

To conclude, in all cases, even though the principle of the bill is interesting, it deserves to be clarified and improved. The Bloc Québécois will be working in that direction.

● (1820)

[English]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak to this bill. I think all members in the House certainly concur that we must make access easier to post-secondary education and skills training for our young people and that government has an important role to play.

Recently, an OECD study of countries stated that one of the most effective things that governments could do to facilitate this access was to concentrate first of all on families of low income revenues. This would begin to help address a very serious skill shortage in many countries including Canada.

Recently, in British Columbia a survey done throughout the province has shown that for the first time the private sector has indicated that skill shortage takes precedence over tax cuts by government as an action that needs to be taken. This is something that we should all consider in these questions.

However, I have concerns and questions about the bill. Some of them were raised earlier by members opposite about the effectiveness of the bill. There were also some technical questions and the cost that it would represent.

As I said, we must facilitate access for students in under-represented groups, students with disabilities, aboriginal students, students of low income families and from rural areas. We know that they are not accessing post-secondary education and training as easily as others.

We also know that the RESP has been effective in attracting families who earn over \$80,000. However, as for the other underrepresented groups a recent study has said that the RESPs, including the Canada education savings grants, while providing enhanced incentives to lower income families to increase their contributions to RESPs, they do not appear to solve the more fundamental problem of insufficient family income which prevents some families from contributing to RESPs and taking advantage of the CESG program.

Approximately six in ten future saver and non-saver parents in the 2002 survey gave no disposable income or insufficient money as a reason for not yet or never saving.

Therefore, this is a very serious problem in considering this particular bill. It seems like a little bit of tinkering rather than the major overhaul of the learner assistance program that we would need to consider.

The Conservatives, in their recent budget as a solution to the problem of increasing student debt, have offered to raise the ceiling that students can borrow. That is their solution. I believe they even offered \$80 for a book.

The Liberals, while they were in government, cut transfers to education and that sent tuition fees spiralling upward and with that student debt.

Private Members' Business

The Liberal post-secondary education critic yesterday called on the government to invest in students and not tinker with the tax system. I am wondering if this bill is a little bit of tinkering. The bill by the member from the same caucus seems to do just that instead of ensuring genuine investment in lower tuition fees, lower debt, and needs-based grants for students.

Liberals talked about investing in students when they were in opposition and that was great to hear. Yesterday I heard the post-secondary education critic claim credit for a \$1.5 billion investment in lower tuitions from Bill C-48 which I think we are all clear was the NDP money that was conceded after negotiations with the Liberal government. This was basically money that the Liberals were forced to put into post-secondary education after years of cutbacks.

• (1825)

In considering this bill, I looked at what the various stakeholders were saying about the existing system of loans and various types of assistance for students.

La Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec said that the federal government must completely review its national registered education savings plan and Canada education savings grant which amounted to \$125 million and almost \$500 million respectively. It felt that instead of eliminating financial barriers, the system has become so complex and convoluted that it is very difficult for students to access it.

Similarly, the Canadian Federation of Students said:

We therefore recommend that the federal government transfer the money now spent on the RESP program and other tax credits to the low-income grant. We estimate this transfer alone, a revenue-neutral transfer, would reduce student debt by 41%.

These are just some of the comments from stakeholders who are themselves paying for tuition. They are advising us on solutions that they feel would begin to address the problems they are facing.

The NDP has never opposed the RESP. We think it is part of a solution, but as students associations and federations have indicated, the system requires a major overhaul, not just tinkering. We feel there is a need for a comprehensive learner assistance program that would create a clearer, simple path for students, one that would be more flexible and more transparent.

In the last election we clearly indicated to everybody that we believed there was a need for the re-establishment of a single transparent transfer to provinces to re-establish adequate levels of funding for post-secondary education and training. The previous Liberal government failed to do that. We are still waiting to see how the present government will respond to this situation.

We are still considering many of the concerns that I have raised about this bill. We will see how it evolves through the House.

• (1830)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the bill that has been wisely put forward by my colleague from Pickering—Scarborough East.

The old issue of post-secondary education is one that has been very important to me before I came to this place, but particularly since I have come to this place.

I had the privilege last year to be the chair of the government caucus on post-secondary education which afforded me the opportunity to travel the country to talk to students from CFS; CASA; and other students; university presidents; CAUT, the professors who teach our students; alumni; and a lot of different people involved in university.

For me there is no more compelling or important issue in Canada than the issue of post-secondary education. How do we maximize the human potential of Canadians?

For a long time, Canada has done very well in the world for reasons that are more by accident than design. We live in a place that does not have world wars occurring in it. We have natural resources that are great. We have been very fortunate, but the nature of the world is changing. It has become so globally competitive with the rise of China, India and Brazil, and the resurgence in Russia. Other nations are investing in post-education and we must ensure we do the same.

To set the stage, there are several components to post-secondary education. One of them is the whole issue of how we are preparing for a new world. Not only have we, as a nation, been successful financially, but in the last number of years we have invested massively in post-secondary education, research, innovation, technology transfer, and things like that. Members do not have to take my word for it. The blue Conservative budget book says:

Since the deficit was eliminated, the federal government has increased its support for post-secondary education research, with nearly \$11 billion in incremental funding. These investments have assisted Canadian universities in strengthening their research capacity and building a global reputation for excellence, which has helped reverse the "brain drain" and attract leading researchers to Canada.

Canada now ranks first in the G-7, and second in the OECD (behind only Sweden) in terms of research and development—

I am sure everybody will join me in a round of applause for former Prime Minister Chrétien and finance minister Manley and particularly the member for LaSalle—Émard who was a leader in this, as well as the finance minister last year, the member for Wascana.

We have done well in that area, but it became clear to me, as an individual and a member of the Liberal caucus on post-secondary education, that the ground has shifted toward the whole issue of access for students. I am not just talking about universities. I am talking about community colleges. I am talking about skills upgrading and a whole host of other issues.

This is important to understand. I have heard, particularly from colleagues in the NDP including my friend from Burnaby—Douglas, who I respect a great deal, that we did not do anything for students. Again, I refer to the Conservatives, who are not particular friends of ours, who indicate in these books that in 1995-96 approximately \$2 billion in direct support measures for post-secondary education were provided. By 2004-05 this direct support had grown to approximately \$5 billion. It says:

Federal direct support to post-secondary education students totals about \$3.5 billion annually, including Canada Student Loans to some 330,000 students; non-repayable student financial assistance through the Canada Study Grants and Canada Access Grants; and measures to help students and families save for future education—

The fact remains that access is still an issue. My hon. colleague from the New Democratic Party mentioned that. She is very sincere about that need.

In fact, it is not just the tax system. I believe, as she does and as members of our party and many other members believe, that we must do more in direct assistance to students. We did that last year. She mentioned Bill C-48 as well.

She should take note that I asked the Minister of Finance a month ago, when he appeared before the finance committee, where is the Bill C-48 money of \$1.5 billion?. The Minister of Finance said he thought it was \$1 billion. I said it was \$1.5 billion. It was checked and it is only \$1 billion, and it is not going to access. It is going to infrastructure.

We need infrastructure. We need research. We need to keep the pressure on research and we need infrastructure, but we need direct support for students. The Minister of Finance indicated that infrastructure is access. I would say infrastructure is not access. Infrastructure is important, but access is important for the very reasons that the member mentioned: low income families, aboriginal Canadians, and persons with disabilities.

• (1835)

Last fall we introduced our fall economic update in the House which contained the following measures: \$2.2 billion over five years to improve student financial assistance for low and middle income Canadians; \$550 million to expand the Canada access grants for four years to the lowest income families; \$3.5 billion over this year and the next five years to increase workplace training; \$1 billion for the innovation fund; \$265 million for five years to assist Canadians with disabilities to participate in the workforce; and \$1.3 billion over five years to improve settlement and integration services.

We made that commitment to the lowest income Canadians, the Canadians most marginalized, those people whose skills we are not taking advantage of.

Since I have been elected I have had students with Down's Syndrome and cerebral palsy come to see me. Some of them have been sitting at home for two years after finishing high school with a real sense of momentum. They are falling off a cliff in terms of what is available to them.

The measures in our economic update would have helped those people and it would have helped the lowest income Canadians to go to community college or university and get a post-secondary education. Our economic update could have been passed in this House. If the NDP had been sincere in supporting it, we could have given students a break, aboriginal Canadians a break and the environment a break. We could have given all Canadians a Christmas break if we would have had our election six weeks later. I do not like to keep bringing this up, but those are the facts. We could do better.

Private Members' Business

I agree that tinkering with the tax system is not the only solution. When tuition at Acadie is around \$8,000 and at Dalhousie \$6,000 for a first year arts and science degree, giving a student \$80 for books is irrelevant. It does not help those who need help the most.

This is a way of using the tax system to make a substantial improvement in access for students. We have all had students come into our office who tell us that they cannot get any student assistance even though their family is not rich. They need some kind of support. Making RESPs tax deductible would be a significant investment in the future of Canada.

I have RESPs for my children, and I think they are a great way to go, but a lot of Canadians cannot afford to invest in RESPs. If we make them tax deductible, if we follow the plan from the member for Pickering—Scarborough East, we will get a lot farther than we otherwise would.

Anything we do for students is good but what we have seen from the government since the election has been nothing for students except some tax changes that affect scholarships and books. Those changes are not significant but this bill is.

In Maritime Canada, average student debt skyrocketed 33% in five years from 1999 to 2004. In five years it went up by one-third. The average student debt of somebody coming out of a Maritime university is now \$28,000. The study found that 73% of all students had to borrow to finance their degrees. This bill would help with that.

Not only is skyrocketing student debt leaving our students after they graduate from university with a mortgage but no house, it is affecting their decision-making. I met with a medical student from around the Amherst area in Nova Scotia who wants to go back and become a family doctor in her community. She had that as her goal ever since she was a little girl. She is now some years into a medical degree with a student debt of \$150,000. She has decided that she has to specialize in order to pay off her loans. If we do not make significant, serious investments in post-secondary education, people will make decisions that are not good for them, not good for their community and, I would suggest, not good for the country.

I think we have all spoken to students. As the chair of our caucus I have had the chance to travel the country. I have discussed this with the Canadian Federation of Students, with CASA and with universities. What I hear is that we have done a lot in research. We have sustained the universities in the last five to six years in the investments that I talked about. It is a good thing for universities. Infrastructure is a good thing for universities. The government put \$1 billion into the budget for infrastructure, which matches what we had put in our economic update. The government's investments in research are one-tenth of what we put in the economic update. That is not enough. There is absolutely nothing for student access or to help a broad range of students and their families prepare for post-secondary education.

Private Members' Business

● (1840)

If the country wants to compete and to continue to do as well as we have, fortunately, through good government in the last decade or so, we need to invest in our students, those who need help the most and those who cannot afford to go university because of high tuitions. We can do it. The bill is part of that and I commend my colleague. There is more that the government should do but this is what we can do to have a positive impact so we can take advantage of the human capital that exists in Canada and continue Canada's success in the world.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special orders or usual practices of the House, on Thursday, June 22, statements by ministers will be taken up, pursuant to

Standing Order 33, at 3:15 p.m.; when statements by ministers are complete the House will stand adjourned until Monday, September 18, provided that, for the purposes of Standing Order 28, it shall be deemed to have sat on Friday, June 23.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the minister have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy 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)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, in that propitious 15 minute spot between 3 p.m and 3:15 p.m., do I take it from the House leader of the government that we would be able to take up in that small window the usual Thursday question and he would be in a position to outline for us the government's agenda for Monday, September 18?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, I will make a real good stab at it, if the hon. member likes and we will deal with that.

[For continuation of proceedings, see part B]

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 141 • NUMBER 045 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

**Wednesday, June 21, 2006
(Part B)**

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, June 21, 2006

[Continuation of proceedings from part A]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability, be read the third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: I think the member for Repentigny still has seven minutes left.

The hon. member for Repentigny.

• (1845)

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before that brief interruption, I was talking about the Bloc Québécois' victories with respect to Bill C-2. For the edification and pleasure of all members of the House, I will continue to list the Bloc's victories following the referral of Bill C-2 to committee.

Earlier, I highlighted the work of my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord, but I left out my colleague from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert. Her presence reminded me. I would like to thank my colleague for her great contribution to making this bill even better. I would like to thank her for her ideas and her support during discussions on Bill C-2.

I mentioned some of the Bloc's victories before being interrupted to make way for private members' bills. I would like to list some more. We did not want to create a tattletale culture, so we succeeded in eliminating rewards for whistle-blowers.

An hon. member: That is good.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: The Conservatives wanted to give every whistleblower a little \$1,000 treat. It reminded me of when I was young, when I used to read Lucky Luke. There were head shots, and on them it said "Wanted". There were professional bounty hunters who were really trying to find the bad guys, to get themselves a nice chunk of change.

That is like telling whistleblowers that they can cash in on their conscience and their honesty. Very fortunately, all parties in this House recognized that this idea of the Conservative government's, this campaign promise, was a poor signal to be sending public

servants and everyone who is protected by the whistleblowing act. So that part was eliminated.

We got a provision that the ethics commissioner, rather than a minister, would have the power to exempt political staff from the law.

Originally, the bill allowed a minister to decide whether such-and-such a person could be exempted from the ethics act. Now it is the commissioner, as an independent person, who will have that role.

There is one victory that may seem futile to some, but that is very important. That is the original title of the bill. That title was: "Loi fédérale sur l'imputabilité". With the assistance of some colleagues in this House, the goodwill of others and the irrefutable proof presented in committee, we succeeded in changing the title of the bill so that it would mean what it was supposed to mean in French: "Loi fédérale sur la responsabilité". This is another victory by the Bloc.

We also succeeded in having a provision incorporated in Bill C-2 that the conflict of interest act will be reviewed every five years. To us, this is important. It has been said before. Everyone in this House recognizes that there are no perfect laws, particularly an act like this one, which will be the first one to be brought into force. We want to be able to rectify this act after five years and ensure that any possible mistakes and errors that remained despite the serious consideration we tried to give it can be rectified.

These are a number of victories in which the Bloc Québécois can take pride after considering and passing Bill C-2.

However, one important part of a promise made by the Conservatives was not kept in Bill C-2, and that is the one that involves reforming the Access to Information Act.

Everything that was said in the same chapter of the "Stand up for Canada" platform, about lobbyists and the commissioner, can be found in Bill C-2, and we recognize that. But what we do not find is the part about reforming the Access to Information Act. The passage that I quote is found at page 13 of "Stand up for Canada".

A Conservative government:

will implement the Information Commissioner's recommendations for reform of the Access to Information Act.

That seems clear to me. When it came time to talk about the Access to Information Act during consideration of Bill C-2, oddly, there was less urgency, less enthusiasm.

Government Orders

When my colleague from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert proposed the idea of reforming the Access to Information Act in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, the urgency described in the Conservative platform had strangely and suddenly evaporated into thin air.

When it came to supporting a motion by my colleague from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert to review the Access to Information Act with the same speed, there was less urgency.

● (1850)

We were given arguments for passing Bill C-2 quickly, that enough had been said about it, that there had been enough studies on the matter and that Canadians wanted something concrete. It is odd, because these arguments all apply to the Access to Information Act. There have been enough studies.

In committee, there was even a unanimous vote to tell the Liberals—who were in power at the time—that we did not want any more studies. The Conservatives shared that opinion: they truly wanted to amend the Access to Information Act immediately. Now that they are in power, they are budging a little on C-2—it is an honourable gesture, but on the Access to Information Act they are not willing to make any concessions.

This seems underhanded to us. During the sponsorship scandal, some documents could not be obtained under the Access to Information Act. If a similar situation comes up, and the Access to Information Act is not improved, we will probably end up with the same problem.

In closing, passing Bill C-2 is a step in the right direction. However, it falls short when it comes to the Access to Information Act. We hope that in the fall, the relevant committee will have the same good will to consider reforming the Access to Information Act.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today toward the end of the debate on the accountability bill.

It is very important to point out that this is a key stage in a difficult and troubled period in the history of Canadian governments. The behaviour of the previous Liberal government deserved to be punished and it was in the last election. We need a bill that helps ultimately to correct the situation as much as possible. As my colleague from Repentigny said, it is also very important to realize that no rule or law will ever replace individual accountability and governmental accountability.

As the Auditor General remarked in this respect, we will have to remain on guard to ensure that the rules that are adopted are actually followed. If they are not, we will have a deep-seated problem that will persist and will not be resolved by even the most draconian of rules.

I want to thank my colleague from Repentigny for all the work he did on the fashioning of this bill. The initial bill that was introduced so hurriedly after the election had many faults and things that needed to be corrected. My colleague has already spoken about them. Some of these faults will be corrected so that we end up with an acceptable bill.

Nevertheless, I would like to ask my colleague a question about one of the aspects he mentioned in the first part of his speech. My question has to do with the appointment of returning officers after a competition. We know that we have been living in the Middle Ages in this regard, with a system that failed to meet our needs because the returning officers were appointed by the government. Some did their job very properly, but others gave themselves more leeway and a bit of partisanship crept in. Regardless of the reality, justice was not seen to be done. Thanks to the new process, justice should now appear to be done.

I would like my colleague to tell me whether he thinks that this part of the bill can come into force quickly enough that the next election can be held under the new rules, the returning officer can hold suitable competitions, and people can be finally appointed, and quite soon, to prepare for the next election. It will be sad during the next election process—whether in one, two or three years—if the rules we decided to follow have not yet been implemented. I would like to ask my colleague whether he thinks that this can be done.

I believe that, after this vote, the Senate will have to study the question. Let us hope that this can be done before the next election.

I would like my hon. colleague to tell us what he thinks in this regard. I thank him once again for the fine work he did on improving this bill so that it now goes a long way toward meeting the concerns that arose as a result of all the scandals, especially those involving the former government.

● (1855)

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: The answer, Mr. Speaker, is yes.

More seriously, I thank my colleagues from Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Actually, I did not talk much about the returning officers in my speech because I talked about the Bloc's victories and we had many. Still I should have mentioned that we in the Bloc submitted to the appropriate committee an amendment to the Elections Act on the appointment of returning officers. It was to have returning officers appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer.

At the time, we told the Liberals we were sure that some Liberals would be competent enough to stay if returning officers were appointed according to their competence rather than their allegiance. So we did not understand why they so stubbornly refused. For us, competence should take precedence over political allegiance. I think this is the message that the Conservatives understood.

As for the prompt enforcement of this amendment in an upcoming election, I will reassure my colleague. The Chief Electoral Officer has been awaiting this possibility for so long that he has put in place all the structures with a view to proceeding very quickly—he has confirmed this to us—with the appointment of returning officers by means of competitions. Probably many returning officers in place today will be able to continue their work. I cannot guess the percentages, but there will surely be a good number.

Government Orders

There are some competent people among them who did a good job in the last election or in earlier ones. They will be able to apply for the position and take part in the competition, and they will be able to keep their positions by showing their competence. As for the incompetents appointed only because they had been members of a party, not ours, for a long time, they will keep themselves busy with a pastime other than working in the service of our democracy.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): First, Mr. Speaker, I must acknowledge the energetic and colossal work that my colleague from Repentigny has done in committee, the rigour he has shown in all of his work, and the fine intelligence he has invested in it. For that he must most certainly be thanked.

I must also thank our colleague from Rivière-du-Nord, who has done her work under extremely difficult conditions, given that there was a lot of pressure to make the process go fast, indeed too fast. Having participated in this committee, I can confirm that the relentless pace did not leave time to receive the witnesses with the seriousness that they deserved.

They provided us with some very thorough documents and made presentations to us that were extremely refined and intelligent, and we did not have time to ask them all of the questions we should have, questions that would have enabled us to formulate a good bill.

The proof that this bill was deserving of improvement is that a lot of amendments were made, to the point that I wonder if we did not set some records.

Most fortunately, some of those amendments represented an improvement, such as the abolition of the \$1,000 reward for whistleblowers. Otherwise we would have transformed whistleblowers into informers, and that was unacceptable.

Without question, the amendment with which I am most pleased is the one recommending the five-year review. For indeed, we performed this work so quickly and under such difficult conditions that the bill is going to be imperfect. We will truly need to have it reviewed in a few years. With use, all of its inconsistencies will become clear.

I would therefore like to ask my colleague from Repentigny whether he thinks that this committee worked too fast or at the proper pace.

I know that the committee sometimes sat for 45 hours a week, which is totally abnormal. In any case, I had never seen such a thing in nine years of work here on Parliament Hill.

Can my colleague confirm that the work was carried out in a serious manner? Is that work going to produce a proper bill? Furthermore, will it not be desirable to make certain amendments in a few months?

•(1900)

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question, which will perhaps give me an opportunity to correct some perceptions that are very soon going to be expressed in this House. When it came time to work on Bill C-2, every political party exhibited the best will in the world and wanted to make a positive contribution.

Strangely, and this is the first time in 13 years that I have seen a committee like that one, all parties agreed with Bill C-2 in principle, and it was the most litigious committee I have ever had to work on. Why? Because from the outset, the sword of Damocles was hung over our heads, when we were told that we had to pass this bill post haste. We could have passed Bill C-11 to create a safety net for whistleblowers and taken the time we needed. Taking the time we need does not mean using stalling tactics.

When we began consideration of the bill, the government got into bed with another political party to ensure that rather than sitting for normal committee times, or even double time, which we wanted to do at the outset, the committee would have to increase its time significantly. The situation was such that we could not get any research documents, or documents prepared by the library, to enable us to do our job conscientiously. Then we were told that if we did not finish by June 21, we were going to sit after that; if we did not finish after that, we were going to sit through the night. It was threat after threat, because, it seems, they had heard enough about it. I am eager to see how speedily they will be wanting to consider the access to information bill.

Nonetheless, working under extremely difficult circumstances, we tried to do it carefully and seriously. Today, as a result, we have a bill that is acceptable, if imperfect. Very fortunately, we were able to pass an amendment about reviewing the act after five years. If there are parts that have been forgotten or that might not be consistent with the objectives of the act, because of the speed with which we had to consider this bill, we will be able to rectify them then.

The working conditions and the circumstances of that consideration, however, were not normal. We should have had the time to consider this bill conscientiously.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have a final opportunity to address Bill C-2, the federal accountability act, on behalf of the NDP caucus.

First, I would ask for unanimous consent to split my time with the member for Ottawa Centre.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the member to split his time with the member for Ottawa Centre?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share some views from the New Democratic Party. At the outset, our party is proud to support Bill C-2 and I am proud to have played an active role in getting the bill to this point of time in the first session of the 39th Parliament.

So much that is embodied in the bill finds its origins and can be found in the very ethics package that the NDP was proudly promoting at the fall of the 38th Parliament. This package was put together by our former leader, the former member from Ottawa Centre, Ed Broadbent.

Government Orders

The NDP found it very easy to relate to Bill C-2 and support the many initiatives. Parts of the bill read almost verbatim of the NDP election campaign platform on accountability and transparency measures. It is only natural that our party would support the bill. We are proud that we were able to in our view improve the bill as well.

Our party was eager to support speedy passage of the bill. The NDP was very concerned that, if the bill lost momentum and dragged on into the fall or possibly even into next spring, its likelihood for success would diminish as the time went by. That is the very nature of this place, that competing interests prevail sometimes.

The committee improved Bill C-2 in very significant ways. The committee achieved roughly 20 amendments to the bill, some of them were huge. I can speak proudly that the public appointments commission, which will exist as a result of Bill C-2, will put an end to patronage as we know it in Ottawa today, the unbridled patronage that used to dominate and so offended Canadians. That alone would have been justification for the NDP's support for the bill. I am happy to say it is only one element.

I will limit my remarks to a few points. I need to clear up some misconceptions that have arisen and some that have been promoted by other parties.

First, I find it humorous that I am being accused of being too close to the Conservative Party in this matter. No one has a monopoly on good ideas. When good ideas arise, people gravitate to them. I spent much of my career being red-baited as being too left wing in the labour movement. They called me a commie. Now I am being blue-baited. They are accusing me of being a Tory. I cannot seem to win in this regard.

I am a fiercely proud social democrat. I am a trade unionist and I am an NDP member of Parliament. I will compare my left wing credentials with anyone who may wish to challenge them. Another thing, I am a fiercely proud Canadian nationalist. Unabashedly, and I say this with great pride, I believe that what we have done today with Bill C-2 is the greatest possible thing we could do to advance the cause of national unity in this 39th Parliament.

The weakest link that Canadian federalism has is to be corrupt, not trustworthy, of maladministration. All those things play into the hands of the enemy of Canadian federalism. If we want to be champions of Canadian federalism, we have to put forward a face of federalism of which we can be proud. That means erasing the stain that was put on the good face of Canada by the last administration. I believe, in my heart, that we are doing something right for Canada when we advance transparency and accountability.

The other misinformation I have to correct is this. The Liberal Party has put out a press release saying that I personally voted down its anti-floor crossing amendment. This is an absolute fabrication and untruth. I want to state it very clearly here today. What happened was the Liberal anti-floor crossing amendment was ruled out of order. The Liberals did not vote for their own floor-crossing amendment because it was ruled out of order.

If we could possibly clarify that, then the Liberals may stop saying this around the country. If the Liberals will stop telling lies about me, I will stop telling the truth about them.

In terms of election financing, the Liberals and the Bloc voted down a corrective measure put forward by the NDP to stop the atrocity of shaking down school children for their lunch money and trying to circumvent the election financing laws by laundering money through children's bank accounts. We had a perfectly viable proposal at the committee, which would have ended this practice forever. The Liberals and the Bloc voted that down. I invite anybody on either side of the House to challenge that.

● (1905)

The NDP thought it brought forward meaningful amendments in election financing. There are changes in Bill C-2 that we support. Lowering the annual donation limits to a reasonable amount, will take big money out of politics. There should be no corporate donations. There should be no union donations. There should only be donations from individuals. With a limit of \$1,000, we believe no one will be able to buy an election any more. That in itself is something of which I am proud. That stand-alone item would have had me voting in favour of Bill C-2.

There are six or seven individual items in Bill C-2 that by themselves would have earned my support and vote. It seems only natural to me that we would enthusiastically support the whole package.

Some of the other opposition parties are sensitive, and I do not blame them. Every page of Bill C-2 reads like a condemnation of the past practices of the Liberal Party of Canada for the past 13 years. I do not blame them for being sensitive about that.

It is true that the first session of the 39th Parliament had to be dedicated to ensuring that no political party could exploit and abuse the public trust the way the last administration did. It was necessary work. It was like pulling a tooth. It is good we are getting it out of the way fast, like ripping off a band-aid. We want to do this quickly and get it over with so we can move on with the other important work and challenges facing our country.

One of the other things I am very proud we managed to get done was on the lobbyist registration. It has always bothered people that peddling influence by insiders in Ottawa has corrupted and jeopardized democracy in that certain people have undue influence because of who they know. That will not be allowed any more.

We have seen what lobbying has done to the United States. It has virtually ground Capitol Hill to a halt in many ways. Nothing happens without satisfying the hordes of lobbyists. We are not going to allow that to happen here. If we are on that slippery slope, I believe we have taken important measures to clean that up, to preclude the influence peddlers having undue influence in Ottawa. I think we can celebrate that move on behalf of Canadians.

Government Orders

I know I do not have much time and I will not dwell on this for long, but I read an interesting speech recently. A few years ago there were only 20 federal countries in the world. Federalism is the most difficult form of government to hold together. People do not realize how rare and difficult it is. At that time, 3 of those 20 federalist states were blowing themselves to pieces through corruption, maladministration and internal strife. The Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Canada were the three countries at risk, as mentioned in the international journal I read.

We know what happened to the Soviet Union. We know what happened to Yugoslavia. To hold this precious effort, this initiative we call Canada together, we need to operate at the highest possible ethical standards in order to earn and keep the confidence of all the disparate parts of this federation. The string that holds all these pearls together into one wonderful entity called Canada is always very vulnerable. It is very fragile and needs to be nurtured.

The enemies of transparency and accountability are the enemies of the Canadian union, in my view. It raises this whole issue to a much higher plane. We are doing something noble as we pass Bill C-2 and I am proud to be associated with it.

• (1910)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I found it interesting to listen to my colleague who, like me, sat on the legislative committee responsible for Bill C-2.

I have two comments and one question for him. He said that the Liberal members and the two Bloc members on the committee voted against the NDP amendment to establish a minimum age for making legal monetary donations to political parties. The NDP amendment stipulated that the legal limit of \$1,000 for a donation made by a child would apply to any child, even a newborn, up to the age of 14. However, Elections Canada would consider the donation to have been made by the parent, which would then limit the amount a parent could donate. After the child turned 14, the donation would be considered to have been made by the child. The amendment would have changed nothing. It would still have allowed children to make donations legally.

A Liberal amendment, however—mine in fact—would have set the minimum age for making donations at 18. I was disappointed that my colleague from Winnipeg Centre and government members voted against this amendment.

I would like to discuss another issue. I am very interested in what the member for Winnipeg Centre has to say about this. He proposed an amendment—which the Liberals supported—to assign criteria, a mandate and powers to the Public Appointments Commission. The Liberals thought this an excellent amendment. The government's Bill C-2 included neither mandate nor powers. It simply said that the governor in council could direct the Public Appointments Commission to appoint a commissioner.

The committee—Liberal, Conservative, Bloc and NDP members alike—supported this motion. What does the member for Winnipeg Centre think of the Prime Minister's statement that despite the adoption of this motion, he will not appoint anyone to this position?

• (1915)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I will use what little time I have to explain the other election financing piece the Liberals and the Bloc voted against. It dealt with these huge Liberal leadership loans, which are more like corporate donations. If they are not paid back in 18 months, they are treated as donations. A \$100,000 loan becomes a \$100,000 donation, which is illegal. In fact, if it is not repayable, they can forgive it.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: They continue to allow it.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I can hardly hear myself think with the catcalling from my colleague. She is being so rude in not giving me the floor. I used a lot of restraint to not shriek at her, such was my outrage. Now she will not be quiet.

The other misinformation is this. The Liberals actually defended the status quo of election financing currently when they defeated the attempt we made if minors wanted to participate in the political process. If my 14 year old wanted to donate \$50 to my election campaign, that would be fine, but that amount would be deducted from the donation limit of the parent or guardian. This would not preclude participation of youth, because we all have a youth wing in our political party. The Liberal amendment was that no one under 18 years old could make any donations. I do not think that was wise, so I did not support it.

What I do ask the Liberal Party to do is stop this campaign of misinformation about how I voted regarding its floor-crossing amendment. No one voted for its floor-crossing amendment. No one was allowed to vote for it. If my floor-crossing amendment was ruled out of order and the Liberals' was allowed to stand, I would have voted for theirs because it would have been the only one on which we would have been allowed to vote.

I hope that helps to set the record straight. I hope they can perhaps issue a second press release to correct the deliberate misinformation of the last one.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all members of the committee for working on this bill and providing Canadians with a bill which we can all be proud of. It is a large bill. There might be some kinks in the bill to work out as we move along, but because of the amendments that were put forward, the witnesses who came forward, and the debate that we had at committee, we have a bill that we can be proud of.

Certainly some people have concerns with some things in the bill. That is fair with a bill this size. There are things in the bill that we will want to keep an eye on and make sure that, as was pointed out by other members, there is not unintended consequence.

I want to start my remarks with a quote:

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

Government Orders

That was said before the last election by my predecessor, Mr. Broadbent. It deserves applause because it was insightful. He was distinguishing between those who understand when they have done wrong and do something about it and those who do not. He was identifying the concerns about ethics and accountability. What did he do? He proposed something. That is what we did on the bill in committee and it is what we are doing as we speak right now. We are proposing a better way. Mr. Broadbent proposed an ethics package which dealt with many of the concerns we all had at the time.

The first concern he had was about floor crossing as was just mentioned. He believed, as I believe and many Canadians believe, that if a member crosses the floor and is vaulted into cabinet, perhaps the member should go to the Canadian people and see what they think about it. It is a pretty democratic idea. We hope that will come to fruition one day. In fact the good people of Manitoba will have that type of law in place soon. They will not have to deal with floor crossing.

The second part of Mr. Broadbent's ethics package was to have fixed election dates. I am pleased that we will have fixed election dates soon. That was a smart thing for the government to introduce.

The third thing he put forward was transparent leadership contests. This is still a concern. In committee we said that we wanted to make sure that these outlandish, ridiculous, opulent, unaccountable leadership contests did not take place. In the last Liberal leadership contest, the former prime minister who was running for leader at the time had \$12 million in the kitty. That is a little over the top. The \$2.7 million that was spent for the present Prime Minister on his leadership may be a little more than is necessary.

Mr. Broadbent was proposing to have transparent leadership contests. The money trail would be followed. We would see from where it was coming. There would be some oversight. It would be regulated. We do not want to see influence being pedalled because the leader of one political party one day might become our prime minister the next. The process deserves accountability. It deserves a window of access to information.

The fourth thing that Mr. Broadbent proposed in the ethics package was electoral reform. We are still fighting for that and will continue to do so. We proposed a model which was very sensible and reasonable. The Law Reform Commission studied it and believes it to be a sensible model. We will carry on with that.

The fifth proposal was to end the unregulated lobbying that was going on because it was way out of hand. We saw what was happening. I will give an example, and we still have not heard the final details. It was the sale of Petro-Canada. It was interesting to follow the money on that one. It was the biggest sell-off of a Canadian asset. The New Democratic Party believes Petro-Canada should have been transformed into a crown corporation to deal with renewable energy, but alas, it was sold off. If we follow the money to see who was involved in selling it off, it is a very interesting story of influence and lobbying.

● (1920)

Look at what happened on the satellite radio file. Initially the cabinet believed that certain satellite radio companies should not

have a licence. The lobbyists got to members of the cabinet and turned it around and there were contingency fees all around.

We saw that with the previous government. We have heard the entitlement to entitlements quote. I think that was exacted by my predecessor, Mr. Broadbent, in committee as a matter of fact. We believe that the unregulated lobbying had to end and Bill C-2 deals with it.

We still have a concern that someone who is lobbying government can get contracts. We will continue to keep an eye on it. What is really important is that the regulations for lobbyists have been strengthened. Contingency fees will be banned to get the money out of this really spurious kind of business. There are good, credible people who do credible lobbying in this town and they were being sideswiped by the people who were making money in, I believe, an ill-gotten way.

The sixth thing Mr. Broadbent had proposed was ethical appointments. I am delighted that because of the hard work of my colleague from Winnipeg Centre, the committee adopted an amendment to the bill. We finally have a process that will ensure there will be ethical appointments with oversight. That is no small gain. That is absolutely huge.

We only have to go back to 1867 and Sir John A. Macdonald, or to the 1984 election and the statement, "You had an option, sir". We know this has been a problem for every single administration in Canadian history. We have seen people being appointed based on their party card, not on their merit card. I am hopeful that will finally end.

The last one was on access to information. I am glad to see there were some gains made. At the beginning of the debate on the bill there were some concerns that we would not have changes to the Access to Information Act. There are amendments. There is more to do and that work will be taken up in the fall.

To paraphrase what my colleague from Winnipeg Centre said, the oxygen of democracy is the access to information in the work we do here. If we are unable to hold the government to account by accessing the information through ministries, crown corporations and agencies, then we will have difficulty doing the job which citizens have sent us to this place to do, and that is to hold the government to account.

Those were the seven points of Mr. Broadbent's and our party's platform, our ethical package. When I look at Bill C-2, we are there in many ways, but there is more work to do for sure. I have already mentioned the need to deal with floor crossing. We need electoral reform. We need a little more work on access to information. The transparent leadership question still needs to be tweaked. We have come a long way.

Government Orders

We have been able to deal with the question of holding government to account and the accountability of government to Parliament and Parliament to government. We need to take into consideration the accountability to citizens. That is what electoral reform is all about. That is the next stage. That is the next area of reform. Our work is not finished. We will have to focus on that.

I was very delighted to see the changes to the whistleblower legislation. It has been referenced by members of the other parties that Bill C-11 was fine if we just put it in place. As someone who was in contact and worked with many whistleblowers in this town, I can say that it was not fine. The oversight was a board that had over 8,000 cases presented to it in a year. It took over 18 months to hear cases. We needed to have a parallel stream. We have it with the tribunal. The fact that Bill C-11 was there was not good enough for the people I worked with.

We have improved the whistleblower legislation. We and other members of the committee were able to make sure there was no reward for whistleblowers. I thought that was anti-ethical. In fact, it is not ethical to provide cash for people to do the right thing. Every single whistleblower that I know was clear about this, they did not want to be rewarded in cash for doing the right thing.

• (1925)

I will end my comments by thanking everyone in the committee for their hard work. We need to be proud of this work and to carry on with our work to be accountable to Canadians through electoral reform.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member that there are a lot of provisions in this bill that are meritorious. The two that I find have the most value are the accountability of deputy ministers and some of the provisions dealing with lobbyist registration.

Everyone is talking about accountability but when I study the bill and when I read what preceded the bill, I do not think it really deals with institutional accountability.

When the federal accountability act, which is what the bill is called, was being debated, we were taking major steps backward in this House. We saw the Prime Minister appoint his campaign co-chair to the Senate and appointed him as the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. He is spending \$50 million a day and he is accountable to absolutely no one. We have seen the revisiting of a previous practice of the Prime Minister assuming control and appointing the committee chairs. We have seen a major step backward in the whole issue of free votes.

What is the member's position with respect to the whole issue of institutional accountability? I think that this bill does not address it in any way, shape or form.

• (1930)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my comments, there is more work to be done.

Clearly what we have heard from many learned people on public policy is that we can bring in bills and we can enact legislation, but unless there are good men and women working day to day to make sure those things are enforced, they are not worth much. I do not take

issue with the member about the need for more work to be done in certain areas.

This place needs to do more work on looking at the books and looking at the estimates process.

Let us go back to the genesis of Bill C-2 and the ethics package that my predecessor put forward. It was the sponsorship scandal and some other areas that were of concern, such as lobbying, et cetera. With respect to oversight in Parliament, we should be taking more time, paying more attention and shining more light on the money before it is spent. When the estimates go through this place, it should not be done in a day. We should take more time and put them under the microscope. It is done in other jurisdictions.

It would mean having more resources for committees. We need to make sure that the people on those committees have more time to serve on the committees. The appointments need to be for longer periods. One way to do that is through electoral reform. The people who are in the third that we are proposing who are elected from the so-called list would be able to spend more time on committee work. A concern of people who have evaluated public policy for many years is that people do not spend enough time on committees.

Maybe we need to have a subcommittee of finance to look at the estimate process and take more time. It was not that long ago that it was a committee of the whole that looked at the estimates. I am not suggesting we go back to that practice, but that we spend more time at the front end examining every single line item that is being proposed. In the past, if we had caught some of the things such as what we saw with the sponsorship scandal, we would all be better off.

Those are some ideas for the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

One minute for both the question and the answer.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of talk these days about who is dancing with whom and who is sleeping with whom. Canadians could be forgiven for thinking we are running a soap opera here rather than the House of Commons.

I would like the member to comment on what took place in the environment committee this afternoon. He watched the accountability break down in the government. I brought a motion forward which was in order and was judged by the Speaker of the House to be in order. The ruling Conservative Party decided that it was out of order, and ruled over its own chair and then was somehow mystically joined by the Liberals, who decided that even though the motion was in order and everything was quite legal and right, for political purposes, they were going to overrule it and side with the government against their own committee chair.

I wonder if he could recount how this fits in with a government trying to be more accountable and an opposition party pretending to actually be in opposition.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member has five seconds in which to answer.

Government Orders

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, very quickly, simply elect more New Democrats and they will see the change.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to add a few comments to the third reading debate on Bill C-2, the federal accountability act. I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

Let me begin by thanking the President of the Treasury Board, the member for Ottawa West—Nepean, and his parliamentary secretary, the member for Nepean—Carleton, and in fact the whole legislative committee for its hard work on this bill. The collaboration of all members has made this a better bill. All parties in this House have worked toward this.

As we have come through the report stage into this third reading debate, it seems that members from every party are claiming victory in some way or another. That is a good sign. It shows that the process is working as it should.

As well, I would like to take a moment to thank my constituents who have given me the opportunity to be here to speak on their behalf. Of course I would like to think I am here because of my boyish good looks and sparkling personality, but my wife assures me that is not the case. I know I am here at the pleasure of my constituents. I take that responsibility very seriously. I will do my best to serve them well. In fact, one opportunity to do so is to support this good piece of legislation.

Like a lot of members in this House, as I went door to door and talked to people on the street during the last campaign and the campaign before that, I sensed a large degree of cynicism about and even distrust of politicians. We of course have seen the polls showing that politicians are the least trusted of any occupational group, and it does not look like the numbers are getting any better in the more recent polls.

In fact, sometimes the people I talked to on the doorsteps would say that we are all the same or that we are only in it for what we can get, although each one of us here will claim that we are not in it for what we can get. In fact, I think we would probably all agree that we do not know of any colleagues of ours, whether they are on this side of the House or in opposition, who are here for what they can get.

It is very clear that Canadians expect more from us: not just to do good but also to be good. In fact, they sent that message loud and clear on January 23. They said they wanted an accountable government, one that they can trust with their hard-earned dollars and one that works effectively and efficiently on their behalf. I believe this federal accountability act delivers on our commitment to do just that.

During the campaign we said from time to time, and probably more often than the Liberals liked, that we needed to move from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability and, really, what we are talking about here is changing the culture.

This is an interesting concept, because there is no real agreement on how to define culture. Some define it in a historical way, saying that culture is the social traditions that are passed from generation to generation. Others view it in a behavioural way, saying that it is shared or learned human behaviour. Others view it in a normative

way, saying that it is the ideals or the values that a particular group of people have. Some view it as a mental thing, as the ideas or habits that we have as people that distinguish us from animals. Or maybe it is a symbolic thing.

I like to think of culture as having three components. It is what people think. It is what people do. It is what people produce.

So if we were talking about a culture of entitlement, what we would think is that we were entitled or, as a more famous person has said, “entitled to our entitlements”. What would we do in that culture? I guess we would do whatever it takes to obtain those entitlements, even if from time to time those things were wrong. What would we produce? We would produce programs or legislation, even well-intentioned programs that at least occasionally were motivated by self-interest.

But if we in this place lived within a culture of accountability, then we would think and believe that we are answerable to Canadians. What we would do is act honestly, ethically and honourably. We would produce programs and legislation that have as their motivation the best interests of Canadians.

● (1935)

We are here about accountability. Most of us who grew up in a loving but firm family understood what accountability was. I do not think my parents ever used that word with me. I think I understood it. I think it was composed of four different things. They made the rules clear for me. Then they removed some of the opportunities to break those rules. They then monitored my behaviour. Then they provided a little correction from time to time if I ever needed it.

Really, that is what we are talking about here with the accountability act. We are making sure that the rules are clear. In some cases, we are changing the rules. We are strengthening the rules. We are strengthening the role of the Ethics Commissioner. Canadians expect elected representatives and public office holders to make decisions in the public interest without any consideration of personal gain. The Ethics Commissioner helps us do that.

In fact, Bill C-2 will combine the positions of the Ethics Commissioner and the Senate Ethics Officer to create a new conflict of interest and ethics commissioner, with powers to fine violators and consider public complaints. We are going to make sure the rules are clear.

We are going to clean up the procurement of government contracts. I think all of us in this place believe that the Government of Canada's purchasing practices should be free of political interference and conducted fairly so that all companies, regardless of size and location, have the opportunity to compete for government work. We are going to make sure that the rules are clear on procurement. We are going to develop a code of conduct for procurement that will apply both to suppliers and to public servants.

Government Orders

We are going to clean up government polling and advertising. As we know, the government uses public opinion research and advertising to listen to and communicate with Canadians. I think that is a good thing most of the time, but recent political scandals regarding sponsorship and advertising have raised some legitimate concerns about the transparency, the fairness and the value for money of the procurement process in these areas. Bill C-2 introduces measures that ensure value for money and preclude these contracts from being used for partisan reasons or political benefit.

We are going to remove or at least reduce the opportunities for these rules to be broken. We are going to reform the financing of political parties. We believe that money should not have the ear of government but that Canadians should.

The federal accountability act will help take government out of the hands of big corporations and big unions and give it back to ordinary Canadians. The act is going to limit individual donations to \$1,000 a year, ban contributions by corporations, unions and organizations, and prohibit cash donations of more than \$20. We are going to ban secret political donations to political candidates.

We are going to toughen the Lobbyists Registration Act. I think everyone in the House would agree that people should not get rich bouncing between government and lobbying jobs. Lobbyists should not be allowed to charge what they call success fees, where they only get paid if they deliver the policy change their clients want. The government is now getting rid of these fees and is extending the ban on lobbying activities to five years for former ministers, their aides and senior public servants.

We are going to ensure truth in budgeting. We are going to create a new parliamentary budget officer to support members of Parliament and parliamentary committees with independent analysis on economic and fiscal issues.

The government will make qualified government appointments. This will be a welcome thing, as all of us here know.

Of course the government will monitor whether these rules actually are kept. Also, we are going to make it harder to hide. We are going to strengthen access to information legislation. Canadians deserve better access to government information. The Government of Canada belongs to the people of Canada. It should not unnecessarily obstruct access to information. There are good things in the bill in this regard.

The government is going to strengthen the power of the Auditor General. Canadians deserve to know their hard-earned tax dollars are spent. The Auditor General needs the power to follow the money in order to make sure that it is spent properly and wisely.

Occasionally from time to time we need correction. The government is creating a director of public prosecutions. It will have the independence to pursue prosecutions under federal law and will report publicly to Canadians on its performance.

The government wants to move from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability. The measures contained in Bill C-2 signal a dramatic change, a paradigm shift, so to speak, in how federal politics and government will work in this country.

As we change how we think, what we do and what we produce, we can provide Canadians with the open, honest, trustworthy government they deserve, a government that acts responsibly, rewards integrity and demonstrates clear accountability. By making everyone more accountable, the federal accountability act will help restore Canadians' trust in their government and make government work better for all.

● (1940)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member opposite that the act contains certain good points, but I also see some points that are not as good.

What I see in the House is that the act is saying one thing and what is being done in Ottawa is totally the opposite. We have seen the Prime Minister take control of the committees of Parliament. Any concept of a free vote has been thrown out the window.

However, one of the most grievous situations is the appointment of the Prime Minister's campaign co-chair to the Senate right after the election. Subsequently, the very same person was appointed Minister of Public Works and Government Services, in effect making that person unaccountable to anyone.

He is not accountable to Parliament, he is not accountable to me and he is not accountable to you, Mr. Speaker, and yet he is spending \$50 million a day. It totally violates anyone's concept of accountability. I have two very specific questions for the member across. First, given that there are about 35 million people in Canada and given that this person was the campaign co-chair, would that not be a patronage appointment? Second, why is it that this so-called accountability act would not have within it some provision that would end this spectacle?

● (1945)

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, I find it a little strange that the member from the Liberal Party would question some of the activities of this government as they relate to accountability. Certainly the record of members on the other side is not one that they should be very proud of. In fact, I think Canadians have sent that message very clearly.

One of the principles of this bill in regard to appointments is that people should be well qualified for the positions they hold. They should be there because they know what they are doing and are responsible and all of those things. In fact, as for the appointments the Prime Minister has made, I believe he has made them in the best interests of Canadians. He put in well qualified people able to represent all citizens in the cities of this country and all Canadians all across this country. That is a good thing.

Throughout this bill it is very clear to Canadians, at least those I have talked to, that this is as we have said: a set of the most sweeping changes to our system of ethics, how we do government, and how we view our work here. Canadians have seen that. I think they will welcome this.

Government Orders

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for a very cogent and concise overview of Bill C-2, the federal accountability act.

I would also like to take this opportunity on behalf of the citizens of Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale to thank the committee for all the hard work it did on this bill.

I knocked on a lot of doors through the last two elections. I heard a lot of concern about the years and years of mismanagement and corruption. People really wanted us to get the work done to bring accountability to the House.

I heard concerns from the opposite side about the timeframe of this legislation. When I reflect on it, I see that 70 witnesses were called by the committee and 100 hours were taken up. The draft legislation was in the hands of the opposition for weeks.

I want to ask my colleague if he feels that there was enough time taken in order for the legislation to reach a place where it is going to be effective, because Canadians do want us to bring accountability through this legislation, and whether he feels that the witnesses were listened to in committee.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. I was not on that committee but I believe that it, like all committees, was master of its own destiny. In fact, I heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons say that early on in the process the committee passed a motion that it would do whatever was required to carry out due diligence with this piece of legislation, that it would take all the time that was necessary. In fact, the committee reached the conclusion that it had done all of their good work and brought it to us here today.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague for splitting his time with me.

[*Translation*]

I would like to speak to the House about Bill C-2, the federal accountability act. I am very pleased to show my support for this piece of legislation. Accountability is a fundamental principle of our democratic system and this bill will dramatically change how the government conducts itself.

We are honouring our commitments, clearly stated in our election campaign and in the throne speech, to ensure a sound and honest government. It is time to restore Canadians' trust in their government.

The need to restore this trust is an important element in the provisions of the bill. These provisions, which I will address in my speech here today, will strengthen the role of the Ethics Commissioner

I would first like to thank the Prime Minister for making this matter a real priority. Our government does more than just talk about its priorities; it pursues them relentlessly and spares no effort in getting the work done. As you know, many hours were devoted to this bill in committee.

I would also like to congratulate the President of the Treasury Board for the results of this important work, bringing the Prime Minister's vision to fruition.

● (1950)

[*English*]

In the time allotted to me today, I cannot possibly address all of the worthy reforms and initiatives in the bill. I know that many of my hon. colleagues have spoken to, or will speak to these issues. The focus of my remarks is on the bill's proposal to create a new conflict of interest act, an act that would create a stronger conflict of interest and ethics regime to be administered by a conflict of interest and ethics commissioner.

As hon. members know, we made seven clear commitments on how to strengthen the role of the Ethics Commissioner. I will just reiterate them quickly.

We must give the Ethics Commissioner the power to fine violators. We must prevent the Ethics Commissioner from being overruled by the Prime Minister on whether violations have occurred. We must enshrine the Conflict of Interest Code into law. We must close the loopholes that allow ministers to vote on matters connected with their business interests. We must end venetian blind trusts. We must allow the public, not just politicians to make complaints to the commissioner, and we must make part time or non-remunerated ministerial advisors subject to the ethics regime.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-2 clearly shows that we have honoured every one of these seven commitments. The new conflict of interest and ethics regime will guarantee that elected representatives and public office holders carry out their official duties and manage their personal affairs so as to avoid conflict of interest. Here is how we have honoured our commitments to Canadians.

First, we have given the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner the power to impose monetary penalties on people who violate the act. Sections 52 to 62 of the proposed Conflict of Interest Act set out a detailed regime of penalties that the commissioner can impose on public office holders who violate the provisions of the act. The maximum penalty is \$500, and the commissioner is to determine the exact amount based on criteria set out in the act. These penalties may be recovered in the Federal Court, and they must be made public, which is not the case in many other similar regimes.

Second, the act clearly says that the commissioner's decisions as to whether or not the act was contravened may not be overturned. Section 47 clearly states that no one may alter the commissioner's report. When the commissioner imposes a penalty, it may not be appealed in court and the prime minister may not overturn the commissioner's decision.

[*English*]

Third, the act enshrines into law the substantive and administrative regime found in the current Conflict of Interest and Post-employment Code for public office holders. The act refocuses the regime as a true conflict of interest regime similar to the approach used in most provinces.

Government Orders

The conflict of interest and ethics commissioner would also be mandated to provide advice and support the Prime Minister on ethical matters beyond conflict of interest.

Fourth, the proposed act was designed to clarify the obligation that ministers not vote on matters connected with their business interests. Section 21 requires all public office holders to recuse themselves from any decision, debate or vote in respect of which they would be in a conflict of interest.

Section 30 gives the commissioner a broad power to determine any measures that might be required to ensure that the public office holder is in compliance with these and other requirements of the act.

Subsection 6(2) of the act expressly prohibits a minister or a parliamentary secretary from debating or voting in the House of Commons on questions that would place them in a conflict of interest. This provision is an essential element of the conflict of interest regime and is based on a similar provision found in the code for members of the House of Commons.

We are pleased that this provision has been reinstated after it was deleted in committee by an opposition motion. This restores the integrity of the conflict of interest regime.

• (1955)

[*Translation*]

Section 27 of the new act, which honours the fifth of our commitments regarding the ethics regime, expressly prohibits the use of blind management agreements, sometimes called “Venetian blind trusts”. Consequently, as this section states, the only way to divest controlled assets is to sell them in an arm's-length transaction or place them in a true blind trust that meets the requirements set out in the bill.

As for the sixth commitment, the new law provides for a means whereby the commissioner may receive complaints from members of the public. Subclause 44(4) states that the commissioner may consider information from the public that is brought to his or her attention by any parliamentarian. In addition, the law now permits MPs and senators to file complaints against any of the 3,600 public office holders, and not just the ministers and parliamentary secretaries as is the case under the existing Parliament of Canada Act. In addition to these changes, clause 45 of the bill gives the commissioner the explicit authority to examine a matter on his or her own initiative, an authority currently not in place. These changes considerably improve the ability of the commissioner to act on credible information and to ensure that public office holders comply with conflict of interest provisions set out in the law.

[*English*]

Finally, the seventh ethics regime commitment has been fulfilled by expanding the definition of public office holders covered by the regime to include ministerial advisors.

Ministerial advisors are those who occupy a position in the office of a minister or a minister of state and who provide policy, program or financial advice, whether or not the advice is provided on a full time or part time basis, and regardless whether the person is remunerated or not.

As part of the action plan, the government has also committed to increase public transparency about the numerous ministerial appointments to advisory bodies who may be unpaid and working part time, and who are not public office holders for the purposes of the act.

[*Translation*]

I could continue to speak about the considerable and very important changes that we presented in order to strengthen the conflicts of interest and ethics regime. These changes have produced a regime that is autonomous, better focussed and more transparent, somewhat like our government.

I am honoured to speak to these points at the third reading of Bill C-2. On their own, these reforms warrant our support for this bill. However, I would like to remind the hon. members that they form part of a number of much more significant measures designed to restore confidence in the government. The other components of the federal accountability bill also deserve our support and I ask my honourable colleagues to carry out their responsibilities and support this bill that will make government more accountable to the Canadians who elected all members to serve them.

[*English*]

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this evening to speak to this bill.

I, like other members who have spoken before me this evening, want to thank the 12 members of the committee who put so much time, energy and effort into reviewing this bill. Like other members, there are provisions in this bill I find very positive. The lobbyist registration and the accountability of deputy ministers before Parliament are major steps for this Parliament and certainly I support them.

However, I believe there will be negative outcomes from the bill. A lot of these additional officers of Parliament that are being created amounts to Parliament outsourcing its fundamental job to hold the executive to account.

Tonight I want to spend my few minutes just speaking about accountability in its broadest sense and how perhaps we as an institution are losing sight of this very important concept.

It is my position that this bill, although very beneficial and containing a lot of good provisions, a lot of steps forward which have been very adequately addressed by other members tonight, really has very little, if anything, to do with institutional accountability here in Parliament. In actual fact, what has happened over the last number of years is that we have taken what I consider some fairly major steps backwards.

I should point out before I go any further that I will be splitting my time with the member for Ajax—Pickering.

As all members know, the Canadian Parliament is governed by three branches: the executive branch, the legislative branch and the judicial branch. The executive gets its authority of course from the Governor General, who appoints the leader of the party with the most seats in Parliament. That leader appoints the executive. The executive is accountable to Parliament, and of course Parliament is accountable to the Canadian people.

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The members of the executive are parliamentarians also, and our job is to provide authority, approve legislation, approve appropriations on the one hand, and hold the government to account. That is our fundamental job in this assembly.

Over the years, there has been a major imbalance between the executive and Parliament. We can see that with the control right now. It did not start with the present Prime Minister. This has been going on and it has been added to by successive prime ministers over the last number of years.

Right now I believe that the Privy Council Office, the Prime Minister's Office, and the Department of Finance have thousands and thousands of employees, experts and researchers. We in Parliament, I believe at last count, have approximately 80 researchers working for us. There is a tremendous imbalance in what is going on here in Ottawa.

The executive branch has gotten stronger over the years and the legislative branch has gotten weaker, and it cries out for reform. There has been much talk about it over the years, much written about it, but very little done about it. There has been the odd step forward taken, but in the last three or four months we have taken some fairly major steps backwards.

The bill is referred to in this assembly as the federal accountability act, but it really has nothing to do with institutional accountability. My position is that it falsely expropriates the term accountability.

I refer members of Parliament to the work of Mr. Justice Gomery. This was a very extensive report with four volumes. The title of it is "Restoring Accountability". Mr. Justice Gomery and his commission make 19 recommendations. We would expect to see a number of them in this so-called federal accountability act. Other than three or four, we do not see anything.

● (2000)

Mr. Justice Gomery talked about strengthening committees, about providing more resources for parliamentarians and about major changes to the public accounts committee. None of that is even mentioned in the federal accountability act. Mr. Justice Gomery talked about the accountability of deputy ministers, which was codified in the federal accountability act, but everything else he said was basically ignored.

What we have seen over the last four months has been some major steps backward with regard to the problem of institutional accountability in Parliament. I do not want anyone to interpret this as having started with the present Prime Minister, because it did not. This has been going on for decades. Every successive prime minister who came to Ottawa wanted to consolidate total, absolute and utter power in the Office of the Prime Minister.

What I have seen here in the last five months I find very grievous. The first thing the Prime Minister did before anything else was to put his campaign co-chair, who spent two months working on his campaign, in the Senate. Two or three days after that he made him the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. The previous speaker did not see anything wrong with that and said that it was not a patronage appointment. I do not think anyone in Canada would agree with that. It is a blatant patronage appointment.

I am not suggesting for a minute that is the first time that has happened in the Senate. However, the Prime Minister made him the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, a minister who spends \$50 million each and every day and is not accountable to anyone in this institution. I cannot ask him a question for two reasons: first, he is not here; and second, I do not even know what he looks like. I am a member of Parliament who was sent to Ottawa on behalf of the people of Charlottetown, and we have a minister walking around Ottawa spending \$50 million a day in taxpayer money and I do not even know what the fellow looks like. That is accountability.

Another major step backward was the appointment of the committee chairs. This was done by a previous prime minister. Parliamentarians came together and one of the leaders of the charge was the present Prime Minister who spoke against and voted against the practice. What was the first thing he did when he became Prime Minister? He appointed not all the chairs but the ones who were government members, which I believe are about 17 of the 22 committees. Members of Parliament issued press releases saying that they had accepted the Prime Minister's appointment to chair such and such a committee. That was a major step backward.

In the campaign literature distributed by the Prime Minister he talked about free votes on everything other than the throne speech, the budget and supply items, which, of course, has all been changed. There are no free votes at all. They are free votes other than the budget, supply and priorities of government.

We have seen some major steps backward in this whole concept of institutional accountability, which I find very troubling.

I hearken back to the four volumes of Mr. Justice Gomery's report. He made certain recommendations that are not being followed. If we are talking about accountability, this is a dishonest debate. It has to do with some good things but it has very little to do with institutional accountability in Parliament.

● (2005)

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it a little rich to be given a lesson on accountability by a member of the former Liberal government.

I should first mention that members in two of the committees that I sit on voted for both of our chairs. It is nice for a change to see a Prime Minister who is actually willing to stand by his word and stand by the first piece of legislation that is being passed in the House, the federal accountability act. This is a great step for the Canadian public.

It is, however, disappointing to see opposition come from the Liberal Party on the accountability act. I was hoping that after January 23 the former Liberal government would have learned a lesson and came on board with the accountability act, and perhaps made it even stronger.

Why is my colleague not embracing the accountability act? Why did he vote against some of the strong amendments, particularly the amendment to include the Wheat Board within the ATI provisions?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I am not opposing the act. I am opposing any concept that the act deals with institutional accountability, which this institution cries out for.

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The member across talks about the appointment of committee chairs. I would remind the member that he had members of his own party issuing press releases that they had accepted the appointment by the Prime Minister to be a committee chair. Everyone in Ottawa knows that the Prime Minister appointed the chairs to these committees.

For the member to come to the House and say that there was an election, of course there was an election. Once the Prime Minister had appointed the government nominee to stand unopposed for election, then the election was held, which confirmed the Prime Minister's appointment.

The legislation does contain some very good provisions, and I have gone over them. The lobbyist registration has been long overdue. I have been offended for years around here. If I call a deputy minister or an associate deputy minister in some department I am told that as a member of Parliament they cannot speak to me. If I go over to Winston's, the same deputy minister is meeting with some lobbyist around Ottawa. I find that offensive.

I agree that the sooner we tighten the controls around some of these lobbyists around Ottawa the better. I could not agree more with making deputy ministers accountable to Parliament. I think that is long overdue.

What I am saying is that what the act says and what I see being done are totally opposed. I will come back to the appointment. A member of Parliament is here to hold the executive to account, and the member does that in a number of ways. Any member of Parliament who consents to allowing the Prime Minister to appoint his campaign co-chair to the Senate and then immediately appoint that same co-chair as Minister of Public Works and Government Services and then give him a budget of \$20 billion is not doing his job as a member of Parliament.

● (2010)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following on the comments by the hon. member for Charlottetown, I would like to give him the opportunity to clarify his thoughts on the underlying values of Bill C-2, mainly in matters of transparency and accountability. I am referring specifically to the appointment of a non-elected person to one of the most important ministerial positions—one of the first moves the Prime Minister made in all his accountability and transparency.

I would like very much for my colleague to make his comments in terms of accountability. Accountability is achieved by tabling documents in this House, so that parliamentarians can review them on behalf of the people they represent. Accountability is also achieved every day in this House. In fact, we are denied the opportunity to question the minister of whom we spoke.

[*English*]

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I do find that extremely troubling. We have a situation and we allow it to continue every day, all members of Parliament. We have a campaign co-chair who was appointed to the Senate and appointed—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Ajax—Pickering.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue and one that I am pleased to speak to. I think increasing accountability is important for every member of Parliament and, indeed, a priority.

The member who just spoke, the member for Charlottetown, and I sat on the public accounts committee during the previous session of Parliament and in that session of Parliament had an opportunity to deal with a wide array of issues and make a broad range of recommendations on how government operations could be improved on everything from deputy ministerial responsibility to internal auditing processes. Some of those are being incorporated and some are not but I would say that this is an ongoing process.

One of the things that concerns me as we have this debate and as we talk about the need to increase accountability is to paint pictures that are, frankly, completely inaccurate.

The reality is that the Auditor General, in her report in the fall of, I believe, 2005, said that when it came to the clarity of our fiscal reporting, the quality of that reporting and the robustness of our internal auditing, Canada was number one in the world, around the same level with respect to New Zealand and Australia. We achieved great things in that period of time and the changes that occurred were met with great effect.

That brings us to the accountability act. I would like to see a number of items changed and improved but the bill concerns me deeply. I started off believing that it was a selective accountability act but it has become more of a realization that it is a non-accountability act in many respects. I think that realization started off with a press conference the Prime Minister had on the topic and he took a total of two questions. He launched a major initiative on accountability, the press was there, he took two questions and he walked away.

When we take a look at the bill and we start skimming below the surface, we see some items here that are of deep concern. We will start with access to information, an issue that I think a number of us have been pushing for some period of time to improve.

I would like to quote what the Information Commissioner had to say on this particular item in the proposal of the accountability act. Mr. Reid said:

All of the positions the government now takes in the discussion paper are contrary to the positions the Conservative Party took, and its leader espoused, during the election campaign.

Mr. Reid recently said, “the decision was taken that they were not prepared to live under the terms of open government”.

He was stating this is what they had done.

He went on to state and criticize the accountability act for introducing new provisions and exemptions protecting sensitive information from public scrutiny.

In another instance he said, “no previous government has put forward a more retrograde and dangerous set of proposals to change access to information”.

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When we look at it again and again we see areas of deep concern. What worried me at the time is the NDP member for the riding of Winnipeg Centre had stood and recognized some of these concerns and said that sending the access to information portion off to committee was a kiss of death, that would be the end of it and that it was a stall and delay tactic. However, we are with the NDP supporting the bill despite those very real concerns and no progress having been made with the issue of access to information.

I am also concerned with campaign finance reform but not so much because the amounts are lowered. In fact, it was a Liberal government, through Bill C-24, that introduced some of the most stringent requirements on campaign contributions that one will find anywhere in the world. Those were appropriate and have worked well and served us well.

However, these new changes concern me in one particular area; and that is, in the area of third party advertising and third party involvement.

The reality is that third party actors are not being controlled under this legislation and it creates a totally uneven playing field. On the one hand we are saying to political parties and to political candidates that they are extremely restricted, in fact far more so than they were before on how they can raise money, but if one is a third party trying to advance a particular issue, we will not get involved in that. That creates an unlevel playing field and actually gives those who are on the peripheral of the political sphere more power in delivering their message. That is exceptionally concerning. If one were to make a change in one area, certainly third party advertising should be changed as well.

● (2015)

I am also concerned with the notion of lobbyists, not so much on the portion with which the bill deals, but on the portion with which the bill does not deal. We have on the one hand a cooling off period for those ministers who leave the public service and go on to other things, but what about those individuals who are lobbyists coming into government?

We have a situation today with the Minister of National Defence. He was a military lobbyist and he lobbied the same people on whom he now makes decisions as Minister of National Defence. Clearly that does not add up, in my opinion. If we are to deal with lobbying, then we should deal with both those coming in and those going out. It is an example, again, of the government selectively choosing the areas where it wants to be accountable.

We can go further. We can talk about the issue of ethics. It has been brought up a number of times, but I think it is worth mentioning again. It is extremely contradictory to appoint somebody, who was a key part of a campaign team, obviously somebody very partisan, to the Senate, even though the government said it stood against those kinds of appointments, then to turn around within a very short period of time and appoint that same person to a senior cabinet position where we do not have the ability in the House to question him. The government then labels that accountability. Clearly that is highly contradictory at the very best.

We have a health minister who we now discover has a 25% interest in a pharma company. Yet is making decisions with respect to pharmaceutical companies and is not willing to sell his shares.

We have a Prime Minister who, shortly after the election, appointed a good friend as a member of the transition team. He gave that individual an untendered contract to review, of all things, the tendering process. There are all these inconsistencies that simply lead me to have a great deal of concern.

We should take a look at the budget office as well and the notion that we want to know exactly what the figures are. Of course we do and we had that in the last government. The reality is we had a variety of independent experts who gave their forecasts. We consistently had an economy that outperformed our expectations. For a 10 year period, we had an economy that was red hot. We put policies in place that allowed that to happen.

However, when members of Parliament try to become experts at being able to tell what is in the fiscal future, to become clairvoyant on fiscal matters, we begin to cut too close to the marrow. When the economy takes an unintended turn, then we will return to deficits, which is something the Conservatives did very well. We had years of them under the Conservatives. However, it is imperative that we not do that, and that we be careful on a go forward basis.

In terms of transparency and allowing the legislative part of Parliament to have a larger voice, we do not see that at all. In fact, free votes are disappearing. There is more and more control over committees. There is more and more control over media and messaging and Parliament is becoming less and less an open place. There is less and less opportunity for parliamentarians to express their voice. Committees decisions are being railroaded time and time again.

We are seeing an inverse of what was promised, and there is a pattern. In the case of the Conservatives, they say one thing and give it a label like accountability and they do something entirely different on the other side. They take an entirely different tack going forward. Time and time again this hypocrisy reveals itself.

Rather than trying to ram through flawed legislation, which has been not only recognized by the Information Commissioner and the House solicitor as being flawed, but is being recognized broadly as being rushed legislation that is full of holes, we should take the time to do this properly.

We should take a look at the work that had been done through the public accounts committee, as one example. We should implement some of the recommendations, as my colleague said earlier, of Justice Gomery. We should take accountability seriously, not use it as some kind of rhetoric tool, to abuse the word "accountability" for the sake of political gain. Rather, we should take a measured approach and ensure that the measures brought forward will bring real improvements in accountability.

In that regard I would hope, although we will have to see what the House does in the coming hours, we take a pause and we get this right.

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• (2020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the presentation by the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering. I noticed that he did not talk about one very essential point included in Bill C-2 and that is the appointment of returning officers following a public competition by the Chief Electoral Officer.

As a relatively new member, I had a hard time with the fact that the returning officer in my riding was a known political patronage appointee. I feared that, regardless of the party in power, following a change in government he would simply be replaced by another appointee of the new government and therefore not necessarily fair and honest in his decisions.

This is a victory for the Bloc and an important one. Now the bill includes a provision to appoint returning officers following a public competition.

I would like to know what the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering thinks of this aspect of the bill. Why was this not done before and how does he now see this aspect of political life?

• (2025)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asked a very good question. I think it is very important to do things that relate to this.

[*English*]

Sorry, I am still working on my French, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comment and I appreciate the change. I think the appointment of a returning officer by Elections Canada is important. It is a worthy change in the bill. I would go a step further. There is a larger role for Elections Canada in a variety of different venues. For example, in nominations for all parties, Elections Canada should be responsible for overseeing that.

One thing that greatly disappoints me in the bill, while that it is beneficial, is the lack of steps it takes to increase the powers of committees and of parliamentarians. In fact, we are seeing a real reversal, both by the appointment of committee chairs and by the taking away the power of individual members of Parliament to speak freely on a number of different issues, as we have seen on the other side, and from restricting media access to the Prime Minister and ministers. Those are very disturbing trends.

We see some positive changes, as mentioned by my hon. colleague, but we need to focus on ways to make this chamber, the House of Commons and its members, through its committees, to have greater say and be able to represent their constituents with greater authority.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague. I know he has a number of opinions and some integrity on the issue of accountability. At the very end of his speech, he talked about accountability and the power of committees. He talked about the important work done at committees and about the importance of committees having independence.

Could he comment on what might be deemed a bit of a travesty in terms of democracy today?

A motion was brought forward to committee by myself with respect to the capabilities of the current environment minister. Two days ago his party called for her to step down and resign for a list of reasons, which they and others in the community listed. The motion was deemed in order by the Conservative chair. It was also deemed in order by the Speaker of the House because we wanted to ensure it was correct. We prepared for debate on the motion. Then the Conservatives came forward with a motion to rule it out of order. Clearly they were wrong and the chair and the clerk of the committee let them know our motion was in order and everything was correct. Then the Conservatives challenged their own chair's ruling, saying it was incorrect.

Clearly the motion was in order and everything was fine, but lo and behold, the three Liberal members who were at committee this afternoon decided to side with the government to rule the motion out of order and we never got to speak about it.

Could talk about accountability as a fundamental measure when a circumstance like that comes before the House, when Canadians are looking for real answers to what happens in our committees?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The period for questions and comments is over, but I will allow the hon. member a short response.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I am not a member of that committee, but the committee has the opportunity to deem what it believes is pertinent to deal with and what is and what is not in order. Members have the right to challenge the chair. It was the democratic will of that committee not to move forward on that item, and I think that is important.

The only comment I would make is that this actually speaks to the point I made about respecting the democratic will of committees.

• (2030)

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to join my colleagues today in support of Bill C-2, a bill that will make government more effective and accountable.

Tonight I will be splitting my time with the Minister of Labour.

Canadians expect politicians and public sector employees to conduct themselves according to the highest ethical standards. As the member of Parliament for Palliser, my goal is to make government more effective and accountable to Parliament and to Canadians.

One of Parliament's most important roles is to hold government accountable for its use of taxpayer dollars. To do this effectively, parliamentarians need objective and fact-based information about how well the government raises and spends public funds.

During the last election campaign, I knocked on a lot of doors and was told by hundreds of people how fed up they were with Liberal corruption. These are hard-working men and women who play by the rules and pay their taxes. They were absolutely fed up and disgusted with the culture of entitlement that developed in Ottawa under the former Liberal government.

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Hon. Jim Peterson: Oh, come on. Get out your agenda.

Mr. Dave Batters: Bill C-2, the federal accountability act—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Willowdale may want to take his seat and speak when it is his turn.

The hon. member for Palliser.

Mr. Dave Batters: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate you restoring a little bit of order and some of this touches a bit of a nerve with members opposite.

As I was saying, people were absolutely fed up and disgusted by the culture of entitlement that developed in Ottawa under the former Liberal government. Bill C-2, the federal accountability act, delivers on that commitment that we made in the last election to clean up corruption and demonstrates that our government is taking concrete action to restore the trust of Canadians.

Bill C-2 is about fixing the system for Canadians. The act will move us from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability. It will make everyone in the government, from the Prime Minister on down, answerable to Canadians. It will strengthen and streamline how government works by making government more effective and accountable, and will let Canadians know that their hard earned tax dollars are being spent properly and wisely.

Concrete changes for Canadians in the new federal accountability act include: banning corporate, union and large personal political donations; giving Canadians confidence that lobbying is done ethically by bringing in a five year lobbying ban on former ministers, their aides and senior public servants; providing real protection for whistleblowers; and ensuring that Canadians know how their money is spent by enhancing the power of the Auditor General to follow the money.

Bill C-2 will bring in some of the toughest anti-corruption legislation in the country while empowering officers of Parliament to ensure that nothing like the sponsorship scandal can happen again.

I would like touch on some of the new reforms introduced in Bill C-2. One of the most important and well publicized aspects of Bill C-2 is that it eliminates the undue influence of big money donors by banning large personal or corporate donations to political parties. With the new federal accountability act, our government will wrest power out of the hands of powerful interests and give it back to the people.

The federal accountability act will limit individual donations to \$1,000 per year; ban contributions by corporations, unions and organizations; prohibit cash donations of more than \$20; and it will also ban secret donations and gifts to political candidates. That last point is particularly important. At present, even though campaign donations are regulated, riding associations can still give large amounts of money to candidates through trust funds.

Among other changes Bill C-2 will prohibit candidates from accepting gifts that might be seen to influence them in the performance of their elected duties. It will also prohibit MPs from using money for political purposes and require candidates to report any gifts they receive worth more than \$500. These are positive

changes that will bring greater transparency and fairness to political financing.

I would also like to talk about the provisions of Bill C-2 that strengthen the ability of the Auditor General to review annual federal grants, contributions and contracts. It is absolutely critical that Parliament is able to hold the government to account for the use of taxpayer dollars. That means Parliament needs objective facts and information about how well the government raises and spends public funds. This is the critical role the Auditor General plays.

The new federal accountability act will give the Auditor General the authority to follow the money by inquiring into the use of funds that individuals, institutions and companies receive under a fundraising agreement with any federal department, agency or crown corporation. It will also require the government to include provisions in all funding agreements requiring recipients to keep records and cooperate with the Auditor General on request.

Because of Bill C-2, every government department will be required to review at least once every five years the relevance and effectiveness of its grants and contributions programs. These changes will reassure Canadians that their tax dollars are being used wisely and will also ensure that the Auditor General is able to get all the facts necessary to do her job.

One of the areas where we know work needs to be done to improve accountability concerns the awarding of government contracts. Unlike the former government, our government will ensure that the government procurement process is free of political interference and that the bidding process for government contracts is open and transparent.

● (2035)

To address this, the federal accountability act will create the position of a procurement auditor to review procurement practices across government, review complaints regarding contract administration, and submit an annual report to be tabled in Parliament. As these changes indicate, delivering accountability means addressing the broader relationship between government, and those persons and companies that do business with the government.

That is reflected in the provision of the bill that concerns government contracts, but it is also reflected in components of Bill C-2 which will toughen rules for lobbying including: establishing a new commissioner of lobbying as an independent agent of Parliament; prohibiting ministers, ministerial staffers and senior public servants from registering and lobbying the Government of Canada for five years after leaving office; and doubling the criminal monetary penalties for lobbyists who fail to comply with the requirements of the lobbying act.

With these new changes the commissioner of lobbying will ensure that lobbying is done in a fair and transparent manner. These changes are dramatic and are part of a package which will produce real results for Canadians.

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While I do not have enough time to go into detail on some of the components of the proposed bill, I do want to make note of some of them because they are very important. There are components such as: strengthening auditing and accountability within departments, creating a director of public prosecutions to conduct prosecutions for offences under federal jurisdiction, and providing real protection for whistleblowers to help create an environment in which employees can report wrongdoing in the federal government without fear of reprisal.

I am proud to be part of a government that has made accountability a priority. I know the residents of Palliser have been waiting for these changes and will welcome our government's actions to bring transparency and accountability to government.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a fair, direct and simple question for the hon. member.

He talked about the need for a new breath of fresh air and accountability. While there are aspects of the bill that move us some way forward, I wonder, in a very specific and simple way, with the appointment of a fundraising co-chair to the Senate and then that person to have such incredible influence as to actually sit at the cabinet table as one of the first acts of the new government, how the bile almost rises up in the throat when we realize that.

On one hand, the Conservatives are saying something about accountability, turning a page or a new leaf and all the various metaphors they have, and on the other hand they do one of the most shameless and partisan acts. This was completely an unaccountable act to the voters of Canada and was certainly unaccountable to the whole theme and measure that the member's party talked about while sitting as the official opposition and throughout the campaign.

The member might correct me if I am wrong. I do not recall the now Prime Minister campaigning on the principle of being able to appoint fundraisers to the Senate and then allow them to sit at the cabinet table. If that was the case, I may have missed that press release. We, the New Democrats, were busy door knocking and engaging Canadians on the idea of a new way of doing government.

How does he square the circle of the strong and courageous rhetoric in his speech with what his government actually did as one of its first acts when it seized power and was able to grab its closest and best friend and plunk him into a patronage spot which he can maintain for nearly the rest of his life?

• (2040)

Mr. Dave Batters: Mr. Speaker, talk about rhetoric. The member began his question by asking how a fundraiser from Quebec could be chosen. I wonder what the member has against Quebecers. I wonder if he feels it is not important for Montrealers to have a voice at the cabinet table.

The desire for more transparency and accountability in government is something that I would hope would be shared by members of the NDP and all members in this place. I hope even Liberal members on the other side will support our government in our efforts to clean up the culture of entitlement that marked the former government.

It is not the Conservative Party but Canadians who will benefit from our accountability package and the new federal accountability

act. As I stated earlier, government should serve the public interest and not personal interests. After years of Liberal government, my constituents in Palliser and Canadians across the country were very clear; they wanted a government that would restore their faith in our public institutions by making them more accountable and effective.

Canadians expect politicians and public sector employees to conduct themselves according to the highest ethical standards, and this government has responded to that expectation by bringing in the toughest piece of accountability legislation in our nation's history. It is a solid accountability package. It is what Canadians have been asking for. It is what we were sent here to do. It is fulfilling one of many priorities. I would expect members of this House to welcome this monumental legislation that will make our federal government more accountable to Canadians.

If my colleague is not in favour of this legislation, he should be prepared to face his constituents and explain why he is not in favour of improved government accountability.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the reply given by the member for Palliser to the question posed by my colleague from the NDP did not seem convincing. A political organizer was appointed as a senator, only to then be given a cabinet post. That minister is not responsible for answering members in the House. It is not enough to say that he gives a voice to the Montreal area, where he resides.

I would like to use the example of a minister from the Montreal region in the previous government: Mr. Gagliano. This is not necessarily a positive reference, after everything that was revealed by the Gomery commission. This is precisely the kind of problem that can arise with appointments such as the one made by the government. The fact that he is proposing a bill on accountability here today adds little to his credit.

[*English*]

Mr. Dave Batters: Mr. Speaker, I have to speak if I may on behalf of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services by saying that we sure do not want any comparisons to Mr. Gagliano, and I know my friend opposite was not trying to make any inferences there.

Canadians, and certainly my constituents, appreciate the job that is being done by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. The member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam is doing a fantastic job.

The ballot question in 2004 was accountability. The ballot question in 2006 was accountability. The question was who could restore honesty and trust to this place. Canadians spoke on January 23. I am very proud to be part of this government that is committed to cleaning up the way this place works forever, to function and serve those people who work hard, play by the rules, and pay their taxes.

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• (2045)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all of our colleagues, from all political parties, who are here this evening to deal with this important subject.

On January 23, Canadians sent the government a message. The message was about change. They expressed a desire for the government to be accountable and worthy of the trust they place in it to spend their hard-earned money, and for the government to work with them effectively and efficiently.

As well, today, may I say that all members from all political parties have clearly shown, certainly in some cases with difficulty, that they are determined to move this bill forward.

The commitment of committee members has taken many forms. They heard more than 70 important witnesses; they answered their thoughtful questions; they tripled their workload in recent weeks to complete the laborious process of clause by clause consideration; in short, they pulled out all the stops to give this House and the people of Canada the best bill possible.

This act deals with 13 separate areas, and so the committee members had to become true specialists in each of those areas, to give it the level of attention it required and to pay particular attention to every detail, effectively, openly and carefully.

The committee members considered hundreds of provisions and a varied lot of amendments, and analyzed them in depth. They spent no less than 90 hours over the last six weeks on this, in addition to doing their everyday work as parliamentarians, to be sure that we are on the right track and that the Federal Accountability Act will enable the government to honour its commitment to accountability and openness, while ensuring oversight and flexibility.

New legislation of course requires a joint effort. This act shows that the idea that we should act in the interests of Canadians crosses party lines, rallies many representatives of every stripe and calls for genuine determination.

As a result of the process followed by the committee, this bill is now a solid piece of legislation. As well, we have worked with all parties to improve it. For example, eliminating the provision for a secret vote for the appointment of officers of Parliament will be more consistent with the autonomy of this House in making its own rules of conduct and protecting its commitment to maintaining transparency.

Something else to note: the act provides that drafts of internal annual reports be disclosed under the Access to Information Act, once the final report has been published.

I am also happy to be able to tell the House that this wider scope has been provided for in the amended act. At the same time the act ensures a fair balance between greater transparency and the protection of sensitive information such as the Auditor General's working papers.

Furthermore, thanks to the process the committee followed, the bill now requires all ministers to publish an annual report of all their office expenses that have been charged to the public purse. By thus increasing transparency, we will help to restore Canadians' trust in their government.

This act is not the only way of demonstrating that the new Government of Canada is keeping its promise to make the government more responsible and more effective.

The federal accountability action plan also plays a key role in this regard. I pointed out a number of reviews contained in the plan that will reduce the host of rules that paralyze the work of public servants, as they do the work of organizations and individuals dealing with the government.

• (2050)

On June 6, the government announced the creation of a group of experts responsible for reviewing the policy respecting grants and contributions.

In December, the group will present its recommendations on how to better manage programs pertaining to grants and contributions, which total close to \$26 billion and under which we provide important services to all Canadians.

Besides creating this group, the government will soon announce the details of two other reviews of all the rules put in place by the previous government and the government's procurement policy.

These three reviews represent a major part of our commitment to make government more accountable and to assure that all programs are delivered effectively and efficiently, and always transparently. We must restore the public's trust in government and leave behind us the scandal everyone has been hearing about in recent months.

Together, and together as well with the action plan and the federal accountability act, they will enhance accountability. This will enable us to institute a culture of accountability that will forever change the way in which business is done here in Ottawa. It will no longer be possible to influence politicians through large political donations. Lobbying will be done openly and in an ethical way. The prohibition for five years on the exercise of political influence will be a way to ensure that no organization is advantaged in comparison with others. Whistleblowers will know that not only are they protected but their vigilance is appreciated. Officers of Parliament will also have the tools they need to better hold the government to account.

These measures and those in the bill are necessary to restore trust in parliamentary institutions and government. Our goal is to ensure that the government embodies the best of what Canada has to offer Canadians.

This entire process has to do with accountability. It is what the Prime Minister asked for. Most of all, it is what Canadians asked for in the last election. Our legislative committee was up to the task. It carefully vetted legislation to raise the ethical standard to which politicians and their senior officials must adhere.

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By increasing the extent to which everyone is accountable, the federal accountability act will restore Canadians' trust in their government and ensure that it works better for all Canadians.

We promised that this would be the first bill we brought before the House of Commons. Our Prime Minister and our government have kept their word, and this evening, we are going to deliver this first bill on accountability. When it comes into force, this bill will improve transparency and accountability, for the benefit of all Canadians.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have had the opportunity to hear the Minister of Labour talk about accountable government. He told us about the elements of the bill and explained why this bill would make the government more accountable, would strengthen accountability.

I would like the minister to explain why one of the first things the leader of this government, who claims to be accountable, did was appoint an unelected person to the Senate and give him a portfolio that requires the greatest degree of accountability not only because of the budget it handles, but because of its mandate and its impact on good governance, transparency and so on. Is there a contradiction in that? I would like the minister to comment on this.

• (2055)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Speaker, in response to my colleague's comments, I would like to say that the Prime Minister made an excellent decision. It is important for the Montreal region to have a representative who can defend its interests and who can also carry out an important responsibility in Parliament.

Our colleague was appointed to the Senate. He himself made a very clear promise to Montrealers that he will step down as a senator as soon as the next election is announced and run for office. It seems to me this is not only a very responsible thing to do, but also very useful for stakeholders in the Montreal region.

I should add that we are not well represented in Quebec. We are only ten or so. We have to send a clear message that we want representation in each one of the province's large regions.

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to my Conservative colleague, the member for Jonquière—Alma. I spent a good deal of time in his area, which I appreciated very much, although I am sorry to say that it did not perfect my French.

I know that he has only fairly recently returned to the House, but he will know that those who are now his Conservative colleagues have talked and talked about how the ultimate accountability for any member of Parliament is to one's constituents.

We now have the federal accountability act before us with, I say without reservation, a good many important measures and improvements in accountability. I think one would have to say that it is a fairly major overhaul, one much improved by a good many amendments that my colleague from Winnipeg Centre was able to gain cooperation to introduce as well.

Regrettably, one of the things that is missing, sadly, is any dealing whatsoever with the phenomenon of floor crossing, which is in many ways the ultimate thumbing of one's nose by individual members and political parties at that notion of accountability to one's constituents.

The member will know that people were outraged not just in the particular riding involved but right across this country, outraged at the notion that someone who ran for one political party and constantly trashed the party that became government on election day simply crossed the floor and decided to join the so-called winners almost immediately following the election.

Would the hon. minister not agree that one of the very great omissions in the new so-called accountability legislation that we are now debating is the complete failure to deal in any way whatsoever with the issue of accountability to one's constituents in relation to floor crossing activity?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The time available to the minister is up, but I am going to give him a little more so that he can answer this question.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Speaker, thank you for this courtesy.

First of all, I would like to tell my colleague that I am convinced her French has improved. Indeed you cannot attend the Centre linguistique du Cégep de Jonquière, in a region where 99.9% of the people speak French, without acquiring some very good knowledge of this second language.

I wish to tell my colleague that I too intend to try and improve my second language by going to Toronto in early August. I will have the opportunity to spend two weeks there in immersion to try and improve, too.

That said, it is impossible to put everything into one bill. The priority of this one was to deal with transparency. It was also aimed at better management of public funds so that Canadians can see what is being done with their money. It also limits election contributions by setting a maximum for such amounts at \$1,000 for all citizens and also by not accepting donations from unions and other organizations.

The spirit of the law is good and this is the spirit in which the Prime Minister wished to table this bill, so that Canadians can see what is being done with their money and what politicians are doing in terms of accountability.

• (2100)

[*English*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise tonight to talk about the most important new legislation in Canada's history with respect to cleaning up the way politics is done and the way government is run. That, of course, is the federal accountability act.

Before I proceed, let me say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River.

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I knocked on over 40,000 doors in the two and a half years leading up to the last federal election. My riding of Edmonton Centre is extremely diverse, with people of dozens of ethnicities, all income levels, all lifestyles and all levels of interest in politics.

There were many issues discussed at those 40,000 doorsteps, but one stood out above the others, especially in the couple of months leading up to January 23. That issue was corruption and accountability. I heard it at door after door.

I have to say that I took a lot of abuse for things that I had not done, but because I was on their doorstep as an aspiring politician they attributed it to me anyway. That is okay. I did not mind taking the abuse because I felt very strongly about it, and that was one of the reasons I got into this in the first place. I felt that something had to be done to clean up our act.

I will not belabour the history behind why it became such an important issue to Canadians. That sad story is well known. Voters rendered their judgment on January 23.

Canadians voted for change, positive change, and that is exactly what the federal accountability act delivers. I sat in as a substitute for three hours of the committee's work in bringing Bill C-2 to this point. I was very impressed with the level of cooperation between all members and their commitment to delivering accountability to Canadians.

The committee ground through hundreds of clauses, hundreds of pages and dozens of witnesses in six weeks. It was an enormous task. I was extremely impressed to watch a small part of it and to be a small part of it. Ultimately, on behalf of Canadians, the committee has delivered a great piece of legislation back to the House. It deserves our full support.

Of the many provisions of this historic legislation, I would like to highlight two.

The first area I would like to address is that of making qualified government appointments. The current process does not fully respect Parliament and it is inconsistent. The current system is not as transparent and merit based as it could be and should be.

To correct these shortcomings, the federal accountability act will do several things. The federal accountability act will institute a uniform approach to appointing officers and agents of Parliament and ensure a meaningful role for Parliament in the process.

Bill C-2 will create a public appointments commission in the Prime Minister's portfolio to oversee, monitor and report on the selection process for appointments to government boards, commissions, agencies and crown corporations.

The federal accountability act will also allow the Chief Electoral Officer to appoint returning officers, following an external appointment process, with provisions that ensure the merit principle is applied.

Finally, the act will remove the entitlements of all ministers' staffs to priority appointments and instead allow them to apply for internal competitions for public service positions for up to one year.

What this means is that Canadians can be assured that the appointments process is approved by Parliament, that government appointments reward merit while being open and fair, and that the potential for politicizing the public service is reduced.

I would also like to address the area of cleaning up the procurement of government contracts. In another life, I was intimately involved with what was the largest military procurement at that time, the CF-18 program. The program spanned two governments, one Conservative and one Liberal. On balance, it was a pretty good program, with some interference on the part of government, but not an inordinate amount.

About a dozen or so years later, we had the Sea King replacement that has stretched on and still is not resolved. That was primarily due to unbelievable government interference in the process, which had potentially disastrous consequences for the brave men and women flying that aircraft.

As the largest purchaser of goods and services in Canada, the government must have a bidding process that is fair, open and transparent. Canadians will be able to have confidence in the procurement process, which will include an overarching statement of principles on procurement, one that commits the government to promoting fairness, openness and transparency in the bidding process.

Canadians will know that contracts include integrity provisions.

• (2105)

The federal accountability act will create a procurement auditor who will review procurement practices, handle complaints from potential suppliers, review complaints regarding contract administration, manage an alternative dispute resolution process, and submit an annual report to be tabled in Parliament.

The government will also engage an independent expert to review draft policy on managing procurement to reinforce a fair, open and transparent procurement process.

We will introduce a code of conduct for procurement. That will consolidate conflict of interest and anti-corruption policies, which will be applicable both to suppliers and to public service employees.

Finally, government will provide more resources and greater regional presence to the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises within Public Works and Government Services Canada. That will help businesses maintain access to government opportunities and will ensure them fair treatment.

What does this mean for Canadians? It means that Canadians can be assured that government will have a procurement process that is free of political interference. We will have a clear process in place to address complaints from potential suppliers. The little guy in all regions of Canada will also have the ability to compete for government contracts.

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There are many other provisions of the federal accountability act that I do not have time to cover in detail. I could go on about whistleblower protection; strengthening auditing and accountability within departments; banning secret donations to political candidates; reforming the financing of political parties; strengthening the role of the Ethics Commissioner; toughening the Lobbyists Registration Act; cleaning up government polling and advertising; and ensuring truth in budgeting with a parliamentary budget authority.

They are all important to making our political process more trustworthy, because if Canadians do not feel they can trust us, then they have no reason to vote for us or to even care about the political process. We simply could not allow that to happen. The implementation of this act will go a long way to restoring Canadians' confidence in this institution.

It will not be enough to pass the act and then not abide by its provisions. We will all have to walk the talk. Canadians will be watching us all closely and we will not let them down. If we do, we do so at our peril. I am sure that all members of all parties will take that responsibility seriously. I look forward to being part of that parade.

The President of the Treasury Board, his parliamentary secretary, their staff and all members who served on the committee have done Canadians and Parliament a great service. They deserve great credit as well as the gratitude of all Canadians.

When I go back to Edmonton Centre this summer and spend time with the 93,000 voters and 122,000 people to whom I am responsible, I will be proud to talk about the great work that all members of the House did in passing the federal accountability act.

The shortcomings of political ethics and accountability were a major motivator for me to get into this line of work in the first place. I am happy to say that the passing of the act will go a long way toward justifying that decision to myself.

I look forward to the next 40,000 doors in Edmonton Centre and I urge all members to pass this great piece of legislation for the benefit of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not hear the answer. There is a lot skating going on in the party in power.

The accountability bill is noble, and we have no objections to it. We are going to pass it. Nevertheless, at present, in the federal cabinet, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services—everyone knows this—was made a member of the Cabinet without being elected. The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities told us earlier that it was because someone important was needed from Montreal. It is true that no Conservative was elected there. As far as I know, no Conservatives were elected in Trois-Rivières, Sherbrooke or Laval, either.

Why talk about an accountability act? We were elected under a democratic system. And in such a system, those elected by the people are the ones that represent them and are accountable to them. How can the member explain then, without making it difficult and without trying to put us to sleep, that something as fundamental as

appointing a minister from among the elected representatives was rejected?

• (2110)

[*English*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest and, I have to admit, a little amusement to my hon. colleague's question. I can assure him that the three ridings he mentioned in fact will have Conservative members of Parliament after the next election.

I will point out, as has been pointed out already, that there is a theme here tonight. It seems to be “pick on the Minister of Public Works and Government Services night”. That is fair. This is a democracy. Members can pick on anybody they like.

We are not skirting anything. We are taking on accountability head-on. We are taking on the lack of accountability and ethics and the corruption we have seen in previous governments for the last many years head-on.

Senator Fortier has agreed to run in the next federal election, as the member well knows. He has said that many times. He is a man of great integrity and great ability. He is doing a tremendous job in his current portfolio, and he is certainly not the first senator who served in the cabinet of Canada with great distinction. He continues to do that. I very strongly suspect that after the next election he will be a member of this House and will continue in an important cabinet role.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to applaud the member for Ottawa Centre for two things he said in his speech, which I listened to carefully.

I would first like to applaud him for acknowledging the fact that members in opposition worked together with other members in government and in opposition to try to bring about amendments and improvements in response to witness presentations over a six week period.

I walked into the chamber a little while ago after coming from my foreign affairs committee and I first heard a Liberal member chastising the NDP for supporting the Conservative legislation now before us in the form of the federal accountability act. Then I heard a Conservative member chastising the NDP for being critical over some of the things that were omitted. I think it was a fair and accurate reflection by the member for Ottawa Centre to acknowledge that there were a lot of amendments. That is what members are there for. We are not here to obstruct legislation but to actually improve legislation when the opportunity presents itself.

I want to congratulate him for having referenced the Sea Kings nightmare and what is really the scandal of them not being replaced to this day even though it is not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I apologize to the hon. member for Halifax, but I do have to allow enough time for the member for Edmonton Centre to respond.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate my hon. colleague's comments, but I will point out that Edmonton is a long way from Ottawa, although I love Ottawa as well.

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I do thank her for the observation. I am a rookie in this place, but one thing I came here to do was to cooperate with members of all parties, because we all have something to offer to this place and we all have something to offer to Canadians.

We can do it in a much more effective manner if we are willing to walk on each other's road a mile or two to get something done together that will advance the issue, whatever it is, for all Canadians. I am very proud to be a small part of this. I look forward to doing that for a very long time in representing Edmonton Centre or any other riding that the hon. member would like to put me in.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, the last thing I would want to do is take away from my colleague, the member for Ottawa Centre, the riding which he now proudly represents as a New Democrat. I intended no offence by this slip of tongue in referring to Ottawa Centre, not Edmonton Centre.

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to speak to Bill C-2, the federal accountability act, despite the late hour this evening. I do not believe it is an overstatement to call this one of the most important pieces of legislation in Canadian democratic history. The very circumstances under which this bill was drafted and introduced have been historic.

It might surprise my opponents across the way that I am not going to use my opportunity to speak on this bill by rehashing the sponsorship scandal and other well publicized scandals which led to the Liberal Party of Canada's troubles while it was in government, as well as its current state of turmoil now that it is in opposition. While these unfortunate events were the catalysts that ultimately led to the tabling of Bill C-2, I refer to them only in order to demonstrate that this legislation we are debating will not only serve Canadians and our entire democratic political system, it will ultimately serve the best interests of the political parties themselves.

First and foremost, the federal accountability act protects Canadians' hard-earned tax dollars and preserves the credibility of and confidence in our democratic institutions. However, by its very nature, this legislation will provide all political parties with the comfort and reassurance of strict guidelines and codes of practice. Had these stringent rules legislated under this bill been in place several years ago, it is possible that my colleagues in the Liberal Party may not have had to endure the controversy and the internal turmoil that is their reality today.

I may disagree on many issues with my colleagues across the floor of this chamber, but I know that Canadians are best served by both a strong government and a strong opposition.

The reforms proposed under Bill C-2 are designed to enhance the openness of all federal political parties. If a particular party gains the ultimate confidence of Canadians and forms a government, it will benefit from the reforms and guidelines this legislation imposes upon government operations and accountability.

By toughening the laws concerning the financing of political parties and candidates, Bill C-2 will increase transparency and reduce opportunities to influence politicians, thereby helping Canadians feel more confident about our democratic process.

These measures include a ban on contributions by corporations, unions and organizations, and lower limits on contributions that individuals can make to a registered party, candidates, nomination contestants and district associations. This legislation also bans secret donations to political candidates. It prohibits candidates from accepting gifts that might risk influencing them in the performance of their elected duties. It requires them to report any gifts over \$500.

When it comes to influencing government, this bill includes significant measures to ensure that lobbying is practised in an ethical and transparent manner. For example, ministers, ministerial staff, transition team members and senior public servants will not be permitted to lobby the Government of Canada for five years after leaving office.

Bill C-2 will also ensure that government contracts are free from political interference. In addition, government polling and advertising will be subject to strict new rules. Significant violations and scandalous practices within these two aspects of government operations were brought to light in recent years by the Auditor General of Canada.

As we are all well aware in this House, reports issued by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada are largely what compelled Canadians to recognize the urgent need to address severe and widespread deficiencies in government accountability and the misuse of taxpayers' money. Parliamentarians need objective and fact based information about how the government raises and spends public funds. The Auditor General is an independent and reliable source of such information.

This new Conservative government recognizes the major contribution of the Auditor General. In fact, Bill C-2 is our tangible tribute to the professionalism, diligence and forthright honesty of our current Auditor General, Sheila Fraser. She is probably the most respected and trusted federal official in Canada today. Many of the reforms proposed in this legislation are based upon recommendations that she herself made.

● (2115)

Therefore, in drafting the federal accountability act and the accompanying non-legislative action plan, it was clear to our government that we must also strengthen the Office of the Auditor General to further enhance her ability to serve Parliament and Canadians.

The Auditor General audits federal departments and agencies, most crown corporations and many other federal organizations. She reports up to four times a year to the House of Commons on matters that she believes should be brought to the attention of the House, and she testifies on audits before parliamentary committees.

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The federal accountability act would give the Auditor General much wider powers to follow the money. In 2005 the Auditor General Act was amended to allow the Auditor General to inquire into the use of funds, essentially transfer payments and loans received by not for profit corporations or corporations without share capital that had in any five consecutive fiscal years received a total of \$100 million or more under funding agreements.

This was a good start to address the Auditor General's concerns on significant transfers to foundations. However, it does not allow the Auditor General to follow the money for a wider range of transfer payment recipients. The federal accountability act would greatly extend this mandate.

At her discretion the Auditor General would now be empowered to inquire into the use of grants, contributions and loans by individuals, institutions and companies that receive funding under funding agreements. The only exemptions are for payments to other governments, which includes first nations, and to international organizations. The power will extend to funding provided by crown corporations themselves. The financial limit will be lowered from \$100 million so that recipients that receive \$1 million or more in total over five years are included. The \$100 million threshold will allow the Auditor General to focus on larger payments and will serve to exclude payments to Canadians under basic statutory entitlement programs such as old age security and guaranteed income supplement.

The act would also enable regulations to be passed that will require that funding agreements with recipients include provisions that support the Auditor General's mandate. Specifically, funding agreements will include terms that require recipients to provide information and records to the Auditor General on request. These changes will allow the Auditor General much greater ability to follow the money when she considers it to be appropriate for the purposes of informing Parliament on the use of funds.

In addition, certain immunities available to some other agents of Parliament will be extended to the Office of the Auditor General. The act would provide immunity for the Auditor General from criminal and civil proceedings for actions taken in the performance or execution of her duties, functions or powers. This protection would not extend to excesses or abuses of authority, but would protect the Auditor General and persons acting on her behalf or under her direction where their actions are taken in good faith in the performance of their duties.

The act would also provide protection to the Auditor General from being a compellable witness in most proceedings. She and persons acting on her behalf or under her direction would not be required to testify about information that came to their attention in the course of performing their duties.

Further to the legislative changes to be enacted through the federal accountability act, we will proceed immediately with non-legislative measures to ensure that the Office of the Auditor General has adequate resources to fulfill its mandate. The Auditor General is one of five agents of Parliament currently participating in a two year pilot project. Under this pilot project an all party parliamentary advisory panel considers the funding requests of agents prior to a final Treasury Board decision on their budgets. This process gives

Parliament a greater role and respects the independence of agents of Parliament while allowing the Treasury Board Secretariat to provide input on panel recommendations.

These changes will reassure Parliament and Canadians that this government strongly supports the Auditor General's role as an essential source of independent information about government spending. Our current Auditor General is a hard act to follow. However, it is my fervent hope that once Bill C-2 and its accompanying non-legislative reforms become well established and entrenched in our democratic and political institutions, Canadians will extend to more federal officials the kind of confidence that they now hold for the Auditor General.

● (2120)

In conclusion, I know that in my riding of Prince George—Peace River in northeastern British Columbia confidence and trust in government have eluded my constituents for far too many years. I believe that the passage of the federal accountability act will serve to help restore those highly valued fundamentals of Canadian democracy.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the last election many of us were very concerned about the erosion of Canadians' faith in ethical government because of the behaviour of the previous government with its scandals and corruption that we all witnessed.

Canadians sent a loud and clear message that they wanted those of us elected to this Parliament to clean up government and restore their faith in ethics and accountability. I am very pleased and proud of a government that is bringing in these kinds of changes that Canadians have wanted to see for so long. I am very proud that it was the NDP that has made many proposed changes that have been voted on and adopted to strengthen this legislation.

I was personally involved in submitting proposals for change around the public appointments commission to ensure that rather than a vague notion of appointments made from the Prime Minister's office, in fact it would be a strong commission that would be accountable to the House of Commons and it would really get rid of patronage based appointments.

My question for the hon. member on his commentary this evening is around the issue of appointments. Will his government now move to appoint the head of the appointments commission so that we can get on with having clear and accountable appointments for all Canadians?

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● (2125)

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that thanks to the NDP and the other opposition parties, that process is not in place now. That is simply because the person whom we had considered to head up that commission, a very renowned gentleman from western Canada who was a businessman, was brought before a parliamentary committee, criticized and torn apart in front of all Canadians on national television. It was a televised committee meeting. His appointment was rejected by that committee.

Despite the best efforts of the Prime Minister and this government, the Conservative Party of Canada, who wanted to have an arm's length process in place that the member says she supports, the opposition parties did everything possible to demean that process and to ensure that no other individual would want to let his or her name stand to go through that type of process.

I think that is a real shame. The reality is that we should have, and the Prime Minister supports, an arm's length process so that we do not have the old system in place where it is only the Prime Minister and individuals in the PMO who make those selections and make those appointments. We would rather have that other system, but I would hesitate, as certainly the Prime Minister would, to appoint someone only to have him or her appear before a committee and be torn apart by partisan interests on the part of the opposition parties.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I assume that the hon. member is not wishing to undermine the democratic process of a parliamentary committee and the democratic vote that took place to determine that the Prime Minister's proposed appointment was unsuitable for the position. I think it is quite reasonable that the committee would determine that someone so partisan who was being proposed would not be a suitable head for a commission responsible for thousands of appointments across Canada.

Will the government accept the democratic decision of the committee and now move to propose a more suitable candidate for the position of heading up this newly created appointments commission so that it has teeth and is truly accountable to Parliament?

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, suitable to whom? I think that is the question.

We and the Prime Minister did not deny that committee the right to democratically express its opinion on the appointment Gwyn Morgan. That committee had its right to do that, and we do not deny that.

Gwyn Morgan, who headed up EnCana, was not unsuitable. He is one of the most highly regarded and highly respected business people. He was going to do this job for \$1 a year. It is important for Canadians watching these proceedings at home to understand that. In other words, he was going to do it for free. A person of that stature was going to assist to set up an appointment process. He was not going to make the appointments himself. Let us be clear about that. Because of his knowledge and his understanding of structure and corporate structure, he was going to set up that process. The opposition parties, for purely partisan reasons, trashed him in committee and passed that motion.

Why would we select someone else to go through that process?

● (2130)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise this evening regarding Bill C-2, at third reading.

I had the honour, if I can put it that way, to sit on the legislative committee responsible for Bill C-2, to which the bill was referred at second reading. That was a revelation.

It was something to see the way that the government, with the complicity of the NDP member for Winnipeg Centre, ensured that the witnesses appearing before the committee did not have the time to fully present their points of view. They were unable to do their preparatory work properly before coming before the committee.

After their presentations, certain witnesses asked to come back a second time, considering that they had not been given enough time to do justice to their viewpoints or to the recommendations they wanted to make to the committee.

The government members and the NDP member refused to give these witnesses the option to return.

I will go no further with this. I think that those Canadians who followed the committee's proceedings—which were, after all, publicized and in the media—were able to see the behaviour of the hon. members, particularly that of the government's parliamentary secretaries.

I will be raising five points in my speech. I want to talk about the Parliament of Canada Act, the changes that the government has tried to make to it, and the reasons that drove the hon. members of the opposition to stop the government's action to amend the Parliament of Canada Act.

I also want to talk about the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Tribunal.

I want to talk about the Public Appointments Commission.

I also want to talk about two other subjects that were raised by certain hon. members in both the NDP and the Conservative Party.

[*English*]

I would like to talk about the questions of floor crossing and of the minimum age to contribute financially to a political party. I will start with the question of floor crossing.

I find it amazing that a member of the NDP took to task members of the Liberal Party and the Bloc for certain decisions taken in committee. What was interesting was that same member was also denouncing Liberal members and government members, who sit on the Standing Committee on the Environment, for upholding a ruling of the chair regarding an NDP motion. The member said it was anti-democratic, it was disgusting, it was this, it was that. I will not even use all of the words.

At the same time, in the legislative committee on Bill C-2, my colleague, the member for Vancouver Quadra, who is also the Liberal critic for democratic reform, had tabled an amendment to Bill C-2 which would have dealt with the issue of floor-crossing. It would have allowed a process for constituents, who had voted for a member who then crossed the floor to another party, to do what we in popular terms call a recall. The chair of the committee ruled the amendment out of order. The NDP member for Winnipeg Centre and the government members voted to uphold the chair's ruling. The Liberal members did not say that was undemocratic. We did not denounce the member for Winnipeg Centre for voting to uphold the ruling of the chair.

However, one of his colleagues turned around and denounced Liberal members for upholding a chair's ruling that an NDP motion in another committee was out of order and said it was undemocratic. I think that speaks to the level of hypocrisy we see at times from at least two parties in the House, the Conservatives and the NDP.

On the question of minimum age for donation. For the last several weeks we have heard non-stop members of the Conservative government, members of the NDP and especially the member for Winnipeg Centre rise in indignation that a Liberal leadership candidate legally accepted donations from children under the age of 18. They said it was inappropriate and reprehensible. It was like stealing from kids' lunch boxes or doing political financing in day cares.

Yet on the legislative committee, when a Liberal amendment would have set the minimum age to make legal contributions to political parties at 18, guess who voted against it? The NDP member for Winnipeg Centre and the five Conservative members of Parliament who sat on that committee.

An hon. member: Hypocrisy.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: That is sheer hypocrisy. Worse yet, not only did they vote against establishing the minimum age of 18 to make legal financial contributions to political parties, but the NDP member for Winnipeg South had the gall to table an amendment which would have allowed newborn babies to make donations to political parties.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (2135)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I have to be able to hear the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine and there are some members in the House who are making it very difficult for me to do that. I would appreciate a little of order from all parties on all sides of the House so that we can finish hearing the hon. for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, to the credit of the Conservative members sitting on the committee, who finally found an ounce of decency and honesty within them, they voted against the amendment of the NDP member for Winnipeg Centre. That was only after an impassioned speech by the four Liberal members and the two Bloc members. Only then were we able to convince the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of Treasury Board, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and

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Government Services, a third parliamentary secretary and the two little backbenchers. However, I am pleased.

I hope the second chamber of sober thought, the other place, when it receives Bill C-2, will examine the possibility of instituting amendments to the bill, which would deal with floor-crossing and which would establish a minimum age for making legal contributions to political parties.

Having dealt with those two issues, I cannot stop myself from saying this. At times when I listened to the member for Winnipeg Centre and some of the government members who sat on the legislative committee on Bill C-2, in their overblown hyperbole of righteous indignation about whether it was political financing, it reminded me of two very famous films. One will date me, the other one will not.

Elmer Gantry was played by that wonderful American actor Burt Lancaster. Anyone who saw it will remember that Elmer Gantry was a preacher. He had the golden word and was able to seduce people into believing what he had to say by using those buzz words that capture the hearts and minds of ordinary, good, decent people. However, Elmer Gantry was a faker. Elmer Gantry was a seller of snake oil. Elmer Gantry was out for Elmer Gantry, like the so-called five priorities of the Conservative Party.

The Conservative Party, can talk about accountability, transparency, oversight, but when one looks at some of the provisions of Bill C-2, they in fact create more secrecy. More power is concentrated in the centre, or for those who do not know, the executive, or the Prime Minister and his little gang. It has absolutely nothing to do with accountability. It has everything to do with trying to pull the wool over the eyes of ordinary, decent Canadians that it is the party of openness and transparency.

We have already heard of some of the first decisions taken by the Prime Minister. What was one of his first decisions? Was it to appoint a non-elected individual to his cabinet and to the Senate, the very Senate the Prime Minister, when in opposition, denounced day after day, year after year. He said that it was not a valid chamber because it was not elected, it was not democratic. He said that if he ever came to government, he would abolish it or create an elected Senate. His first act was to appoint a non-elected individual to the Senate and then to bring that person into his cabinet.

• (2140)

Where is the accountability? I forgot, that individual was a major fundraiser, if not the chief fundraiser for the Conservative Party in Quebec. Where is the accountability there? Where is the transparency? Where is the oversight?

Ministers of cabinet are supposed to be accountable to Parliament. They are supposed to be accountable in the House of Commons. That minister is not accountable here. He may not step foot in the House. He is not allowed to step foot in the House. He is not permitted to take part in question period, as members of the Conservative Party know very well.

So much for accountability. So much for transparency. So much for oversight. Hello, that is the Conservative Party, the snake oil seller, the Elmer Gantry of 2006.

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Let us talk about another movie that might ring a bell, *The Nutty Professor*. The original starring Jerry Lewis, considered to be one of the greatest actors by the French in France. There was a remake starring Eddie Murphy, so the younger crowd will also know *The Nutty Professor*.

Anyone who saw the original or the remake will remember that there is the archetypical villain and that was Buddy. Buddy was good looking. Buddy was a sweet talker. Buddy could seduce anyone with his sweet-talking and make them believe anything, but Buddy was found out in the end.

I must say that when I listen to the Conservatives spin out their line on accountability, transparency, integrity, and ethics, their own conduct belies every single one of those fundamental principles, and I am reminded of Buddy. We must not forget Buddy's demise. Everyone ended up seeing through him.

I would like to get to a couple of points within the legislation which we Liberals and the Bloc members feel are very important. I believe the NDP believes at least one point is important as well. The first is the public appointments commission.

● (2145)

[*Translation*]

I know that the member for Halifax, the former leader of the NDP, raised the point. Another member of the NDP, who is currently in the House, also asked questions about the Public Appointments Commission. He asked the government, specifically the government whip, whether the Prime Minister intended to implement this commission and proceed with appointments once Bill C-2 is passed in the Senate, has received royal assent and is in effect.

It was interesting to hear the government whip's answer. He blathered on that a standing committee of the House had done its duty, which was to review the appointment that the Prime Minister had made prematurely, because the act was not even in effect. The Prime Minister had the arrogance—the only word I can use that is parliamentary and acceptable in this House—to appoint an individual to the position of chairperson of the Public Appointments Commission before the commission was even in place, before it was even a legal entity. What arrogance.

In spite of this, the committee duly welcomed the appointment, summoned this man, Gwyn Morgan, to appear, proceeded to examine his credentials and qualifications and determined, in its judgment, that he was not qualified to occupy the future position of chairperson of the Public Appointments Commission.

When Bill C-2 was referred to the legislative committee created specially to study it, only one clause in the bill dealt with this Public Appointments Commission, which, according to the Conservatives and the Prime Minister, was nonetheless the cornerstone of their policy of integrity, accountability, and so on.

That one clause, number 228, the only text about that institution that is so important to the Conservative policy, can be found on page 175. It amended section 1.1 as follows:

The Governor in Council may establish a Public Appointments Commission, consisting of a chairperson and not more than four other members—

The bill said nothing about the commission's mandate, powers or objectives—nothing.

An NDP member who sat on the committee, the member for Winnipeg Centre, introduced a motion, an amendment, as did the Liberals.

Since my time has run out, I will conclude by saying that thanks to the opposition members, the Public Appointments Commission will have real powers. I strongly encourage the other place to have a look at page 148, clause two-twenty-some—

● (2150)

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

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there were a number of things that the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine has touched upon but time does not permit following all those rabbit tracks.

I want to raise a question because I am genuinely puzzled. I was not on the committee so I do not know everything that went on. I will certainly acknowledge that. Nobody following this debate from their living rooms tonight would find it surprising that not everyone here knows every word of debate that goes on in committee, but I am surprised by a perception that may have been created.

Perhaps she would like to take the opportunity to correct the perception, if in fact it is not accurate, and the really quite stunning revelation that one of her Liberal colleagues who is seeking the leadership of her party, the member for Eglinton—Lawrence, had actually accepted campaign donations from 11 year old twins and their 14 year old brother.

I think this really shook a lot of people's confidence in what kinds of rules and regulations exist with respect to the accountability for campaign contributions. I know that has seen a lot of resistance from both the Conservative Party and Liberal Party for any kind of restrictions on leadership campaigns.

I wonder if the member would clarify whether she feels that it is perfectly all right for the intent and the spirit, if not the letter, of existing restrictions on campaign donations to have been violated by contributions from 11 year old twins and their 14 year old brother whose father just happened to be a corporate mogul who was supporting this leadership aspirant.

Does she have a problem with that or does she not, and does she think there should be some attempt to establish some guidelines that would make sense?

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I cannot say how happy I am that the member asked me this question. I thought I had covered it in my introductory remarks, but she has allowed me the opportunity to go at it a second time, to ensure that everyone in this chamber and anyone who is watching understands.

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Not only did I have a problem with it, I had such a problem that I brought an amendment to Bill C-2 to establish the minimum legal age to donate to be 18. What was my surprise? The member for Winnipeg Centre, who is the colleague of the member for Halifax of the NDP who just asked me this question, voted against that amendment. He is the same person who stood in this chamber day after day, saying it was reprehensible of that leadership candidate to accept donations from 11 year old twins and a 14 year old. He voted against the Liberal amendment which would have established 18 years of age as the minimum age to legally donate.

That is the first thing. I could not understand it. How hypocritical to stand here and denounce the Liberals because one member accepted donations, which were legal by the way, and then when a Liberal member attempts to correct it, he votes against it.

However, he then went even further. He tabled his own amendment which would have allowed day-old babies to donate legally. I would like that member to explain to me how she could condone her own colleague putting an amendment through that would have allowed day-old babies to donate.

• (2155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the generalities presented by the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine and her reviews of two American movies. I would like to point out that there are also good Quebec movies produced by the film industry, sometimes with grants from Canadian Heritage.

In 2004 and 2006, after a career as an engineer, I stood for election. I truly believe in democracy and I wish to participate in the democratic way so that as many citizens as possible can participate in our Parliament.

I was struck by the fact that, in general, politicians were held in low regard. I arrived on the heels of the sponsorship scandal and revelations about various other corrupt government practices. I am referring primarily to the appointment of returning officers, until now, by the Prime Minister's office .

I could talk about all the outrageous things that were done in my riding to prevent constituents from voting because a well-known Liberal was the returning officer. I am most satisfied with this aspect of the bill. I would like to hear the member's views on this important reform.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. member's opinion entirely regarding the excellent movies made in Quebec. I am very proud of them, being a Quebecker myself. However, those two American movies perfectly illustrate my point. I am glad, in a sense, that we do not have Quebec movies that portray such hypocrites, like the characters in the two movies I mentioned.

As for the returning officers, I fully support the notion of granting the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada the power and authority to appoint returning officers in the ridings. I am a Quebecker and live under the Quebec Election Act, under which, the Quebec chief electoral officer makes the appointments in the ridings.

When I began my political career in 1997, the returning officer in my riding had been appointed by my predecessor. Not only did he

not give me any preferential treatment, he definitely got in my way on certain occasions.

It is not because someone is appointed by a predecessor from the same party that that person is going to be partisan. I am, therefore, happy about this change.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague for her fine oratory skills in outlining the massive deficits in Bill C-2.

It is interesting that with a title like “public accountability”, who could possibly disagree with that? One could only disagree with the bill if the bill did not deal with public accountability.

The major flaw and the big lie with respect to this bill, because let us call what it is, it is an effort to tie the whole bill into the big lie which will somehow lambaste the previous government and the Liberal Party for being corrupt, which everybody knows is not true. The reality is vastly different. However, to the government's credit, it successfully rode on that pony to government and history is what it was.

This is a much more serious issue than petty politics because this bill, if passed, will have a profound impact upon the lives of Canadians and the functioning of our public service.

If this bill were to improve the public service and improve accountability, that would be a useful thing. I venture to say that the bill has nothing to do with accountability because true public accountability is the obligation on the part of elected officials and senior government officials to tell the public what they are doing.

Does the hon. member not think that this bill would cause gridlock in the public service by all the—

• (2200)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry but I do have to allow the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine time enough to respond to the comment.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, yes, I do believe the bill would create a gridlock.

Expert witnesses have said that many of the new structures that have been put into place did not need to be put into place. The new authorities, if that was what the government wanted to create, could have easily been embedded in existing structures. I will give two examples.

The first example is the public appointments commission. We have the Public Service Commission which already has expertise in establishing criteria for hiring, for promotion, et cetera, within the public service. The Liberals proposed amendments that would have taken the authority of the public appointments commission and embedded that into the Public Service Commission. The government and the NDP voted against those amendments.

The second example is the public servants disclosure protection tribunal. We had unions telling us that should go to the Canadian Industrial Relations Board because it has the expertise. The government and the NDP voted against that. They preferred to create an entirely new structure.

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Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from St. Catharines.

I have been sitting here listening to the members on that side of the House for the last three months and I have come to the conclusion that they do not really know or understand why they are sitting on that side of the House. They think they have some divine right wherever they are and do not understand why they are sitting on the opposite side of the House. Perhaps I should remind them that on January 23, Canadians sent them a message and sent them into the opposition, out of the government, because Canadians lost trust in those people.

I do not understand how they can sit over there as if nothing has happened and keep puffing their chests and screaming at all these things. It is all absolute nonsense. Perhaps they should look at themselves in the mirror and try to analyze why they are sitting over there. Your own leadership candidates are now questioning what you were doing sitting over there for the last 12 years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The member will please address his remarks through the Chair and not directly to members of the House.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Sometimes we get carried away, Mr. Speaker.

Those members are sitting over there for the simple reason that they do not understand accountability. Their record on accountability was so bad that Canadians were fed up and voted them out of office. We just have to look at what happened in the Gomery inquiry. The member said that there was no corruption in the Liberal Party. If there was no corruption why was there a Gomery inquiry? Why did the previous prime minister try to distance himself from the sponsorship scandal? Where did the money go? Why did the Liberal Party return the money to the government? The Liberals returned \$700,000 because they said they had taken it. That is the issue today.

On January 23, Canadians decided to give the Conservatives a chance. We stood up for our priorities. We told Canadians what we stood for. We had no hidden agenda. We promised Canadians this bill and we are delivering. As the President of Treasury Board said, this accountability bill is one of the toughest in the western hemisphere. It brings accountability back to politics, back to running the government.

We just heard about a leadership candidate going after children. That is how much nonsense this has become. The last speaker stood up and tried to defend this by saying that she brought in an amendment to raise the age to 18. I did not hear her say one word about condemning that leadership candidate. I did not hear her say that he was wrong. Why could she not stand up publicly and say that the leadership candidate was wrong? She then pretended that she was now bringing accountability into this thing. She had every opportunity when she was in government to bring in accountability but at that time she found it difficult to do so. However, not the Conservative government.

The member for Halifax tried to put us in the same light as the Liberals when she said that we had no rules for leadership races. She should look at the accountability act under "Reforming the

Financing of Political Parties". It is very clear. I hope her party will support this. It is quite simple. A candidate in a nomination contest or a party leadership candidate cannot receive more than \$1,000 in contributions. If that is not accountability, then what is? This is an attempt by the Conservative Party to bring some semblance here. It would take away the influence of business. We know of Liberal cronyism. We must not forget the Dingwall affair and the culture of entitlement that went on for 13 years.

The accountability act would bring Canadians' confidence back because politicians will finally be accountable to the people. They would no longer be accountable to special interest groups or to people who give large donations. The bill is a direct result of the Liberal sponsorship scandal.

I am pleased to say that the Conservative Party is fulfilling its promise and we are delivering on what we said in the election. That is foreign to members of the Liberal Party. They promised so much but what did they deliver? They delivered nothing.

● (2205)

The Liberal candidate was going after children and of course it was quite amusing to see the member from Winnipeg telling him, "Please don't go to schools. Don't attack my children".

However, on a serious note, the accountability act will bring in what Canadians were asking for. They were looking forward to relying on politicians and those who govern them to do that. They send us their tax dollars without question, but they want us to use them carefully. That is what this accountability act is.

I am extremely happy and proud to be associated with a government that has brought such a strong accountability act forward, but there is more than that, because what we promised is what we have delivered: our five priorities. The opposition may not like it, but the fact of the matter is that this is what we told Canadians and that is what we have delivered.

On July 1 we will have a GST cut of 1%. That is what we promised. It was not what the Liberals promised in 1993, which was that they were going to scrap the GST. We said we would cut it and on July 1 we will cut it.

I also am very happy to note that Liberal Party and of course the NDP were out there saying they opposed the budget, everything in the budget, yet when the budget bill came to the House, they passed it. Some may want to say that they were sleeping. Others may want to say that on the issues they do not know what they are doing and they do not know what they are talking about.

Again, they go out there and they tell Canadians "this is what we stand for". Then when we look at the record of what they have done, it is absolutely the opposite. One would wonder: if they were so opposed to this budget, why did they pass the budget unanimously? That is because they know the budget is good. We want to thank them for passing the budget.

I am happy to say that I am very proud to be associated with this government that is bringing forward this accountability act and bringing back to the Canadian people the power to make politicians accountable.

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• (2210)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was very glad to be part of the NDP's changes to Bill C-2, the accountability act, to ensure that appointments are made in a fair, open and transparent manner, that all appointments are based on merit and that patronage will now be against the law.

Of course there was the committee that interviewed Mr. Gwyn Morgan to head up the appointments commission. Mr. Morgan, the Prime Minister's choice, had called the Kyoto accord "sound-bite junk science". He was of course against the Kyoto accord. For reasons of his extreme partisanship and also because we felt it would be unsuitable for someone who was heading up the continent's largest gas company to oversee appointments such as those to the national energy board, we found him unsuitable.

At the time, the Prime Minister said that he was going to do away with the appointments commission and he needed to have a majority government to have fairness in appointments, but really, all it took was NDP amendments to make the appointments commission work.

My question is for the hon. member who has just spoken. Will he take a different tack from the Prime Minister, who said he was going to take his bat and ball and go home, and urge his party now to deal seriously with the appointments commission and finally set up compliance with this fair and transparent process that the NDP has helped bring into place?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member asked this question. Let me point out that Mr. Gwyn Morgan is one of the best CEOs. He was voted the best CEO of the year for this country. He led one of the best-run companies in the world. He had a stellar record both as a businessman and as a man who contributed to Calgary's art, culture and everything. He was a community driven man. He accepted only \$1 to come here to do his share of public service.

Of course, his views may not be what the NDP wanted. That is fine. But it does not mean that if his views did not meet with the NDP's views that the man was not qualified to take one of the best jobs and bring accountability to this country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like the parliamentary secretary to indicate whether he agrees with the fact that implementing the principle of responsibility necessarily involves the notion of accountability.

If he agrees with that, how can he—as the Conservative government gloats about having reinvented the concept of responsibility—explain that the first action taken by the leader of his party as Prime Minister was to appoint someone who is not accountable to this House—who cannot be accountable to the duly elected MPs—for the enormous portfolio assigned to him?

• (2215)

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, let me say that it is very simple. The government is in this House and the government is held accountable by the opposition. The opposition here has been asking questions in relation to that portfolio and they have been answered,

because ultimately the Prime Minister is responsible and he sits in this chamber.

In reference to the Minister of Public Works, he has said that he would be running in the next election to come into this office.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that we are getting to the end of the session and we have been here a long time. We have heard the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine talk about a couple of movies. One of them was entitled *The Nutty Professor*. What I find really interesting is that Canadians were forced to watch a movie for the last two and a half years—

An hon. member: It was a horror movie.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: It was a horror movie. It was full of suspense, full of emotion, full of intrigue—

An hon. member: And bad acting.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: It had bad acting, theft and corruption.

In fact, that movie was a real life story. It was called the Gomery inquiry. We could not change the channel. We had to change the government. On January 23, we did.

That led to a whole host of changes, changes that turned a new leaf and introduced to Canadians a new government, a government with a vision, a government focused on the issues that matter to Canadians and with an action plan to accomplish what Canadians expect, a government that introduced a new culture of accountability which will forever change the way business is done in Ottawa.

It is not a movie. It is real life. The federal accountability act is about fixing the system for Canadians. It is about strengthening and streamlining how government works. It is about making government more effective. It is about providing Canadians with better access to government information.

The federal accountability act will ensure that Canadians have easier access to government information by strengthening the access to information legislation. I want to take a couple of moments to describe these changes in particular.

Through the work of the legislative committee, the federal accountability act will indeed expand the coverage of the Access to Information Act even more to include all agents of Parliament, including five foundations, which are: the Canada Foundation for Innovation, the Canada Foundation for Sustainable Development Technology, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, the Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada, and even the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. As well, the act includes crown corporations and most of their subsidiaries, excluded until now because of their commercial nature.

The federal accountability act will expand the coverage of the Access to Information Act to all crown corporations and will make government more open and transparent. Even the Canadian Wheat Board is no longer exempt, based on the amendment that passed this afternoon. Even as late as this afternoon we were working to make sure that this act makes sense, that it is going to work and that it is going to be representative of what Canadians want.

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It does not stop there. The government is going to ensure that a broad range of views is considered in exploring ways to further strengthen access to information legislation. Canadians deserve better access to government information. Better access allows Canadians and organizations to participate more fully in public policy development and better assess the Government of Canada's performance. We are not scared to be there. We are not scared to be judged on the performance that we provide.

Our government has been listening and is delivering on its commitments. By expanding the coverage of the Access to Information Act, the government will become more transparent and open. It will provide Canadians with access to more information, and the act will also have the criteria for the future addition of institutions included in the regulations, making them clear, consistent and, most important, transparent. It will provide a duty for institutions to assist requesters without regard to their identity and will clarify the time limit for making a complaint under the Access to Information Act.

• (2220)

As all members of the House know, the Access to Information Act is a complex legislation, with a broad constituency across many sectors of our society. It includes widely divergent views on its administration.

The government is committed to accountability and transparency. That is why the government will invite parliamentarians to engage in a comprehensive debate and to consult with a broad range of stakeholders, as well as to issue a report when it reaches the end of deliberations.

The government is committed to doing the right things and to doing things right to change how business is done in Ottawa. We have proven we can, we will and we will continue to prove that we are delivering on the commitments it made to Canadians.

The reform of the Access to Information Act will be done in collaboration with parliamentarians, with Canadians and with stakeholder groups within our country. The goal is to make government more open, while balancing legitimate requirements for personal privacy, commercial confidentiality and national security. By expanding the coverage of the Access to Information Act, the government will become more transparent and more open.

The Government of Canada belongs to Canadians. It should not obstruct access to information. I promised and committed to the people of my riding, as all of us on this side of the House promised Canadians, that we would clean up government and that is what we are doing. After four short months, our track record speaks for itself. The federal accountability act will strengthen public access to government information, simple and straightforward.

The government has tabled a very important act that went through rigorous parliamentary committee scrutiny, amendment after amendment, debate after debate, hour after hour since April 11.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to rebuild the confidence and trust of the people in St. Catharines, the people in the province of Ontario and the people in every province of our country. Trust is what we are rebuilding.

Accountability is not something that can be simply defined. At the end of the day what we will have is the guiding post that will be the lamp we work under, work through and commit with. This means that each and every one of us, all 308 members sitting as parliamentarians, are still under the same responsibilities that we have acknowledged to the people who elected us. There still is the individual responsibility to ensure we live up to the act.

It takes commitment. It is going to take effort, but we have set a guiding post. By working under that guiding post called the accountability act, I think we will raise the level of respect Canadians have for this institution, for parliamentarians, for the governing party of Canada and for all of us who are here to represent our constituents.

• (2225)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's comments with great interest. I want to go through three parts of his comments and ask him a question at the end.

The member made an absolutely staggering comment. He said that accountability cannot be defined. That is a remarkable statement for someone in a government, professing to put forth an accountability act. How can the member possibly support an accountability act when, in his own words, he cannot define accountability?

My second point is the member spoke about access to information. If he is in favour of access to information, then he should take it up with his Prime Minister as to why he is muzzling the media, why he is muzzling his cabinet, why he is muzzling his members of Parliament and why he is trying to muzzle the public service from doing its job as an apolitical institution.

My third point is on the issue of what Canadians want. They want the same as all of us want because all of us are taxpayers. Canadians want their money to be spent wisely and effectively in the interests of the public.

According to Henry McCandless, an expert on this matter from the Auditor General's office, accountability is the obligation of elected officials to tell the public what they are doing. Bill C-2 will cause a gridlock.

Does the hon. member not admit that this bill, a bill that he cannot define, will cause gridlock in the public service and drive good, young smart people away from joining the public service at a time—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for St. Catharines.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I am not about to take a lesson on what accountability is all about from a person who crossed the floor to join a party that simply does not understand accountability, that did not even want to talk about accountability.

When I speak about accountability in terms of definition, we have not tried to pull out Webster's Dictionary and determine what accountability is from a dictionary perspective. We put 13 elements into the accountability act, which have been debated for the last four months. When I speak about defining it, it is about us, as individuals, as parliamentarians, living up to the responsibilities that are defined within those 13 elements of the act.

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Clearly, as individuals elected to represent our constituents in Ottawa, we have to be prepared to live up to that act individually, based on our conscience, to do the right thing as we work here. That is what it means to live up to the 13 pieces in the accountability act.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the his response to the question by the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, the member for St. Catharines questioned his accountability and whether he should even have to answer that because the member crossed the floor from the Conservatives to the Liberal Party of Canada.

At the same time, though, one of the cabinet ministers, to whom the member has to report, the member for Vancouver Kingsway, crossed the floor from the Liberals to the Conservatives immediately after the election.

I find it interesting that a backbench Conservative would question the fact that —

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Both members who spoke are incorrect. I never crossed the floor. I left my former party, sat as an independent and ran as a Liberal, but I never crossed the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I do not want to get into the elements of debate here. I will allow the hon. member for Windsor West to continue his question.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I am working on the member's analogy of the situation and how he characterized that action. However, the member for St. Catharines was questioning the accountability of members crossing the floor.

What accountability is there in his government's legislation right now, which does not have a floor-crossing element, when the member for Vancouver—Kingsway, immediately after the election, crossed the floor for a cabinet position against the wishes of his constituents?

It is unacceptable that we are not fixing that in the legislation before us today. What credibility does the member have on this issue?

• (2230)

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, the member listened almost closely enough to my response to the question. I indicated very clearly that our party is committed to accountability. Our party was elected to government to bring accountability. We introduced and delivered an accountability act that speaks to the very nature of what we need to clean up here in Ottawa.

The comment I made was very clear. Had the member been listening very closely, he would have heard what I said. Accountability is not on the other side of the House. Accountability is on this side of the House. A member chose to join this party. I think that member did so based on the fact that he knew that delivering on accountability rests in the party that is in government right now.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to hear the intervention from the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca in response to the last totally illogical comment from the member for St. Catharines.

Bill C-2 has been trumpeted by the government as historical legislation and to some degree there is some validity to that, mostly stolen ideas from our former leader and past member, Ed Broadbent. A number of the provisions within Bill C-2 were proposals that he entered into the public record by way of a report issued about 18 months ago, one that was heavily adopted by the Conservative Party at the time and now the Conservative government. As the member for Halifax just mentioned, unfortunately not all of it.

However, there are some key components in it and it is the reason our party has been willing to support the legislation, recognizing it is far from perfect and has some fairly glaring gaps in it, which I will address in a few minutes.

It is important to say that we support it. It has some fairly major advances to deal with what has been a growing level of corruption in some cases, but certainly a growing level of cynicism in the Canadian body politic toward the House and members of this House and toward political parties in our country. It is well past the appropriate time for this legislature and all political parties to address that cynicism, to respond to it and to in effect clean up our act, which the bill, and hopefully soon law, will go some distance in doing.

It begs the question that if we do this will we see a reduction in cynicism? Will we hopefully see an increase in engagement by the average Canadian citizen in politics. Will they pay more attention to it and involve themselves both at election time and in between elections in the determination of policies that are in their best interests and in the best interest of the country as a whole.

We are hoping, and I would say to some degree expecting, some positive outcome in the body politic as a result of this legislation. To that again, I want to acknowledge the phenomenally good work that Ed Broadbent did. He contributed to pushing the Conservative Party and government along these lines and, in effect, showing them the way. It is a debt of gratitude that our country owes to him as a result of all his hard work and vision in that regard.

There are a number of things that it does. It brings into play a new public appointments commission.

In terms of the level of commitment we see from the Conservative Party, we always had suspicions. Because Mr. Gwyn Morgan was in effect shuffled out of the intended role of heading up this commission, in a snit the Prime Minister said "I'm taking my ball, I'm going home". He said that he would not include the public appointments commission in the bill. It was to heck with all the rest of us, to heck with the country and to heck with the importance of having this appointments commission to in effect clean up the patronage, which has been so pervasive. It was in the previous Liberal government and it obviously was going to be in the current government. However, when he did not get his chosen appointment, he took his ball and went home.

• (2235)

Quite frankly, because we have a minority government, we told the Prime Minister he could not do that and we were going to change the bill, which we did at committee stage. We got the commission back in place. All parties and all members of the House will be faced with the need to ensure that the appointments are only made based on clear criteria.

Government Orders

In the last Parliament Mr. Broadbent prepared a model which a number of committees adopted when they were reviewing appointments. Not as many appointments were reviewed as we would have liked, and I will not say the criteria were always followed, but it was a beginning. We have now come to a much broader scope and positive changes, we hope, in the way appointments are made to our innumerable commissions and boards.

Whether they be crown corporations or small committees, they all play an intricate part in the democracy of the country. For far too long those appointments have been based on who one knew and to which political party one belonged, which was always the party in power. Far too many of these appointments were not based on quality and merit but simply on who one knew and to which political party one belonged. Shortly that will be a thing of the past.

It is amazing that we are at the early part of the 21st century and we are only finally getting to this. We look back and think about the days when a government changed and the entire civil service changed from the most senior official to the least significant part time employee. It was wholesale. To the victor went the spoils was the motto. We did away with that quite some time ago in the public service. We created a public service of a standard based on merit and substance, but we did not do that for the appointments and it continued right up until the present time. We observed in the last government just how terrible that could be. That sense of entitlement was so pervasive and was so negatively viewed by Canadians right across the country.

As the appointments come forward at all levels to be reviewed by committees, the NDP will be vigilant that criteria are based on merit and not on political affiliation. To a great degree we have substantial hope that the quality of the boards and committees and the appointments to sit on those boards and committees will substantially improve to the benefit of all Canadians.

I want to spend a few minutes on a couple of key points that are missing from the proposed legislation. One point has already been referred to by my colleague from Windsor West in one of his comments. It is an issue that the bill did not address. We tried to get it addressed in committee and it was ruled out of order. It is the issue of floor crossing.

Mr. Broadbent, in his writings on this subject, made it very clear to all of us in the House and to the country as a whole that there was a fundamental need to address this issue if we were going to clean up the democratic process in this country and the way the House and the government functioned overall. We should not have individual members of Parliament who stood for election in one party, who canvassed door to door, adopted the policies and principles of that party, and then sometime after gaining the confidence of the electorate and being elected, on a whim, or as a result of incentives offered by the government of the day or on some occasions the opposition party, responding to those incentives most times out of self-interest and not the interests of their constituents. We should not have individuals who certainly were not responsive to the vote that had brought them to their seats determining on a whim or through self-interest to leave the party to which their constituents had elected them to join another party.

●(2240)

We saw several very blatant incidents of that in the last Parliament, but I do not think we saw anything so crass as what we saw after the election. I happened to be driving in the car with one of my sons when I heard the news on the radio. I said, "They have to be wrong. That did not happen". This was two or three days after the election.

The member for Vancouver Kingsway, now the Minister of International Trade, had been elected to the Liberal Party. He had sat in the previous Liberal government as a minister, and had been very vigorous, aggressive and confrontational in his attacks on the Conservative Party during the election. He led his constituents to believe that he would represent their interests, that he would stick with the Liberal policies and principles, and I sometimes think those two do not go very well together, but leaving that aside, he had convinced his electorate in Vancouver Kingsway that they should vote for him and they gave him the seat. Sixty per cent of the people voted for other parties. In any event, he took that seat under those conditions and within days switched parties.

Did he do it, as he claims, in the interests of his riding? Did he do it because he was offered the incentive of becoming a cabinet minister again as opposed to sitting as a backbench opposition member? We may never know. I suppose history will judge that, but in either event, it is wrong. It is morally wrong. It is ethically wrong. It should not happen.

Mr. Broadbent had made it very clear that his policies would have prevented that. That legislation, if he were the author of it on our behalf and on behalf of the Canadian people, would have prevented that.

That provision should have been in Bill C-2. As I said earlier, at the committee stage we moved amendments to include that provision. They were ruled out of order. We did not even get a chance to have them come to a vote at committee.

I have to say I have some doubts as to whether they would have gone through, as the sense I have of the other three political parties in this House is they are prepared to continue to permit that kind of conduct. They are not prepared to deal with the absolute anger that constituents feel when their elected member, who ran on one basis, makes that kind of abrupt change and they have no control, they have no say until the next election. They are stuck with a member like that for an extended number of years until the term is up and they can get at him again in an election. That is not good enough and it has to stop.

One of the failings of Bill C-2 is it did not address that. The government refused to address it. Obviously given the greetings that the Conservatives gave the member for Vancouver Kingsway, I suppose we should not have expected anything else from them, but it certainly belies their claims of accountability. What is accountable about that? Nothing at all.

We are stuck with that for the time being. At some point the Canadian people will get another shot at this and I believe we will respond at some point with the proper legislation that will prohibit that kind of conduct in the future.

Government Orders

• (2245)

There is another major point that is missing here. In the election and in the run-up to the election, the Prime Minister and the Conservatives made various overtures to the Canadian people about electoral reform. They even included it in the throne speech earlier this year.

The one little thing that we have seen and which is being claimed as being some form of electoral reform is the bill we saw earlier on, and I will put it in quotes, "Senate reform". Quite frankly, it is a joke. All it does is fix the maximum number of years that unelected, unaccountable senators get to sit in the other place. This is claimed as being some kind of major step forward, which of course it is not at all.

What should have been put in place with Bill C-2 is a meaningful process to have full electoral reform. It may be worth a few shots to actually get the government to accept the reality of what the Canadian people want. Electoral reform is needed. We are out of sync with the rest of the major democracies in the world in terms of exclusively using the first past the post system. The United States is now the last democracy that uses it. England has begun to move significantly, both in Wales and in Scotland, and all the other democracies have moved in one form or another to do away with the first past the post system. They have recognized, going back 100 years in western Europe, that it does not respond properly to full democratic representation, so that every vote counts as the same, so that there is not a wide divergence in results in the reflection of the actual popular vote where a party forms the government, with a significant majority in some cases, with less than 40% of the vote.

We have seen very many examples of that in Canada, at the federal level and at the provincial level. We have seen the anomalies in New Brunswick where the government gets a little more than 50% of the vote and takes every single seat in the province. In British Columbia there were two elections where the provincial government took all but two seats. The party got less than 60% of the vote but took 97% and 98% of the seats. We have not had a government in Canada at the federal level that got a majority of the vote since around the second world war, for more than 60 years now. We simply cannot continue with that system.

I mentioned earlier in my address about the cynicism in the public generally regarding politics in Canada. It is part of that sense that people do not have control over their politicians, over their elected officials. It is not the be all and end all to that, but it is one of the significant pieces that has to be put into play.

When we hear the Conservative government extol the virtues of Bill C-2, we have to keep in mind that there are some gaping holes in it. We are going to support it because it does address some of the accountability issues. It does build in, in a number of ways, protection from some of the worst forms of corruption that we saw in the last government, and which we saw quite frankly in the Conservative government under former prime minister Mulroney. To some degree that will stop, but it is not the end, and we will not get that until we replace the first past the post system.

We are quite prepared to support this bill, but we are saying to the Canadian people and to this House that we are going to continue to work for the further reform that is needed in our democracy.

• (2250)

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the NDP member's comments on Bill C-2 and I share a number of his views. I definitely share his comments regarding the public appointments commission. Happily, opposition members who sat on the Bill C-2 committee did see fit to reinstitute that public appointments commission.

It is interesting to note that the Prime Minister ran on a platform of accountability, integrity, ethics and that a promise made would be a promise kept, but when his choice of a chair for the future public appointments commission was rejected by the appropriate standing committee of the House, he picked up his toys and said that he would not play the game anymore.

When the committee reinstated the public appointments commission in Bill C-2 it gave very clear directions in the legislation as to what the commission's mandate would be and what authority it would have. The committee also stated:

Before making a recommendation to the Governor in Council that a person be appointed to the Commission, the Prime Minister shall consult with the leader of every recognized party in the House of Commons. An announcement of an appointment shall be transmitted to the Speaker of the House of Commons for tabling in that House.

Now that the Prime Minister has stated that he will not appoint anyone to the positions in the public appointments commission, notwithstanding the fact that opposition members reinstated this commission and that we are confident that it will stand the test of the other House, is that not just sheer arrogance and hypocrisy on the part of the Prime Minister? Is that not the kind of behaviour that actually breeds the cynicism in the Canadian public that the hon. member of the NDP was speaking of?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I must agree with the member's characterization of the Prime Minister's conduct as being arrogant. There is just no question about that.

The role of the commission is set out very clearly. It is a major step forward in dealing with blatant political patronage at its very worst. The commission is required to do a number of things. When we hear the Prime Minister making statements that the commission will in effect not be allowed to perform its duties because he will not appoint anybody to it, breeds the cynicism that I made reference to as did the member in her question.

My understanding is that Canadians and members of this House were taken aback and insulted by the Prime Minister's attitude in saying that if he did not get his way he would go home with his ball. He appears to have shifted his position and we expect that he will make the appointments. If he does not play the proper role of the Prime Minister in this regard, including the consultation process that is required, which again was an idea that came from Mr. Broadbent, I can assure the Prime Minister that he and his party will pay in the next federal election.

Government Orders

• (2255)

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I sat on the committee where the Prime Minister's nominee for chair of the commission was so-called questioned by the committee. I can say that it was the most disgusting and reprehensible witch hunt that I ever saw in my entire life. Members of the hon. member's party led the charge in eviscerating a respected, successful and proud Canadian.

This American style witch hunt was a disgrace to Parliament. Why on earth would the Prime Minister put another proud, respected Canadian through that kind of repugnant process? I think the Prime Minister is quite right not to have another solid person put through the kind of disgusting rigmarole that the member's party and others put him through.

Far from being arrogant, the Prime Minister is protecting other good Canadians from this kind of partisan attack for no good reason other than to somehow diminish what the Prime Minister is trying to do. To be part of demeaning a process and then criticizing someone else for the actions of the member's party is reprehensible.

I wonder how the member can possibly defend that kind of witch hunting and bigotry that was demonstrated in that committee against a fine Canadian.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, this will be really easy. It is such hypocrisy to hear that from the member for Calgary—Nose Hill. In the last Parliament her party led the charge against Glen Murray and did exactly the same thing to him. Now she stands in the House and accuses us of witch hunts and American style politics, which is really interesting coming from the Conservative Party.

It is not me talking when I say that Mr. Morgan did not meet the criteria as the person to head up that commission. I am quoting from a really radical magazine, the *Canadian Business* magazine of May 22 to June 4. This is a two page article and a commentary on Mr. Morgan. We hear from the Conservatives repeatedly about how this person is such a great person.

I know I do not have enough time to read the whole article but it goes through incident after incident that Mr. Morgan was involved with in the corporate world; how he destroyed ecosystems; his attack on Kyoto; his attack in Ecuador on a whole ecosystem. He destroyed a whole ecosystem.

The company he headed up in Colorado was fined more money in one year than all the other company fines for 15 years before that. That is the kind of person the Conservatives feel is a paragon of virtue who should be heading up our public appointments process. It is a joke and it is the height of hypocrisy for the government and the member for Calgary—Nose Hill to suggest otherwise.

• (2300)

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the member for Windsor—Tecumseh has brought a real sense of moderation to many of our discussions in the House and I appreciate his remarks on the accountability act.

Floor crossing is the one area that we have not really talked about tonight and it is something that has affected people across parties, certainly governing parties over the years, and it is something that always creates a discomfort.

We had a chance to deal with this in the accountability act. The Liberal opposition put forward a suggestion on floor crossing. Because it can involve such a range of possibilities, including time from the election to the time when the member changes parties, to a member sitting as an independent, to a member having a serious ideological or principled disagreement with his party or its leader, we put forward a suggestion that would allow each situation to be judged by the constituents who elected that member. It would be a limited recall system where a petition could be called within 30 days and then 60 days to canvas 50% plus 1 of the people who actually voted but not the voter's list because that can change over time.

We thought that was a way that was fair to the MP because the MP could go back directly to his constituents and make a case to those people to whom he or she is most responsible.

I appreciate that the NDP put forward a private member's bill last year but I voted against it. I felt it was too all-encompassing and could not take into account the range of circumstances. I thought that a much more focused way that could put the MP in front of his or her own constituents and make the case and have a limited recall might be a sensible way forward.

That was ruled out of order by the chair of the C-2 committee—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Speaking of order, I cannot tell the member that his time is up if he never looks at the chair, but the time for questions and comments expired quite a while ago, but I will give the member for Windsor—Tecumseh a minute to respond to the member's query.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the member for Vancouver Quadra must have missed part of my speech because I spent a good deal of time on floor crossing and being highly critical of the member for Vancouver Kingsway and his conduct and this government allowing it to go ahead.

I am aware of the amendments that were brought forward. It gives me an opportunity to attack the Liberal Party members for attacking our member for Winnipeg Centre. They actually put out a press release saying that he had not dealt with it and in fact had voted against the floor crossing amendment. He complained about it. They did it a second time.

The member for Winnipeg Centre, who was representing our party on that committee, made it clear that we were strongly in favour of legislation that would prohibit, once and for all, floor crossings, not the representation that was made by the Liberal Party members in their personal attack on him.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Government Orders

I want to say straight off that I do not agree with Bill C-2, which is being debated at third reading tonight, and the fate of which, if I understand correctly, has already been decided. When time is up, it will be declared passed on division. I therefore want to put my opposition to this bill on the record.

There are too many complications and too many provisions that have not gelled sufficiently and have not been given enough thought. Too many problems may arise out of this bill, if it were somehow to be passed in the other chamber as it now stands.

Let us hope that those in the other chamber will have the time they need, and the will, which they certainly have, to fine-tune the bill, to fix it and improve it, and that the government will allow them the time they need to do that.

I will mention some of the reasons why I am opposed to this bill. I may have a chance, in the 10 minutes I am allotted, to explain some of them in more detail.

First, there is the question of post-employment restrictions. I believe that the period specified, five years, is unreasonably long. That is one of the reasons I do not support this bill.

I know that there was a brief discussion tonight about how returning officers will be selected. I had an opportunity to appear before the standing committee, I talked about this, and I will come back to it.

There is also the question of the contribution limit that Canadians will now be subject to.

There is the question of the Access to Information Act, which has not been resolved at all. On the contrary, we seem to be going off in the opposite direction from where we should be going.

There is the entire question, which was referred to tonight, of the effect of this bill on the public service and the inflexibility that will result.

There is also the entire question of the omnibus nature of the bill. This often means that some of our colleagues try to take advantage of the situation and introduce amendments to other bills. There have been at least two examples in this case. One well-intentioned colleague—I am not questioning his intentions—wanted to change the structure of the National Capital Commission, without any discussion on that subject having taken place.

Another colleague also wanted to introduce the idea of switching parties into the bill, for a member to be able to cross the floor.

I would have been against this bill, if the virtually totalitarian big brotherism of the provision that public servants who inform on other public servants would be paid \$1,000 had not been deleted. In that case, the committee had the wisdom to delete that clause of this omnibus bill before us.

There is also the entire question of the general climate of the debate on this bill. This has been a cause of extreme concern for me, and this is where I will begin.

It is very easy to use a broad brush when you want to tar as widely as possible on the whole question of corruption. The government says that this is the main reason for this bill. Forgive me if I doubt

that rationale. Forgive me for thinking that in some cases, there are partisan motives behind the government's decision to concoct this bill, which is really a crazy quilt, a patchwork of pieces that clash with each other, provisions that will complicate everyone's life without necessarily achieving the intended objectives.

The Bloc Québécois said that this bill would do nothing to prevent future scandal. I hope the Bloc is wrong, but I am not sure it is. I hope it is wrong. If another scandal were to surface during the tenure of my colleagues opposite, for whom I have great respect, the temptation to use that same broad brush would be very strong. Then all of Parliament would be sullied.

When they were in opposition, I often asked my colleagues across the way—who are now in government—to be careful with their comments and circumspect in their accusations and their tendency to wantonly and unfairly cast aspersions on all and sundry.

I hope that the tables have not turned.

● (2305)

As I said, it would probably be very tempting for members on this side of the House to do the same thing. Of course, they are the ones who would suffer, along with the rest of Parliament. We must therefore take great care not to be motivated solely by partisanship when discussing public policy. We must consider the common good and good governance.

This is why I will vote, or rather, would have voted against the bill, because we know the vote has essentially been carried on division. I guess that makes me a dissident.

The five years that is being required is far too long. If the government insists that certain persons will not be able to work in their field for five years, we should perhaps consider the costs this will incur. It could well be that we are obliged to issue severance pay for two years, two and a half years or three years. That has not been provided for.

Take the case of Elizabeth Roscoe. I do not know her. I met her only once or twice at society parties. This lady is being denied the chance to work for five years in her field, when she served the Prime Minister for two weeks during a transition period. It is unacceptable that the rules should have been changed retroactively. A Parliament should never legislate retroactively, and in this case we seem to be doing that. I am opposed to it.

It is the same thing for returning officers. I know that my colleagues are listening to me on the other side and on this side. When I appeared before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I said that the way that returning officers were chosen had to be improved. But I also said that we had to be very prudent about what was proposed. If we give an authority the ability to choose certain people and to dismiss them from their service, we will likely be asking ourselves questions about the governance model, that is, whether it is the right one.

This is what the bill seems to be proposing. So I must necessarily stand in opposition to it. I am hesitant. I have doubts about the wisdom of this. Maybe I am wrong. I hope I am, but Parliament will have to be very vigilant about this situation.

Government Orders

The issue of contribution limits is probably another shocker. There is an incongruity here in the discourse of the party opposite. On the one hand, when the Prime Minister was with the National Citizens Coalition, he fought in court. He appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada to affirm the right of individuals to contribute as much as they wanted. If this bill were adopted, I would be subject to a limit of \$1,000. However, any company or individual could contribute, in the riding I have the honour to represent, over \$3,000, or \$150,000 at the national level. In fact, third parties are not subject to the same limits. I believe that this is not only unfair, but probably unconstitutional. I would like this measure to be confirmed and tested before the courts, because in my opinion, what we have before us at the moment is pure partisanship, a purely partisan attempt unfortunately supported by the New Democrats, as regards its coming into force as soon as the bill receives royal assent.

Those are two of the reasons. There is also the whole issue of access to information. The Information Commissioner issued a special report on this matter. He wondered how it was that the government, which had said it would be going in the opposite direction, was tabling a dozen measures that made access to information more difficult.

Given this whole list of measures, I find myself obliged to oppose this bill. I repeat that I sincerely hope that the other chamber takes the necessary time and has the necessary will to correct these shortcomings. I also hope that when this bill comes back to us, we have an opportunity to do likewise in this House.

• (2310)

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the presentation by the member for Ottawa—Vanier. I am surprised at the lack of recognition that MPs in general have received in the past few years, mainly because of the 13 years the Liberal Party spent in power.

The Bloc Québécois sees gaps and shortcomings in the current bill. It is certainly not perfect. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it can help us gain a little more recognition from the public, whom we would like to convince of our legitimacy and the importance of representing them here in Parliament.

I would like to ask the member for Ottawa—Vanier whether he thinks it is worthwhile at least to take this opportunity to improve the situation. Regardless of what people may think about the responsibilities of the previous government, he could demonstrate his good faith while he is in opposition and show that there is hope of improvement in the years to come.

• (2315)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, once we have discussed it, the hon. member will not question my good faith.

That is not the issue. I am now a member of the official opposition. My role is to oppose what the government proposes, as constructively as possible. I must question, go beyond what is being presented, see if there are any contradictions and see if there are better, more effective ways of doing things.

First, the bill before us is an omnibus bill. That in and of itself should have rung a bell. For the past 30 or 40 years opinions have

been expressed in this House on omnibus bills and their nature. I get the feeling that some of these opinions have not changed.

There are artificial delays. There is absolutely no reason, except for the government's desire to say all summer long that it did this or that, to do this now. Given the complexity of this bill—a complexity the members opposite themselves have acknowledged—we should have taken the time needed to do this right. Instead, the committee sat from dawn to dusk for two weeks and worked for six weeks. That is what I am opposed to. I am somewhat opposed to the content, but also to how we arrived at it. Again, I hope the other place will take the time it needs to come up with a better product than we are coming up with tonight.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question will be quite brief.

I would simply like the hon. member to tell us what he thinks of the fact that comprehensive reform of the Access to Information Act is being postponed until later.

Could he tell hon. members what he thinks of this aspect in particular? Is he against this inaction, this refusal to act—for that is what it is—when the government had an opportunity with this bill?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that this government promised the opposite during the election campaign.

The Information Commissioner said on more than one occasion that he wanted certain things done. The government across the floor, that is, the Conservative government, promised to do them, but it is not. We might ask ourselves certain questions. That is what the commissioner is doing.

What is disappointing about this debate is the NDP's position. I must admit, they put up a good fight to improve access to information. The result was capitulation. They capitulated and say that they achieved some amendments. These few trivial amendments essentially allowed them to save face. The bill, in relation to access to information, is the opposite of what it should be, even with NDP support.

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are dealing here late tonight with an interesting bill. It looks like we will be able to pass it before the summer. The bill proposes a lot of changes to the conflict of interest rules and is generally framed as a fix to some of the accountability mechanisms which we have in the federal government.

The bill includes provisions dealing with whistleblowing. I see those provisions recycling a previously introduced bill in the House. There are new lines of financial reporting from departments, a few changes to the political contribution rules, minor changes to the conflict of interest rules, and some new post-employment provisions for public office holders which now involve not just cabinet ministers but senior civil servants a little further down the pecking order.

Government Orders

Most of us see this as fixing something or providing a better framework of accountability. That is the general intention, but it struck me that as the bill was introduced and the lead-up to it, there were an awful lot of allegations coming from the Conservative opposition members then, and even in government now I still hear these allegations. They use the word "corruption".

I thought I would do some research and see if I could figure out why they were using these words. I was also curious why from time to time the Speaker would not have thought it a matter of some concern that many words of that nature were being thrown about in the House and why some of them were not found to be unparliamentary. That never happened, and my party and I took the verbal blows.

I wanted to do some research to find out why the Conservatives, and perhaps the NDP, were so concerned about corruption. I started going back in time. I was looking to see if there have been any members of Parliament charged or convicted of fraud or corruption offences. I have been here about 18 years, and you have been here longer, Mr. Speaker. I have looked and I cannot find any Liberals on the list.

Let us admit right off the bat that there have been members on both sides of the House who have encountered personal problems, problems with relationships, and problems with alcohol. I am not talking about those kinds of problems here in terms of corruption. These are personal issues and they sometimes percolate up in the life of a member from anywhere in Canada, and those things have been dealt with reasonably well by the House.

I want to talk about real Criminal Code fraud and corruption. I have found the last six individuals who were charged and convicted. I am just going to go through it. I am a little uncomfortable doing it, but these are the individuals who have been charged and convicted.

The first one is a Mr. Gravel. He was convicted on February 13, 1989 of 15 counts of influence peddling and bribery. He was fined \$50,000 and jailed. He was a member of the Conservatives.

The next one is a Mr. Grisé, and son of a gun if he was not also a Conservative. He was convicted in May 1989. There were 13 counts of fraud and influence peddling. He resigned from the House of Commons. He was fined \$20,000 and served a day in jail. He was a Conservative.

Here is another one. This is Mrs. Jacques. Son of a gun, she was a Conservative. She was convicted on October 13, 1989 of two counts of fraud, one count of conspiracy, and one count of influence peddling. She was sentenced to two years less a day, conditional sentence, plus community service. She was a Conservative.

• (2320)

There is another one. This is the fourth one on my list that I have found. This was Mr. Desrosiers. He was a Conservative as well. He was convicted in 1990 of fraud. In exchange for having all of the other charges dropped, he was fined and given probation for one year.

I kept on with my research and then found number five. This was Mr. Fontaine, also a Conservative. There are an awful lot of Conservatives here. He was convicted in 1999. He pleaded guilty to

three counts of fraud. Before the trial was to begin, he was sentenced to a \$15,000 fine, and remained in the House while his case went through the system.

That is an awful lot of Conservatives and it is the Conservative Party that is alleging a whole lot of corruption.

Another one was Mr. Stupich, a New Democratic Party member of the House of Commons. He was convicted of fraud and contravening the gaming provisions of the Criminal Code. That was called "bingogate".

I looked and still I could not find a Liberal member of Parliament who had been convicted, let alone charged, with any corruption offence. I could only find a whole list of Conservatives.

I was very disappointed, if I could put it that way, to hear all of these allegations over the last two or three years coming from Conservatives in the House. It seems to me that the Conservatives and perhaps even the NDP must have been drinking their own bath water. Maybe they were so concerned about corruption because they had it in their own benches. The Conservatives really understood corruption because it was found in their own benches here.

I am still looking for a case involving a Liberal and I cannot find one, no cabinet ministers and no backbenchers involved in fraud. Yet, some members of this place have the audacity to get up and allege that my party and my colleagues over here are somehow corrupt, when it is the Conservative Party that has sown the seeds of corruption and has the convictions.

There is a whole list of charges, not convictions. The convictions were overturned on appeal. I could go through that list, but I am not going to because I do not think it is fair to the individuals. A lot of the charges have been overturned or not proceeded with. I have done my research and I can say they were all Conservatives as well.

I am not saying that every Liberal on this side of the House is perfect, but what I am saying is that if people are going to allege corruption, they should look in their own house first. I do not think that was done. I wanted to put that on the record.

The last thing I want to say is not about corruption at all. It is about the contribution limits contained in the federal accountability act, the act that was generated because the Conservatives thought the Liberals were so corrupt, which turns out not to be true.

I do not know how it is all going to work out, but there is a contribution limit in the bill now of \$1,000 per person. My experience in the political system now is that some members of political parties will, in the ordinary course of a year, by following through all the political activity that goes on, including provincial, federal, regional or leadership conventions, will actually end up spending convention fees of a significant amount, between \$500 and \$1,000.

If they are spending that kind of money participating in ordinary political activity, will they have any room to make an actual cash donation to the party for an electoral purpose? I am suggesting that they may not. I think it is unfair that those who participate a whole lot in the political process with their parties will not have any contribution room when it comes to donating at the time of an election to a candidate or party.

Government Orders

• (2325)

I do not think that is fair. I think that is inequitable. I wish that the bill did not have that limit. I wish the bill had a provision that allowed for a higher limit in circumstances such as I have described.

I thank the House for letting me get through those remarks without a whole lot of cat calling. I guess the House is in a better mood tonight.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the speech by the hon. member, but I do have to disagree with him on a number of points that he made.

I will reference the Toronto Port Authority scandal as just one of the many. He talked about the sponsorship scandal and the scandal involving André Ouellet. There are many scandals that we could bring forward, but the Toronto Port Authority, and the hon. member's constituency is part of the region of greater Toronto, involved the unlegislated, illegal transfer of funds to the Toronto Port Authority of moneys that have gone now to the Toronto Port Authority to subsidize a port authority that should not have received those funds in the first place.

During the entire period over the fall we were endeavouring to get to the bottom of that transfer of money, \$35 million. It just disappeared and we have yet to find out what happened to those funds.

I would disagree with the hon. member that somehow there is a cleanliness throughout the Liberal Party operations meaning there is no taint resulting from any of these scandals. Clearly, here is an area where moneys were transferred. Moneys were transferred against the statutes that exist. Yet there was no way of finding out what happened to those funds.

Now there is an inquiry in place. Hopefully, within a few months we will find out what happened to those moneys, but these were appointees made by the Liberal Party.

I have not finished yet. I appreciate the hon. member getting up with such alacrity.

Here is another clear case where there should have been transparency. Canadians should have been aware and should have been told quite openly what happened to those funds and this new Parliament is now having to dig in to find out what happened to those moneys.

Those types of issues are what led to the result that we saw at the end of January, which led to more Conservatives being elected, certainly, but many more New Democrats as well being elected with the idea that we would be cleaning up Parliament and restoring the confidence of Canadians in what is happening here in Ottawa in the use of public moneys.

I cite that as an example and I would be very interested in hearing the response of the hon. member.

• (2330)

Mr. Derek Lee: The hon. member could hear from me a lot quicker if he would cap his question, Mr. Speaker.

I feel badly for the hon. member. I do not know why this is, but he seems to be incapable of distinguishing between the members of Parliament in this place and the party for which we sit here.

He has referred to an agency of government, which has nothing to do with the Liberal Party of Canada or the Liberal government. It is simply a statutory agency of the government, of which there are hundreds. I have no idea why he would ask me, as a Liberal member of Parliament, to account for something that happened in a harbour commission or in the Halifax disaster commission.

As a Liberal member anyway, certainly as a parliamentarian, I have about the same amount of career and occupational obligation to account to our electors for these moneys, but I was talking to the House about charges and convictions of members of the House of Commons, members of the Conservative Party and members of the New Democratic Party.

I am not talking about the rest of the activities that go on generally in the Canadian population. If he cannot figure that out, we will have a problem discussing public accountability around here.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member for Scarborough—Rouge River a brief question. I listened to his speech and I think I got the point that he was making, which is that he found it offensive for the word “corruption” to be used again and again in relation to the incredible scandals that have been revealed to Canadians over the last few years, but it seems to me that he has entirely missed the point.

First, the reason why “corruption” has come to the lips of so many people is that finally the cloak of secrecy around a lot of activities has been lifted. The result is that brought to the light of day have been a lot of very unacceptable practices. Unless the member has failed to knock on any doors and talk to electors, he has to know that this has caused a lot of concern among Canadians, to the point where trust in political processes is at its lowest ebb in Canadian history.

Does the member not understand that the whole point of the federal accountability act now before us in its final stages of being debated is to try to lift that veil of secrecy, to bring to the light of day what kinds of practices go on and that, in an attempt to prevent the kinds of corrupt practices that have been revealed and have shocked Canadians, we actually are going to clean up our act and be seen as restoring public confidence?

If the member does not understand where that is coming from, I suppose I understand now why he is voting against the bill.

• (2335)

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, the member should be careful before she decides how I am going to vote. She should wait to see how one votes.

However, the point I am making is that if there is corruption in the public service, if there are people stealing from government, the accountability act may well assist with that, but there is nothing in this accountability act which would prevent or reduce the likelihood of another Conservative or NDP member of Parliament defrauding this place and the taxpayers. There is nothing in the accountability act which would address patent overt fraud by members of Parliament. The act does not even try to do it. That is my point.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is an inordinate pleasure for me to be able to speak at such a late hour. This shows how much we want better rules under which political parties and a parliamentary system can really come into their own and on which a democracy can be based. Nothing is perfect, but these rules will certainly help.

Not so very long ago, I was a teacher in Franco-Ontarian and Franco-Saskatchewanian circles. I taught ethics and philosophy. When I think of all that has happened over the last few years in Quebec and Canada, when I see that the Gomery commission had to be established because of all the corruption that was in the air, prompting a feeling of resentment in the public toward politics, I said to myself that it was time to set things straight.

The word “democracy” is derived from *dêmos* and *cratia*; *dêmos* meaning people and *cratia* power. It means, therefore, power to the people. When we speak of ethics, we mean what is good, and the trust that people must have in the institutions that govern us in a democracy.

We should remember one basic thing. Bill C-2 did not happen by chance but as a result of a situation that Canadian federalism was keeping quiet but that the Gomery commission fortunately exposed. They were trying to stamp out Quebecers’ pride through fraudulent means. The Guités, Corriveau, Gosselins, Braults and Gaglianos created a situation where money was given to agencies to stamp out the idea that Quebecers are a proud and noble people who have a right to their sovereignist aspirations.

We should also remember Mr. Guité’s statement before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, or at the Gomery commission, where he spoke about war with the separatists—a term often used by federalists—these big bad wolves. It was in the name of this war that things went as far as they did.

One of the basic principles of democracy is that there are opposing and different ideas, but that in a democratic forum like the Parliament of Canada, these ideas can co-exist.

For example, currently in Quebec, 68% of the federal members are sovereignists. They are in the Bloc Québécois. We were legitimately elected by the people of Quebec.

I will give an illuminating example where the ignominy of the Liberal Party made it possible for some pretty ugly things to happen. There is still much to investigate in this regard. I am referring to Édith Gendron, a public servant whom I know very well. She was fired because she was the president of an organization called “Le Québec, un pays!” She was returned to her job one year and ten months later thanks to the staff relations board tribunal. It turned out that this public servant had a right to her political views outside of working hours. On the job, all that could be said of her was that she was an excellent federal public servant. In the end, the idea of stamping out Quebecers’ pride went beyond all bounds.

I should point out that three political parties still supported this public servant. Ed Broadbent, who was the member for Ottawa Centre, supported the sovereignist Édith Gendron. The current member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington supported Édith Gendron on March 25, 2004. Even though he did not share her

views, he maintained that she had a right to her opinions. In addition, the current member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel supported this public servant on behalf of the Bloc Québécois.

● (2340)

It is an attempt to crush Quebecers’ pride. The federal cabinet will go to Quebec City a day from now on the occasion of Quebec’s national holiday, but it does not recognize the nation of Quebec. This entire idea of nationalism implies that Canada has the right to its nationhood, that the first nations have the right to their nationhood and that Acadians are entitled to their nationhood. I recognize them even though the nation of Quebec is not recognized in the House of Commons of a G-8 nation, a so-called democratic nation. At any event, we do not need this institution of Canada to know that we are a people and that we are proud of it.

The sponsorship scandal was a disgusting example of how the money of Canadians and Quebecers was used to try to deceive Quebecers. We are not immune to such a situation. I know that at least one member from Saskatchewan remembers that at least 15 ministers in Grant Devine’s government went to court on charges of corruption. That was the Conservative Party of Saskatchewan. That party was forced by a moratorium to disappear. There is no longer a Conservative Party in Saskatchewan. It did away with itself and created, together with the area Liberals, the Saskatchewan Party, a type of Reform Party of the era. Today, it is the official opposition to the NDP in Saskatchewan.

Corruption can taint the Conservatives, the Liberals, the NDP or the Bloc Québécois. We must protect ourselves from it. Legislation, whether omnibus or more specific, protects us from such situations. We must be on our guard. Senator Bernston was forced to resign, as he was the deputy premier of Saskatchewan at the time. However, he tried to hide behind his senatorial robes in order not to be brought to justice. Fortunately, in 2001, the pressure was so great that he resigned. He too had to face the music.

Laws are needed. I am also thinking of another aspect that I will not discuss in detail. My NDP friends were talking about crossing the floor, that is, leaving one party to join another. They should be careful, or maybe they should start reviewing recent history. A former premier of British Columbia was a minister in the previous government and is still a Liberal member to this day. Bob Rae, Ontario’s only NDP premier, is running in the federal Liberal leadership race. Chris Axworthy, once the member for Saskatoon—Clark’s Crossing, was a member of the NDP here. He ran in the leadership race and lost to Mr. Calvert, then became Saskatchewan’s Minister of Finance as a New Democrat. Yet in 2004 and 2006, he ran under the Liberal Party of Canada banner. One would be justified in wondering whether the NDP is just the farm team for the Liberals. As for crossing the floor, you have to be aware of your own recent history and not start pointing fingers until you know your own party’s history.

Government Orders

That said, in light of my statements, the Bloc Québécois will support this bill. The bill is not perfect, but it is important. As part of our support, we have to shine some light on a few very important things. This bill has the advantage of ensuring that returning officers will no longer simply be appointed, but will be selected according to merit criteria. The same goes for the registrar of lobbyists. Some things have been brought to light in this regard as well. There is also the whole issue of giving the Auditor General more power to ensure that she can keep an eye on how the government spends taxpayer dollars contributed by Canadians and Quebecers. This money must be spent effectively and honestly.

● (2345)

The goal is to ensure that every person who goes to work every day and pays income tax to the government can have honest accountability.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the Bloc member's speech and comments, particularly about members who are elected under a certain political party's banner and then cross the floor of the House to sit as independents or to join the ranks of another political party, which could even include a newly created party.

In Canada's recent history, the largest group of members to cross the floor was made up of a number of Progressive Conservative MPs, who had been elected in Quebec as such. They crossed the floor to become members of the Bloc.

I was very glad that the Liberal member for Vancouver Quadra introduced an amendment to Bill C-2. This amendment would have resolved this problem by creating a process through which voters who had voted for a member who then crossed the floor could have forced a byelection. Unfortunately, the chair of the committee decided that the amendment was out of order. In committee, I was happy to see the two Bloc members vote with Liberal members, agreeing that the committee chair's decision was unjustified.

I would like to know what this member thinks of these former colleagues who were elected under the banner of the Progressive Conservatives, but then crossed the floor of the House to become Bloc members.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, I think of Gilles Rocheleau, who was a member of the Liberal Party of Canada and was the mayor of Hull at one point. He was also a minister in the government of Robert Bourassa. He was here. He had come to meet John Turner and had supported the Liberal Government of Canada. He was one of the founders of the Bloc Québécois.

I think also of the current member for Outremont, who was a Bloc Québécois member and founder and who returned to the Liberal Party. I do not know whether my hon. colleague is looking to correct the situation, but that would be a good place to start.

I think of my colleague from Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, who has been here since the inception of the Bloc Québécois. If I remember correctly, there was the Conservative Reform Alliance Party. Under Preston Manning, a portion of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada became the Reform Party, which became the Canadian Alliance, which did away with the Progressive

Conservative Party and created what we have today, the Conservative Party.

The same thing happened with the New Democrats. I think of Robert Toupin, who, during the Mulroney era, left the Progressive Conservative Party to become a New Democrat. Mr. Broadbent welcomed him with open arms. Ms. Venne left the Progressive Conservative Party to join the Bloc Québécois. This type of situation has occurred in the history of Canada and even in the history of Quebec. People in the Union nationale have become members of the Quebec Liberal Party. Think of René Lévesque, who was elected to office representing the Quebec Liberal Party. Think about other members like Gilles Grégoire of the Social Credit Party, who was one of the founding members of the Parti Québécois.

When people share ideologies, they want to form a new political party together. Society evolves. These people have the right to evolve. Some would say "regress", but that is a matter of opinion. The fundamental basis of a democracy is that all of us here are elected by citizens who want us to represent their riding. The vast majority of us represent a political party. There can also be independent members. We need to think about what a member of Parliament is. This is how we need to see the situation.

● (2350)

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the NDP in support of this important legislation.

We owe a real debt of gratitude to Ed Broadbent who was the original architect of fundamentally transforming our federal legislation so we could look at accountability and look at the starting to renew the public's confidence in federal institutions. Mr. Broadbent, the former member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre and before that for Oshawa, put forward his points almost a year ago. He made it very clear how important it was to renew Canadians' trust and confidence in our federal institutions. It is for this reason that we owe such a debt of gratitude to Ed Broadbent.

Mr. Broadbent talked about establishing democratic accountability for members of Parliament. He talked about fixed election dates, a very important component that the NDP has pushed for some time. He also talked about establishing transparent leadership contests, again a very important component of establishing public trust from coast to coast to coast. Mr. Broadbent talked about electoral reform, about establishing the principle that a vote is worth a vote in the sense that the House should really represent how Canadians voted in a national election.

The NDP traditionally has been under-represented in the House. If we had the membership proportional to the voting support that we received across the country, we would have 60 members of Parliament voting for progressive legislation. The only reason we do not have 60 members of Parliament is because we do not have electoral reform. Though we play an important role, we would play an even more important role with the establishment of electoral reform. This is not present in the current legislation, but I will come back to that in a moment.

Government Orders

Mr. Broadbent also talked about ending unregulated lobbying and establishing an ethical appointment procedure. In his years in the House, Mr. Broadbent spoke very passionately about establishing access to information. This is really the essence of accountability and responsibility in federal institutions. It is about the right of Canadians to know what is going on, to have access to information that establishes transparency around our public institutions. I will come back to this important component of the Broadbent plan.

Why did he propose this? It is obvious that Canadians felt increasingly concerned about what transpired over the last few years in areas of our federal institutions. They saw the sponsorship scandal. They saw the scandal around Liberal political appointments. As I mentioned earlier in a question to a member of the Liberal Party, we had concerns about the Toronto Port Authority and the transfer of illegal funds and moneys that were lost. We have never been able to find out exactly how those funds were used. These kinds of scandals eroded public confidence in what was happening in Ottawa. Those kinds of scandals established the principle among Canadians that they had to take back Parliament.

It is important to note that not only were the various scandals coming forward and Canadians were becoming aware of the misuse of taxpayer money, but Transparency International, an independent NGO that rates countries according to the transparency and the accountability of their various public administrations, reported that Canada came from being a decade ago one of the top and most transparent, most accountable, cleanest governments in the world to falling to an also-ran.

• (2355)

It was not just the accumulation of scandals, it was also the fact that independent, impartial evaluations of public administration clearly indicated that Canadians were also getting haphazard administration, not transparent, with various levels of corruption and various levels of scandal. That is something we have to rebuild.

I believe that is why Canadians on January 23 voted to elect more Conservatives to the House, but also voted to elect many more new democrats. They voted to get many more New Democrats in as an effective watchdog to ensure that we could move forward on accountability legislation.

[*Translation*]

What happened? A bill was introduced. The NDP said it was in favour of it in principle, but it also said very clearly that it wanted to improve this bill. What Mr. Broadbent presented here in Ottawa almost a year ago went quite far.

What did we do? We worked for months. The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre and the new member for Ottawa Centre also worked hard. We made improvements to the bill as presented at first. We established a new Public Appointments Commission. We had proposed that for a long time in order to make favouritism illegal, to create a process based on merit and to verify ministerial appointments. We established a new, stricter rule to put an end to the practice of revolving doors between lobbyists and the upper levels of government.

We also made some improvements to the Canadian access to information legislation to broaden the application of the legislation

to all government institutions. That is an extremely important aspect. The NDP caucus was able to make progress during the weeks of study and work on this bill.

We also supported giving more teeth to some provisions of the Canada Elections Act, namely making the use of trusts illegal and bringing the ceiling for donations to political parties down to \$1,000. This is an important principle. Money will no longer be able to buy an election. We also lowered the ceiling for donations to \$1,000, which is something all Canadians can agree on.

We have also tightened the rules governing conflicts of interest and authorizing any Canadian citizen to file a complaint with the new conflict of interest and ethics commissioner. And through this legislation, we have protected the rights of the first nations.

• (2400)

[*English*]

The bill that came forward had holes. Subsequent to that we were able to make substantial improvements to the initial bill. These are not minor improvements. These are improvements that will help substantially.

That does not mean that the bill meets the vision that Mr. Broadbent set out almost a year ago. There are still areas where, very clearly, there are holes, most notably in the area of floor-crossing. The NDP will continue to work on the principle that a vote is worth that vote and that members, once elected on a political party, should they choose to change, they submit themselves to the will of the electorate.

We will continue to work for improvements in public accountability in the House and in federal institutions, but Bill C-2 represents a step forward from what we have seen in the past and we will support it because of that.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the member of the NDP. I apologize for not recalling off the top of my head the name of his riding, but I appreciated many of the comments he made.

I would like to point out that I have been listening to the debate on third reading. I believe I have listened to all of the speeches. When I was not seated in my place I was in the opposition lobby watching them on the television screen.

A point that virtually no member has raised is the issue of how the opposition members saved an important constitutional reality for members of the House of Commons and for the House of Commons itself, which is that under the original Bill C-2 presented by the Conservative government, it would have diminished and impeded constitutional autonomy of the House and its members. It was Liberal amendments and NDP amendments, put forward by myself and the member's colleague from Winnipeg Centre, which re-established the historical parliamentary constitutional authority of the House and its members.

Government Orders

The government members initially were opposed to that. It took a significant amount of arguing and a brief presented by the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel to convince them that those amendments should go through. I would like to hear what the member from the NDP has to say about that victory, because it was a historic victory.

Mr. Peter Julian: Very clearly, Mr. Speaker, what we have seen is an initial bill that had flaws and holes and was not perfect by any means. Members of the opposition, working together, and indeed, members from all four corners of the House working together, have succeeded in substantially improving the legislation. That is our role as parliamentarians: to work to improve legislation.

I think what we have come up with is something that is substantially improved. It still falls far short of the Broadbent vision, but we can still, in all four corners of the House, in the interests of continuing accountability and building upon accountability, work on other issues like floor crossing.

Floor crossing is something that Canadians fundamentally disagree with. They do not agree that the member for Vancouver Kingsway can run for one political party and the next day decide he is going to be a representative for another political party. They fundamentally disagree with this. I have been in Vancouver Kingsway and have heard the outrage and frustration expressed. Unfortunately, it undermines the pretension of the Conservative government that it is indeed working for more accountability.

I hope that the amendments brought forward by the hon. member, the member for Winnipeg Centre and members from all four corners of the House to improve the initial flawed legislation can be continued. I hope we can move from here to dealing with other issues like floor crossing so Canadians can have confidence that when they vote for a candidate of a political party and that person decides to dramatically change that representation, he or she will go back to the voters to ensure that the voters have the final say about that representation.

• (2405)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to ask my colleague a question with regard to election financing. It has not been discussed very much lately, but there are improvements in the bill, in my opinion, in terms of restricting corporate and other donations, as well as the limits that I think will improve the availability of all individuals to be able to contribute in a fair way to politics.

I would like to have the member's comments with regard to capping the amount at \$1,000 per individual and how that might better enhance our democracy by limiting the flow of cash that could be stuffed in at the last minute by special interests.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member from Windsor West asks a question about a pretty fundamental issue. Indeed, money should not be the preponderant influence in politics. Someone should not be able to donate \$5,000, \$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000 or \$30,000 to an election campaign.

We have made substantial improvements. We have eliminated corporation contributions. We still have to close those loopholes that might allow a corporate contribution to be routed through children to get around election legislation, as we unfortunately have seen in the leadership campaign.

What we need to do is ensure that all Canadians are on an even playing field. By limiting contributions to \$1,000, what we are doing is ensuring just that. Candidates and political parties that have a wide degree of support, that go out there and work hard and get small contributions from hundreds of different sources, will be able to fund their campaigns.

Everybody is entitled to those same rules. Somebody who might have some wealthy contacts will not have an advantage. That is the essence of democracy: accessibility and a level playing field. I think the legislation goes a long way toward achieving that.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise here this evening to speak to Bill C-2, this historic piece of legislation that is reaching its final moments in debate in this House of Commons in the 39th Parliament. It is a bill that I think is very important to Canadians, as confidence in government is so desperately needed with regard to a democracy. When that is undermined, we have a situation where Canadians lose faith in that democracy. They stop and they disengage from the political process.

It happens on two fronts. There are those individuals who no longer even belong to campaigns or parties, or who are independents, and who pull away in terms of being part of a process of electing individuals and parties. Second, there are Canadian voters who become disengaged with the process and no longer believe their ballot has worth. A significant element is necessary for people to feel engaged and, more important, to participate in meaningful way to make decisions about how civil society is run.

Many democracies have faced these questions through a variety of different mechanisms, whether through war, corruption or some type of process change from one form of government to another. If we lose the faith based principles of engaging in civil society, in the government of a society, people no longer contribute in a meaningful way. That restricts the availability and also the ingenuity of society, because people no longer get engaged themselves in being candidates and leaders in society.

That is why Bill C-2 is very important. It starts to set the framework for this change, this cultural shift.

My colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster noted the good work of Mr. Ed Broadbent, the former member for Ottawa Centre, the former member for Oshawa and party leader of the New Democratic Party for many years, who came back to this chamber out of retirement to contribute to a change in electoral reform in Canada as well as ethical reform. He added a presence.

I think we have a legacy here today because of those efforts. I will always feel a debt of gratitude for that type of leadership. I know that people in my party and my colleagues here today will feel the same. It is important to note that Ed Broadbent did not have to do that. He was occupied with a whole bunch of different initiatives and matters that he was involved with internationally as well nationally. He had other personal matters that were very significant in his life. He came back to dedicate his time and his energy to help and to be part of a reformation process, which is so important.

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I would like to read a quote from “Cleaning Up Politics. Demanding Changes in Ethics and Accountability”, Ed Broadbent’s seven-point plan, which he published prior to his retirement. He stated:

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

I will come back to this later and touch upon this statement from his seven-point plan.

Progressing to where we are today, there is a quote from another person who was very much a fixture in accountability and in the application of legislation that would change and clean up politics, long before Bill C-2, and that is the member for Winnipeg Centre, who has done yeoman’s work for us and for this country on this matter.

His paper in terms of the accountability act states:

It was the culture of secrecy that allowed corruption to flourish in Ottawa, but in a few short months we have advanced the cause of transparency dramatically.

I want to highlight briefly some of the accomplishments that we feel are very important to note in this legislation. It does not give us everything we want in terms of a bill. It falls short in several departments, but overall it is an excellent first step in cleaning up politics in Canada.

● (2410)

During the recent election many Canadians discussed the issue of corruption, scandal and a series of things, but at the end of the day, all those things aside, what they wanted to see was significant change in Ottawa. They wanted to see a real difference. They wanted to see all members come back to the House and restore the sense of pride that has been lost in the House of Commons. With that in mind, the former member for Ottawa Centre went about proposing legislation to change the bill.

The NDP members are very proud of our proposal for a new public appointments commission which would outlaw patronage, create a merit based process and audit appointments made by ministers. In the past it had always been assumed that “who you know in the PMO” will get a person a position or an appointment somewhere in the country, a job for which no other Canadian would have the opportunity to compete. This was the culture of entitlement that disengaged many Canadians and they felt very frustrated.

The appointments commission is a significant shift and having party leaders consulted is important because it adds a level of transparency and begins to pull back that veil on the concept of entitlement.

We are also proud of the proposal for stricter rules to stop the revolving door between lobbyists and senior levels of government. That is an important shift. The problem is that the Conservative Party has backtracked on this, with the war room being exempt from these measures. It is something that we were disappointed to see happen. The headline in the *Globe and Mail* today read, “Tories backtracking on accountability bill”, and it referred to that issue quite significantly.

It is disappointing because the issue of lobbyists and the revolving door is important for Canadians. They feel that others have access through money and resources and the ability to influence legislation at a higher level than they have. They worry that they do not have the same opportunities. This, unfortunately, does not go the full way but at least it is a start in the right direction.

There are some improvements to Canada’s access to information laws, including broadening the act substantially to include all government institutions. We know a committee will be formed to get into greater detail with this. We were hoping to achieve more goals and more objectives. We did not get there at this particular point in time, but at least it is a change and a shift that is important to note.

As well, we are talking about strengthening parts of the Election Act, including outlawing the use of trust funds and lowering donation limits to \$1,000. Another issue has been the trust funds and their relationship with candidates and members of Parliament who are able to sock away large sums of donations and moneys that they can use almost like a slush fund and carry on. Some members had them in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. These trust funds were used almost in an unfettered way to circumvent election laws and outperform and outmanoeuvre the legitimate democratic process, which is why we believe the elimination of trust funds is significant.

The second item is the \$1,000 limit on donations. We did have some electoral reform in the form of Bill C-24 that restricted some donations and eliminated the major restrictions on corporations and unions. Now there will be outright elimination of that. The \$1,000 limit is important because individuals will be able to participate on a more even level in terms of donations.

We hope we can plug up all the loopholes where there was in the past a practice of loans and a series of other circumventions of giving toward campaigns, whether they be for leadership or for individuals, because we believe the \$1,000 limit is very important.

As well, we have a tightening of the conflict of interest rules that allow any Canadian to make complaints to a new conflict of interest and ethics commissioner. The protection of first nations rights is also within the act.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the former member for Ottawa Centre, Mr. Ed Broadbent, for all his hard work. Although not all of his ideas were included in the act, it is important to note that he actually developed the platform that has resulted in a significant change for all Canadians.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spoke about transparency and accountability with respect to the bill. I wonder if he knows that when we were in government, we introduced the comptroller general system and we put a large chunk of crown corporations under greater public scrutiny. I wonder if he would acknowledge that.

I also wonder if he would agree that this particular bill does not have anything to do with public accountability. It has to do with conduct. This is a conduct bill.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Auditor General said very clearly that we do not need more layers of rules and regulations. There are enough rules and regulations. Failures did not occur because rules and regulations were flawed; problems happened because people did not follow the law.

There is nothing we can do to prevent an individual who wants to commit theft from committing theft. We have sufficient rules and regulations and when people do it, they are caught and prosecuted. The fact that people have been caught and are being prosecuted is a testimony to the laws that are already in existence.

I wonder if the hon. member would simply comment on the fact that the bill will put layers and layers of regulations on the public service and will cause gridlock in the public service. It will in fact drive good people away from the public service. Who in their right mind would want to join the public service with those kinds of rules and regulations? It will also damage or destroy the innovation that is absolutely essential for our public servants to do the extraordinary job they do day in and day out.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I suppose it depends on how one defines innovation.

We could talk about crown corporations and how the member's government used crown corporations as political patronage pay-backs.

I would point quite sincerely to the situation with David Dingwall where basically there was a circumvention of the Industry Canada rules with regard to payments for programs and services that were routed back to him. It led to a great controversy about our crown corporations.

Canadians understand that this law will bring greater accountability. If there is going to be a greater demand on the public service with regard to the bill, then it is the duty of Parliament to ensure that our public servants are supported quite strongly in carrying out this law.

The New Democrats have no problem with a strong and accountable public service if we provide fair rules. That is one of the reasons we believe in strong whistleblower legislation. One of the things missing in the bill is that whistleblowers who are students and researchers are not included. We would like to include them in the bill. It is a shame that the other parties did not agree with that.

We believe that the public service will be better served by the bill. It will also be less abused, because it seems that flunkies or bureaucrats related to the sponsorship scandal have been the problem, but we know there are political connections in this file. The bill is an improvement.

I do not disregard the member's comments with regard to adding other levels of work on our public service. It is an important point that probably should be talked about more.

It is incumbent upon us to provide those appropriate supports. If there is a failing of that system, once again it will be Parliament that will have to provide the necessary means to correct it. I believe that Canadians in general view this as accountability in Parliament and in the whole system. We have to deliver on that in terms of real results and not just pass an act that does not provide a fair system for all.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the comments of the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca. I am not sure whether he includes in his condemnation of the act the stricter rules to stop the revolving door between lobbyists and senior levels of government as another layer of requirements that somehow will overburden the bureaucracy and make it unworkable.

Perhaps the member for Windsor West could elaborate briefly on why stricter rules to stop the revolving door between lobbyists and senior levels of government are important to bring to the light of day what is actually going on. How is the public interest actually harmed by that kind of revolving door that blurs the lines of accountability?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I will summarize very quickly. The member for Winnipeg Centre said this best in committee. He said the government made the commitment that it would end influence peddling and it would put an end to the revolving door that so angered Canadians in the previous government.

The transition team was not just ordering furniture for the new government and organizing office space, it was hiring the most powerful people in the country. It is a shame that the government has not lived up to its expectation on this and has now exempted the war room people. It is appropriate to end this debate with comments made by the member for Winnipeg Centre.

[Translation]

Le vice-président: It being 12:24 a.m., pursuant to order made Tuesday, June 20, 2006, Bill C-2 is deemed read a third time and passed on division.

(Bill read the third time and passed on division)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[Translation]

SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be a member of Parliament representing an area where the agricultural industry is key. In addition, coming from a region where we find egg, poultry and dairy industries, I understand how important supply management is. This is a system that ensures a satisfactory return for producers and stable prices for consumers.

Allow me to quote a few impressive figures to show just how important supply management is. In Atlantic Canada alone, all supply managed commodities combined—chicken, turkey, eggs—account for \$440 million. This for just four relatively small provinces. It is important to the economy of our regions. More importantly, there are more than 15,000 jobs that depend on it.

If the government begins to soften its stand on supply management, negotiate and accept compromises, this will jeopardize an entire industry in the Atlantic provinces, as well as the diversification of our economy.

Adjournment Proceedings

On November 22, 2005, the House of Commons unanimously agreed to protect supply management and maintain current WTO duties.

However, on June 13, 2006, the Conservatives voted against a recommendation made by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food that called for improving Canadian controls on imports and limiting, through tariffs, the amount of milk protein concentrate, which would allow the flow of our dairy products to stabilize. Allowing these products into Canada without tariffs undermines our own dairy industry.

And yet supply management of milk proteins on the domestic market is on the verge of crushing our small farms. The Federal Court ruled that such ingredients that come from outside of Canada and contain a high percentage of milk fat should not have been considered milk products for the purpose of tariffs. Without the application of these tariffs, the supply management system is becoming more fragile. That ruling paves the way for massive importing of milk fat substitutes.

This situation will lead to the collapse of the domestic market, to a certain degree, and could mean the loss of thousands of jobs. Billions of dollars in revenue and economic activity could be lost.

By voting against these recommendations from the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Conservatives abandoned Canadian farmers.

Our farmers are very upset that they are not receiving the support they need from the government, as they watch their revenues dwindle.

I share this frustration and fear that the agricultural industry has for the future. If supply management as it stands is changed, this would create a very big problem for Canadian agriculture.

I am fearful, but determined to put up a fight because I strongly believe that it is highly important not to weaken the supply management system.

For far too long, we have proposed compromises and we have negotiated. We have told our American and European friends that they could enter a certain percentage of our market and that we could enter a certain percentage of their market. We all would have been able to export. Exporting is one thing. Nonetheless, when we respect our commitments and our friends do not respect theirs, then we have to realize that negotiation and compromise have to stop.

As I said, supply management is not negotiable and no compromise is possible. We have to promote the system we have and protect it 100% in order to protect our industry.

The Minister of International Trade said we needed to consider the possibility of the WTO negotiations not succeeding.

On June 9, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said that the government stood alone against 148 countries in defending supply management.

In the event the government fails at the negotiations, will the minister promise to set up Canadian mechanisms that will help

protect producers of milk, eggs and poultry, or will the government let the international market decide, as it does in other issues?

• (2425)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to reiterate the government's firm commitment to ensuring the success of the Doha round of WTO negotiations and promote the interests of Canada, particularly when it comes to defending our supply management system.

The sustained growth and prosperity of the Canadian agriculture and agrifood sector depend on our ability to compete in international markets. This is why we are doggedly pursuing within the WTO the elimination of all forms of export subsidies, a substantial reduction in trade distorting domestic support and truly improved access to markets.

Should we achieve these objectives, our agriculture and agrifood producers and processors will be the big winners. This government is therefore doing everything in its power to ensure a favourable outcome for the sector as a whole.

We are continuing to press for the implementation of a tariff reduction formula which would significantly improve access to leading markets in both developed and developing countries for our exporters.

We are also asking for significant reductions in market-distorting subsidies to producers currently provided by countries such as the United States and those of the European Union. That is why we are very happy that negotiations will be focused on the principle that the countries providing the largest subsidies will make the largest cuts.

We are also pleased that members of the WTO have agreed to eliminate all forms of export subsidies by the end of 2013. Thus, our exporters will be able to compete on a more equal footing in international markets.

At the same time, the government recognizes that, like all other WTO members, Canada has offensive and defensive interests. Our negotiating position takes into account the diversity of our agricultural sector. The government supports unreservedly Canada's supply management system all the while attempting to increase markets for our exporters.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has clearly stated this commitment to the supply management system. The government firmly believes that supply management is advantageous for poultry, egg and dairy producers and that this will remain the case in future. However, it is true that Canada is under a great deal of pressure at the WTO with regard to key issues that directly affect supply-managed sectors. Specifically, the 148 other members of the WTO are ready to accept a reduction in customs tariffs and an increase in tariff quotas for sensitive products.

Adjournment Proceedings

However, as negotiations progress, we will continue to vigorously defend our interests and to seek the best possible outcome for Canada. The minister has also very clearly stated that Canada will not withdraw from WTO negotiations. We will continue to participate and to exert pressure to obtain the best possible outcome for the Canadian agriculture sector as a whole.

● (2430)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, it is not a matter of coming up with the best possible solution, it is a matter of protecting supply management in Canada, the dairy producers, the egg and poultry producers.

Of course hearing what the parliamentary secretary just said is worrisome, not only for parliamentarians, not only for the public, but it is worrisome for the entire industry. It is not enough for the government to say it supports supply management. It has to protect Canada. But that is far from the response we received.

I will give the parliamentary secretary another chance. If the negotiations fail, will the minister promise to set up a Canadian mechanism that will protect supply management? If the parliamentary secretary does not answer my question this time, I will take that as an indication that the government will adopt the same attitude it has for other issues and allow the international market to decide.

I am asking the parliamentary secretary to answer this question. Will the government protect supply management and ensure that Canadian mechanisms are put in place should the negotiations not work out? Yes or no?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, WTO negotiations are intensifying as Canada and other WTO members do everything in their power to come to an agreement on detailed regulations and commitments as quickly as possible.

Canadian producers and processors have a lot to gain if the Doha round of negotiations ends in a favourable agreement. The government will continue to stand firm in the negotiations in order to reach our goals and protect our interests.

The government has been clear: Canada will not withdraw from the negotiation process. Such a step would be unrealistic. The outcome of the Doha round will affect the agricultural sector worldwide, including Canada's agricultural sector.

The government will continue to work closely with other members of the WTO, the provinces and the sector to conclude negotiations by the end of 2006. We will work toward achieving the best possible outcome for Canada's agricultural sector.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley not being present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

● (2435)

[*English*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until later this day at 10 a.m.

(The House adjourned at 12:34 a.m.)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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