



CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, September 19, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, September 19, 2006

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)
[English]

PETITIONS

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by many people across the country who state that undocumented workers play a vital role in Canada's economy, are usually employed in highly skilled jobs and needed professions and their removal would significantly damage Canada's economy.

The petition calls upon Parliament to immediately halt the deportation of undocumented workers and to find a humane and logical solution to this situation.

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to table today. The first is on behalf of a number of people from across the country calling upon Parliament to cause the Canadian armed forces to immediately reinstate the soldier apprentice training program.

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition signed by several hundred people within my riding of Wild Rose calling upon the government to take all measures necessary to immediately raise the age of consent from 14 to 16 years of age.

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the pleasure to present a petition signed by over 100 constituents from my riding of Etobicoke Centre.

The petitioners demand that Parliament pass Motion No. 19 calling for the lifting of visitor visas for the following seven EU member states: Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. These countries are EU members

with free movement within the EU and the same visa regime should apply to them as to the other EU countries.

With hundreds of thousands of Canadians with family ties to these countries, Canada's onerous visa regime is a throwback to the days of the Iron Curtain and should be changed.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 71 could be made an order for return, the return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 71—**Hon. Roy Cullen:**

With regard to the decision by the Minister of Natural Resources to discontinue or cancel the funding of certain programs, including EnerGuide for Houses Retrofit Incentive Program and EnerGuide for Low-Income Households Program, and initiatives relating to climate change, the reduction of pollution and the reduction of greenhouse gases: (a) for which of these programs and initiatives was funding cancelled or not renewed; (b) what current, statistical or empirical data, rationale and evidence can the Minister demonstrate to support the discontinuation or cancellation of the funding of these programs and initiatives; (c) what cost-benefit analysis, or financial estimates compiled for or by the Department of Natural Resources, relating to the discontinuation, cancellation or otherwise withdrawal of funding of these programs and initiatives, can the Minister provide; (d) what information was provided to the Minister or his staff by way of analysis prior to this decision; (e) what recommendations, pertinent to the decision to discontinue or cancel funding of these programs and initiatives, were made by the Department of Natural Resources to the Minister; and (f) what information, pertinent to the decision to discontinue or cancel funding of these programs and initiatives, was provided by other departments or the Privy Council Office to the Minister?

(Return tabled)

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***CANADA ELECTIONS ACT**

The House resumed from September 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak in the House to Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act. The intent of the bill is to attempt to establish fixed election dates at the federal level of government in Canada.

Allow me at the outset to clearly state that I am very much in favour of the principle of fixed election dates and view the implementation of such an amendment as a major step forward for Canada's parliamentary system. Having indicated my support for this principle, I must, however, note that the bill certainly falls short of its stated goal.

Although it refers to fixed election dates, a more accurate description would be the most probable election dates.

As members here have noted during the debate, the role of the Governor General and the attendant royal prerogative remain in place.

Therefore, the bill would designate a date in October four years away as the date of the next election but, within our parliamentary system, a government can fall on matters of confidence, particularly financial issues, and this would invalidate the so-called fixed election date for that particular Parliament.

The passage of Bill C-16 is, however, a significant change to our electoral system and one that is long overdue.

We are currently in the midst of our second minority Parliament. While many will argue that minority governments tend to be more accountable to voters due to their vulnerability, there is clearly a significant element of political instability that exists during these mandates.

However, it is important to note that in our parliamentary system, in its current manifestation, this uncertainty is always present to some degree, regardless of whether it is a minority or a majority government.

Any sitting prime minister has significant powers of persuasion over members of the government and Parliament itself, not least of which is the ability to ask the Governor General to dissolve Parliament and call a general election. This certainly affords the prime minister considerable leverage but, in many respects, removes from elected members of Parliament the freedom that is in the best interests of voters, their country and our democratic system of government.

In establishing fixed election dates, the ability of the prime minister to call an election at will would be severely curtailed, at least in principle. Outside of the defeat of the government on a treasury bill, it would have to be a very sound matter of confidence that would see a government risk the political implications of ending a mandate prior to the fixed election date.

The parliamentary tradition of an election call following the defeat of a government treasury bill would remain in place but this would be the only practical condition beyond reproach that would warrant a premature dissolution of Parliament. On matters of policy outside the realm of fiscal issues, it would be more likely than at present for a Parliament to continue, even if a government measure were to be defeated.

The practice of designating bills as confidence matters is quite simply a means of exerting influence over government members and even opposition parties fearful of a general election. It is rarely the case that the integrity or validity of a government actually rests with the passage of these so-called non-treasury confidence matters.

Once again, I believe members would be better placed to serve their constituents more effectively if they could avoid the constant threat of a general election simply because a matter is deemed to be a confidence issue. In other words, there would be a greater sincerity in trying to make Parliament work without the automatic move to a general election.

I suggest this, not only for reasons of political stability but for freer expression by members of Parliament and to facilitate more effective representation.

● (1010)

We all realize that general elections are extremely expensive and it is particularly dismaying and wasteful that they can occur without a truly justifiable reason. How many of us, along with our fellow Canadians, abhor the traditional spending spree that has accompanied the period just before a government decides that the time is right for a general election?

Whether true or not, the point is that public money should not be used to attempt to influence voting practices. These practices are wasteful and not sound public policy. It is difficult for political parties in power to resist the temptation to pursue these strategic spending initiatives all the while denying what is often the obvious reality of a pre-writ period.

The reality of fixed election dates would make it much more difficult in terms of political realities for governments to embark on pre-writ spending sprees. The fact that a specific election date is fast approaching would lay waste to any denials associated with the motivation for these kinds of announcements.

Similarly, in implementing fixed election dates we would be effectively ending the practice of allowing parties in power, or even opposition parties in a minority Parliament, to simply choose the best time politically for their members to face the electorate.

Often the timing that best suits a political party may not be the most conducive for voters. The last general election was a campaign that took place over the holiday season with an election day in the midst of the coldest month of the year. Although this election was one that resulted from the defeat of the government on a treasury issue, the timing was certainly not popular.

Government Orders

Once again, fixed election dates would eliminate the ability of elections being called for reasons of political expediency at times which serve the interests of a political party. Having elections take place in the third week of October recognizes the reality of Canada's climate and the challenges that other times create for both candidates and voters.

October elections are also much more realistic in terms of practical considerations associated with voters' calendars. Most people are back at work and school and few are on vacation. This would be most beneficial in terms of encouraging voter turnout as people are available to exercise their franchise.

Similarly, fixed election dates would encourage the candidacies of many more Canadians who would otherwise be reticent to seek elected office due to issues like their current employment situations and the realities of family life. Knowing when an election is going to take place removes this uncertainty and would allow for concrete planning to take place.

The benefits of fixed election dates are recognized by most of the traditional developed democracies. In fact, studies indicate that 75% of these countries now operate on fixed election dates.

There are those who will argue that fixed election dates undermine the traditions of our parliamentary system. I would suggest that our parliamentary system is one that needs to evolve and one that is strong enough to undergo these changes.

Many parliamentary systems are based on the British system as is ours. If we look to the situation in the United Kingdom, there are many changes that have taken place and many that are under consideration. In fact, the devolved Parliaments of Scotland and Wales operate with fixed election dates.

I would suggest that this is the first step on the path of democratic renewal. By allowing for greater political stability, more effective representation and less politically expedient elections, we will be helping to restore the confidence of Canadians in our democratic institutions. Indeed, this is what I would call a significant first step in the process of democratic renewal.

The province of British Columbia has spent considerable time attempting to pursue democratic renewal and in fact led the way recently with its first fixed election date campaign. It is time for the federal government to do so as well.

The bill is only the beginning of the process of democratic reform. By taking this step, we are signalling to Canadians that we are serious about democratic renewal. I would maintain that this first step is but part of a process that will encourage Canadians to become involved in democratic renewal aimed at restoring public confidence in our political institutions and encouraging greater involvement by voters in the conduct of the federal government.

I encourage all members to join with me in supporting Bill C-16 and in continuing the process of democratic renewal in this country.

•(1015)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has indicated his support for electoral reform to restore the confidence of the people in our Parliament. I heartily support that as well.

During the summer I heard many of my constituents express some cynicism about what the government is actually doing through this electoral reform when they hear the Prime Minister invoke confidence votes whenever he has seen his numbers looking favourable.

Would the member opposite support the NDP proposal for an amendment to tighten the definition of confidence votes in the House?

•(1020)

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, as I stated yesterday in the House, I, as well as the member, am concerned about the fact that the Prime Minister has stated on many occasions that he is prepared to call a vote on confidence on quite a few matters, in some ways even threatening Parliament to defeat the government on a bill so that he could go before the electorate.

I find this type of behaviour undermines the very essence of what we are trying to accomplish with Bill C-16. If the Prime Minister really is serious about a fixed date election and about making sure this bill is workable and has wide support from all of us in the House, then the Prime Minister must, I believe, stop this tactic of constantly threatening an election every time the polls seem to go up for the Prime Minister. I share my colleague's sentiment.

As for the second part of her question on the NDP amendment, I have not seen it but I certainly am interested in looking at it, because we should do anything we can to in fact tighten that prerogative, as it might be called, to call an election on any whim and waste \$300 million of taxpayers' money. Canadians should not be having elections every year, as seems to have been the case in the last two minority parliaments. We should do whatever we can to make sure that we are taking good care of taxpayers' money and we should not call an election whenever we deem it should be the case. I am interested in looking at the amendment and welcome the opportunity to do so.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, historically on the issue of fixed election dates, the government when it was in opposition talked about the fact that the previous government was threatening to have votes of confidence on various issues. The government said then that it should be narrowed down to only a few issues.

I would suggest that the Speech from the Throne and the budget are the only two areas where votes of confidence should occur. Obviously the Speech from the Throne outlines the program of government and the budget gives government the fiscal tools to implement that Speech from the Throne.

In its legislation, the government talks about fixed election dates on the one hand, but on the other hand the government is constantly throwing up straw men by suggesting that the vote on softwood lumber, on Afghanistan or something else could be a vote of confidence.

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Does the hon. member agree with my view that the votes on the Speech from the Throne and the budget should really be the only votes of confidence because they test whether the government in fact has the will of the House on these two critical issues? Or does he believe that there should be others? Again, does the member believe that there should be a very prescribed approach rather than this knee-jerk reaction, which we have often heard from the government now that it is in power, that every time it feels threatened it will call an election because the government is obviously looking for an excuse to go to the people?

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I concur with my hon. colleague's comments. If anything, we should try in any way possible to limit those times that the Prime Minister can in fact deem something to be a vote of confidence. It seems, at first glance, that certainly financial issues, in particular the budget, should be a vote of confidence. This has been the tradition of the House. I believe it is the Westminster tradition as well that an election should be called when a government falls due to a vote of confidence or lack of confidence in the House on the budget bill. I think the throne speech is also a major initiative.

Beyond that I would hope that by moving forward on this bill the Prime Minister would change his tone in the House in terms of when an election should be called, as well as his behaviour in terms of deeming everything to be a vote of confidence and threatening an election whenever he finds that the polls are going well for him. That is not the way to behave. If we are to be true to the spirit of this legislation, then we should try to make sure we live by it. There should be very specific issues on which a vote of confidence can be called, such as the budget issues, and nothing else beyond that.

• (1025)

Hon. Carol Skelton (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to split my time with my hon. colleague from South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale.

It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on Bill C-16, which would establish fixed election dates for the third Monday of October every fourth year. The bill continues the Conservative government's commitment to provide accountability and transparency in our Canadian democracy.

There is no perfect day for an election. There are, however, better days than others, as everyone in the House knows. I commend all the volunteers in the last election who had the unfortunate job of trying to hammer—or should I say jackhammer?—signs into the ground and who door-knocked with chilling winds and snowy days.

Of special importance to my riding of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar is that October 19, in good years, allows farmers to finish their harvests. Agribusinesses and the people employed in those businesses could become involved in the election process. During the harvest, the agricultural sector barely has time to sleep, let alone participate in or even think about politics. Bill C-19 would ensure that they are able to fully participate in elections.

Senior citizens would also not have to brave the cold weather to exercise their democratic rights. I have heard from many of my senior constituents about the difficulty of making the trek to the polls in freezing temperatures that can reach -30°C. The ice is another

danger best avoided when possible, as it seriously hampers their ability to participate in Canada's democracy.

The third Monday of October allows our youth to get settled in the school year. Students could hold candidate debates so they could actively participate and become aware of the issues. As we all know, youth voter participation is at an all time low, with only an estimated 35% of 21 year olds to 24 year olds voting. The most cited reason for this lack of participation is cynicism of the political process. This cynicism extends further than youth, with manipulation of election dates increasing voter apathy.

A poll in 2004 by the Environics Research Group found that 81% of people supported having elections at fixed times. The government listened and now we are acting. By removing the politics from calling elections we are restoring trust in Canadian democracy. No longer will election dates be manipulated by politicians behind closed doors. Combined with the federal accountability act, we are responding to the concerns of our youth and all Canadians by doing politics differently.

The bill makes elections predictable but also makes room for flexibility. In the case of the election falling on a religious holiday or near an important provincial or municipal election, the date can be moved up to seven days following the set polling date.

With the passage of Bill C-16, elections will become predictable and stable while still keeping governments accountable. B.C. and Ontario, under Liberal governments, have both adopted fixed dates for elections, with other provinces considering doing the same. These governments remain accountable because they still allow for votes of non-confidence.

Bill C-16 would allow the government to be voted out in a vote of non-confidence. In this way, the Governor General retains her powers to dissolve Parliament. The bill explicitly states:

Nothing in this section affects the powers of the Governor General, including the power to dissolve Parliament at the Governor General's discretion.

There have been no constitutional or legal problems for either B.C. or Ontario with their election dates and there will not be for the federal government.

We are providing predictability while still working with the traditions of parliamentary democracy. This bill is truly the best of both worlds. It would also allow for provincial governments to plan their elections around federal elections. They could plan to hold them closer or further away from federal elections based on their preferences. One thing is clear, though, and that is that it would make election planning a more rational and easy to follow process. People could plan in advance to get involved in the political process knowing exactly when the next election would be called.

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•(1030)

This bill will increase voter turnout by giving more access to our electoral system. Predictable elections will also reduce waste in government machinery and give Canadians value for their money. Elections Canada has to be in a constant state of readiness, which forces it to keep a high level of staffing. This is very costly. In the case of a majority, Elections Canada knows when to expect an election and can plan accordingly. This bill will substantially reduce the cost of holding elections in the future.

Political parties, individual candidates and staff will also be able to plan better. Staff members may be able to join a hockey league knowing that they will not have to leave it midway through to participate in an election. Candidates can plan their election strategies knowing precisely when they will start campaigning. Government departments can plan their agendas more effectively. Instability and uncertainty means that departments have to hold off on projects because they are unsure who will be in power. Committees will be able to plan policy in advance, making it a more focused and efficient system.

Predictability has many political rewards for government and allows us to do our jobs better. In the current system, the governing party has an unfair advantage over opposition parties with the ability to call elections when that suits its purpose. We have seen this done in the past by federal and provincial governments and parties of all stripes. Governments can call elections to coincide with upturns in the economy after large capital projects have been completed or if they are doing well in the polls. This is clearly an unfair advantage for the governing party. Levelling the playing field is an important aspect of democratic government.

People in my riding often come up to me and say that they do not feel the democratic process is working for them any more. Instead, they say, it is working in the interests of those in power and their friends. With this bill, election dates will no longer be set to benefit the ruling party but set to benefit the people.

We must continue the process of restoring trust in our democratic institutions by making them independent of internal party politics. Parliament has been developing a non-partisan electoral system for the past 100 years. Electoral boundaries are drawn by independent commissions and elections are administered by Elections Canada. The date of elections, though, continues to be in the hands of politicians.

In conclusion, let us finish the process by taking politics out of electoral date setting. Let us restore trust in Canadian democracy.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was listening closely. I like what I hear and it makes a lot of sense, but I have a real concern about fixed dates. I think back to 1988, when municipal and federal elections took place at the same time. At that time, the government fell and elections went on. My concern is that I do not see anything in the bill, and I hope there will be an amendment, so that this would not happen.

My big fear is that at some point the federal government will fall due to non-confidence during a time when there is a municipal election. Municipal elections now are scheduled every four years in Ontario. What would happen then is that in perpetuity, until the next

non-confidence vote takes place, we would have elections happening at the same time at the municipal level and the federal level. The same thing can happen at the provincial level, because Ontario now has a fixed date. It all depends on when that non-confidence vote happens. My big concern is that we would have two levels of government having elections at the same time and it would cause a lot of confusion.

What we are trying to do is mix a congressional system, like those in the United States and other countries, with a parliamentary system. I have a concern when we start blending those two things and do not look at the consequences, because we solve one problem but we may cause 500 more. That is my concern. Other than that, I really do not have a problem with fixed date elections. Maybe the member can comment on what we can do to prevent that from happening.

•(1035)

Hon. Carol Skelton: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague, which is very interesting. My hon. colleague has spoken about how this works very well in the province of British Columbia. We in Saskatchewan do not have fixed election dates. I think it would be a great benefit for our province. We know when the municipal elections are and we know when they are going to be held. Non-confidence is always something that we cannot work around, but I think this whole bill would start to make a very positive change at the federal level in this country.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about the election dates being fixed and how governments have at the moment discretionary power in order to call an election at their whim for political purposes. I certainly agree with that, except that in the beginning of the bill it states that the Governor General still has discretionary power to dissolve Parliament.

The government of course can go to the Governor General and say that this was a vote of confidence. The bill does not define what is a vote of confidence. Is it only going to be, as I suggest it should be, on the Speech from the Throne and on the budget?

Governments still have the power to dissolve Parliament based on what they perceive to be a vote of confidence. If the government is really serious about fixed election dates it will define that. Otherwise, by saying that in fact we are going to have a fixed election date four years from now does not prohibit in the interim this government or any government in the future from calling an election based on a perceived vote of confidence.

That is the weakness I see in the bill. Neither the government House leader nor members of the government have been able to address that, which to me is window dressing and not dealing with the real issue. The real issue is how to prevent an election from happening either by accident or still by design by a government, which the member claims she does not support.

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Hon. Carol Skelton: Mr. Speaker, as someone who was first elected to this place in 2000 and has undergone three election campaigns I think the bill is a huge step toward making a rational decision to help Canadians, to save money, and to put some common sense back into the whole issue of election dates. I think that common sense is having an election every four years and not on the whim and call of the Prime Minister. Non-confidence votes are always based on money bills and I think that is something opposition parties will have to look at.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I take great pleasure in rising to speak to Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act. The bill would fix federal elections for the same day every four years.

The bill is the fulfillment of yet another election promise on the part of this Conservative government. In our election platform we stated we would:

—introduce legislation modelled on the BC and Ontario laws requiring fixed election dates every four years, except when a government loses the confidence of the House (in which case an election would be held immediately, and the subsequent election would follow four years later).

That is exactly what the bill does. By now, the opposition, the media and the voting public are starting to understand that the promises we made during the last election are promises we intend to keep. They watched us fulfill our campaign promises to cut the GST, deliver truly universal child care benefits, present criminal justice reform and pass the accountability act. They will see many more commitments from our platform fulfilled this fall.

This particular bill, though relatively modest in scope, is significant for what it represents. It signifies this government's strong commitment to an ordered and measured reform of our democratic system of governance. The 19th century model of government our fathers of Confederation founded our nation upon has served us for nearly 140 years. Yet, in recent decades, we have seen a tendency of our current system for power to become consolidated at the centre. Provincial powers have become subsumed into the federal power and the power of Parliament has become subsumed into the Prime Minister's Office.

This concentration of power at the centre has had serious consequences in many areas of Canadian life. For instance, we have seen the rise of regional alienation and even the formation of various separatist movements. A chief complaint they level is that Canada is not working. I disagree with those separatist sentiments, but it is a fair criticism to make that Canadian democracy does not work as well as it could.

That is what we will begin to correct with basic democratic reforms such as fixed election dates. With these reforms we will begin to move from a 19th century toward a 21st century system of democracy that better serves the needs and aspirations of our many provinces, our much larger population and our modern society.

After nearly 140 years of Confederation we have seen little democratic reform up until now. We have long heard promises of democratic reforms from other parties including the previous Liberal government. We saw reports commissioned. We saw ministers of

democratic reform appointed under the Liberals. The previous Liberal minister of democratic reform said just last year:

Our political structures and institutions need renewal. Canadians are crying for political stability. Only in this way can we direct the focus of government once again to growing a competitive economy that safeguards our quality of life.

We agree with that statement, but we will take action and not just talk about it. Yet, it is this new Conservative government that has delivered during the first months of office.

As a member of Parliament from British Columbia, I am particularly proud to be speaking in support of fixed election dates. My province has long been the leader in the area of democratic reform and was the first province to implement fixed election dates in 2001.

British Columbia made history when we had our first provincial election with a fixed election date of May 17, 2005. I believe it is no mistake that B.C. in particular has become a driving force behind our democratic reform in Canada. Indeed, B.C. is literally the furthest from the centre of political power in Canada; three time zones away, with high mountains and vast prairies between us and Ottawa.

Yet, despite the distance and the political alienation that many sometimes feel, British Columbians have always taken the constructive approach. Rather than throwing out the baby with the bathwater by choosing separatism, we have asked ourselves what needs to be done to fix these problems.

British Columbians strongly believe that our system of government can be renewed and reformed. We have worked hard in recent years to make that a reality. We have legislation to allow for the election of senators to represent B.C.

● (1040)

We have recently undertaken a process called a citizen's assembly to examine the question of proportional representation and we held a province-wide referendum on that proposal. We have passed recall legislation. We have successfully implemented fixed election dates.

Fixing the election date levelled the playing field for everyone in B.C. Voters knew when the election was coming and had plenty of time to gather information, discuss the issues and formulate their decisions. Every party was able to plan accordingly. Parties could find candidates and those candidates could plan their lives around the known dates of the campaign. Candidates and parties could plan their fundraising. The governing party lost a real advantage, but this reform worked and democracy in B.C. has ultimately strengthened.

As with the reforms in B.C., we now see Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador adopting similar methods that are proposed here in Bill C-16. Federal election dates would no longer be chosen with the advantage they may provide to the governing party. Every party would have the same opportunities.

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The reverse is also true. Not only are snap elections out, no longer will governments that have passed their “best before” date and face certain defeat at the polls be able to drag out their terms simply for the purpose of remaining in power as long as possible.

The disastrous Ontario administration of would-be Liberal leader Bob Rae comes to mind as a prime example. His unpopular government clung to power for 57 months out of the 60 possible maximum.

Setting the dates of future elections in law would also have a noticeable benefit for the Canadian economy. As a trading nation with borders that are open to the flow of goods and capital, Canada's economy prospers when investors enjoy stability. Knowing the date of an election enhances the ability of businesses to engage in longer term planning. We also avoid the potential for large fluctuations in our currency due to speculation, which can harm our export based economy.

Returning to the example of a government that has overstayed its welcome and is intent on grasping power for a full five years, the four year election cycle would give voters the opportunity to judge a government on its economic performance sooner.

The disastrous Bob Rae government in Ontario, which ground the economy to a literal standstill on its infamous “Rae days” could have been tossed out nearly a year earlier. Ontario might have avoided that final year of high taxes, huge deficits, high unemployment and record welfare rolls.

A date fixed in October would also steer clear of many of the shortcomings of the recent federal election that straddled Christmas and New Year's. The October date would avoid interfering with most of the religious holidays and observances of Canadians. It would also avoid the summer and winter seasons, when many Canadian may be away from their homes and communities for extended periods.

My riding of South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale has one of the highest populations of seniors in the nation. A large number of these seniors head to warmer climes in the winter months, for reasons of health and recreation. An October vote would allow my constituents to discharge their civic responsibilities without interference to their vacation plans. As such, making it easier to participate in an election with a fixed date in October should encourage a higher voter turnout; and the higher the participation rate, the healthier our democracy.

Our democratic reforms do not end with fixed election dates. These are only the first steps. We promised a series of substantive reforms during the recent election.

Among these, we promised to begin reform of the Upper House by creating a national process for choosing elected members for that House from each province and territory. We proposed further reforms to make the Upper House an effective, independent and democratically elected body that would equitably represent all regions.

We committed to restore representation by population for Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta in the House of Commons while protecting the seat counts of smaller provinces.

We committed to making all votes in Parliament, except the budget and main estimates, free votes for ordinary members of Parliament and to increasing the power of Parliament and parliamentary committees to review the spending estimates of departments and to hold ministers to account.

Members will know that a modest step toward reform of the other place has begun with a bill to limit the terms of new members of the other place to eight years. Members will also know that we have opened up the process by which our Supreme Court justices are chosen so that Parliament would be allowed to question and consider potential appointees.

In conclusion, I encourage all members to support this modest yet important reform proposed in Bill C-16.

● (1045)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am old enough to remember wearing a button that said “Canada's NDP: The only party with policies worth stealing”. Therefore, I am delighted to see that the Conservatives have finally seen the wisdom of that saying and have adopted at least one of the pieces that was part of Ed Broadbent's package for true democratic reform.

The member concluded by saying that theirs was a modest step forward. Could he explain to the voters, who are concerned about things such as the musical chairs by the member for Vancouver Kingsway or the member for Newmarket—Aurora, why that reform stops short of actually dealing with other democratic reforms such as banning floor-crossing, bringing in proportional representation and adding new transparency to leadership races in our country?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, I can understand the urgency and the desire for the member opposite to increase the amount of democratic reform that this place needs. I suggest that one step at a time is the way to go. To put all these things into one omnibus bill would surely result in greater opposition than what we experience when we bring in legislation one at a time. I encourage her and her party to stand behind this initiative and help it pass.

● (1050)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to see the government talking about making our democratic process work better to serve the interests of all Canadians. However, there are many commonsense practices that exist now, outside of these legislative changes, that would also further that goal. One of them is to hold true consultation processes.

Recently the government supposedly held a consultation process on post-secondary education. The closing date happened to be the date when students returned to university. It was held during the summer and it failed to advise many of the stakeholders of this consultation process.

Would the government commit to a real consultation process rather than the kind of sham that was held this summer on post-secondary education?

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Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but note that the member has no real questions with respect to the legislation. She has moved on to other topics of reform that perhaps the House should consider, but I would like to address Bill C-16, the one focused on fixed election dates, and simply highlight some of the other benefits that I did not get a chance to address in my speech.

In summary, there are four clear benefits from the legislation.

It provides fairness. No longer will the governing party be allowed to manipulate the process.

It provides transparency and predictability. Canadians will benefit from knowing exactly when these fixed elections will occur so they can plan their lives and the businesses around it.

It improves governance by removing power from the prime minister's office and devolving it to the people, as it should be.

Hopefully, it will result in a higher voter turnout. The date in October was chosen particularly to avoid conflicts with municipal elections and religious holidays, such that the voter turnout should be higher if we adopt this legislation.

I encourage all members in this chamber to support Bill C-16.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, saying it does not make it so.

I support the principle of fixed election dates, however the hon. member has said that snap election dates are out and that a government cannot manipulate the process. There is absolutely nothing in the legislation that prevents the government or any future government from manipulating the process. It does not define what votes of confidence are.

Later today we are going to have a vote on the softwood lumber deal. The government, which just the other day and over the summer, said that if in the vote did not go its way, it would be a vote of confidence, the government would fall and we would have an election. At the same time it has Bill C-16 before the House. To me, that is inconsistent and indeed almost hypocritical to suggest on the one hand that we are bringing in fixed election dates, but still not dealing with the process.

How does the legislation prevent the government from manipulating election dates when in fact it is silent on it?

Unless there is an amendment, which clearly defines what votes of confidence would be, we will be subject to future manipulation by the government. I suggest that the real target is to tell the public to feel good, that we will have a fixed election date in four years, when the reality is get ready, we will have one either later this year or early next.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member did not listen closely to what I had to say. He quotes me as saying that I said snap election dates were out. That is not the case.

This morning the member repeated that question time and time again. He has received his answers, yet he does not seem to be satisfied with the answers he gets from the government. Perhaps he could pose a new question, one that is a bit more novel than the one he has asked.

Let me assure him that the proposed legislation can only go so far without reforming the Constitution. We have moved as far as we could to bring in the stability that this place requires and that Canadians expect.

• (1055)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill C-16.

I chose to run for political office, as many here did, to make a difference. I believe we were sent here by our constituents to improve the state of the nation.

One of the areas where our nation definitely needs improvement is the structure and the function of our democracy. Before the last election, our party put forward a seven point plan to clean up and improve the state of our democracy. A friend of mine and a colleague of many who are here, Mr. Broadbent, proposed the seven point plan to clean up and put in the hands of Canadians some ideas that we could then bring to this place to improve the state of our nation and, indeed, the state and health of our democracy.

I want to go over those points. We know that with the accountability act the government quite smartly and rightly took some of our ideas and brought them forward. We certainly contributed to the committee on Bill C-2 in which the member for Winnipeg Centre and I proposed, as opposed to just opposing, ideas. We proposed some of the ideas that we had put forward in our plan, which was available to Canadians not only during the election but before the election.

To summarize the seven point plan, the first was to have democratic accountability in the House. We proposed that no member of Parliament could ignore his or her voters and wheel and deal for personal gain. No member of Parliament should be permitted to ignore the wishes of their voters and change parties. This was before the interesting musical chairs by the member for Vancouver Kingsway. We wanted to ensure that the wishes of voters were honoured. To cross the floor and become a member of another party, without first resigning his or her seat and running in a byelection, was not on.

Democracy is something that is evolving. It is an experiment of sorts and it is something where we know that when voters are not honoured, they do one of two things. First, they just walk away from the process, and no one wants to see that happen. Sadly, we have seen that happen over time. Second, they propose to change things.

The first thing we wanted to do in our seven point ethics packages was to ban floor-crossing. We saw that it dishonoured the wishes of voters.

The second point of our seven point plan was that election dates should be fixed, which is the spirit in the proposition the government has put before the House in Bill C-16. There are many reasons for that, which I will explain in a minute.

Point three, which we proposed before the last election, was to set spending limits in leadership contests. We saw in the previous Liberal Party leadership contest the contestant, who then became the prime minister, had over \$12 million in the bank. Obviously, there was not much competition in the end, but he had lots of money. We had concerns at the time about the amount of money in leadership contests, and it was not just with the Liberal Party. Parties are largely financed by the public and the same principles pertinent to the public good should play to the internal affairs of parties as they do to electoral competition between parties.

Point four was electoral reform. This has been a demand, a suggestion, a proposition that was made probably before I was born. An organization of Canadians from coast to coast has been brought together from all parties. It has decided to focus on electoral reform, which obviously needs fixing.

● (1100)

Many people have suggested we look to the other healthy democracies that have proportional representation, that the will and the spirit of the voters is represented in legislative bodies. This clearly has not happened in the last number of elections. We need a process and we need to ensure that we get on with that process.

Fair Vote Canada, the organization to which I referred, has been tireless in advocating for fair elections so voters are not cheated, which has happened. It is not about parties. We know we have had majority governments that are false majorities, governments that are based on 38% and 39% of the vote. That is clearly wrong, it is undemocratic and it should be changed.

Point five was that unregulated lobbying and political cronyism must end. We have started on that path with some amendments we made on Bill C-2. We have to change government appointments so they are not patronage appointments. We have made some changes, but there is work to be done.

Point seven was access to information. Clearly, that is the window on democracy. It is a bit clouded now. We are working on that and there is more to come.

Now let me turn to the bill before us. The reason why we put forward fixed election dates long before others were talking about it in this place was because we saw the concerns that people had with the executive power, which has been concentrated over time, in the hands of the Prime Minister's Office. Some put it back to just after Pearson. We saw this lead to the deepening of cynicism among the voters of Canada. We had a previous government call a snap election when it was clear that the opposition at the time was not coalesced or organized. Why? Because it could win the election.

As was mentioned, governments sometimes go on too long. We remember the previous Conservative government, which waited until 1993 to finally let Canadians have their say. We could see a government call a snap election to get power or a government that hangs on too long. We see the benefit of having fixed election dates, but there are many other reasons, if we look to the people who have studied it.

I refer to Henry Milner, who is an author, visiting scholar and professor of political science at Laval University. He has studied this, and I consider this an objective opinion. He is one of the people we

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tapped into taking a look at fixed election dates. He showed that Canada is only 1 out of 12 of 40 comparable democracies that does not use some form of fixed election dates. Clearly, when we look at the juxtaposition between our democracy and others, it is worth examining, and he did that. He also said that these numbers contradicted the widely held misperception that flexible election dates were incompatible with parliamentary systems, as some have suggested.

I will turn to concerns with the fact that there have not been constitutional changes proposed in the bill. In effect, a prime minister can walk down the street and still call for an election. My colleague has made a proposal. In committee we will look at proposing ways to ensure that there are criteria on what is a confidence vote.

Most parliamentary democracies in Scandinavia and continental Europe, including several Westminster style systems, have what is called a flexible fix. In other words people would have concerns if there were a loss of confidence and the government should fall and set criteria accordingly. That is really what we are talking about: not fixed election dates, but nuance. It is a flexible fix so if there is a minority Parliament and the government loses the confidence of the House, there is an opportunity to go to the people, and that will not change. Therefore, we have fixed election dates when it is opportune.

● (1105)

Like many others, I am concerned that the present government is simply trying to engineer, between policy and brokerage politics, the fall of the House so it can then gain a majority. I actually think that with this debate and this bill in front of us people will become wise to that kind of backroom politicking. Not only with fixed election dates would we avoid the cynical use of power within the Prime Minister's Office, as we saw with previous governments, but the public would be aware of a fixed election date in October and would then question the government if it were orchestrating the fall of the House. The government would need to make that political argument. Is it playing brokerage politics simply to have the House fall so that it could gain a majority government? I see that as an important debate to have.

By adopting a precise date, preferably early in the fall as has been suggested, it would allow a campaign to take place at the end of the traditional vacation period in Canada. We also must take rural Canada into account. If we were to have an election too early in the fall it would affect farmers. Farmers, goodness knows, have had enough challenges and they do not need another one in front of them.

Although many of us had a terrific time going door to door in the last election and found it very invigorating ploughing through the snow, many of us, and probably most Canadians, would rather that be a footnote in history and not a practice to embrace.

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If we were to build in provisions for holding early elections when necessary and in such an event stipulate that the following election would occur on the designated date four calendar years later, I believe Canadians would embrace that and it would help fix democracy.

I want to conclude by emphasizing the fact that this is something the NDP proposed before the election and it is something we embrace. We have some concerns but they can be dealt with in committee. We fully support fixed election dates.

I would like to leave the House and Canadians with the fact that this is not the end of electoral reform and democratic reform. Canadians are demanding that we fix our democracy, that we embrace the idea of democratic reform and that we embrace the idea of proportional representation. Canadians would then have genuine confidence in democracy. This is the beginning, definitely not the end. I look forward to engaging in debate with my colleagues.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to our colleague, and I found that he raised some excellent and very interesting points about democratizing the decision-making process, which in his view is currently dominated by the cynical use of power on the part of the party in power or the Prime Minister.

We know that during elections, the parliamentary process is blocked. It affects our ridings too. Plenty of things get put on the back burner. I find it has a huge impact on what we are trying to do for our constituents.

I think that when the election date is unknown, we often drop certain issues the moment the election is called so we can prepare for the campaign. Then we campaign for two or two and a half months before we can get back to work. Then another three or four months go by before the government ministers are ready to deal with their portfolios.

In reality, average citizens looking on and paying our salaries can expect to wait seven to nine months before their issues are addressed.

I would like to know what our NDP colleague thinks about this. Does he think that fixed election dates would have an impact on the service we provide to our constituents?

• (1110)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, as an aside, perhaps we all knew when elections were coming before because the money would start flying like no tomorrow from various ministers. They would be shoveling it out the train or plane depending on where they lived and we would know an election was coming.

We saw in this town and across the country that things came to a standstill around the time there was a perception of an election coming and files were not moved. In this past election, because it was a fairly long period, things were not getting done and, as a result, service to Canadians was affected negatively.

I personally believe that fixed election dates, particularly when it would occur just after summer vacations and when business is done

throughout the land, people could begin ratcheting up their campaigns before the actual election date, which is common.

However, I do not think the business of the country will come to a standstill. People will understand and accept that an election is happening and that the government will no longer be able to manipulate it and, if it does, it will be in what I will call the public square. Everyone will be saying that we are throwing more money at something or we are going to stranglehold the bureaucracy by not allowing it to do anything because there is an election coming.

I personally think what should happen is what has happened in other jurisdictions that have brought in fixed election dates. It will make government more effective, more comprehensive and will, hopefully, avoid what we have seen in the past, which is the manipulation by the Prime Minister's Office, the executive branch or the bureaucracy simply for its own pursuit of power.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in theory, fixed election dates are very good. However, Bill C-16 has not taken into consideration what constitutes confidence. If we look at the general history we know that confidence motions are on the Speech from the Throne or a finance bill. Within the current environment, the Prime Minister, whenever it does not suit him, calls everything confidence. How does the bill help in ensuring the Prime Minister will not use that power and not create more cynicism among voters to call a snap election?

The bill is also a mishmash with the U.S. congressional model. Could you give me your thoughts on how we could improve on accountability?

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind members, as I did yesterday, to address their remarks to each other through the Chair and not use the second person but the third person.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my comments, something we can look at in committee is the setting of some criteria as to what is a confidence vote. However, with this legislation and this concept of fixed election dates, as we see this with the present government, this will take the rug out from under it, the strategy of trying to orchestrate a non-confidence vote simply to get a majority, as we have seen with previous governments.

In other words, if the bill were to pass and we do have fixed election dates, Canadians will question why the government would try to play brokerage politics, playing one region off the other simply to have a government fall and then gain a majority.

We all know, let us be honest that is the elephant in the room, that the government is simply looking for a way to orchestrate the fall of Parliament, particularly while one party is going through a leadership process. It may be a strategy it learned from another political party, I do not know, but that will be known to Canadians who will ask why the government is orchestrating the fall of Parliament when we have a fixed election date two or three years hence.

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There are two criteria. One is that we can look at making amendments and set criteria for confidence, if that is possible. The second is that Canadians are smart and they will see when they are being manipulated. If there is a fixed election date and we have a government that is cynically trying to cause the fall of Parliament simply to get a majority, it will pay the price.

If we take a look at that in combination with the fact that this is the beginning and not the end of electoral reform, this is something we should embrace. We can see how we can make it better in committee and that is why my party will be supporting it.

• (1115)

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP supports the idea of fixed election dates. It was part of our seven point platform on accountability, which was to bring true electoral change and reform to Parliament.

The member talked about many points but the one I want to focus on is proportional representation. A previous opposition member spoke about a referendum that was held in British Columbia where 59% of the population supported proportional representation in some form. My caucus and members of my party through their good work have supported that. We know that in the general public there is an appetite to see true electoral reform.

Would my colleague go into somewhat more of the merits of proportional representation and inform the House of some of the things that can be achieved with true proportional representation and true electoral reform?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, before I answer my colleague's excellent question, I should answer the second point raised by my previous colleague about this being a kind of an American style reform.

I simply suggest that the member take a look at the reference in my speech to the work that has been done by Professor Milner. He takes a look at the fact that it is not only the United States but that many other jurisdictions have successfully embraced fixed election dates, fixed but flexible. The American system does not have that flexibility. We would have the flexibility and it honours the Westminster tradition.

As to my colleague's question on proportional representation, we need to honour the voters of this country with a system that is fair. What we do not have presently is a fair system. It was referenced earlier that we have a system that was created back in the 18th century and obviously needs reform. We have seen reform in every other jurisdiction. Every other mature democracy, save two, have embraced some form of proportional representation. Why? It is because it is more democratic.

I would suggest to the House and to Canadians that this is not something that needs to be studied. We need to go to Canadians and have a citizens assembly, as has been done in other jurisdictions. We must provide these citizens with some of these ideas and hear from them what they think makes sense.

We proposed that process, by the way, as something we were going to follow in the last Parliament. Sadly, the government abandoned that commitment. I would like to see that embraced in this Parliament and discussed with Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from the outset, as the House leader of the Bloc Québécois and the deputy leader said yesterday, the Bloc Québécois will support this bill in principle. However, we do have some comments.

This bill is like many bills that seek to improve how the federal system works. They sometimes add to our difficulties as sovereignist members in this place. Many of our constituents tell us when we meet with them that we are not here to improve the federal system.

I want to tell my fellow Quebeckers that the Bloc Québécois remains a resolutely sovereignist party. Until Quebeckers say yes to themselves, Quebec will work within a British parliamentary system. Incidentally, the same is true in the Quebec National Assembly. The British parliamentary system that is in force here means that sovereignist members represent Quebec, and until we achieve sovereignty, if improvements can be made to the way the parliamentary system works, we will make them. I wanted to make that clear so that the Bloc Québécois is not accused of improving how the system works and turning its back on sovereignty as an option.

With this bill on fixed election dates, Canada will join the ranks of countries that have adopted the same principle, countries with a clear democratic tradition such as Sweden, Finland, Norway, Switzerland, Luxembourg and the United States. In Canada, three provinces have passed legislation providing for fixed election dates: British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Ontario.

In Quebec, this is nothing new. For decades, it has been customary to hold elections on fixed dates for what I would call lower levels of government. I cannot think of any other term for this, but I am referring to different levels of government, such as the municipal level. I want to be careful what I say, especially since we have in our ranks the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, the former president of the Union des municipalités du Québec. I would not want him to accuse me of implying that municipal elected officials are lower or inferior in any way, during the upcoming period of questions and comments.

Fortunately I have just had a stroke of genius and found with a synonym. I am talking about the municipal level as a different and very important level of government. I should know since, before being elected here, I was municipal councillor for Boischatel, in Côte-de-Beaupré where I live. I still live in Boischatel and I am a proud Boischatelois. I can tell you that working in a municipal government is not a prerequisite for working in the federal government or at the Quebec legislature. It is nonetheless an asset and I am proud of the years I spent at the municipal level.

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In Quebec we already have fixed-date elections at the municipal level every four years. In the past two or three years, the Government of Quebec has harmonized these elections because there were still some municipalities that held their elections on different dates. Now in Quebec, municipal elections are held the first Sunday in November every four years. My memory fails me but I believe that our school boards in Quebec also have fixed-date elections.

• (1120)

This has been going on for decades, as I was saying. This has not hindered the accountability of the elected representatives or democracy in general.

We believe that the main advantage of this bill will be eliminating the prerogative of the party in power—I will go a bit further—the prerogative of the Prime Minister.

When Jean Chrétien was the Liberal leader and Prime Minister he used to say that it was his wife Aline who chose the election dates. This was done very privately. Mr. Chrétien, a dramatic man, told us the story somewhat like this: he would get up in the morning and be shaving in front of the bathroom mirror when suddenly Aline would appear and tell him not to arrange any more appointments, to go see the Governor General and ask that an election be called. It went a little something like that.

Apparently the prerogative of the party in power is a rather secretive decision.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Spousal.

Mr. Michel Guimond: My colleague from Hochelaga is suggesting that it is a spousal decision. Nonetheless, it is a rather secretive decision and is more or less the Prime Minister's prerogative.

The leader of the government, the leader of the Conservative Party, the Prime Minister, probably remembers how former Prime Minister Chrétien legally exercised his prerogative and took advantage of whatever situation certain opposition parties were in.

• (1125)

I would remind the House of the facts. On March 15, 1997, the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie was elected leader of the Bloc Québécois. An election was held two and a half months later, on June 2, 1997, called by former Prime Minister Chrétien.

He repeated the same strategy in 2000. On July 8, 2000, the current Minister of Public Safety was elected leader of the Canadian Alliance, one of the many names of a party that changed names frequently, in search of its identity.

I recall from my law practice that requesting a name change is relatively easy and lucrative. That party often changed names. At that time, however, it was the Canadian Alliance. The current Minister of Public Safety was chosen to lead the party on July 8, 2000. Five months later, Prime Minister Chrétien called an election for November 27, 2000.

The leader of the Conservative Party, who is the current Prime Minister, was elected leader on March 20, 2004. The former Prime Minister, whose name I cannot mention since he is still the member for LaSalle—Émard for a few more weeks, called an election to be

held on June 28, 2004, three months after the election of the Conservative Party leader. It was an opportunity for barely legal tricks aimed at furthering a possible division or realignment within a party that had just chosen a new leader.

We feel that this did not serve democracy, which is why we like the fact that this bill removes the for the party in power's prerogative to call an election whenever it would be most politically advantageous for that party.

An election will now be a sure thing, exactly as it is in the United States. If you would like to try a little exercise, ask any grade 6 class on what date the American election of 2092 will be held. They need only look at a calendar. Everyone knows that the election is held every four years. This removes the possibility of playing games or engaging in political manipulation.

This principle places all the parties on a more equal footing. The party in power no longer has an organizational advantage because only they know when the elections will take place. All parties democratically represented in the House, and even registered parties without parliamentarians, would be playing by the same rules. I believe there are 21 registered parties in Canada.

We also believe that this bill would make it easier for more people to participate in the electoral process, whether as supporters, election workers or even voters. The issue of motivation and advertising by the Chief Electoral Officer could create a certain buzz among voters, with the goal of increasing voter participation.

Over the past 20 years there has been a decline in voter turnout in Canada. I believe there was a slight increase of a few tenths of a point during the 2006 elections even though they were held on January 23. The strong trend over the past 20 years has been a decline in voter turnout. This is worrisome.

Our fellow citizens can be grouped into certain categories. There are citizens who have lost interest in public affairs and who no longer vote. Unfortunately, when we have gone door-to-door and regardless of whether or not an election campaign is underway—Bloc Québécois members have a reputation for being visible not just during election campaigns and, as the whip, I receive my colleagues' schedules and I can confirm that the 50 Bloc Québécois members are known to have a strong presence in their community—our fellow citizens have told us over the years that they will no longer vote. They feel it is useless and that it makes no difference if the government is Liberal or Conservative. They will no longer vote.

This is worrisome in a democracy. We must find ways of increasing voter turnout.

The result of having fixed election dates would be to enhance the effectiveness of the work done by parliamentarians, since committees would then have an opportunity to plan their work schedules better. Certainly some parliamentary work is done in this House of Commons, but we must also not forget the work done by the standing committees, the equivalent of parliamentary committees, sometimes called commissions, in Quebec. Here, they are standing committees. We have 26 of those committees, and they do fantastic work and deal with a huge work load, whether by approving bills on second reading or in the special studies they do. Unfortunately, people too often see only the work that is done here in the House.

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Sometimes we have visitors. People sit in the galleries and are surprised to see that there are not more members in the House. What I tell them then, and I take this opportunity to tell the people who are watching us on television, is that you must not base your impressions solely on the number of people physically sitting here. If my memory serves me, there are 16 or 17 committees meeting on a Tuesday. Our members of Parliament, who are not blessed with the ability to be in two places at once, cannot be in the House and at a committee meeting. That does not mean that members are not working, even if they are not physically present in the House. Too often, people consider only the work done in the House of Commons.

If committees knew that elections would be held on fixed dates, they could organize their work accordingly and could avoid initiating an extensive study, knowing that elections would take place in seven months, and that it would demand a lot of work. Conversely, they could start work earlier on an extensive study, knowing that elections would take place in a year and a half or two years.

Another consequence of this bill is that when the time did come, the public would be in a better position to evaluate the track record of the party in power, the party chosen in the election campaign to form the government.

• (1130)

We would be in a position to use better judgment when exercising the right to vote. As well, knowing it would soon have to face the dangers of the polls, a government would be more inclined to make tough decisions, decisions that might be unpopular but that are necessary. A government could decide to go ahead, and, because there were fixed election dates, tell itself that the public would be able to judge its actions.

In addition, the opposition's approach to its work would change. Knowing that the government had a fixed term, the opposition would opt for different approaches and would contribute positively to the bills before the House. One of the roles of the opposition is to be the critic of the government.

The Bloc Québécois has taken on the responsibility of not acting simply as a critic for the joy of criticizing or the joy of saying that what the government is bringing in makes no sense. When we think that the government is bringing in things that make no sense, we say so. However, when we think that the government is bringing in things that are serious or reasonable, that could be improved, we voice constructive criticism.

In my view, the softwood lumber agreement on which we are going to vote at 3:15 this afternoon is a good example. The Bloc Québécois still believes that a billion dollars are missing from the American trust fund. We consulted with working people in the regions. The leader of the Bloc Québécois and our critics for industry and international trade toured exhaustively in the regions. We consulted people in the pulp and paper industry. They tell us that this is not necessarily a good agreement but they want us to ratify it anyway.

From a purely partisan standpoint, we could vote against the agreement because it was signed by a Conservative international

trade minister, who used to be a Liberal minister—but that is another story. But after consulting, we decided that we would support it. We are therefore providing constructive criticism, and this is why the Bloc Québécois still wants an assistance plan. In any case, though, that is not the purpose of my speech and questions could be raised about the relevance of what I am saying.

This principle would also make it easier for Elections Canada, the parties, and the candidates to plan for election campaigns and ultimately might well improve them and possibly reduce their cost. That is a major point.

I am currently vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Kingsley, just testified before this committee. When we do our election post-mortems and ask all our caucus colleagues to tell us about problems with the implementation of the Elections Act, Mr. Kingsley or one of the members of his team always shows up with a notebook. They certainly do listen because after I speak in the House, I sometimes receive e-mails or telephone calls from them. They do not always agree, or they provide further clarification.

At the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, we are occasionally critical, and quite rightly so, of the Chief Electoral Officer and the Elections Canada team. Sometimes, however, in view of the short deadlines involved, we must bear in mind that the Chief Electoral Officer could have difficulty getting his election preparations quite right. I would think he would like fixed election dates because he would always know where he stood since he would be aware of the exact date of the next election, for example in 2009.

• (1135)

I have been signalled that I have only a minute left and will finish up as follows: in general, this bill will help to fix some contradictory situations that currently arise. We in the Bloc Québécois support the basic principle. If the bill passes and works well, who will be the ultimate winner? I think it will be democracy and also the respect that citizens have—citizens who decide through their vote who will represent them in the House of Commons.

The Bloc Québécois legitimately represents its constituents. Everyone in this House, regardless of whether or not they like the individual who was elected, must respect democracy and the persons chosen in a democratic election by the people of Quebec and Canada.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentions that he spent 12 years in municipal politics. He knows that the difference between fixed election dates in the municipal world and under this legislation is that the mayor, for example, cannot at his discretion decide to dissolve the council and call an election. If it is a fixed election date, it is a fixed election date both in terms of principle and in reality. Under this legislation, we would have a fixed election date, but still have the ability of government to have discretionary power to call an election any time it sees fit.

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Would the member or his party be prepared to look at specific amendments to reduce that discretionary power, for example, only on money matters, money bills or the Speech from the Throne? A government could come along and say it promised 15 things in the last election and has deemed each and every one of those 15 as confidence matters. Therefore, notwithstanding that we have a fixed election date four years or three years from now, it is going to deem this a confidence matter and if it loses of course it would go to an election.

What type of amendments would the member's party be prepared to look at to deal with this issue which at the moment seems to be the great flaw in Bill C-16?

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, who was President of the Union des municipalités du Québec, but I forgot to mention my Liberal colleague for Toronto Centre, who is a former President of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. I hope I did not commit a serious faux pas by forgetting to point out his presence, but I am sure that other Liberal members took care of that during the debate.

The member highlighted something that the Bloc Québécois has been giving a lot of thought to. I am not prepared to announce an amendment at this stage today. Let us remember that we are only talking about adopting the principle underlying the bill, and that it will be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, where we will study it thoroughly. However, the flaw that my Liberal colleague just pointed out is obvious. I am sure the issue would be resolved if there is an amendment, but if there is no amendment, we know that holding elections at fixed intervals would put additional pressure on any government that might try to ignore this.

We have to give this some thought. When the time comes, we will have the opportunity to state our position on any amendment put forward by my colleague or members of his party or even by members of my party. Nevertheless, I would reiterate that we want constructive opposition and that this bill, like most bills introduced in the House, has some room for improvement.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the issues that are raised by this bill and the direction it is going fundamentally speak to the nature of the political system we work in. This political system has been characterized in the last while by minority governments, by a call by people for proportional representation.

The bill purports to set out a timeframe which really is not binding on the Governor General or the government of the time, but really we are all elected to govern here and the bill needs to be taken in that context. There is room for amendment here, to look at how we can ensure that the will of the people, expressed through their elected representatives, has an opportunity to work within a fixed timeframe.

Would the member opposite look at amendments that could ensure that others in the House, in a fixed period, would have the opportunity to form government in the case of a confidence vote in the House?

• (1145)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the minority government situation changes things a bit.

Even in a majority government, if enough government members are absent, the government could lose the confidence of the House. It could happen, but it is unlikely. The problem remains, and we will have to pay particular attention to it. I think we still have time to come back with constructive ideas before the bill is passed.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

[English]

I also appreciate his support for common sense legislation that Canadian taxpayers willingly support for the benefit of all Canadians.

[Translation]

This includes Canadians living in the lovely province of Quebec.

[English]

I also appreciated his clarification of his party's *raison d'être* and I would ask him this simple question. Given that he supports what the government and this Parliament are doing in this regard, would he take that word back to his constituents and his party's constituents in Quebec, that this Parliament and government are working in the area of democratic reform to the benefit of Quebecers and all other Canadians?

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the member should avoid dreaming in technicolor and come back down to earth. The member needs to keep his feet on the ground.

I should say something about weekends and the parliamentary recess. It must be said, and I do so as a non-partisan comment, that on Monday members of all parties did not return from a vacation that began June 22. We were not on vacation. We spent some time with our families because we are human beings and we do need a little rest. However, we continued to work in our respective ridings.

Fixed-date elections are not something that preoccupies the voters of Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord on a daily basis. This summer, the people were talking about the government's position on the war in Afghanistan, about their hopes that the Kyoto protocol would be respected and the Prime Minister's position on the bombardment of south Lebanon and about many other subjects such as the higher price of gasoline. Those are the subjects that the voters are concerned about.

I do not need to say how good this Conservative government is in wanting to improve the democratic process by means of fixed-date elections. The government needs rather to be concerned with settling the most pressing problems. I believe it needs to increase its credibility because this summer the government's credibility was at its lowest point.

Government Orders

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks. As many members have already stated, a degree of cynicism has made its way into our Canadian democratic system. If I understand correctly, the purpose of this bill is to restore the confidence of Canadians and Quebeckers. However, I believe that Canadians are concerned about a party that is pledged to break up our Canadian federal parliamentary system. I put this question to the member: how does the Bloc propose to restore the confidence of those Quebeckers who see their future in a strong Quebec, but within Canada?

• (1150)

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I believe my NDP colleague could have benefited from walking around the streets of our ridings and talking with some ordinary people during the NDP convention two weeks ago. She should have gone out of the Concorde hotel, the Quebec convention centre and the Hilton hotel.

There is a very strong desire in Quebec to manage our own affairs. We are saying that sovereignty will not be a vote against the people of British Columbia. We are going to say “Yes” to ourselves. According to the polls, between 48% and 52% of the population shares that view. What more can I say? The desire to manage your own affairs is not against anyone else; it is for yourself. It is exactly like a young couple that decides to live together. Do they ask permission from the butcher, the grocer or anyone else? They do not even ask permission of their parents. A young man may tell his mother that he loves her. She does his laundry and cleans his room, but he has decided to spread his wings and leave the nest. That is what freedom is.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my honourable and active colleague from the Yukon.

I welcome the opportunity to speak to Bill C-16, legislation that seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act to bring in fixed election dates at the federal level in Canada. The bill provides, subject to an early dissolution of Parliament, that a general election must be held every four years.

The issue of fixed elections is embraced by many people as a way of addressing some of the perceived cynicism in our political system. Rightly or wrongly, people do believe that what happens here in Ottawa is often out of sync with ordinary Canadians. I think we could all think of circumstances. I will vote for the legislation at second reading so the committee can deliberate and make any changes, particularly as it relates to the issue of confidence and confidence votes.

I was not always a fan of fixed elections. In fact, I can recall when I was the president of the Liberal Party in Nova Scotia, my good friend and former leader, Danny Graham, upon becoming leader, proposed sweeping changes on how the government and the House of Assembly operated. He had a large number of democratic reforms about which he was very passionate, including fixed elections.

As party president at the time, I thought there were more important issues to be addressed and I was not at all enthralled with this idea but, as is usually the case when I look back on it, Danny

was right. I have come to believe that fixed elections do have useful elements and are worthy of support. I think they are generally good for government. I think they are generally good for the public service. I think they are generally good for the media who have to cover and portray campaigns at their cost. And I think they are generally good for Canadians.

One of the primary arguments for fixed elections is to remove the unfair advantage that the government has in setting the election date. Does this take politics out of the election dates? I do not think it takes all of the politics out of election dates. It does mean that the government cannot determine in a majority situation that it will have an election early or even go for five years if it wishes. It does determine that the date will be held at a certain point in time, but it certainly will not take the politics out of fixing an election date, nor will it shorten election campaigns. In fact, looking south, I suspect that it will make election campaigns much longer. People are already preparing for the 2008 presidential elections and for senatorial elections two or even three years down the road as well.

However, this fixed election date will mean that a prime minister would no longer have the opportunity to call an election when it is thought to be to her or his advantage. In Nova Scotia, we had a case in the 1980s. Premier and then Senator Buchanan was elected in 1978. He called an election in 1981 and another one in 1984. It was similar to what we had at the federal level through the 1990s.

Fixed elections might also level the playing field for all participants by providing certainty for candidates who are seeking to become members of Parliament. I think that is important.

I recall that when I was seeking election, there were a lot of decisions to be made. There is a lot of planning with one's family and with one's business if one happens to be a business person. There is an awful lot of work that has to be done around identifying when one is going to make the announcement.

In the case of people who may be in business, or partners in business, a position similar to my own, can one in fact be a nominated candidate for a year or perhaps even two years not knowing when the election might be? I think that is worthwhile considering.

We all know the risk involved in running for office. We set aside our lives to run in the hopes of winning. Many who have jobs without protection must, in a relatively short period of time, make significant changes in their lives to run for office, so I think fixed elections will allow individuals the opportunity to plan effectively to run for public office.

Those are positive elements and, as I say, I look forward to supporting the legislation and bringing it to committee. It is my hope that when it comes back I can vote for it again.

There are, however, some questions that I think need to be addressed, not the least of which is the issue of what constitutes confidence and what parameters might exist that would not allow a government the opportunity to circumvent the legislation for its electoral advantage.

Government Orders

For example, we would want to avoid any situation whereby an election is called, or orchestrating an election, let us say hypothetically next spring or even this fall, perhaps after the introduction of a budget before it has been debated, or triggering an election before bad news arrives. For example, maybe the government has some indication of pending release of documents suggesting there might be some ill-conceived action that has taken place.

• (1155)

I think we need clarity as to what constitutes confidence and what parameters would exist in that regard. Could the softwood lumber vote today be an issue of confidence? Could the gun registry vote be an issue of confidence? I think these are some important constitutional issues that need to be addressed.

Our Constitution does not contain many provisions regarding elections. Section 50 tells us that the House of Commons shall continue for up to five years. Section 4 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms suggests that:

No House of Commons and no legislative assembly shall continue for longer than five years from the date fixed for the return of the writs of a general election of its members.

In any event, I will support this bill in the initial stages, and I hope in the later stages, in the hope that the committee will spend as much time as possible in ensuring the bill makes sense and answers some of the questions proposed here and yesterday in debate in this House.

I must address another issue tied into public confidence, and occasionally public cynicism, about what happens here and how we conduct ourselves in Parliament.

Perhaps the real issue is not who calls an election or when, but how parliamentarians treat each other and the institutions of Parliament, such as, for example, question period. Question period is the time when most Canadians see us in the House of Commons. Debate clips do not usually get on TV, but question period does. During this 45 minute period, accusations are made, although the accusations seem to me to be more reasonable this year than last year, and reputations are sometimes ruined. We see false outrage and packaged answers. We wonder why people might think their elected representatives do not connect sometimes.

So is the issue of cynicism in politics solved by the introduction of fixed elections or by an overhaul of how we treat each other in this chamber? Why is it that colleagues from all sides can speak well to each other outside the chamber and enjoy a drink or dinner together, but when the cameras are on we cannot resist the temptation to replace debate with feigned outrage?

It is one thing to reform our election process, and I support that, but I hope all members would also reflect on issues related to our level of discourse in this chamber. I do not suggest that there are any angels among us. We all share that responsibility. We should all do better.

Nonetheless, I will support this bill, and I hope to support it when it comes back. We need more certainty about what constitutes confidence, about what determines when an election is called. The advantage of this bill for Canadians is that it would provide some certainty. It is important that we define certainty before we pass this

bill. I will support it going to committee. I hope some changes are made. I hope very much to support it when it comes back.

• (1200)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his intervention the hon. member brings to the House some of the historical relevance of what has happened in other governments. The member will know that clause 1 of the bill basically says that nothing in the bill will affect the responsibilities under the Constitution of the Governor General, commonly referred to as the royal prerogative.

For the clarification of the House and for Canadians, maybe the member would care to comment on whether, if the bill were in place, it would necessarily mean that we would have elections every fourth year. Or would the bill provide the flexibility and latitude that in certain circumstances the Governor General may call for an election and dissolve Parliament because of other circumstances such as, for instance, the death of a prime minister or war or insurrection?

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to suggest that there is any slim chance the next election may not be in October of 2009, but I do think the member raises a good point. I would be the last person to ever engage in either parliamentary questions or issues of the Constitution with the member for Mississauga South, but the concern of course is that, yes, the way the bill is written, there is still every opportunity that the government could force an early election if it felt that was to its advantage.

Whereas this bill is singularly about fixing an election date, I think the prime result of this bill is that Canadians should know when the next election would be, barring a loss of confidence and what would constitute confidence in the House of Commons. The first section of the bill clearly does say:

Nothing in this section affects the powers of the Governor General, including the power to dissolve Parliament at the Governor General's discretion.

There are a lot of questions that need to be hammered out at the committee level in the sense of trying to come up with a bill that we could all support when it comes back to the House, a bill that would actually provide what it says it is going to provide, which is certainty around the timing of elections.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I asked the question earlier about a concern that I truly have. I can see the issue being a real problem down the road.

I would like the hon. member sitting next to me to comment on a couple of things. One would be on priorities. The other is that the provincial elections in Ontario have been set for a certain date as have municipal elections. We know exactly when they are going to happen.

My concern is that if a minority government all of a sudden falls just before a municipal or a provincial election, two elections would happen at the same time. This would cause a lot of confusion. I do not see anything in the bill that would prevent this. There is a clause that allows for three days' movement, but that does not make any change to a whole election campaign.

Would the member be open to discussing an amendment that would allow that to be changed? I am not sure exactly what the parameters are. I have identified a weakness in it. Unfortunately, I do not have a solution.

Government Orders

I like fixed election dates; I think they are a good idea. However, I am really concerned that if there is an election at the same time as a municipal or provincial election and they are both held at the same time in perpetuity every four years, it would cause real problems not only for the parties, but also for the voters. It would be very confusing.

The other question I have is on priorities. There were five priorities and now it is down to four. Where does this come as a priority? It does not seem to be terribly high on the list. I never saw it before. All of a sudden it is a priority. It is the first item that we are talking about. Could you comment on that please?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I remind the hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming to address his comments through the Chair.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, the issue conflicting with other elections is something that would have to go to committee. I do not know how to manage that.

I want to address the member's other question which is on priorities. This issue clearly is not a priority for Canadians.

As a result of budget 2006 we are seeing once again a growing disparity between the rich and the poor. Government initiatives in my view do little to help those who most need assistance. They do little to help students to gain access to post-secondary education, and do nothing for the productivity agenda which is so important to Canada. The government's initiatives do very little, if anything, for Canada's first nations people and do nothing for child care. There are all kinds of priorities.

When I went around my constituency this summer, people said to me, "The GST was cut, but I didn't notice. A penny and a half on a cup of coffee does not make a lot of difference to me, but if the personal exemption had been kept where it was, it would have helped".

As priorities, this issue is not one of them. It has been presented as legislation and I will support it, but we could have done a lot more for Canadians.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak here today regarding Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

I would first like to comment on the response given by the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord to the hon. member for Victoria.

[*English*]

The member said that when Quebec left and part of Canada was taken away it would not hurt British Columbia or any part of Canada. I disagree. I refer to the great English parliamentarian, John Donne, who said that when just one clod of earth washed away from the shores of England, when one was lost, it affected the entire country. When we lose one person, for whom does the bell toll? It tolls for thee. Losing any part of Canada would have a great effect on all of Canada. It is a subject of great concern and importance to everyone.

Turning to the bill, most of the discussion so far has been on the philosophical aspects of the bill, but I want to talk about three technical aspects of it. The drafters and departmental officials may want to consider some technical points.

I want to talk about proposed subsection 56.2(1). This refers to changing the fixed election date slightly if there is a provincial or municipal election. The government philosophy that it does not want to conflict with other governments' elections is good. It could be a nightmare if two elections were going on at the same time.

Unfortunately, this section is very flawed, because it refers only to municipal and provincial governments. Canada is not made up simply of provincial and municipal governments. There are four orders of government in Canada and the federal government has neglected two of them: the territorial and the first nations governments. It was only a few parliamentary days ago when we had a vote in the House of Commons and only two of us, the member for Nunavut and I, voted against it because it referred to federal and provincial governments but had left out the territorial governments. Here again the territories have been left out.

If we characterize the current government since the election, it has been a government of omission: who has been left out; who has been left behind. Think about the low income people whose taxes were increased, as mentioned previously. Think about people with disabilities and seniors whose income tax increased from 12% to 12.5%. Global warming is having a dramatic effect on the people in the north while many of the climate change programs have been allowed to expire and are not being renewed. The aboriginal people were also left behind when the greatest agreement in the history of this nation, with funding of \$5 billion, was abrogated. It was a good faith agreement and those people were left behind. Single mothers have lost the \$5 billion day care program which would have given them some relief, some possibility of getting into the workforce and building new lives for themselves.

We are leaving behind geographically almost half the country: the territorial governments and the first nations governments. I want to talk about first nations governments. This is only the tip of the iceberg. Unfortunately, federal departments, agencies and politicians too often do not realize the new reality in Canada, the great land claims and self-government agreements. I am sure every member in the House is in total agreement with the modernization of dealing with these other governments in Canada. Too often we forget that we have made these arrangements.

Government Orders

●(1210)

When we sign deals with first nations, we have created new governments in Canada that in some cases have more power than a province. These governments have to be legally and morally dealt with on a government to government to government basis. We cannot just omit them when we are talking about governments in this country. We have signed deals that mandate consultation. We have signed agreements that are constitutionally protected in some cases that mandate consultation with these governments. Sometimes people do not understand and they think it is only the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, but it is all federal departments and agencies and it is all politicians. We have signed these agreements on behalf of Canada and not on behalf of a single department.

I would certainly be looking for a technical modification to proposed subsection 56.2(1) to include governments that are omitted in the present drafting.

The only other major point I want to make relates to proposed subsection 56.2(4). My colleague from Nipissing—Timiskaming made the same point. As I have said earlier, this is in relation to not having elections at the same time.

If Bill C-16 were to come into effect in its present form, the federal election would occur three days before all the municipal elections in my jurisdiction. Any member who has had the unfortunate situation of having two elections going on at the same time knows what a mess it is. When enumerators go door to door, people say that they have already been enumerated. There are signs of all different colours for different elections. The voters do not know which advance poll is for which election. It is absurd to have two elections going on at the same time. If possible, it should be avoided.

The bill will mandate that two elections go on within three days of each other in 2007. Some technical modifications are needed. I know the government is acting in goodwill. The government does not want to pile up elections. This was part of the government's philosophy in bringing forward the bill. Unfortunately, the technical aspects of the bill do not make that possible now.

The bill allows for small changes in timing, but only three days. It could be the day after or a week after, which in effect would only be three days from the election that I am talking about.

We need more flexibility in that section, perhaps a month, so that the Governor General has enough flexibility and that provincial, municipal, first nations or other government elections do not overlap. As the NDP member from Ottawa said earlier, when there are conflicting situations what happens is that the electorate stops showing up. There is already a big enough problem with that. We do not want to create more problems for the electorate which is already having a problem getting enthused with the process.

Proposed subsection 57(4) talks about changing the election day to the Tuesday if the Monday happens to be a holiday. That does not jibe clearly with proposed subsection 56.2(4) which talks about the alternate dates, because it could be the alternate Tuesday or Monday. Technically we must make sure that those two sections work together and that the results are very clear.

In conclusion, there are two major technical flaws with the bill. One is that the bill only talks about two of the four orders of government where the federal election date would be altered. The other is the bill does not have enough flexibility to change the federal election date slightly by a number of weeks, a month or so, in order not to conflict with a provincial, municipal or first nations election.

●(1215)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

(Motion agreed to, bill read a second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

CANADA TRANSPORTATION ACT

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC) moved that Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-11 which contains proposed amendments to the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act. Many of the clauses in Bill C-11 are taken from omnibus legislation tabled by previous governments which never passed despite repeated attempts. Bill C-11 is strategic in selecting high priority items, like powers to address railway noise, ensure proper advertisement of airfares and facilitating commuter rail for quick passage.

Bill C-11 is the second transport bill I have selected for second reading because it addresses high priority issues that were not addressed by previous governments. The current bill contains amendments to the Canada Transportation Act related to the general provisions, air provisions, rail passenger provisions, railway noise and grain revenue cap. Some of these issues were raised by members in the House during the second reading debate on Bill C-3. I am sure those members will be pleased that we are proceeding with the proposed amendments.

Government Orders

The government plans to table a third bill soon on amendments to the rail freight provisions of the act. These amendments will reflect the views heard during a final round of consultations with shippers to develop as much consensus as possible. The government has assured shippers that it takes their concerns very seriously and will be proceeding with a third bill on a priority basis.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to focus on Bill C-11, which aims to strike a balance between the interests of communities, consumers, commuters, public transit companies, and air and rail carriers.

We believe that these changes will translate into a better strategic framework, which will help Canada achieve its economic and environmental objectives, increase the efficiency of its transportation system and improve the quality of life of Canadians, especially those living in urban areas.

The proposed amendments include a modernized and simplified national transportation policy statement, which sets out the guiding principles in a way that is simpler and clearer than in the past.

The statement provides direction and guidelines for possible action plans, along with information on how to process complaints and arbitration applications submitted to the Canadian Transportation Agency. The improvements made to this statement are intended to address the concerns expressed by shippers.

• (1220)

[*English*]

Bill C-11 contains a number of provisions related to the role and structure of the Canadian Transportation Agency. The number of full time members of the agency would be reduced from seven to five, all of whom would be located at the agency in the National Capital Region. I believe that the efficiency of the agency would be increased if all members were located at the agency on a full time basis. This would be more consistent with the nature of the agency's decision making processes, which normally require more than one member to sign off on decisions, orders and findings.

At the same time, the concentration of members at the agency office in the same location makes it possible to reduce the number of members to five. This is not only an efficient measure; it would bring financial savings as well.

The proposed amendments would give the agency the statutory authority to engage in mediation upon request on matters within its jurisdiction. The amendments would ensure the adequate safeguards are in place to maintain its quasi-judicial role.

Mediation solutions can be simpler, quicker and less litigious and costly than other options. The lines of communication between parties during mediation typically contribute to a healthy commercial relationship after disputes are resolved. In addition, mediated agreements have higher commitment levels as parties jointly craft solutions and the process can assist in narrowing the gaps on disputed issues if brought before the agency at a later date.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-11 also provides for new measures designed to protect air passengers.

The government realizes that Canadians want to know the real price of a plane ticket in airline advertising. It would like the prices advertised for air transportation to be clear and transparent, and not misleading. The airlines have listened to consumers and taken major steps to guarantee greater transparency in their advertising. At the same time, consumers wish to make sure that the industry will continue on the right track.

The amendments proposed in Bill C-11 authorize the minister to make regulations that would apply to all media, as necessary. The Air Travel Complaints Commissioner's Office was created as a temporary, transitional measure in 2000, following the merger of Air Canada and Canadian Airlines International. Bill C-11 would replace the temporary function of the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner with a permanent, transparent function imposed by the law for handling complaints about air transportation. This activity would be part of the regular activities of the Canadian Transportation Agency.

The government recognizes the importance of the air travel complaints program for Canadians. Thanks to the amendments under study, Canadians will still be able to address their air travel complaints to the Canadian Transportation Agency.

[*English*]

The proposed amendments in Bill C-11 will improve the framework for passenger rail service in Canada by allowing commuter rail operators and VIA Rail Canada to seek adjudication from the agency if they are unable to reach agreement with the railways on access to track and other services when new agreements are negotiated or existing agreements renegotiated.

In addition the line transfer and abandonment provisions will be extended to include urban corridor and urban transit authorities. Bill C-11 will give the agency the authority to settle noise disputes if voluntary efforts are not successful. The agency will be able to order a railway to make the necessary changes in order to reduce unreasonable noise levels associated with railway operation or construction.

Governments need access to good data to help develop and assess transportation policies and programs. The existing data provisions in the Canada Transportation Act will improve to add security as a purpose for which I can collect data. The amendments will also expand the list of stakeholders from whom data can be gathered and improve on the administrative penalties that can be applied if reporting requirements are not met.

Government Orders

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

The amendments in Bill C-11 would introduce a new merger review procedure, which would apply to all carriers and service providers under federal jurisdiction, for example, air, rail and maritime transport, bus and truck transportation, and airports and seaports.

This approach would build on the strong points of the merger review process now in place for airline companies.

This process was put in place with the amendments made to the Canada Transportation Act in 2000 as a result of the issues of public interest raised by the acquisition of Canadian Airlines International by Air Canada. This new mechanism replaced the requirements of the Competition Act respecting merger reviews.

Here are the chief elements of the proposed provision respecting mergers:

Merger applicants must address specific issues in the new merger review guidelines.

I will be authorized to appoint someone to review the proposed transaction if the proposal raises enough issues with respect to the public interest as it relates to national transportation.

The provision provides for a single government decision to be made so as to avoid duplication. I will handle public interest concerns, and the competition commissioner will look at competition concerns.

[*English*]

The proposed amendments include a new provision that authorizes me to enter into an agreement with a provincial authority under which the provincial authority would regulate a federal railway.

One other main element of the previous Bill C-44 that I would like to explain is a proposed new provision on the grain revenue cap, which limits the amount of revenue that Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railway can earn from regulated grain movements in western Canada. The provision is linked to the costs of maintaining hopper cars for such movements. On May 4, I announced that the government would retain its fleet of 12,100 grain hopper cars in order to maximize benefits for farmers and taxpayers.

There is a provision in Bill C-11 that would enable me to make a one time only request to the agency to adjust the revenue caps to reflect the current maintenance costs for all hopper cars used in regulated grain movements. This will more closely align the costs in the revenue caps with the actual costs of maintaining the hopper cars in revenue cap service. Estimates show potential savings for farmers of approximately \$2 per tonne or about \$50 million per year based on an average movement of about 25 million tonnes.

I also want to explain the proposed amendments to the Railway Safety Act. They are fairly straightforward. The Canada Transportation Act authorizes federally regulated railways to establish and operate their own police forces. CNR and CPR maintain police

forces as do provincial railways and transit authorities. The duties of railway police constables relate to the protection of property owned or administered by the company, and of the persons and equipment on that property. Only a judge of a superior court, upon the application of a railway, is allowed to appoint, dismiss or discharge railway police constables. The power to appoint police constables is being moved from the CTA to the Railway Safety Act. The Railway Safety Act deals with matters pertaining to the safety and security of railways, making it a more appropriate statutory authority to deal with railway police.

In addition, amendments to the Railway Safety Act will require that the railways establish an independent review mechanism for responding to public complaints against railway police. The review mechanism will be filed with me for approval.

In closing, I want to reiterate that Bill C-11 is consistent with the government's legislative strategy for amending the Canada Transportation Act. The strategy is to proceed with amendments that stakeholders are already demanding, have awaited for several years, and that reflect extensive consultations and consensus building.

I believe that the proposals contained in this bill will have strong support from stakeholders and that they look forward to early passage of the bill. I encourage all members to give Bill C-11 their full endorsement.

● (1230)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the minister for appearing this morning and sharing with us the salient features of Bill C-11. There are obviously many questions from members here that run through the essential elements of the bill.

[*Translation*]

First, I would like to congratulate the minister on being here this morning. We have not seen him for a few weeks, even though the important issue of security at the Montreal airport has been under discussion. This is a rather disturbing issue for Canadians.

[*English*]

It is important to raise a couple of core points before responding officially to the government's bill.

I have a couple of pointed questions for the minister that deal with what is not in the bill as opposed to what is in the bill. I do also at the same time congratulate the minister for his candour in reminding the House of Commons that the vast majority of this legislation is in fact legislation from our previous government. There was an awful lot of heavy lifting done by government officials and all members of the House, but I do want to give him those kudos because it does take great big shoulders to admit that the lion's share of the work here was accomplished by previous governments.

Government Orders

There are two pointed questions I want to put to him. First, if I understand the bill correctly, this bill provides new powers to the minister and the government to devolve further the responsibility for federally regulated railways, and this at a time when the government represents a government which strictly interprets the Constitution and responsibilities. Is that the case?

Second, there is no talk at all in the bill about final offer arbitration, a very contentious issue. I would like to ask the minister for his views in this regard. Why is final offer arbitration not addressed in the bill?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, I too am very happy to see my colleague. I know that in a recent radio interview, he had indicated that we had progressed quite well over the last three years in ensuring safety in airports, and I am quite pleased that he also was able to admit it with full candour.

On the issue of the rail amendments and what we are doing, the purpose of that amendment is to enable Ottawa to receive the authority to go forward with its light rail train. That is the essential purpose of the amendment.

On the issue of final arbitration, there are several opinions on that. It is quite possible that we will ultimately go in that direction, depending upon the circumstances.

I know my hon. colleague is probably referring to shippers and the rail freight issue. We are moving on that. Discussions are ongoing. Hopefully, the parties that are involved will be able to come to some solution. In the event that is not the case, both of us will be able to sit down and look at how we can push that forward and move the file forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by commending the minister on his presentation about Bill C-11.

Perhaps I could ask the transport minister to think back to his career in the municipal arena. I say this because clause 29 refers to noise. I would just like to explain to the minister that whole communities are experiencing serious problems with marshalling yards.

In reality, as we know, federal law takes precedence over provincial law and even municipal laws. As the clause is written, when determining whether a company is making excessive noise, the Transportation Agency is limited by the company's obligations and operational requirements. This is therefore related to how the company operates and what constitutes reasonable noise. Municipalities do not work in this way. A municipality would have set standards to obey, with decibel levels.

I would simply like the minister to send an important message, especially to the Transportation Agency, to avoid the tendency to target industry practices and instead make sure the industry can adapt to the surrounding area. Clearly, it is important to ensure that the Transportation Agency plays more than just a mediation role. Cooperation has to be facilitated, and in the end it has to be possible to impose standards when the industry does not want to listen. In many places, mitigation measures have been taken and discussions have been held with the companies in operation. But the parties do

not reach an agreement, because there is too much noise for the surrounding area.

I would therefore like the minister to tell us that he will keep abreast of this situation and will make it clear to the Transportation Agency that steps must be taken to solve the noise problem.

● (1235)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, our role as legislators is to ensure that what we enact in the House is something that will work properly and can be carried out.

I agree with the comment by my hon. colleague, that in municipal government, a determination has to be made as to whether, for example, the level of the noise made by heavy vehicles exceeds 50 or 55 decibels. In that case, the public can call for a noise wall to be erected or other measures taken.

I am certainly open to examining these things. However, I mainly want to convey the message that if Parliament intends to correct this problem, we will have to work together to find ways of doing it.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the minister for describing some aspects of this new bill, the principle of which is a very good one. He is establishing mechanisms that will encourage dialogue so that communities and transportation agencies will finally start talking to each other and also introducing measures designed to protect the environment and correct noise problems.

I know that there are problems in my part of the country, in British Columbia. So let us hope that this bill will help to solve them, or at least to open the way for dialogue so that these problems can be resolved.

I have a question to ask regarding the amendments, in relation to abandoning rail lines.

[*English*]

In my part of the country, in British Columbia and specifically on Vancouver Island, a rail line was to be abandoned by CP Rail and VIA Rail. I know our communities up and down the island spent years trying to arrive at some solution. The process was cumbersome. It was not transparent.

Therefore, I truly hope the bill will help in the future and will continue to help our communities, which are trying to make this rail line run better to serve our communities.

I have a question concerning one of the proposed amendments. There is a suggestion that it will extend the measures that relate to the transfer or the abandonment of rail lines that can be used for public transportation or transit.

Could the minister tell me whether he feels that this will also apply to the use of possible abandoned lines as cycle paths in the context of the Canada Trail?

● (1240)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Government Orders

I do, quite humbly, think that the amendment provides a benefit for all these transportation companies that are asking to be able to use the existing rail lines, and that it protects consumers from prices that might be charged. We had to find a way of enabling these transportation companies and public transit agencies to be able to operate, while at the same time ensuring that consumers come out ahead, because fundamentally we need to be able to use these infrastructures for the common good, the good of the public.

On the question of these rail lines, my colleague is of course referring to policies that were applied several years ago, when a number of rail lines were transferred, for example, in Quebec, to regional municipalities or local authorities. Some of them ultimately recycled the rail lines by making them into bicycle paths or pedestrian trails.

We can study this. I must humbly say that I do not have the answer to my colleague's question, but this question can certainly be raised during the debate that will take place in committee in the near future.

[*English*]

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to respond to the minister and to speak to Bill C-11.

[*Translation*]

Today we begin debating Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. I am pleased that this debate is taking place as it will enable us to help Canadians understand the path that this project has taken.

Amendments to the Canada Transportation Act were introduced for the first time in Bill C-26 during the second session of the 37th Parliament.

Unfortunately, the current Prime Minister and the rest of the Canadian Alliance at the time were opposed to these measures and voted against them at second reading.

We reintroduced these amendments in Bill C-44 in the 38th Parliament. Once again the opposition at that time felt that the bill presented to the House was not good legislation. It decided to bring down the government and at the same time to drop the bill for a second time.

[*English*]

If this sounds familiar, let me assure the House that it is not déjà vu. One of the last debates that was held before the House rose this past spring concerned Bill C-3, the first bill brought to our consideration by the Minister of Transport in the 39th Parliament. During the debate on the bill, I welcomed the minister's decision to bring important legislation, which had died on the order paper, back to the floor of the House.

Bill C-11 is the second bill that the Minister of Transport has introduced in this session, which relies on the heavy lifting of a previous Liberal government, and it will not be the last.

We are happy to see the minority government again endorsing solid Liberal legislation in actions rather than words, by pushing for Bill C-11's quick adoption in the House. While we agree in principle

with much of what is being presented, there have been substantial changes to the workings of the bill. My colleagues and I will address some of these and outline our concerns today and in the days ahead. In turn, though, the onus remains on the government to convince us and Canadians that the legislation is still well-founded.

The parliamentary history of the bill is important at the outset for our context and so too is the wider history of the two bills that Bill C-11 aims to amend.

Back in 1996, a decade ago, the first of the two, the Canada Transportation Act, laid out our national transport policy. It was really a vision to modernize and deregulate rail and airline traffic. It consolidated the 1987 National Transportation Act, which itself had roots in a 1967 predecessor, and the venerable Railway Act into one unified law. At the same time the new Canada Transportation Act took steps to reduce or eliminate subsidies for transport, costs that were borne by all Canadians.

The second act to be amended by Bill C-11 is the Railway Safety Act. The act allows Transport Canada to review and upgrade the regulations, the standards and rules for rail safety oversight. It is precautionary legislation and should be the home of our attempts to improve the safety for the millions and millions of children and pedestrians, motorists, travellers and workers who come into contact with trains every day across our country.

A thorough statutory review of the Canada Transportation Act was completed again by our government in 2001 and it was very important in forming Bill C-11 by way of its earlier incarnations. The bill we debate today is the third attempt to legislate following that review.

Let me begin our consideration with provisions that are similar in principle to the most recent version that we presented, Bill C-44.

●(1245)

[*Translation*]

I would like to review some of the provisions of this bill beginning with those concerning noise caused by railway operations.

My riding, like a good number of Canadian communities, is home to railway activities and I am fully aware of the disputes arising between residents of the communities and the railway companies because of noise.

I am pleased to see that proposed amendments to the Canada Transportation Act empower the Canadian Transportation Agency to deal with noise complaints and, if necessary, to order railway companies to make changes in order to reduce unreasonable noise.

This is an important matter, one aspect of the problem that my colleagues and I look forward to examining in greater detail.

Government Orders

[English]

Also on the subject of rail, proposed amendments in Bill C-11 involve the expansion of the provisions on railway line transfers and discontinuances to cover rail corridors, such as spurs and sidings, in urban areas that could be used for urban transit purposes.

As members may know, I have long been a strong proponent and advocate of public urban transit. In fact, right here in the city of Ottawa I was pleased to help deliver \$200 million of federal funding to expand our own O-Train.

Steps that we can take to improve public transit and advance the use of rail in Canadian cities are worthwhile undertakings. Giving a right of refusal for urban transit authorities to purchase rail that would otherwise be abandoned is very good public policy. That is why two previous Liberal ministers of transport have tried to pass the legislation through the House.

On a related subject, I am also frustrated with the government's ill-informed tax break on public transit passes.

Many riders, as we know, do not have monthly or yearly passes to use public transit. In fact, many users forgo passes for the flexibility of tickets. The most needy riders simply do not have the wherewithal to buy an annual pass. Studies that were shown to the Minister of Finance before he took his decision to make transit passes tax deductible, and brought to his attention by his own officials, demonstrated that tax deductible transit passes did not encourage increasing ridership and did not have the corollary intended effect of substantial greenhouse gas reductions that the government purported they should have. The cost per tonne of GHG reduction through these transit passes is exorbitantly high. This again speaks to the pattern of the government of never letting the evidence get in the way of governing by tax credit.

The Conservatives should have spent the budget money on better infrastructure and lower rates for all users.

However, getting back to Bill C-11, if these amendments mean more urban rail, then I say that we should take a look.

The minister has asserted that Bill C-11 would bring clarity in airfare advertising by giving the Canadian Transportation Agency the authority to regulate advertised pricing of airfares. The goal, of course, is to indicate all fees, all charges and all taxes collected by the airline on behalf of a government body or an airport authority. It must also disclose the price of an airline ticket for both domestic and international travel.

If these provisions, which are also inherited from our Bill C-44, ultimately help everyday Canadians to more readily understand and determine the total cost of a travelling ticket and the terms and conditions that apply to its purchase, then I will welcome them on behalf of my constituents who, as consumers, face a barrage of misleading information, often from the travel sector.

Bill C-11 would create a mediation process for disputes concerning federal transportation matters that are within the jurisdiction of the Canadian Transport Agency.

The member for Outremont, as Minister of Transport, delivered legislative language to this House on this for us because mediation is

less litigious and therefore quicker and cheaper and ultimately leads to friendlier resolutions in transportation disagreements.

Bill C-11 would add security to the list of purposes for which transportation data can be collected by the minister. This is an expansion of the minister's powers that was fiercely resisted by the Canadian Alliance the last time it was debated and fiercely by the Prime Minister the last time it was debated.

As someone who witnessed the events of 9/11 as a visitor in Washington D.C. on the morning that those awful events occurred, I am open to considering such measures. We need to give our government the tools to protect us in the event of threats to Canadian life that are meticulously planned and malicious.

However, I recognize that this provision sets off alarm bells for many actors in Canadian society, not least because it would allow the minister to set administrative monetary penalties for individuals or companies that do not supply data that the minister might request.

● (1250)

As I indicated earlier, the onus is on the minister to justify this expansion of his powers to all Canadians. I look forward to the explanations from the minister about the import of certain other provisions as well. Let me briefly outline some of them.

Bill C-11 would reduce the number of members of the Canadian Transportation Agency from seven to five. We just heard the minister state that this would lead to cost savings. I would be looking for the numbers. If we move from seven part time members to five full time members now resident in the Ottawa area, I would like to see the numbers to substantiate this claim that it will amount to cost savings while at the same time the mandate of the Canadian Transportation Agency is being seriously expanded.

Our proposal was to streamline the agency in Bill C-44 and it could have been law by now. The minister will have to explain to Canadians why fewer members can do the job better than the seven who are currently endorsed, while the mandate of the agency is being expanded in the act.

Bill C-11 would allow Transport Canada to review mergers and acquisitions in all federal transportation sectors, not just airlines as our Bill C-44 planned in the last Parliament. This is a very large discretionary power, a power that is being invested in the minister and in the government. I imagine that the government would say that it is necessary to protect the national interest. However, it is a provision with economic consequences. I would ask the minister to outline his rationale for this incursion, for this disturbance, for this fettering of the market. It is unusual to hear a Conservative government speak of fettering the marketplace, particularly as it expands into the precious area of mergers and acquisitions.

Government Orders

Bill C-11 would require companies to set a process for complaints against their railway police constables under the Railway Safety Act. This too was part of our inspirational predecessor Bill C-44. It refers to the creation of an internal complaints process rather than a government process or board of some sort. Is an internal process up to the job? The minister has not addressed the question at all. By demanding that records be kept it should permit us to retrace the facts and timeline of any complaints.

One area that has attracted public attention and will inevitably require the government's thorough explanation is the elimination of the post of Air Travel Complaints Commissioner. Many Canadians will recall that this position was introduced by the Liberal government in 2000 with the merger of Air Canada and Canadian Airlines.

Bill C-11 would officially merge the complaints process into the mainstream of the Canadian Transportation Agency dropping the more autonomous ombudsman-like position which heretofore found its way into the office of the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner. Why? We have supported this position in the past and we may be prepared to do so again but not without a full and frank examination of the point.

Bill C-11 is composed of amendments that are the fruit of extensive consultations that our government conducted to update the legislative framework of our national transportation system. The way that Bill C-11 is currently written, the minister would be required to report on the state of Canadian transportation every three years and carry out a new statutory review of the Canadian Transportation Act eight years after Bill C-11 enters into force.

All of this being said, I must wrap up on a note of disappointment. Section 43 of Bill C-11 alludes to a major reversal in policy, a decision taken early on by the minister that has rightly upset farmers right across our Canadian western provinces.

The Government of Canada made a commitment in 1996 to transfer the federal fleet of hopper cars to the Farmer Rail Car Coalition. The final commitment was signed in the fall of 2005 but the Conservative government has now reneged. We have no explanation and no understanding. The minister spoke moments ago about cost savings and about a net saving of \$2 per tonne of material shipped. No evidence has been presented to the House and I see no evidence at committee. I am looking forward to hearing why it is the government has reneged and why farmers continue to pay more than is necessary to ship their product.

● (1255)

My colleague, the hon. member for Malpeque, has mounted a passionate opposition. We will hear from him again on this subject in due course.

I do commend the government for reintroducing many of our forward looking transport measures in this 39th parliament. For the most part, with Bill C-11 the minister has again lent credence to that old literary maxim that goes something like this, "sometimes good writers borrow, but great writers steal".

I wish to be clear that there are significant new provisions in the bill. As such, I look forward to working with hon. colleagues from

all parties to properly and thoroughly examine and revise Bill C-11 in committee.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's presentation touched on a couple of points on transportation but the one that leaped out at me was in his closing comments on the Farmer Rail Car Coalition and how this government did not honour the so-called agreement that his government had inked with FRCC in the dying days of the last Parliament.

If the member were to check that out he would find that the cabinet table, consisting of Liberals and so on, had signed off on that initiative but the Privy Council Office had not taken that route. Therefore, there was nothing to honour that this government was forced into.

We took a look at a number of different things that were pertinent to the future of rail transportation, especially in my area on the prairies. Even good Liberals, such as Red Williams and his group, Agrivision, out in western Canada have done an exceptionally good study on the use of container cars as opposed to these bulk cars and saying that is the future and that hopper cars will become obsolete in the very near future.

The Wheat Board has continued to study that initiative and it is saying the same thing. It says that there is a tremendous opportunity for the back haul on a lot of these container cars coming in, especially from the Pacific Rim, China, Japan and so on, and we can be shipping our product back in that, a more specialized way of doing it when we get into the niche and innovative market that is the future for a lot of western Canada.

I am wondering why he would hang us with that 10 year old program that was out of date at that time? Why does he not allow us to move into the future, which containers will give us?

● (1300)

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I intend to hang no one. This is not about hanging anyone. What this is really about is to actually make sure we achieve the appropriate balance between the needs of our farmers who are facing excessive shipping costs through the system that we presently have.

I am talking about a deal that was negotiated over many years. The member himself, in the preamble to his question, made it very clear when he said that cabinet had supported the measure but that the Privy Council Office was opposed. In my understanding of the Constitution and the workings of the federal government, it is not for the PCO to tell cabinet what to do. It is for the cabinet to instruct PCO what to do. The Privy Council Office, as the department of the Prime Minister of Canada, is in no position to overturn a cabinet decision of this kind.

Government Orders

I think the minister has to come clean for us on this. The western farmers who have contacted me and many of my colleagues in our party are deeply disturbed by what they are seeing. They are asking how it is that they will save \$2 a tonne, as the minister asserted only moments ago, by keeping 12,100 rail cars in the government's ownership. This again I find a little bit rich because the government, presumably, is a Conservative one. It speaks often about unfettering the marketplace. I am wondering how it is that keeping 12,100 cars in the hands of the federal government is not fettering the marketplace.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to congratulate the hon. member who did a good job describing what Bill C-44 was and what he sees now in Bill C-11. However, I have the feeling that I understood something that I hope I failed to understand. The hon. member said that the train subsidies were eliminated in Bill C-44 and that is continued.

I have the feeling that I must have misunderstood because trains are the future, the future of our country, and not the past. They are the method of transportation that will be the greenest and the most economical and that will support all our industries and jobs.

Do you not think, Mr. Speaker, that the government should encourage a transportation system that will both protect the ozone layer from greenhouse gases and do miracles in regard to energy expenditures?

All countries now help their railways. The leader is the government of the United States, right next door to us. Although the United States favours private enterprise, it provides generous assistance to railway companies because otherwise they would not exist. I ask the hon. member, therefore, why he thinks the subsidies for railway companies should be eliminated when we provide lots of them for roads.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

He is perfectly right. He misunderstood what I said. At no time did I say that the railway subsidies in Canada should cease. To the contrary, what I would have liked to raise with the minister, if I had had a little more time, is the fact that he mentioned three or four times in his presentation that Bill C-11 would apparently have a positive effect on environmental protection.

What I find a little frustrating when I read the bill is the fact that the words "greenhouse gases" do not even appear in it. At a time when this minority government seems to be saying that it will propose a new environmental strategy for the country, the Department of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and the minister do not mention the greenhouse gas issue at all in the bill. My hon. colleague is quite right when he speaks about the positive effects of using the railway system in Canada to reduce greenhouse gases.

However the government, which is supposed to be formulating a new environmental policy, misses this very opportunity at a time when we need it.

● (1305)

[*English*]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Liberal member for his thoughtful analysis of some of the issues. Because I also believe that railway is the future, I want to talk a little bit about railway safety.

As some members might know, there has been a frightening increase in rail accidents in British Columbia. The former Liberal government's last attempt to deal with this matter was to ask CN to develop its own proposals, which was ridiculous, it seems to me. I am wondering if the member would now support the proposal to launch a public inquiry into Canada's sagging railway safety record.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if we are in a position to support the idea of a full commission of inquiry into rail safety. I would like to hear more and I would like the committee to hear more, but I can tell the member that I am very deeply concerned about what can only be described, I think, as the missing in action strategy of the Minister of Transport around safety generally.

We have not heard a peep from the minister with respect to the Montreal airport security breaches of just two weeks ago. He has not issued any statements. He has said there is some sort of internal investigation. We have seen nothing brought forward to reassure the Canadian public travelling through airports that this is in fact being taken seriously.

We have an outstanding issue with flight attendants and the ratio in our airplanes, something that we may be taking up at committee again, hopefully this week. Once again the minister has been missing in action. We have heard nothing about his views on this issue. It speaks directly to the question of safety and security.

The member makes a very good point. I would like to see the government actually step up and take ownership now as we move forward in the wake of the five year anniversary to commemorate the 9/11 victims and their families, which the Prime Minister went on television to commemorate. I would like to see what the Minister of Transport in fact is going to do as opposed to say about airline and rail security.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister was here when I told the House how the government twice in recent laws forgot that the territories is part of Canada, the northern half of Canada. I was not going to speak on this, but he specifically mentioned allowing provincial authorities to decommission railways. Why not territorial!?

Proposed subsection 56(3) states "provincial government or a municipality". Section 87 talks about "provincial, municipal or district government". There are three different parts of proposed section 145 that refer only to provincial or municipal governments and have totally forgotten the northern half of Canada.

Government Orders

Would the member commit to pushing at committee for amendments that do not leave the territories out of our Confederation as the government seems to be doing in bill after bill?

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Yukon raises an excellent point. Once again, the government is apparently not speaking for all provinces and territories in this bill. It seems to be the second pattern which we have diagnosed on this side of the House, the first being that decisions are apparently being made without reliance on evidence. Whether it is the gun registry, the appointment of judges process or other issues, apparently evidence does not always rank as highly as it might for a government when it comes to making informed choices for Canadian citizens.

Second, I will take it to the committee on Thursday. The committee will be examining questions for the future. This is a very important point that ought to be raised and I commit to doing so.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of my party, the Bloc Québécois, to Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

Before getting right into Bill C-11, I will provide some background on this bill so that our colleagues in this House, those who are newly elected, and Quebecers and Canadians watching us, can understand how we ended up today with such a bill that is an amalgamation of parts of other bills.

Bill C-11 originated in Bills C-26 and C-44, which were introduced in the last two Parliaments. Bill C-26 was introduced on February 25, 2003, and Bill C-44 on March 24, 2005. The Conservative government decided not to use the entire content of all these bills.

The minister did in fact say that what is being introduced today is essentially identical to what has been introduced before. However, he failed to say that the bills that were introduced by previous governments and received the support of the Bloc Québécois were much more consistent, especially in matters relating to the railway.

Let us not forget that Bill C-44, among others, had the advantage of resolving the VIA Rail situation. Everyone knows why the Conservative Party decided to split Bill C-44 and not present the same bill: because it was always annoyed with the part of the bill affecting VIA Rail. It was always against allowing VIA Rail to develop so that we could finally have a rail line between Montreal and Windsor, between Quebec City and Montreal, and even between Montreal and Boston. To the Conservative Party, developing transportation does not mean the railway. My colleague from Brome—Missisquoi is absolutely right: this is more than a refusal to subsidize; they do not want to allow VIA Rail to be a corporate entity.

In fact, Bill C-44 would have enabled VIA Rail to become an entity capable of taking charge of its own rail development and of arranging its own borrowing. That did not suit the Conservative Party. We have to look at the context. Today, it is a good thing that we are presented with a bill on railway transportation, but we have already gone beyond Bill C-44. Indeed, we are now involved in some

major amendments. However, we have put aside the question of VIA Rail and railway development in such major corridors as Quebec City and Montreal, Montreal and Windsor, and even Montreal and Boston.

It has been very difficult for us to understand that position. It is important that Quebecers understand the values that the Conservative party is defending. They are values that are completely different from the values that we proclaim. Clearly, rail transport is more environmentally friendly. We should be tabling bills that recognize that fact and allow rail transportation to develop to its full potential. The Conservative party refuses to do this, as I have explained, in the Montreal to Windsor corridor, between Quebec City and Montréal, and between Montreal and Boston.

Thus, they developed Bill C-11, based on Bill C-44, which had been introduced by the previous governments, by the Liberals, and out of which they retained one part dealing with railways.

I do not have time to talk about the entire bill, because it also deals with air transport. I will concentrate on several important matters. If I had the unanimous consent of the House to use the entire afternoon, I would be pleased to discuss it all. However, I will not even make that request because I would be surprised if my colleagues were to give consent.

Nevertheless, there are some important points concerning railway transportation. I will go directly to one issue that in many Quebec ridings has always been an environmental concern, that is, noise pollution.

Pollution cannot always be felt or touched. However, it can be heard. Thanks to new technology, we have replaced humans with mechanical devices and machinery. When trains are being assembled in the marshalling yards, the shunting of cars makes a devilish noise. Many communities have spoken out against these operating companies. The echo has reached as far as the federal government.

• (1310)

I will cite a few examples. Hochelaga has the Moreau yard; Brome—Missisquoi has the Farnham yard; and Jeanne-Le Ber and Lévis—Bellechasse also have yards. They all have problems linked to noise pollution caused by the work carried out in a marshalling yard.

We might all think that new technology allows everything to be done quietly, as circumstances evolve, and that noise pollution is now at the safest possible levels. On the contrary, decreased manual handling actually means mechanical switching that is less effective and very noisy. Neighbouring communities have every reason to complain. Thus, such complaints led to the change proposed in this bill.

I would like to assure the House that the Bloc Québécois will support this bill, especially those sections, which I will summarize here, that address noise pollution.

Government Orders

We would have liked to see even stricter provisions, but we are willing to give this system a chance, a system that involves mediation, cooperation and, finally, decisions taken by the Canadian Transportation Agency. Earlier, I asked the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities this question. Although the municipal level has tried to resolve the issue of noise pollution with decibel standards, as custom dictates, we face a simple problem: federal laws override all other laws, including provincial and municipal. In other words, even if cities want to adopt regulations regarding decibels or noise pollution, the entire federal sector does not have to comply with municipal standards. We should therefore support the content of the bill as tabled today.

I would reiterate to all Quebeckers who endure the problems caused by these yards: we accept this approach to resolving the problem. This is evolution, after all, and the reason for it is understandable.

Clause 29 reads as follows:

The Act is amended by adding the following after section 95:

95.1 When constructing or operating a railway, a railway company must not cause unreasonable noise, taking into account

- (a) its obligations under sections 113 and 114, if applicable;
- (b) its operational requirements; and
- (c) the area where the construction or operation takes place.

These are the obligations “when constructing or operating a railway”.

As such, the standards do not set out a specific limit on decibel levels. Rather, this bill says that you are not allowed to operate unreasonably or to create unreasonable noise pollution. We are setting a standard based on what is unreasonable.

What impact would that have? It would be an improvement over the status quo, which does not touch on this. Any complaints would be addressed as follows:

The Agency may issue and publish, in any manner that it considers appropriate, guidelines with respect to

- (a) the elements that the Agency will use to determine whether a railway company is complying with section 95.1 [which I just read to you]; and
- (b) the collaborative resolution of noise complaints relating to the construction or operation of railways.

Thus the idea is to promote cooperative measures: sitting all the parties down together and finding the best way to solve the problem. Before establishing guidelines, the agency consults the stakeholders. Nothing would be imposed; instead, there would be discussions and negotiations.

I would point out that in certain locations, including the Moreau yard in Hochelaga, despite ten years of negotiations between citizens' committees and the company that operates the yard, they still have not managed to reach an agreement on possible measures to please the majority. We would like to see that happen, but the only thing now permitted by law is direct intervention by the agency. It can then act once a complaint is received.

Under section 95.3, the agency:

on receipt of a complaint, may order a railway company to undertake any changes in its railway construction or operation that the Agency considers reasonable in order to prevent unreasonable noise.

This is the first time a bill has stipulated that the agency can oblige an operator to resolve the problem based on cooperative measures negotiated between the various stakeholders. This is more or less the case.

This is not the cure-all. We are not yet at the stage of obliging companies to comply with a standard regarding a certain number of decibels. Yet my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who is our expert on the environment, knows very well that international standards regarding noise pollution now exist. It becomes dangerous to human health when certain levels are exceeded. However, we are not quite there yet.

In short, whether the government is Conservative or Liberal, it is often said that one is the same as the other.

●(1315)

There has been a slight change, a slight movement in the direction of change, but we are not yet ready to adopt international standards for noise pollution. We could set the number of decibels that companies must not exceed and we could monitor the noise levels with decibel meters now that this equipment is available. However, we are not quite there yet. Nevertheless, there has been change. We are giving authority and some teeth to the Canadian Transportation Agency.

Since it appears that the government, whether Conservative or Liberal, has not wanted to go any further, we will see what happens, and we may be able to exert some pressure in the committee. Nevertheless, it is better than what we had before. Quebeckers will always be able to rely on the Bloc Québécois to represent their interests. If they are not properly represented, we will demand legislative amendments. That represents the first, important part of this bill.

The second part concerns the obligation of airline companies to publish in all media, including on the Internet, their prices for air services in Canada. This is dealt with in clause 27 of the bill. The regulations may require that an advertised price for air services include all costs to the carrier of providing the service, and that the advertisement indicate all fees, charges and taxes collected by the carrier on behalf of another person so as to enable a purchaser to readily determine the total amount to be paid for the service. This has been called for by the Bloc Québécois for a long time.

Families put money aside. We work 50 weeks in a year in order to pay for one or two weeks of vacation. We read the advertising and think we have enough money to cover all costs. When we make the reservation we realize that the price does not include charges and taxes.

For some time now the Bloc Québécois has been asking for this situation to be clarified, so that Quebeckers, who work hard to earn a living and pay their taxes to the governments, can treat themselves to vacations without having any surprises when they make their reservations. It is understandable for the Bloc Québécois to be in favour of the amendment proposed in this bill. So when the airlines post a price, it will be the full price. We are not demanding that hotel expenses be included, although now the all-inclusive package exists. All expenses will be included once this bill has been passed. The Bloc Québécois is pleased to give its consent to this part of the bill.

Government Orders

The third part I would like to discuss concerns the section of clause 39 and following, respecting the abandonment of railway lines and sidings. It was time the government cleared up this situation so that, when a railway company gets rid of a railway line, it can be obliged to offer it before selling it to private enterprise or doing whatever it wants with it.

The obligations contained in the bill seem clear: the railway line is offered first to the passenger service provider. Let us say that VIA Rail operates a passenger train and decides to stop running it. VIA Rail must first offer it to the local transit authority, which can then decide to operate it.

As for all the rest, that is, sidings and other tracks that would not be used for passenger transportation, the provision is to offer them to the province, then the transit authority and finally the cities.

I know that the Union des municipalités du Québec has already asked to appear before the committee. In committee we will see what the cities think. We will see whether it is still necessary to make an offer to the transit authority before offering it to the cities. There is still this dilemma, given that the operating budgets of the transit authorities often come in large part from users. Often the transit authorities have grants to purchase equipment, but operations are often subsidized by cities. We will see what the municipal unions ask for in this file.

For us it seems very important that we have a policy respecting the transfer of railway lines, that is, of those that are or will be dismantled. It seems important too that we can offer them and use them appropriately, especially for the transportation of passengers. The future in transportation lies in maritime and rail transportation, more ecological ways of transporting freight and people.

Since the Bloc Québécois is still defending the Kyoto objectives, we seem to be increasingly isolated in this House.

• (1320)

The Conservative Party wants to have its own green program, its own green plan. It seems to be more in agreement with the positions taken by the United States and other countries that are not abiding by the Kyoto protocol, rather than the large majority of countries that have signed the protocol.

Obviously, in our view, railway transportation is a very worthwhile and important way of looking at development. That is why we could never stress enough the importance of VIA Rail's mission. I will repeat what I said at the very beginning. Sometimes, it is important to state the message that one wants to convey more than once. In Bills C-44 and C-26, there was an entire part dealing with VIA Rail, which enabled it to develop and to adopt a plan that would, in particular, have enabled Quebec to open itself up in terms of the railway. Quebec could then have turned its gaze to the rest of the world, for example to Boston, the United States and Ontario. The Conservative Party has decided to settle the VIA Rail issue. We had been told that one day, perhaps, we might come back to it. I think that what is happening here is that the entire development of VIA Rail is being buried, but that is the choice made by the Conservative Party and it is not adopted by the Bloc Québécois.

The aim of this bill is to solve the various safety-related problems involved in transportation. The minister told us earlier that this bill

has set us on the green path. I have taken a few minutes to explain that what eliminating VIA Rail actually did was throw a big lead weight, a big rock, into the canoe the Minister of the Environment is paddling toward a green development plan using rail transportation.

Earlier, I sensed that the minister was quite uncomfortable when he was asked a question about transportation safety. The title of this bill is, in fact, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. We might then think that this bill is going to solve safety problems. Far from it. There is not one cent for safety. Thanks to what the *Journal de Montréal* has revealed concerning Dorval airport, we have seen how the minister, the government and Transport Canada manage safety. Plainly Canada is just putting out fires.

Money was put into resolving the passenger problem because at one point passengers had taken control of planes. We also experienced the events of September 11. Then the government decided to focus on passenger safety. However, we can make ourselves at home in the rest of the terminal. As we saw in the *Journal de Montréal* report, nothing has changed. The more things change, the more they stay the same. There is no culture of safety in Canada. We can forget that.

To have a culture of safety is to ensure at all times, when there is an objective, that absolutely nothing is forgotten and that we are capable of analyzing every plan. That is not what Canada does. Canada has a piecemeal approach. When something happens then we try to address it.

I will close on this idea of the culture of safety that Canada is lacking. They preferred putting our money in provincial jurisdictions. They preferred engaging in regional development, which is a responsibility of the Government of Quebec, instead of taking care of security at the borders. The problem is that the Government of Canada was unable to secure funding for its own mandates. There is no culture of safety. That is what the *Journal de Montréal* showed in Dorval. And it was just a year later when the same thing happened at Toronto's Pearson airport.

Will the Conservative Party be able to resolve the security problems? Forget about it. It has neither the will nor the means. It wants yet again to interfere in the provinces' responsibilities and it chooses to spend outside its own jurisdiction. This just further proves that the Canadian government does not defend the interests of Quebecers, since it is unable to take care of its own security.

• (1325)

[English]

Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member went on at great length about the concerns of noise pollution and air pollution. It seems to be a common theme across the country. It is a concern in many provinces and communities.

Government Orders

With the reduction in membership of the Canada Transportation Agency from seven part time to five full time, centred in Ottawa, does the member feel there will be sufficient human resources to adjudicate and mediate what I say will be a tremendous amount of complaints that will come forward now that we have an agency that can actually deal with disputes and concerns? Do you feel that there will be sufficient manpower to do this now that we have the tools, although do we really have the tools?

• (1330)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I would remind the hon. member for Welland to address his questions and comments to the Chair.

The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Will there be sufficient resources? We can always discuss this. I think that the real question is whether we will have the will to solve the problem. We are prepared to give the new system a chance and have two fewer members of the Canadian Transportation Agency. If we do not have the will to solve the problems and impose standards that prohibit noise pollution on operators, we will not accomplish much. I think we should sit down and discuss this.

Does the Canadian Transportation Agency have to hire additional personnel because it is centred in Ottawa? Time will tell.

Once this bill becomes law, the Canadian Transportation Agency will receive complaints from Quebec about at least five marshalling yards, if not more. This will happen very quickly, because this position is known. Citizens' committees have been formed and they will receive complaints very quickly. If they are unable to handle the demand, we will know in short order. I hope that what my colleague mentioned will not happen.

Personally, my fear is that there is no will to solve the problem and that officials will try to sit down and work out mitigation and cooperation measures and try to find a solution without requiring the operators to solve the problem.

That is my fear right now. As for the rest, we are prepared to give it a chance, but certainly the members will be supported by inspectors.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP certainly shares the concerns of the Bloc about the safety of public transportation.

As I mentioned a little earlier, there has been a recent increase in the number of railway accidents in British Columbia. I am sure that the member will agree with me that the problems of public transportation safety greatly exceed the capacity of each province or any one province to find solutions.

I ask what solution does the Bloc propose to deal with this very serious problem, the matter of safety?

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. She has recognized that this bill will not solve the issue of transportation safety.

However, she is right that there is a safety problem, especially on the railways. Ninety per cent of railway accidents take place on a curve or coming out of a curve. All the reports from Transport Canada state that it happened on a curve. Yet, these curves are not inspected. There is no systematic inspection of curves. The companies state that there was an accident on a curve. Clearly, the problem is that the rail lines were not in good condition; that there had been no preventive maintenance and they had not taken the necessary steps. All accidents happen on curves. Transport Canada knows that. The reports are available and we do nothing. A very effective remedy is needed for a very serious problem that is now plaguing us, the fact that railway lines are not being maintained, especially by the rail industry. We know that 90 per cent of accidents take place on curves and we say that the next one will be on a curve. That is the problem we are living with.

I hope that my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities will fully examine the problem of transportation safety and join me in finding solutions to this problem.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question that I want to put to my colleague, who sits with me on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, concerns the problem of noise in the railway yards, especially at Charny and at Lévis.

Finally, we have before us a bill that would make it possible to settle this matter, which causes a great many problems to users. This bill, which we hope to adopt with the support of the House, will authorize the Canadian Transportation Agency to deal with complaints about noise, to order railway companies to make changes to reduce unreasonable noise in the construction or operation of a railway or railway yard. I believe this is a key element that responds to the expectations of the community to deal with the problem of noise from railway yards.

Does my honourable colleague think that we can improve this bill when it is examined by the parliamentary committee?

• (1335)

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, in answer to my colleague's last question, I would say yes, absolutely. However, although I do not want to rain on his parade, I should point out that he cited the end of the clause. The first part of clause 29 does mention "unreasonable noise".

To determine what might be considered "unreasonable noise", the company must take into account the following elements:

- (a) its obligations under sections 113 and 114—;
- (b) its operational requirements; and
- (c) the area where the construction or operation takes place.

There are no decibel level standards. This is what I was saying earlier to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities—he and I share a similar background in municipal affairs. If ever the industry fails to abide by the standards, and if the Canadian Transportation Agency is too indulgent, we will have to adopt international standards. As for noise pollution, we know the international decibel level limits. We could include a decibel level limit in the bill, but we have not yet reached that stage.

Government Orders

In other words, the government has again decided to give cooperation and mitigation a chance. Will this produce the expected results? I hope so. If not, we will have to follow the municipalities' example by adopting real measures and noise regulation standards. We will have to adopt a regulation limiting decibel levels, just like everywhere else in the world.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting to hear my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel speak because he always goes into the history of the previous bills or those that preceded the introduction of the most recent one.

This time he spoke about two things that caught my attention, noise pollution and the cost of airline services. I took the train this summer to go to Vancouver. All along the line were scattered old barrels of products for coating wood; I think it is creosote. There are mountains of blue barrels along the railway, mountains of pieces of wood that were used to hold the rails. The area all along the railway going to Vancouver is terrible. It is littered with all sorts of debris, and I am not the only one who noticed. Some Americans who were going to Vancouver on the same train said that it was frightful and asked what the environment people were doing regarding railway rubbish.

I want to find out from my hon. colleague whether the bill includes any obligations to clean up the environment. In addition, insofar as the prices of airline services are concerned, it has reached the point that when you take the plane, you have to pay a few dollars to get earphones and pay, if you are on a long trip, for the blanket and pillow that you use. Will these extras be included henceforth in the rates? Will we know what we are paying for?

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

The answer to the first question is no. From an environmental standpoint, and this is the tragedy, everything she mentioned—the products and pieces of wood—are all contaminated. What we need to understand, and I said so from the outset, is that everything that is federal, including the railway corridor, is not subject to provincial and municipal legislation. Theoretically, therefore, Environment Canada is supposed to deal with this problem, but the department closes its eyes. Why? Because it would cost too much to clean up. So my colleague is right. It is Canada's image that suffers the consequences of this government's decision not to comply with its own legislation on its own lands. That is the tragedy.

In regard to the second part of her question about charges on board aircraft, I do not think that we have got that far yet. Everything that is on the outside before the aircraft is boarded will be included in the advertising, but everything that is inside, the pillows and other amenities, is something else. We have not got that far yet. The hon. member is quite right that the government does not comply with its own regulations.

• (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to have the opportunity to provide information on the provisions relating to air transportation in the proposed Bill C-11,

the amendments to the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act. First, I can assure the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel that this government does stand up for the people of Quebec. We listen to the people of Quebec and this is an example that we listen and will make changes.

In fact, these are common issues across Canada. I had the opportunity to put some 3,000 kilometres on rental cars this summer travelling around the lower mainland of British Columbia and Alberta. I visited many of the members of Parliament from British Columbia, for instance, the members for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, Kelowna—Lake Country and Abbotsford. All of these members had issues that were very similar to the issues that the member raised. I can assure him that our caucus as well as many other members of other caucuses come to me with these issues and we will act on them for the betterment of the people of Canada.

One of the driving reasons for the introduction of this bill is that this government sees and believes that a modern, effective transportation system is integral to the well-being of Canada's economy. A proper and well planned out transportation initiative across the country, a hub system, as well as a system that has adequate highways and rail will be only good for the people of Canada and we understand that. It contributes to the air industry in Canada that is competitive as well as continental and global markets.

Canada's air industry is a vibrant and dynamic one, as the member knows. It contributes to a prosperous and innovative economy which benefits all Canadians. The air industry in Canada helps drive economic development in all sectors of our society. The Conservative government and the Prime Minister is committed to promoting competition in the air transportation sector because this increases consumer choice to the travelling public and provides better service and pricing.

The government is also committed to regulating only where deemed necessary and advantageous to the Canadian public. The objectives of the proposed air transportation amendments meet this government's commitments to Canadians. This bill provides for technical and housekeeping amendments necessary to modernize the act since it was last amended in 1996. As all members of the House know, the transportation industry is integral to Canada's economy. It is an ever changing environment and we need to stay as good stewards on that, making changes as necessary.

The proposed amendments will also provide a clear role in how the Canadian Transportation Agency will continue to exercise its functions in the future, which is also very important. The proposed legislation offers additional consumer protection to assist Canadian travellers as they continue to make choices respecting travel in Canada and abroad.

Government Orders

I will now speak to the proposed amendments that would enhance the protection of Canadian consumers. Although there were concerns regarding some potential abuses that may have taken place when Air Canada acquired Canadian Airlines in 2000 due to the resulting market dominance of Air Canada, this is no longer the case. In fact, we have seen dynamic changes in the Canadian domestic industry over the last few years, as most Canadians recognize.

The proposed amendments would actually reflect the reality of today's Canadian air industry by returning the agency to its well established regulatory and complaints based function and structure which was in place prior to 2000. The government is committed to regulating only where necessary and where the Canadian public would be best served.

Today I am proud to say that Canada has a world class air system and boasts several well established airlines providing international, national, regional and charter airline services. Airlines such as Air Canada, WestJet, CanJet, First Air, Air North, Air Transat, Air Mikisew, which is actually located in my constituency of Fort McMurray—Athabasca, and many others. All of these companies are providing increased competition and consumer choice in all areas of the country and indeed on the global stage.

I also wish to recognize that new carriers are seeking to enter the Canadian air industry because it is so healthy. These industry carriers propose to offer Canadian consumers additional choice in air travel. This government listens.

The proposed amendments would continue to allow our new and expanding airlines to make their decisions based on private sector commercial realities free of unnecessary legislation that is not providing any benefit to Canadians. The government is committed to letting Canadian air carriers develop and grow based on the merits of the business choices they make.

• (1345)

The Office of the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner was created in 2000 to review complaints and attempt to resolve the issues informally on behalf of air travellers. The commissioner served as a useful tool during this transition period only to assist consumers with their complaints following Air Canada's merger with Canadian Airlines.

The Canadian air transportation market has dramatically changed even since then. Today the complaints received by the airline agency are distributed more proportionately across Canada's air carriers, including even low cost carriers. Competition in the marketplace is one of the most effective mechanisms to ensure service quality. The government encourages competition for the betterment of Canadians.

Complaints now increasingly relate to matters that fall within the ongoing jurisdiction and mandate of the agency itself. The government recognizes the importance of an ongoing informal complaints process to get results for Canadians. The proposed amendments would therefore make transparent and permanent, like this government, the air travel complaints function. The informal complaints resolution function launched so effectively by the commissioner would be made permanent and would be integrated

into the regular operations of the agency. This would be supplemented by the agency's ongoing regulatory responsibilities.

Since the fall of 2004, the agency has demonstrated its continued effectiveness in its ability to handle consumer complaints. Canadians have received results, the same as this government is dedicated to doing. It has consolidated its ongoing informal processes in an air travel complaints program. With this step and the legislative measures proposed, the Canadian public can be reassured that the agency will continue to respond to travellers' complaints in an informal manner and consistent with its ongoing mandate.

The government wishes to ensure that Canadian consumers are offered clear choices in air travel. Where necessary, the government will take on the responsibility of protecting consumers in exercising these choices. The government is aware of consumers' concerns that airfare advertising be clear, transparent and not misleading. Consumers have told us that they want to be able to compare different airline advertised pricing and to know up front how much they will pay for these air services.

Canadian carriers have heard the message. Canadian airlines have taken important steps to respond to consumer demands even so far. However, some consumers remain concerned that price advertisements prepared by air carriers, either in the newspaper or on the Internet or other methods, do not always contain complete or clear price information. This government is listening to Canadians.

Other countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia have implemented policies, legislation or voluntary mechanisms with the cooperation of the airline industries in order that consumers have sufficient pricing information regarding air travel ads that display their prices. Some provinces such as Quebec and Ontario require transparent advertising of air travel by travel agents and other provincially regulated operators. Canadian consumers have told us that they want a similar level of transparency for advertising by airlines across Canada, and the government intends to do that with the cooperation, of course, of the other parties.

As already noted, Canadian airlines are moving toward improving advertising transparency with the encouragement of the government. These decisions are prompted by past year demands and respond to other dynamic changes in the industry. The government recognizes that market forces will maintain the pressure on air carriers to take further steps to ensure clear and transparent advertising.

It is for this reason that the proposed amendments provide the minister with the ability to authorize the development of regulations for transparency in airfare advertising in all media. These regulations, should they become necessary only, would be enforced by the agency. This would ensure that these standards are consistently applied across the industry by all domestic and foreign carriers and their agents for flights operating within or originating within Canada.

Government Orders

These provisions clearly signal the government's expectations in this regard and put the industry on notice, that notice being to further modify their practices voluntarily as required by Canadian consumers or be regulated by the government.

● (1350)

In addition, consumers are entitled to know the terms and conditions of the air service before they book a flight. Consumers want that and this government is responding. This is consistent with the government's commitment to ensure the transparency of information to allow consumers to make informed travel choices.

The proposed amendments would require all commercial air operators, both domestic and foreign carriers, operating air services in Canada to promptly display their terms of carriage. That will be necessary at their places of business and on any Internet site, or from wherever else they sell these air services.

These proposed amendments would ensure that Canadian consumers are adequately informed of their rights and the obligations of the air carrier for flights offered as they make choices regarding their travel arrangements. It gives them choices because they know what decisions they need to make.

In conclusion, the proposed amendments reflect the Government of Canada's commitment to a liberalized and competitive air transportation system for the betterment of Canadians wanting to make choices, a system that balances the need to update statutory and regulatory instruments, where necessary, to respond to developments in the air industry marketplace, with the responsibility as well to ensure that consumers, as I have said a few times, are offered choices and options consistent with a fully deregulated market so they know what they are going to buy before they buy it.

We firmly believe that these changes to the Canada Transportation Act are warranted, that they will give the Canadian Transportation Agency the ability to continue to serve the travelling Canadian public well, and will ensure that Canada continues to have a viable and competitive air service industry in the many years to come.

This government listens to Canadians and will act on their priorities.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is of great interest to hear the parliamentary secretary pick up on some of the themes mentioned by the minister just one hour ago.

I would like to focus on the question of transparency and openness. For most Canadians, if they had a problem with the airlines and the airline system previously, they would go to the position then filled by Mr. Bruce Hood as was created in 2000, the air travel complaints commissioner. I understand that position is being folded into the mandate of the Canadian Transportation Agency.

I would like to put to the parliamentary secretary and to the government a couple of comments made by some important actors around that move. Bruce Hood himself, the former commissioner, in May of this year expressed his concern that the proposed elimination of the position would make it increasingly difficult for Canadians to resolve problems with airlines. Furthermore, a Canadian Transportation Agency spokesperson went on to say that these changes would

reduce the Canadian Transportation Agency's role in dealing with airline complaints on a case by case basis as opposed to being able to tackle larger ongoing problems with airline service or quality.

Could the parliamentary secretary help illuminate and explain for Canadians when the average citizen may have a problem with an airline and is seeking transparency, is seeking recourse, just how Bill C-11 in transferring this commissioner's office to the CTA is going to ensure that the same kind of function—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I can assure my colleague that the difference between this government and the previous government is that we will listen and we do listen.

We have appointed someone to take over that function and will act on that function.

Speaking of transparency, I would say that the difference is that we are transparent in the way we conduct business because we do listen to Canadians and we will implement the changes necessary. It is an ongoing function of the government to make sure we listen and make those changes as necessary. This government will do that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his remarks.

In my riding, trains pose a problem mainly in three large cities: Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Beauharnois and Huntingdon. Three problems are especially serious: noise from marshalling during the day, in the evening, at night and on weekends; diesel fumes, which seriously bother people in their homes; and rail maintenance for civil security purposes.

Residents complain that the railway company pays little attention to them. Municipal elected officials feel totally powerless. On reading the bill, I was disappointed that clause 29, which has to do with train noise, does not restrict nuisances other than noise.

Does the hon. member not think that the Canadian Transportation Agency has sufficient credibility to be given jurisdiction over emissions and vibrations, for example?

● (1355)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that this bill deals with noise. However, we are looking at other issues as well, and the committee itself has the authority to do that.

I want to assure the member and all people across Canada that it is not a complaint that happens in one or two places or one or two provinces; it happens everywhere. Citizens are concerned with what is taking place in relation to noise, in relation to fumes, in relation to vibrations. Indeed, each of the members of the committee came to me in the spring, as did many members of my caucus and other caucuses, and advised me of those concerns. It will be dealt with insofar as we are able to do so. We certainly are listening and will make changes in the best interests of those people who are affected.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I notice that Bill C-11 deals with the air transportation sector and complaints process. I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary could comment on the idea that Canada needs its own do not fly list.

I filed numerous complaints because somehow my name is on the do not fly list which will not allow me to get a boarding pass on a flight from my hometown to Ottawa within my own country. I do not know if it has anything to do with the revisions or the hearings leading up to this comprehensive bill which amends rail and air transportation, if any of that analysis dealt with the do not fly list, but it is crazy that a Canadian member of Parliament cannot get a boarding pass on a domestic flight within his own country because his name is on an American do not fly list.

What is the government doing about the do not fly list so that we can fly again in our own country?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, we do not have a do not fly list. We are working on a passenger or preference list in essence. The situation as far as what the Americans do with their do not fly list is beyond the jurisdiction of this Parliament. Certainly, security is an issue that is foremost for the government. We will take it as a number one priority and all other issues that Canadians bring forward to the government we will act on.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for mentioning Air North in his list. That airline is half-owned by the Vuntut Gwitchin first nation. It is a very successful airline.

My last comment was on railroads and some people may wonder why. The Yukon Territory has a historic railway, the White Pass and Yukon Railroad, which was built during the gold rush. It is one of the engineering wonders of the world. There is also the potential of joining the Alaska Railroad, one of the few successful railways in North America, through the Yukon, to the B.C. rail system which ends almost at the Yukon border.

Would the member support that railway project that would open up the Yukon if we joined Alaska? It would be a visionary project for the country. People could go anywhere in Canada, right up to the Yukon by railway, if that project were to go ahead.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I cannot give specific authority on one particular railroad, but I can assure the member that this government listens to Canadians. This government is interested in doing what is best for Canadians.

Certainly as a northerner myself, I can assure the member that I do have places in my particular constituency, like Fort Chipewyan, that are inaccessible by any way except air, or snow in the wintertime of course. Any encouragement to open up the arteries to those areas would certainly be looked at.

In this particular case, it sounds like a very good idea and something that would open up the north, which is so important to our economic interests in the future. If the member wants to see me privately on that particular issue I can give him a briefing on that, and work cooperatively with all members in this House.

• (1400)

[*English*]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the leadership of the Prime Minister, the new federal accountability act has passed in the House.

Liberals in the Senate appear determined to retain the Liberal culture of entitlement. Canadians voted to end Liberal corruption and Liberal kickbacks. Canadians voted to end the funding of the Liberal Party with dirty money. Canadians voted to end the Liberal practice of passing cabinet secrets to their Liberal friends. Canadians want an end to the Liberal culture of entitlement.

Liberals in the Senate are blocking this legislation. Liberals in the Senate should be hanging their heads in shame. Canadians are saying it is time to make the Senate a democratic, accountable institution.

It is most unfortunate that a group of unelected Liberals and hacks are blocking the democratic will of Canadians.

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PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEES AND LEGISLATIVE AUDITORS

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and thank the organizers of a very special conference which took place in Charlottetown last week. The Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees and the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors held their 27th annual joint conference from September 10 to 12.

Legislators and staff from federal, provincial and territorial public accounts committees across Canada met simultaneously with the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors and discussed matters of mutual interest relating to financial accountability. The annual conference also provided forums for the delegates to participate in joint sessions to discuss subjects of mutual interest to elected officials and legislative auditors.

Over 140 people attended this three day event held in Charlottetown. Sessions ranged from presentations on maximizing the effectiveness of committees to observing their changing roles.

It was a very productive conference. I congratulate the co-chairs, Colin Younker and Ron MacKinley, and all the staff and volunteers who organized this event.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EVA AVILA

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is extremely happy to join me in congratulating Eva Avila, the talented singer from Gatineau who won the finals of *Canadian Idol 2006*.

Statements by Members

Chosen from over 12,000 contestants from across Canada, Eva Avila captivated the television audience with her huge talent. Fans of singing in Quebec and Canada were dazzled by her performances. In 2004, Eva won the title of “Jeune Diva du Québec”.

The new ambassador for Gatineau, Eva will represent this new big city with grace wherever she travels, while serving as a model for young people.

We also congratulate Eva's parents, Suzanne Gougeon and Carlos Avila, on instilling their passion for music in their daughter.

Bravo, Eva, and keep on spreading joy wherever you sing.

* * *

[English]

WORKPLACE LEARNING

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week we celebrate the second annual Learn at Work Week, a national initiative of the Canadian Society for Training and Development. It recognizes the enormous value of lifelong learning to Canadians, to our economy and also to the quality and security of our jobs and our standard of living.

There is widespread agreement that Canadians require access to quality continuous learning opportunities, yet Canada is currently underperforming in workplace learning in comparison to other countries.

I thank the CSTD for raising the issue of workplace learning across Canada. Learn at Work Week gives us the chance to recognize the importance of developing a culture of learning on a broader level and to renew our call on the federal government to encourage investment in workplace learning as part of a pan-Canadian strategy for lifelong learning.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to dedicate this statement to my constituents, Jake and Marie Penner. No matter who one is or where one comes from, within a week of moving into our neighbourhood, one can count on a warm welcoming visit from Jake and Marie.

Most Canadians, including myself, can take a lesson from the Penners. That simple lesson can be applied to some of the very complicated public safety and security issues that we are grappling with today.

Over the spring and summer our new Conservative government has made progress by introducing measures to get tough on crime, but no amount of legislation, no amount of enforcement is going to entirely eliminate the presence of evil in our society.

As Canadians, we can take a more proactive role in crime prevention simply by practising what Jake and Marie do every day: getting to know our neighbours.

Some may accuse me of being idealistic, but hate as an attitude and violence as its subsequent action both feed on a lack of understanding and isolation. People like Jake and Marie choose to

focus their energy on building relationships instead of walls. As more of us curb our cynicism and follow their example, Canada will be better for it.

* * *

● (1405)

AIDS

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this summer the Prime Minister embarrassed Canada on the international stage by refusing to attend the international AIDS conference.

We know that the Prime Minister has a strained relationship with the city of Toronto, which does not seem to cater to his voter base. It seems the only time he wants to come to Toronto is when he wants to snub Premier Dalton McGuinty in favour of his buddy, John Tory, but even John Tory had the decency to attend this conference.

During the conference, the Prime Minister indicated that he was not attending because it had become “too political”. This is a pretty weak excuse coming from a politician. It is almost like a hockey player not wanting to go to the rink because it is too icy.

In the words of Stephen Lewis, the Prime Minister's refusal to attend the AIDS conference was “a slap in the face to the international community”. Canadians are quickly realizing that health care is not a priority for the government. However, the Prime Minister had a chance to take some real action and show some real leadership by attending and he failed.

* * *

DARFUR

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is committed to helping achieve a lasting peace for the people of Darfur. Canada strongly supports UN Security Council Resolution 1706, which authorizes a UN force in Darfur and makes reference to the “responsibility to protect”.

Canada is working to have this position adopted as a new norm of international law and remains deeply concerned by the ongoing violence in Darfur, particularly the attacks on civilians and internally displaced persons camps.

Canada is working with the governments in the region, Security Council members and other international partners to urge the government of Sudan to act responsibly and accept a UN transition.

Our Minister of Foreign Affairs will be raising the issue of Darfur at the United Nations this week during bilateral consultations. Since 2004, Canada has spent a total of \$320 million in support of AMIS and on humanitarian and diplomatic support to the region.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

QUEBEC FEDERATION OF WOMEN

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I pay tribute to the Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ). Forty years ago, in March 1966, on the initiative of Thérèse Casgrain, women in Quebec who were determined that all women there would enjoy the same rights as men founded the Fédération des femmes du Québec.

Last Friday, the FFQ celebrated its 40th anniversary by looking back at what it has accomplished in education, health, work and civil rights. Let us not forget that in 1972, the FFQ supported the election of women from Quebec to this place. That year, Quebec elected the first three women to Parliament: Monique Bégin, Jeanne Sauvé and Albanie Morin.

Quebec society has benefited from the battles the FFQ has fought, but much remains to be done. Many economic and social inequalities still persist today.

Let us salute the Fédération des femmes du Québec, which, in carrying on its work, calls us to justice, equality and dignity in Quebec, in Canada and in the world.

* * *

[English]

FORT MACLEOD

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today in the House to recognize a great achievement for the town of Fort Macleod in my riding.

Fort Macleod was selected out of 29 other towns and cities in Alberta to become the home of the new Alberta Police and Peace Officer Training Centre. This centre will be a unique facility in Canada, providing centralized training for new municipal police recruits and peace officers, as well as professional development for all of Alberta's police and peace officers.

Fort Macleod has a long and proud history of policing, going back to its early days when the North West Mounted Police set up barracks there in 1874. This new training centre will revitalize the community of Fort Macleod and provide Alberta's police and peace officers with the training they need to serve and protect our communities.

I would like to congratulate Mayor Patience and the citizens of Fort Macleod on this achievement. I look forward to welcoming new police and peace officers to training in Fort Macleod.

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AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week I received a phone call from a Canadian soldier, Sergeant Frank Bird of the Princess Louise Fusiliers, a Canadian who has served his country for 32 years and has recently returned from Afghanistan.

He called me to tell me about the valuable work being undertaken by Canada in helping to rebuild Afghanistan, telling me that our efforts to provide support in reconstruction, humanitarian relief and

human security are making a difference in the lives of ordinary people in a troubled part of the world.

Members of this House, like all Canadians, have differing views on our role in Afghanistan, but I know that all MPs support our troops and respect their efforts and their valour.

As we again mourn losses in Afghanistan, Sergeant Frank Bird reminds us that our efforts are not in vain and that we are making a difference.

To those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, to those like Frank Bird, who have served, and to those who continue to serve and will serve, a grateful nation salutes their sacrifice in working to build a more peaceful world. I believe it is work that we can all be proud of. I extend thanks to Sergeant Frank Bird.

* * *

●(1410)

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is disturbing to see Liberal MPs from B.C. refusing to support the new softwood lumber deal.

This agreement reached by our Conservative government will end this dispute and bring certainty back to our forest industry.

B.C. and the other softwood provinces have joined the huge majority of the lumber industry to support this deal, but the Liberal MPs from B.C. have chosen to support uncertainty, forest industry job losses, foreseeable mill closures and continued harassment by the U.S. lumber coalition.

B.C.'s forest minister has asked the Liberal MPs to support this deal because it is good for B.C. and good for Canada.

I call on the Liberal MPs from B.C. to support the forest workers and their families, support the forest industry, and support their province and their country. I call on them to quit playing political games and get behind this monumental softwood lumber deal.

* * *

WILD SALMON

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, wild salmon are part of the culture of Vancouver Island North. Well managed salmon enhancement, stock assessment, habitat management, enforcement, and fisheries research programs all contribute to building and maintaining healthy salmon stocks, but the DFO's ability to manage these core programs has been severely curtailed by Liberal cutbacks and privatization.

Such a vital part of our coastal culture and economy is in jeopardy, yet the Conservative government says nothing while handing over our resource to the private sector, with no mention of any money in the budget.

Statements by Members

We need a west coast wild salmon renewal policy that includes strong public sector support for fisheries programs, renewal of funding for the salmonid enhancement program, recognition and support of the role that salmon play in aboriginal culture, full funding for upgrading and new hatchery infrastructure, and maintaining wild salmon as a public natural resource for the future of our communities.

* * *

BREAST CANCER

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Weekend to End Breast Cancer was a two day, 60 kilometre walk through the neighbourhoods of Toronto that took place from September 8 to 10, 2006.

Proceeds benefited Princess Margaret Hospital, funding important breast cancer research, education, services and care. The hospital has announced that 5,382 walkers raised \$17.2 million for breast cancer research in Toronto.

It was a weekend of hope that honoured lives lost, celebrated survivors and helped bring breast cancer care to those who so desperately need it.

One in every nine Canadian women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. The Weekend to End Breast Cancer is a chance to go the distance in the fight against this disease. It is a chance to be a hero for someone we love or someone we may never meet.

* * *

[Translation]

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois decries the statements by journalist Jan Wong published in *The Globe and Mail* on Saturday, September 16.

To claim that there is any link between the tragic incident at Dawson College and Bill 101, which the journalist refers to as infamous, is the result of a defamatory delusion disconnected from the Quebec reality.

Quebec is an inclusive and welcoming society where it is pleasant to live. As an immigrant, I very quickly felt welcome and I deplore that the openness of Quebecers is being attacked.

After the article on Quebecistan by Barbara Kay, it seems that English Canada is overly tolerant of Quebec bashing.

I urge the Conservative government and the other opposition parties to denounce without delay these unacceptable remarks that question the choices of Quebec society, its values and their foundation.

* * *

●(1415)

[English]

NEW BRUNSWICK ELECTION

Mr. Paul Zed (Saint John, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night was a great victory for the people of New Brunswick as Shawn Graham

and the Liberal Party won a majority government in a tough-fought campaign.

[Translation]

Obviously, the voters of New Brunswick desire change and Shawn Graham's Liberals have undertaken to bring hope and prosperity under the banner of equal opportunity.

[English]

Shawn Graham is committed to making job creation a priority again; ensuring that New Brunswick is a leader in energy conservation and generation; strengthening our schools and providing support for our teachers; improving the health and wellness of New Brunswickers; taking real action against poverty; addressing our affordable housing needs; and taking environmental responsibility, starting with the Saint John Harbour cleanup.

On behalf of the entire federal Liberal caucus, I would like to offer sincere congratulations and best wishes to Shawn Graham.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank some members across the way, the members for Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Thunder Bay—Superior North, and Eglinton—Lawrence, for rising above petty partisan politics and stating their intentions to vote in favour of the softwood lumber agreement.

Why then are other Liberals opposing an agreement the provinces support? Why then are other Liberals opposing an agreement the industry supports?

The member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River says this agreement will ensure that more mills are not closed and more jobs are not lost in the industry. The member for Eglinton—Lawrence says that if the Liberals do not support this agreement, it could cost them the last of their support in rural Canada. The member for Thunder Bay—Superior North criticized his own colleagues, asking, "How dastardly can they be when they'll vote against it when forestry is our lifeblood?"

How can the Liberals not support an agreement that is obviously in the best interests of Canada when even their own Liberal MPs are now supporting this deal? I would urge all members in all parties in this House to put petty politics aside and show their support for this important agreement.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***FIREARMS REGISTRY**

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, less than 24 hours after the Conservative minority government denied the usefulness of the firearms registry, we learn that the Sûreté du Québec used the registry to arrest a teenager from Hudson who allegedly made threats on the Internet. This gives us more evidence that the registry can be a useful and effective tool.

Will the Prime Minister change his mind and promise to keep the registry and perhaps thereby prevent another tragedy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the police arrested this man because he was making threats. As I have said many times, this government intends to take the necessary action to ensure public safety. Unfortunately, the record clearly shows that the registry did not prevent the tragedy at Dawson College.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, can we use facts instead of ideology when making decisions? If the Conservative minority government's bill were in effect today, the 12 gauge hunting rifle found in Hudson yesterday would not have been registered.

To all the groups asking to keep the registry and in light of all the evidence in favour of it, can the Prime Minister explain the real reasons preventing him from facing the truth?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think everyone realizes that, unfortunately, a person can be killed with a gun whether that gun was registered or not. We have to look at the facts of the matter. I have asked the RCMP to report the facts to us and to propose actions for ensuring better public safety in the future.

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minority Conservative government speaks only of penalties and completely ignores prevention. Yesterday, in response to a question on the Dawson shootings, the Prime Minister suggested that legislation imposing mandatory minimum sentences would have prevented the tragedy.

Could he explain how mandatory minimum sentences would have prevented the Dawson shootings?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I never suggested any such thing. What I have said is that the government and I, as a father of children who go to school, are obviously very concerned that under the existing gun laws the Liberals gave us that somebody like that, an unstable person, could get an arsenal of weapons and go into a school. We will look at the facts and see what we can do to minimize the possibility of that in the future.

What I did say is the last government, instead of worrying about insane people or criminals, simply went after farmers.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is interested in facts. Let us listen to some fact.

The Prime Minister was wrong when he said that the gun registry would not prevent the kind of tragedy we witnessed in Montreal. Yesterday, Quebec police, using information from Canada's gun registry, arrested a teenager who planned a copycat of the Dawson College shooting. Tragedy has been averted and lives have been saved because of the gun registry.

How many examples does the Prime Minister need before he listens to the police, Canadians, Premier Charest and parents who want the gun registry maintained because it protects—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is quite right to point out that there are many voices on this issue, and we want to see the safety of our communities enhanced.

We have the Liberal MP from Ottawa South saying as recently as yesterday that it is important for us to remember that no long gun registry system could have solved the problem.

The Liberal leadership candidate, the Liberal from Kings—Hants, voted against the gun registry and voted against funding for it. The member from Newmarket—Aurora said, "As a mother, I am scared by gun violence", and she voted against it.

We want a system that will prevent these firearms getting into the wrong hands.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety would rather act ideologically than protect Canadians, no matter what facts he has been given.

Yesterday, police forces illustrated the usefulness of the gun registry by arresting a potential copycat of the Dawson shooting before he went into action at his school.

Will the minister announce that the firearms registry will be fully maintained in order to protect his fellow citizens and to protect our children?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the debate to continue without personal attacks. I have children and I have grandchildren. The hon. member says this is nothing but ideology and that is not true.

I commend the police officers who intervened yesterday. It was not because of the firearms registry, but because of something they discovered. I commend them.

*Oral Questions***MAHER ARAR INQUIRY**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a report made public yesterday, Commissioner Dennis O'Connor cleared Maher Arar and chastised the RCMP for its involvement in this matter. The inquiry revealed that the RCMP provided false information to American authorities, which contributed to Maher Arar's deportation to Syria, where he was imprisoned and tortured for nearly a year. The commissioner recommended that the Canadian government compensate Mr. Arar for damages for his ordeal.

Now that Commissioner O'Connor has absolved Maher Arar and cleared his name, will the Prime Minister do his part by compensating Mr. Arar?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have received Justice O'Connor's report and we intend to act on his recommendations. We are preparing our response as quickly as possible. It is clear that Mr. Arar was the victim of an injustice, and this government intends to act.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): The Prime Minister says the government intends to act. Will he also send a formal complaint about Mr. Arar's treatment to the American and Syrian authorities? Will he use his visit to the United Nations to complain to the United States and Syria?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, we intend to act. We will act on the basis of the recommendations in Justice O'Connor's report. I would emphasize that these events happened under the former government.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP acted in a way that is entirely unacceptable in the Maher Arar case. It made up evidence. It is unbelievable how it behaved. It created a guilty party out of thin air.

I understand that the government will implement the recommendations of the O'Connor report, but I would like to ask the government if it intends to follow up with a report to the House, so that implementing the recommendations is not left up to the RCMP and nothing happens.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Justice O'Connor made many recommendations. We have read them and we agree with them. We will take action.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the government will take action, for anything less would be surprising, to say the least. The RCMP is guilty of the worst abuses. Our government police force created guilty parties by fabricating evidence. This is unacceptable. People are worried. People called in to hotlines today and expressed their concerns. First it was Maher Arar, but who is next? What official guarantees will the government give us to ensure that the recommendations will be implemented and that its police force can never do something like this again?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take Justice O'Connor's recommendations seriously. He said that certain things were inappropriate, but he also stated that the RCMP did not act in bad faith. We will therefore follow the recommendations. We agree with them and we will take action.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Justice O'Connor's report has finally cleared Maher Arar's name and his reputation can now be restored.

We have learned his deportation to Syria and the year of living hell that he had to live through was as a result of information provided by the RCMP that was unfair and outright false information.

This country owes Maher Arar a lot. His country owes him an apology.

Will the Prime Minister apologize on behalf of all Canadians to Maher Arar and to his family?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, I think it is clear from the O'Connor report that Mr. Arar has been done a tremendous injustice. We all know this took place during the period of the previous government.

The government has received the report, which has a series of recommendations. As I said, the government will act swiftly based on those recommendations.

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada obviously owes an apology to Mr. Arar and his entire family.

He was tortured. He was taken away from his family. He was humiliated. He was dragged through the mud because Canada failed him.

Why does the Prime Minister refuse to rise in this House and, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadian citizens, apologize to Maher Arar today?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just stated, I accept the fact that Mr. Arar suffered a grave injustice.

Justice O'Connor has made several recommendations. The government will base its actions on his recommendations. I also understand that Mr. Arar has launched legal proceedings against the federal government. I obviously expect that there will be discussions among the lawyers to ensure an outcome to the satisfaction of Mr. Arar.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in an interview the Prime Minister said that for much of the past 30 or 40 years Canadians were the ones hanging back from international commitments and not carrying our fair share of the load.

How dare the Prime Minister diminish the Canadian soldiers' contribution in Cyprus, in Haiti, in Rwanda, in Bosnia and in Kosovo.

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister have the courage to apologize to all those veterans who have served Canada with distinction over the years?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was speaking specifically of Canada's role in NATO, which we know that under successful Liberal governments—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: —we were at the bottom of the pack in terms of our commitments to NATO—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor and it is hard to hear.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I just said. We were for decades under the Liberal government at the bottom of the pack in terms of our contributions to NATO. That has obviously changed. We are playing a leading role.

What the party opposite, and particularly its so-called defence critic, should do is support those troops as they work on this NATO mission.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister on national television last night made the following statement. He said, "it's I think making them a better military, notwithstanding maybe, and in some ways because of, the casualties". He was talking about the Canadian military.

Will the Prime Minister please explain to Canadians what he meant?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am sure the Minister of National Defence appreciates the enthusiastic response with no language, but we will want to hear what the minister says.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it reprehensible that the member over there, who voted against our troops in Afghanistan and who weasels all his words all the time about support for the military, is talking about our military. This government is behind our military 100% and the military knows that. It is the people on the opposite side who have not supported our military.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister finally had some time for the media yesterday. In a performance worthy of Guy Fournier on *Tout le monde en parle*, he showed contempt for our military, our veterans as well as for all Canadians.

Does the Minister of National Defence who has served under the Canadian flag believe, like his Prime Minister, that Canada has not fulfilled its peacekeeping responsibilities over the past 30 or 40 years and, even worse, that we let other countries take the lead? What will he say to the families of the 25 soldiers killed in Bosnia?

[English]

They were hanging back.

[Translation]

It is a disgrace. We expect an apology from the Prime Minister.

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the record of the previous government over the last 12 or 13 years was to drain the military of all its resources, to run its strength down, to ask our military to do things well beyond its ability and it kept straining the military. This government has changed that tack. This government supports the military and it will support it into the future.

* * *

● (1435)

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the Prime Minister does not have the courage to apologize, we would like to pay tribute to our veterans and our troops.

We now learn that our government's exit strategy for Afghanistan is nothing less than total success. The Prime Minister declared yesterday that we are at war and suggested that we will stay as long as necessary. The Prime Minister also said he felt it was unfortunate that Canadians do not understand the danger of the mission.

Is this new approach part of the \$5 million CIDA investment to change the image of the mission in Afghanistan?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous government put us in Kandahar and committed us to the Kandahar area. It knew what we were going into and yet it held back and did not tell the public what we were going into. We are now faced with combat operations in Kandahar and those people put us in that place.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government has a mandate until 2009 for the Canadian Forces mission in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister suggested that this mandate could possibly be extended beyond 2009. How presumptuous of a Prime Minister in a minority government to even hint at this time at the possibility of extending this mission.

Does the Prime Minister realize that he is making commitments when the current mission is already such a serious challenge to the Canadian Forces?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada and NATO will exit Afghanistan when we are confident that governance, development and security are satisfactory and irreversible.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has started putting his conditions on withdrawing Canadian troops in Afghanistan after 2009. He spoke, among other things, of implementing a real democracy and secure borders.

Oral Questions

Is the government not being too quick to presume that it will have the support of the House of Commons for a mission that it might want to extend when, in fact, the current mission is already problematic enough?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in recent months the House authorized our extension to September 2009. We are confident that the House will support the military in whatever it has to do in the future.

* * *

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Industry has no plan to help the workers, communities and businesses affected by the softwood lumber crisis, his colleague, the Minister of International Trade, has said the opposite and claims to be open to such a measure.

Can the government give us a straight answer and say whether or not it intends to implement the measures proposed by the Bloc to help the industry, including a measure to help businesses involved in natural resource processing accelerate capital equipment amortization in order to support the modernization and development of processing activities?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the question posed by my Bloc Québécois colleague, because this afternoon in the House, the Bloc Québécois will finally vote with us to help workers.

I know that the Bloc Québécois will show, in this House, that our party is working in the best interests of Quebeckers, within the federation, and that we are very useful when it comes to fighting for Quebeckers' interests. Maybe the Bloc Québécois' own uselessness in this House will be revealed.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the softwood lumber file, companies agreed to give up a billion dollars in duties collected by American authorities. When they began paying those duties, the Canadian dollar was worth 63 cents US. Now that the Canadian dollar is worth 90 cents, they will have lost not only a billion dollars, but also the difference in the exchange rate.

Will the government take a page from the Bloc Québécois' action plan and introduce supplementary fiscal measures that take into account the companies' additional losses due to the exchange rate?

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the softwood lumber agreement actually puts over \$5 billion Canadian cash into the pockets of Canadian companies. It creates stability and it protects provincial forest management policies.

This government will be there to work with the Quebec softwood lumber industry and other sectors of the softwood lumber industry in Canada to ensure its health and prosperity going forward.

LOBBYING

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his war with the National Press Gallery, the Prime Minister used his lobbyists, like Tim Powers, Goldy Hyder, Bill Pristanski, Deb Grey, Lisa Samson and Geoff Norquay, to spin and sell the Conservative message, but all this benevolent service by Conservative insiders is not free. They use their privileged status to gain private sector clients.

Is this not a direct violation of the throne speech promise, last paragraph, page 4, to eliminate government stepping stones to private lobbying?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to say very clearly at the outset that I am in complete agreement with that internal Liberal Party report that was made public on September 10 where it said that the Liberal Party of Canada has absolutely no credibility with the people of Canada.

Let us look at that party's record in office. As a member of the Liberal prime minister's transition team, who is sitting among those transition team members? Registered lobbyist Francis Fox. What was the Liberals' response to that? They appointed him to the Senate with his fellow lobbyist friend, Dennis Dawson.

The member for Wascana should stand in his place and apologize to the people of Canada for those ethical lapses under his regime.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suspect the minister doth protest too much.

Speaking of previous governments, that is the minister who oversaw a \$500 million computer boondoggle when he served Mike Harris in Ontario. That is the minister who could not even read his own power bill when he was energy minister. That is the minister who wasted nearly \$2 million of taxpayer money on partisan advertising. That is the minister who approved a 48¢ doughnut expense. That is the minister who spent \$5,000 polishing his own image.

When is he going to walk the talk?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I am sure all hon. members want to hear the answer from the President of the Treasury Board and he now has the floor. We will have a little order, please.

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I say to the member for Wascana that I may have been wrong but I have never been on the side of wrong, which is something the member cannot say.

Maybe the member for Wascana could stand in this place and let us know how the income trust leak RCMP investigation is going.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister is obviously very desperate to be saying that. I do not know if he forgot his Ritalin today.

Oral Questions

Last spring I asked the President of the Treasury Board why he rewarded the Conservative transition team member and friend of the Prime Minister with a big untendered contract for PR advice for the so-called accountability act. The minister said that the contract had been cancelled and that the money had been returned.

Today we learn that is not so. From access to information we now learn that the minister paid Marie-Josée Lapointe \$13,462 for two weeks of work. This was for a contract that he said was cancelled.

It is time for the minister to come clean and demand that every cent of the more than \$13,000 be returned to Canadian taxpayers.

• (1445)

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the record is checked I think it will be very clear that I stood in my place and I took responsibility for what went on in my department and the contract was immediately terminated. Case closed, black and white.

Maybe the member opposite could tell us if he agrees with Liberal Senator Larry Campbell. When the Senate committee was asked to sit over the summer he said, "Why would we want to sit over the summer?" I will tell the House why. We want to deliver accountable government to this country. We want to pass the federal accountability act.

The member opposite should not hide behind his colleagues in the Liberal Senate and tell them to get on and pass the bill.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps ducking the questions. I know he picked up some bad habits when he was destroying Ontario with Mike Harris but shouting and pointing to irrelevant facts that have nothing to do with the question is not accountability.

The fact is that if he was wrong to award this contract to a Tory insider, then it is wrong for her to be paid a single penny, period.

If the minister will not ask Ms. Lapointe to repay the money, will he actually demonstrate some accountability and repay the money himself?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minute that issue was brought to my attention the contract was terminated and no further work was done. That sets a very high ethical bar for Canada's new government.

I would say to the member opposite that perhaps he could go to the Liberal Party and return all of the cash, the thousands of dollars, \$7,000 per envelope. When will he return all the cash that the Liberal Party and the Liberal government stole from Canadians? He should stand up and do the right thing and return the cash.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women tell us whether Guy Fournier, the chairman of the board of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, still has the confidence of the government, given the statements he has recently made in the media?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Fournier was appointed as chair of CBC Radio-Canada by the previous Liberal government. He has increasingly lost the confidence of Canada's new government.

I would inform the House that I have received the voluntary resignation of Mr. Fournier effective today. This will enable this new government to make an appointment that reflects the importance that we put on the role of the chair of CBC Radio-Canada.

* * *

MAHER ARAR INQUIRY

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for four long years Maher Arar and Monia Mazigh have lived an unimaginable nightmare. It is reasonable for the government to take time to study Mr. Justice O'Connor's 23 recommendations but it is not reasonable to delay an official apology to Maher Arar and his family.

Mr. Justice O'Connor found that Canadian investigators made extensive efforts to find any information that could implicate Arar in terrorist activities. They found none. Now we see the Prime Minister hiding behind lawyers.

Why will the government not do the decent thing, apologize now and agree today to fair compensation?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I once again commend Justice O'Connor and all the people who worked on this report. The report was two and a half years in the making. It is 1,400 pages long and contains 320,000 words. We just tabled it yesterday.

We have had time to look at the recommendations and we will be acting on those recommendations, including concerns related to Mr. Arar and the fact that he has lawyers right now. There are government lawyers who are talking with those lawyers. We will be taking action on this matter.

• (1450)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hiding behind lawyers around the question of apology and compensation is unbelievable. The government must do two things today if it is serious about righting a horrendous wrong done to Maher Arar.

First, it must apologize unequivocally, not express sadness, not offer regrets, not hide behind lawyers, but apologize for the atrocious treatment of Maher Arar and his family. Second, the government must agree to compensation.

Why not assign Justice O'Connor immediately to recommend binding compensation for the horrors visited upon Arar and his family? Will the Prime Minister do the honourable thing and agree today to—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Oral Questions

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I indicated that we will be acting on the recommendations of Justice O'Connor. Justice O'Connor did not recommend that he himself be put in charge of yet another investigation or inquest related to compensation or any other matter.

As a matter of fact, Justice O'Connor's own words, and heartfelt words I might add, related to Mr. Arar were that this whole situation was regrettable, and we have said it is regrettable. Those were his words. Those are our heartfelt words and we think those are appropriate.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the flawed softwood deal, unfair and crippling export duties will, at today's softwood prices, add to the government's coffers 15¢ on every dollar's worth of Canadian softwood exported to the United States. It prohibits that money from being used to support the very industry it cripples.

Can the minister clarify for us today just how big he expects this new cash cow to be in its damaging impact on the Canadian softwood lumber industry?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. should know, if in fact he has read the softwood lumber agreement, that any export tax revenue will be flowed back, net of administrative expenses related to the agreement, to the provinces.

The provinces are protected under this agreement for a large number of forest management practices that they can continue. They can apply industry support measures that are not specific to the lumber industry. We have received literally dozens of letters from Atlantic Canada and all four Atlantic provinces support this—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beauséjour.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only were the American duties illegal, American trade courts ruled that the duties could not be used to reward American lumber companies.

The government plans to not only tip the United States a billion dollars, but it also wants to collect billions more over the next few years by imposing a 15% duty on its own softwood lumber industry.

When the Minister of International Trade crossed the floor a few months ago, did he ever imagine he would go from championing the first Canadian lawsuit against illegal softwood tariffs to being a Republican lackey willing to do the United States' dirty work?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that hon. member should come clean. That party was prepared to settle for far less than this government has achieved in negotiations with the United States.

That member and those who vote against that agreement are supporting continued litigation, dumping duties that will climb, and dislocation in the softwood lumber industry in Canada, and in Atlantic Canada in particular.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said yesterday, the Harper-Duceppe-Bush coalition is forcing the adoption of a softwood lumber agreement by putting a gun to the heads of Canadian companies.

One of Quebec's largest companies, Domtar, still opposes the Harper-Duceppe-Bush agreement and thinks that the agreement is bad for...

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member knows that he cannot use members' names in the House. I am afraid that the names he mentioned are those of members of this House. He must reword his question to comply with the Standing Orders of this House.

• (1455)

Hon. Jean Lapierre: Mr. Speaker, I was just quoting the name of a new club.

Why is the minority government imposing a punitive surtax of 19% on companies that do not think as it does and did not give in to its blackmail?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this agreement is supported by the softwood lumber industry in Quebec, by the unions in Quebec and by the Liberal government of Quebec. It should therefore be supported by all the members from Quebec.

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no one is going to convince me that Domtar is a small company. It is one of the largest companies, and it is totally opposed to this agreement. We also know that Domtar is waiting for a decision from the Competition Bureau about its deal with Weyerhaeuser.

Can the minority government assure us that it will not continue to persecute that company, which is refusing to do what the government wants, by blocking this major deal out of spite?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this agreement is supported in Quebec, as in the rest of Canada, by nearly 90% of the softwood lumber industry. That is why it deserves the support of all the members from Quebec.

By voting against this agreement, the hon. member is voting only for lawyers and lobbyists.

* * *

OLDER WORKERS

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, an assistance program for older workers who have been victims of massive layoffs is required not only for the softwood lumber industry but in all industries, in all regions, as in the case of the Saint-Émile shoe factory in the Quebec City area.

Given that the government acknowledged the importance of such a program in the throne speech and in the budget, does it intend to follow up on its commitment and put in place a true assistance program for older workers who lose their jobs as a result of massive layoffs?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government made a commitment to Canadians during the election and during the budget that it will conduct and deliver a feasibility study on ways to help displaced older workers. I am pleased to advise the House that the government is proceeding with that and it will be making an announcement soon.

* * *

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the assistance program proposed by the Bloc Québécois is not only to provide assistance to the softwood lumber industry but also to improve the energy balance. It provides incentives for production of biomass energy, mainly with technological innovations in wood chip processing.

Does the government intend to follow up on this suggestion which would not only reduce the impact of logging on the environment but would also help attain the Kyoto targets?

[English]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to inform the member that she will be very pleased as we move forward with our plan this fall. The government believes very much in energy efficiency and alternate fuels, including biomass. I am sure her party will be very supportive of the new made in Canada government plan.

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, given the way the government has browbeaten and threatened the softwood industry into accepting the complete capitulation that is the softwood lumber deal, it comes as no surprise to hear that the minority Conservative government is now threatening to punish those companies that refuse to go along.

Will the Prime Minister spare us the schoolyard bully routine and admit to the House that his trade minister has gone too far with the imposition of a 19% tax on those companies that refuse to sign on to his birthday gift to George Bush?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a feeble attempt to cast aspersions on an agreement that has over 90% support from the industry in Canada and over 90% support from the industry in British Columbia. The agreement has the very strong support of the government of British Columbia and the governments of other lumber producing provinces.

The member should be ashamed of himself, playing partisan political games with the lives of workers in the softwood lumber industry.

● (1500)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we will vote on the softwood lumber agreement. The member for Beauséjour has praised the deal stating "as an Atlantic Canadian, I'm certainly pleased that this agreement protects the

rights we have fought hard to ensure are protected". However, now he is indicating that he will be voting against the deal.

Can the Minister of International Trade please explain once again to the member opposite why this deal is good for Atlantic Canada, good for New Brunswickers and good for the member's very own constituents?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, hon. members across and members from Atlantic Canada realize that Atlantic Canada did not escape from the duties that were applied to the Canadian softwood lumber industry. Indeed, it was hit with dumping duties. Dumping duties will get higher as the lumber market gets weaker.

Those members who vote against this agreement are voting in favour of higher anti-dumping duties, more dislocation and more job loss in the Atlantic Canadian softwood lumber industry.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, an issue was raised earlier in question period that I think really needs to be clarified by the Prime Minister. In his interview last night on television he stated that the mission in Afghanistan is making "a better military maybe, in some ways, because of the casualties".

These remarks are disturbing and I really cannot believe that is what the Prime Minister intended. I really cannot believe that Canadians mourn the loss of each and every soldier as an act of bravery, not as a benchmark of military improvement. Will the Prime Minister—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the issue of support for the military, the Prime Minister is backing the military 100% and the military recognizes that.

We also mourn our losses and we regret any losses. We try to provide the best training and the best equipment to reduce losses, but the government and the Prime Minister are behind the military 100%.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Rory O'Hanlon, Chairman of the House of Representatives of Ireland, and His Excellency Rory Kiely, Chairman of the Senate of Ireland.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Her Excellency Eva Kjer Hansen, Minister for Social Affairs and Gender Equality for Denmark.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Government Orders

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The House is ready to take the recorded division on the ways and means motion before the House that deals with the softwood lumber agreement. I think if you seek it you would find agreement among all four parties to have the bell ring for only 15 minutes as opposed to 30.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 6

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC) moved that a ways and mean motion to introduce an act to impose a charge on the export of certain softwood lumber products to the United States and a charge on refunds of certain duty deposits paid to the United States, to authorize certain payments, to amend the Export and Import Permits Act and to amend other Acts as a consequence, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 33*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
André
Asselin
Baird
Batters

Ablonczy
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Arthur
Bachand
Barbot
Bellavance

Benoit
Bezan
Blackburn
Blaney
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie
Casey
Chong
Comuzzi
Cummins
Day
Del Mastro
Deschamps
Doyle
Dykstra
Epp
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Galipeau
Gaudet
Goldring
Gourde
Guay
Guimond
Harper
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Jaffer
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kotto
Laforest
Lake
Lavallée
Lemieux
Lévesque
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Manning
Mayes
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nadeau
Norlock
Obhrai
Ouellet
Paquette
Perron
Picard
Poilievre
Preston
Reid
Ritz
Scheer
Shipley
Smith
Sorenson
St-Hilaire
Storseth
Sweet
Basques)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Warkentin
Yelich — 173

Bernier
Bigras
Blais
Bonsant
Boucher
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Brunelle
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cardin
Carrier
Casson
Clement
Crête
Davidson
DeBellefeuille
Demers
Devolin
Duceppe
Emerson
Faille
Finley
Flaherty
Gagnon
Gallant
Gauthier
Goodyear
Grewal
Guergis
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Komarnicki
Krampt (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise
Lauzon
Lemay
Lessard
Loubier
Lunn
Lussier
Malo
Mark
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Mourani
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Pallister
Paradis
Petit
Plamondon
Prentice
Rajotte
Richardson
Roy
Schellenberger
Skelton
Solberg
St-Cyr
Stanton
Strahl
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Turner
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Vincent
Warawa
Watson

Government Orders

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	Angus
Atamanenko	Bagnell
Bains	Barnes
Bélangier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Bevington
Black	Blaikie
Bonin	Brisson
Brown (Oakville)	Byrne
Cannis	Chamberlain
Chan	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coderre	Comartin
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davies
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dion
Dosanjh	Dryden
Easter	Eyking
Folco	Fontana
Godfrey	Godin
Goodale	Graham
Hubbard	Ignatieff
Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Karygiannis	Keeper
Lapierre	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
MacAulay	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	Patry
Peterson	Priddy
Proulx	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rota	Russell
Savage	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Sgro
Siksay	Silva
Simard	St. Amand
St. Denis	Steckle
Stoffer	Stronach
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks	Valley
Wappel	Wasylycia-Leis
Wilfert	Wilson
Wrzesnewskyj	Zed — 116

PAIRED

Members

Freeman	Lalonde
MacKay (Central Nova)	Williams — 4

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADA TRANSPORTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety

Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: Order. When the bill was before the House before oral questions, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities had the floor for questions and comments consequent on his speech. There remain two minutes in the time allotted for questions and comments to the hon. parliamentary secretary. I therefore call for questions and comments.

There being no member rising, resuming debate. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on Bill C-11. The NDP finds that there are some aspects of this bill that are worthy of consideration. I will address the aspects that Canadians might consider less interesting a little later.

The principle set out in this bill is that this is a government that listens. However, given the vote that has just taken place and the pressure that was brought to bear in all the proceedings surrounding the softwood lumber agreement, I am not convinced of this. In this corner of the House, we are in fact not convinced that this government is capable of listening to people.

An agreement has been made on softwood lumber that is in almost all respects bad for the Canadian softwood lumber industry. Nonetheless, and notwithstanding all the consultations that were held this summer at the Standing Committee on International Trade, it is clear that the government has not listened to people's concerns and worries.

With respect to the question of Bill C-11, the same problems arise again, the same questions that arose in relation to transportation. For some months now, we have seen that the government is trying to weaken the regulations governing transportation, whether in relation to railways, aviation or marine transport.

This is what concerns the NDP. What we have is a government that does not listen and that does things backwards. We saw this when it came to the softwood lumber agreement. In fact, we have just had the first of several votes that will take place in the next few weeks. The Senate will then of course have to consider these questions. We are seeing the same thing in relation to transportation.

We therefore have concerns. Even though we are supporting Bill C-11 at second reading, we shall see, in committee, whether the government is capable of listening or whether, after only seven months in power, it is leading us back into the same situation as we had under the former Liberal government: no listening, no genuine consultation, no ability to understand its mistakes. Even though we are supporting the bill now, we are giving notice that our support is conditional on the improvements that we hope will be made to this bill at the next stage.

Government Orders

• (1540)

[English]

I would like to speak more specifically about some of the aspects of this bill that we support and some of the aspects of the bill that we are concerned about.

I will start with the issue of railway noise complaints. The legislation provides a mechanism, finally, for individuals and communities to make complaints about railway noise.

I come from the community of Burnaby—New Westminster. There are railway yards around the Westminster Quay area of downtown New Westminster. Many constituents have approached me, including Brian Allen and others, to raise very serious and very legitimate concerns about railway noise in their neighbourhood. They have tried to deal directly with the railways, as have I as their member of parliament, but there has not been a formal, structured mechanism in place to deal with the railway noise complaints.

In urban areas this is a matter of grave concern, when people cannot get the sleep they need. Families are working harder and harder in Canada now for less and less. Most Canadian families have seen their real income decline over the last 15 years and they have seen the hours of work per week increase. Now it is even more important in an urban setting that our constituents from coast to coast get the opportunity to have legitimate sleep when they need it.

Bill C-11 has a section that deals with railway noise complaints. It provides a mechanism for citizens who live in the Westminster Quay area or in South Burnaby who are near railway yards, particularly with railway shunting back and forth. They and their members of parliament will have a mechanism to try to resolve those noise complaints. This is welcomed and is one of the most positive aspects of Bill C-11.

A second element deals with mergers and acquisitions and provides for a public interest review process. This is important as well. We need to have much more public consultation, particularly when we talk about the transportation industry. Canada is a vast land, the world's largest democracy. We are linked together by our transportation modes. If there is any area of interest that unites Canadians from coast to coast, it is in maintaining the safest and best possible transportation facilities in all areas of transport.

It is an important step forward to have the protection of a valid review process and public consultations when there are mergers or acquisitions in the transportation industry. That is also an element which we support, although in committee we will perhaps be looking at tightening what is currently stated in the legislation.

Another important component is a framework for passenger rail services. I come from an area which is served through TransLink by the West Coast Express. The West Coast Express is a very well run commuter railway operation that runs from Mission through to Vancouver. However, the West Coast Express has had some real difficulty having the kind of arrangement with the rail operators that allows access to the rail lines that it needs.

Bill C-11 provides a better framework for the kind of negotiations that sometimes take place between commuter rail services in our larger cities and the rail operators themselves. This is important. It is

a benefit and an improvement. We would like to see this go further. We need that mechanism to allow the commuter rail services to negotiate directly with the rail lines, but we have to be aware that the public good has to be served as well.

There are cases where rail lines will be discontinued. We have to make sure that there is a public good, a public benefit, for example, urban bicycle paths.

• (1545)

My colleague, the member for Victoria, has raised the issue of ensuring that further to providing access to commuter rail when we are talking about discontinued rail lines, there should also be access to the public in general as another alternative through various facilities, bicycle paths or rail paths themselves. The member for Victoria has been effective in articulating this.

We would like to see something in the legislation to advance that right, that if the rail line is not being used for rail purposes, not being used for commuter rail, there are other alternatives for the public good that must come first. The improved framework is a good first step for that, and another element why at this stage, in any event, we will be looking at supporting the legislation so it moves forward.

In terms of the advantages, the bill itself speaks to greater transparency in advertising airfares. This is an important component. Consumers need to be aware of how much they are paying for tickets. We do not want to see hidden costs. Greater transparency undoubtedly would be an advantage. However, I say that this is an advantage if we are looking at the type of regulation that provides greater transparency.

The unfortunate aspect, something that the transport committee will have to look at in much more detail, is the idea of integrating the complaints function of the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner into the Canadian Transportation Agency. I am not convinced that this provides for the transparency of which the government is speaking. I have some concerns. At committee we will be expressing those concerns, bringing the appropriate witnesses forward to examine whether that is the best mechanism, whether expanding the office of the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner, expanding those powers or providing for other methods of dealing with the same transparency better serves the travelling public.

The principle is there. We in all four corners of the House want to see transparency on airfares so that members of the public know what they are paying when it is being advertised that there are no hidden fees. I should add that hidden fees include the fees that Canadian passengers are paying on airlines for things like headsets, to eat, to get a glass of water, to get a pillow or a blanket. Increasingly there are fees for the simple fact of travelling on that transport and those are fees that need to be taken into consideration.

I was on a flight from Quebec City to Vancouver, back to my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster. One gentleman joked that he was being asked to pay for his pillow and blanket and soon passengers would be asked to bring their own chairs. This is a good point. The situation now is that members of the travelling public are being asked to pay fees that they should not have to pay once they have purchased their tickets. They should not have to pay for a pillow or a blanket. They should not have to pay to get some chips or some water. They should not have to pay these small costs. If the air transporters want the consumers to pay those fees, they have to be front and centre.

One can imagine that with completely transparent advertising it would be very difficult for an airline to say that passengers will have to pay \$2 for this, \$3 for that and \$5 for something else. Those hidden fees would be forced away by having that transparency because it would not be to the competitive advantage of the airline to gouge members of the travelling public once they were on board.

Greater transparency in advertising is a component that we support. We do question whether the best method is through the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner through the Canadian Transportation Agency. Hopefully this will be sorted out during the committee process. We look forward to participating in that.

We have concerns about other areas. We will raise questions and possibly amendments as well.

On the grain revenue cap adjustment, we have concerns about how that might be dealt with. As I expressed at the beginning, we have concerns about the government's ability to listen. Certainly with respect to the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management there have been major concerns about how the government deals with the preoccupations and concerns of rural Canada. Though in principle having that adjustment is important to us, we want to see in very strict details how that would work in practice and whether there would be honest public consultation around it.

I mentioned the question around advertising airfares and the air complaints function. Again the same question is raised, whether the best mechanism for air complaints is through the Canadian Transportation Agency and the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner. It is something that will come out through the committee hearing process in which we will be very pleased to participate.

• (1550)

Finally, in terms of the exact details of Bill C-11, the details that we have concerns about are around the national transportation policy statement, which was very specific on the private sector's contribution to transport policy and mum on the whole impact and the importance of the public sector.

We in this corner of the House are not caught up in the ideology, that it has to be the private sector. There are many things the private sector cannot do as well as an efficiently run, effective public sector. That is why over a 20 year period, the best financial managers in Canada were NDP administrations. Despite the flop of the Bob Rae government in Ontario, which was due a lack of leadership, when we take the actual fiscal period returns of all the NDP administrations from 1981 to 2001, we see that Liberal governments across the country were in deficit 85% of the time. The Conservative

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governments over that period of time were in deficit 66% of the time. They did not balance the books. NDP administrations, most of the time, balanced the books.

We have the best track record in financial administration and we are proud of that, but we also believe in a very prudently run, effective public sector. Our concern around the national transportation policy statement is that it does not reflect the importance of the public sector working with the private sector to ensure that we have the kind of safe, effective and accessible transportation system that should exist for Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

In no country on this planet is transportation as important as it is in Canada. We are a vast land. We are the largest democracy. Throughout that vast land, transportation infrastructure is of primary importance. We profoundly believe that we need a national transportation policy statement that actually reflects the importance of the private and public sectors working together and that there has to be an effective public sector to ensure that we do get the kind of effective transportation infrastructure that we need to have. That is something we will be looking at as well in committee and it is something about which we are concerned.

I want to say a few words about the general direction. I talked about Bill C-11 and I have talked about some of the elements we support, some of the elements to which we will be looking at providing changes and improvements. Our role in this Parliament is to ensure that we get the best possible policy. New Democrats are not ashamed to work very hard to ensure that we get the best policy process.

Despite Bill C-11, we have concerns over the general transportation thrust of the government. I will raise some concerns that we have raised in the House and that we continue to raise. To date we have not received the response that we believe a prudent and responsible government should give.

The first is the issue of railway safety. Because of self-managed railway systems and a cutting back of that important public sector role to watch over our transportation sector and ensure that it is as safe as possible, what we have seen is railway accidents are on the rise. In 2005 we saw the highest number of railway accidents in nearly a decade, much higher than the 10 year rolling average that existed before.

We have seen an increase in railway accidents. We have seen, tragically, deaths in the Fraser Canyon this summer. We have seen environmental damage such as the Cheakamus Lake in the Squamish Estuary and Lake Wabamun in Alberta. We have seen consistently a greater number of railway accidents over the last few years. This is a matter of some concern.

We have called for an inquiry. The government has not responded. We have called for the tightening of railway regulations and we have seen very little response and activity from the government. That is a matter of very real concern because people's lives are at stake. The well-being of communities is at stake when we see the kind of environmental damage, when we see the lives lost most recently.

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•(1555)

It is a tragedy and we need to deal with it. We will be repeating the call for a public inquiry because we do not believe the existing lack of regulations in rail transport is to the public advantage. Obviously, if the number of accidents are on the rise, the number of fatalities are on the rise and environmental damage is on the rise, there is a problem. A responsible government deals with the issue. We certainly hope the government will deal with this issue, and quickly.

[*Translation*]

Second, there is the entire question of regulating air transportation. We talked about precisely that last June at the Standing Committee on Transport. We talked about the government's plan, or objective, of reducing the number of flight attendants on Canadian aircraft. This is a major concern. We know very well that a large majority of Canadians are opposed to this measure.

A survey was done on these questions in June 2006. Respondents were asked whether they wanted to keep the existing Canadian regulations or wanted regulations similar to the ones in the United States. And 69% of Canadians wanted to keep the existing regulations in relation to flight attendants. Only 19% of Canadians wanted regulations like the ones in the United States.

When we consider all these questions, that is, whether safety standards have to be lowered so that airlines can continue to be competitive, 72% of Canadians are opposed to it.

Because of how this government seems to do things, we are indeed hoping to be able to change its perspective. We support Bill C-11, but it remains to be seen whether the government will listen to our concerns and make the changes that are called for.

•(1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just caught the last few minutes of the hon. member's speech, but I want to take him to task a bit on one aspect of that, and that is the issue about flight attendants.

Given the current climate of rampant anti-Americanism promoted by some parties in this House, if we ask Canadians whether they want something more like Canada or more like the U.S., we will get a biased answer. With respect to the question of flight attendants, the question should be: Do we want Canadian airlines to have the same standards as every other air transport jurisdiction in the world when it comes to the number of flight attendants per passenger, or do we want Canadian airlines to simply stick with the Canadian system which is 40:1 versus 50:1?

Does my hon. colleague understand that every other air transport jurisdiction in the world adheres to the 50:1 ratio?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, that is just not true and the hon. member should know that. In Australia the standards are actually tighter than they are in Canada. It is just not true that those standards are universal. There are other jurisdictions that have safer standards.

He raised the point of what the question was. I raised the comparison of Canadian standards as opposed to American standards. Another question that was asked was whether Canadian airlines should lower their safety standards to stay internationally

competitive. Seventy-two per cent of Canadians opposed that: 65% of males and 78% of females. In all the generations, regardless of the age group, Canadians disagreed. In fact, I think most Canadians would be in line with the NDP perspective on this.

We have competitive international airlines because we have the safest standards in the world. If Canadians know our airlines are safer than the airlines of any other country, then our Canadian airlines will have a major competitive advantage. That is something the NDP stands firmly behind. It is not a question of cutting back on safety standards to save a few cents. It is a question of ensuring we have the safest possible transportation structure, and that becomes a competitive advantage.

We have seen over the past few months some of the problems that exist already within the airline industry. The government has been talking about the potential of cutting back on safety standards, of bringing in self-managed systems similar to what we have seen in rail. We have seen the deterioration of safety standards with respect to rail. We have seen a rise in accident rates and fatality rates as well as a rise in environmental damage.

Why would the government act like the previous government and diminish safety standards? People have raised concerns about some of the airlines flying out of Toronto like Air Canada Jazz, and concerns exist now. We should be moving forward to tighten safety standards, not loosening them. Clearly, most Canadians agree with our stand.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his insight into the speech, particularly with regard to the consumer issues.

The member will know that under current section 85.1 there is the provision for the complaints commissioner, which was a temporary post established back in the year 2000 when Canadian Airlines was taken over by Air Canada. As a consequence, since the marketplace has somewhat stabilized, new clause 25 in the bill will effectively eliminate the position of the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner.

The airline industry continues to be a volatile industry. I am wonder whether there is argument still to be made that having a specific travel complaints commissioner for the public to focus its attention to still may well serve Canadians.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is my neighbour in the Confederation Building so I always appreciate him rising to speak on this issue.

I raised this during my initial speech. The question of how most effectively to deal with the issue of air complaints is important to us, so we will be very closely monitoring and ensuring that, through the committee process, we get the best possible witnesses forward to really comment on what would be the most effective route forward.

We want to ensure that there is an air complaints mechanism that is better than what we have now. We want to ensure that passengers, the travelling public, are better protected and have better mechanisms or better ways to follow up if they have concerns.

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I would like to read for the record, because I did not get a chance during my speech, an article in the *Toronto Star* of a few months ago on these increasing violations within the air safety sector. It states:

Transport Canada data show a steady increase in the number of alleged violations of Canadian aviation regulations such as improper maintenance checks and pilots taking off or landing without air traffic control authorization....

According to the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, the number of fatal aircraft accidents was up 48 per cent between 2004 and 2005, from 27 to 40.

These are the kinds of concerns that we are bringing forward. We are seeing the same kind of escalation in air safety as we have seen in rail safety and we do not want to see the government take the same ill-thought, ill-judged routes that we saw on rail safety, where it is diminishing standards and increasing accidents.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the question I wish to put to my colleague is simple.

Bill C-11 is supposed to amend the Railway Safety Act. But the only amendment is that it allows the presence of police officers to supervise the railway companies' property. So there really is not anything in this bill to make poorly maintained tracks more secure or to increase security.

So I ask my colleague to confirm what I am advancing.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the Bloc transportation critic, for his question. This is indeed a shortcoming in the existing legislation. He is quite right.

Now these are aspects that have to be reviewed in committee. I know that the member will take part to the same extent as I in attempting to improve this bill. There are of course some positive aspects, but also some shortcomings and things to be changed.

Still, the big question is knowing whether the government will agree to listen to the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and the improvements it proposes. That is the big question. I hope so, but some concerns remain because of what we have seen in the last few months in this House.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question for my colleague is about hazardous materials.

A very important factor in the debate is the types of things we put on our rail system that put people at risk, not just the operators, but the populations around them. Chlorine gas has moved through a number of highly populated areas.

In the United States, that has been categorized as a weapon of mass destruction because it can kill up to 100,000 people within a 15 mile radius. The U.S. has introduced legislation to move those gases outside of densely populated areas.

Will the committee at least start to look at what the U.S. is doing in terms of rail safety and how it is dealing with the issue of chemicals going through communities that are densely populated.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of grave concern to us.

I mentioned earlier in my speech that there has been a call for a public inquiry into rail safety. What we are seeing increasingly with the larger number of rail accidents is a greater risk to Canadians, particularly in urban areas where these hazardous wastes are transported. This is of real concern.

Just last December there was a rail accident in my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster. Fortunately, it was not hazardous waste but had it been hazardous waste going through a populated area, goodness knows what the result might have been.

It is a matter of great concern to us that the government seems to want to move to self-managed systems when clearly in rail transport it has not worked. It certainly would not work in air transport. It would be highly irresponsible for the government to move toward less regulations on things like hazardous waste.

The committee will be looking at this issue. We want to ensure Canadians are protected but we also urge the government to do the right thing. It should move to a public inquiry as quickly as possible so that we can finally determine all the elements that are there in terms of rail safety, why we are seeing these increasing numbers of accidents and try to avoid what could well be a catastrophe for Canadians if the present situation continues. More rail accidents mean greater danger for Canadians.

• (1610)

Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-11.

Transportation has been integral to our nation's growth and development. Using transportation as a building block to overcome major challenges, Canada has built a mature and robust transportation system that has enabled our nation to compete with the best in the world.

As our transportation system continues to grow and mature, we must adopt innovative policy approaches to successfully meet new and emerging challenges in this sector. A statutory review of the Canada Transportation Act was completed in 2001 and Bill C-11 is the third attempt to legislate amendments arising from this review. Its two predecessors, Bill C-26 and Bill C-44, both died on the order paper with the dissolution of Parliament followed by general elections.

Successive governments have appreciated that new policy approaches are required to meet the emerging challenges in the transportation sector and keep them competitive and stable.

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Bill C-11, as my hon. colleague from Ottawa South has pointed out, takes most of the good ideas from the previous Liberal bill, Bill C-44 and starts to adjust the framework found in the Canada Transportation Act. This bill would allow Canada to position its transportation system to respond to the needs and expectations of Canadians and address domestic and international pressures to remain competitive.

The bill includes many of the good provisions found in the previous bills that would make rail and air sectors more efficient, enhance competition and environmental protection, and create stable conditions for investment.

I would like to concentrate my remarks on the rail industry, the industry that helped build this country and still links us from sea to sea to sea.

Although railways make a tremendous contribution to Canada's economy, the growth of the industry has also contributed to a significant increase in concerns expressed by those who live or work near railway property.

At present, Transport Canada is responsible for regulating the safety of rail operations, including the transportation of dangerous goods, under the Railway Safety Act and the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act. However, it is not currently involved in matters involving noise or fumes from railway operations, except train whistling.

The Liberal government recognized the complexity of addressing these kinds of issues and obviously wants the communities and the railway companies to seek solutions through collaborative approaches or mediation.

On December 7, 2000, the Federal Court of Appeal ruled that the Canadian Transportation Agency had no jurisdiction to address complaints related to noise, vibration or fumes generated by the operations of railway companies regulated under section 95 of the Canada Transportation Act. Consequently, there are no specific provisions in the act or in any other federal legislation setting out how the agency or any other body can regulate issues concerning railway operations that are not related to railway service or safety.

In this context, in May 2003 the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Railway Association of Canada signed a memorandum of understanding in order to build common approaches pertaining to the prevention and resolution of issues that arise when people live and work in close proximity to rail operations. After May 2003, the Canadian Transportation Agency implemented an improved mediation initiative but it was not enough.

The Liberal government recognized that circumstances exist whereby mutually agreeable solutions may not always be possible. While there have been successful collaborative and mediated solutions to railways' nuisance issues in the past, these solutions are not always sufficient and may not be sufficient in the future given the important role that rail transport may continue to play in Canada's economic future. This being the case, action was required on both the legislative and collaborative fronts.

Following extensive public consultation, an act to amend the Canada Transportation Act was first introduced in Parliament in

February 2003 that included several provisions related to railway noise and gave jurisdiction to the Canadian Transportation Agency to address noise related complaints. Bill C-26 made it to the transport committee but died when the House prorogued in November 2003, as I previously indicated. In the next session of Parliament, the Liberal government entertained additional representations from the public, members of Parliament and other stakeholders on the proposed legislative amendment. The result was Bill C-44 tabled in March 2005 and now Bill C-11.

The proposed changes to the act authorized the Canadian Transportation Agency to review noise complaints and, if required, order rail companies to make changes to reduce unreasonable noise when constructing or operating a railway or rail yard. The agency must be satisfied that the parties were unable to reach a voluntary settlement of this dispute on their own.

●(1615)

Residents and municipal leaders in the city of Thorold in my riding of Welland have been very supportive of the changes to these sections to all incarnations of this bill. Excessive noise and emissions emanating from a rail yard in Thorold have significantly concerned citizens residing in the close proximity for many years. While prolonged noise like this could be irritating enough during the day, it is far worse to have it going throughout the night and into the early morning hours.

I personally visited adjacent homes and heard and saw how serious the problem is. All night idling and shunting of rail cars force some residents to go to sleep using ear plugs. The vibrations are so severe at times that household furniture shakes. Some have complained of air emissions with a soot like material landing on their cars and residences. We all can appreciate that such fine particles will move inside by numerous ways thereby constituting even more significant health concerns. Outdoor pollutants become indoor pollutants. Such particulate matter can adversely affect human health. The very young, the genetically predisposed, the elderly and those with pre-existing heart or lung disease are more susceptible to the adverse effects of this particulate matter.

It is well-documented that long term effects of noise exposure can cause a myriad of health problems. According to the World Health Organization, people may feel a variety of negative emotions when exposed to community noise and may report anger, disappointment, dissatisfaction, withdrawal, helplessness, depression, anxiety, distraction, agitation or exhaustion.

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Noise can produce a number of social and behavioural effects in residents, besides annoyance, that include changes in overt everyday behaviour patterns. Residents close windows, do not use balconies or decks, turn TV and radio volume up louder or write letters to elected officials. It can also change their social behaviour for the worse. People affected by noise may experience aggression, unfriendliness, disengagement and non-participation. There can be adverse changes in social indicators such as residential mobility, hospital admissions, drug consumption and accident rates. Finally, their mood or mental health can be affected. They may be less happy and more depressed.

The research of the World Health Organization also states that stronger adverse reactions have been observed when noise is accompanied by vibrations. It is no wonder that these residents want to see a better way of dealing with this noise problem.

This community wants to deal with those noise complaints through the Canadian Transportation Agency. They believe in mediated solutions that are reached through fair and non-confrontational ways. As has been mentioned, this approach is less litigious, quicker, cheaper and a more friendly resolution but they can only stand the aggravation for so long.

We tried working with the rail company to come to some kind of solution, such as allowing the trains to idle in a more rural area. We inquired about technologies so that the diesel engines could be shut off rather than idling for hours on end. However, we met with no willingness to compromise and the rail company hid behind the position that a caveat about the noise had been written into the municipal subdivision agreement that is registered on the titles of the affected homes. Admittedly, a caveat on the titles of their property should constitute notice of many of the concerns expressed. However, the reality is that few are made aware of such notices and no one appreciates their full implications. It also is cold comfort to the residents who have invested their life savings in properties that they cannot enjoy to their full benefit. Caveats on titles to properties must not mitigate or be an unequivocal response to noise pollution or air pollution.

In the rail company's defence one must concede that the changes required may affect their operating efficiencies and most certainly the cost of relocation to a more appropriate location. However, in such situations one must consider the greater good. My support is for the constituents in my riding and in communities in ridings throughout country.

The Thorold community knew the benefits of Bill C-44 and was disappointed when it died on the order paper and can now be hopeful that it is included in Bill C-11.

Another area I would like to address very briefly is the abolition of the Air Travel Complaints Commission. It does concern me. This commission was there to assist consumers with complaints on air travel. The government takes the position now that competition is an informal way of utilizing a complaints process. One can choose another airline. This might be fine for the frequent flyer travelling between major cities who can choose another airline but in many rural areas there is not the luxury of service by more than one airline. Retention of the Air Travel Complaints Commission is most important to service these communities and these flyers.

● (1620)

In addition, clarity in air fare advertising is a very positive initiative. The Canadian Transportation Agency would have the authority to make and enforce regulations to require that the advertising price includes all costs to the airline for providing the air service.

Advertisements would also indicate fees, charges and taxes collected by the airline on behalf of a government body or airport authority. In addition to the prices of airline tickets for both domestic and international travel, the travelling public is often literally shocked when actual ticket costs are far in excess of the advertised costs of the flights.

I am also concerned about the reduction in the membership of the Canadian Transportation Agency from seven part time to five full time centred in Ottawa. With all their increased responsibilities I am sincerely concerned that they will have insufficient manpower to undertake their current responsibilities and the new responsibilities that the act would give them. That would be a travesty if they certainly do not have the tools to deal with the situation presented to them.

In conclusion, I look forward to a full review of Bill C-11 at committee and listening to the comments and concerns of the transportation industry and the public.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully to my hon. colleague's speech. Just like him, there are citizens, constituents from my riding who are concerned about the noise caused by the railway yards. I have had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the various groups affected. We know that it has harmful consequences.

Today we have a bill that makes it possible to respond to this situation and to take these elements into consideration, by offering a mechanism to settle this problem through the Canadian Transportation Agency.

My question for my hon. colleague is as follows: according to him, does the bill in its present form properly meet his constituents' expectations?

[*English*]

Mr. John Maloney: Mr. Speaker, certainly, prior to this act there was no resolution of noise complaints. No one really had the authority to deal with it. This is a good first step. Whether this will work or not, we will soon see.

My concern is whether there is going to be sufficient manpower in these five members to deal with all the solutions or all the problems that come from across the country. We have heard even in this debate today that community after community have this problem and residents are subjected to these loud noises at all times of the day or night. There may be a plethora of complaints to the commission or to the agency and whether it will be able to deal with it in a timely fashion again remains to be seen, but as I said, it is a good first step that we did not have before.

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Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, the member for Welland, for his comments. In looking through the act, as a representative of northwestern British Columbia, we have a terminus in Prince Rupert where many of the trains and goods pass through, particularly to the Asian markets but other markets as well.

We have noticed over the last number of years, particularly with the absolutely diabolical sale of B.C. Rail to CN, that the accident rate has gone through the roof. Hazardous materials are spilling into lakes and rivers near communities. Just recently, volunteer fire departments in my region were sent a letter by CN that suggested that if any of these materials were to cause a major spill in the region that these fire departments were meant to hold tight for 12 hours until CN could get its act together and show up with a hazardous materials crew.

These are volunteer fire departments. They do not have the equipment, training or money to handle such spills. Looking through the act, we know that the government, neither the previous one nor this one, has not really taken on aggressively what is in the new age of shipping of increased traffic and diversity of goods and also the increased complexity of materials that are actually being transported.

We hear from my colleagues of the work being done in the United States to prevent the bad combination when the stars line up in the wrong way to have a material passing through either a sensitive environment or ecosystem or through a community. My first question to the member is, is not such a powerful review required?

My second question is around the agency and appointment process. I know there have been some bad legacies in the previous government's appointment process of not always being able to distinguish talent from partisanship. I wonder what confidences he has with respect to the new government's ability to make that important distinction and actually appoint people to this vital committee who are known and based on transparency, which is not written into the act as it is right now.

• (1625)

Mr. John Maloney: Mr. Speaker, transparency in appointments is always a very good thing. I cannot really respond to that because the new government has been very derelict in making its appointments. There are many vacancies on many commissions, judicial vacancies as well, and it is difficult to comment because the government has to move very quickly to fill some of these positions.

With respect to my colleague's first question, certainly the transportation of dangerous goods is a matter of real concern. In fact, I attended a training exercise with volunteer firemen in my region along with the former member for Churchill who was present from his party. They were concerned as well about what was travelling through their region, especially if there was a wreck. They were concerned about how quickly they could find out what exactly was in a tanker that was leaking some kind of substance.

I think there should be a better tracking system and there should certainly be one for rail lines that go across our borders. The rail lines in my region cross a major river and if there was a derailment or the possibility of an explosion, it would create a tremendous problem not only from an environmental perspective such as water

pollution, but a main arterial route leading to the United States would be affected.

I would encourage and support more stringent requirements to deal with goods which are potentially explosive, noxious, et cetera. I welcome the member's comments. I feel the same way.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too have some concerns about the transparency that weeds its way or not through this bill.

It is interesting that my colleague mentioned, just in passing, our record of appointments. I am particularly proud, for example, of the fact that our government fought for the appointment of Stephen Lewis, a very well known former leader of the NDP, as Under-Secretary-General at the United Nations. I am even more proud of our appointment of Ed Broadbent for seven years as the President and Chief Executive Officer of Rights and Democracy in Montreal. I do not exactly share my colleague's interpretation of our appointments record.

I want to come back to a question that was raised by the member for Welland which dealt with the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner. If I am paraphrasing right, the member said there are a number of average citizens who fly from time to time. They are not regular commuters and they do not use airports like bus stations like many of us in the House who travel regularly.

I want to come back to what was said by Bruce Hood who was the first actual Commissioner of the Air Travel Complaints Office and a former NHL hockey referee. He expressed his concern that the proposed elimination of the position of the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner would make it increasingly difficult for Canadians to resolve problems with airlines.

I am a little concerned about this and I would like to put it to the member for Welland to see what his instinct is in this regard as we look to transfer the commissioner from an independent status into the Canadian Transportation Agency.

Mr. John Maloney: Mr. Speaker, certainly, with any complaints system a prompt response for the little guy, the Canadian, against the big airline industry may get lost in the shuffle when the government gets involved. An independent complaints commission will cut through that and it will be much better for constituents in our respective ridings and for Canadians. Canadians will have a quick, independent option to complain to and get a quick response.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question to the member for Welland will be in regard to the history of this bill and its former incarnations.

Although Northern Ontario is very remote and very rural, it suffers many of the issues that he brought up. During my municipal government days we suffered through a lot of these same issues. Citizens need to be listened to.

I think he mentioned in his speech that this bill began in the House in February 2003. I want to know how inclusive the debate was at that time. I would also like to know how inclusive the search was from other communities, both rural and urban all across Canada. Could the member give me a bit of the history on how we developed this position?

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•(1630)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It will have to be a short history. The hon. member for Welland has 40 seconds.

Mr. John Maloney: Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is the third attempt at getting this through. Certainly, when legislation is cut off because of an intervening election or dissolution of Parliament, a full and complete review of the act is not possible. We will hopefully be able to do that this time and that would be very beneficial.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): 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 Victoria, Education; the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, Marine Industry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Bill C-11, introduced by my hon. colleague, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

This bill would update the Canada Transportation Act of 1996. It is the result of extensive consultations and its basic purpose is to improve the act by enhancing transportation safety and transparency, by reducing inconveniences to users—in terms of noise as we saw earlier—and by protecting the consumer, who uses the modes of transportation.

Today my presentation will focus more on air transportation. There are businesses in Lévis—Bellechasse that regularly ship products manufactured in the area.

There are amendments that would protect the rights and entitlements of the air travelling public by ensuring that air carriers will always represent their products in an open and transparent manner. This afternoon we saw that sometimes there are hidden costs. Air carriers are currently being more transparent on a voluntary basis. The industry is taking steps in the right direction, but this government must not derogate its responsibility to the air travelling public. It therefore proposes to amend the act, to permit its administrator, the Canadian Transportation Agency, to develop, implement and enforce regulations on the recommendation of the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, if necessary, to ensure transparency in the pricing of passenger air services.

The amendments in the bill would make clear the government's expectations with regard to the air carrier industry. These amendments would be in keeping with initiatives in the U.S. and Europe that are also designed with transparency in mind.

The proposed approach is also consistent with the broader strategic thrust of this government to legislate only when necessary and to make carriers accountable.

The amendments would also require all operators providing commercial air services in Canada to prominently display their terms of carriage at their business offices and on any Internet site from which they sell these air services. Many travellers buy their tickets on the Internet. It is important to ensure that when a price is posted, it is in fact the price the traveller will pay. That is how this will work.

There is another addition.

[*English*]

There are amendments that would make clear that Canada is wholly committed to all of its trading relationships in international air services. The amendments would ensure that an international agreement or convention respecting air services would have prevalence over the Competition Act in the event of an inconsistency or conflict between the two. Canada is a trading nation and so the government believes it is imperative that Canada's partners can rely on their air transport trading relationships with us. These amendments would send that signal.

•(1635)

[*Translation*]

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, there are amendments that would ensure that air services provided on behalf of the Canadian Armed Forces or in the case of a declared emergency are not subject to part II of the Act. Part II of the Act provides the framework for commercial air services. Military aircraft are sometimes used in humanitarian missions and, consequently, should be exempt in such cases.

It is only sensible to distinguish that air services provided for our nation's armed forces, or in the case of a declared emergency, are not regular nor for-profit occurrences. Therefore the provision of these types of air services should not be covered by the act. In that sense these amendments would bring clarity to such situations, and should be considered housekeeping measures that ensure the continued relevance of this act.

We are proposing these amendments because they would ensure a higher degree of transparency and consumer recourse, as well as bring clarity to its application. Also they make the complaints process simpler and more efficient by integrating it into the Canadian Transportation Agency's permanent functions. In this way, the amendments to the air transportation provisions in the act contribute to building a modern, efficient transportation system, which is integral to the well-being of Canada's economy.

At the same time, the amendments would continue to allow air carriers to develop and grow based on the merits of the choices they make in the course of doing business.

In conclusion, the proposed amendments reflect this government's commitment to a competitive air transportation system; one that balances the need to update statutory and regulatory instruments, where necessary, to respond to developments in the air industry marketplace, with the responsibility to ensure that consumers are aware of their rights and entitlements.

A vote was taken in this House today on softwood lumber. Our government is taking action. I believe that Canadian taxpayers, our constituents and parliamentarians want a government that works and that is up to the challenge. This bill will improve the Canada Transportation Act and give results.

Parliamentarians are asked to take concrete action. People expect parliamentarians to be up to the challenge and want them to ensure that our government functions as efficiently as possible with the utmost respect for democracy.

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This government believes that these amendments to the Canada Transportation Act are warranted, will give the Canadian Transportation Agency the ability to continue to serve the air travelling public, and will ensure that Canada continues to have a viable and competitive air services industry in the years to come.

My speech focused mainly on air transportation, but there are many aspects to this bill. It aims to solve the problem of noise pollution caused by rail, and proposes measures to improve safety and to protect consumers who travel by plane.

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Parkdale—High Park is an urban riding, two sides of which are bounded by rail lines, both CN and CP. Where those lines cross it is called a junction, and that is where my office is located. It is a historic area that has been a hub of railway transportation.

In the junction and many other parts of my riding, because of growing deindustrialization in our community we are seeing a greater density of residential development, and we are finding more and more homes right up near railway lines. Of course we are hearing more and more complaints about noise and concerns about railway safety.

My question to the hon. member is twofold. Given the large population of Canada, more than 32 million citizens, 110,000 persons in my riding alone, how will the noise and safety complaints process work so that these five individuals will be able to hear complaints from throughout the Canadian population? How will it work so that it is not cumbersome and is not a bottleneck?

Second, with only five members, what kind of representation will there be on the panel? Will there be citizen representatives? Will there be a balance from different communities? Who does the member envisage being appointed to the committee?

• (1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

In fact, my colleague has raised the case of a real and current situation in this country. Essentially, two situations have arisen. Urban development has indeed occurred near railway stations and rail lines, but also near switching yards. This has created a cohabitation problem, to start with, a cohabitation problem that has been exacerbated by a kind of rationalization in railway operations, and in particular the privatization of railway companies. There has been a real and significant conflict between these uses, which continues today and which this bill is intended to resolve.

The answer I might give my colleague is that in its present form, the bill does in fact try to provide some tools for people who have complaints arising from the fact that a lot of noise is being caused. They can complain to the Transportation Agency. I can tell you that in the riding next to mine, in Charny, people are very concerned about noise, since, as was just being said, noise creates major problems for people who live around the station.

So the proposed amendments to the act will authorize the Canadian Transportation Agency to deal with noise complaints and,

when necessary, to order the railway companies to make changes to reduce unreasonable noise resulting from the construction or operation of a railway or a switching yard.

Before taking action, the agency will have to ascertain that the parties are unable to reach agreement. That is what the bill says at present. I hope that, with the consent of the members of this House, it will be able to go to committee where it can be examined clause by clause.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question for the member for Lévis—Bellechasse will be simple. He talks to us about his good government. I have a question for him about Bill C-44.

The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities told us today that what was proposed in Bill C-44 has been incorporated virtually word for word. So why does this Bill C-11 not contain the VIA Rail component that was in Bill C-44 and that was the gateway to developing high-speed train service from Quebec City to Montreal and Montreal to Windsor?

I would like the member to explain why his good government, once again, has decided to disregard Quebec's interests, not to discuss them, not to include in this bill what VIA Rail was asking for—to become a real company that could bring about real development. I would like the member to explain this for me.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

First, with respect to the premise of his question, I should perhaps remind him that in fact railway transportation is one of the most ecological modes of transportation there is, and that it is entirely in our interest to make it part of a sustainable development policy. That being said, the objective of the bill before us today is to improve the existing bill, on which consultations have already been held.

Now I think that there are some very commendable projects, like the one mentioned by my colleague. I hope that one day we will have a high-speed train running through Quebec and the provinces of Canada and that it will help to strengthen the Canadian federation.

• (1645)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to address a question to my colleague that deals with precisely the same subject raised by our colleague from the Bloc Québécois, to which he has given an answer. It concerns the whole issue of sustainable development.

We on this side of the House have read the bill several times. There is no reference to sustainable development. There is no mention of “greenhouse gases”. This minority government is apparently in the process of proposing a new environmental strategy for our country. There is no reference to that strategy in the bill. At the same time, the Minister of Natural Resources has advised the employees of his department to stop using the expression “sustainable development,” and in place of that term, to begin using the expression “responsible development.”

Government Orders

Could the member simply clarify the situation a little? Does this bill seek to protect the environment, yes or no? He has just said in the House that a railway system contributes enormously to the reduction of greenhouse gases. On this side of the House, it is very difficult to reconcile that with what is going on.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

In fact, the underlying objective of the bill is sustainable development, it seeks to rationalize the regulation and thereby facilitate the expansion of the railway industry, and also to promote the creation of short-distance railways.

We know that rising fuel costs are prompting carriers to look to other modes than road transport, for example, to move their goods. That, indeed, is one of the objectives of the bill.

I would also remind my colleague that one of the benefits of our government's approach to this bill, and also in a more general way, is not to introduce bills that are loaded with so many elements that they become difficult to adopt because of their complexity. We have before us a relatively simple bill, containing a series of measures designed to improve transportation safety. For that reason, I hope the bill will go forward and receive the support of all members present today.

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to take part in the debate on Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

First of all, I want to tell you how disappointed I am concerning the length of time the Parliament of Canada has taken to bring this bill to fruition. We should recall that earlier versions of this bill have already been presented twice, in the form of Bills C-26 and C-44, introduced on February 25, 2003, and March 24, 2005 respectively. However, the adoption of this bill is of major importance for the people of Quebec and for all of Canada.

This delay reminds me of the saga surrounding repairs to the Quebec bridge. Remember the Conservatives' election promises from last winter. Then they were promising to settle this issue as quickly as possible.

During the last election campaign, the Conservatives enjoyed repeating that the Bloc Québécois could not solve this problem, being an opposition party. The Conservatives boasted that they could finally provide a solution to something the Liberals had been unable to do anything about.

It was not until the company partially mandated to repair the bridge decided to dismantle the scaffolding that the Conservative government woke up.

A government source said that an additional \$69 million to \$76 million would be needed to complete the work.

The headline in the July 19 issue of the daily newspaper *Le Soleil* read: "New hope for the Quebec bridge." There actually were discussions among spokespersons from Ottawa, Quebec City, Canadian National and the owner of the bridge on July 18. No timetable, however, was put forward and the people in Quebec City are still waiting, and waiting.

It is like this bill that is supposed to amend the Canada Transportation Act. Lots of people have been waiting for it to be adopted for a long time, but it has not yet come to fruition and this may prove to be catastrophic for urban transit, as we will see later.

To begin with, I would like to underscore an amendment that I deem to be important and that was added to the bill's declaration of principle.

For the first time, respect for the environment is being added to the various obligations of transportation systems. In committee we will see what provisions may be added so that this obligation is really enforced and complies with the Kyoto protocol.

I will give the example of the locomotives. The rate at which the old locomotives are renewed has to be speeded up, since only 29% of all diesel locomotives comply with environmental standards.

Furthermore, we must encourage the use of the Green Goat switchers, a hybrid diesel-electric system tested in 2004. It seems that this hybrid switcher reduces fuel consumption by 60%. These are but a few examples.

There are three measures among the legislative provisions proposed in this bill that particularly attract our attention. They deal with air and rail sectors and concern airline advertising, noise relating to rail operations, and the abandonment of rail lines.

I feel that consumer protection is absolutely vital, and that increasing open competition must not in any way penalize the consumer, who is entitled to greater transparency.

In this connection, Bill C-11 will amend the Transportation Act in relation to complaints processes, the advertising of prices for air services and the disclosure of terms and conditions of carriage. These new measures will provide for greater control over the sale of airline tickets, among other things by giving the agency jurisdiction over ticket sales advertising.

Licenses must in future display, in a prominent place, the rates for the service offered, including the terms and conditions of carriage. This new condition also applies to services offered on the Internet.

So the terms and conditions of carriage must be made accessible.

The Canadian Transportation Agency will have a new regulatory power allowing it to require, through regulations, that the advertised price of air services indicate the fees, charges and taxes collected on behalf of another person, enabling the consumer to readily determine the cost of the service.

• (1650)

Although it is a step in the right direction, we must ensure that the Transportation Agency exercises this power in a rigorous, proactive way and in the best interests of consumers. Consumer associations have been requesting far more transparent pricing for a very long time.

Government Orders

These new measures to improve transparency will benefit both consumers and the airlines, which will be able to engage in healthier competition.

I would like to raise one point. That is the abolition by the former finance minister of the position of Air Travel Complaints Commissioner in the 2005 budget. The previous government announced at the time that the Canadian Transportation Agency would henceforth assume responsibility for the complaints program.

Bill C-11, as proposed by the Conservatives, no longer provides for the position of Complaints Commissioner and includes this function in the ordinary operations of the Transportation Agency.

We take a positive view of the fact that the Transportation Agency can henceforth order carriers to compensate people for damages caused by a failure to comply with the conditions of carriage. This is a step forward because the previous Complaints Commissioner could only make suggestions.

There are some shortcomings, however. For example, the Transportation Agency no longer has to submit an annual report on the complaints and how they were settled. This report would point the finger at the guilty parties and their failings.

The commissioner was also able under the complaints process to demand a lot of information from carriers, something that the Transportation Agency cannot do. The Bloc Québécois deplors this weakening of the role of the Transportation Agency, which loses its ability to investigate and some of its visibility.

We certainly cannot forget the Jetsgo saga, when hundreds of travellers suffered damages when this airline abruptly ceased operations at the height of the holiday travel season. This must never happen again. The Bloc Québécois severely criticized it at the time.

It is clear that, in the Bloc's view, the government must assume its responsibilities. In particular, it could help set up a compensation fund which would ensure that tickets are reimbursed when consumers buy them directly from carriers, as happens increasingly often.

Therefore, this bill can be improved considerably in a number of ways.

Besides the legislative changes in connection with air transportation, another very important aspect of Bill C-11 concerns rail transport.

The legislation would amend part III of the Canada Transportation Act by creating a mechanism for dealing with complaints concerning noise and by amending the provisions for dealing with the transfer and discontinuance of operation of railway lines.

For some years now, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for legislative changes to deal with the serious noise problems faced by many communities. I am referring to the harmful effects of noise resulting from the construction or operation of railways, and the movement of cars in marshalling yards in particular.

In recent years, the public and the railways have often been at loggerheads. The public bothered by noise has no recourse but to

complain directly to the railway concerned or to initiate civil proceedings. No federal agency currently has the authority to intervene in such instances.

Hence the importance of legislating in this regard, so that the railway companies feel some pressure and take the initiative to limit the disturbances caused by railway construction or operation.

These legislative changes are a step in the right direction, but I have some amendments to propose. I will try to ensure that the agency's jurisdiction will not be just over noise, but also over emissions or vibrations from rail cars. In this Kyoto protocol era, environmental issues are extremely important.

I realize that rail transport is an excellent alternative to road transport and is key to economic development in Quebec.

● (1655)

However, there must be a balance between such economic objectives and the environment, particularly in terms of respecting the public's quality of life and well-being.

The powers granted to the Canadian Transportation Agency are in no way prejudicial to the railway companies, particularly since the agency will now have the power to issue and publish guidelines, after consulting with interested parties, and to propose a mechanism for the collaborative resolution of noise complaints. Consequently, each party will know the other's limits. The purpose of this is to resolve such conflicts peacefully and without delay.

I am pleased to see that urban transit authorities will now be recognized. A section has been added under which a railway company wishing to sell a railway line shall first offer it to the federal government, the provincial government and the urban transit authorities concerned.

These new provisions are desirable and will provide better protection for the unique transportation network provided by urban railway corridors. I have always considered rail transport to be an excellent alternative to road transport. Such measures, therefore, should be encouraged.

I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation that this bill has been floating about these halls since the 37th Parliament. Not passing it could have irreparable consequences. If things continue as they are, the survival of agencies such as the Agence métropolitaine de transport, which serves greater Montreal, will be threatened. The new act gives them an arbitrator, the Canadian Transportation Agency. They will also benefit from new regulations that will let them negotiate on a more equal footing with bigger players such as CN and CP, which often behave like monopolies in the face of these agencies. The survival of these agencies is important in the context of the Kyoto protocol, and that is why I sincerely hope this bill will finally be passed.

We support this bill in principle, and we will try to improve it by making amendments in the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Government Orders

•(1700)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Alfred-Pellan for his wonderful address. I have had the opportunity to sit with the hon. member on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. My question for my colleague is simple.

Several members from the Conservative government tell us today that considerable consultation took place and that the proposed bill is a result of that consultation. It is true that considerable consultation took place for Bill C-44, but not for Bill C-11, since consultations are about to begin for this new bill.

In Bill C-44, there was an entire chapter on VIA Rail. I would like my colleague from Alfred-Pellan to describe his experiences in committee during the last Parliament. In fact, Conservative members exerted tremendous pressure to ensure that everything to do with VIA Rail never come to fruition. All of the Conservatives were against developing VIA Rail. This clearly affects Quebec directly, given the rapid rail project for the Quebec City-Windsor corridor.

I would like my colleague from Alfred-Pellan to explain the situation in relation to Bill C-44 from the previous session.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel for his question.

Indeed, Bill C-44 contained a whole chapter on VIA Rail, to facilitate better performance and ensure improved service everywhere. However, as you know, the bill did not reach the second reading stage during the last session, and all of the thoughtful work and careful study of the bill led nowhere.

We regret that this is still not the case, despite the fact that certain elements of Bill C-11 are important and should be passed. Nevertheless, I share the hon. member's concerns regarding the fact that important aspects of Bills C-26 and C-44 are still missing.

In the meantime, the development of our rail system has suffered and been put in danger because more significant decisions and bills are not being adopted to develop this transportation system.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech. Although we support Bill C-11, some elements missing from this bill would be of greater help to our fellow citizens in coping with the overpopulation of the train, which is actually an important ecological means of preventing greenhouse gases. Our fellow citizens often complain about vibrations and blocked intersections. But we do not find these elements in the bill, elements that could have been included.

I would like my colleague to tell me why, in his opinion, this bill did not include these elements, which are of major importance.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the member for Berthier—Maskinongé. Indeed, various points pertaining to the issue of environmental damage and the nuisance of vibration—especially in railway yards—are not dealt with in the bill. All the thoughts expressed today will contribute to the committee's review, during which certain amendments can be added to the bill so as to improve it.

The issue of noise addressed by the current bill is only one of the irritants of rail transportation. By eliminating these irritants, the railway system will be more attractive for all our travel. We spoke earlier about safety, which has not been dealt with in the bill, despite the title it has been given. We have often mentioned the derailments, which have occurred repeatedly, but it has not been addressed. Perhaps we will add these elements in committee with a view to improving this bill.

•(1705)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am lucky enough to ask another question of my colleague from Alfred-Pellan, who is entirely right. I would like my colleague to explain to us how the procedures work in committee. Once we have decided to send this bill to committee, the committee can make amendments and improvements, which have to come back to the House and be approved by all the political parties.

I would like him to explain to what extent Quebecers are in good hands, since the Bloc Québécois will be able to make proposals to the committee for amendments.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Mr. Speaker, while I do not have long experience with the work of Parliament, I can nonetheless say that the Bloc Québécois makes a point of inviting comments from the people who are most directly affected by a bill and who are of the opinion that it is flawed. We therefore have the privilege, and the advantage, of hearing directly from the people we invite to our working session, who include representatives of the government and all the opposition parties, to provide us with the information we need for considering the bill. Never imagine that a bill introduced by a government is complete in itself and that all possible stakeholders have been consulted.

We will make a point of inviting the Agence métropolitaine de transport, which has told us about the difficulties it is currently having in developing its commuter train service in the greater Montreal region. Montreal is one of the important regions of Quebec when it comes to transportation. There is always talk of adding more highways and bridges in that region, despite the fact that there are rail lines lying unused because of the lack of coordination and cooperation between the railway companies. Those companies sit on their monopolies and their vested rights and refuse to give the commuter trains that could serve a larger population free rein to expand. We will have the opportunity to hear these people at the committee and they may have important things for us to add to the bill.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would also congratulate the member for Alfred-Pellan on his speech. He spoke earlier about vibrations and the obstruction of municipal access roads. I thought I understood him to say, however, that he is particularly concerned about marshalling yards and all the activity that they generate.

Government Orders

My colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé asked a question about the obstruction of access roads. I offer the example of my constituency, Chambly—Borduas. Trains, rail lines, go through 10 of the 12 towns that make up that constituency, and one of them, Saint-Basile-le-Grand, has two access roads. Sometimes a train stops at the municipal access roads for a long time. We had one occasion when a train stopped for an hour and a half. If there were an emergency in the municipality, or for some other reason, this would create a major problem. And yet the act already contained monitoring provisions. I would like to know whether the committee has studied this aspect.

As well, is this in fact fuelling debate in order to get the bill amended? As my colleague said earlier, this bill makes no provision in that regard.

• (1710)

Mr. Robert Carrier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Chambly—Borduas.

Indeed, the issue of blocked entrances and main thoroughfares in municipalities has yet to be addressed at committee. What makes the committee's work following second reading of the bill interesting is that stakeholders might be called in by the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas or members representing other ridings. This would help generate additional questions which could very well bring about changes to the bill.

I therefore encourage my hon. colleague to identify stakeholders who could meet with us to discuss this issue, even though the bill as it stands, which assigns many responsibilities to the Canada Transportation Agency, could give it the authority to hear any complaint dealing with transportation in general, which is not the case at present.

The legislation does provide, however, that a consultative body may hear all these complaints to arrange for the mediation provided for in the bill. Still, nothing prevents us from identifying the main issues in order to ensure that they will be adequately addressed in one clause or another; otherwise, amendments will be in order.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak today on the important changes to the Canada Transportation Act in Bill C-11, changes that will help improve the environment for passenger rail services, preserve valuable rail infrastructure in urban areas, and make communities served by railways more livable.

I would like to begin by speaking briefly on the history of CN Rail and the important role it has played in the lives of Canadians for nearly a century. The Canadian National Railway has mirrored the history of Canada for more than eight decades. The company's roots lie in the turmoil and disillusionment that accompanied World War I. In the 1920s and 1930s, CN's fortunes reflected the peaks and valleys of the Canadian economy. During World War II, CN, like Canadians themselves, met challenges that could not have been predicted even a few years earlier.

In the decades after the war, Canada became a supplier of resources to the world, resources such as lumber, which we dealt with earlier today, grain, sulphur, potash and petroleum products,

and CN carried them. In the 1990s, when the North American economy became more integrated, CN followed suit as it expanded its U.S. presence and took a north-south orientation.

Because CN was for more than 70 years a government owned railroad, it had a social role in the life of the country as well as an economic one. This role is exemplified by narrow gauge freight and passenger services across Newfoundland, by mixed trains on low density branch lines, and by passenger cars used for schooling and medical services in remote parts of Ontario and Quebec.

There is no doubt that CN and the railways of Canada represent an integral and important part of our history as Canadians. Bill C-11 recognizes the great importance of our railways and focuses on achieving a balance between the modern interests of communities, consumers, commuters and urban transit authorities with those of today's railway carriers.

I would like to highlight the bill's proposed changes in the railway aspects of the bill. The proposed changes to the Canada Transportation Act will help ensure that our railways remain innovative, strong and healthy in the 21st century.

The bill looks at existing policy and regulations from an urban quality of life perspective to see if we can make them work better on behalf of our cities and our communities. At a time when Canadians are increasingly concerned about rising energy prices, particularly prices paid at the gasoline pumps, I am very pleased to be able to say that the proposed amendments will contribute to the well-being of urban transit services as well as intercity passenger rail services like GO Transit and VIA Rail.

Through a number of amendments to the CTA, the government is introducing several measures that will benefit the passenger rail services that are critical for the movement of the growing number of commuters in my community and throughout the GTA with and between our largest urban centres. For example, on the average workday in Burlington alone, between 70 and 80 passenger trains pass through Burlington's three GO stations and one CN station. Nearly 90% of all trains that pass through Burlington carry passengers.

The government recognizes the benefits of providing publicly funded passenger rail services such as those operated by VIA Rail across Canada, the Metro in Montreal, the O-Train here in Ottawa and the GO Train in Burlington through to Toronto and the east side of Toronto.

The government also recognizes that because these services are essentially government mandated, the operating entities may encounter difficulties in negotiating on even terms with the host railways over those infrastructures they operate. To this end, the amendments to the CTA will include new dispute resolution provisions clearly aimed at public passenger services.

Government Orders

Currently, the only recourse available to the CTA for public passenger providers for resolving rate and service disputes with the railways is final offer arbitration. The new provision would replace the existing final offer arbitration provision that became available to commuter and other publicly funded passenger rail operators in 1996. However, passenger rail that is not publicly funded would continue to have no recourse in the final offer arbitration system.

• (1715)

The new recourse will improve access to rail infrastructure for public passenger services, under commercially reasonable terms. The government strongly encourages VIA Rail and commuter rail authorities to conclude commercial agreements with infrastructure owners. However, when commercial negotiations are unsuccessful, which does happen on occasion, these public passenger service providers will be able to seek adjudication from the Canadian Transportation Agency on terms and conditions of operation on federal rail lines, including fees and services charged by that host railway.

Further, since the contracts are entered into by public bodies, in the interest of greater transparency, the amendments of the CTA will require that such agreements are made public for the first time. As such, any future contracts between public passenger service providers and federally regulated railways will be made public. Existing amendments will also be made public unless one of the parties can demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the agency, that the contract contains commercially sensitive information and that it would be harmed by its release.

The government also recognizes that preserving surplus rail corridors for subsequent use by urban transit is of growing interest in large urban centres, including my own centre of Burlington. Often these corridors represent the only land available for transportation uses.

Presently a railway can discontinue operations on a surplus rail line only after it has followed the notification and advertisement steps prescribed in the CTA. The objective of these provisions is to promote the takeover of lines of new owners or operators in place of service abandonment.

When a railway is no longer required for freight service, it must first be offered for continued railway operations, then must be offered to federal, provincial and municipal governments for a price that is no greater than the net salvage value. This approach to corridor evaluation will be retained.

However, under the current transfer and discontinuance provisions of the CTA, urban transit authorities, which in some urban areas serve several municipalities, including mine, have no right to receive such offers from railways. In the interest of protecting valuable corridors that may be required for urban transit, the CTA will be amended to require an offer of sale to urban transit authorities before municipal governments.

Also, the current provisions do not apply to railway spurs and sidings, some of which could sufficiently serve the needs of commuter rail services. Nor do the present provisions apply to passenger railway stations. The amendments would require the railways to offer these segments in urban areas and passenger

railway stations to governments and urban transit authorities, not for more than the net salvage value, before removing them from service.

As I noted earlier, the CTA currently requires that no interest has been expressed in the purchase of a line for continued rail operation. A railway company must offer to transfer the line to governments for not more than its salvage value. A government interested in purchasing the line must advise the railway company in writing that it accepts the offer. If the government and the railway company cannot agree on the net salvage value of the line, either party can apply to the agency for a determination of such value. In other words, the government is required to accept and bind itself to the purchase offer without knowing the purchase price.

The proposed amendments to these provisions in the bill will improve the notification processes to governments, urban transit authorities and agencies at certain stages of transfer and discontinuance of the process. As well, the amendments will allow a government of an urban transit authority to seek a determination of the net salvage value from an agency when it receives an offer from a railway and before it binds itself to an offer of purchase. Again, this is transparency. This will provide a government and an urban transit authority the necessary information to decide whether it is the right business decision, whether they want to purchase the line or not.

• (1720)

This is one area that is important to me in this bill and important to my area of Burlington and Halton and of the urban transit issues that we face every day.

Another area in the bill that is very important to me, and I have been dealing with on an ongoing basis, particularly this summer, is noise, and noise is addressed for the very first time in the act.

At the outset, I noted these amendments would introduce measures that would make communities such as mine served by railways more livable.

Over the past several years, some members of the House have heard community concerns, and I have heard that from a number of speeches here today, about railway noise and the Federal Court of Appeal decision of December 2000, which ruled that the agency had no jurisdiction to entertain complaints relating to noise from the operating of federally regulated railways, and that is about to change in the act.

Government Orders

A large number of Canadian communities are home to railway operations and disputes can arise from railway noise between residents and communities and railway companies. While citizens adversely affected by noise from railway operations can make a formal complaint to the company through a 1-800 number, which I have received and passed out many times, or seek civil action through the courts, no federal body is mandated to regulate railway noise.

Proposed changes to the bill authorize the Canadian Transportation Agency to review noise complaints for the very first time and, if required, order railway companies to make changes to reduce reasonable noise when constructing or operating railway and railway yards. The agency must be satisfied that the parties were unable to reach a settlement voluntarily of the dispute on their own, which of course is the preference of everyone.

The Railway Association and the CPR have established voluntary mechanisms with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to address noise and other complaints stemming from the proximity to railway operations.

The government applauds and encourages this voluntary approach for resolving these often contentious matters, which I have had this summer in my riding.

However, the government also wants to ensure the agency, and I support this, has the authority to resolve noise complaints if a voluntary settlement is not achievable. The agency is well-positioned to strike a balance between operational needs of the railway, with which I think we all agree, and the expectation of communities and those who live beside the railways not to be subjected to unnecessary and unavoidable inconvenience.

The amendments would require railways not to cause unreasonable noise when constructing and operating a railway, taking into consideration the requirements of operation, services and interests of affected communities.

I want to pause for a moment and talk about a specific example in my riding. GO Transit is adding a whole new line, a new track through my riding of Burlington to Toronto, to provide us with ongoing, everyday, all-day GO Train service. As a GO Train user this summer and over a number of years my wife has used GO Train to Toronto on a daily basis when she works in downtown Toronto, it is a very important thing. The people who live in Burlington understand the need for an expanded GO Train service to Burlington, but do they need to have the railway constructed in the middle of the night with no notice? That is what has happened over the summer.

This past week I had the fortunate opportunity to meet with railway officials, their communications people, their construction people. They freely admit that there are no rules and regulations, that they are basically able to do whatever they want, whenever they want, and that is the way the law is.

The new changes that we are proposing in this bill do make changes on the noise side to give us some authority to ensure that, at the bare minimum, the people who are affected on a daily basis due to the changes, the growth in railway, get an opportunity to comment on it. Whether they get to stop it is a different story, but at least they have the knowledge, they have the right to know what is happening

in their backyard. I am looking forward to seeing the bill pass so we can start working on those issues.

The agency has been given the statutory power to provide guidelines for what it will consider in deciding on noise complaints, elaborate measures on the noise resolution and require complaints to demonstrate that all voluntary measures are exhausted.

● (1725)

We first want to ensure that the citizens and the railway contact and communicate with each other to ensure they cannot find a solution on their own. They will investigate noise complaints and order railways to take appropriate action to prevent unreasonable noise, taking into consideration the requirements of railway operation and the interests of affected communities.

The amendments I have outlined today go a long way in improving passenger rail service across the country, preserving valuable railway infrastructure in urban areas such as mine and reducing railway noise and complaints in ridings such as Burlington.

Ultimately these measures will reduce congestion in our urban areas and make our transportation system more environmentally sustainable. Not only are we adding railway lines in our area, but the tax incentive for people to get out of their cars, to use GO Transit and to take the mass transit system to Toronto has been a tremendous support to Burlington and to the people of my riding.

We want to improve the quality of life of those who have to live beside the railway lines. They understand that they are there for a reason, that they do have a good public role. However, they also need to be dealt with respectfully and in a reasonable manner. The changes to the CTA will make that happen.

I have been listening very actively today. All parties seem to indicate that they are willing to send this to committee, which is what I would like to see done, where it will be reviewed and some changes may or may not be made. It has had significant consultation. Our friends from the official opposition have said a number of times today that the bill has come to us a couple of times in different formats.

Let us get on with it. Let us get it passed. Let us get it to the transportation committee. If there are any amendments, let us hear them and deal with them appropriately. Let us start helping those people in the urban areas who are affected by transit needs on an everyday basis.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to come back to a theme that I have raised now on two or possibly three occasions with the government this afternoon as we pursue the debate of Bill C-11.

The minister spoke this morning very clearly and referenced two or three times that the bill would have environmental implications. My colleague highlighted GO Transit and the notion of public transit support in his riding. We even heard that his wife takes the train, which is a good thing.

I want to raise the fact that there seems to be a disconnect here. On the one hand the government is speaking now about a new environmental platform, apparently rejecting 13 years of our work in this field. This is somewhat exaggerated. There is also a tax deductible transit pass, which does not seem to be supported by the economists.

Where does the bill in any way talk about environmental objectives, including greenhouse gases?

• (1730)

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, let me focus on the fact that the transit pass has been a great asset to my community. I have had numerous calls from people thanking us for that opportunity.

The reason that GO Train is adding a line to the west side is because the volume is there and it is increasing. Any additions to make it a more efficient and effective system, including the bill, will make mass transit a more appealing piece for the country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed from June 7 consideration of the motion that Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): On June 7, 2006, during debate on Bill C-293, an act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad, which is standing in the name of the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform raised a point of order to argue that this bill requires a royal recommendation.

The parliamentary secretary began his intervention by pointing out that clause 6 of the bill would oblige the Minister of International Cooperation to establish an advisory committee for international development cooperation with remuneration and expenses for members of the committee to be set by the minister. In arguing that this provision has financial implications, the parliamentary secretary referred to the Speaker's February 8, 2005 ruling where it was stated that a similar provision in a bill was judged to require a royal recommendation.

The parliamentary secretary continued to explain that clauses 7 to 10 of the bill also described functions of this committee and obligations of the minister that entailed new expenditures. He described these functions as receiving, recording and replying to petitions, as well as preparing and submitting reports.

The Chair has reviewed this matter carefully and agrees that the establishment of the advisory committee for international development cooperation provided for in clause 6 clearly would require the

expenditure of public funds in a manner and for a purpose not currently authorized. Similarly, the provisions in clauses 7 to 10, which describe the functions of the advisory committee with regard to the process of petitioning and reporting, are also functions which would require the authorization of spending for a new and distinct purpose.

As such, clause 6 and clauses 7 to 10 cause the bill as a whole in its current form to require a royal recommendation. Accordingly, I will decline to put the question on third reading of this bill unless a royal recommendation is received. Today, however, the debate is on the motion for second reading which will proceed as scheduled.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You had indicated that unless a royal recommendation was forthcoming by the end of third reading the question would not be put. Is it also the case, maybe for the clarification of the House, that should the bill be remedied either at committee stage or at report stage with regard to the items raised that in fact it would go forward at third reading for a vote?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): If the bill is remedied in committee to deal with the problems that were raised in the points of order and subsequently in the ruling in such a fashion that it did not require a royal recommendation, that of course would impact this ruling. As it is right now, it will not be put at third reading. These changes could happen in committee, but right now we will deal with second reading. As the bill stands now, the question will not be put at third reading.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was certainly one of the concerns that our parliamentary secretary brought out at first reading. We appreciate the ruling on that.

I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-293. I also want to thank the member for Scarborough—Guildwood for introducing a bill, flawed as it may be, to create legislation for Canadian development assistance. Indeed, the bill introduces proposals that are very close to some of the issues that have been raised by the government.

Development is a moving target. Today, more than ever before, we have a better grasp of what works. As an individual country and with the international community, we have embarked on a complex journey that is leading to more effective aid, aid that can better harness the energies and talents of developing countries, and that can truly make a difference in the lives of the poor. There is a vision in Canada for aid programs.

We have a vision of donors and partners working together to achieve the reduction of poverty, of mutual accountability, of trust and respect, and of good governance which makes all of these things possible. However, visions must also be practical if they are going to work. Canadians want us to be certain that this bill in fact actually does guide us to the delivery of that vision.

Private Members' Business

We have already heard in the first hour of debate in the House on the bill that there are many members of Parliament who do not feel that the bill facilitates Canada's vision of our federal government's aid program. I would remind members of the House that the Speech from the Throne stated that the government is committed to "a more effective use of Canadian aid dollars."

The government wants to ensure that we do the right thing with our aid money in putting this vision into practice. We will ensure that aid dollars are provided to the countries that have created a climate in which progress can be achieved. We will ensure that such progress can be achieved as efficiently as possible and that the people who most need the help will receive the assistance they need to find their way out of poverty.

I have yet to be convinced that Bill C-293 will allow us to build a dynamic and effective development assistance program, but we are keeping an open mind and we are anxious to participate in the committee that perhaps will study the bill in the event that it is passed at second reading. We want to ensure, and I know all members of the committee want to ensure, that it gets a fair hearing in committee.

The bill is very complex and seems to contain a number of mixed messages that may not bring precision to Canada's development assistance. If our assistance is going to be effective, our objectives must be simple and clearly defined. Yet, this does not appear to me to be a simple bill.

As I said, in the first hour of debate we heard comments that some are concerned about the possibility of escalating administrative costs as the result of the bill. Development assistance should reach the people for whom it is intended. We need to be careful that Canada's aid dollars, which ultimately are Canadian taxpayers' dollars, are not being tied up in lengthy process or procedures in Ottawa.

The bill's proposed petition system, reporting requirements and advisory committee would add layers of bureaucracy into an already well-developed system. They could, quite conceivably, turn current consultative processes into cumbersome Canada-focused procedures.

The system, as proposed in the bill as I read it, would risk the focus or could risk taking the focus off of the recipient country and put it back onto Canada. I would argue that the recipient nation's particular circumstances, that of poverty or need, should always be the focus in terms of what is needed.

Our new Conservative government has made the enhancement of accountability within government one of our highest priorities. We are committed to strengthening the rules and institutions that ensure transparency and accountability to Canadians.

I am concerned that the bill may bring considerable confusion to those accountability rules and institutions that we have created in government.

•(1735)

I hope that the foreign affairs and international development committee, the committee that will conduct the hearings on this bill if it is passed by the House, will study carefully the roles and responsibilities of the Minister of International Cooperation. In my

view, the minister's extensive roles and responsibilities are worthy of great consideration. I have not seen that reflected in this bill.

The bill adds to the already considerable reporting requirements of the minister and may not help clarify in legislation what she does in practice. We do not want to simply add to her administrative responsibilities without demonstrating real value-added to Canada's aid program.

This bill would give considerable oversight to a committee of unelected individuals who would function on the basis of complaints from aggravated individuals in other countries. I am not sure of the extent that this may be really counter to the letter and the spirit of the democratic process and whether or not this comes close to making the minister responsible or accountable to an advisory committee rather than being accountable to Parliament and ultimately to Canadians.

The bill would require the minister to report on how she has implemented the guidance of this advisory committee rather than how she has implemented the guidance of the will of Parliament. I am not sure Canadians support having our cabinet ministers accountable to authorities outside of the parliamentary precinct and in reality outside of our country.

The bill would remove from Canada the authority to define development assistance and would place it within the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, the OECD, a high level, multilateral organization not based in Canada, not based in Ottawa, but based in Paris.

While Canada values highly the role of the OECD and is an active supporter of greater collaboration between OECD members, it is clear that the current formulation would result in Canada having reduced control over where it targets development assistance.

The last time I checked, Canadians want control over the taxpayer dollars we send around the world as foreign aid. Under this bill Canada's development assistance program would be subject to the rules of an unelected institution. Such a move could potentially restrict both programming and the countries to which development assistance may be given.

For accountability purposes, it is extremely important that Canada be able to choose where its development assistance can be most effectively utilized. Experience has taught us that countries that promote sound governance, democracy and human rights, are more likely to be able to make good use of Canadian aid dollars and that we can make a true difference in those countries.

Canada's aid program has had results by taking this approach. We should be careful about undermining the effectiveness of the aid program that already is working. Someone said that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. I would suggest that there have to be some changes. Our committee is looking at that and has looked at that. We do not want to diminish the effectiveness of our programs.

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CIDA has concentrated on implementing the principles of aid effectiveness in our bilateral operations and has worked effectively with countries that are committed to improving governance and making effective use of resources. With our assistance, countries such as Tanzania and Ghana are beginning to show results. There is more to be done in these countries. There is more to be done in other countries in terms of improving and focusing Canada's aid program.

I welcome the intent and the spirit of this bill. I believe the member, as he puts this forward, will recognize the concerns we have with this bill. If it passes the vote at second reading in the House, the foreign affairs and international development committee will look forward to working on this bill.

• (1740)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In view of the ruling given a few moments ago by your honour concerning the need for a royal recommendation for the bill now under consideration, I want to inform the House and the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood that the government is not prepared to advise Her Excellency to issue a royal recommendation for Bill C-293. I knew the House would want to know this and this is the first opportunity I have had to so inform the House.

• (1745)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I thank the government House leader for clarifying that for the benefit of the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to take part in the debate on Bill C-293, an Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad.

I have a deep interest in international development as the Bloc Québécois' foreign affairs critic for Africa and Latin America.

I can assure the House that the Bloc Québécois takes very much to heart the effects of poverty and misery in the developing countries, especially the sub-Saharan countries.

We are lucky in the West to have been born in rich countries that have the resources to meet our basic needs, such as food, clothing and housing.

Quebec is often cited as a model on the international scene for its health, education and daycare systems, as well as its social safety net in general.

As we speak, a number of human tragedies are playing out in various parts of the world: armed conflicts, natural catastrophes, famines.

The Bloc Québécois has always supported increased international assistance that is fair and effective. Canada has the wherewithal to act and should do so. The Bloc supports Bill C-293 in principle. However, some aspects of it should be studied more extensively in parliamentary committee.

The bill proposes the establishment of a committee of experts in international assistance to be appointed by the minister responsible for this file.

I really wonder. Is it appropriate for members of the House of Commons to be on this committee?

Parliamentarians already have an opportunity to express their views and make their recommendations known in the House as well as in various committees.

Would it not be better for the members of this committee to be experts who are active in the field and can be found by the hundreds in different non-governmental organizations, religious organizations and the private sector that does business in these countries?

I have another question. Should the appointment of these specialists not be subsequent to a study of their candidacy by the members of Parliament and a vote in the House to approve the suggestions of the minister in charge?

If the minister has the ability to appoint the members of the committee, determine their remuneration, and dismiss them any time he likes, who in this House would really believe that these future committee members are impartial?

This is all the more true in view of the fact that some NGOs are very dependent on federal government funding for their work in the field and will feel obliged to keep quiet in order not to displease their funder.

Another question arises as well. Will the moneys allocated to the establishment of this committee be taken from the funds, already too paltry, that we have invested in international assistance?

Let us hope not, since Canada currently is not even able to meet its Millennium Goals commitment to invest 0.7% of its GDP in international assistance by 2015.

That is why this morning, my colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, the Bloc Québécois critic on international assistance, tabled a motion to force the Government of Canada to respect its commitments on this matter.

The motion states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should improve Canada's contribution to international assistance through a commitment firstly to achieving the target of 0.7% of GDP by 2015 by increasing in a stable and predictable manner amounts for government development assistance, and, secondly by enshrining in law that the mandate and purpose of government development assistance is poverty reduction based on the principles of the United Nations Millennium Goals.

Last spring, the Auditor General of Canada criticized the way Canada spends its money on international assistance.

The purpose of Bill C-293 is to enhance transparency in the department, but nothing is proposed for improving the internal management of funding at CIDA.

Perhaps the panel of experts proposed here would not be necessary if CIDA resolved its internal management problems once and for all and if the Government of Canada finally adopted a concrete and effective plan of action for the distribution of its international assistance.

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In my opinion, Bill C-293 raises another problem and that is the way it defines development assistance, limiting it to poverty reduction and sustainable development.

None of the other six targets put forward by the UN in its Millennium Goals has been emphasized in terms of Canada's action for eliminating poverty in world.

• (1750)

It is important to recall these goals, which are all necessary to put an end to poverty in developing countries.

First is the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. We know that more than a billion human beings live on less than one dollar a day and that 800 million of these people do not have enough to eat and cannot function day to day. One quarter of all children under the age of five in developing countries are malnourished. This starvation has long-term consequences, making these children frail and vulnerable to sickness and disease.

Next is the achievement of universal primary education, because 115 million children of school age do not have the opportunity to attend primary school.

In addition, the promotion of gender equality in developing countries is more than necessary. Here are some examples: family violence; crimes of passion; trafficking of women; female circumcision; early and forced marriage; elimination of young girls through infanticide; violence related to dowry; acid throwing; and violence related to sexual exploitation. Such is the daily lot of millions of women in the world.

In terms of the infant mortality rate, the United Nations calculates that more than 11 million children die every year in the world. Those 11 million victims equal the entire population of Ontario.

Thirty thousand children die every day from causes directly related to poverty. The loss of those 30,000 children is the equivalent of the city of Alma disappearing on a Monday, and the city of Mirabel vanishing on Tuesday, and the population of Val-d'Or wiped out on Wednesday. In other words, there are far too many victims.

There is an enormous amount of work to be done in order to improve the health of mothers in poor countries. Mothers are generally the last line of protection for children of these countries in the face of poverty. The death of mothers during pregnancy, delivery or soon after the birth of a child leaves infants in a very fragile state in the face of extreme poverty or exploitation.

HIV-AIDS is also a fierce adversary to the advancement of women in Africa. More than 60% of the people infected are women and that has countless repercussions, in particular, reduced education of children, a decrease in per capita GDP, and more food crises, because women are at the heart of the agriculture industry in those countries.

I must also mention the struggle to eradicate such diseases as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV-AIDS, which is the main cause of early death in sub-Saharan Africa, and the fourth leading cause in the world.

As for promoting environmental sustainability, Canada is truly pathetic right now thanks to Conservative inaction. Canada's

withdrawal from Kyoto reveals the Minister of the Environment's lack of awareness and vision. Two weeks ago, she decided not to act on Canada's commitment to poorer countries to help them reduce their greenhouse gases. This proves that this government does not care about our planet's and our children's future.

The last goal is to establish a global development partnership that includes all countries struggling against poverty. That way, all human beings, whether they are born in Quebec or in Rwanda, would be guaranteed the basics of life.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my support and my party's support for bill C-293. I hope that my colleague's motion will resonate with this government that, since it came to power, has been boasting about its transparency, accountability and integrity.

This is the same government that, as soon as it came to power, tore up the Kyoto protocol, turned its back on poor countries seeking to help stop global warming despite their many social problems, spent billions of dollars on arms, but failed to keep its word on the millennium development goals, turned its back on its commitment to correcting the fiscal imbalance with Quebec and reneged on its promise to establish a new program for older worker adjustment.

• (1755)

[*English*]

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand in the House today and support this bill from the member for Scarborough—Guildwood. The bill is a central part of the four goals of the Make Poverty History campaign which asks us to enact legislation to make ending poverty the exclusive goal of Canadian foreign aid in a way that is consistent with our human rights obligations.

I have received correspondence and visits from hundreds of people in my riding who support this campaign. I want to make it clear that I strongly support the international campaign to make poverty history.

One of my constituents, 14-year-old Sally, has written to me several times on this campaign. She has also written to the Prime Minister and has urged the Prime Minister to show true national and international leadership on the issue of making poverty history. In her most recent e-mail to the Prime Minister, she says that all the eyes of the world are on us and that she wants Canada to show real international leadership by increasing support for HIV-AIDS prevention and treatment programs in developing countries, investing in public health care in developing countries, promoting access to affordable medicines and cancelling the debt of the poorest countries. We should heed the words of Sally and show the world that we are determined to act to end world poverty.

Members in this House should be supporting the bill, which is very similar to Bill C-293 put forward by my colleague, the member for Halifax, who is our party's international development critic.

In 1969, Prime Minister Pearson authored the report “Partners in Development”, in which he put forward the idea of the government providing 0.7% of gross national product to official development assistance, as well as 0.3% of ODA coming from the private sector. Since then, several countries have met this goal, including Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Most recently, several members of the G-8 agreed to reach that goal, the U.K., Germany, France and Italy, but sadly Canada did not make that commitment.

The history of ODA in Canada is quite sad. We have never reached our goal of 0.7%. The highest was in 1974-75 at 0.53% and peaked again in the late eighties and early nineties. During the Liberal government's term in office from 1993 to 2005 it cut official development assistance in half from 0.44% to 0.23%, which is quite shocking. Incredibly, Canada rated 14th out of the 22 OECD members in terms of official development assistance as a percentage of our gross national income.

Something else disturbing that began under the Liberals was the first move toward redefining ODA so that it would include not just humanitarian and development spending but also military assistance as well. We now see, through what is happening in Kandahar, Afghanistan, how that is pertinent today.

We must guard against changing the definition of official development assistance. Changing the definition could allow the government to artificially inflate its ODA figures by including some money spent on national defence or foreign affairs, which has nothing to do with reducing poverty, and then deem that to be part of the spending on ODA.

The government should not be able to change the goals of development assistance at a whim. The commitment to reducing poverty must be put down in legal form to bind the actions of government. The bill would guarantee that official development assistance would be focused on poverty reduction, which is a good thing. This would ensure that Canadian money was used to fight not just the effects but also the causes of extreme poverty. The bill, therefore, would give real hope to those in poverty.

• (1800)

It is interesting that the Conservative government is opposed to this legislation, because in February 2005 the Prime Minister endorsed the idea of this legislation in a joint letter to the former prime minister which was also signed by the leaders of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. I will quote from this letter:

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

That letter was signed by the current Prime Minister of Canada. The Conservatives should honour the promise of their leader and they should support this legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to express my full and unconditional support for Bill C-293 introduced by my colleague, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood. This bill fully addresses Canadians' concerns about the international aid Canada provides. That is why

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we should not only salute the initiative by the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, but also support its implementation.

Because of my various parliamentary duties, especially on the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, I have long had the opportunity to talk with Canadians about this important issue, which concerns our country's commitments and responsibilities in the world.

Whether from members of the public who take the time to express their views individually or from associations involved in international aid and businesspeople, we always hear the same message, stated loud and clear. Our resources must be allocated with greater concern for effectiveness, transparency and good democratic governance.

In practical terms, this means that the vast majority of Canadians not only feel concerned by this major issue, but also demand that our international aid really promote the values that characterize our country. We must work to ensure that Canadian aid initiatives abroad are better targeted so that our country really attacks the poverty that afflicts so many peoples that are part of the human race.

Incidentally, young people strongly support this objective, as evidenced by the large number of international solidarity organizations that are found across the country, even in schools, and that youth intuitively gravitate towards, often very early in their education.

Our youth are therefore sending a very strong message that we as parliamentarians must listen to, because they represent the future of our nation and its role in the world.

In today's world, where so much economic, technological, scientific, cultural and democratic progress has been made, it is scandalous that peoples in whole areas of our planet still suffer such extreme poverty that they do not even have the bare necessities of life.

A long time ago, our government and others, as well as multilateral organizations such as the UN and many more, declared that they would work towards reducing poverty. However, as we have seen, it is not enough to make a declaration. Concrete action is required to achieve real results. In this regard Bill C-293 represents a true step forward because it unequivocally states that “all Canadian development assistance abroad is provided with a central focus on poverty reduction”. This is crystal clear.

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If passed in its present form, as I dearly hope, this bill will give us a legislative tool enabling parliamentarians to better oversee Canada's efforts to reduce poverty. This bill also seeks to provide better means of assessing the true impact of our international aid, in a context where accountability for management of public resources is increasingly important in the conscience of our citizens, and will lead to greater transparency.

Transparency is required for the Canadian government to provide its citizens with a clearer account of its management of international aid. I mentioned the goal of poverty reduction. However, there are other crucial aspects of this bill which make our support all the more important. These include the requirement to respect international human rights standards. Canadians are very clear on this issue: they do not want international aid to support oppressive political regimes that do not respect human rights, the rights of workers or the duty and obligations of any democratic country with respect to its citizens.

The state must seek to improve the well-being of its citizens. It must have no other purpose. Thus, international aid must never be used to line the pockets of tyrants who are incapable or unwilling to take on such a responsibility and one that we cannot shirk. This bill also requires the government to ensure that the criteria for Canadian foreign aid include respect for the principles of sustainable development.

Concerns regarding responsible management of natural resources and environmental conservation are also an important focus of our fellow world citizens, for today and the future, as well as the responsibilities they demand of their governments in those areas.

• (1805)

This is actually a matter of clarity or common sense. We see it all too often these days: the planet's ecological balance is seriously threatened by the destruction of resources and pollution has crossed our borders, only to now affect us.

In that sense, we Canadians are connected to everyone else on the planet, whether we like it or not. In terms of environmental degradation, the future of our entire species is at risk.

We must therefore take action in this area, as well, or we would be reneging on our responsibilities to future generations, who are just as entitled as we are to live in a healthy ecological environment.

This is why it is so important to include this element in Bill C-293, since we can no longer avoid this aspect of international aid. The issues inherent to human development are becoming increasingly interconnected, and resolving one depends more and more on resolving the other.

In conclusion, this bill contains an essential element of our international aid that not only must become an integral part of the responsibilities of any government in the world today, but that also addresses the concerns and desires expressed by so many of our fellow citizens. Accordingly, it is the duty of this Parliament to pass this bill and we should be privileged to do so.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I begin by congratulating my colleague, the hon.

member for Scarborough—Guildwood for his interest in bringing forward private member's Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad.

The hon. member has a reputation that has put him at odds with other members of his party when it comes to children and family issues. I congratulate him for having the courage to stand up on certain issues when it has not always been popular to do with within his party.

It is a pleasure for me to participate in this evening's debate. I am on record both here and outside the House as supporting measures that assist families and children. One example is my public opposition to the clawback by the Liberal Party of Ontario of the national child benefit from some of our neediest children in Ontario.

The Renfrew County Child Poverty Action Network, CPAN, is asking for the public's help in its backpack campaign that supplies backpacks and shoes for children who may otherwise have to do without. Due to the overwhelming demand, there are so many children who are in need. In my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, children suffer from the clawback of that benefit. As a result CPAN is asking for the public's help to assist us in filling every request. Sixteen dollars buys backpack supplies for one child, and \$20 to \$40 will purchase shoes. I encourage those who are able to help to do so.

I am proud to support the plan of the new Conservative government to provide parents with a \$1,200 annual allowance for each child under the age of six.

The aim of the choice for child care allowance is to support the choices of all parents of young children, whether they choose to work, study or stay at home with their children, live in a small community like Eganville, a rural community like Brudenell, a small city like Pembroke, or do shift work.

I point this out in the context of the private member's bill before us today for what is being argued by other groups that deal with child poverty.

The most effective way to help parents is not through another government program that eats up more cash by administering a bureaucracy rather than what is actually provided to the recipient. The most effective way to help is to provide the cash directly to whom we want to assist.

It was never the intent of our new Conservative government to fully subsidize the cost of institution based child care. Not all parents use or choose to use such care.

Like this bill before us today, if I understand—

• (1810)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Respectfully, it appears that the member is speaking to possibly another bill. The private member's bill before us has to do with CIDA, with international development assistance. If the member is in fact here to speak to that bill, I think the matter of relevance should be brought to her attention.

Private Members' Business

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I thank the member for Mississauga South for that point of order. I would urge the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke to try to bridge her comments as much as possible, as quickly as possible to the main thrust of the bill before us.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that the Liberal Party takes the official position that it does not trust Canadian parents to make the right decisions for their children. The phrase “beer and popcorn” I believe was used to criticize parental choice in this country.

Clause 7 of the bill gives to aid recipients in other countries the right to petition or challenge the type of aid being delivered. Yet when our new Conservative government proposed to give the same right to Canadian parents to make child poverty history in Canada by providing a \$1,200 annual allowance for children under the age of six directly to their parents to use as they deem necessary, members opposite opposed this child poverty initiative.

As a member of Parliament with many of the same concerns when it comes to family as the the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, I welcome the interest in international development that the bill demonstrates. However, as my colleague on this side of the House has already stated, while the intent of C-293 is good, it falls short in terms of practicality.

The bill as it is drafted could hamper Canada's ability to make a positive and effective contribution to international development. I will not go into the detailed reasons why the bill is unworkable since the hon. member for Crowfoot has laid them before the House so clearly.

Canada has a long tradition of international engagement and of meaningful contribution in international development and to poverty eradication. We were at the forefront of the very first formal international development initiative in the 1950s called the Colombo plan. Hundreds of Canadian people travelled around the globe in the early 1960s to serve as volunteers to help people in developing countries. Many of those volunteers went on to become leaders in private and public sectors. In fact, they set an example that has been followed by thousands of their compatriots every since.

Right at this moment, as we debate this bill in the House, a number of our fellow citizens, some from my own riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, are working around the world in Africa, Latin America, and yes, Afghanistan, lending a helping hand and making a difference.

The Government of Canada and Canadian citizens are committed to making lives better for people around the world. We do it because we are compassionate and caring, and because it is the right thing to do. Our fellow citizens have indicated they are supportive of Canada's efforts to eradicate poverty around the world. Consistent with their compassion for the less fortunate, the new Conservative Government of Canada is committed to providing much needed assistance to the world's poor. To achieve this objective, we are committed to poverty reduction as seen most clearly in our commitment to the millennium development goals.

The millennium development goals are the global yardstick against which the world can measure progress in key areas. These

goals were agreed to by every country, including Canada, in September 2000 at the United Nations millennium summit. They continue to provide a framework for the global community to work together toward a common end.

The goals, which include reducing poverty and hunger, achieving basic education for all, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and forming global partnerships for development, represent a minimum agenda for action.

I want to assure members of the House that our new Conservative government understands the importance of international development work. The Speech from the Throne clearly stated that the Prime Minister and our government are committed to making Canadian development assistance more effective. We are reviewing our aid to strengthen its focus and to put resources where the impact will be the greatest and to show tangible results.

If the Canadian International Development Agency, CIDA, has not concentrated on implementing the principles of aid effectiveness in our bilateral operations, and this is the opinion of the member as an MP in the old regime in bringing forward this private member's bill, our new Conservative government is certainly prepared to examine this position.

Canada is working with countries that are committed to improving governance and making effective use of resources, countries such as Tanzania and Ghana. I am pleased to say that our efforts at undertaking this innovative work are showing some very positive results. In Tanzania, for example, Canada and other donors have focused on primary education, which has yielded a very impressive outcome.

Since the program began in 2002, the enrolment rate has soared from 60% to more than 90%. More than 32,000 new teachers have been recruited and nearly half of all students in primary schools are girls. In fact, now that donors are aligning and coordinating their approach to basic education, we are seeing amazing results throughout Africa. Between 2000 and 2003 the number of children out of school dropped from 44 million to 40 million. When we consider that the population rate has continued to grow, this is a substantial achievement.

• (1815)

Even more important, the number of girls in school continues to grow. This is a very positive thing, not only for girls but for their communities as well. When girls are able to access education, it means improved family income, better agricultural productivity, better health awareness, delayed marriage and healthier children.

I could cite many other examples, but I understand that tonight my time is limited. Nevertheless, before I conclude I think it is important to put on the record the fact that the new Conservative government is committed to international development.

Private Members' Business

Our first budget allowed us to show how serious we are about advancing Canadian values and Canadian interests on the international stage. By 2010-11 we will have doubled international assistance from 2001-02 levels. In other words, it will grow to about \$3.8 billion in 2006-07 and then to approximately \$4.1 billion in 2007-08.

In conclusion, I welcome and appreciate the spirit in which the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood has proposed the bill. I look forward to continuing the debate about the provision of development assistance abroad and the debate here at home on how we can make poverty history here in Canada.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to say what a pleasure it is to speak on Bill C-293. I congratulate my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood for having the foresight to put forward this bill, a bill that over time has been supported by members from every single political party in this House, including that of the government.

Why the need? Over the last 50 years the international community has spent more than \$2.3 trillion on aid. I am going to focus my comments on sub-Saharan Africa because that dark corner of the world is the only place in the world where lifespans are decreasing and poverty is increasing. In fact, 30 years ago, the average income in sub-Saharan Africa was twice that of Southeast Asia, but today it is half that. Indeed, as I said before, for many reasons it is the only place in the world where lifespans are decreasing and poverty is growing.

That is ironic given that sub-Saharan Africa possesses 40% of the world's natural resources. Why in the midst of the resource-rich countries is there this grinding poverty that is inhumane for any person? The reasons are actually quite complex, but there is much we can do. My colleague's bill would go a long way to focusing CIDA, to make it an organization focused to task and to do that which is required to alleviate this grinding poverty.

Corruption, conflict and a lack of capacitance: these three are major problems in sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately for too long our aid has been unfocused and scattered and too much of it has been spent here in Canada. That is why this bill put forward by my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood, contrary to the comments made by members of the government, would actually aid the Minister of International Cooperation. It would enable her to have an accountable, focused, effective agenda so that Canadian taxpayers' money would be spent most effectively to actually make poverty history.

What can we do? As a previous speaker said, let us focus on the millennium development goals. When we Liberals were in government we focused those efforts on 24 countries. How about if we also do the following? We can focus on primary health, primary education and water and food security, along with corruption and governance issues. Those are niches where we can make a big difference and those are things that we can do on the ground.

In my experience in 23 visits to Africa and working there as a physician, it has been profoundly tragic to see what takes place. Many of these countries are actually set up to fail. In fact, the aid nexus can be seen as a big funnel, with the big circle on the top

where the money goes in and the little circle down at the bottom where the people are. Money comes in that way and frameworks are built, but the frameworks are given to countries that do not have any chance whatsoever of implementing them because they do not have the capacity to do so.

What we can do is take up the Canada corps, the plan that our previous prime minister put forward, use that as a vector to be able to pool the best and brightest we have in our country and use those human resources here in Canada for work abroad. We can do it because we have an interesting demographic issue in our own country. As our population ages, we have a collection of individuals who are young retirees.

If 60 is the new 40, then we have a population of people with the resources, the capabilities, the talents and the desire to work abroad. By working abroad they will be able to fill that capacity in these developing countries through working with the local populations, not only to provide the care and the expertise but also to train the people on the ground. We can do this in our own country.

With respect to administration, I would encourage the government to look at what UNAIDS has done in terms of developing an effective administrative structure. CIDA would be wise to look at the three ones: one oversight mechanism, one framework, and one administrative body. If it does that with respect to aid and development, we will be able to have a focused, effective and administratively functional aid department and we will have aid initiatives that will make a difference on the ground.

● (1820)

All of us have travelled abroad, I think, and for those who have had the privilege of being in developing countries, they will have seen and they will know of the incredible courage and talent that exists in these countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, the people just want to have an opportunity. They just want to be free of somebody trying to kill them. They just want to be free of somebody trying to shoot them. They just want to be free of people who are putting the people's money into their own pockets and thereby depriving them of the basic social structures that all of us enjoy in this country. In short, they just want to have a chance. They just want an opportunity.

On the last point, the AIDS pandemic, where the government did not put forth an opportunity at the AIDS conference in Toronto, here is something we could do. What if the Prime Minister were to stand up at the United Nations this week and state that Canada was going to plant its flag on the care of the pregnant women and the care of orphans?

Through focusing on the care of pregnant women, we can use it to build the health care human resources structures, the prevention, the education and the testing. We could deal with our partners and with the ARVs, the antiretroviral medications.

If we give these medications to a pregnant woman after her first trimester, the incidence of the transference of the virus to the fetus is reduced from 40% to 1%. It is a simple, lifesaving and effective plan that will save millions of lives and reduce the sea of orphans that is happening now and will only worsen as time passes.

Private Members' Business

There are 14 million orphans in sub-Saharan Africa right now. That number will balloon to 18 million in the next five years. In the next 10 years that number will be up to 25 million, with no end in sight.

We as a country can decide this week that we are going to stand up and make the care of pregnant women and orphans our contribution to the fight against AIDS. It is simple, effective, easy to do, easy to understand and focused. We could do this in the 12 to 18 countries in sub-Saharan Africa that we have chosen to focus on. In doing so, we will start the process of enabling the international community to have an effective plan on the ground that is going to save lives and turn the tide on this pandemic that will claim up to 250 million lives in the next 30 years.

Nothing in the history of our planet has threatened our species as much as this one virus. I would implore the government, and indeed I would beg and beseech the government, to take this opportunity to do this. We have wonderful people in CIDA with extraordinary capabilities. Eighty per cent of them, tragically, sit across the river in Hull. We need to get some of them out into the trenches. We need to get them into our embassies and high commissions. We need to get them working on the ground with the countries. We need to align our efforts with the principles and ideals that the people on the ground want, consistent with that which will be effective for the poor and the poorest of the poor.

If we were to focus on the five areas that I mentioned, primary health care, primary education, water security, food security, governance, and anti-corruption activity, we would be able to make a difference. We would be able to save lives. We would be able to ensure that Canadian taxpayers' moneys are going to be spent wisely.

• (1825)

Mr. Peter Van Loan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this private member's bill on the very important issue of development assistance.

We in this government share a view on the importance of ensuring the government does what it can to help others abroad in alleviating poverty and addressing those issues in developing countries. That is why in our budget last spring we committed to add \$320 million to our international assistance funding and that was in addition to already budgeted increases over five years. This puts Canada on track to more than double international assistance from 2001-02 levels by 2010-11 at which point it will amount to over \$5 billion per year. It is an important amount, particularly in light of the many competing domestic and international priorities.

However, the bill, unfortunately, although it is very well intentioned, is naive in terms of some of the unintended consequences. I read from the legislation which says, "Development assistance may be provided only if the competent minister is of the opinion that it contributes to poverty reduction".

Canada's international development assistance has historically, even under the previous government, and I give it credit for this, gone well beyond poverty reduction into other very important areas: democracy promotion; the training of judges on how to run a proper judicial system; good governance support like that; and helping former communist countries translate their statutes into other

languages so they can get accession to the European Union. These are all examples of financial support we have given to other countries and they are consistent with Canadian values. They are certainly consistent with the values of this government of promoting freedom, promoting democracy, promoting human rights and the rule of law.

To say that we are going to shut it down so we can no longer promote democracy around the world, to say that we can no longer help countries, which are struggling to develop their institutions, by supporting them in developing good civil service and good governance and by helping train promising new parliamentarians on how a democratic system works and so on, programs we have done in the past to help countries overseas make that advance, all of which we think is very important to make them good, stable parts of the world, none of that would be permitted under this legislation. That is unfortunate.

It is important for Canada to continue to play that important role. Think of all the projects around the world. In Afghanistan, which is our principal recipient of foreign aid, we are involved in things that go well beyond poverty reduction. We are training civil servants. We are helping people develop the institutions they need to run government. We are helping people with schools. Is a school part of poverty reduction or not? Is creating civil servants part of poverty reduction or not?

An argument could be made that those are not strict poverty reduction. The concern is that we will run into realm where that kind of activity to help people develop those institutions simply will not be permitted. For our government, those priorities of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law have to remain paramount.

To illustrate this, Canada has been providing development assistance in some places to help people in civil society, for example to help women become more involved in their community and to defend their rights. That is nothing to do with poverty alleviation necessarily. It has to do with fairness, equality and justice, but those are issues we should be allowed to encourage and continue to support.

Similarly, in countries which continue to have authoritarian regimes that resist democracy, should we not be able to provide support for elements of civil society whether they wish to promote the environment or other democratic development? Should we be allowed, through our development, assistance to give opportunities for people to learn, to study, to acquire education elsewhere so they become more effective when they return home to their countries?

All these are important priorities and part of the tradition of development assistance for Canada and something that we should continue to do in our tradition of promoting democracy, human rights, rule of law and freedom, great Canadian values that should not be ruled out by this well-intentioned, but poorly written legislation.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1830)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all members who participated in the debate. I appreciate both those who are for and I somewhat less appreciate those who are against. So many people said so many nice things about me that I feel like I have just come from my own funeral. I hope that does not auger poorly for the bill.

This continues to be and will always be an extremely important bill in order to focus our thoughts on what ODA is all about. What is official development assistance all about? Is it about poverty alleviation or is it about a whole bunch of other things? That is what this bill is about.

I appreciate that on the other side we received what I might call spiritual support for the notion of the bill. As in life, spirit does not pay the bills. I hope that we are strong enough and that we will see through this issue, so that we put some teeth in our official development assistance. The teeth are in this bill. The practicality is in this bill. Whatever else this bill is, it is not naive.

I do not dispute with the hon. member that we do other good things. I do not dispute that for a second. Our official development assistance must be focused on poverty alleviation and only on poverty alleviation.

In fact those are values that we all adhere to and support, fine, then we will continue to do those things, but it will not come out of this particular budget. It will only count if it is in favour of poverty alleviation. Those are the issues and that is where the debate is to be joined.

I do not see this as a naive bill, with the greatest respect to my friend opposite. I see this as a bill that asks for accountability. Presumably accountability is something that this new government thinks is an important thing. Apparently, those members thought it was an important thing when they were in opposition, as Mr. Harper, Mr. Duceppe and Mr. Layton wrote to the then Prime Minister—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I would remind the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood to refer to members by their title or riding.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the leader of the NDP, and I apologize for using their names, wrote to the former Prime Minister and I quote:

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

Which is a concern raised by my friend opposite:

—and respectful of the perspectives of those living in poverty.

The bill tries to take into consideration those who are living in poverty.

That concept was supported by the foreign affairs committee in June 2005 and in the House on June 28, 2005, with all party support. By unanimous consent, it was resolved that the 12th Report of the

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development be concurred in, which said:

To introduce legislation prior to the next federal budget which establishes poverty reduction as the priority for Canada's Official Development Assistance—

As I have said, that is good in spirit, but spirit does not pay the bills. We now have an opportunity to actually put this legislation in place and we have some disappointing resistance on the part of the members of the Conservative Party. I would ask those members to reconsider their position.

In fact, this is an opportunity for the minister to be able to say, "I can only use my budget for poverty alleviation. That is the only thing. I cannot use it for security. I cannot use it for other noble goals. I can only use it for poverty alleviation". That in itself will be a huge step of leadership on the part of our nation and, indeed, I would say on the part of this government, to focus its aid on poverty alleviation and only on poverty alleviation.

I thank members on all sides for speaking to the bill. I would urge members from the government party to reconsider their position, to review their previous commitments made to the previous government, and to act on them by supporting this bill.

• (1835)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 6:34 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired. Accordingly the question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the division stands deferred until Wednesday, September 20, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

Adjournment Proceedings

[Translation]

EDUCATION

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a few months ago, I asked the government to restore the billions of dollars that the Liberals cut from post-secondary education during the 90s. I still have not received a satisfactory answer.

Students and families continue to deal with absurd tuition fees, even for average-income Canadians. Graduates have a hard time starting their careers while burdened with crushing student loan debt.

We know that current financial aid and tax credit programs for students are nothing more than a motley assortment of measures that do nothing to improve access to or enrolment in post-secondary studies. Too many Canadians are left behind.

Professors are faced with huge class sizes and a shortage of resources and materials. In colleges and universities, administrators are having difficulty balancing tight budgets as they face a pressing need for new professors, infrastructure renewal and so on.

The provinces and territories are still under tremendous pressure. Some have frozen tuition fees, often at the expense of class sizes and quality. Other have allowed tuition fees to skyrocket.

This government must stop confusing tax credits with a well-thought-out social policy.

[English]

It is time the government put some real effort into achieving a universally accessible, high quality public system of post-secondary education and skills training in Canada. The federal government has a key policy role to play to increase access to post-secondary education for all Canadians and that starts with a substantial, long term reinvestment in core funding through a dedicated transfer to provinces and territories. Even the premiers can agree on that, if nothing else.

Social justice aside, surely a Conservative government can see the economic case here if Canadians are to compete globally. In the global economy they need access to quality education. We also know that post-secondary education enrolment has remained static since 1995. Is it any wonder, when tuition costs have reached unreasonably high levels in those provinces?

I met a young married couple this summer, each with \$35,000 of student debt at 30 years old. They asked me how they could even begin to think of starting a family. I had no answer. Would a reasonable person think this is a manageable debt level at that age?

I do not want to hear that the 2006 budget of the Conservatives helped all students. It helped those students who already had a scholarship and tossed a free textbook at the rest. We can help all students by funding truly accessible, quality post-secondary education with lower tuition, more teachers and better resources across the board.

Yes or no, will the government help to make this happen now?

• (1840)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for

Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in today's knowledge based economy, a more educated and skilled labour force is key to Canada's competitiveness in the world. Government investments in education and training are critical to productivity and economic growth.

As announced in budget 2006, our government has taken action in support of a more skilled and educated workforce by including measures for students, apprentices and tradespeople.

Measures for students include: a new \$500 tax credit to help about 1.9 million post-secondary students with their textbook costs; making all scholarship, fellowship and bursary income received by post-secondary students exempt from income tax; and expanding the eligibility for student loans to more students from middle income families.

Measures for apprentices include: a new tax credit of up to \$2,000 per year for employers who hire and train apprentices to help them cope with the difficulties they face in finding skilled tradespeople; and apprentices themselves will be eligible for \$1,000 grants as of January 1, 2007 as part of the new apprenticeship incentive program.

Measures for tradespeople include: a new tools tax deduction of up to 500 for tradespeople for the cost of tools in excess of \$1,000 that they must acquire as a condition of their employment; and, in addition, we are increasing the limit to \$500 on the cost of tools eligible for the 100% capital cost allowance.

In order to help provinces and territories provide high quality post-secondary education, the government is also providing a one time payment of \$1 billion through the post-education infrastructure fund to support critical and urgent investments in innovation, accessibility and infrastructure. Moreover, this government is making progress on its commitment to restoring fiscal balance which has a post-secondary education component.

Notably, over the past several months the Government of Canada has been consulting with provinces and territories, stakeholders and citizens. The Government of Canada is committed to hear from as many individual Canadians and stakeholder organizations as possible that share an interest or role in post-secondary education and training.

We sought input from a range of Canadians, including businesses, employers, educators, training organizations, students, parents, academics and experts. Also, over 100 national stakeholders were contacted to share their views. They were encouraged to forward the invitation to their regional and provincial member organizations as well.

The government is continuing its consultations with provinces and territories which, along with Canadians' views, will help inform the proposal for post-secondary education and training that will be brought forward as part of the Government of Canada's overall proposals to restore fiscal balance in Canada.

Adjournment Proceedings

Clearly, Canada's economic prosperity and social well-being is dependent on our ability to nurture a highly educated and skilled workforce. Governments must work together to ensure that our country's post-secondary education and training system remains of high quality and responsive to national and provincial economic and social needs.

Finally, post-secondary students need to be supported for their hard work in pursuit of academic excellence and this government is committed to this goal.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask two follow up questions.

First, Statistics Canada has recently released a report showing that undergraduates in Nova Scotia, for example, pay almost double the tuition that undergraduates in Manitoba pay and that is over triple what undergraduates pay in Quebec. It is something like \$6,700 in Nova Scotia compared to approximately \$1,700 in Quebec. Does the parliamentary secretary believe that is making post-secondary education accessible to all Canadian students?

I would ask the parliamentary secretary to tell us what the government is prepared to do to improve that situation for all students.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, one of the key components of our long term plans to improving post-secondary education for all Canadian students is fixing what has been called the fiscal imbalance and what we are now calling the fiscal balance.

We need to address the situation where we allow the provinces to participate more fully in the revenues that we receive. Quite frankly, there is quite a large disparity between the revenues received by governments on a provincial basis and revenues received by the Government of Canada.

The ongoing discussion we have been having with the provinces and territories is to find a solution to fixing the fiscal imbalance situation and where provinces can more fully participate in the revenue sharing. Once that happens, and I am quite convinced it will, provinces will hopefully have the financial ability to address the post-secondary education delivery system more effectively.

We think that after years of neglect by a federal government that did not even acknowledge there was a fiscal problem in the cost sharing between governments, federal and provincial, this government is committed to solving that problem. We hope to make our first foray into that with the approvals, frankly, of all of the provinces and territories this fall.

I can assure the hon. member that hopefully by no later than the next fiscal year and the budget of 2007 many of her concerns will be answered.

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

MARINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on June 2, 2006, I asked a question regarding the marine industry and the recovery of the Lévis shipyard. I would have liked to rise in the House today during the

adjournment proceedings and tell the government that the company had got the business restarted and was asking for a helping hand. Unfortunately, this is not the case. There no longer is a business to speak of, unless a miracle comes along to restart it.

There are many lessons to be learned from this situation. If the Lévis shipyard cannot be turned around—which seems to be the case, since the piecemeal selling off of the shipyard has been announced—the Conservative government must at least acknowledge that if we had a real marine development policy in Canada, businesses would have been interested in investing in that shipyard, which, in terms of infrastructure, was quite an interesting opportunity. However, when I remember the response given by the Minister of Industry, the hon. member for Beauce, Lévis' neighbouring riding, and when I read the comments made by the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse when the Teco Management company was supposed to get the business back on its feet, I can almost understand why we now find ourselves in this situation.

For example, the minister replied, and I quote:

—that the Lévis shipyard is up and running thanks to the private sector and free enterprise.

However, today we see that it is not up and running because the necessary conditions are not in place for free enterprise to develop. This has not been done by the former governments nor by the current Conservative government, which has been around since January 2006.

On the same matter, the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse, who seemed a bit alarmed by the question I asked in the House, said the next day in response:

—I will ensure that the shipyard and its partners have the same financial mechanisms as other Canadian shipyards.

The reality is that we do not have a maritime policy in Canada. We are in a situation where shipyards are having a hard time surviving and those that do are making suggestions and proposals, like Groupe maritime Verreault. However, their suggestions do not get the attention we would expect from the government.

I take the opportunity of this adjournment debate to ask the government to review the whole transfer costs policy. You know how it is, when work must be done on a vessel, the transfer costs that must be paid to bring it to the shipyard must be taken into account. The federal government decided to include these costs in its calls for tenders. Consequently, shipyards like the Verreault shipyard on the St. Lawrence River are at a disadvantage compared to those in the Maritimes, like Irving shipyards. That has major negative consequences.

Should the Conservative government not take into account regional and local development when it sets its standards concerning transfer costs? It is a legitimate question and I would like the parliamentary secretary to answer it to see if, for the sake of fairness between regions, he should leave those costs aside.

Adjournment Proceedings

Moreover, those transfers raise other issues, concerning non-competitive supply for example. In that regard the Conservative government should consider what was done with regards to the Davie shipyard. It must realize that if nothing is done, if there is no real development policy for the shipbuilding industry the other shipyards in Canada will also suffer, and I mean those that are still able to operate. That would be really a shame, considering the current tremendous market opportunities on the international scene.

Today, mere months after the minister said that the private sector had given new life to the Lévis shipyard, that it was for the best and the way things should be, does the parliamentary secretary believe that the government should learn from it and propose a real shipbuilding development policy, at least to save the shipyards that are left?

• (1850)

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member that we are looking at the shipbuilding industry.

I thank the hon. member for the opportunity to talk about Canada's shipbuilding industry. The Canadian shipbuilding industry has a long and proud history. Today we have firms recognized as world leaders in the manufacture and repair of ships, the building of offshore oil and gas structures and supplying shipyard related services.

Key stakeholders for our shipbuilding and marine industrial sector include offshore oil and gas exploration, marine transportation, and defence and security.

As the member opposite should know, the Government of Canada supports the shipbuilding industry in a variety of ways. With budget 2006 Canada's new government is working to ensure an economy durable enough to withstand the up and down cycles of world markets by creating a business climate that will attract investment to Canada for the benefit of all Canadians. Budget 2006 demonstrates our commitment to keeping this strong economy moving forward and signals how we want to proceed as a government.

One way is through the economic boost that will come from 29 tax cuts for Canadian businesses and individuals, reductions worth \$20 billion over the next two years. Small business owners will have more money to invest in their businesses because we raised the income ceiling for the small business income tax rate and then cut that tax rate from 12% to 11% by 2009.

In budget 2006 we are reducing the general corporate tax rate from 21% to 19% by 2010. We eliminated both the federal capital tax and the corporate surtax. The unemployment rate in Canada remains near its lowest level in more than 30 years, while the employment rate is near its highest on record. This is because, despite challenges in some parts of the manufacturing sector, Canadian companies continue to grow and create more jobs.

Our government is reviewing various industrial sectors with a view to increasing our economic competitiveness. For Canada to compete globally, we have to establish an environment for investment where those who wish to innovate and bring new products to market have the opportunity to do so.

It should be noted that the Canadian shipbuilding industry sees government support in two more direct ways: a 25% duty on vessels imported from countries with which we do not have a free trade agreement; and in June the government announced a \$2.9 billion joint support ship project for Canada's navy.

This project will deliver three multi-role vessels for Canada's navy and includes a base cost of \$2.1 billion, plus an estimated \$800 million in contracted in-service support over 20 years. The Canadian shipbuilding industry is well positioned to play a significant role as the joint support ship project proceeds.

The Government of Canada recognizes the global commercial and trade environment is changing and we are evaluating our policies to meet that new reality.

In the weeks and months ahead, the government will review what is the most effective role for it to undertake with respect to the Canadian shipbuilding industry. We are committed to the competitiveness of Canadian industry and to fostering a climate where all businesses, including shipbuilding, can thrive.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for demonstrating that the efforts of the Conservative government and the measures it talks about have not in any way helped to save the Lévis shipyard, despite the fact that the Minister of Industry is from the riding of Beauce, the riding next to Lévis—Bellechasse, which also has a Conservative MP.

In the future, would it be possible to get from this government, in the review it claims to be undertaking, a real policy on ship building, so that the remaining shipyards, such as the Groupe Maritime Verreault shipyard in Méchins, the Océan shipyard and others can continue to develop and have a chance at getting their share of the market?

The current inaction of the Conservative government has contributed to today's result, namely the closure of Canada's largest shipyard. We were told the private sector would take care of it and that it was not up to the government. Today we are facing the consequences. There is nothing to be proud of on this day and the parliamentary secretary did not even bother to mention the name of the Lévis shipyard in his answer.

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I want the hon. member to know that it is disappointing the proposed purchase of the Davie shipyard seems to have been unsuccessful. This was a negotiation between companies in the private sector.

There has been a lot of effort both from the Quebec government and the federal government to save Davie Industries. Everyone tried very hard, but even with all the government support, it did not save Davie.

Adjournment Proceedings

Industry Canada has provided substantial support to Davie over the years. Most recently, in June 2006 Public Works and Government Services Canada advanced the remaining 2006-07 funds under the 1997 agreement for the dry docks in order to allow a final delay to assemble a financing plan for the sale of the shipyard.

In 2004, Industry Canada contributed \$7.4 million through the structured financing facility to facilitate a ship conversion project that was undertaken at Davie. Also in 2004, Public Works and Government Services Canada advanced \$2 million to Davie under—

●(1855)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:56 p.m.)

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