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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Vancouver Island North.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

TASTE OF AUTUMN

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, October 27, the Rotary Clubs of Orangeville are holding their 12th annual fundraiser, A Taste of Autumn. This event takes place at the Hockley Valley Resort and features a terrific six course dinner prepared by chefs from some of the finest restaurants in Dufferin—Caledon.

These restaurants include the Hockley Valley Resort, White Truffle Inn, Mono Cliffs Inn, Greystones Inn, Millcroft Inn and the Train Station. A silent auction will be held throughout the evening and a live auction will take place around 9 p.m.

These auctions have helped raise over \$1.25 million in support of local community projects and international charitable programs. Many organizations in Orangeville, Shelburne and Caledon have benefited from A Taste of Autumn.

For a sensational evening in Dufferin—Caledon, this October 27 the place to be is A Taste of Autumn.

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[Translation]

JANNICK LECAVALIER-RODRIGUE

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pride that I draw attention today to the merit of a young 15-year-old student from my riding, Jannick Lecavalier-Rodrigue. Jannick is a brilliant and exemplary student who is working hard to succeed in school and to develop all his skills.

He was selected as the only Canadian participant at the 2006 Pacific Rim International Camp that took place in Japan August last. Each of the 11 countries at the camp is represented by a single teenager and Jannick was selected as the representative from Canada.

The purpose of the Pacific Rim International Camp is to promote cultural appreciation and international friendship through mutual understanding, allowing the young participants to experience both traditional and modern Japan.

My congratulations go to Jannick Lecavalier-Rodrigue, whom I commend for preparing himself to become a young Canadian citizen open to the world and able to spread, at home and abroad, the human and social values unique to the citizens of this country.

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MIRABEL

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada recently published its report on population growth in the various regions of Canada between 2004 and 2005. This report shows that Mirabel saw the strongest population growth in Canada over that timeframe. The city-RCM of Mirabel had a net migration rate of 37.1 per 1,000 population. By comparison, Calgary's net migration rate is 21.1 per 1,000 population, and Alberta is experiencing an economic boom.

According to a 2003 study by the Institut de la statistique du Québec, there is every indication that Mirabel's population will have grown by 43% by 2026; that is the highest rate of growth in Quebec.

I would like to congratulate the City of Mirabel for the outstanding job it is doing promoting its jurisdiction. Mirabel is a model as a region that took charge and turned things around following the tragedy of expropriation for the purpose of constructing an airport and the shock of its closure. Mirabel has become a symbol of success for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel and Quebec as a whole, and I am very proud of that.

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[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is the anniversary of the day that women became persons in this country.

Statements by Members

Today, women across Canada are holding vigils and celebrations, including tea with the Famous Five, to mark this historic occasion and I celebrate with them.

However, only nine months after committing to take concrete and immediate action to increase women's equality in this country, the Conservative government slashed the budget of the Status of Women, removed any reference to the word "equality" from its mandate and disallowed advocacy on the part of groups who receive federal funds through the department.

This giant leap backward effectively silences the voices of the most vulnerable women in our society.

Today, the Governor General is honouring women for their great work in the struggle for women's equality but, ironically, one of these groups receiving the award has had its funding gutted by the government.

One can only conclude that the attitude of the government is "You've come far enough baby".

* * *

• (1405)

FIREARMS STORAGE

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, year after year, the Liberals keep proposing one costly, ineffective gun control measure after the next leaving real public safety for the Conservatives to deal with.

Last week, one of the Liberal MPs from Toronto proposed that hundreds of thousands of legally owned and safely stored firearms should all be moved to a central storage facility. It was a silly idea in 1991 when the leader of the NDP first proposed it and it is still a foolish idea today.

The Liberals must be campaigning for the criminal vote because criminals are the only people who would benefit from having all the lawful guns stored in one place.

We should ask ourselves one question. Would criminals rather break into houses at random hoping there was a gun in there that they could steal from a gun safe, or would criminals rather just sit around the city's firearms storage building and wait for law-abiding gun owners to get into their cars with their firearms?

I guess the Liberals really are in favour of one stop shopping. Talk about making shopping for guns more convenient for criminals.

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GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in less than 10 days, over 3,400 people have added their voice to the Canadian wave of protest in light of unacceptable Conservative cuts. These cuts will have a direct impact on all Canadians: minority groups, women, aboriginals. Everyone is affected.

[Translation]

Among those condemning these harsh cuts, over 20 New Brunswick groups have united to demand that the court challenges

program, literacy measures and status of women measures, as well as other programs, be reinstated.

[English]

Today I join with over 3,400 citizens in New Brunswick who have asked the Conservative minority government to come to its senses and reconsider the cuts to these essential services.

[Translation]

We say no to these cuts.

* * *

[English]

PERSONS DAY

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today I had the honour of attending the 2006 Governor General Awards with the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women.

We were all inspired by the courageous Famous Five who challenged the existing status of women by creating legal history in women's rights by contesting the notion that legal definitions of persons excluded females.

We continue to honour the Famous Five today through the Governor General's Awards in commemoration of the Persons Case.

This year's award recipients are strong, dynamic and diverse women. They include: Joyce Hancock, Maureen Kempston Darkes, Doreen McKenzie-Sanders, Jan Reimer, Charlotte Thibault and Semma Shah.

I want to extend my heartfelt congratulations again to each of the winners and thank them for being Canadian leaders.

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[Translation]

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women. In 2006, 22,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. That is an increase of nearly 400 cases compared to 2005. Of those 22,000 women, 5,300 will die of the disease.

As a former victim of breast cancer, I know how devastating it can be, how it makes its victims feel powerless and discouraged, and how painful it is for the victims, their families and their friends.

Correcting the fiscal imbalance is critical to ensuring the provinces have more money to prevent, diagnose and treat breast cancer.

The federal government must also invest more money in research and refuse to issue licences for silicone gel breast implants, which can contribute to causing cancer.

I invite my colleagues to support this cause and the thousands of women who have breast cancer.

Statements by Members

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Liberal members of the international trade committee demanded the release of the government's negotiating positions for the Central America Four free trade negotiations. The Liberals have irresponsibly flip-flopped on their long held position.

When in power, the Liberal government never revealed its negotiating stance. Now the Liberals want Canada to completely compromise its negotiating position by revealing it partway through trade talks.

Based on the actions of the Liberal members, it is obvious that they are not interested in Canada's government getting the best for all Canadians.

I hope the Liberal leadership candidates do not share their colleagues' total disregard for Canada's economic future.

In order to prosper in the global economy of the 21st century, we need to build and strengthen our trade relationships. This requires aggressive pursuit of new trade agreements. We can ill afford to toss away our ability to negotiate effectively.

Unlike the members opposite, the Conservative government puts the prosperity of Canadians first.

* * *

• (1410)

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we continue to learn of more programs that have lost their funding due to the meanspirited cuts by the heartless Conservative government.

Sadly, the Prime Minister has cut funding that was used by labour unions to operate apprenticeship programs that helped youth at risk learn construction trades. These programs were model examples of a hand up, not a handout.

Developing skills for youth and aboriginals at risk both helps fill Canada's desperate need for skilled workers and provides these young people with abilities that they can use throughout their working careers. Canada needs more skilled workers, not less, to build our great country.

The Conservatives inherited from the Liberals the strongest economy and the best fiscal situation that any newly elected government in the history of Canada has ever received.

It is unconscionable that the ruthless minority Conservative government, despite being in such a strong fiscal position, continues to cut programs that were providing concrete help to Canadians.

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[Translation]

CO-OPERATIVES

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to recognize the

importance of co-operatives in Canada's social and economic fabric. October 15 to 21 is Co-op Week.

Co-operatives are businesses owned and created by their members, individuals who want to join forces to meet their common needs. Canada has over 9,000 co-operatives run by some 70,000 volunteers and 150,000 employees.

The new Government of Canada has decided to make a one time investment of \$1 million within the framework of the Co-operative Development Initiative to help individuals, groups and communities form co-operatives in order to seize opportunities that come up in the biofuel sector and other value added industry sectors.

The biofuel industry has the potential to stimulate rural economies by creating jobs and by stimulating economic development. It goes without saying that the co-operative model is the tool of choice to achieve this potential.

The new Government of Canada is pleased with its partnership with the co-operative sector and hopes it will continue to benefit all Canadians.

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[English]

TORONTO PORT AUTHORITY

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has received the Roger Tassé review of the Toronto Port Authority's shady dealings, yet he has chosen not to release the report or take any action.

The port authority once again demonstrated its incompetence. Its new ferry to the island airport crashed on its very first run, but the minister has not even suspended operations and has given the green light for flights at the island airport next Monday. The lobbyists must have got to the Conservatives.

The ferry crash was a total farce, but could have easily been a tragedy. We can afford neither farce nor tragedy with airplanes in the heart of Toronto. Public safety is at stake. We need an international air safety audit, and to return the port authority back to the hands of Torontonians now so we can have a clean green waterfront.

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[Translation]

CANADA'S CITIZENSHIP WEEK

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity during Canada's Citizenship Week to welcome and congratulate all new Canadians.

Canada's Citizenship Week is a national annual celebration to recognize the value of citizenship and the privileges, rights and responsibilities that go with it.

Oral Questions

My thoughts go out to the new citizens in the riding of Laval—Les Îles.

Every year, roughly 150,000 people acquire Canadian citizenship.
[English]

Every year new Canadians affirm their commitment and dedication to Canada's laws, our democratic process, rights and freedoms. Economically, socially and culturally, new Canadians are playing an important role in building a better Canada.

[Translation]

As the official opposition critic for citizenship and immigration, I am calling on the current government never to make a distinction between natural-born citizens and naturalized citizens.

* * *

• (1415)

WILBERT COFFIN

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 50 years have passed since Mr. Wilbert Coffin was hanged, convicted of the murders of three American hunters in Gaspésie. Mr. Coffin's family has maintained his innocence since that time, pointing out that the Crown never produced any direct evidence during the trial and that political interference was a factor.

After many years of waiting, the federal justice minister has finally examined the Coffin family's legitimate request to re-open the file.

Mary Coffin-Stewart—Wilbert Coffin's sister—, Jim Coffin—Wilbert Coffin's son—and many other family members are here in Ottawa today. I would like to assure them that they are not alone in their quest for justice. They are very honourable and courageous for taking on this important challenge.

The Bloc Québécois is proud and honoured to support the Coffin family in its request for a judicial review concerning Wilbert Coffin.

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[English]

PERSONS DAY

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we celebrate Persons Day, an important day for women in Canada. It was on this day that the British privy council in 1929 decided that women were persons under the law, thus opening the way for them to be appointed to the Senate.

Unfortunately, Persons Day this year comes on the heels of devastating cuts to Status of Women Canada and the exclusion of “equality” as one of the goals of the women's program. Advocacy and lobbying activities are also prohibited under the new laws.

It seems that the spirit of Persons Day is lost on the government, which has made it clear that women's equality is not a priority. The government is not only living in the past, but is actively allowing the clock to be turned back on women's rights.

PERSONS DAY

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby and Nellie McClung: today we honour the Famous Five and their landmark achievement in the Persons Case Day.

I rise to join the Government of Canada in recognizing the remarkable contribution these Canadian women have made. In 1929 they won the right for women to be recognized as persons. Overcoming countless obstacles, their extraordinary achievement benefited all Canadians who came after them. Women throughout our history have made, and continue to make, exceptional contributions to Canada.

Nellie McClung once said, “Women who set a low value on themselves make life hard for all women”.

Like the Famous Five, I believe that valuing oneself goes hand in hand with valuing others.

Another of the Famous Five, Louise McKinney, said it best when she said:

The purpose of a woman's life is just the same as the purpose of man's life—that she may make the best possible contribution to the generation in which she is living.

On behalf of the new Government of Canada, I invite all Canadians to celebrate this landmark achievement.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. It is about farmers and their families. It is about democracy. It is about the rule of law.

In 1998 Parliament voted to give control of the Wheat Board to farmers. They have a right to vote on changes to their board. The Prime Minister is ignoring the law and their rights by trying to destroy the Wheat Board without a proper, open and democratic vote among all producers.

Will the Prime Minister reverse his anti-democratic actions and permit a fair vote among producers on the future of our Canadian Wheat Board?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the premise of the hon. member's question is that we are or are going to do something and it is going to violate the law. Nothing could be further from the truth. What we in this party are going to do is defend the rights of western Canadian farmers, something which that party has never stood for in its entire history.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as one Conservative member of the House learned today, the Prime Minister just cannot cope with anyone who disagrees with him, constructively or not, and that includes Canadian farmers.

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister stop the gag orders on anyone in the Wheat Board who disagrees with him? Will he stop trying to cook the voters list? Will he allow farmers who do not share his ideology to vote? Will the Prime Minister uphold the rule of law, uphold democracy, and put this issue to a fair vote among all producers and not just those who agree with him?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, years ago the Liberal Party took away from western Canadian farmers the right to market their own wheat. Then a leader of the Liberal Party came along, having monopolized that privilege, and said “Why should we sell your wheat for you?” We in this party are going to make sure that our farmers are never subject to that kind of arbitrary behaviour by a future Liberal government.

[Translation]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): That is all well and good, Mr. Speaker, but this government has shown that it does not care about farmers and their preferences.

In the west, our farmers chose the Canadian Wheat Board. In Quebec and across the country, they chose the supply management system. The Prime Minister, however, chose to impose his ideology at the expense of our farmers' well-being.

Why does the Prime Minister insist on attacking the choices of our farming communities?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government defends the decision of farmers who chose supply management. We defended this decision here and internationally.

[English]

Western Canadian wheat farmers do not have supply management. They are looking for options. This government will always respect their choices and make sure the choices are available to our farmers.

* * *

[Translation]

GUN CONTROL

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative minority government is once again ignoring the consensus in Quebec. A few weeks ago, a young student at Dawson College asked the Prime Minister to strengthen gun control. Yesterday, the parents of young Anastasia sent the same message.

After the tragedy, the Prime Minister stated in this House that he wants to look at the situation and make it harder to have access to firearms. Now, four weeks later, can he tell us how he intends to control firearms in Canada?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want a system that is more effective than the one that was in place under the former Liberal government. This is why we have asked for all the facts. We are now engaged in a consultation process with the Quebec provincial minister and with the ministers from the other provinces to improve the process, so as to have a system that is effective and that will prevent tragedies such as the one that occurred at Dawson College.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, day after day the minority government ignores the pleas made. It has made a habit of ignoring those groups that do not agree with it and of silencing them.

Yesterday, Jean Charest called on the Conservative government to reflect on all the tragedies that were avoided thanks to the gun registry.

Will the Prime Minister at last choose to represent all the citizens of this country? Will he give up his project to weaken gun control? Will he respect the choice made by Quebeckers?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are at the stage of strengthening and improving the gun control process. Such a tragedy is unacceptable.

This is why we have been in contact with the Quebec minister. We will of course reflect on the comment made by Quebec premier Jean Charest and we will continue to have in place a system that is effective and that will protect all our citizens.

* * *

OLDER WORKERS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government made a clear commitment in the throne speech and the budget to introduce income support measures for older workers. It also promised in the budget that it would conduct a feasibility study of assistance measures for workers. But yesterday, the government tabled an assistance plan that includes no income support measures and that once again promises to conduct a feasibility study.

How does the Prime Minister explain that after seven months, his government has studied nothing and delivered nothing and that all he has for older workers is a retraining program with no income support measures?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I absolutely refuse to accept the criticism from the Bloc Québécois leader.

In cooperation with the provinces, this government has proposed a \$100 million plan for older workers. The commitment made in the budget has been honoured. This government has kept its promise. The problem is that the Bloc Québécois will never be able to do anything about this issue.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister is in power, and he is using that power to help the oil companies. He is doing nothing to help the unemployed. That is the reality.

That is why his assistance plan is being rejected by everyone in Quebec: the CSN, the FTQ and Quebec's minister of employment and social solidarity, who said this morning that the assistance program was “not very realistic”.

Oral Questions

How can he act this way with a \$13 billion surplus? With the \$250 million in tax breaks given annually to the oil companies, we can see who he is serving with his power: his friends, the oil companies. And he is doing nothing for the unemployed. That is what he should be saying. This minister has sold—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Industry.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House do not have the same information as the Bloc Québécois does. Our information indicates that the Government of Quebec wants to take advantage of this program and will also take advantage of the program we are setting up for Quebec workers. That is the information we have today.

However, I would like to say that the Bloc Québécois will never be happy with everything this government has done, because we are a government that abides by Canada's constitution, whereas the mission of the Bloc Québécois is to destroy this country.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the mission of this government is to care for the most unfortunate among us, and yesterday it failed in that task.

Does someone not have to be disconnected from reality to think that a sawmill worker who has spent 40 years of his life in a sawmill is going to be able to get retrained and re-enter the labour market at the age of 59, under a program like the one the government is proposing?

Why does a government decision to give oil companies \$250 million call for just two lines in the budget, but it is always impossible to do something for workers?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Bloc Québécois, we have confidence in workers, and in older workers. That is why we have developed a program that meets their needs.

The truth of this is demonstrated by the fact that the Mouvement des aînés du Québec told us today that it is essential that we support workers who are 55 and over, and that is what we are doing. The retirement bell has not yet rung for many older workers in Quebec. These people still want to participate in the economic life of Canada.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this minister is completely disconnected from reality. I met the Whirlpool workers in Montmagny during the election campaign, workers who have sent out 25 or 30 or 40 job applications and been told "I am sorry, you are too old".

How can the government justify having hundreds of millions of dollars for its friends the oil companies, and not have a few million dollars to preserve the dignity of the older workers who have built what we have today?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Bloc Québécois talks and talks and talks.

When the budget was debated, the Bloc Québécois said that it wanted a program to target and assist older workers in regions of Quebec where there was hardship; that is what we have delivered. What are they telling us now? Obviously the Bloc Québécois will oppose everything done by this government, which advocates open federalism and believes in respecting jurisdictions, because the goal of the Bloc is Quebec's secession.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Prime Minister, just like the Liberals before him, while he was quietly slipping hundreds of millions of dollars into the pockets of the big oil and gas companies let it slip that, just like the Liberals before him, he is going to break his promise on reducing pollution.

Canadians know that with these so-called intensity based targets, pollution does not go down. It goes up.

It turns out that the Prime Minister has actually produced what he likes to call a made in Canada plan that was really conceived in Washington, a Washington based approach to increase pollution and make the air dirtier right here in Canada.

Will the Prime Minister admit what he is doing?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course I will not admit that.

I would urge the hon. member and leader of the NDP to actually wait and see the government's proposals to see that everything he said is completely wrong and without foundation.

The hon. member likes to talk about money slipping by him. As I recall, that is exactly what happened to the government's budget. It was a good budget and we are proud of it.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again the Prime Minister's solution to pollution is to say to all Canadians "hold your breath". We will see what happens with that bill tomorrow.

[Translation]

We need some political will. The government's bill is a stalling tactic. It is a waste of time. It will not reduce pollution, and the Prime Minister knows it. We can take action now to reduce pollution and to combat climate change.

Will we ever hear anything but hot air from the Prime Minister?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the actions taken by this government will reduce pollution. This is the first plan that has been introduced in this Parliament to reduce pollutants in Canada.

The fact that the leader of the NDP is denouncing this bill before seeing it shows that we cannot have any faith in what he says.

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GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one might think that a minority government would be inclined to show some understanding for linguistic minorities, but that is clearly not the case. After having massacred the court challenges program and stifled the voice of francophone communities, the Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages poured oil on the fire by accusing minorities of living in the past.

Oral Questions

Does the minister not understand that the future of our communities is at stake here and it depends on the preservation of our rights?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very important to understand all that I said.

If the hon. member had taken the time to read the transcript, he would have seen that I was referring to our government's approach, which is to look to the future to ensure that the communities continue to thrive.

If the hon. member wants to look to the past, he should explain to the communities why the Liberals cut \$100 million from their budgets between 1993 and 1999.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities declined to meet with the mayors and councillors at the conference of francophone municipalities of New Brunswick, the Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages is trying to stifle the voice of the Acadian communities.

Has she not heard the appeal from the FCFA demanding that the court challenges program be maintained? Has she not read the letter that the SAANB sent to her government asking that the program be preserved?

How does the minister answer all the minority communities across the country that are demanding that the court challenges program be kept?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is what our government and I have done in just a few months time.

I have signed education agreements with every province worth more than a billion dollars and agreements for services worth a total of \$64 million. I have signed agreements with the communities.

Recently, I joined forces with my colleague the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to announce a plan to encourage francophone immigration. That is what we have done.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, order. I can hardly hear a word the minister is saying. There is continual yelling. She has another 15 seconds. We will have some order. The hon. Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Speaker, we have done an awful lot and I had not even finished.

Last week, I announced \$660,000 in financial support for the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne to hold a summit of the Canadian Francophonie.

An hon. member: Resign!

● (1435)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bourassa should be more careful. It is getting too noisy.

The hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora has the floor.

* * *

[*English*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment drives a car with a bumper sticker which says, "A woman's place is in the house, the senate and the oval office". That is a great sentiment if we were all Americans, but it is too bad that she did not advocate for rights and equality for Canadian women within her own cabinet.

In fact, the six women in cabinet sat back, said and did nothing, while equality was dropped as part of this government's mandate.

On the anniversary of Persons Day I ask the minister responsible this question. How does it feel to be the person who eliminated equality as a benchmark for Canadian women?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is made up of caucus members who understand that not all women have equal opportunity and therefore we will address that issue.

This government did not cut, as the previous Liberal government did, the women's program budget three times in the last decade, and this government does not have a caucus that has boys' weekends to make up its policies.

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that answer will satisfy Canadian women.

On a day that we should be celebrating progress in the area of women's rights, there is a black cloud over it because the government does not believe in women's equality and does not even want to hear their progressive voices.

The CIDA minister and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women apparently share the views that minority rights do not deserve protection.

Will the minister send a strong signal to Canadian women on this very important day and reverse her decision to cut equality from the mandate of the Status of Women?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I shared with you an experience this morning of honouring some very significant women and in fact these women are with us today.

I would suggest that the member opposite who had the opportunities, at one time being recognized as the most powerful businesswoman in Canada, did very little about it. Consequently, when we look at her board at Magna, there is no female representation on that board.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

OLDER WORKERS

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only is the program announced yesterday not a real income support program for older workers, but it is also limited to localities with populations of 250,000 or less. Straight off this excludes workers who lost their jobs at Wolverine in Montreal, for example, or the factory workers at Régence shoes in Quebec City, in Charlesbourg riding.

Does the government realize that its supposed support program will not be of any help to hundreds of workers who have the misfortune of being laid off in a major centre where the program will not apply?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am still trying to figure out the Bloc Québécois position on this new initiative that we announced yesterday. In fact yesterday the Bloc Québécois member for Sherbrooke said, and I quote:

This program gains something for the forestry industry and the textile industry.

It is a good program.

Today the Bloc Québécois is against the program. What is the Bloc's position?

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I give you the example of the Cardinal clothing company, where hundreds of workers were laid off. These are good seamstresses who are over 55 years old and many of them are immigrants with only a limited knowledge of French or English and a limited education.

What reasons is the government going to put forward to explain to these workers that not only is the program inadequate, but also that they are not eligible for it?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a misunderstanding of the program that we announced yesterday. It is very simple. We were asked for a program for older people, to help older workers in the regions. That is what we did

There are two key criteria: be between 55 and 64 and be in a hard-hit region. All the other criteria will be discussed in cooperation with the provinces, including Quebec. The Government of Quebec will decide which community will benefit from this program.

We believe in the provinces, unlike the Bloc Québécois.

• (1440)

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the program announced yesterday will not be of any use in truly helping the workers. The Minister is fooling herself. When you are over 55 and you have spent the better part of your life in a textile factory, it is almost impossible. The Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages can go ahead and urge workers not to look back anymore, but to look ahead all she wants. It will not change a thing.

Does the minister realize that if you lose your job after spending 40 years with the same company, without a diploma, the only thing ahead of you is often a choice between welfare—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Industry.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is trying to say that people 55 and older can no longer contribute to Canadian society. This is not what the Mouvement des aînés du Québec is saying. Those individuals can take part in Canadian society. I have confidence in people, in individuals, and I know that people over 55 deserve to work and deserve our support to find work.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, many workers who are victims of mass layoffs live in regions that rely on a single industry such as forestry, fisheries or mines. In that context, retraining is difficult, if not impossible.

Can the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development tell the hundreds of forestry workers in the Gaspé Peninsula, who recently lost their jobs, how her program is supposed to help them retrain and for what?

What will they be retrained for, Minister?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are telling all older workers, including those in the Gaspé Peninsula, that we have implemented a program. We will work together with the province of Quebec and we will respect its priorities. The province will decide which community will benefit from the program.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans was the fisheries critic, he said in the House, "The department has been asked to find up to \$20 million. This means devastating cuts. The government cannot give and then taketh away".

The departmental estimates now prove he is cutting \$100 million, affecting 200 jobs in fisheries. Why will the minister not use the money to give instead of taking away?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know and does know that he should not be reading NDP published press releases because what he is talking about are interim figures that are tabled that have no reality to the budget that will be presented next spring.

Our budget will not be cut. We are in the process of helping people, not hurting them. They had enough of that in years past.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a fish off the Atlantic coast called the flounder. It is kind of a flat fish. When it swims and sees trouble, it flips, it flops, and it swims in the opposite direction.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member has the floor. We will hear the hon. member's question at once.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of flip, flop and flounder.

Department cuts, also custodial management, when will he practise what he started to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I asked the member who ducked away from supporting our committee to go to Newfoundland so that we could hear what the people had to say and that we made the proper decisions in relation to the fishery.

The biggest problem we have in Newfoundland is an oversupply of one fish. It is called the shrimp.

• (1445)

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

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We are on to the next question. The hon. member for Labrador has the floor. We will have a little order.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, that is a bit of a whale of a tale, but there was shock among Canada's aboriginal peoples when the Prime Minister announced that he would eliminate race based fisheries. It is a page out of the Reform book. It is inflammatory and divisive.

Yesterday the fisheries minister was confronted by a fellow MP for his government's handling of the west coast fishery. Having crushed Paul McCartney's relationship, is he now set on crushing Canada's relationship with aboriginal people?

Will the fisheries minister commit to protecting aboriginal fishing rights, constitutional rights that have been upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will gladly answer. I would ask my colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador if he would talk to his friends and aboriginal families across the country, including the chiefs of many of the groups across this great country. He should ask them what they think of the performance of this minister and the work we are doing with them to make sure that we have a part as we move forward in the fisheries of this country.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is his job; it may be mine later.

Confronted with anger over the PM's assault on aboriginal fisheries, the Minister of Indian Affairs says not to worry. The fisheries minister too has tried to soften his leader's vicious and unwarranted attack.

The Conservative Party policy on aboriginal fisheries depends on who one asks: the Prime Minister, the Minister of Indian Affairs, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, or the member for Delta—Richmond East.

Let us get some clarity here. Does the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans share the Prime Minister's opinion of race based fisheries?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is one person responsible for fisheries in this country and that is the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. Our policies are clear cut.

Oral Questions

There is one way to move ahead in this country. We take all the players that are involved, bring them around the table and make sure that they agree to a process that suits everybody.

That is exactly what we are doing. The Prime Minister, myself and everybody else are in the one boat on this.

* * *

TRANSPORT

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities with regard to the Toronto Port Authority.

Can the minister inform the House on the status of the review by Mr. Roger Tassé that this new government has commissioned?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report to the House and all the members that on October 16, Mr. Tassé submitted his report on the findings of the Toronto Port Authority. On behalf of the government, I would like to thank Mr. Tassé for his extensive work in preparing this report.

I will be reviewing the report and on completion of this review, I will be in a position to comment more fully. I can assure all Canadians that the government is open, accountable and transparent and will therefore make the report public, once I have reviewed the findings thoroughly.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, workers and unemployed individuals took part in a march from Montreal to Ottawa to protest the EI program and the Conservatives' inaction.

Years of successive Liberal and Conservative governments have resulted in a situation that is worse than ever.

The government has built up its largest surplus on the backs of workers. Yet, 68% of the women and 62% of the men who contributed to the EI fund are still being denied benefits.

Will the minister listen to workers and the unemployed and make changes? The need for the program—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Social Development.

• (1450)

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for all the work that he has done on this issue.

As he knows, employment insurance is extremely broad, extremely complex. Any changes that are to be made, we have to make sure that they do not affect some other part of EI in an adverse way. That is why we are slowly going through and making sure we pay due attention to all the various aspects of EI so that it meets the needs of all Canadians.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government always finds some excuse to justify its lack of commitment to workers and the unemployed.

The Liberals and the Conservatives have been giving the same unacceptable excuses for the past 13 years. We have 800,000 workers who do not qualify for employment insurance. Also 1.4 million children are living in poverty. A fairer and more accessible EI program would help address that.

Yesterday, the government introduced a program that will do nothing to help workers. Enough already with laughing at people's expense.

What is the minister going to do to help this country's workers?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly why we launched our program yesterday, because we do care. We recognize the needs of older workers who have been displaced through circumstances beyond their control. I would like to quote the president of the CPQ who said yesterday about our new program:

[Translation]

Between being given a fish and learning to fish, the choice is clear. We have to help the affected workers retrain in different areas, and the sooner the better.

[English]

This government is not going to write off older workers. We are going to help them.

* * *

EQUALIZATION PROGRAM

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Atlantic Canada alarm bells are ringing over the government's waffling on the Atlantic accords. Back when they needed votes in Atlantic Canada, the Prime Minister said in writing that no province would lose out to the changes in equalization, but now suddenly, he is not so sure and neither is anybody else.

Will the Prime Minister stand today in the House and admit that his signature is worthless?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the government before us, we keep our commitments. We are keeping our commitment with respect to the Atlantic accord. We are also following the process that was outlined in the budget papers in 2006; that is, we are consulting with the provinces. The finance ministers have met. We have received and we are reviewing and studying the various reports that have been presented. These discussions continue. We expect them to continue through the end of this year and into the new year and look forward to budget 2007.

* * *

ATLANTIC CANADA ECONOMY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is just the latest in a long line of policy reversals by the government. The Prime Minister of Canada gave his word. If that cannot be honoured, what can?

The government recently reannounced the Liberal Pacific gateway plan. It even used the same minister we did. Well Atlantic Canada is also a gateway to the world's richest markets. Atlantic Canadians know what the Prime Minister thinks of them, but are there any Atlantic Conservative MPs who will stand up for the Atlantic gateway, or are they afraid of getting the same treatment as the member for Halton?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member of the opposition is absolutely right in underlining the tremendous work that was undertaken by my colleague in announcing last week with the Prime Minister and the premier of the province of British Columbia the gateway and the corridors.

We are also committed to the other initiatives in this country. As a matter of fact, we have already initiated some funding so that we can see this program and this project go forward.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week by having his staff leak confidential documents concerning Ottawa's signed light rail contract, the President of the Treasury Board inserted himself in a municipal election. Now he has his sights set on Toronto's waterfront revitalization project and a TTC contract.

How many more municipalities across this country will this minority government blackmail and bully before it hands over previously committed infrastructure funding?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government promised to change the way Ottawa worked. We promised more accountability. People across the country felt the Liberal standard on accountability fell short.

I do note that the relationship between the Government of Canada and the City of Toronto is working quite well. I am working quite well with the Mayor of Toronto, David Miller, who just on Monday said that I was a friend of Toronto.

● (1455)

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board, if he had read an article in the *Ottawa Citizen*, would have seen "people thought that this was purely political" when they were speaking about his actions in Ottawa. The new deal has become a raw deal and the minister responsible for infrastructure can do nothing about it.

Is this the new government policy, to breach confidentiality agreements, deny local democracy, use federal funding for blackmail and interfere in municipal elections?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Kitchener Centre is obviously not reading the same stories in the *Ottawa Citizen* that I am reading. Here is what it said last week, “unprecedented scope of the investment...makes a final, ratifying endorsement entirely appropriate”. An *Ottawa Citizen* headline this morning said that the majority backed me on the light rail delay.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, instead of using the \$13 billion surplus—which includes \$2 billion from the employment insurance fund—to initiate real reforms, the government chose to put it all toward the debt.

How can the government justify this to the unemployed people who ended their long march to Parliament Hill today? How can it explain that it would rather use its billions of dollars to give generous gifts to its oil company friends than to bring about real change to the employment insurance system?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, any surpluses in the EI account go to general revenue. Those are shared by all Canadians. The benefits of that go to help all Canadians, not just those unemployed but to help create new jobs in the country as well. That is important to keep our country going and growing.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the minister realize that this money belongs to workers and employers?

The government's attitude is incomprehensible. It lowered employment insurance contributions to help workers. It did nothing for the people who really need help, the people for whom the fund exists: the unemployed.

If the government is that short of ideas, will it at the very least support the two bills introduced by the Bloc Québécois, one to improve the EI system and the other to create an independent employment insurance fund?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a new government, we are reviewing every program in every department. What we have to recognize is that Canada has registered almost record low unemployment rates, 6.4% last month. That is a miraculous achievement.

We have to focus on getting more people prepared and skilled and into the workforce. That is what we have to do. That is what we are focusing on. That is why we announced our new program yesterday to help older workers participate in the workforce, not pension them off and have them sitting outside. Let us let them contribute. Let us get everybody back to work.

[Translation]

OLDER WORKERS

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry.

Why is he trying to hide behind the Quebec government? Minister Michelle Courchesne just said that she is disappointed with the program. It does not at all meet workers' expectations, it has an adverse impact on Montreal and Quebec City, and it is not an early retirement plan. In fact, his program is nothing but a band-aid solution to a serious problem, a bridge to welfare. Will the minister admit it?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the information that the hon. member for Outremont has is contradicted by what the Quebec government just told us moments ago, namely that it is going to take advantage of the program and that this is an interesting initiative for Quebec workers.

I want to ask the hon. member for Outremont what his government's priorities were? The former government had 76 priorities just before the House was dissolved. However, none of these 76 priorities was related to older workers.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is reported that Chinese border guards fired on a group of about 70 unarmed Tibetans who were attempting to cross the border from China into Nepal. A 17-year-old nun was killed. The guards also reportedly took some Tibetans into custody, mostly children aged six to eight.

Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell the House what representation has been made to the Chinese government and what measures are being taken to have these children returned to their families?

● (1500)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. member's abhorrence and dismay for this terrible incident that happened at the border. Canada strongly condemns this act of violence against unarmed civilians as an egregious violation of human rights. We have formally raised these concerns.

About the incident, we will follow up further with the Chinese government and we intend to reiterate Canada's strong condemnation of this gross human rights violation. We have called upon the Chinese to conduct a full, independent investigation and punish those responsible, as well as release the detained Tibetan children immediately to their families and abide by the relevant international obligations, including those under the UN Convention of the Rights of Children.

*Routine Proceedings***STATUS OF WOMEN**

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today Charlotte Thibault, the chair of government relations for FAFIA, was presented an award by our Governor General to recognize her work promoting women's rights. The disgraceful irony is that she is honoured and the minister responsible for women has gutted the funding for Thibault's organization.

The minister has changed the mandate so that women's organizations will be unable to continue to do their work.

Will the minister stand up and defend women in our country and reverse her decision to change the funding mandate?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nobody has to talk to me about minority rights. What we are trying to do as a government is to offer opportunities.

Unlike the previous Liberal government, this government is taking action. In nine short months, we are acting on matrimonial property rights for aboriginal women. We have introduced the universal child care benefit. We are going to put forward tougher justice legislation to protect our women. We will no longer treat the women who are victims of human trafficking as criminals.

This is action and this is what we will deliver to Canadian women.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious by the minister's non-response that she does not understand her portfolio.

By refusing new pay equity legislation and insisting that women have full equality in our country, the minister shows her total ignorance about the needs of women in Canada. She is unable, or refuses, to stand up for women at the cabinet table.

I have asked for this before and I am going to ask again. As the minister refuses to protect the mandate for the Status of Women, will she now do the right thing and resign?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand up for women, but every member of this caucus and government stands up for women. I will not resign.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier in the House the Prime Minister, as is his way, attempted to confuse Canadians on what the Canadian Wheat Board Act is about.

The act empowers farmers as opposed to them being at the mercy of the grain trade. Farmers under that act have rights and one of those rights is, by vote, to determine their marketing institution's powers.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing, obey the law and give them a vote on single desk selling?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government will do what farmers have always wanted, which is to have a range of marketing choices, including the Wheat Board.

We are never going to be afraid to consult western farmers. The last time we did it, like so many times when we have done it, they did not return a single Liberal MP, and they never will.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

The minister delivered a keynote address earlier this week to the Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centres during the national symposium on pediatric wait times.

Could the minister please inform the House what steps Canada's new government has taken to address the important issue of wait times for children?

• (1505)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Curiously, Mr. Speaker, while the previous Liberal government was doling out money to its friends, it forgot and it cut the funds in March 2005 for the Canadian Paediatric Surveillance Program.

Help is on the way. In budget 2006 this government will provide funding of \$400,000 per year for the next five years for this important program. This will help our kids. It will help reduce wait times. We are on the side of our patients and we are on the side of those most special patients, our kids.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the Governor General's Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case. They are as follows: Joyce Hancock, Maureen Kempston-Darkes, Doreen McKenzie-Sanders, Jan Reimer, Charlotte Thibault and Semma Shah, the Youth Award recipient for 2006.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 66(2)(b), I would like to designate Thursday, October 19, for the purpose of concluding the debate on the motion to concur in the first report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

POINTS OF ORDER

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the point of order raised on September 20, 2006 by the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform with respect to Question No. 90 on the order paper.

[*Translation*]

I wish to thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary for raising the matter. I also want to acknowledge the contributions made by the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh and by the hon. Government House Leader on September 22.

[*English*]

Let me first summarize the essence of Question No. 90. On September 19, 2006, the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam submitted to the Journals Branch a question containing 47 subsections. In general terms, the question has to do with the presence of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan and each subsection poses a separate question on the government's defence and foreign policies with respect to the Afghanistan mission.

After consideration by the Journals Branch staff in the usual manner, the question was placed on the notice paper. After the usual two day notice period, Question No. 90 was transferred to the order paper, where it now stands as the only written question in the name of the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

In his intervention, the hon. parliamentary secretary expressed concern about the length of Question No. 90. In addition, he contended that some of the subsections to the question were not within the administrative responsibility of the government. He concluded by asking the Chair to rule Question No. 90 out of order.

In response to this point of order, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh asserted that current practice permitted the placing of lengthy questions on the order paper. In support of this argument, he referred to Questions Nos. 5 and 7 from the previous Parliament, which he claimed were lengthier than Question No. 90 but which were nonetheless answered by the government. The hon. government House leader countered that the length of Question No. 90 was unreasonable and that it violated the spirit of Standing Order 39 by asking 47 questions under the guise of one question.

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

As all hon. members are aware, the purpose of placing questions on the Order Paper is to allow members to seek detailed or technical information on matters of public affairs from one or more government departments or agencies so as to enable members to carry out their parliamentary functions.

[*English*]

In order for a written question to be placed on the order paper, it must first meet certain requirements as to form and content. Standing Order 39(1) requires that no argumentative material or unnecessary fact or opinion be included in a question. In addition, the subject matter of the question must pertain to public affairs, which is another

Speaker's Ruling

way of saying matters within the administrative responsibility of the government. A written question is also judged acceptable if it satisfies the general guidelines for oral questions. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on page 441 states:

Given that the purpose of a written question is to seek and receive a precise, detailed answer, it is incumbent on a Member submitting a question for the Notice Paper "to ensure that it is formulated carefully enough to elicit the precise information sought".

The modern rules respecting questions on the order paper can be traced back to the 1985 third report of the Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, commonly known as the McGrath committee. The committee recommended that members be limited to having four questions on the order paper at any one time as a means of resolving the decades long problem of hundreds, at times thousands, of written questions remaining unanswered on the order paper.

At the same time, the committee anticipated that members might try to circumvent the limit of four written questions by submitting questions containing numerous subquestions. The McGrath committee proposed that the Clerk should have authority to reject outright or to split into separate and distinct questions those questions that contain unrelated subquestions. What is today known as Standing Order 39(2) was subsequently adopted. It states:

The Clerk of the House, acting for the Speaker, shall have full authority to ensure that coherent and concise questions are placed on the *Notice Paper* in accordance with the practices of the House, and may, on behalf of the Speaker, order certain questions to be posed separately.

[*Translation*]

Hon. members who were here during the 36th Parliament may recall a ruling delivered by Mr. Speaker Parent on the division of a written question on February 8, 1999. The ruling was in response to a point of order raised by the hon. member for Delta—South Richmond, now the hon. member for Delta—Richmond East, and it can be found on pages 11531 to 11533 of the Debates for the First Session of the 36th Parliament.

The hon. member raised a number of issues in his point of order, including the matter of the division of his question by the Clerk's staff. The hon. member claimed that the question had been divided by the Clerk's staff because of its length. Mr. Speaker Parent found that the Clerk's staff had followed the proper procedures and had made the decision to divide the question in accordance with Standing Order 39(2) not because the question was lengthy, but because the sub-questions were not related. The Speaker stated, and I quote:

The issue was not the length of the question but rather the fact that it contained unrelated subquestions. The subquestions may be linked from the member's point of view but are in reality separate and distinct questions.

[*English*]

This ruling underscored that in order for a question with multiple subquestions to be found admissible, there must be a common element connecting the various parts.

Routine Proceedings

As the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh correctly pointed out in his intervention, there have been numerous lengthy questions containing multiple subquestions and even some with subsections within subquestions, placed on the order paper in the past. These would include, for example, in the 36th Parliament, Questions Nos. 28, 56, 91, 103, 132, 138 and 190, which were judged acceptable and placed on the order paper.

Similarly, in the 37th Parliament, Questions Nos. 17, 60, 225 and 240 were also found to be acceptable. In the last Parliament, Questions Nos. 5, 7 and 151 were placed on the order paper and, finally, in the current Parliament, Questions Nos. 13 and 33 were placed on the order paper.

I do not recall that any objections were raised at the time these questions were placed on the order paper and, indeed, the government provided answers to all these questions, albeit perhaps not always within the 45 day timeframe set down in Standing Order 39(5)(a).

It is apparent to me from the examples cited above that the interpretation of the term concise in Standing Order 39(2) has evolved since this rule was first adopted. It is no longer interpreted to mean short or brief but rather comprehensible. Undoubtedly, this practice has evolved as a means of getting around the limit of four questions per member.

Leaving aside the issue of length, I want to turn now to the substance of the questions, specifically to the Standing Order requirement that questions must be “coherent and concise”. As hon. members will know, the Clerk and her staff routinely edit written questions as to form and, from time to time, have divided questions to make them conform to the requirements of the Standing Order. In questionable cases, their practice has been to give the member submitting the question the benefit of the doubt and to allow the question to be placed on the order paper. The Speaker has only become involved in rare cases such as this one where objections have been raised.

With this in mind, I reviewed all 47 parts of Question No. 90 carefully. Keeping in mind the need for coherence in the question, I must admit that I found that, as currently constructed, some parts of the question are rather tenuously knitted together. Accordingly, I have determined that the need for greater coherence necessitates that the question be divided. For this reason I must rule that Question No. 90, as currently formulated, is inadmissible.

To remedy the situation without unduly penalizing the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, I have instructed the Clerk to divide Question No. 90 into three separate questions. The first question concerns the government's objectives, strategy, vision, results and capabilities with respect to the Afghanistan mission and includes 33 subquestions. The second deals specifically with Canadian Forces casualties in Afghanistan. It contains five subsections. Seven subquestions related to financial matters are grouped together in a third question.

In reviewing the question, I have also examined it to determine whether it respects the Standing Order requirement by seeking information that pertains to matters within the administrative responsibility of the government. In this case I have found that

two of the original subquestions dealing with allied forces and non-governmental organizations are outside the administrative responsibility of the government. Accordingly, I have asked that they be deleted. Another subquestion was amended to remove references to agencies and multilateral organizations for the same reason.

Copies of the three questions are available at the table and will also be found on tomorrow's order paper listed as Questions Nos. 106, 107 and 108.

Finally, in view of the fact that the information sought remains essentially unchanged, the 45 day period for the government to respond to the questions will be retroactive to the original date when notice was first given of Question No. 90, that is September 19, 2006. I believe these steps taken together provide a remedy to the objections raised with respect to Question No. 90 while respecting rights of the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam in seeking information by way of written questions that meet the requirements of our Standing Orders.

I wish to thank hon. members for allowing me the opportunity to clarify our practices with respect to written questions and if hon. members are still concerned about the rules and practices, they are of course free to take the matter up with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Since 20 years have passed since the current Standing Order went into effect, it may be opportune to examine whether the rule has worked out in the way in which it was intended.

In the meantime, I am confident that, to avoid difficulties, members may be well-served should they seek guidance from the Clerk and her staff when drafting questions for the order paper. I apologize that this ruling was not more concise as is required in respect of the questions.

* * *

● (1515)

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN TRANSPORTATION ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION AND SAFETY BOARD

Hon. Michael Chong (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister for Sport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table here in the House the annual report to Parliament on the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act, prepared by the Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board.

* * *

[*English*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2006, NO. 2

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-28, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on May 2, 2006.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

●(1520)

[*Translation*]

AIR CANADA PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ACT

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Air Canada Public Participation Act.

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

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canada-France Inter-Parliamentary Association concerning its 34th annual meeting, held in Paris and Touraine, from September 10 to September 17, 2006.

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 16th report from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 16th report later this day.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-344, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (Employment Insurance Account and premium rate setting) and another Act in consequence.

He said: Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing a bill to create an independent employment insurance fund, and I think it is appropriate to introduce this bill today.

With the creation of this independent fund, workers' and employers' contributions will benefit the unemployed alone. The government will no longer be able to use the fund surpluses to finance its own activities.

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

* * *

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-393, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (punishment and hearing).

He said: Mr. Speaker, night crimes are becoming more prevalent across Canada. Knives are the new weapons of choice. They are small, easily concealed and quickly used in all types of crimes.

Traditionally, punishment for knife crimes such as murder and assault is minimal. The latest published Statistics Canada information for the five year period from 2000-04 has a category called "homicides by method". During that five year period, which accounts for 2,852 homicides, the statistics show that there were 840 shooting homicides and 849 stabbing homicides.

I am introducing a bill today to address this issue. The bill would assign mandatory minimum sentences to certain offences committed with a concealed weapon. It would also ensure that the interests of victims and their families are taken into account during the conditional release process, and that only the actual time spent in pretrial custody is credited toward the term of imprisonment.

I am introducing this bill for Andy Moffitt, a young man from my riding who was killed by a knife in 1998. I introduced a similar bill in the 38th Parliament and it was known as Bill C-393. I am seeking unanimous consent of the House today to number this bill, Bill C-393.

The Speaker: Does the House give its consent that the bill be numbered Bill C-393?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

* * *

●(1525)

FISHERIES ACT

Mr. Paul Zed (Saint John, Lib.): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-358, An Act to amend the Fisheries Act (deposit of sewage).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to introduce a bill that is critically important to both my riding of Saint John and also other communities across Canada.

This bill prohibits the deposit of untreated sewage in Canadian waters. It allows for the governor in council to prescribe by regulation how sewage must be treated and the standards that it must meet before it can be deposited in those waters.

Every day in my riding of Saint John more than 16 million litres of raw, untreated sewage flows into the harbour. In Greater Victoria, 127 million litres of liquid sewage is dumped into the ocean daily. In St. John's, Newfoundland, it is 120 million litres. In Halifax, it is 180 million litres.

It is a serious national problem and it is a major public health issue. The dumping of untreated sewage is an unacceptable practice and we have to stop using our oceans as a toilet. Our children deserve clean water.

Routine Proceedings

The bill would ensure that the Government of Canada would take responsibility to restrict the dumping of untreated sewage into waterways that creates a harmful effect on communities, the fishery and the coastal environment.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 16th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

FINANCE

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of motions to deal with today. I would like to indicate at the outset that discussions have taken place between all the parties.

The first motion is concerning the recorded division scheduled to take place later today on the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Finance, requesting an extension of time to consider Bill C-294. I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That the recorded division scheduled to take place later today on the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Finance, be deemed concurred in.

The Speaker: The House has heard the motion proposed by the chief government whip. Is there unanimous consent to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Finance is deemed concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think you will find there is unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in relation to its study of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan, 10 members of the Standing Committee on National Defence be authorized to travel to CFB Petawawa, Ontario, on Tuesday, October 24, 2006 from early morning and return by 5:30 p.m. the same day, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

The Speaker: Does the chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move that the second report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, presented on Thursday, June 22, be concurred in.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Churchill.

I am pleased to stand in support of the second report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food which has the following in its report:

That the government prior to any legislative or regulatory action affecting the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board as it is currently constituted under the Canada Wheat Board Act, submit through plebiscite to all those eligible to vote in Canadian Wheat Board elections, a clear and direct question asking whether those eligible to vote support or oppose the single desk selling provisions of the Canadian Wheat Board.

We put the motion today because of the tactics being used by the Conservative government. These tactics that have been taking place in a Canadian democracy are shameful.

The questions concerning the Canadian Wheat Board and the Conservative government really are: What will the Conservatives not do to destroy single desk selling under the Canadian Wheat Board? What will it not do to take power away from primary producers and give that power to the international grain trade? What will it not do to tear down a marketing institution that has become renown around the world for how it maximizes returns back to primary producers? What will the Conservative government not do in terms of catering to its American friends in the grain trade who have challenged the Canadian Wheat Board 11 times and have lost every time under international trade law?

From its actions to date, it would appear that the government is prepared to use any device up to the very line of legality in an effort to undermine the Canadian Wheat Board.

Under the act, producers should determine their marketing future. I was shocked and surprised by what I heard from the Prime Minister today during question period. What we heard in the House just 30 minutes ago was absolute arrogance from the Prime Minister. He basically told farmers that he would decide what was best for them.

It does not matter whether it is the law of the land or not, he was going to decide what was best for primary producers even though under the Canadian Wheat Board Act they have a right to determine the Wheat Board's future. The government opposite is not only by its words showing its true colours but its actions are even worse.

Earlier on in this exercise we heard about a secret meeting in Saskatchewan, that became public, and the only people on the invitation list were those who were opposed to the Wheat Board. In the final analysis, after Saskatchewan and Manitoba kicked up a stink, they were allowed to go as observers. Imagine this happening in Canada.

Four provincial governments are duly elected to represent their citizens on the Wheat Board and two of those provinces were denied the right to participate. They were denied the right to take part in discussions concerning a marketing institution that affects their constituents. In other words, duly elected governments were denied the right to speak on behalf of their citizens at that one-sided meeting.

The Minister of Agriculture set up a task force which is stacked with only those who oppose the Canadian Wheat Board. We cannot find its schedule. We cannot find out who this task force is meeting with, although we have had a few little brown envelopes slipped to us. This task force is holding secret meetings for invitees only and participants are not talking to those who believe strongly in single desk selling under the Wheat Board.

● (1530)

We know as well that there is word of a fake letter writing campaign, encouraged via the email from a communications firm in Saskatchewan, which said “encouraged by government, MPs and others”. We know they are catering to a propaganda campaign from the other side as well. However, the worst of all was an order in council from the minister himself directed toward the Canadian Wheat Board, which is absolutely nothing short of a gag order.

What we are seeing now is not only has it stacked task forces, not only has it denied democratically elected governments the right to participate in a meeting, but it is also taking away freedom of expression for those Wheat Board directors who have the most knowledge and experience in this industry. They can tell their primary producers, who elected them to their positions, what the pros and cons of various proposals relative to the Canadian Wheat Board really mean to those producers on the ground.

It is unbelievable that this could happen in a democracy like Canada. Those with experience are being intimidated.

● (1535)

The minister will say that it is not really a gag order, but this is what the Library of Parliament has said on these orders in council:

It appears that several activities could fall within the purview of this Order in Council. For instance, electronic and print publications, information on the CWB website and information sessions/meetings held by the CWB, may be prohibited under the order, if it advocates the retention of monopoly powers and involves the expenditure of funds. Further, the term “advocating the retention of its monopoly powers” may itself be subject to very strict interpretation. It is possible that publications prepared following the Directive (and therefore involve the expenditure of funds), which do not necessarily advocate the retention of the CWB’s monopoly, but discuss the single desk selling capacity, from a positive point of view, may also potentially violate the Order in Council.

It goes on to say:

Similarly, advertisements sponsored by the CWB, containing information about the advantages of the CWB monopoly may also be considered to violate the Directive.

That is pretty serious stuff. I never thought that a Government of Canada would deny freedom of expression in our country to primary producers, to elected producers to the Canadian Wheat Board who have the information and the knowledge to talk to their fellow farmers.

There are many other factors as well.

Let us look at the economic losses that would occur if we lose that marketing power through the Canadian Wheat Board. I will give summary, and this comes from the Wheat Board itself in terms of independent studies.

The Summary of the annual Canadian Wheat Board, benefits and services for single desk marketing approach for wheat are: the net benefit to producers, \$146 million to \$255 million per year; the value

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of single desk marketing approach for barley, \$59 million per year; the value of single desk marketing approach for durum, \$92 million to \$103 million; tendering and railway and terminal handling agreements, \$38.1 million per year; net interest earnings, \$66.2 million; approach to managing the delivery system, giving farmers power within the delivery system, a benefit of \$115 million per year; terminal blending, \$7 million to \$10 million per year; and farmer access to producer cars, \$6 million per year.

The net total loss to primary producers, if they lose single desk selling, which the Prime Minister is doing everything in his power to take away from them, right up to almost illegal means, is \$530 million to \$655 million per year. Why would the Prime Minister want to take marketing power away from western grain producers? I just cannot understand it.

He will go on. He tried this today in the House by the way that the Prime Minister tries deception, tries to confuse people about the real issues. The Conservatives are using the words “dual marketing”. There is no such thing. We either have single desk selling or we have an open market. Let us not be fooled. If we lose single desk selling under the Wheat Board, then we have an open market in which the multinational grain trade controls. It will take control and gain those profits and those benefits now accruing to primary producers.

Under the law, the Government of Canada, under the Canadian Wheat Board, is supposed to give primary producers a vote on single desk selling in our country. That is what the government should do, even though, at the head depots, it is trying influence producers in many ways with fake letters, manipulation of the press, gag orders in the Wheat Board itself and so on. Producers deserve the right to decide their own destiny on single desk selling.

● (1540)

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among the parties and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion: That Bill C-290, An Act to amend the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act (Northern Ontario), be referred, after second reading, to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs as opposed to a legislative committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Wheat Board is a very critical element of life on the Prairies and a very important element of how farmers have conducted business for a number of years. The member touched on this in his intervention, but I would like to him to expand on this.

One of the things we have seen recently is a lack of democratic process. Certainly, under the softwood agreement, we saw a refusal to allow the committee to go out on the road and get input from people across the country, from coast to coast to coast, who would be affected by the softwood agreement. With the Wheat Board, we see a gag order, something that will prevent a democratic process.

Could the member could expand on the trend that he is seeing with the Conservative government, about shutting down a democratic process in our country of getting input from people most affected?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the question goes to the heart of the issue. We live, or we believed we did up until now, in a democracy where members of Parliament pass certain laws based on discussions with the community.

In the case of the Canadian Wheat Board, in 1998, at the request of farmers, the Canadian Wheat Board Act was changed so it no longer would be a government agency of which the cabinet appointed the commissioners for it. At that time, the Board was changed to be an elected board of producers, elected in their Wheat Board districts, to represent the farmers. That is true democracy.

We are seeing a trend from the government, and not only on grain. This is a bigger issue than a farm issue. This is about the Prime Minister's character; it is either his way or the highway. If a person does not agree with the Prime Minister, or the Conservative government, or the parliamentary secretary to the minister of agriculture, then do not try and have a say in the issue. They are only meeting with one side of the equation.

This is a very serious matter. It goes to the heart of our democratic institutions in our country. It is the Prime Minister, by his character and his ideology, that matters, and this is undermining the essence of our democracy.

•(1545)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member opposite and to his expressions with respect to voting on the Wheat Board issue.

The important issue is, members who raise grain should have the ability to express themselves. The member is saying that we are restricting that, but we are not. We are simply saying that people who do not use the Wheat Board and who do not have a permit book should not be permitted to vote.

I am sure in the upcoming Liberal leadership vote, Liberals would like to have only their own members voting. Therefore, it seems to me that the principle of democracy is an important one.

I would like his response to this, although I know already what he will say.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite made the point and the point is that producers should be given the right to

decide the choice of the powers in their marketing institution and whether or not they support or oppose single desk selling.

That is what we are asking the government to do. The government has denied that right. It has denied the right of producers, by plebiscite on a clear question, to vote on single desk selling.

Worse than that, it is going out there to manipulate public opinion, holding secret task forces, holding secret meetings by a stacked task force, and putting a gag order on those who have the most information, experience and knowledge relative to the operations of the Canadian Wheat Board. That right has been denied by the Prime Minister. He made that clear today in the House.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise today to speak to this critical issue facing the Canadian Wheat Board as we face monumental opposition by the minority Conservative government to the single desk marketing system for Canadian wheat farmers, a hugely successful single desk marketing system I might add. We are seeing the dynamics which point to leadership in this country seeking to undermine the populace and seeking to undermine democracy.

The blatant disregard of the voices of farmers and the gagging of the Canadian Wheat Board by an order in council is absolutely shocking, although it is a pattern that emerged early in the minority government's term as we saw the government fold the Kelowna accord. There too it completely disregarded the voices of aboriginal people in Canada. It made a decision which could have only been done by an order of the Prime Minister or by the Minister of Finance to pull the \$5 billion commitment. The Kelowna accord was not a partisan effort and the Conservative government refused to uphold the honour of the Crown.

The same Conservative government has plans which it knows very well will gut the Canadian Wheat Board by making membership voluntary and will result in the destruction of the world's largest single seller of wheat and barley. The government's task force does not include individuals except those who support its mission. The Canadian Wheat Board Act explicitly states that the member farmers have the right to a plebiscite on any changes to the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board.

The Conservative government's tactics on this issue have shaken not only me, but my entire riding. This is an issue of ethics. The principles of transparency, respect and accountability are not found in the dynamics at play which have a sole purpose, which of course is the one point on which the Conservatives have been transparent, to eliminate a world-renowned successful single desk marketing system.

The implications of the dismantling of the single desk marketing system will not only have a negative effect on farmers, but will have far-reaching implications in the employment of hundreds of people at the Canadian Wheat Board and in the private sector of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and thus significantly impacting the entire province of Manitoba.

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In fact, the services related to the Canadian Wheat Board reach to the far north and my riding, and the loss will be a crushing blow for the Port of Churchill which sees approximately 80% of its annual shipments from the Canadian Wheat Board. More directly, the sustainability of the port is dependent on the Canadian Wheat Board.

The northern towns of Churchill and Gillam, among others, along the Hudson's Bay railroad line are dependent upon the movement of grain to the Port of Churchill. The Mayor of Churchill, Mr. Mike Spence, says that this is the most pressing issue that his community has had in many years in terms of how it could be affected as a port community.

In Churchill alone, and a community of 1,000 people, the loss will mean the loss of 100 jobs. Communities along the rail line will be adversely affected as they rely upon the local transportation economy. As Manitoba's Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Eric Robinson, said so succinctly in his communication to the minister:

Most urgently, however, I'm appealing to you not to let your government's CWB policy become another nail in the coffin of several northern communities. Many of these places could just as easily prosper with minimal Federal support and common-sense policy considerations.

The Canadian Wheat Board is all that stands between Canadian wheat growers and the giant conglomerates in the global wheat market. An absence of the collective strength of the Canadian Wheat Board in the international economy would leave farmers to fend for themselves.

A motion was passed by a majority of the members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food which called upon the federal Minister of Agriculture to commit to respecting the provisions of the Canadian Wheat Board Act and called for a plebiscite of western Canadian grain farmers on the future of the Canadian Wheat Board.

I urge the Minister of Agriculture and all members of this House to look at the entire picture and at the economic consequences that will for sure occur to farmers, workers, and entire communities that are involved in this process.

• (1550)

The solution is clear. The decision on the future of the Canadian Wheat Board should not be decided by the Minister of Agriculture or the Conservative government but by the members of the Canadian Wheat Board. The very least the government can do is empower farmers rather than hinder their capacity to succeed.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just to give us a gauge in this place of who we represent as we speak on this issue, I wonder if the member could respond in terms of how many permit book holders there are in her constituency in the northern part of Manitoba. If that is a little difficult to respond to, could she give us a ballpark figure of how many farmers there are in her riding in Manitoba?

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate that my riding is a northern riding. In fact, the issue that is facing my riding has to do with the transport of grain.

The Port of Churchill, as I have mentioned, is a port that is dependent upon Canadian Wheat Board shipments and about

400,000 tonnes of grain move through the port. It has been a long established relationship that is critical within Manitoba, the Canadian Wheat Board and the Port of Churchill. There is a relationship in which the Canadian Wheat Board represents 80% of the grain which moves through the Port of Churchill.

I did not mention, as the member opposite seems to think I did, that there are farms in my riding. However, the implication of the dissolution of the Canadian Wheat Board has an impact which goes far beyond just affecting farmers. That is the point that I thought I made clear. The impact will have consequences not only on farmers but as we have said, will assist the large global conglomerates to take over the marketing. The Conservatives know very well that is going on.

The Canadian Wheat Board represents the primary producers under an act of Parliament. It says explicitly in the act that farmers would have a plebiscite if the mandate of the agency were to change. That is the first point.

The second point is that the impact goes far beyond the farmers. In fact, that is why I spoke today. It is because of the implications in terms of transportation for the Port of Churchill where there are hundreds of jobs that are dependent on the Canadian Wheat Board. There is a private sector which does business with the Canadian Wheat Board. The implications are not just in terms of farmers but have far-reaching implications.

• (1555)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, dismantling the Wheat Board is just another example of the government's assault on public institutions. It is an example of the government's insidious advancements of private interests and a clear abuse of power. A gag order is another example of that abuse. There is just too much secrecy and not enough transparency or oversight.

The Prime Minister was the past-president of the National Citizens Coalition and he spoke against the use of gag laws and called them unconstitutional. I am wondering why the Conservatives now condone this practice as an acceptable means of promoting the government's hidden agenda.

There are media reports recently pointing out that the Alberta Conservative government spent a million of public taxpayers' dollars over the past three years on a campaign to discredit the Wheat Board.

I am wondering what the hon. member thinks of this gag order by the government and the fact that it now has money to discredit the Wheat Board. What does the member think of this kind of practice?

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Speaker, indeed, I fully agree that the tactics that the government has taken to undermine the Canadian Wheat Board go far beyond anything that I could have imagined. As was mentioned earlier in the House today, this is a democracy. This is Canada. For the government to involve itself in underhanded tactics to dismantle a valuable Canadian institution is absolutely shocking.

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Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary (for the Canadian Wheat Board) to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we heard a bit of an attack earlier on the character of the Prime Minister and I want to respond to that because I do not think the member for Malpeque should be talking to anybody about character.

I will tell the House a bit about the circumstances of how we come to be here today. He is one of the people in the opposition who insisted that the agriculture committee have extra hearings and meetings. This afternoon the agriculture committee had an extra hearing. All committee members were there while he was here introducing his concurrence motion. I would suggest that he does not have that much of an interest in farmers. He is way more interested in playing with this issue politically than he is in actually dealing with the issue honestly. I know a number of people at the agriculture committee were very upset. They expected that he would be treating it seriously, particularly since he is the official opposition critic. However, he does not seem to be treating his position seriously and I suspect he will not be treating this issue seriously at all.

I want to point out a few different things. We have heard a bit about the hysteria and hyperbole that accompanies this issue. The NDP member just spoke about the fact that she thought the Alberta Conservative government should not have been spending money on promoting its side of this issue and that the federal NDP government seems to be against it.

I would like to ask her a question and perhaps I will get the opportunity later. However, will the NDP speak out against the money that the Saskatchewan and Manitoba NDP governments are spending on this issue? The NDP government has clearly taken one side of this issue. It is supporting and actually helping to establish organizations that will then be speaking to this issue. I would be interested in hearing a little later what she has to say about that issue.

There is another thing that we need to deal with today. She mentioned that there seems to be too much secrecy and not enough oversight. I am not sure what she was talking about, but we can certainly say that about the Canadian Wheat Board over the last few years. Western Canadian producers have not had access to information about the Wheat Board. For example, they can no longer find out through the Wheat Board's annual reports how much money is being spent on communications, advertising and those kinds of things.

As a consequence of that and with the help of the NDP, we proposed an amendment to the accountability act that would help people to access that kind of information with regard to the Canadian Wheat Board. We look forward to dealing with secrecy and providing a bit more oversight into the organization in the future.

There has been an issue over the last few days about the voters list. I need to speak to that and address the issue. Yesterday, the leader of the NDP rose and started to make wild accusations about the voters list for the director elections this fall. He clearly did not understand what he was talking about, which is unfortunate, but hopefully we can provide him and the public a bit of information so they can more clearly understand what is going on in terms of the director elections and the voters list for those elections.

Over the past few years there have been director elections regularly. The voters list has always been a huge concern because everyone who indicates an interest in grain gets a permit book. There are many permit books that are not even used. People do not deliver on them. Someone may own a quarter of land who lives in the city and has nothing to do with the operation of the farm but still has a permit book.

Up until now the ballots have been mailed out to everyone and have actually gone to people who are deceased. There has been no way to know whether people are farming or not farming, or if they have retired or are living in another country. The minister decided to send ballots to farmers who had actually delivered on permit books over the last two years. In that way the government would know that these people had made deliveries and were actively farming. Anyone else who has an interest in grain has not been kept from voting. They simply need to make a statutory declaration saying that they have an interest in the grain and that they would like a ballot and a ballot will be sent out. We definitely wanted to clear that up because there was misleading information coming from particularly the NDP but the Liberals seemed to be mouthing some of that as well.

I would also like to make a point for the member for Churchill who admitted that he was not familiar with agriculture. She said that the Canadian Wheat Board stands between farmers and conglomerates. We would suggest that the CWB is actually standing between farmers and opportunity. We looked into this.

The agriculture committee heard last week that the present grading system, which is based on having to visually distinguish the kinds of grains, costs farmers in the neighbourhood of \$200 million per year. That grading system is maintained primarily because of the Wheat Board. It has made statements that it cannot possibly get rid of it for another 10 years. Everybody else in the world has a declaration system where farmers can declare the kind of grain they have and then it is checked to ensure it is accurate. That is costing about \$200 million a year.

● (1600)

We also know there are freight costs because rail cars are not being fully tendered. George Morris Centre has done work that says that western Canadians are missing between 8,000 and 15,000 jobs that would be available if there were the value added opportunities that we could get if we were able to market our own grain. Western Canadian farmers will have a huge opportunity when we move ahead on this issue and when we move to choice.

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I noticed that the member opposite did not really want to talk that much about his concurrence motion and I would suspect the reason he does not want to talk about it is that it is a mess. Tomorrow we will request that people vote against it. We tried to explain to the agriculture committee what the implications of it were. The opposition members were not that interested in serving farmers. They are more interested in their own political stunts so they went ahead and passed this.

I just want to point out some of the consequences that would come out of passing the motion if the member for Malpeque has his way. The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommended:

That the government prior to any legislative or regulatory action affecting the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board as it is currently constituted under the Canada Wheat Board Act, submit through plebiscite to all those eligible to vote in Canadian Wheat Board elections, a clear and direct question asking whether those eligible to vote support or oppose the single desk selling provisions of the Canadian Wheat Board.

That is a mouthful which I am sure hardly anybody could understand. I think the reason the member for Malpeque chose to word it that way was to try to confuse people and to confuse the issue. He probably does not even know this but the board itself does not have a legislative mandate. We can look right through the act and it does not have a legislative mandate. People have tried to take different sections of the board and say that it does but the only possible place that one could actually imply that there is a mandate for the board is in section five where it talks about the object of the board. It says that the object is marketing in an orderly manner in interprovincial and export trade grain grown in Canada. It does not say anything about a single desk and there is no mention of a mandate anywhere in the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

Right off the bat the member's motion does not make any sense, which may not surprise some of us here. The consequence of this is that the recommendation either applies to nothing in terms of the board or it applies to everything. We assume that he does not want it to apply to nothing so he is probably saying that it applies to all the activities in which the board is involved.

Let me explain the consequences of that. This would mean the end of the government or the board's freedom to do a number of things, such as setting initial grain prices. Farmers would not be allowed to set initial grain prices. They certainly would not be allowed to adjust grain prices.

We are sitting in a situation right now where grain prices are the highest they have been in 10 years and our farmers are telling us that, more than ever, they want the opportunity to market their own grain so that they can take advantage of the market. The market is surging and they have opportunities now that they have not had for a decade. What happens? The Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc working with them are preventing western Canadian farmers from having an opportunity to access the market when it is at its peak.

As usual, they are working against the interests of farmers. They want to keep them poor. They want to keep them down on the farm and unable to stand on their own two feet so they have to depend on them. My farmers are telling me that they do not want that. They want opportunities. They want to move ahead and they want to market their own grain.

The motion would also stop us from making a final payment to farmers. I guess everyone here understands that the board sets the initial payment in agreement with the government and then, throughout the year, hopefully, if the price goes up, adjustment payments are paid out and at the end of the year the farmers get whatever extra money is in the pool account. The member for Malpeque wants to shut that down. We do not think that makes good sense at all.

Another thing the motion would do is affect the board's borrowing capabilities. It would stop loan financing and the board's ability to guarantee payments.

An hon. member: Cash advances.

Mr. David Anderson: Absolutely, cash advances. The member is absolutely right. It would stop the board's ability to offer or to administer cash advances. I do not think the member for Malpeque probably understood that when he wrote the motion but that certainly is the impact that it would have. Actually, my colleague makes a very good point. One of the reasons he probably does not understand the impact is because he does not live anywhere near the region where the board applies.

• (1605)

Western Canadian farmers have told me time and again that they are capable of making their own decisions. They do not need people coming from outside and telling them what is good for them. The member for Malpeque has been doing that to western Canadian farmers for many years and they are getting mighty tired of it.

One of the things that the motion would affect is the ability to administer cash advances. If our farmers do not have that ability, they have nothing. We just extended and improved the cash advance program. We are working through the final regulations to give farmers the opportunity to borrow up to \$100,000 cash free and then they can turn around and borrow up to \$400,000 against their inventory. We do not want to interfere with that and we are wondering why the member for Malpeque would be.

The motion would also interfere with the ability to manage the contingency fund that is so important to the board's operations. It interferes with its ability to establish and to manage any of the separate funds that it sets up. I am sure that the board itself does not want restrictions put on that. It restricts any opportunity to provide for enhanced employee benefits. I do not think the member for Malpeque probably understood that either when he brought this forward.

It actually interferes as well with the ability to change the election process and improve the election process even as the board requests. The board actually agreed with us on the idea that these permit books that were not active be removed from the active mailing list. The board was with us on that in spite of what the NDP and the Liberals have said. If they were to come to use with a suggested change for an election process, this motion that the member for Malpeque has brought forward would stop us from being able to do that.

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It also would stop the government from being able to appoint directors or a president. I am sure the member did not mean to interfere in that way either. It would interfere with the board's ability to invest in outside projects and, of course, it is involved in a number of things at universities, at research centres and there are partnerships around the world. It would also interfere with the ability to do the board's final audit for the year.

It actually goes further than that. It would interfere with any ability to change regulations that have anything to do with the board's operations. That would render the board's operation impossible because there have been 525 orders in council over the last 14 years and they deal with most of the issues that I have just mentioned. Orders in council concerning the board regularly go out. The member for Malpeque apparently wants all of that stopped until we have a plebiscite.

I do not think he understood what he was doing when he wrote this. However, I am sure that will not change his mind in terms of insisting that his party would support it. The motion would actually cripple the board and bring total chaos. He has brought 100 unintended consequences that he did not realize because of the poor wording of his motion. Hopefully he will take a bit more time the next time and maybe talk to some of us who understand the board and how it operates. A number of people, including some of my colleagues, have spent many years dealing with this issue. They certainly have the capability and the capacity to direct the member for Malpeque and to give him some clear understanding of what the board is all about.

I want to take a minute to talk about one of the other options or opportunities that we have offered western Canadian farmers. The member for Malpeque said that he has been a farmer advocate for many years and that he wrote a report last year that supposedly said that farmers needed more access to opportunities and to capital, and that they needed more ability and power in the marketplace.

My colleague, the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster, brought forward Bill C-300. It is not a big bill but it is a good bill. It basically says that under Bill C-300 prairie producers could market their own wheat and barley directly to processing facilities owned by prairie producers. It seems pretty straightforward does it not? Prairie producers can market their own grain to a processing facility that is owned by their friends and neighbours.

Finally, we have a small thing here that would give farmers an opportunity. In the past of course this has not been allowed. Swift Current is in the centre of my riding where a few years ago people wanted to set up a pasta plant. They had support from the area and they had a great project going. It was going to be very successful and we thought we could compete with anyone in the world. We decided that there was no sense in sending our grain to another country so someone else could make it into pasta and get the benefit from that. We decided we should keep it at home and make pasta in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and ship it out to the world. Since we grow the best durum in the world we wanted to see what we could do with pasta.

• (1610)

The project never got off the ground. The main reason the project did not get off the ground is that the Canadian Wheat Board said,

“We are not going to let producers deliver their own grain to this facility and then process it. They have to go through the buy back”. They have to take their grain which is in their bins and they have to sell it to the board and then they have to buy it back at a higher price. Then they can try to sell it to the pasta plant.

An hon. member: Plus freight and elevation.

Mr. David Anderson: Plus freight and elevation, exactly. It just did not make sense. It did not make it profitable. That project has sat for years waiting for an opportunity. I talked to people at home and they still wish that they had the opportunity to participate in that. Bill C-300 deals a little bit with that opportunity that we think we need to have for western Canadian producers.

The surprise to me was that members of the opposition decided that they would oppose this. The opposition is led by an agriculture critic who says that farmers need some strength in the marketplace, but when we came forward with a bill that would actually give them some, that would not have changed the marketing system, he opposed it. His colleagues opposed it because they do not know any better and they get their direction from him.

We would think the NDP would be on side with a proposal such as this, small community projects and people could get together and work with their neighbours and set up a processing facility to process their own grain. One would think the NDP would take that up in a minute, but the NDP decided that ideology was more important than farmers. For some of us this is not much of a surprise any more.

We see it in the debate that is going on right now. We simply want to offer western Canadian farmers the choice to do their own business. Let me as a western Canadian producer when I get up in the morning decide that I am going to sell some grain. I am going to take a look at what the price of grain is. I am going to make what I think is good deal and I am going to move my grain.

The opposition members do not want that to happen. They want me to have to go to the Canadian Wheat Board and I have to sell it to the Canadian Wheat Board. I have to buy it back and then I have to try to find someone to buy it from me.

Someone called me last night and said that right now he has a barley sale, organic barley into the United States. He made the sale. He went to the board for the buy back and the board told him that he could have the buy back if he wanted to pay \$122 a tonne for a buy back, which is unbelievable. That is almost \$3 a bushel extra just to buy his own grain back. His grain is sitting in the bin. He has made a sale into the United States for his organic grain which the board does not market. Then the board tells him, “You have to give us over \$3 a bushel just to get your own grain back”. That is a true story.

It is interesting that the member for Malpeque will not believe me when I say that. He does not understand how the system works. That is very unfortunate. He is the one on the other side who is in charge of telling the opposition members what their agriculture decisions and policies are. He does not understand what farmers have to go through.

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The member for Malpeque wonders why people become angry. The reason is that he does not have a clue what is going on in western Canada. He does not seem to care. He has an ideological position that he thinks he is going to stay with no matter what. Meanwhile our farmers are going broke.

The Liberals have a history of doing this to our farmers. I do not think they should stand up in the House and try to pretend that they are protecting farmers on the Canadian Wheat Board issue. A few years ago when we had grain farmers who wanted a choice, who wanted to do something different with their wheat, what happened? Did the Liberals offer to have a plebiscite? Absolutely not. The Liberals locked the farmers in jail.

People went to jail and people were being strip searched for weeks at a time. That was as a consequence of that member, the member for Wascana and the Liberal caucus at the time making a decision that that was the way farmers in western Canada should be treated.

Western farmers are tired of it. They want the opportunities that farmers in the rest of Canada have. They want an opportunity to get out there and market their grain. Western farmers are not afraid of the opportunities that face them.

When I say that the George Morris Centre says that there are between 8,000 and 15,000 jobs that would be available in western Canada if we had these value added opportunities, farmers say, "Let me at it. Let me have the chance to do that kind of a thing".

The government will continue to move ahead. We want to bring choice to western Canadian farmers, the same choices that farmers across this country have. We want to give them the same opportunities that other farmers have. The farmers are very supportive of what we are doing here. It is unfortunate that some of the special interest groups funded by NDP governments and by Liberal caucuses are standing in the way of the opportunities for western Canadian farmers.

● (1615)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have seen quite a line from the parliamentary secretary, that is for sure. We are seeing a new tactic. Just to make a point, we are seeing the difference between the two parties, we really are. We consult with farmers. We take their advice and then we try to represent their interests in the House. The member opposite, the parliamentary secretary, obviously just takes his direction from the Prime Minister based on ideology. We are seeing a new tactic.

It was interesting listening to the parliamentary secretary as he spoke of the motion the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food put forward. We are seeing a new tactic now from the governing party. On top of the gag orders and the propaganda campaign, we are seeing scare tactics.

This motion is about one thing. There are three pillars to the Canadian Wheat Board: single desk selling, price pooling and the government guarantee. The motion and the report is about a clear and direct question asking whether those eligible to vote support or oppose the single desk selling provisions of the Canadian Wheat Board. Simply put, that is what the motion is all about.

Is the parliamentary secretary willing, on behalf of his government, to allow producers the choice whether or not they want single desk selling to be maintained under the Canadian Wheat Board as that pillar which gives it the ability to maximize returns to primary producers?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, it is also good to see the member for Malpeque realize he has problems with the motion, so he will try to turn attention away from it. The fact is that it is so poorly written it would affect virtually every activity in which the Wheat Board is involved. If we had a vote tomorrow, we would see the member voting for it. Obviously, we have to be far more responsible than that. The member is in opposition. He can resort to whatever hysteria and hyperbole he wants, but as the party in power, we have to be responsible for the decisions that we make. Our decision is that we think western Canadian farmers need choice in marketing and we would like to bring that forward to them.

I would like to make one other point, which is that I am extremely proud to follow the man who is the Prime Minister of this country right now. Canadians have seen what a leader he is and they are turning to him. They are very thrilled with the fact that we are actually keeping our promises. Everywhere we go across this country people are saying, "We cannot believe that you people kept your promises after 13 years of what we had before".

● (1620)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going through some material here, comments over the last few years made by the hon. parliamentary secretary. It seems to be a trend, a vendetta against the Wheat Board, that it is corrupt, that its directors are stealing money, that it has broken laws and refuses to sell grain.

I am just wondering if the parliamentary secretary and his government is representing the farmers. We are representing the farmers. We are speaking for farmers. There are grassroots organizations and other people speaking up and letters coming in.

How do the Conservatives know that they represent the majority of the farmers? I think they do not know because they are afraid to have a vote.

Is the parliamentary secretary in agreement with me?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that question was asked, because I really wanted to get into that and I actually forgot about it during my speech.

The Wheat Board itself has done surveys. We would have to stretch it to say that it was trying to find a real neutral position with the survey. The last one actually showed 54% of producers in western Canada want choice as their option. They want choice in marketing. That was the Wheat Board's own survey. Sixty per cent of them in the Wheat Board survey actually said that the Wheat Board would be far better off if it had competition. It would make it a far more effective and efficient marketing entity if it had some competition.

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While the member wonders if we represent farmers, we actually do because we have the rural ridings in western Canada, so we are proud to say we represent farmers. It is not just ourselves who are saying that there needs to be choice. Farmers themselves are saying, even to the Wheat Board when it asked in its surveys, that they want choice and they would like to see the opportunities that come out of that, the same opportunities that the rest of this country has.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague opposite speaks frequently of unknown, undesirable and unintentional consequences. There are two areas that I am particularly concerned about in terms of the unknown, undesirable and unintended consequences.

The first relates to the democratic processes, or the lack thereof, that we are seeing as we move forward on this issue. My colleague here has certainly enunciated them.

The second is quite devastating. We hear frequently from members of the press in our community that when questions are put to Conservative members from Manitoba day after day after day, their calls are not returned. Their calls are not returned because those members know what the implications are for the city of Winnipeg.

Does the parliamentary secretary understand that this means the elimination of 500 jobs in downtown Winnipeg? Does he understand that it means a loss of an additional 1,800 jobs in the province of Manitoba? Does he understand that it means a loss of \$66 million in wages and salaries? Does he understand what the impact is on governments in terms of lost taxes?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: This is garbage.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: How many farmers are we losing?

Mr. Brian Storseth: Do not let the facts get in the way of a good story.

An hon. member: Don't believe Wayne.

Hon. Anita Neville: Trust me, I would rather believe my colleague than members opposite who do not speak out on behalf of their communities and the citizens of their communities. Trust me.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, now you see what farmers are supporting. They are the ones who have kept the Wheat Board over the years.

The members opposite say the Wheat Board is going to completely fail. We do not say that. We say we are going to offer it as an option. We think that it has a lot of potential. It has a lot of advantages right now over most of the other entities in the industry. If she is saying it is going to completely disappear, I hope that the farmers are not listening to her when she says that because they hope that the Wheat Board can be one of those options. They know there are going to be jobs still in Winnipeg, that there is going to be a payroll there.

Most of the jobs that are in Winnipeg are not volume dependent. If the board is at all competent at being part of this marketing choice option, those jobs are going to continue to exist. That money is going to continue to come into Winnipeg and farmers will have the opportunity to prosper as well.

● (1625)

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands brought this up because we are talking about character, the character of this government and the character of our Prime Minister, people who actually follow through on what they say they are going to do in a campaign. We said we were going to do one thing and we are doing that.

The member for Malpeque talked about freedom of expression. What we are talking about is freedom of choice. There are not many businesses in this country or in the world that work like the Wheat Board system without that choice. Many farmers have fought for that choice and we have listened. These people are not masochists. My friend from Cypress Hills—Grasslands is not crazy. He thinks he can do it better. He wants that choice so he can better himself. We will still have a strong, viable Wheat Board, as the member said.

I would like to ask my friend, the parliamentary secretary, why producers in Ontario do not have to operate under a board monopoly system. If the monopoly system is so great and that is where it is at, why is it only producers like himself in western Canada who have to operate under that system? Why is that not the case in provinces like Ontario?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, this actually ties into the last question with what I can only call it scare tactics from the member from Winnipeg when she was giving the information she had. I will put it that way.

The fact is there are voluntary boards around the world. There is a voluntary board in Ontario. There is one in Australia as well. In order for the board to continue to exist, it does not need to be mandatory. The Australian wheat board has almost an export monopoly on grains in Australia. It functions well. People are free domestically to move their grain. The Ontario Wheat Board has been a marketing board that has had choice in Ontario here for several years. Those opportunities exist and the options work for farmers.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso, Veterans Affairs.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this important debate this evening. The member for Malpeque has done excellent work in committee presenting the ins and outs of this issue. That is why we supported the second report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food. I would like to read it to you.

It seems to me that any talk of a referendum, of free choice, is a very important democratic issue. It is important to allow western producers to make that free choice, and the best way to do so is through a referendum. That way, we will know exactly what they want with respect to the future of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Here is the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food:

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That the government prior to any legislative or regulatory action affecting the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board as it is currently constituted under the Canada Wheat Board Act, submit through plebiscite to all those eligible to vote in Canadian Wheat Board elections, a clear and direct question asking whether those eligible to vote support or oppose the single desk selling provisions of the Canadian Wheat Board.

That is the subject of today's debate. I think it is very important for us to give that choice to the producers who want it. As you know, the Canadian Wheat Board is one of two very important collective marketing tools in Canada, the other being supply management, which I could obviously discuss in more detail.

Currently, we are under attack from WTO member states—especially the United States and the European Union—because of the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management. Now we are also under attack from our own government, the Canadian government. It has been in constant attack mode since it made its famous promise in the last election campaign and even before then, in 2002, when the Prime Minister himself introduced a motion in this House to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board.

The Conservatives' free market ideology is not news here. However, for some time now, they have been implementing a process to undermine and even destroy the Canadian Wheat Board.

As I was saying, the attacks are not only coming from other countries, but also from within our own country. If this tendency persists, we, in Quebec, are very much afraid that, after the Canadian Wheat Board, the next attack will be on our supply management system.

And I know what I am talking about since I, along with the leader of the Bloc Québécois and people from the Union des producteurs agricoles in Quebec, took part in a meeting, here in Ottawa, with ambassadors from around the world. Representatives from the European Union were present and, for them, it was clear that there was a serious problem at the WTO with regard to marketing, and the culprits were the Canadian Wheat Board and our supply management system.

Pressures targeted at these two marketing tools still exist and we want to eliminate them. We have been doing a lot of explaining and have been able to convince more and more countries, particularly African countries, that were also present at that meeting, and some European countries, that these are not subsidies to our farmers but tools that allow them to get the best possible price at no cost to the government. I am mostly talking about supply management because in the case of the Canadian Wheat Board, there were irritants that were eliminated to comply with other countries' requirements at the WTO.

This election promise about free choice and a dual market was made by the Conservatives. In my view, free choice means letting producers decide for themselves what is good for them. That is the attitude one must always have in politics. Forcing one's ideology or anything else on others is not the way to go, but it is necessary to go out there to get a better understanding of what people want and what they need. As legislators, we will then be able to propose bills or amendments or plans that will really meet their needs.

In the past few hours we have seen another example of that on the part of this government. The Bloc Québécois introduced a motion

concerning an adjustment program for older workers. It consisted of measures to help older workers who have lost their jobs because of mass layoffs. The response of the government was something of their own ideology, something that, in their opinion, was the best solution, a kind of program that pleases neither the workers nor the Government of Quebec because it does not take account of the real needs and demands of those workers.

They are proceeding in somewhat the same way in the case of the Canadian Wheat Board. In the committee, I have even heard government members say something along the lines of "We are not going to let the majority decide for the minority".

• (1630)

It seems to me that in a real democracy it should be the exact opposite. In fact that is the way we conduct our elections. When a majority wants to retain an organization such as the Canadian Wheat Board, we should make certain that it is not dismantled or knocked down.

Earlier, the parliamentary secretary referred to a survey by the Canadian Wheat Board. He provided some numbers that suited his argument. There are other numbers. This is a quite recent survey from March and April 2006. The figures in the survey are quite significant.

For example, 90% of producers believe that any decision concerning the future of the Canadian Wheat Board should be made by the producers themselves. That is exactly what the member for Malpeque proposed during the committee meetings we are discussing today as part of this motion, to let the producers themselves decide the future of the Canadian Wheat Board. Nothing could be more democratic than that. It is the best way to find out exactly what the producers want.

Moreover, 66% of producers are against any weakening of the Canadian Wheat Board; 63% want the marketing of their produce to be under the exclusive responsibility of the Canadian Wheat Board, and 75%—this is important because this is what we are talking about today—75% want a referendum or plebiscite on the future of the Canadian Wheat Board. In my opinion, those figures speak for themselves.

I have other surveys, if that would please the Conservatives, who do not seem to give much credibility to the surveys done by the Canadian Wheat Board. There is the survey of the National Farmers Union, which says that 76% of farm producers in the west, who are subject to the Canadian Wheat Board, support that organization. We are looking here at rather significant evidence.

So this begs the question: Who is calling for the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board at all costs? In fact, some of our own producers are calling for such a measure. I, myself, am a producer. I respect their views but I am certain that other producers have other ideas. Just look at the survey; it is not 100% everywhere.

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I have received hundreds and hundreds of letters at my office from wheat and barley producers in western Canada, but mainly wheat producers, despite the fact that I am a Bloc Québécois member of Parliament from Quebec. They are asking me to stand up for the Canadian Wheat Board. In fact I am sure that all of my colleagues have received letters written by those producers. These are not form letters, many of them are written by hand, and I have read them all, regardless of where they came from. None of those letters was written by someone from an organization or a communications firm. They are genuine letters written by producers to tell me that in their opinion, the Canadian Wheat Board is very important and that it must not be dismantled.

The unfortunate thing about what is happening now is that since this election promise was made in the last campaign, every effort has been made to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. Bill C-300 was introduced in this House. We in the Bloc Québécois opposed it because, in our opinion, it was the beginning of the end.

Things got even worse for the Canadian Wheat Board with the gag order imposed on it by the ministerial order made on October 5. If you will forgive the expression, I swear that this knocked me on my backside. I did not even think that a minister could make that kind of ministerial order, a gag order that appalling, and imposing censure on the Canadian Wheat Board. But I can read an excerpt from it:

—directs the Canadian Wheat Board to conduct its operations under that Act in the following manner:

It shall not expend funds, directly or indirectly, on advocating the retention of its monopoly powers, including the expenditure of funds for advertising, publishing or market research.

It shall not provide funds to any other person or entity to enable them to advocate the retention of the monopoly powers of the CWB.

The Canadian Wheat Board has quite simply been gagged, and this is a completely undemocratic procedure. The board cannot even defend itself anymore, while the government continues to attack it. In my view, this way of doing things amounts to unfairness and inequality, and it is not even subtle, because the intention is to prohibit it from speaking and defending itself, to gag it. I have never seen anything like this. In fact, we looked a little into what has gone on in the past. We wondered whether ministers had ever done this. We had to go back to 1979 when Russia invaded Afghanistan.

●(1635)

At the time, all Canadian government organizations, including the Canadian Wheat Board, had been ordered not to have any dealings with Russia because of its cowardly attack on Afghanistan.

This was a highly unusual if totally understandable reason, which required that there not be any trade with a country that had just committed such an act.

It was the government's decision, and that was to be expected. It simply forbade them to have any dealings with this country for a certain amount of time. Obviously, things have changed now. It was understandable at the time that the government would take the action it did.

I would like a Conservative member, a minister or the Prime Minister to tell me that there was a real emergency and it was essential to prevent the Canadian Wheat Board from speaking, that it

was necessary to censure it, to gag it and tie its hands. I am not aware of any such reason. There is no precedent proving that this was essential and that this kind of ministerial order absolutely had to be instituted.

There have been partisan appointments to the board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board. The steering panel was led by opponents of the wheat board. I spoke earlier about the letters we have received from farmers.

We also received an e-mail from a communications firm. It was obviously not intended for us. The firm was offering its services to the government to send out chain letters directed against the Canadian Wheat Board. At the same time, farmers were sending out letters in support of the wheat board. This communications firm, on the other hand, said that it could send a certain number of letters a week. Lovely form letters would have been sent out saying that the Canadian Wheat Board was not effective and was not any good. Fortunately, this was exposed and a stop was put to it.

The fact that I have not received a single letter goes to prove that there is no real farmers' revolt against the Canadian Wheat Board. I am sure that I would have received a great many if this communications firm had secretly been able to do what it wanted and if the government had gone along. I have not received a single letter saying that the writer agreed with Bill C-300 or agreed with what the Conservative government wanted to do with the Canadian Wheat Board. When we found out what this communications firm wanted to do, we hoped to hear the person responsible for this e-mail in committee. We have not succeeded yet in getting this person to appear, but I hope we will soon do so because we have some interesting questions for him or her.

The Conservatives' determination has not let up and what comes next is worrying, as I said in the introduction to my speech. I said that for us in Quebec the other extremely important collective marketing tool in Canada is supply management. That is not just me talking. I have met with the main stakeholders, including the people from the UPA. We talked about this with the president of the UPA. We talked to him about the Canadian Wheat Board. They too are worried. This government has a free-trade ideology and nothing will stop it.

For example, I could quote the discussions that took place in parliamentary committee with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada before the latest negotiations of the World Trade Organization in Geneva. Whenever we asked him whether he planned to protect supply management, he always said yes. We were very happy with this answer. However, we found ourselves alone, against 148 in Geneva, during the negotiations on supply management. The Minister did not feel very comfortable in that situation.

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But he represents a population. Some voted for him while others did not. Regardless, once he is in government, he represents the entire population. He should pull up his pants and defend a system as effective as supply management, even if he is alone. There is nothing to feel uncomfortable about here. What worried me more was the minister's speech. He said that if there was an agreement in the WTO, Canada would not remain outside that agreement. Canada would not remain alone in its corner and would sign the agreement. To my mind that meant that, if there had been an agreement to begin removing areas of supply management or dismantling it, Canada would have signed.

●(1640)

We have good reason to be concerned considering the Conservative government's attitude.

To give you an idea of how important supply management is in Quebec, I remind members that it represents 40% of the Quebec farm economy. It is the apple of our eye and we are going to defend it tooth and nail. That is what we have been doing since we came to the House of Commons. That is what I, personally, have been doing for over a year, since my leader named me as agriculture critic for the Bloc.

The latest WTO negotiations in Geneva did not produce an agreement. That is almost fortunate. The Doha round was supposed to deal with developing nations. However nothing is being done for them. We hope to succeed in obtaining an agreement that will give those countries a greater access to markets. That is what everyone wants. However, in the case of supply management, every time negotiations reach an impasse we have to heave a sigh of relief. The fact is that successive governments have always said—in promises—that they support us and they are going to defend supply management. When that support is rather lukewarm we have reason to be concerned.

The important thing for the Conservatives is to follow up on their commitment to allow western producers a free choice concerning the marketing of their grain in the export market. What we are seeing, in fact, is the dismantling of single desk selling and, at the end of the day, the extinction of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Yet section 47(1) of the Canadian Wheat Board Act is clear. Any decision seeking to change single desk selling must be made by the producers. I do not understand why the government is opposed to the motion presented by the member for Malpeque since a very clear section of the Canadian Wheat Board Act provides for consultation of farm producers. It is up to them to decide; it is not up to the government.

I mentioned the UPA, the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec, earlier. We met with them, with our leader, to discuss the Canadian Wheat board, even though it does not apply to Quebec. Those people explained to us very clearly that in Quebec there were quite a few voluntary marketing agencies that failed not long after they were created, whether they were set up to market grain, potatoes, apples or greenhouse vegetables. All of those experiments, which date from the 1990s, could not be sustained. The marketing branch of the UPA did a thorough study of this subject. They examined cases where these models had failed, and what they found

was that they lacked a critical mass of the product to be marketed, and the corollary to that, participation by producers—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. André Bellavance: I understand what goes on in Quebec is not of much interest to the Conservative Party, but I think that it is very important to talk about these things.

Another major factor in the failures was the negative reaction by competitors, who used every possible means to bring those systems down. Based on experience in Quebec, we have very good reason to assume that freedom of choice when it comes to marketing grain in the Prairies will eventually lead to the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board and will have negative consequences for producers, including lower prices.

This information comes from the Union des producteurs agricoles. I did not make it up. We did experiments and experienced failures ourselves in the 1990s relating to the same thing as what the Conservative government now wants to put in place for the Canadian Wheat Board. We should look to the example of what happened in Quebec and not repeat this kind of mistake. It is reasonable to experiment, but it is also reasonable to learn from our mistakes.

So in the UPA's view, the Canadian Wheat Board provides producers with market income that is higher and fairer. It guarantees stable and predictable supply in the agri-food industry. The UPA is also of the view that we cannot allow the Conservative government to destroy such an influential institution, one that creates 14,700 direct and indirect jobs, with spinoffs amounting to \$852 million a year.

I urge everyone in this House to vote for the motion presented by the member for Malpeque.

●(1645)

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a few comments and a couple of questions for the member. I find this whole episode this afternoon very unfortunate. There are many good and more productive things about which we could be talking.

This motion would compel us to have a plebiscite in order to pay farmers a higher initial price. How ridiculous this whole motion is. It is beyond the pale. We want to react quickly to market conditions and help prairie farmers.

What also is beyond the pale is the attempt by Bloc members to link the future of the Canadian Wheat Board to supply management. What they should be talking about is a commitment on this side of the House to keep, maintain and follow through on our campaign promises. What were those promises?

The first promise was to provide more marketing choice for western Canadian farmers, when it comes to wheat and barley.

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The second promise was to maintain the supply management system. We fought for that in Geneva. We fought for that in every negotiation we have had internationally. We will continue to fight for supply management because this party on this side of the House promised we would follow through on that, and that is what we will do.

More important, what I want to know is, when will the hon. member from the Bloc bring in the motion to expand the Wheat Board to ensure it covers Quebec? He will not do that. Why? Because he does not want the Wheat Board to affect his business in his province. He does not want the Wheat Board to affect the hogs. He said that there had never been a success in another marketing board. Tell that to the hog producers in Canada. Tell it to the canola producers in Canada. Talk to the pulse crop people and the cattle industry. All of them are successful. Why? Because the government is not mucking around in the decisions that should be made by farmers, who take the risk and take the problems on to their shoulders and try to market their own products.

I can guarantee that he does not want the Wheat Board in Quebec. How about if we expand it to include potatoes?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: As one Deputy Speaker, to a former deputy speaker, the member knows that many people are seeking the floor for questions and comments. A couple of minutes have already expired. I hate to interrupt the minister in flight, but if he could ask a question.

• (1650)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Speaker, as you can tell, I am kind of passionate about this subject. I guess I will have to wrap it up with a question for the hon. member. I can hardly talk because it is such a silly motion.

Could the hon. member tell us which products he would like us to include under the Wheat Board in the Quebec area? How many products and lines would he like us to have compulsory, managed by a national board in his province?

He can be quick, but I will answer it for him. The answer is none. No one wants the Canadian Wheat Board to run the products in his provinces, or in Ontario or in the rest of the country. This only applies, for some reason, to the farmers in western Canada—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I can finally respond.

That was a rather passionate speech. I would like to see the hon. member equally passionate, fiery and firm when the time comes to defend the supply management system.

Earlier, I used the example of our considerable concern in committee, when he said that Canada would not decline on a future WTO agreement, rather it would sign on. I asked if that would mean “at all costs.” I did not get an answer earlier, so would it be “at all costs”?

[*English*]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: That is what I thought. The minister just said yes. He is going to sign at all costs, for all of Canada, a WTO agreement, even though this would jeopardize the Canadian Wheat Board and especially the supply management system. Is that what the minister wants?

I would like to see him stand up for our farmers a bit more. Recently, we made requests on behalf of potato farmers. Farmers in Saint-Amable are still having problems with golden nematode. We would like to see a program specifically for farmers affected by golden nematode. Once the embargo was lifted and the problem with the Americans was resolved, these farmers had to destroy their potato crops. Growers in the Saint-Amable region are also affected by this problem. Yet, the CAIS program cannot help them.

I would like the minister to rise—and be just as passionate and firm as he was earlier when he tried to corner me—and defend these farmers, and not only by pointlessly attacking—

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member was asked a direct question by the Minister of Agriculture. He has completely avoided it.

What products are to be included under the Wheat Board?

The Deputy Speaker: If unanswered questions were points of order, we would be constantly in points of order in the House.

The hon. member for Saint Boniface.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his comments.

My colleague is right. The Canadian Wheat Board has a great deal of support in western Canada. This is apparent when we talk to people who live in towns near us in Manitoba, in Portage la Prairie, for example. Some hon. members opposite agree that it works extremely well.

Personally, I am surprised that the members opposite are not prepared to represent their constituents. They are under a gag order, just like they have been in every other matter introduced by the Conservatives.

How are these members under a gag order supposed to represent the people in their riding? Some 73% of people truly believe in the Canadian Wheat Board program.

The hon. member mentioned that he received letters and opinions from people in western Canada about the Canadian Wheat Board. We have also received comments from people in Quebec who are very concerned about supply management.

People are worried. Even if the Minister of Agriculture says he will protect supply management, people do not believe him. It is certainly a source of concern. I would like the hon. member to elaborate on this.

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Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, when I was speaking earlier, the Conservatives were not listening.

I presented the opinion of the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec on this. I was criticized for making a connection between plans for the Canadian Wheat Board and plans for supply management. I did not make up this connection. This comes from supply managed producers in Quebec who immediately see the Conservatives' ideology on free trade. To them this ideology falls precisely in line with what the U.S. and the European Union are asking for. The latter claim our collective marketing systems are suspect and rely on government subsidies. This makes me laugh because the Americans and the Europeans subsidize extensively. We are simply agreeing with them. We are saying that perhaps our systems are upsetting to others and we should abolish them. Quebec does not share this ideology.

I imagine that the member who just rose also knows supply managed producers elsewhere in Canada who are not at all happy with what the Conservative government is doing to the Canadian Wheat Board. What comes next is cause for concern. It is not good for producers not to have the right to choose what they want for their own organization. We should let them vote, be democratic and adopt the motion of the member for Malpeque. It is the only way to have the real answer. The Conservatives will not give us the real answer.

• (1655)

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Ottawa is a far away place from the very farms we are dealing with at this point.

I know the Reform and the Alliance movement started by promising to give democratic rights to the grassroots. One of the key elements was the right of farmers to vote for their own future, not politicians somewhere in Ottawa. I do not understand why farmers are not given the choice to decide the future of their farms and the future of the Wheat Board.

The government continues to undermine public institutions. Then it says that we are attacking its integrity when we point out its anti-democratic practices. I thought I heard the Prime Minister say, in the past, that gag orders were unconstitutional.

Does the hon. member agree that it is our duty to defend the Constitution and ensure that the farmers have the right to decide on the future of the Wheat Board?

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question, although it is a bit hard to hear because the atmosphere is rather charged. In my opinion, the Conservatives have so few arguments to support this decision to put the Canadian Wheat Board out of commission that they are talking nonsense and hurling insults. I find it very rude of the members. I can take it, though, it is no problem for me.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. André Bellavance: Despite everything, I have managed to understand the member's question. I agree with her that this decision is antidemocratic, because we saw the Canadian Wheat Board stifled

when the Russians invaded Afghanistan, as I mentioned earlier in my speech. At that time, there was a reason, but today there is none.

The minister, in his passionate speech—which was not supposed to be a speech—never explained why the government was using such a harsh method against the Canadian Wheat Board.

Yet section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act gives farmers the right to choose what they want. Nothing but a referendum would give them the opportunity to decide on the future of the Canadian Wheat Board.

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

First, I want to say that I think this gag order is an insult to farmers. The last time this happened was to stop selling wheat to the former Soviet Union during the war in Afghanistan. By the way, we know that the mighty Soviet machine was not able to conquer Afghanistan. There may be a lesson for us.

My point and the point of my party is simple. Let the farmers decide the fate of the Canadian Wheat Board. Currently, there are democratic elections in place in the Canadian Wheat Board. Instead of letting them play out as they should, there seems to be interference by the minister.

Once the director elections are finished, there should be a plebiscite. Let us end this debate once and for all. Everybody says the government represents the farmers and thinks it knows what it is doing. Let us have a plebiscite. In a cooperative spirit, the minister could work with the Canadian Wheat Board in formulating a question and this would be the democratic process. It is as simple as that.

A small minority of those who want to go it alone should not be able to destroy the future of the majority of farmers. That is the question today. That is the question we are facing.

The Prime Minister is about to deliver what an American based WTO challenge and countervail action could not accomplish. In April 2002, following a meeting with top U.S. trade officials, North Dakota wheat commissioner chair Maynard Satrom assured growers that the common objective of both the U.S. government and the U.S. wheat producers is the ultimate reform of the monopolistic Canadian Wheat Board.

The U.S. department of agriculture stated that American growers should be able to freely compete with Canadian grain for Canadian rail shipments. The USDA has called for a fundamental reform of organizations such as the Canadian Wheat Board to permanently assure that U.S. producers are treated fairly in the world market.

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Our Canadian government is following along with the demands of the American government and American multinational corporations. Dual marketing is a whistle stop. Multinational competitors with deep pockets will bid away grain into the short term and the Canadian Wheat Board will eventually cease to exist.

Once again, farm economists say that grower premiums that are \$30 to \$45 per tonne will disappear forever. There will be a domino effect. The producer cars will probably diminish or disappear. We have the whole problem of the Port of Churchill in Manitoba.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, the government is doing its best to take marketing powers away from western producers. It wants to set up a dual marketing system under which the Canadian Wheat Board would be but one exporter of western Canada's wheat and barley. As we know, Canada's competition on the world market, including the United States, has long been fighting to reduce our producers' marketing powers.

There is a connection between two Canadian programs, namely the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management. Both are threatened under the WTO. If we give up our Canadian Wheat Board single desk seller, then supply management will also disappear. Multinationals, through the Conservative government, are very close to achieving their goal.

The government is under the impression that it was given a mandate to fully pursue free market initiatives on January 23. It does not feel that consulting producers unquestionably means holding a referendum. We are faced with the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board.

It is interesting to note that, a few years ago, the Prime Minister publicly supported producers who had circumvented the law by exporting wheat without going through the Canadian Wheat Board. The government wants to take powers away from producers and give them to multinationals.

• (1700)

[*English*]

The attack on the Canadian Wheat Board is another example of the heavy handed approach by the so-called new government to ram its agenda through, just as we have seen in the softwood lumber agreement, for example. Yet, we know that 75% of those people who use the Canadian Wheat Board would like to have a plebiscite, so the question is, is this ideologically driven?

I am receiving letters from farmers, as are all MPs, stating that they want the Wheat Board to continue. My hope then is that the Conservative MPs who represent the farmers will listen to them. My message to the farmers is: if they are not happy, they should talk to their MPs, put them on the spot, and ensure that they do exactly what the farmers want because I have a feeling the government is not doing that at the present time.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to take a minute to speak to my colleague who spoke previously, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska. We sit on the agriculture committee together. Certainly, he has a passion for his farmers, as do I. I commend him for that, but there is a little lesson

that he should take in the difference between, and I notice the member for Malpeque is not telling him this, supply management, that all of the left wing people pull up as an icon and we support it as well, and the Wheat Board.

I will give him a quick lesson. I buy a quota at my choice and at my beck and call, and I join into the supply managed sector. If I decide I want to make cheese, I use that quota or I buy more quota to make cheese, but under the Wheat Board, I cannot use my own grain to make flour or bread. I cannot do that. That is the big difference between the two operations. They are like night and day, black and white. The hon. member should quit listening to the member for Malpeque and start listening to other farmers out there.

The member who just spoke talked about the democratic right to have a vote. At the beginning of the Wheat Board, when it became mandatory in the mid-forties, there was no vote. Wheat, durum and barley were put in and there was no vote. Oats were taken out in 1986. There was no vote.

At that time, we did 50,000 tonnes of oat trade with the United States and 20 years later, we do 1.3 million tonnes. That is the difference between taking product out, plus we have a burgeoning processing sector growing here domestically for oats. That is what prairie farmers are looking at. Those examples are out there of how the system can do better when we have marketing choice. Why will the members opposite not allow it?

• (1705)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the question was, but it was an interesting discourse. Let us ask the farmers for their opinion. Let us ask them. Let us have the plebiscite and we will see. Are they on board or are they not on board? It is as simple as that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his excellent presentation. I also congratulate the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska, my colleague from the Bloc Québécois. Farmers, and the UPA in particular, must be extremely proud to have such an articulate spokesperson and one who is showing so much interest in the system we have been using for at least 35 years. I wanted to congratulate him.

As a former economist with the UPA, I know what I am talking about after hearing my hon. colleague describe quite eloquently his understanding and convictions about supply management, the power of the Canadian Wheat Board and the will, the democratic will of producers which we would like to see become reality.

I would have a question for my colleague from the NDP. We have an orderly system. In light of the international situation which is in total disarray and the American policy which is a total fiasco but that Canada wants to copy, despite the fact that our systems are working well, why are the Conservatives trying to scrap everything and offer a dogmatic vision and a free market system that never worked in the agrifood sector, particularly at the international level?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. I am wondering about the same thing myself.

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We need the power of the marketplace nowadays to be able to compete with other countries and multinational companies. It seems to me that, if we start dismantling our Canadian Wheat Board, we are going to lose our ability and power to compete and, in the end, the farmers will suffer.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was good to listen to the NDP critic outline his support for the current concurrence motion.

It was interesting to note that the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster confused the facts in his question, but those members on that side of the House consistently do that. He is right in what he said about oats, but that was prior to 1998 when the act had changed. Does the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster not know that in 1998 the Canadian Wheat Board changed from being a government agency with appointed commissioners to an elected board of directors?

My question to the NDP critic is really two-fold. The parliamentary secretary neglected to mention earlier the fact that 88% of farmers in the survey he talked about said they wanted a vote to decide the future of single desk selling.

The only government that ever mucked around and gave directives to the Wheat Board is the Conservative government with the exception of the war in Afghanistan when it was invaded by the Russians. What does the NDP critic believe? Does he believe that farmers should have a vote on whether they want single desk selling or not? Should that be the vote as mandated under the act?

• (1710)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, if 88% or 80% or 70% of the members want to have a vote on single desk selling then of course they should do that. Let us remember that the government is a grassroots party. Let us respect the grassroots and let us go along with the farmers and let them have that vote.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to take part in the debate. I represent the downtown area of Winnipeg, which is home to the headquarters of the Canadian Wheat Board. Also coming from a prairie province that depends so much on agriculture and farm income, I felt it was necessary for me to enter the debate.

Let me start by simply saying there is no business case for abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board. It is pure ideological madness. It is an ideological crusade that the Conservative Party has undertaken, really to do the Americans' dirty work for them.

The Wheat Board has been the subject of 11 separate U.S. trade attacks. The board has won every one, something the Americans could not do. Even before the ink was dry in the 1989 free trade agreement, they were gunning for the Canadian Wheat Board. They made no bones about it whatsoever. In fact, the Americans wanted the Wheat Board out of the way. It is a trade irritant just as the softwood lumber deal is a trade irritant. The new Conservative government is dutifully falling in line to do the dirty work of the Americans.

Many people, if they are not in the industry, do not understand how the Wheat Board works. The reason a dual market will not work

and the reason it will be the death rattle of the Canadian Wheat Board is very simple. If the open market is higher than the initial payment, the board will not get any deliveries. However, if the initial payment is higher than the market, then it gets all these deliveries, but it has to sell them at a loss. That is why this dual marketing will not work.

I respectfully ask members to think back to the voluntary central selling agency run by the pools in the 1920s and to the voluntary Canadian Wheat Board, which was run in 1935. Both of them had spectacular bankruptcies. They were the greatest business bankruptcies in Canadian history for that simple reason. A voluntary Canadian Wheat Board do not work nor will it survive.

We have had letters from farmers and I want to read one. I know people have questioned the veracity of these letters. These are letters written by individual farmers and signed by them. This one is from a farmer in Richmond, Saskatchewan. He challenges the statements from our current Minister of Agriculture and from the Parliamentary Secretary. He says, "The statement that the majority of farmers support the concept of dual marketing is false".

I believe it is false as well. I believe if it was put to a plebiscite, if it was put to a fair vote, we would be able to verify that.

He goes on to say, "The statement that the present government has a mandate to end the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board is false and the statement that it's not about economics, it's about freedom, which I have heard the minister and others say, is just plain stupid". That is according to him. I would not say that. "In this case, freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose. Leave the Canadian Wheat Board alone. It's the only support left for western Canadian farmers".

That brings me to the point of this gag order. The minister says that I called him a Fascist for denying them the right to vote and then imposing this gag order. I did not call the minister a Fascist. I said it was like Fascism to deny them democracy. I said that Mussolini would be proud the way the government introduced this gag order over Canadian farmers because it is an unfair fight. It is an issue of natural justice.

We have misinformation abounding or information with which we disagree. The Canadian Wheat Board claims to have other evidence to the contrary, but it is not allowed to bring it into this public debate about the future of the Wheat Board. How can that be seen to be fair?

Let mention a couple of the facts that we would enter, and I am sure the Wheat Board would make public if it were allowed to. One study found that in 2001 farmers got about \$10 per tonne more under single desk selling than they would have otherwise received. That is a study by a Dr. Richard Gray. I would be happy to table that.

Another study, the Kraft-Furtan study in 1997, showed the benefit from single desk selling at \$265 million per year. Again, we would like to promote those figures as opposed to the figures we heard from the parliamentary secretary, who said that farmers lost up to \$400 million a year by single desk selling, I believe.

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●(1715)

Another earlier study by a Dr. Andrew Schmitz showed that marketing through the Wheat Board increased the returns of barley producers by \$72 million a year.

The Conservative government would have to admit that there is a body of evidence on the contrary of the position it is tabling. How is it anybody's best interest to deny the Wheat Board what I would see the legitimate right to make its case and to have its argument known. It is a bit like a boxing match where we have one guy with his hands tied behind his back. In nobody's mind could that be viewed as even remotely fair.

There are things that we could challenge about the parliamentary secretary's comments. I have a quote from *Hansard* where he said, "In fact 60% to 80% of the farmers do support change, I am not sure why 20% to 30% of the farmers should hold the other 70% captive".

One cannot get away with that kind of thing without being challenged. If the Canadian Wheat Board is being denied a voice, we will be the voice for it. I serve notice right here that we will be dedicating our time, between now and whenever the government plans for the axe to fall, to make the case for the Canadian Wheat Board and to fight the government if it intends to tear down this great prairie institution.

Nobody should want to go back to the bad old days, least of all a party that says that it represents the grassroots farmers. I used to deliver papers in the rich part of Winnipeg when I was a kid. Virtually every one of those mansions was built by the robber barons, the grain barons, who used to systematically rip off the prairie farmer. Those mansions were built on the backs of prairie farmers who could not get a fair price for grain, so they started to act collectively and cooperatively.

Maybe that is what the Conservative Party has in opposition, that it is ideologically opposed to acting collectively. It is against public auto insurance, unions and that kind of action.

Farmers banded together to protect their own interests, and that is a good thing. It was a survival thing and an issue of basic fairness. Since 1943, when the Wheat Board was founded and given its single desk monopoly, they could get a fair price, compete on the world market and get the prices because its was a superior product.

Also, because I come from the province of Manitoba, the future of the Port of Churchill is in serious jeopardy because the grain will be sold south. It will be mixed with the inferior American product. We will lose the commercial identity of our superior Canadian wheat product, and that will be to our lasting detriment as well.

I am happy the minister stayed to listen to the speeches. I beg the government to reconsider this idea. There are consequences that go far beyond living up to the campaign promise that Conservatives made to their base. Clearly, there is a legitimate pocket of farmers who do want the Wheat Board dismantled, or at least a dual marketing system. However, it is a more complex issue than that.

We remember the bad old days on the Prairies, when an individual farmer had virtually no bargaining strength in terms of trying to sell product to the Paterson's and the Cargill's and

whomever would be dominating and controlling these things. Maybe Cargill is a bad example.

In our experience, the Canadian Wheat Board is the best opportunity to get a fair price for the product. I cannot argue enough that we need to defend this great prairie institution for all those compelling reasons.

Let me go back to the directive that the minister put forward, what we are calling a gag order.

●(1720)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: It's not really a gag order, but that's what you're calling it.

Mr. Pat Martin: We are calling it a gag order. It says right here on the top of my page, "The minister's gag order". It clearly says that the Canadian Wheat Board will not be allowed to expend funds directly or indirectly, even for market research. One would think that would be a necessary aspect of its day to day function, to conduct market research, publishing and advertising et cetera. It will not provide funds to any other person to do a similar task.

If there are two legitimate sides to this debate, and we would have to be pretty pigheaded to say that there are not two legitimate sides to this argument, it has been wrestled with for the last decade, then should we not be hearing both of those sides equally? Should we not be allowed to have both sides of the argument represented and then the one side will win on the virtue of its merits, hopefully, not on some ideological crusade?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member. We should hear from farmers and we should hear from both sides.

I just received a letter from someone in my constituency. I will give a little background. If the member for Malpeque will tone it down a bit, maybe we can get some communications going. This farmer is from my constituency. Just so someone from downtown Winnipeg can understand the trials and tribulations of some of these farmers, I want to give him an idea what is involved and to also counter some of the spin that the NDP have put out.

He says: "The majority of farmers in my area want choice. The Wheat Board knows that. They have elected a free marketing representative. I come out of an area that used to be NDP for 25 years until the Conservatives came along. They have changed their mind and they understand the advantages of it".

This farmer marketed 3,837 bushels to the Wheat Board. He got 24¢ a bushel from the Wheat Board. Today he could take that same grain to Butte, North Dakota and get \$3.42 a bushel. That is many times more. We are talking less than \$1,000 to over \$12,000. The Wheat Board is holding his grain. There is more to this story. The Wheat Board said that it was malt, it took it and sold it for feed and there is a lot more to it.

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Because my time is limited I cannot go through the whole story. He is upset. He has now got farming bills which he has to pay and he cannot do it. That is an example of what happens when one does not have choice on the farm.

I think people from the cities, people from Quebec, who are holding back—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I apologize to the member from Yorkton, but there are a lot of members who want to ask questions or make comments. I do have to allow the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre to respond.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I do not know what to say. I do not think one can make this kind of broad policy decision based on isolated ad hoc incidents.

I read a letter from one farmer and he read a letter from another one farmer. Therefore, we are even on that front.

The point is that no one is being allowed, in any kind of a public way, to make this case to the Canadian people. Instinctively, I think most Canadians would understand that, collectively, we are a lot stronger in terms of marketing this product. This is the only chance we have to be taken seriously on the world market.

The Canadian Wheat Board is respected as perhaps 18% or 20% of world market. We are taken seriously as a player. If we dismantle that, we will not have that advantage in terms of world marketing and et cetera.

One issue I do want to point out is that the spokesman for the National Farmers Union talks about how the dual market kills the CWB because its monopoly seller position is precisely what earns farmers premium prices in those global markets. In unity there is strength. It is an old adage that we use on this side of the House. Those guys would be well advised to consider that as well.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague speak about the dual marketing system and why it did not exist. It is a smoke screen. This is a scam.

When we put this in place, we are in fact dismantling the Wheat Board. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture has been stating for years that he wants to dismantle the Wheat Board. If that is what the government wants to do, why does it not just come out and say it? Why does it go through this backroom way of doing this?

Would my hon. colleague agree with me that this is a round about way of doing things?

• (1725)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member has attacked me personally. I would like to make it clear that our position is what it has been in the past, and that is, we want to see the Canadian Wheat Board as one of the options for farmers. If he is going to accuse me of other things than that, he should be accurate in what he is saying.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am not sure if that is a point of order or not, but I thank the hon. member for that intervention.

Could have a bit of order in the House for the last few seconds for the hon. member's response?

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I think I understand the question from my colleague, the member for Saint Boniface. The Conservative government is trying to do through the back door what it could not do through the front door. By statute, to make these changes to the way the Wheat Board operates, it has to be put to a vote of the member farmers.

The government started a gerrymander with the voter's list because I think it knows it is on shaky ground. It is going to have to allow farmers to vote on this. It is not just because we accuse it of being undemocratic. It is probably getting that same advice not only from the Canadian Wheat Board and the member farmers. Maybe there are people who are not afraid of democracy breaking out.

The government is trying to do this through the back door without going to a vote of the people, which is required by statute. That is what led me to say that this is Fascism to deny democracy in this way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Before I recognize the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre on debate, I would just let her know that at 5:30 I will have to interrupt the proceedings to call in the members for a vote. The member has about four and a half minutes.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is no coincidence that you see so many members from Manitoba rising today, my two colleagues here, and my colleague across the way. This is a very important issue for the province of Manitoba. It is important for the farmers of Manitoba. It is important for the communities of Manitoba. It is important for the city of Winnipeg and it is very important for the port of Churchill. We rise with great concern today to speak to this issue.

Because I have only a short time, I am going to take a slightly different tack.

Mr. Speaker, I should add that I am sharing my time with my colleague from Saint Boniface, who will pick up when we resume debate on this matter.

What I am struck by is the whole lack of any semblance of balance or fairness on this issue. It is all gone. It is out the door and members across the way make no pretense.

I often find myself sitting here thinking of the fact that, like many of my colleagues, I go into schools to talk about how democracy does and does not work, how we as members of Parliament advance issues, how there is opportunity for community members to speak to both sides of the issue. Here is a good case study for students on what one does not want to see in a democratic country: muzzling, gagging, misinformation, keeping people out of meetings.

Mr. Leon Benoit: That is the Liberal leadership race you are talking about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre does not have a whole lot of time before we have to call in the members, so maybe we could just let her finish her comments.

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, boys have their fun too; I do not mind.

The muzzling began with a private meeting in Saskatoon. We have heard about that. We have heard about how the interested parties in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were not invited. We heard how the—

Mr. David Anderson: They were invited. Get the facts right.

Hon. Anita Neville: Only when they asked for an invitation were they included, and in the back row, not at the table, my friend.

We heard about this meeting earlier. We heard about the appointment of a task force. Any semblance of balance was absolutely gone. Just give one, two, three people an opportunity who might put forward a pro-Canadian Wheat Board position, but no, they do not trust the arguments that might be there.

Now we have documented evidence of lobbyists setting it up so that we get letters from those who are opposed to the Wheat Board. Anyone with a contrary opinion has been ignored by the Conservative government.

An hon. member: It will not be a Conservative government for long.

Hon. Anita Neville: It will not be the government for long, as my colleague says.

Any semblance of dissent has been stifled. Does my colleague here think that those who work for the Wheat Board, those who are concerned with the Wheat Board are allowed to speak to their members of Parliament? Are they too frightened, or does the gag order go that far?

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings on the motion at this time. Accordingly, the debate on the motion will be rescheduled for another sitting.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 5:30, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in the name of the member for Ottawa—Vanier.

Call in the members.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 42*)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra
Angus
Atamanenko
Bagnell

André
Asselin
Bachand
Bains

Barbot
Beaumier
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bellavance
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Blaikie
Bonin
Boshcoff
Bourgeois
Brown (Oakville)
Cannis
Carrier
Charlton
Christopherson
Comuzzi
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cuzner
Davies
Demers
Dewar
Dosanjh
Easter
Faille
Gagnon
Gauthier
Godin
Graham
Guay
Holland
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Kotto
Laframboise
Lavallée
Lee
Lessard
Loubier
MacAulay
Malo
Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Masse
Matthews
McDonough
McGuire
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mourani
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nash
Ouellet
Pacetti
Patry
Peterson
Plamondon
Ratansi
Regan
Rodriguez
Roy
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Silva
Simms
St-Hilaire
St. Denis
Stoffler
Szabo
Temelkovski
Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Valley
Wasylycia-Leis
Wilson

Barnes
Bélanger
Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett
Bevington
Black
Blais
Bonsant
Bouchard
Brison
Byrne
Cardin
Chamberlain
Chow
Comartin
Cotler
Crowder
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
D'Amours
DeBellefeuille
Deschamps
Dhaliwal
Duceppe
Eyking
Folco
Gaudet
Godfrey
Goodale
Guarnieri
Guimond
Hubbard
Julian
Keeper
Laforest
Lapierre
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lévesque
Lussier
Malhi
Maloney
Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McCallum
McGuinity
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Minna
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nadeau
Neville
Owen
Paquette
Perron
Picard
Proulx
Redman
Robillard
Rota
Russell
Savoie
Scott
Siksay
Simard
St-Cyr
St. Amand
Steckle
Stronach
Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Tonks
Vincent
Willfert
Zed- — 160

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Allen

Abbott
Albrecht

Allison
 Anders
 Arthur
 Batters
 Bernier
 Blackburn
 Boucher
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Bruinooge
 Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
 Carrie
 Casson
 Clement
 Davidson
 Del Mastro
 Doyle
 Emerson
 Fast
 Fitzpatrick
 Fletcher
 Gallant
 Goodyear
 Grewal
 Hanger
 Harvey
 Hearn
 Hill
 Jaffer
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lauzon
 Lukiwski
 Lunney
 MacKenzie
 Mayes
 Merrifield
 Mills
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Norlock
 Obhrai
 Pallister
 Petit
 Prentice
 Rajotte
 Richardson
 Scheer
 Shipley
 Smith
 Sorenson
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Thompson (Wild Rose)
 Toews
 Tweed
 Van Loan
 Verner
 Warawa
 Watson
 Yelich — 123

Ambrose
 Anderson
 Baird
 Benoit
 Bezan
 Blaney
 Breitreuz
 Brown (Barrie)
 Calkins
 Cannon (Pontiac)
 Casey
 Chong
 Cummins
 Day
 Devolin
 Dykstra
 Epp
 Finley
 Flaherty
 Galipeau
 Goldring
 Gourde
 Guergis
 Harris
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Hinton
 Jean
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Lemieux
 Lunn
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Manning
 Menzies
 Miller
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Paradis
 Poilievre
 Preston
 Reid
 Ritz
 Schellenberger
 Skelton
 Solberg
 Stanton
 Strahl
 Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
 Tilson
 Trost
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Williams

PAIRED

Members

Mark — 2

Freeman

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER PRODUCTS EXPORT CHARGE ACT, 2006

The House resumed from October 17 consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to impose a charge on the export of certain

Government Orders

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 read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-24.

● (1805)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 43)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
 Albrecht
 Allison
 Anders
 André
 Asselin
 Baird
 Batters
 Benoit
 Bezan
 Blackburn
 Blaney
 Boshcoff
 Boucher
 Breitreuz
 Brown (Barrie)
 Calkins
 Cannon (Pontiac)
 Carrie
 Casey
 Chong
 Comuzzi
 Cummins
 Day
 Del Mastro
 Deschamps
 Doyle
 Dykstra
 Epp
 Fast
 Fitzpatrick
 Fletcher
 Galipeau
 Gaudet
 Goldring
 Gourde
 Guay
 Guimond
 Harris
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Hinton
 Jean
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Komarnicki
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Laframboise
 Lauzon
 Lemay
 Lessard
 Loubier
 Lunn
 Lussier
 MacKenzie
 Manning
 Ménard (Hochelaga)
 Menzies
 Miller

Abloncy
 Allen
 Ambrose
 Anderson
 Arthur
 Bachand
 Barbot
 Bellavance
 Bernier
 Bigras
 Blais
 Bonsant
 Bouchard
 Bourgeois
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Bruinooge
 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
 Harvey
 Hearn
 Hill
 Jaffer
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kotto
 Laforest
 Lake
 Lavallée
 Lemieux
 Lévesque
 Lukiwski
 Lunney
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Malo
 Mayes
 Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
 Merrifield
 Mills

Private Members' Business

Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 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 Basques)
 Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
 Thompson (Wild Rose)
 Toews
 Tweed
 Van Loan
 Verner
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Williams

Nadeau
 Norlock
 Obhrai
 Ouellet
 Paquette
 Perron
 Picard
 Poilievre
 Preston
 Reid
 Ritz
 Scheer
 Shipley
 Smith
 Sorenson
 St-Hilaire
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Tilton
 Trost
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Vincent
 Warawa
 Watson
 Yelich — 172

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
 Atamanenko
 Bains
 Beaumier
 Bell (Vancouver Island North)
 Bennett
 Bevington
 Blaikie
 Brison
 Byrne
 Chamberlain
 Chow
 Comartin
 Crowder
 Cullen (Etobicoke North)
 D'Amours
 Dewar
 Dosanjh
 Eyking
 Godfrey
 Goodale
 Guarnieri
 Hubbard
 Julian
 Keeper
 LeBlanc
 MacAulay
 Maloney
 Marston
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
 Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
 Mathysen
 McCallum
 McGuinty
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Minna
 Murphy (Charlottetown)
 Neville
 Pacetti
 Peterson
 Ratansi
 Regan
 Rodriguez
 Russell
 Savoie
 Scott
 Siksay
 Simard
 St. Denis

Angus
 Bagnell
 Barnes
 Bélanger
 Bell (North Vancouver)
 Bevilacqua
 Black
 Bonin
 Brown (Oakville)
 Cannis
 Charlton
 Christopherson
 Cotler
 Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
 Cuzner
 Davies
 Dhaliwal
 Easter
 Folco
 Godin
 Graham
 Holland
 Jennings
 Karetak-Lindell
 Lapierre
 Lee
 Malhi
 Marleau
 Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
 Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
 Masse
 Matthews
 McDonough
 McGuire
 McTeague
 Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
 Nash
 Owen
 Patry
 Proulx
 Redman
 Robillard
 Rota
 Savage
 Scarpaleggia
 Sgro
 Silva
 St. Amand
 Steckle

Stoffer
 Szabo
 Temelkovski
 Tonks
 Wasylcyia-Leis
 Wilson

Stronach
 Telegdi
 Thibault (West Nova)
 Valley
 Wilfert
 Zed — 110

PAIRED

Members

Freeman

Mark — 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on International Trade.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

TRENT-SEVERN WATERWAY

The House resumed from October 4 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion No. 161 under private members' business in the name of the hon. member for Simcoe North.

• (1815)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 44)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
 Albrecht
 Allen
 Ambrose
 Anderson
 Angus
 Asselin
 Bachand
 Bains
 Barbot
 Batters
 Bélanger
 Bell (North Vancouver)
 Bennett
 Bernier
 Bevington
 Bigras
 Blackburn
 Blais
 Bonin
 Boshcoff
 Boucher
 Breitreuz
 Brown (Oakville)
 Brown (Barrie)
 Byrne
 Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
 Cannon (Pontiac)
 Carrie
 Casey
 Chamberlain
 Chong
 Christopherson
 Comartin
 Cotler
 Crowder

Ablonczy
 Alghabra
 Allison
 Anders
 André
 Arthur
 Atamanenko
 Bagnell
 Baird
 Barnes
 Beaumier
 Bell (Vancouver Island North)
 Bellavance
 Benoit
 Bevilacqua
 Bezan
 Black
 Blaikie
 Blaney
 Bonsant
 Bouchard
 Bourgeois
 Brison
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Bruinooge
 Calkins
 Cannis
 Cardin
 Carrier
 Casson
 Charlton
 Chow
 Clement
 Comuzzi
 Crête
 Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)

Cullen (Etobicoke North)
 Cuzner
 Davidson
 Day
 Del Mastro
 Deschamps
 Dewar
 Dosanjh
 Duceppe
 Easter
 Epp
 Faille
 Finley
 Flaherty
 Folco
 Gallant
 Gauthier
 Godin
 Goodale
 Gourde
 Grewal
 Guay
 Guimond
 Harris
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Hinton
 Hubbard
 Jean
 Julian
 Karetak-Lindell
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kotto
 Laforest
 Lake
 Lauzon
 LeBlanc
 Lemay
 Lessard
 Loubier
 Lunn
 Lussier
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Malhi
 Maloney
 Marleau
 Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
 Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
 Masse
 Matthews
 McCallum
 McGuinty
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Ménard (Hochelaga)
 Menzies
 Miller
 Minna
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
 Nadeau
 Neville
 Norlock
 Obhrai
 Ouellet
 Pacetti
 Paquette
 Patry
 Peterson
 Plamondon
 Prentice
 Proulx
 Ratansi
 Regan
 Richardson
 Robillard
 Rota
 Russell
 Savoie
 Scheer
 Scott
 Shipley
 Silva
 Simms
 Smith

Cummins
 D'Amours
 Davies
 DeBellefeuille
 Demers
 Devolin
 Dhaliwal
 Doyle
 Dykstra
 Emerson
 Eyking
 Fast
 Fitzpatrick
 Fletcher
 Galipeau
 Gaudet
 Godfrey
 Goldring
 Goodyear
 Graham
 Guarnieri
 Guergis
 Hanger
 Harvey
 Hearn
 Hill
 Holland
 Jaffer
 Jennings
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Komarnicki
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Laframboise
 Lapierre
 Lavallée
 Lee
 Lemieux
 Lévesque
 Lukiwski
 Lunney
 MacAulay
 MacKenzie
 Malo
 Manning
 Marston
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
 Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
 Mathysen
 Mayes
 McDonough
 McGuire
 McTeague
 Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
 Merrifield
 Mills
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Mourani
 Murphy (Charlottetown)
 Nash
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Owen
 Pallister
 Paradis
 Perron
 Picard
 Poilievre
 Preston
 Rajotte
 Redman
 Reid
 Ritz
 Rodriguez
 Roy
 Savage
 Scarpaleggia
 Schellenberger
 Sgro
 Siksay
 Simard
 Skelton
 Solberg

Sorenson
 St-Hilaire
 St. Denis
 Steckle
 Storseth
 Stronach
 Szabo
 Temelkovski
 Basques)
 Thibault (West Nova)
 Thompson (Wild Rose)
 Toews
 Trost
 Valley
 Van Loan
 Verner
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Watson
 Williams
 Yelich— 279

St-Cyr
 St. Amand
 Stanton
 Stoffer
 Strahl
 Sweet
 Telegdi
 Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
 Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
 Tilson
 Tonks
 Tweed
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Vincent
 Warawa
 Wasylcia-Leis
 Wilfert
 Wilson

Private Members' Business

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Mark— 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[English]

KELOWNA ACCORD IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed from October 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-292, An Act to implement the Kelowna Accord, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-292 under private members' business.

● (1825)

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

(Division No. 45)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra
 Angus
 Atamanenko
 Bagnell
 Barbot
 Beaumier
 Bell (Vancouver Island North)
 Bellavance
 Bevilacqua
 Bigras
 Blaikie
 Bonin
 Boshcoff
 Bourgeois
 Brown (Oakville)
 Cannis
 Carrier
 Charlton
 Christopherson
 Comuzzi
 Crête
 Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
 Cuzner

André
 Asselin
 Bachand
 Bains
 Barnes
 Bélanger
 Bell (North Vancouver)
 Bennett
 Bevington
 Black
 Blais
 Bonsant
 Bouchard
 Brison
 Byrne
 Cardin
 Chamberlain
 Chow
 Comartin
 Cotler
 Crowder
 Cullen (Etobicoke North)
 D'Amours

Private Members' Business

Davies	DeBellefeuille	Fletcher	Galipeau
Demers	Deschamps	Gallant	Goldring
Dewar	Dhaliwal	Goodyear	Gourde
Dosanjh	Duceppe	Grewal	Guergis
Easter	Eyking	Hanger	Harris
Faille	Folco	Harvey	Hawn
Gaudet	Gauthier	Hearn	Hiebert
Godfrey	Godin	Hill	Hinton
Goodale	Graham	Jaffer	Jean
Guarnieri	Guay	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Guimond	Holland	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Komarnicki
Hubbard	Jennings	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Julian	Karetak-Lindell	Lauzon	Lemieux
Keeper	Kotto	Lukiwski	Lunn
Laforest	Laframboise	Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
Lapierre	Lavallée	MacKenzie	Manning
LeBlanc	Lee	Mayes	Menzies
Lemay	Lessard	Merrifield	Miller
Lévesque	Loubier	Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Lussier	MacAulay	Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Malhi	Malo	Norlock	O'Connor
Maloney	Marleau	Obhrai	Oda
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Pallister	Paradis
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Petit	Poilievre
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse	Prentice	Preston
Mathysen	Matthews	Rajotte	Reid
McCallum	McDonough	Richardson	Ritz
McGuinty	McGuire	Scheer	Schellenberger
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague	Shipley	Skelton
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Smith	Solberg
Minna	Mourani	Sorenson	Stanton
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)	Storseth	Strahl
Nadeau	Nash	Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Neville	Ouellet	Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Owen	Pacetti	Toews	Trost
Paquette	Patry	Tweed	Van Kesteren
Perron	Peterson	Van Loan	Vellacott
Picard	Plamondon	Verner	Wallace
Proulx	Ratansi	Warawa	Warkentin
Redman	Regan	Watson	Williams
Robillard	Rodriguez	Yelich— 123	
Rota	Roy		
Russell	Savage		
Savoie	Scarpaleggia		
Scott	Sgro		
Siksay	Silva		
Simard	Simms		
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire		
St. Amand	St. Denis		
Steckle	Stoffer		
Stronach	Szabo		
Telegdi	Temelkovski		
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)			
Thibault (West Nova)			
Tonks	Valley		
Vincent	Wasylcia-Leis		
Wilfert	Wilson		
Zed— 159			

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Arthur	Baird
Batters	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Boucher	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casey
Casson	Chong
Clement	Cummins
Davidson	Day
Del Mastro	Devolin
Doyle	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty

Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Komarnicki
Lake	Lemieux
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	Manning
Manning	Menzies
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson	O'Connor
Oda	Paradis
Paradis	Poilievre
Poilievre	Preston
Preston	Reid
Ritz	Schellenberger
Schellenberger	Skelton
Skelton	Solberg
Solberg	Stanton
Stanton	Strahl
Strahl	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Tilson
Tilson	Trost
Trost	Van Kesteren
Van Kesteren	Vellacott
Vellacott	Wallace
Wallace	Warkentin
Warkentin	Williams
Williams	

PAIRED

Members

Freeman Mark— 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

The Speaker: It being 6:29 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

● (1830)

[Translation]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from June 6 consideration of the motion that Bill C-257, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (replacement workers), be now read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are discussing Bill C-257. For me, the response is self-evident. The Canada Labour Code seeks to balance and to reconcile opposing interests in any labour dispute and not to promote the interests of a single group to the detriment of the other.

Private Members' Business

I shall explain. We are being asked to amend the Canada Labour Code concerning the use of replacement workers.

Anyone who has studied questions of labour policy closely knows that employing replacement workers is far from unanimously accepted, especially here in this House, to judge from the number of times the question has been debated.

There are those, like the opposition member, who have introduced a bill calling for the prohibition of the use of replacement workers during a legal work stoppage. I am sure that to the member it is almost a profession of faith to maintain that position.

On the other hand, there are those who just as fervently proclaim that an organization must have an absolute right to use replacement workers.

Usually, unions and employee groups are in favour of prohibition while employers normally support the use of replacement workers. Both parties are concerned about their survival.

As it often happens in this kind of debate, both sides offer solid arguments in favour of their positions. It is almost impossible to get either side to accept the point of view of the other. There is nothing surprising about that because we are dealing with a very sensitive issue.

In any event, what concerns me is that Bill C-257 appears to defend the interests of only one party. However, it is clear that as lawmakers our role is not to line up on one side or the other but rather to determine where to find common ground.

I believe that we must ask ourselves whether it is appropriate to arbitrarily amend the Canada Labour Code. Should we not ensure that the Code serves the interests of all the parties involved in labour relations? To me, the answer is clear.

The Canada Labour Code seeks to balance and reconcile the opposing interests in any labour dispute and not to promote the interests of one group to the detriment of the other. The question of replacement workers is a good example of that.

When part I of the Labour Code was amended a few years ago, this House opted for a happy medium between a total ban on the use of replacement workers and the right to use replacement workers.

The code does manage to provide a middle ground by allowing employers to hire replacement workers on a temporary basis and only if their purpose is not to undermine the union's efforts to defend the interests of its members. If an employer's intentions prove less than honourable, the union may appeal to the Canada Industrial Relations Board.

At present, the Labour Code has the merit of not favouring one party at the expense of the other. It leaves it up to the parties to conclude a fair collective agreement without infringing upon the right of the other party to preserve its livelihood. By being impartial, the code offers an approach which strikes a balance between competing interests.

This approach has been in use for some time now and, in most instances, the parties to negotiations under the Canada Labour Code have been reasonably happy with it.

The amendment proposed in Bill C-257 would jeopardize this precious balance. This makes it counterproductive, and therefore I cannot support it.

One also has to measure the impact of the use of replacement workers on the duration of work stoppages.

Some contend that prohibiting the use of replacement workers helps settle labour disputes faster. In their opinion, preventing employers from hiring replacement workers makes the bargaining process more effective. The member opposite shares that opinion.

• (1835)

Still, there are arguments on the other side. In fact, some independent expert studies indicate that in the provinces where the use of replacement workers is forbidden by provincial legislation, that is, in British Columbia and Quebec, strikes last longer, on average 32 days longer. Furthermore the probability of a strike in these provinces increases by 12%.

An hon. member: That is not true.

Ms. Sylvie Boucher: The study does not offer any evidence that prohibiting the use of replacement workers is an advantage for employees and employers in those regions. Also, in spite of such legislation, every year Quebec and British Columbia process a large number of complaints pertaining to the use of replacement workers. In other words legislation has not eliminated the problem.

It is also interesting to note that in Ontario, which once prohibited the use of replacement workers, later removed the prohibition. And as my colleagues have already pointed out, the statistics do not show that preventing the use of replacement workers shortens the duration of work stoppages or presents advantages for workers.

We can debate this issue for a long time yet, but I know that everyone here feels that it is our duty to be good stewards of the Canadian economy, as long as workers' rights and employers' rights are respected in complete impartiality. Impartiality is the very foundation of the Labour Code.

This is a complex issue. The current provisions of the Labour Code deal with this complexity by establishing a fair balance between the interests of employers and employees.

Moreover the Labour Code prohibits an employer from punishing employees who refuse to replace workers who are locked out or on strike or from penalizing them. It guarantees employees' right to strike and to regain their job.

At the same time employers may pursue their activities and provide useful goods and services during work stoppages. By allowing conciliation and mediation, part I of the Canada Labour Code can also help the parties concerned to resolve their disputes in an atmosphere of respect. So part I of the Canada Labour Code serves the interests of employers and employees equitably, in the difficult context of a labour dispute.

Passing the amendment proposed in Bill C-257 would upset the precious balance established and this would be completely ridiculous. The House should not support this bill.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for this House to give its full support to Bill C-257 for several reasons, including respect for and consolidation of labour rights, which seem to me to be the most essential elements.

In that respect, this bill is part of Canada's ongoing industrial relations evolution toward guaranteeing fairness and balance between the prosperity of our businesses and the rights of workers.

I would also note that this bill seeks to ensure that labour negotiations take place according to rules that do a better job than we have so far of guaranteeing civility and clarity in the best interests of all parties involved.

Only when all of the parties to a negotiation—or to a labour dispute, if that is the case—are governed by rules that guarantee respect for the rights of each participant can we ensure a process that will mitigate the severity of potential conflicts.

Better yet, clear rules and respect for the rights of the parties are often basic conditions required to avoid worsening the situation and escalating conflict.

That is why this bill deserves the attention and support of the hon. members of the House because it is our primary duty to foster harmonious labour relations, which, in the end, are always good for our prosperity and always benefit our fellow citizens as a whole.

The measures set forth in Bill C-257 establish important standards that will help us achieve these objectives.

We need this bill, or else the rights of workers, which we claim to honour in our legislation, will be ignored and lose all significance or reality.

What would be the purpose of enshrining the right to strike in our legislation if employers could easily keep up the production normally done by the striking workers?

Under these circumstances, the right to strike obviously loses all significance and our laws to protect labour rights would be devoid of any real meaning.

As a representative of Quebec in the House, I can attest to the fact that it has been setting a precedent in our country for nearly three decades providing powerful, compelling proof of the benefits of the spirit of this kind of legislation.

Quebec labour law prevents employers from hiring replacement workers, commonly called scabs, when a dispute goes so far as a strike or lockout.

When this Quebec legislation was still at the bill stage, there were very strong and usually negative reactions to it.

There was every reason for this because the spirit of this kind of legislation obviously profoundly altered the labour relations culture that had existed since the beginning of time.

This episode proved that change—especially progress in an area as sensitive as labour relations can be—is never without some conflict and upheavals in the beginning.

However, once the Quebec legislation passed, it did not take all the parties long to find something in it for themselves, to such an extent that there has been a consensus around it for a long time. No one believes anymore that it would be in their best interest to challenge it.

Everyone realizes that when legislation creates unambiguous rules that clearly define and stake out the powers and rights of all parties, negotiations usually benefit, especially because they are a lot more efficient.

What this kind of balance of power does in any industrial bargaining is make it possible for the parties involved to better assess the interests they have in common in any labour dispute.

Employers then become aware of their employees' interests, and employees are better able to grasp the importance of the company they are working for being able to continue operating profitably and competitively, so that everyone, employers and employees alike, can benefit by ensuring that the company they are working in continues to exist and continues to function.

I would reiterate, however, that to succeed in this scenario, which is based on preserving the commonality of interests and which always benefits both parties at the end of the day, the rules of the game have to be clear and based on the law, and so does the balance of power.

That is where Bill C-257 takes a novel approach, an approach that we must admit is necessary today.

And we have a precedent here in Canada, in the Quebec legislation that bears witness to the wisdom of the legislative action we are being asked to take by supporting the bill we are considering today.

That is why I would like to thank my parliamentary colleagues who have put their efforts into drafting Bill C-257 and introducing it in this House.

● (1840)

In doing this, they have not only done pioneering work at the national level, they have also laid down important benchmarks for the work that must still be done to bring about the kind of prosperity that will provide the greatest possible benefits for Canadians, employers and employees alike.

This is achieved by recognizing and consolidating workers' rights, in a spirit that also recognizes the interests of our businesses. But we must also not forget the fact that a business is, first and foremost, the sum of everyone who works in it, employers and employees alike.

That is why the more that decisions made by a business are in the common interests of the parties who work there, the greater the guarantees it will have that it will be able to continue operating and that it will have a future.

It is because Bill C-257 reflects that recognition and that spirit that I have the honour of confirming that I will be voting for it.

Private Members' Business

•(1845)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand in the House to speak to Bill C-257, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (replacement workers).

We know how many times such a bill has been introduced in the House and rejected by only a few votes. Personally, I can speak from experience. Before talking about the bill per se, I would like to make a few comments.

In her speech, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, the spokesperson for the Conservatives, said that we must reach a balance and that anti-scab legislation is not balance. British Columbia and Quebec both have an anti-strikebreaker legislation that works relatively well. It is not true, as the member said, that such legislation produces an increase in the number of strike days, which is 32 on average. I can say that in my riding, workers in the turf pits remained more than 1,500 days without working when the company Lamèque Quality Group declared a lockout. That is more than 32 days. Strikebreakers were called in and that created violence on the picket line. That was the result.

Our laws give us the opportunity and the right to become members of a labour union. They give us the opportunity and the means to negotiate collective agreements. However, in case of a strike or lockout, we give the employers the opportunity to abuse those rights by hiring scabs who take legitimate workers' jobs. Where is the just balance in that situation?

The Conservative member said that Ontario had had such a law and that the government had decided to eliminate it. But she neglected to mention that it was Mike Harris, a Conservative who was then Premier of Ontario, who eliminated it. She said that there has to be a balance, that things have to be fair. The Mike Harris Conservatives also passed a law saying that every employer should have a poster on their company walls describing how employees could go about getting rid of their union.

If the idea is to find something fair and balanced, I do not understand why that same premier and the Conservatives in Ontario did not pass a law to tell employees how to join a union. How is that balanced? That is what Mike Harris and the Conservatives did in Ontario.

Are the Conservatives workers' friends? Do they deserve workers' votes? It will be up to workers to decide. Is it fair if, when you work for an employer, you cannot go on strike and when you are on the picket line, you watch scabs go by. That happened at a company in Bathurst, New Brunswick, in my own riding. It has been a year now since a man from outside the area came to Bathurst to buy Le Château, a hotel. In the negotiations, he decided to take the employees who were working for \$9.50 an hour and reduce their pay to minimum wage, \$6.70. The employees opted to go on strike. For more than a year, scabs have been doing the employees' work. It is shameful.

In Quebec, employees of CHNC New-Carlisle have been on strike for more than three years. Three years, and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Minister for la Francophonie and

Official Languages has just said that the Conservatives think that having anti-scab legislation in Quebec has led to more strikes.

•(1850)

We must remember that CHNC is under federal jurisdiction and this is why the strike lasted longer. For example the strike at Radio-Nord took years to be settled. I went to Rouyn-Noranda and Abitibi personally to meet with people on the picket lines. Watching the scabs go by was not a pretty sight.

We remember well the strike that took place in the mines in the Northwest Territories, the tragedy that occurred there where once again a company's employees saw scabs taking away their living—and they say it has to be well balanced. They are capable of prolonging a strike. I come back to Lameque Quality Group, where they were locked out for 43 months, and the provincial government gave loan guarantees during the lockout of \$500,000. It was shameful to see.

We can hope that the Conservatives will take a close look at their conscience and have a little heart for the workers, because it is not just anybody that votes for them; I am sure there are also some workers. This is not acceptable. It is as if we arrived at Parliament one fine day and a group of scabs was entering Parliament to do our work. Perhaps we would think differently then.

Looking at Quebec's experience, looking at what took place in Quebec with the anti-scab legislation, there are fewer strikes and lockouts in Quebec and there is greater harmony between the workers and the companies when it comes time to bargain. The proof is there.

After this legislation was passed by the Parti québécois, the Liberals were elected twice, but they did not dare to remove the anti-scab legislation, even though they could have. That means that it works. In British Columbia, they could have abolished the anti-scab legislation, but they did not because it works. In Ontario, they had strikes under Mike Harris, under the Conservative government and besides that they told employees how to get rid of the unions. That means that the Conservatives do not believe in an association that defends workers.

I never saw a bill from the Conservatives proposing to abolish the right of employers to join the chamber of commerce. To my mind the chamber of commerce is the union of businesses, of employers, of companies. The Conservatives never put forward legislation to prevent employers from joining the chamber of commerce. But they come up with the sort of legislation they introduced in Ontario. Today we see the Conservatives' reaction.

If we want a healthy work environment, one in which workers can join the association of their choice, we cannot go just part of the way. We cannot cater only to large corporations, to rich companies or individuals who make workers suffer. That is what happened at the Bathurst hotel and workers have been on the picket line for a year, while scabs are doing their work, because the employer reduced their wage from \$9.30 an hour to \$6.70 an hour, by taking away all their benefits.

Private Members' Business

This must no longer be tolerated. We need harmony. Rules must be established to prevent abuse, and the only way to prevent it is by enacting legislation to prohibit scabs from entering workplaces to replace workers, who have been granted the right by the government to resort to strike or lockout action. We give workers rights and then we turn around and give them something else that they can break.

We know what happens on picket lines. They fill armoured buses with workers and put their lives in danger. I could perhaps understand scabs who are unemployed and feel they have no other option. But it puts those workers in danger. Then, the police are forced into dangerous situations. We see fighting in the streets that should not happen.

I congratulate Quebec on its anti-scab legislation. I also congratulate British Columbia. It is now our turn, at the federal level, to do our job and become leaders in eliminating the use of scabs.

• (1855)

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, allow me first to commend the commitment of my colleague from Gatineau, who introduced the anti-scab legislation, Bill C-257, and who thereby showed his generosity toward and understanding of workers' rights and his dedication to defending them. I would like to congratulate and thank him.

A lot has been said about the anti-scab bill. The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst spoke about it quite eloquently, as did the Liberal member. They made fine analyses of this bill and the advantages it presents.

I have to say—and it is not said enough—that anti-scab legislation reduces the length of strikes. It also reduces violence on the picket lines and at the employer's facilities. It improves the general mood. If the strike is short and all the people have been respectful for the duration, the mood is far better than at the plant next door where conditions were much worse and more problematic.

This creates balance. It creates balance between the workers and employers in Quebec. This respect and balance in pressure tactics available to each party results in labour peace in Quebec and in British Columbia. This is advantageous both to the employee and the employer.

Everyone wins. In Quebec in the past 30 years, no one has questioned the anti-scab legislation that has existed there all this time. That means we have real labour peace. We have balance. It does not lean to the right of centre or in favour of major industry. That would be a false balance, which is what we currently have in places without anti-scab legislation.

In Quebec, one of the problems is that 90% of workers are under federal jurisdiction and are entitled to the benefits of anti-scab legislation. Some 8% of the workforce in Quebec is under federal jurisdiction and is excluded from these benefits. The Bloc Québécois is working hard for those people in collaboration with all the other stakeholders in Canada. It is for this reason that we have to stop having two classes of workers in Quebec.

On June 6, the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec made

some arguments that did not make much sense. He said there was less investment in provinces that had anti-scab legislation. I do not understand why he said that.

First, the Minister of Labour and Minister of Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, who is also the member for Jonquière—Alma, voted in favour of this bill. I will give you the date. It was November 5, 1990, and it was Bill C-201, introduced by the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour. He voted for it.

On May 1 of this year, when I asked him in this House, he said that, in Quebec, that was fine, that it was a distinct society. I do not agree with him on the term “distinct society”, but it is what he said. He said there was a tradition in Quebec, an obvious culture in favour of anti-scab legislation, but that, as a minister, he had to consider this under a “Canadian angle.” However, he is now telling us that he will vote against this legislation. It makes no sense for the Conservative Party to vote against legislation that is also beneficial for workers across Canada, and not only in Quebec.

If he considers this under a Canadian angle now that he is a minister, he must then change his mind and vote for this bill. Since we are only at second reading stage, he should at least vote on the principle of the bill to give it an opportunity to be studied in committee. There we could really discuss it. He could invite his witnesses who are saying that strikes last longer.

The member for Beauport—Limoilou suggested that anti-strike-breaker legislation would contribute to increasing the frequency of strikes. This hypothesis was disproven by a researcher named J. W. Budd, who, after reviewing over 2,000 collective agreements in Canada, concluded that there is little evidence suggesting that anti-strikebreaker legislation increases the frequency of strikes.

• (1900)

Those are the Conservative Party's arguments. All of its arguments are bizarre, to say the least.

The minister's first argument that there has been less investment in provinces with anti-strikebreaker legislation was quickly disproven using statistics. He has not brought the argument up again.

I would add that the studies he consulted were conducted by the Fraser Institute and the Montreal Economic Institute. We know these two right-wing think tanks manipulate the numbers until they say exactly what employers want to hear. We have therefore taken these studies and the minister's arguments with a grain of salt. He seems to have done the same, because he has not brought those arguments up again.

On September 22, he came back to the House with a second argument. He said something that is worth hearing again:

Thus, there is no evidence indicating that prohibiting the use of replacement workers has any of the alleged benefits for workers—

Private Members' Business

Not a single one. Tell that to the millions of workers in Quebec. Tell that to all those who have been on a picket line. Tell that to all those who were on a picket line while replacement workers were crossing it to steal their job, their spot, their salary. Tell workers who must get into debt during a strike because of the presence of replacement workers in their plant that an act prohibiting the use of replacement workers is of no benefit at all. Tell that to workers who, along with their family, are experiencing emotional distress because they do not know where they will find the money to pay next month's rent.

So, when the minister claims in this House that there is no evidence indicating that prohibiting the use of replacement workers has any benefits, he is not credible. We know that he is exaggerating. If he had said that there might be a shred of evidence to that effect, we would have taken his comments into consideration, but he said there is no evidence at all. As we know, such sweeping statements are meaningless, and this is what we thought of the minister's argument.

An hon. member: It is true.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I expected him to come and tell us today that it is the environmentalists' fault, but in the end he did not show up and nor did the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. Not only did he not come here to explain his arguments, he did not even explain them to FTQ officials from the Outaouais region, who wanted to meet with him. He did not even agree to meet with them. Not only does he not want to debate the issue, he does not want to meet these people, and he does not even return their calls. This means that their arguments are either too weak or shameful. That would be surprising, but who knows.

The benefits of such an act can be seen in Quebec, where millions of workers have been protected by such legislation for the past 30 years. We can even provide numbers. In fact, my colleague, the hon. member for Gatineau, will give some very relevant and accurate figures. But we do not need numbers to see what we are seeing, to hear what we are hearing, and to show how effective Quebec's antiscab legislation has been over the past 30 years. It is just common sense.

I invite all members of all parties—and especially members of the government party—to face the facts and vote for their constituents, for their workers, not for their leaders who subscribe to a neo-conservative ideology and too often side with a few company executives instead of with the people. What is important is the human factor.

I see that I have only a minute left, and that is too bad, because I wanted to talk about all the people throughout Quebec and Canada who have mobilized to support this bill. Obviously, the CLC is behind this bill, but so are the FTQ, the CSN and the CSD. They are working and will continue to work very hard to convince the members of this House of the benefits of this bill.

I would also like to talk about Monique Allard of Quebec City, who is getting people to sign petitions, because she really believes in this legislation. There is also Mario Elrick of the CMOU, the Canadian Marine Officers' Union in St. Catharines, who is doing an outstanding job as well. They believe in this legislation. The minister

should talk to them instead of to the Montreal Economic Institute or the Fraser Institute, which feed him arguments that do not stand up and that he does not dare repeat here.

I say that we should give this bill a chance in second reading so that it can be discussed in committee.

● (1905)

From the witnesses who appear, we will hear the most intelligent, most brilliant arguments and the experiences people have had. We will also hear all kinds of arguments, including those of the right-wing think tanks of the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec.

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the last two speakers.

Someone talked to me about the Bathurst hotel. I would like to inform my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst that that hotel is not under federal jurisdiction. What we are talking about here is federal legislation. I found his example a bit strange. It is as though, by adopting federal legislation for federal companies, we ended up adopting anti-scab legislation applying from coast to coast to coast, in all provinces.

There is a problem here. It is as if the Canadian government decided to encroach on provincial jurisdiction by imposing anti-scab legislation on all of Canada.

Let us make no mistake. Our friend from Acadie—Bathurst talked about the Bathurst hotel. I do not see how that hotel could fall under federal jurisdiction or how it could be seen as a federal company. I would not want to speculate, but I think that that was the hon. member's example.

Following that, they talk about statistics. Every month, when I see the statistics from Radio-Canada, I notice that the unemployment rate in Quebec is from 1% to 1.5% higher than the average for all of Canada. They tell me each time that everything is fine. No, I am sorry, that is not the case. Out of 2.7 million workers, 1.5% more people are unemployed in Quebec. That means that 27,000 workers are not working.

It is for those people that I rise to speak today; for those 27,000 workers who, in the end, have no work, and perhaps that is because of an anti-strikebreaker law that causes employers to locate somewhere else rather than to come to Quebec. It is for those 27,000 workers that I am speaking today.

Whether they talk to me about balance or any other issue, it is a matter of provincial jurisdiction. Each province is free to do what it wants. I see no reason why my government, the Government of Canada, should interfere in these areas of jurisdiction. Quebec has its law and does very well. I am from Quebec and I live with that law. Nevertheless, I do not see why I would try to force all other Canadians to accept what I have at home. I am happy with what I have; it is perfect, but live and let live.

Moreover, I do not see why the Bloc Québécois want to introduce a law today requiring all of Canada to be like them. I am sorry, but I respect my neighbours. If they want to do it, let them do it but it is not up to me to oblige them.

Private Members' Business

Some hon. members: The federal code.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please.

The hon. member for Louis-Hébert is very close to my chair and still I cannot hear him very well. So order, please. That will be better for the hon. member.

•(1910)

Mr. Luc Harvey: Mr. Speaker, I will conclude with this. I find it most ironic that the Bloc Québécois is introducing a bill to force all of Canada to vote in favour of anti-strikebreaker legislation.

[English]

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we debate in the House Bill C-257, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, it is important that we recognize that at its core this debate is about protecting workers in this country. It is for this reason that I intend to support this legislation.

Even the most basic economic theory recognizes that within any economic system the role of labour is an essential component. People within the workforce are basically asked to provide their labour in return for income.

Therefore, with this most basic economic concept in mind, we need to recognize that for workers the security of their job during a labour dispute is not only an important consideration but an inalienable right.

It was not long ago that workers in this country, and in many similar nations, were required to work in conditions that today would seem unimaginable. For their labour they were compensated, but not at an acceptable level. Nor were they reasonably protected within the workplace. In terms of job security, quite frankly, there was none.

Today much has changed. There is much that still needs to be done. Workers across Canada and in many nations around the world are protected by minimum standards outlined in statutes and further enhanced by union representation.

In my home province of Ontario the basic rights of working people is contained within the Employment Standards Act which outlines standards and reasonable levels of protection workers can expect in this province.

The law enshrines only the most basic rights and there are many who would argue that statutes such as these do not go anywhere near the level of protection that workers really need. Many workers are further protected by the efforts of their union representatives who represent them in collective bargaining agreements.

These unions are also of great service to young people by way of training programs and the like. They also advocate on a variety of labour issues and, like union leaders before them, they fight for workers' rights to protect the hard won advancements workers now enjoy.

In fact, I have been pleased over the years to work with various union leaders such as Ucal Powell, Carlos Pimentel and Mike Yorke of the Carpenters and Allied Workers Union. These people, like so many others in the labour movement, are committed to serving their members.

As a former city councillor, I was instrumental in implementing the city's fair wage policy. The policy set a standard that continues to resonate throughout the public and private sectors and in particular those who choose to do business with the city of Toronto. These are important steps forward for working people in our cities, provinces and the country as a whole.

With respect to Bill C-257, it is important to recognize that in this country the provinces retain the constitutional power to legislate labour regulations and standards for most workers within their jurisdictions. However, the unique nature of our Confederation means that there are many employees in this country who are not covered under federal law.

Those who fall into this category look to the Canada Labour Code for the security other workers may find in their corresponding provincial statutes. Only two provinces in this country, Quebec and British Columbia, have in place statutes that protect the jobs of workers who are participating in a legal labour dispute.

As noted, the fundamental negotiating tool available to workers is their labour. Their work is the commodity they offer in return for their compensation.

There are many international conventions that recognize and encourage this right. For example, the 1981 collective bargaining convention of the United Nations reaffirms that the international labour organization has a solemn obligation to further among nations of the world programs which will achieve the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining. This statement speaks of the right of workers to secure effective collective bargaining, including the right to strike that should not be undermined.

It is really quite inconceivable that workers who are involved in a legal work stoppage would have to stand by and watch as their jobs are filled, even if only temporarily, by other people hired by their employers. Without the ability to withdraw their labour, then what do these workers have to negotiate with during periods of collective bargaining?

If employers can simply replace their employees with alternates, then clearly the motivation for an expeditious settlement is removed from the management side of the negotiating equation.

•(1915)

I would note and believe this may have already been pointed out by other members that in the provinces where legislation does prevent replacement workers, there are generally less intense labour-management disputes. What I mean is that the average number of days that employees are on strike in provinces that prevent replacement workers is significantly less than those where they are permitted.

In the provinces that prevent replacement workers, it is clear that there is a greater incentive on the part of employers to negotiate in good faith with employees. The statistics clearly back this assertion.

Similarly, when one looks back at the most contentious and bitter periods of labour unrest, it is quite clear that these periods included attempts by employers to use replacement workers, either permanently or temporarily. This is another major incentive for the House to pass into law Bill C-257.

Private Members' Business

It can be reasonably argued that the inability of employers to hire replacement workers helps to reduce the intensity of labour disputes in the same way that it clearly reduces the length of work stoppages. There are those who have argued that implementation of the bill would have dire consequences for the nation's economy and for labour-management relations. This is simply not supported by the facts.

Indeed, as noted above, there are two provinces within Canada that have already implemented this kind of legislation and there have not been any of the major problems that some have warned would occur.

The bill before the House deals with the Canada Labour Code. It is a piece of legislation that would apply to all federally regulated workers in Canada. It would not have the force of law within provincial jurisdictions that have not yet adopted this kind of labour protection.

As stated in this debate, only Quebec and British Columbia have laws of this kind. However, by proceeding to pass Bill C-257 we would as a federal government be setting an example for those other provinces. Like the Canadian Labour Congress or the Canadian Auto Workers, I support Bill C-257 because it sets a standard of protection for federally regulated workers across the country.

I encourage all members of the House to join with me in supporting Bill C-257 in order to extend to workers in this country the job security they need and deserve.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to rise today with my NDP—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni on a point of order.

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might engage my colleagues tonight. We are all enjoying this discussion so much. I have a blockbuster speech on this subject. I would ask for unanimous consent from my colleagues to extend our hours by 10 minutes so I can deliver my speech.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There does not seem to be unanimous consent.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to rise tonight with my NDP colleagues to speak in favour of this important bill.

I want to begin by recalling a person I know by the name of Don Milner. Don Milner is a young man with a wife and small children. He nearly lost his life on a picket line in Chatham, Ontario in 2002 during a very bitter six week strike at a company called International Truck. The company decided it was going to prolong the strike. It turned nasty and the company brought in strikebreakers. Don Milner and two others were run over by a van driven by young people hired by the company as security forces. They were there to ensure that strikebreakers were brought into the plant.

Don almost lost his life that day. He was run over by the wheels of the van. His life has changed forever. He has had numerous operations and has not been able to return to work and we do not

know if he ever will. This has totally turned his life upside down. At least he is lucky and is alive; others have not been so lucky.

We know that the vast majority of collective bargaining sessions are settled without a strike. In fact, more than 97% of negotiations are settled without a strike. Anyone who has had to stand up for their rights in collective bargaining knows what it means to have scabs brought into their workplace. A minority of employers resort to this, those who decide they prefer confrontation instead of negotiation.

For those employers that decide to take this route, what does this mean? This means longer strikes. We know this from the history in every province where anti-scab legislation has been brought in. We know it means more violence. We know there have been deaths and all kinds of incidents on picket lines as a result of scabs. We know bad labour relations result, both during negotiations and after a strike or lockout is settled. It can affect the workplace for months and years to come.

Scabs take the food right out of the mouths of strikers and their families. We just need to ask workers in federal jurisdictions, people who would be covered by this new law who work at places like Giant Mine, Telus, Vidéotron, SECUR and CBC. They all know firsthand what it means to have strikebreakers and scabs in their workplaces. Imagine what that would feel like if we decided to stand up for our rights and others were brought in at a fraction of the wage in order to do our jobs. Surely, we would want to stand up and defend our rights.

We know from the experience in Quebec and British Columbia that anti-scab legislation is successful. Surely, we support the fundamental rights of working people not only here in Canada but around the world as well. If we support the right of working people to freedom of association, freedom to join a union, and freedom to free collective bargaining, then we must support their right to free collective bargaining and their right to not have scabs in their workplace. I urge all members to stand in support of this bill.

• (1920)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-257, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (replacement workers) is intended as a humanistic reflection of our society. That is why we ask all members of the 39th Parliament to vote in favour of this bill in principle.

Its aim is to encourage civilized negotiations during labour disputes—during strikes or lockouts—and to reduce picket line violence and the social and psychological problems caused by the stress of labour disputes. It would diminish the resentment that employees feel upon returning to work and foster a just balance and greater transparency in the negotiations between employers and employees.

This bill will ensure that the management and union parties negotiate under the same constraints in order to facilitate a quick and fairer solution.

Adjournment Proceedings

The bill has several objectives: reduce the number of legal proceedings resulting from strikes and lockouts, shorten the duration of these strikes and lockouts, and reduce the lost income of workers and lost profits of employers.

Here are few figures on this point that are worth considering. Quebec workers whose employer is under federal jurisdiction almost always have a higher number of lost work days.

So although they make up less than 8% of the labour force in Quebec, they accounted for 18% of lost person-days in 2004 and 22.6% of lost person-days in 2003.

This reached a peak in 2002, when 7.3% of Quebec workers were employed in organizations under federal jurisdiction. They were responsible for 48% of the work days lost because of labour disputes.

The number of work days lost because of labour disputes drops when there is anti-strikebreaker legislation. Here are a few figures: the average number of work days in 1976, before the anti-strikebreaker law in Quebec, was 39.4; afterward, it fell to 32.8 in 1979 and 27.4 in 2001.

In British Columbia, which enacted an anti-strikebreaker law in 1993, the ratio of lost time fell by 50% from 1992 to 1993.

Workers who are subject to the Quebec Labour Code averaged 15.9 lost work days from 1992 to 2002. Workers who were subject to the Canada Labour Code averaged 31.1. For every 1,000 employees subject to the Quebec Labour Code there were 121 lost work days from 1992 to 2002; for workers subject to the Canada Labour Code there were 266.3.

The 10-month dispute at Vidéotron alone resulted in a loss of 355 work days in Quebec in 2002. This was more than a third of all work days lost because of a strike or lockout in Quebec in 2002.

The year 2002 was a record one in terms of person-days lost. It is important to note that this unfortunate record is largely attributable to strikes in organizations under federal jurisdiction. Those strikes last much longer.

If a majority of the House of Commons votes for this bill, this will be an opportunity for parliamentarians and every actor in civil society to take a position on this kind of legislation to amend the Canada Labour Code in the course of a debate on its merits.

● (1925)

Witnesses from every background will be able to express their views to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities of Canada, right here in this institution.

By voting for this bill, members of the House of Commons will ensure, for the first time in the 10 attempts that have been made since the early 1990s to have this bill enacted, that a debate that can only be beneficial to labour relations makes it onto the agenda.

In so doing, we will together be engaged in the worthy cause of recognizing the exceptional contribution made by everyone who goes out to work every day to build our societies.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 7:29 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 nays 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, October 25, 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.

● (1930)

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rose in the House on June 9 and I directed a question to the Minister of Veterans Affairs with regard to whether or not the minister was going to honour a promise that was made by the Prime Minister. I did this on behalf of a constituent of mine, Joyce Carter from St. Peters, Cape Breton Island. Joyce is a war bride. She is the widow of a second world war veteran. She has long been a champion for many issues regarding veterans and veterans' widows.

The issue she wanted me to bring forward was a letter that she had received from the member for Calgary Southwest, who at that time was the leader of the official opposition. The letter was written just prior to the 2006 election.

I should quote from the letter directly because we know that that former leader of the official opposition is now the Prime Minister. He said, "A Conservative government would immediately", and I will repeat that for the members in the chamber and the people at home who want to make sure that this is concise. He said that a Conservative government "would immediately extend veterans independence program services to the widows of all second world war and Korean war veterans, regardless of when the veteran died".

Adjournment Proceedings

Members in this House are very much aware of the veterans independence program. They understand that the services, such as the home care services and grounds maintenance services, are very much appreciated and important services so that the veterans who did so much for us are able to stay in their homes and live in some degree of dignity.

That is the reason I posed the question to the minister on June 9 as to when he would honour that promise made by the Prime Minister and immediately extend the benefits to all war widows.

I was very surprised myself with the response from the minister at the time because really he was taken aback. I believe he was not aware of the promise at all. I believe his subsequent comments in the media indicate that. Under testimony when he appeared before the veterans affairs committee, it seemed that it was the first time he had heard of it.

As a matter of fact, when pressed with regard to immediately extending the benefits, the minister said, "Maybe we can do it in a piecemeal fashion, if you will". Certainly a piecemeal fashion would not be anything like immediately, as promised by the Prime Minister

When will the veterans affairs minister honour the promise made by the Prime Minister and extend VIP coverage to all war veterans and all veterans' widows, as was promised?

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that the previous government had more than 13 years to do what the member is asking for today.

This government is committed to veterans and their families. This government does not break its promises.

Our record of achievement speaks for itself. The veterans independence program, or VIP as it is commonly referred to, is one of the most successful and popular programs offered by Veterans Affairs Canada. The objective of VIP is to help veterans remain healthy and independent in their own homes, not only helping to maintain their independence but ensuring a high quality of life in their later years.

Over the years, the veterans independence program has been made available to more and more clients since its inception. Today, approximately 94,500 Canadian veterans and primary caregivers, 70,500 veterans and 24,000 caregivers, now receive VIP services across the country at an approximate cost of \$270 million per year.

The program has become a model for programs both in Canada and throughout the world designed to help senior citizens live independent lives in their homes and in their communities until long term care becomes an absolute necessity.

The program assists veterans to maintain their independence through a combination of services that can include home care, housekeeping, grounds-keeping, meals on wheels and home adaptations. It is a customized plan for each client based on a needs assessment, which is created with support from Veterans Affairs staff and is self-managed by recipients in cooperation with provincial and regional health authorities.

The program also assists primary caregivers to maintain their independence after the veteran has died by providing housekeeping and/or grounds-keeping services depending on what the veteran was receiving at the time of death. Its goal is achieving nothing less than healthy living within the community, an emphasis that was all but unique in North America in 1981 when this program began.

In addition to VIP. Veterans Affairs Canada provides a wide range of support to veterans. If any veteran or his or her primary caregiver feels that they have a need that is not being met and for which they are eligible, we will work with them to assist them to receive the care they need.

The government remains committed to ensuring its programs and services meet the changing needs of its clientele. In its continuing effort to achieve this goal, Veterans Affairs Canada is currently conducting a comprehensive review of its health care programs and services. This review will include a thorough examination of access to VIP services.

The impact on this review will undoubtedly lead to a transformation no less profound than the one we achieved through the consultations and planning that brought us the new veterans charter.

• (1935)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, that is not the answer that war widows wanted and that is not the answer that war widows deserve.

This week, in the veterans affairs committee, Mr. Jack Fost, the Dominion President of the Royal Canadian Legion, while giving testimony on the development of an ombudsman office for matters of Veterans Affairs, felt that this was such a pertinent and relevant issue that he wanted to articulate the legion's position on this. In his opening remarks he called for the extension of the benefits to all pre-1981 veterans and war widows.

My plea again is for the Prime Minister to call upon the Minister of Veterans Affairs to extend the benefits to all war veterans and war widows.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Speaker, I repeat that we have done extensions and we are moving toward a goal of achieving what we set out to do, which is to take care of all widows and all pensioners who are entitled to VIP services. We honour the veterans we have in this country.

I repeat what I said earlier. The member opposite was part of a government that for 13 years did nothing and yet in nine months we have accomplished more than the previous government had in 13 years. It takes a bit of time and it takes a bit of patience. If the member opposite has worked at all with veterans he will know that they are very patient and understanding people and they also understand the value of a dollar. We cannot rush into these things quickly. We have done what we can do to date and we will continue to do more and more for veterans as each day passes.

The member opposite is part of the veterans affairs committee. He works hand in hand with myself and other members of that committee and knows which direction we are going in and that it is in the best interest of all veterans.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[Translation]*

(The House adjourned at 7:39 p.m.)

Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.
m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

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