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Monday, January 29, 2007

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, January 29, 2007

The House met at 11:00 a.m.

Prayers

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

VACANCY

OUTREMONT

The Speaker: Order. It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely: Mr. Jean C. Lapierre, member for the electoral district of Outremont, by resignation effective January 28, 2007.

[*English*]

Pursuant to subsection 25(1)(b) of the Parliament of Canada Act, I have addressed earlier today my warrant to the Chief Electoral Office for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill this vacancy.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that Mr. Peter Van Loan, member for the electoral district of York—Simcoe, has been appointed as a member of the Board of Internal Economy in place of Mr. Rob Nicholson, member for the electoral district of Niagara Falls.

* * *

[*English*]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed certain bills, to which the concurrence of this House is desired.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ) moved that Bill C-280, An Act to Amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (coming into force of sections 110, 111 and 171), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on Bill C-280, which I introduced on May 12 for my hon. colleague from Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

First off, however, I would like to take this opportunity to wish a happy new year to my hon. colleagues, Parliament Hill employees and all my constituents in Laval.

This bill would implement the refugee appeal division. The Bloc Québécois has to put this bill forward to have a provision of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act come into force, which is rather ironic.

A proper appeal process for refugee claimants ought to have been put in place as soon as the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act enacted in 2002 took effect. This is one of the significant changes required to ensure that asylum seekers are treated fairly and equitably. To persist in not making this change is to allow a situation that is unfair to asylum seekers to continue.

To illustrate, I have some examples to share of people who are experiencing or have experienced difficulties in recent years because the refugee appeal division was not in force. Pierre Gauthier from the refugee outreach committee of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Ottawa appeared before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on November 2, 2006. He reported that, for more than 16 years, the refugee outreach committee of St. Joseph's Parish on Laurier Avenue in Ottawa has been helping newly arrived refugees in Canada's capital area.

In 2005, they helped a woman who had applied for refugee status and who was ordered deported without a complete and just hearing. After spending a year in a sanctuary with their help, Maoua Diomande was authorized to remain in Canada. Once all the facts had been uncovered, the minister decided to issue the permit on compassionate grounds.

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At present, religious institutions are forced to offer sanctuary only because the refugee determination system is not working properly. Countless other refugee status claimants—hundreds and maybe even thousands—have been turned down by Canada because they did not have the opportunity to fully present their case.

The case of Samsu Mia, who lived in sanctuary at First Unitarian for 18 months, illustrates some of the problems encountered within Canada's citizenship and immigration system.

Mr. Mia came to Canada in 1995 as a domestic employee of a senior official in the Bangladeshi High Commission. He was treated as a slave. His wages were withheld. He was not given his contractual trips home. He had to sleep on the floor, and his shoes and passport were confiscated. In 1999 he escaped and attempted to recover his wages and passport.

He, his family at home, and his Canadian rescuer, were all threatened. Mr. Mia's initial refugee claim was turned down by a single judge on the grounds that this was simply a personal dispute between two individuals. The judge ignored the fact that one individual was an illiterate cook and the other a powerful official.

Shortly after he was turned down, Mr. Mia's brother in Bangladesh was threatened by a different official, who had been transferred home from Canada. This was new evidence, and evidence of continuing danger, but there was no way to present it under present procedures.

In 2001 his son in Bangladesh was beaten and admonished to "Tell your father to be quiet and go home".

In March 2003, the pre-removal risk assessment noted that this beating was not documented. The result was a removal order. It would have been better if a decision on removal had been delayed to allow time to document the son's beating.

With the help of one of our contacts, a Canadian who operates several orphanages in Bangladesh, documentation was finally obtained, but it took some time. However, there was no procedure in place to allow him to present this new evidence; the decision had been taken.

• (1110)

It does happen that a refugee may not be able to produce such evidence; whether more time is required or because someone did not understand in time the need for that evidence. There should be an appeal process and a process that makes it possible to present new evidence. The final decision should not depend upon religious institutions or the compassion of the minister. Justice should be rendered without the necessity to call on the intervention of strong and well-organized pressure groups.

Finally, Mr. Mia received permission to remain in Canada. However, he must deal with numerous administrative complications.

The federal government maintains that a safety net already exists by virtue of the opportunity to request a pre-removal risk assessment, through judicial review by the Federal Court and through a request for permanent resident status on humanitarian grounds. These do not in any way offer refugees the protective measures that the refugee appeal division would provide. The Federal Court provides only for

a judicial review and does not provide for a review of the facts of a case. Since the Conservative party came to power, neither the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development nor the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration have established the division, even though in the past the Conservative party had supported all demands for that to be done.

Many groups in civil society in Quebec, across Canada and in the international community have called for establishment of the RAD. Among these are the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United States Committee against Torture, the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Canadian Bar Association, Amnesty international, la Ligue des droits et libertés and the KAIROS group.

There are four reasons why the refugee appeal division should be established. The first is efficiency. In dealing with applicants who have been denied refugee status it is more efficient than the Federal Court for pre-removal risk assessment or applications on humanitarian grounds. The second reason is the improved uniformity in the law to ensure unified jurisprudence, in terms of analysis and in legal interpretation. In other words, an appeal mechanism helps the system to make decisions by establishing precedents. The third reason is justice. The denial of refugee status has grave consequences. Because human errors occur in any decision-making process, it should be normal to have an appeal process to offset the fact that decisions are made by a single person. The fourth reason is political. By not establishing the refugee appeal division, the federal government is going against the will of Parliament and the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted by the United Nations in 1951. According to this convention, Canada cannot directly or indirectly return refugees to a country where they will be persecuted. Article 33 sets out the responsibilities of states for protecting refugees:

No Contracting State shall expel or return ("refouler") a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

Although the definition is limited, it is nonetheless a major legal component.

Refugees find themselves in very difficult situations and are very vulnerable. They have left a situation where their lives are in danger. Often they do not understand French or English. They arrive in a precarious economic position. The Bloc Québécois is dismayed by the lack of justice shown by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration when dealing with refugees since the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, Bill C-11, came into force in 2001.

Previously, two panel members would hear refugee claims. Only one member had to rule in favour of the refugee's request for asylum in order for it to be approved. Now, with only one member, there are many shortcomings and a great deal of injustice takes place because quite often there is not the balanced view that prevails when two people make a decision. The former chairperson of the Immigration and Refugee Board, Peter Showler, confirmed before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration that:

Single-member panels are a far more efficient means of determining claims. It is true that claimants will no longer enjoy the benefit of the doubt currently accorded them with two-member panels...

● (1115)

Mr. Showler also said:

However, any perceived disadvantage is more than offset by the creation of the refugee appeal division, the RAD, where all refused claimants and the minister have a right of appeal on RAD decisions.

The Bloc Québécois believed that these increases toughened the requirements that refugee claimants had to meet and made it more difficult for immigrants to enter the country. Still, we felt that the refugee appeal division balanced the loss of two-member panels. That is why we voted against this bill. However, we asked that the refugee appeal division be reviewed.

It is difficult to know what an appeal division would cost, as such a division has never been set up. However, we do know that the human costs would be much higher than the financial costs. Considering that the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and the various components have financial resources of some \$116 million for 2006-07, the annual costs of the RAD represent only 7% of the total budget. When we look at the costs of the appeal division, we must take into account the savings it generates.

This political inaction must not be allowed to continue, because there is an urgent need for the refugee appeal division. It is unacceptable that this appeal division is not yet in place in 2007.

In my riding alone, I employ someone who spends 40 hours a week working on these extremely important, time-consuming cases, which I would describe as "humanitarian cases". Most of the people who come to see us would be entitled to be heard by the government, through the refugee appeal division.

What is more, on December 14, 2004, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration adopted the following motion:

The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration requests that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration implement the Refugee Appeal Division or advise the Committee as to an alternative proposal without delay.

Every committee member from the Conservative Party voted in favour of the motion. We do not understand the delay in implementing an effective refugee appeal division. Furthermore, in April 2005, the Conservative Party published a report on a national consultation on Canada's immigration system. It recommended reviewing the appeal process. There is no real appeal process. The refugee appeal division has to be set up. Decisions have to be made by more than one person.

However, the previous minister did not show any willingness to implement this appeal division. This safety net is very important because we cannot accept that failed refugees are denied the opportunity to seek permission from the Federal Court, Trial Division, to request a judicial review. Currently permission is granted in a very small number of cases, roughly 4% of the time.

In closing, many people have called for a refugee appeal division for a number of years now. The Bloc Québécois has called for one a number of times and it is certainly not alone in doing so. Even before the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act came into effect the

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Inter-American Commission on Human Rights was calling for such an appeal division. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has always felt it was necessary to have an appeal mechanism.

In December 2004, the United Nations Committee against Torture condemned Canada for still not having a refugee appeal division. The Canadian Council for Refugees has also repeatedly spoken to the need for an appeal division. That is why I am asking all my colleagues in this House to support this bill, which will allow greater fairness and greater justice for refugees.

● (1120)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-280 deals with three sections, sections 110, 111 and 171, all of which I think members may very well agree are important additions to the current act.

Would the member assure the House that she has determined that these provisions in fact are already in the act and that the issue here is whether or not the refugee board is able to bring on board and properly train the people necessary to discharge these responsibilities? Is that the issue the member is concerned about?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I do believe that this is very important legislation to get the refugee appeal division implemented. I think that the necessary resources are available. Indeed, the resources necessary to hire people and allow them to familiarize themselves with the problems facing refugees can be found.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Laval and the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges for bringing this legislation to the House. I think it is a very important piece of legislation, as the member has just outlined.

I think it is a very unusual piece of legislation, though, in that to have to debate in this place a bill to implement legislation that has already been passed in this place is a very unbelievable situation. I know that is exactly what this private member's bill does.

Does the member know of any other circumstance wherein the House has actually had to debate a bill to implement a bill that already has been passed in the House? Could she comment on why she thinks Liberal and Conservative governments have refused to obey the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and implement the refugee appeal division?

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: As you know, Mr. Speaker, I am still pretty new in this place, and I do not have the experience that many other members have gained in this House over the past 10, 15, 20 or even 25 years. I am therefore not familiar with every piece of legislation that has been debated in this House. I can however assure the House that, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that we are forced to ask that a bill be introduced to implement something the House had already decided, something that had already been approved, passed and enacted.

I wonder why that is. But that is not surprising, coming from either the Liberals or the Conservatives. When in office, they act a certain way. During election campaigns, they act another way: they make promises. And when in opposition, they act differently yet again. So, I am not surprised.

I am proud to say that we in the Bloc Québécois have always stuck to our guns very appropriately and consistently. It would therefore be appreciated if, when in opposition, parties acted the same as they did when in office and, when in office, the same as they did when in opposition.

The Conservative Party took decisions; it supported this bill and the establishment of the refugee appeal division which has not been implemented. That is unfortunate, and I am sorry that such is the case.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of my questions is about looking at what already exists: the pre-removal risk assessment, which is an appeal process, the compassionate and humanitarian grounds process, which is another one, and as well the application to the Federal Court of Canada, which can look at not only the record but the factual situation, as this appeal proposes. We have cases taking two to four years, and this legislation would add yet another layer of time.

Would the member not agree that we should not look at the legislation in isolation? Would the member not agree that we have to look at the whole system and what it will do not only in terms of adding time to the system but in terms of costs as well, costs for the government and the provinces?

• (1125)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Laval has half a minute to answer.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question, although I wonder why he asked it. It was his party that decided that the refugee appeal division was very important and essential in order for refugees to get answers to their questions as well as their refugee status in order to stay in Canada permanently.

Why did he ask this question when it was his own party that decided it was essential?

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to

speak in opposition to the private member's bill tabled by the hon. member for Laval.

I appreciate the hon. member's motives in proposing Bill C-280. It is clear that she and her colleagues, and in fact all of us, want to see a refugee system that is fair and efficient as well as compassionate. These qualities are what we, as compassionate people, hope to see in the systems and programs of our government.

Canadians can take pride in our humanitarian, compassionate nature. That is why Canada's new government welcomes refugees, and over 32,000 were welcomed last year. I am sure all members of the House and all Canadians understand Canada's obligation as a member of the global community to provide protection to those in need.

We also understand the importance of having in place a refugee determination system that is fair and consistent in the application of the rules. As recently as last November, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees praised the fairness and quality of Canada's refugee system in being one of the best in the world.

Canadians also see the value in our system. Last October, Ms. Janet Dench, executive director of the Canadian Council for Refugees, appeared before the House Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. I fully recognize that she supports Bill C-280, but it is worth noting what she had to say with respect to the existing system. She stated:

—I think it is fair to say from our perspective that the Canadian refugee system... has a lot to be said for it...One of the great benefits of the Canadian system is that we have invested in a very competent first-level decision process. Rather than wasting time making a first decision that has to be overturned most of the time on the appeal, we have a first-level refugee determination that, generally speaking, is good.

In other words, an applicant for refugee status in Canada can begin the process knowing that at the first-level hearing the members will be generous in listening to claims and deciding them. Applicants actually can make representation and present evidence and of course the matter is determined in accordance with the judicial principles of fairness and justice. This is the first step.

Our system, which earns high praise from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, currently includes a review mechanism for errors that may have been made by the first-level decision maker. In the current system, if an individual's claim for refugee status is denied by the Immigration and Refugee Board, that person may apply for a judicial review of the claim by the Federal Court of Canada. Ordinarily this review proceeds while the claimant is able to remain in Canada, with full social benefits throughout the process.

I should point out that there is a common belief that the court considers only errors in law in determining whether a case will be returned to the IRB for another look. This is not correct. The Federal Court can overturn and has overturned IRB decisions based on errors in finding of fact. The appeal division at the heart of this bill will not in fact be bringing that much more to the applicants in this sense.

Private Members' Business

When we look at the jurisdiction of the Federal Court, we see that it can do a number of things, including declaring the order invalid, setting it aside, or referring it back for further consideration. Some of the grounds the court looks at are that the first tribunal acted without jurisdiction or beyond its jurisdiction, that it failed to observe a principle of natural justice, procedural fairness or other procedure that it was required by law to observe, that it erred in law, or that it based its decision or order on an erroneous finding of fact made in a perverse or capricious manner or without regard for the material before it. Those are the grounds, along with others, that the Federal Court can consider.

When we look at the section that this private member's bill wishes to bring into place, we note that it allows the appeal division to look at the record, just like the Federal Court can, without calling new evidence, without calling viva voce evidence. This particular tribunal can of course either affirm the decision or refer it back to the first tribunal for further decision, as the Federal Court can; in fairness it can substitute its own decision. When I asked the registrar of the Federal Court whether the number of grounds set out in the Federal Court of Appeal were actually broader or more extensive than the ones the refugee appeal division proposed, the answer was yes, that is correct.

● (1130)

The refugee determination system is noted as being fair and a model for others to use. If a judicial review with the federal court is not successful, the claimant has the right to apply for a pre-removal risk assessment. This process addresses situations where there is new evidence, a change in circumstances, or a concern with respect to danger in terms of removal.

Another avenue available to a failed refugee claimant is provided by the Immigration Refugee Protection Act, and that is on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. This is one that a good percentage of applicants take advantage of for their benefit.

In considering the bill, we must also consider whether opening another level of review, creating yet more processes, will enhance what is already regarded as one of the best and most generous refugee determination systems in the world.

The cost of putting the RAD in operation is estimated to be a minimum of \$2 million in start up costs alone and an additional \$30 million on an ongoing annual basis to the federal and provincial treasuries. This includes the cost of items such as the provision of health care, legal aid services and other social assistance as necessary.

These are not small sums and we must consider the impact on our partners in the provincial and territorial governments. It is they who bear much of the responsibility for the welfare of refugee claimants while they await the determination of their claims and the hearing of their appeals.

Consider if you will, Mr. Speaker, a study carried out by immigration officials which followed 100 random refugee claimants from 1998 to 2004 and the number of processes that were required from beginning to end.

By 2004, 71 claimants had achieved some kind of resolution, while 29 had not. It took 2.1 years on average from claim to landing

as refugees. It took four years on average from claim to landing in other categories, such as humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

It is expected that implementation of the sections of the act dealing with the refugee appeal division would add at least another five months to the refugee determination process. As we all know, that is on a minimal basis, but there will be perhaps a year, nine months or more, added to what already is not functioning as efficiently as it should.

This is of concern. As praiseworthy as our system is, if Canadians express one concern about it, it would be to have less delays in the refugee determination process. All quarters and all parties have expressed this concern.

Indeed, it was the previous Liberal critic who said that she found the current process allowed delays by failed claimants ad infinitum. I might just quote a portion of what was said by the critic:

—I think it's important that when we look at the RAD, we see it not as being off and by itself but within the context of all the other types of appeals to which refused refugee claimants have access. I'm talking about humanitarian and compassionate grounds, I'm talking about risk of return, I'm talking about the Superior Court, and so on.

If I were a refugee claimant who had been refused and I went to the RAD, if the RAD existed, and the RAD told me, no, I couldn't do it, then obviously my next step would be to go on asking someone else, and someone else, and someone else. Because right now that's what the system allows, almost ad infinitum. I would make the suggestion to the committee that when we come to our suggestions and recommendations for the minister and the House on the role of the RAD and whether the RAD should exist, we should put it in the context of all the appeals that are possible for refused refugee claimants. We should try to bring some kind of homogeneity and logic to the whole system of appeals on behalf of the refugee claimants.

The acting chief administrator of the Federal Court of Canada administration services said he agreed 100% with that aspect of it.

There was some mention made about two members being better than one, but in tracking the decisions of a two member board, less than 1% of the cases resulted in a split decision. The question now is, when we take those factors into account, that alone is sufficient basis for implementation.

I am sure all hon. members understand that when Parliament passed the Immigration Refugee Protection Act, it gave government the authority to decide when to implement these sections of legislation. It did so by making the sections come into force by governor in council resolution. The bill proposes to sidestep that and to make it effective on a sooner basis.

Canadians trust the government and the governing party's judgment. Canada's new government is listening to Canadians. It listened to Canadians who wanted to see funding increase for immigrants and refugees by adding \$307 million more to services that help them adapt to life in Canada. It also increased the budget by 25%.

Canadians would be right to question whether a fourth avenue for appeal would make the system any fairer, especially when they are already seeing some people in the system for many, many months, and even years in some cases.

Private Members' Business

• (1135)

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I rise in the House for the first time in 2007, allow me to take a moment to wish you and my honourable colleagues a successful and productive year serving Canadians. It appears that 2007 will be another year filled with excitement and political drama.

I also want to extend my wishes particularly to the residents of my riding of Mississauga—Erindale who just over a year ago elected me as their new MP. I thank them for their ongoing support and wish them a peaceful and joyous 2007.

I am pleased to speak to private member's Bill C-280 that is intended to reaffirm some of the clauses of the existing Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and calls for immediate enforcement of an appeal mechanism for failed refugee claimants. I totally agree with the intent of the bill and will be supporting it.

Canada has a long tradition and a compassionate history of receiving refugees from around the world, refugees who are escaping unfair persecution and severe injustices, and are seeking a new and peaceful life. Canadians recognize that welcoming legitimate refugees is not a feel good exercise, but a right and moral thing to do as a country which believes in the principles of equality, fairness, opportunity and justice. Also, a privileged country like ours has obligations under international treaties to contribute to providing relief in the global refugee crisis.

Canada is one of the very few countries in the world that has made a conscious decision to take every refugee claimant very seriously. Claimant applications are first reviewed by a quasi-judicial refugee board where each case is examined based on its own merit and circumstances.

Currently, if a refugee application is rejected, the applicant is entitled to apply for a federal judicial review. A pre-removal risk assessment is also conducted to ensure that circumstances that led to the negative decision have not changed. However, under the existing Immigration and Refugee Protection Act there are clauses that allow for the creation of an appeal process that would enable failed claimants to have their applications reviewed and have a negative decision re-examined.

Bill C-280 is intended to reaffirm the need for the installation of such a process and urges the government to implement it immediately. The decision to accept or reject a refugee application is extremely serious. It must examine the reality and the merit of the application in an objective and thoughtful way. The consequences of such procedures could have a life or death implication and we as a country have accepted our responsibility in affording fairness and justice to all applicants. By proceeding with this appeal mechanism we can assure that our responsibility as a government and as a country has been fulfilled in a just and verifiable way to the people who seek our help.

It is worth noting here that the Conservative Party has been exhibiting very little compassion and understanding to the real humanitarian issues of immigrants and refugees. We just witnessed that today where it is reluctant to implement a clause that already is on our legislative books.

While the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act can benefit from a comprehensive review and modernization, the Conservatives are busy flexing their muscles at vulnerable undocumented workers. While the Citizenship Act is in need of fundamental re-examination, and it appears that thousands of Canadians are at risk of losing their citizenship because of old flaws, the Conservatives are busy reviewing the issue of dual citizenship, wanting to make Canadians feel guilty if they hold dual citizenship.

Not surprisingly, just like we see them behave on most files, the Conservatives appear to be at odds with what is needed and what Canadians expect of them. In their pursuit of holding onto power, the Conservatives and the Prime Minister have been humbled and have had to appear that they have changed their mind on many issues. Canadians will not be fooled. They want to see real action with substantive measures.

• (1140)

Canadian voters are much more sophisticated than the Conservatives give them credit for and we will be closely monitoring how the minority Conservative government proceeds with immigration and citizenship reforms. Canadians expect genuine and sincere efforts to improve our systems for the benefit of all Canadians.

Let me pause here to remind the Conservatives that we, the opposition parties, have the responsibility to evaluate and analyze how they govern, while it is their responsibility to govern according to what Canadians expect of them. We have been witnessing recently in the news that someone must frequently remind the Conservatives of their role and remind the Prime Minister that he is the leader of a country, not just the Conservative Party, and as such must govern responsibly for all Canadians.

I must take this opportunity, while debating the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, to express the urgent need for evaluating the security certificate process contained in that legislation. Many have been arguing that this process contains inherent, unjust and unfair procedures that can easily destroy lives without the necessary checks and balances. The Supreme Court is currently examining this tool and many Canadians are disheartened by the Conservatives attitude which is unwilling to compromise and accept the need for reform.

There are currently three security certificate detainees at the Kingston facility who are expressing their despair with a hunger strike. Mahmoud Jaballah, Mohammad Mahjoub and Hassan Almrei have been on a hunger strike for about 60 days. Various human rights organizations have written to the Minister of Public Safety urging him to ensure that medical aid is provided to these detainees and that he take immediate action to resolve this hunger strike. I urge the government to heed their call and demonstrate a real commitment to genuine reforms. As the case of Maher Arar has taught us, stubborn security procedures that do not receive appropriate checks and balances do not make us any safer and could in fact endanger the lives of Canadians.

Private Members' Business

I will be voting in favour of Bill C-280 with the hopes of sending it to committee where it can be carefully examined. Some may argue that it is in need of some minor adjustments such as ensuring that the department has prepared the capacity and resources needed to establish an efficient and effective appeal mechanism. These changes are mechanical or technical in nature and can be adjusted for in committee.

This bill is not asking us to introduce anything new or change our procedures drastically. It is only reaffirming what is already on our legislative books. There are probably many reasons why these clauses have not yet been applied, but it is hard to deny the intent and the objectives of this bill. Stakeholders and human rights advocates have been calling for the need to strengthen and reform our refugee application examination process. This step will further enhance the transparency and credibility of our system.

I call upon my colleagues across all party lines to vote in favour of sending this bill to committee. In a country where we pride ourselves on championing justice and equality, we must not turn our back on implementing a process that would ensure the application of justice. Not only do we want to pursue the application of justice, but we must also be seen as doing everything we can in that pursuit.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure today to speak to Bill C-280, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, introduced by the member for Laval, no doubt in close collaboration with the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges. I thank them for taking this initiative and indicate to them that New Democrats strongly support the bill.

However, the private member's bill, a bill to implement a bill that was already fully debated in the House and in the other place and that received royal assent, should never have been necessary. It is unbelievable that the House should have to revisit legislation, passed after a full debate, to call on the government to implement the provisions of the law in Canada. However, that is just what the bill does, and it is sadly necessary because the current Conservative government refuses to implement the law of the land and the former Liberal government and the former Liberal ministers of citizenship and immigration, the members for Bourassa, York West and Eglinton—Lawrence, all directly refused to implement the law of the land.

The bill before us today would implement the sections of the current Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, or IRPA, pertaining to the establishment and operation of the Refugee Appeal Division, or what we commonly call the RAD.

IRPA, including these sections related to the RAD, was passed in Parliament in 2001. It is the law of the land. However, Liberals and now Conservatives have decided that they know better than Parliament, despite their participation in the legislative process in Parliament, and that they can ignore the decisions made here. I believe that kind of decision making shows contempt for Parliament and for the law.

We should not need to have this debate. The implementation of the Refugee Appeal Division should have been done years ago. It should be up and running.

I want to be on the record. I want to give officials and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration this notice. After an

election, should I be in a position of responsibility in government, and I am an optimist by nature, as the minister of citizenship and immigration, I expect the department's file, with a detailed plan to implement the provisions of the existing Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Refugee Appeal Division and with the accumulated dust of years of Liberal and Conservative inaction and contempt blown off it, to be on my desk the moment I walk into the office. If I am ever in that position of being minister, I will, as the first act of my time in office, implement the Refugee Appeal Division. I have made this commitment publicly many times. It is the only possible decision, the only possible action, if one respects the law, if one respects Parliament and if one is concerned for fairness and justice for refugees in Canada.

What exactly is the Refugee Appeal Division?

The RAD was a compromise reached during debate on the immigration act in 2001. In exchange for reducing the Immigration and Refugee Board, IRB, hearing panels from two people to one, MPs agreed to establish the RAD to ensure there was an appeal of errors. It was to be the fail-safe. The only appeal of a decision of a refugee claim by the IRB in our system is to apply for leave to appeal in the Federal Court, and only 15% of claimants that apply for leave to appeal are granted an appeal by the court.

The RAD was, and is, a key ingredient of a fair and just refugee process. It is a paper-screening process, and it is not expensive. The former Liberal government estimated the cost at \$2 million to establish it and \$8 million a year to operate it. These figures have recently been jacked up in estimates from the Conservatives, but remain very low in terms of the overall immigration program.

The Canadian Council for Refugees, the key organization working on refugee issues in Canada, which is made up almost every refugee serving agency and organization in Canada, has taken a strong stand on the need for the Refugee Appeal Division and on the miscarriage of justice that the failure to implement it represents.

Back on June 28, 2006, Amy Casipullai, its vice-president, said:

Accountable government means respecting the laws passed in Parliament by the elected representatives of Canadian citizens. Yet for the past four years, the Canadian government has been flouting the law that gives refugee claimants a right to appeal. As a result, contrary to the will of Parliament, the Canadian government has been deporting people whose refugee claim was determined by a single fallible human being, with no right of appeal on the merits.

• (1145)

Peter Showler, the former chairperson of the Immigration and Refugee Board, has said:

Private Members' Business

Refugee decisions are often very difficult to make, particularly when assessing the credibility of the refugee claimant...The government's failure to implement the Refugee Appeal Division is profoundly undemocratic and some genuine refugees have undoubtedly been lost in the asylum shuffle. This is not just an issue about legal process. In the refugee business bad policy destroys individual lives.

"Destroys individual lives" is a strong statement from someone who understands the refugee process inside out because he ran a key part of it for years.

I want to point out that in this case "destroy" must be taken literally because a wrong decision in a refugee case can return someone to a situation where they may be killed. That is why we cannot take this legislation lightly and why we have to ensure the best possible system is in place. We cannot rest on our laurels.

We will hear in this debate, from the government benches, that Canada has the best refugee system in the world, that we resettle thousands of refugees each year, that the United Nations has repeatedly applauded Canada for its refugee work. That is all true, but it does not excuse us from addressing the flaws in our system. It does not excuse us from making our system even fairer or more just. It does not excuse our government from obeying our laws or respecting the will of Parliament.

Even though it has honoured Canada for our refugee work, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has criticized the lack of an appeal. Here is what the UN High Commissioner for Refugees wrote to the Liberal member for Bourassa in May 2002, when he was minister of citizenship and immigration, after he announced that the RAD would not be implemented:

UNHCR considers an appeal procedure to be a fundamental, necessary part of any refugee status determination process. It allows errors to be corrected, and can also help to ensure consistency in decision-making. Canada, Italy and Portugal are the only industrialized countries which do not allow rejected asylum seekers the possibility to have first instance decisions reviewed on points of fact as well as points of law. In the past, a measure of safeguard was provided by the fact that determinations could be made by a two-member panel, with the benefit of the doubt going to the applicant in case of a split decision. With the implementation of IRPA on June 28th, this important safeguard will be lost.

And it was lost.

Last November the Most Rev. Brendan M. O'Brien, Archbishop of St. John's, and a member of the Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, appeared before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. At that time he stated:

—it is hard for us to understand how governments can fail to implement the appeal provisions of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and not face some form of meaningful censure. It was on the promise of a fair and timely appeal system that the legislation carried. The executive branch's failure to fulfill this promise is a sign of obdurate defiance of democratic authority. In the absence of an effective right to appeal, many parishes and denominational congregations are placed in the position of having to make agonizing decisions of whether or not to grant sanctuary. As other witnesses I'm sure have testified...it is very rare that churches choose to grant sanctuary, notwithstanding the many requests they receive. They do so only after close examinations of the facts before them, through an extensive process of communal deliberation. Granting sanctuary, then, for these churches is an exercise of their informed conscience that must take into account the prospect of breaking the law, risking fines and imprisonment, or violating conscience and the imperative of hospitality. When all other recourse has failed, I think granting sanctuary is a way to call the government's attention to an exceptional injustice and a way to denounce a specific and unacceptable failure of the immigration system in faithfulness to the Lord's own call to hospitality as justice. We recommend, therefore, that the committee unanimously call upon the

government to implement a rigorous, transparent, and timely appeal system, as required in the act.

The argument has been made by Liberal and Conservative governments that our refugee appeal process is too complicated and that the RAD will only further complicate the system. I do not accept that argument. The RAD is a necessary level of appeal against an incorrect decision by a single member of the IRB. Having a functioning appeal at this level will stop some cases from going to the Federal Court. Having a hearing at the RAD will be far cheaper and less time consuming to the system than having a full blown court appeal in Federal Court. Having a functioning RAD appeal will ensure that fewer failed claimants, denied and appeal and denied leave to appeal in Federal Court, will disappear underground. It will also ensure that fewer refugees will end up in sanctuary in churches in Canada, supported by communities that believe, communities that know, they did not have a fair hearing in our refugee determination system. Rather than complicating the system, I believe the RAD will simplify the system.

• (1150)

This debate should not be necessary. The government should act immediately to implement the provisions of the current Immigration and Refugee Protection Act with regard to the refugee appeal division. Justice and fairness demand it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to wish you and all my hon. colleagues a happy new year and a productive session of Parliament. I would also like to extend best wishes to my fellow citizens in Vaudreuil-Soulanges

I have been working for three years on this bill and the need for the refugee appeal division. This is very close to my heart because I have seen the number of people who come to our offices.

Like my colleague for Laval, I have one or two people in my riding who work full time on immigrant and refugee matters.

I feel very upset every time we have to submit files to the minister and ask her to review a decision because it is unfair or contains first-instance factual errors that cannot be corrected anywhere in the system.

People currently have a right to go to the Federal Court and ask to be heard. Not many cases are actually heard here, though, and none of them can look into the facts. They can discuss errors in law or whether undue attention was paid to certain matters. However, the court cannot be asked to correct factual mistakes. This legislation is necessary, therefore, because the consequences are very serious. Human tragedies occur because of this weakness in the law.

What is even more ironic is that these legal sections were already passed here in the House and should have taken effect the year following the implementation of the act. There was an announcement back when the Liberals were in power that these legal sections would come into effect one year later, in other words in 2002-03. There would just be a little delay because of a major backlog. However, once the backlog was cleared and these sections came into effect, we would have the appeal division.

Government Orders

The chair of the IRB also did a lot of work. Peter Showler, who was the chair at the time, and the current chair told us that it was a purely political decision. “Purely political” means that someone somewhere is accountable to Canadians and the House for not having established the appeal division.

I would also like to remind the House that there have been several requests for amendments to the Immigration Act in recent years. Since 1978, it has undergone two major overhauls with a view to making it easier to understand. For most of my colleagues in the House, the Immigration Act is very complex. From meeting with citizens who have been through the system, we realize that this act is quite inflexible. Furthermore, we do not have the means to react efficiently.

There is one of a number of reasons why this act carried, and that is the spirit underlying it. It has to do with all the considerations related to security. So instead of talking about integration and the way we want to welcome immigrants and refugees, we have a bill focused on border control and security issues. From this stems a series of processes and forms of recourse that affect a part of the population that to my mind is disproportional. Refugees are people who arrive at our borders from countries in which there are conflicts. These are people seeking our help.

• (1155)

We may have the best of systems in place. I think that the IRB’s intention is to process these files quickly in order to administer justice. But we have to look at the substance of things. It is possible to appeal a parking ticket, for example. Quite unreasonably however in my opinion, it is not possible to appeal a decision affecting the life of a human being. That is what we are talking about today. We are talking about provisions. We are talking about sections of the act that are not implemented and are harming people whose only wish is to make a positive contribution to our society.

I think it is regrettable that the Conservatives are doing an about-face. There were lots of signs allowing us to think that we could be optimistic about the implementation of this appeal division. One need only reread the discussions that were held in 2001. The way in which the appeal division is being proposed now was indeed supported by a Conservative colleague. Last year there was also a political document drafted by the Conservatives that supported implementation of the appeal division.

When the Bloc Québécois introduced a proposal in committee to establish the appeal division, we had the unanimous support of the Conservatives. I hope that by the next time we debate this bill in the House in March, we will have seen a positive turnaround for refugees, for the people who are currently being denied this right.

In the past five years, not one of the ministers of Immigration has kept that promise. Mounting evidence lays the blame squarely at the feet of the government, which shamelessly accepts that fundamental errors can come up anytime and that there is no way to fix them.

Considering that human beings are at risk of being deported to countries that allow torture, and that these errors can cause them great harm, it makes sense for the Canadian Parliament to demand greater care in the application of principles of justice and equality.

As such, today we are asking all of our colleagues to support bringing into force all provisions of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. I believe that the federal government has a moral responsibility to do this. Furthermore, it has the means and resources to do it.

Such a court, made up of experts in protection, would make it possible to correct errors of fact and errors of law at the very beginning of the refugee claims process. This means hiring, at most, 20 people. I think this is important because we are talking about the lives of human beings, about refugees, and we know that our country, Canada and Quebec, was built by and continues to grow because of the contribution of several communities that were welcomed here as refugees. In my opinion, the appeal division must be established immediately.

• (1200)

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

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL BRIDGES AND TUNNELS ACT

Hon. Vic Toews (for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities) moved the second reading of, and concurrence in, amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-3, An Act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin my speech today with a brief outline of the legislative history of Bill C-3, a very important bill to Canadians regarding the safety and security of this nation and the transportation of goods across our borders. This includes the developments while the bill was considered in the Senate.

The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities introduced the bill to the House of Commons on April 24, 2006. Members may remember that at that time the bill borrowed heavily from two predecessor bills, Bill C-26 and Bill C-44, both of which were put forward by the previous Liberal government but both of which actually died on the order paper. Those previous bills dealt with amendments to the Canadian Transportation Act and included the addition of new provisions for international bridges and tunnels, which are very important to our nation.

The House Standing Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities discussed Bill C-3 at five of its meetings. An amendment to the bill was made by the committee concerning the minister's powers with respect to the setting of toll rates. During the third reading stage, further amendments were made to the bill adding clauses dealing with consultations with other levels of government, especially municipalities.

Government Orders

All members of the House are aware that the government is concerned about stakeholders and listens to stakeholders, especially those stakeholders, such as municipalities, and those levels of government. The bill was then passed in the House on June 22, 2006. Bill C-3 was read for the first time in the Senate on that very same day. Again in the Senate, the second reading debate was completed on October 24 2006, and the bill was referred to the Senate standing committee on transport and communications for considerations.

The Senate committee met a total of seven times to study the bill and it heard a lot of testimony. It heard testimony from the Minister of Transport and Transport Canada officials. As well, it heard testimony from four stakeholders in particular: the Bridge and Tunnels Operators Association; the City of Windsor, to which this bill is very important as it is important to its citizens; the Canadian Transit Company, the owner and operator of the Ambassador Bridge; and the teamsters union. These are the same stakeholders who appeared before the House Standing Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities when we were studying the bill. They were very informative and provided us with a lot of very valuable information.

The Minister of Transport told the Senate how supportive the majority of the stakeholders were with this initiative and how important this bill was to Canadians regarding safety, security and transportation of goods. He indicated that the government had demonstrated its willingness to consider stakeholder input at all times and that it was very important for the government to listen to stakeholders and implement their needs if they meet the needs and priorities of Canadians.

The House of Commons did amend the bill in response to concerns raised by a municipal government.

During its clause by clause review of the bill, the Senate standing committee on transport and communications made five technical amendments. The amendments were to ensure consistency between the English and French versions of certain sections that had been previously amended by the House at third reading. Another important thing that the government does is it listens to the communication issues that we have in our great country.

The bill was passed in the Senate on December 12, 2006. In Canada there are 24 vehicle and 9 railway bridges and tunnels that link our country to the United States. No one needs to hear how important our trade with the United States is to Canadians and how important it is to have a border that our citizens can cross back and forth to encourage trade between our nations and the relationship of our nation.

Of the bridges that carry vehicle traffic, 14 of them are located in Ontario, 9 in New Brunswick and 1 in Quebec. The rail bridges and tunnels are all located in Ontario except for one which is located in New Brunswick.

The bill, when enacted, will be the very first law to apply to all of Canada's international bridges and tunnels. It took the Conservative government to take this initiative and follow it through.

●(1205)

Bill C-3 contains several themes. First, the bill declares that these bridges and tunnels "to be works for the general advantage of Canada". Therefore, it reinforces the federal government's exclusive jurisdiction with respect to these structures as stipulated in the Constitution and reinforces the government's priority on the safety and security of Canadians.

Second, the proposed act would also require governmental approval for construction or alteration of new and existing bridges and tunnels, which is because it is so important. It would also require governmental approval for all sales or transfers affecting the ownership and control of these international bridges and tunnels, another important first by the government.

Finally, the bill would authorize the government to make regulations regarding bridge maintenance and repair, safety and security, and operation and use. These regulations are very important to those people using the bridges and tunnels.

Passage of this bill would not be the end but simply the beginning of more work in this area. It marks the first step that a Conservative government had to take the initiative on to actually implement.

Government officials would also need to develop guidelines for the approval or alteration of international bridges and tunnels. They would need to begin the regulatory process and consultations with stakeholders would again take place so that these regulations reflect the intention of the bill and the intention of we in the House of Commons and the Senate.

During the debate on this bill we often heard that the development of regulations was a lengthy process. I and Canadians would urge departmental officials to begin work immediately so that we do not leave these bridges and tunnel structures vulnerable to the safety and security matters that are so important in this post-9/11 world.

I would like to thank all members of the House and of the Senate for their great work on this bill. I would also like to thank the members of the transport committee, with which I was personally involved, for all their work in getting it through so quickly.

I would like to especially thank Madam Bacon, chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, for her leadership during the Senate standing committee meetings. The discussions in this committee were very candid and thought provoking and helped us push this agenda through. I appreciate the committee's diligence in making several technical amendments so that the French and English text better reflect each other and the consistency of what we in the House of Commons intended.

I would also like to thank the stakeholders who appeared before both the House and the Senate committees: the Bridge and Tunnel Operators Association, the City of Windsor, the Canadian Transit Company and the teamsters, all members of which are very important. The contribution of stakeholders who are directly on the ground, who would be tremendously impacted by this legislation, is very important for all bills that we pass through the House. The significance of their contribution highlights how this bill would affect them and their membership.

Government Orders

I believe the passage of this bill will serve Canadians and our international visitors well by ensuring that our international bridges and tunnels remain safe and secure.

I would encourage my colleagues to pass this bill, as amended by the Senate, so that the government can proceed with drafting the guidelines and regulations authorized by it.

As everyone in the House and most people who are listening today know, sections 92.10 and 91 of the Constitution give exclusive jurisdiction to the federal government for international bridges and tunnels. Despite this exclusive legislative authority, no law up to now in the history of Canada has ever been adopted that applies to international bridges and tunnels. It took this Conservative government, this Prime Minister and this minister to get it to the point that it is at today. I am proud to be a part of a government that gets so much work done for Canadians.

• (1210)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke to this bill before it received third reading and I think he will recall that there was support for its essence. This has taken a long time. Consultations went on for at least three years prior to the new government taking office. It is a good bill and it should pass.

My question for the member is with regard to the Senate hearings on the bill, which is something the House does not hear very much about. We do have an amendment before us that I think is acceptable. Is the member aware or is he concerned about any other points that were raised by the Senate in its assessment of the bill? Is there some area of concern he might like to share with the House? It is important that the work of the Senate be opined upon in terms of whether or not the bill received a good review and that all of the issues that were raised were dealt with appropriately.

• (1215)

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I note with interest that the Senate dealt with the bill in its entirety and there were discussions. As I mentioned previously, there were five particular amendments put forward to make sure that the English and French translations were perfect and worked together toward the initiative that we wanted to put through the House.

I agree with the member that a lot of work was done on this bill prior to this. There were three years of consultations. It pretty much follows through with everything the previous government did for 13 years, and that was talk with no action. This is about action. This government, after looking at the results, got action. I am proud to be part of a government that actually gets results.

After only nine months of working on this particular bill, it went through the House, the standing committee and the Senate and here it is today, 12 months later, ready to be passed. I am hoping members of the Liberal Party, and all members of the opposition parties, will support us in that initiative.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his work on this very important bill. New Democrats can feel very proud about the amendments that we put in this bill relating to public consultation for municipalities, groups and organizations relating to the operations of structures, their influence in terms of a new development project as well as maintenance.

The parliamentary secretary raised a very important point that the work has just begun and that there have to be regulations to make a difference in the bill. Where I come from the Ambassador Bridge is under the jurisdiction of the private sector, one which we do not have access to until this bill actually passes.

Will the parliamentary secretary ask the department to intervene in areas of conflict that may potentially arise? One of them is the excavation of land on that site which is moving forward that has aboriginal status to some degree and has raised concerns with the municipality about that property and the way it will be done.

Will this bill, when it is passed, and the regulations be there immediately to provide due process and intervention to make sure that nothing is being done improperly on the sites of our most important border crossing?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Windsor West has some very strong opinions in relation to this piece of legislation and for some period of time has lobbied to be heard on it and make sure it gets done. That is exactly what this government is doing, making sure that it gets done and that it gets done right.

Regulations are in the works now. They are being done by the department. We are looking for more consultation with stakeholders to get it done right. The member is aware that this government is a government of action, but at the same time the government makes sure it gets the job done right the first time.

I have an open door policy, as the member knows. I have suggested in the past that he come to see me in relation to all issues that deal with his constituents. This government is prepared to listen to stakeholders and all members of the House. I invite him to see me regarding his particular concerns on this issue.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin on a very positive note. The parliamentary secretary began to thank the previous government for its initiatives in this regard. In that spirit it is important to acknowledge that the bill deserves support if for no other reason than it is but a small portion of its predecessor, Bill C-44.

Bill C-44, as the parliamentary secretary indicated, was an initiative of the former Liberal administration. I will say a few more words about that in a moment. That bill, which was very comprehensive, strategic, forward looking and proactive in its nature, has now been reduced to something a little bit smaller and has a very specific role. I want to compliment all of those members of Parliament who worked on the House committee, especially the members on this side of the House from my party, including the previous critic for the role they fulfilled so admirably. We in this party are going to support the bill. I will explain the details in a moment.

I was especially struck by the chronology of events the parliamentary secretary thought were significant enough to warrant 10 minutes of parliamentary time. I want to digress for a moment from the courteous diplomacy and positive demeanour I have just indicated and become a little bit more harsh.

Government Orders

In harshness I would say that some people in the morning must get awfully tired of putting salve on all their nicks after shaving as they look at themselves in the mirror and puff themselves up. I do not think the Conservative government can claim it has done something very positive when it spent 13 months during the previous administration trying to tear down a bill that was much more comprehensive than this one and then say that they did something in nine months and it is great news and that none of the members of the other opposition parties in the House ever did anything for it.

Members of the Liberal Party devoted all of their time to ensuring that the bill would pass. It was part of a comprehensive, strategic, proactive forward looking piece of legislation that came out of government policies when the previous Liberal administration was in power. Why did they do that? This cannot be puffery on the part of the Liberals. We do not engage in that sort of thing. We deal with realities.

The member for Windsor West had an interest in this and always made sure that that interest was focused on his party rather than on the government that was doing its job. That member's party was not looking at the things that we in the government at the time felt were absolutely crucial and important: one, security and two, economic.

I do not mean to switch the two, but obviously in a post 9/11 environment, security issues from political and terrorism points of view were extremely important. They were also important from an infrastructure point of view. The government of the day through Bill C-44, the predecessor to this bill, said that we must pay very special attention to the means and mechanisms by which the Government of Canada would assume the responsibilities for ensuring that there be a safe and secure environment from a political perspective, one that would be coordinated very closely, but not subordinate to, the interests of homeland security defence in the United States.

• (1220)

We were establishing a period of cooperation to ensure that our borders would be safe; safe politically, safe for the purposes of maintaining our sovereignty, safe for the purposes of maintaining our economic viability and durability. We proposed a bill and the opposition parties of the day, one of which is currently the government, objected to it every step of the way. That bill focused on putting in a place all the mechanisms necessary to provide the security to keep Canadians safe and assured that their country would be beyond attack, and that the mechanisms for response in the event of any kind of action would be readily available and quickly dispatched.

That security is not just political. We cannot conjure up images of people with grenades, missiles, et cetera, at our borders in all instances. No, part of the security, as we know, is economic.

The member for Windsor West knows that in excess of \$1 billion a day of business goes through precisely the targets of this bill, our bridges and tunnels. We need to make sure that that \$1 billion a day of business is maintained in its security. We need to ensure that the crossing points between our country and our neighbours to the south are always maintained in a fashion that the people of Canada can be assured that their business, their commercial relationship with the United States and the interests of all the businesses that generate

activity are always within the reach of the powers of the Government of Canada.

What were the difficulties? I note that the government member did not mention any of them. They have to do with building and maintaining an infrastructure, as I am sure the member for Windsor West will indicate in his presentation, to ensure the free and quick movement of truck traffic now, but also rail traffic across our two boundaries.

The Liberal government of the day had already begun a series of initiatives that were designed to move that commerce quickly to give substance to that just in time economic theory, to ensure that all goods would traverse the border points without undue delay. It is not only people that cross the border but also the goods that provide us with the lifeblood of day to day work environments. We wanted to ensure that all investments made by companies on this side of the border because of the advantages that the Canadian environment provides, would always reach their market in a timely fashion, but to do it with due consideration for the environmental strategies of our country, of the Liberal government of the day.

All these issues that appear to be, if I can judge the parliamentary secretary's 10-minute rendition of chronology, the government's priorities, i.e., one detail after another, do not strike at the heart of what it is that causes legislation to be tabled. It is strategic, as I said. It is always about being proactive. There has to be a purpose to government. There has to be a purpose to the importance of the jurisdiction of the federal government in this affair. That affair is security and economy. It is engendering greater economic interest in the areas being served by the targets of this legislation.

The parliamentary secretary said that there are 14 border points, tunnels and bridges, in Ontario where the bulk of that trade takes place. Were something to have happened at any of those places, the economy of southern Ontario in particular but not exclusively would be in grave danger. We were moving to ensure that would not happen. He said there were another nine in New Brunswick and one in Quebec, almost as an afterthought.

• (1225)

I understand why there would be an afterthought, because for the Conservatives it was of little interest. When we were trying to promote this legislation two years ago, the obstructionism from what is now the government side was palpable. They had no interest in it: why have that bill pass? Today, the Conservatives want to take credit for the fact that we are going to support it, as I said, in its reduced form.

Government Orders

We would love to have much more, because at the time we were putting substance behind our thoughts. We were putting reality behind the political rhetoric that the government of today likes to think is a matter of substance. There was a \$300 million infrastructure program specifically addressing the issues in southern Ontario. There were more in other places, including Quebec and New Brunswick, with those other 10 points, the points of contact. For us, there was a material need to ensure that people engaged locally, regionally, provincially and nationally.

It should not come as a surprise to anybody on that side of the House, whether in government or opposition, to know that we on this side will support this bill. The bill retains some of the strategic components that we put into Bill C-44.

It retains, even if in a reduced fashion, the understanding that we must have a macro view to economic survivability. It thinks in terms of, as I said, a proactive role for the Government of Canada. By grouping into one all of those pieces of legislation that governed each and every one of those points through various parliamentary acts, it recognizes that the federal Government of Canada has the responsibility to coordinate all of those issues that ensure the viability of our security, our sovereignty and our economy so that we will have one repository of responsibility and action. With that repository of responsibility and action comes as well an incumbent accountability to be able to say that we have to plan for tomorrow.

There were a lot of people who thought that perhaps we should not get involved because, as the member for Windsor West indicated, there is a private owner. People in the NDP do not like private enterprise and said that was bad and that these people were holding us to ransom.

No. Our response of the day, the fact of the matter, which has now been put into this bill even though nobody wants to give credit to the minister of transport or the former Liberal government and the Liberal government as a whole, is that what we do is safeguard the role of that private owner as we safeguard the maintenance and the management of all of the border crossings, but now the Government of Canada can exercise its authority to ensure that no harm comes to the Canadian economy or the Canadian people, its authority to be proactive and to direct that certain things be done in the public interest.

That is a pretty strong thing for the Government of Canada or any government to do. I imagine the current government has accepted that principle because, faced with having a minority government, it cannot control, except by subterfuge. It must do what has to be done.

I have looked at this because we are talking about security. In the last several days, we have been deluged with issues relating to CATSA and to the way the government is dealing with security issues with the agencies that have been established to ensure that Canadians can sleep well at night in the knowledge that all of those agencies—and the government—that are to take control or care of security issues are functioning properly.

● (1230)

The government loses a most valuable member of the board, General Baril, the chairman of the board of CATSA, the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority. We do not know why, except that it

is reported that he no longer has the energy or the will to address all the tasks and challenges that have emerged in this last year.

Can we imagine? Because the chairman of that board disagreed with the government in trying to establish an appropriate *modus operandi* and to ask for the resources necessary to effect those tasks, he is gone. As for the very terse statement that he just did not have it any more, the Canadian public deserves a lot more.

The kind of oversight and responsibility envisaged by the framers of the bill in Bill C-44, its origin, demanded that the minister not only assume the responsibility but divest that responsibility in an open and transparent fashion, open to public criticism, good or bad. We do not see that now. The minister is not here to explain the relationship between him and his department and an organization that is absolutely crucial to air transport and travel in the country.

I think it is important to keep something in mind in the context of transport issues, especially since the Auditor General has filed a report that does not appear to be very favourable to the minister. We have to take it in the context of what the ambition, the focus or the goal of Bill C-3 was initially.

It was to ensure that the Minister of Transport be vested with the authorities necessary to ensure that the sovereignty, the security and the economic well-being of the country be handled expeditiously, with great dispatch, but with accountability, to ensure that it would be his responsibility by virtue of his mandate as minister. We do not see any of that in the actions of today, but we can say that at least with Bill C-3 we now have the opportunity to give to the minister of the Crown responsible for those things the tools he or she needs—in this case he—to ensure that this begins to take place.

It is a great responsibility. I am not sure that the government opposite is up to that task, but we are going to give it that responsibility because we believe in a parliamentary system that functions for the betterment of its people. Its people are now at the mercy of the Minister of Transport.

● (1235)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his comments, the member for Eglinton—Lawrence spoke about security and accountability in regard to the border crossings, which is something that I have been pursuing for a number of years.

I would like to ask my colleague a question about his party's performance. I will not get into the difficulty we have had since 2002, when actually for the first time there was an introduction to trying to solve some of the border problems in the Windsor corridor area. Despite the years of neglect and delays, it took a lot of effort just to get that.

More important in regard to Bill C-3 is the fact that the Liberal member for North Vancouver introduced a motion that I will read for members:

That Bill C-3, in Clause 6, be amended by replacing lines 37 to 39 on page 2 with the following:...

6.(1) No person shall construct an international bridge or tunnel without the approval of the Governor in Council.

That would be removed. The Liberals wanted to substitute this:

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(2) Despite subsection (1), the approval of the Governor in Council is not required in the case of replacement, substitution, expansion or twinning of an international bridge or tunnel at an existing international crossing.

What would that have done? It would have given the opportunity for border crossings to actually expand, twin or do what they want with no accountability. In particular, that could have been done without environmental assessments. Why the Liberal Party would want to introduce that type of motion is puzzling at best.

Also, the motion comes at a time when it is counter to the Detroit River international crossing study being done and the Windsor border corridor that was set up by the previous administration, the member's own government. I ask the member, why is it that during the committee process one of the Liberal members had the intent to move for border crossings, twinings, expansions and a whole series of developments without community consultation and also without environmental assessments?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, that is trying to extrapolate to the extreme in order to get some validity for whatever it is that he wants to accomplish. I do not know what he wants to accomplish other than to draw unto himself all of the credit for having reached this point, because he knows quite well that I was the minister responsible for Ontario when all of those studies were begun and when all of the infrastructure initiatives and solutions were being put in place by our government.

He knows quite well that none of those studies to which he has made reference can take place without environmental assessments. In fact, the environmental assessments were cascading one over the other. What people were looking for was a way to bring everyone together for that specific issue, on both the American side and the Ontario side. No one wanted to take things away from those who had a legitimate right to them in the private sector.

What everybody was looking for at the time, and I believe that to be the case today as well, is the cooperation for one large national goal. We must keep in mind the fact that the Detroit-Windsor corridor is not a local issue alone. It is a very important national issue. It is, at the very least, a very central issue for the southern Ontario economy, and so the Government of Ontario, the municipal council of Windsor, regional councils in the area, Michigan, the governor, the City of Detroit and the Government of Canada were all engaged.

The member knows quite well that there were some mechanisms put in place to move traffic much more quickly. That involved Customs and Excise Canada. He knows that it involved the homeland security department. He knows that it involved CBSA. He knows as well that Environment Canada was part and parcel of all of the assessments and deliberations as we went along. Never at any time was the Government of Canada of the day interested in curbing growth, investment and development in the context of an environmental, political and economic security environment.

• (1240)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on that. It was the interpretation of the motion at the committee by government officials and also by the clerk that such was the case, that there was a circumventing of the Environmental Assessment Act by that motion.

Even if we grant that, why would it be the Liberal Party's position that we would actually have the circumventing of its current programs that it has laid out for accountability? Why would the Liberals allow a twinning? Why would they allow non-consultation? Why would they, by a motion in that manner, allow somebody to run roughshod over an entire process that involves four levels of government?

That is what happened. That is what was proposed. That is what was on the table. I would like to know if that is the position of that party.

It is important because this border crossing element has been complicated, difficult and problematic. Why is it that we still see the emergence of the private sector interest above the public interest? It is not just the private sector component that is affected, that being the Ambassador Bridge. It is the whole auto industry. It is the corridor and all the businesses that depend upon the border crossing, from the Windsor-Detroit region all the way to Montreal. All of them are affected because we have the highest fares by far compared to any other border crossing and that is because of the conditions we have right now.

As for the extra cost, the delays and the lack of accountability, why would the Liberals want to return to that type of agenda? Why was that motion tabled in the committee? Do they want to preserve the environment that is happening right now?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, it is good that I have been around here a while because otherwise I would be bowled over by the concept that somebody from the NDP might actually think that the private sector has a role in life. I am actually surprised by the member's indication that economic partners in southern Ontario, including the auto workers and including what I think he said is the auto industry private sector, all of them, have an interest in what goes on at that border crossing.

What is really surprising is that somebody from the NDP can speak with such a straight face on an issue like this, an issue that could have been resolved two years ago when we had all of the energies and synergies in place, with all of the levels of government on both sides of the border, the CAW, the auto industry, the trucking industry and the railway industry all determined to make sure that this border crossing was going to be efficient and effective. They had all the mechanisms in place.

What did the NDP members do? They decided they wanted to bring the government down so they could have instead, if we can believe it, a Conservative government, and now they are happy that we actually have something going. Good heavens. I am not sure whether these guys are talking about politics or economics, or what they live in; I guess it must be blue Kool-Aid now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in this House for the first time in 2007. I would like to wish Quebeckers and Canadians a happy 2007 full of health and prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, I wish you a happy 2007 full of wisdom.

I also want to wish my colleagues wisdom and transparency in their words.

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I will be discussing Bill C-3, An act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act. From the outset I will say that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of the amendments to the bill and what the government has introduced, given the fact that in Quebec, only one bridge is subject to this legislation. I am referring to the Sutton bridge linking Quebec and Vermont. Responsibility for this bridge is shared between the State of Vermont, the municipality of Sutton and the Government of Quebec. That is why we have worked conscientiously on this.

In all transparency, I would like to go back over Bill C-3, since the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, the Conservative member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca, told us he finally decided to divide bills introduced by the Liberals that had died on the order paper. However, he did not exactly say what truly happened.

Let us not forget that the bridges and tunnels issue was part of Bill C-44 prepared by the Liberals, a bill that was delayed because his party—the Conservative Party—did not agree with one of its main provisions, which created Via Rail. The issue is that Via Rail is a crown corporation and that Bill C-44 created the Via Rail Act replacing the articles of incorporation and making the corporation much more independent and capable of taking care of its future, especially the development of its industry, which is often linked to government decisions.

Let us recall the infamous project known as VIA Fast. Once again, I must take to task the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities for not telling us that the Conservatives were against drafting the legislation that created VIA Rail and that would have given rise to the VIA Fast project for a high-speed train linking Montreal, Windsor and Quebec City. That was the aim and VIA Rail never hid that fact, nor did the Liberals. This is why the new Liberal Party critic, the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence, will represent the Liberals on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. Naturally, I would like to acknowledge and say hello to him.

Nevertheless, at that time, the Liberals were themselves divided. The minister at the time, Mr. Collenette, wanted to make a concerted effort and provide VIA Rail with a good opportunity to develop. However, not all Liberals agreed on the subject. It must therefore be understood that Bill C-3, before us here in the House today, constitutes just one small part of an interesting platform. This was backed by the Bloc Québécois, especially with respect to the new legislation that would have made VIA Rail Canada an independent corporation. Thus, VIA could have taken care of its future and development, and secured its own loans in order to ensure its development. VIA Rail was refused this by a group of Liberal members who were against it, who were divided.

I would remind the House that, at that time, there was a considerable division between the Chrétien camp and the Martin camp. Moreover, as we have seen, the Conservatives have presented no new legislation regarding VIA Rail, because they are very afraid of VIA's development.

I listened to the Liberal Party critic talk to us about safety. That is fine. However, problems with safety do exist, as we have seen. It

was mentioned that General Baril, Chairman of the Board of Directors of CATSA, is taking early retirement on this count.

The fact remains that there are some difficult situations. Some reports have indicated that there are security breaches at Trudeau airport in Quebec. Journalists have to play the role of politicians, to investigate and find flaws. However, in the meantime, the damage has been done insofar as the public is concerned.

In a way, VIA Rail was right to develop a market. However, it is wrong to believe that people who are afraid to fly because of television reports on airport security are going to eagerly buy airline tickets. They will use other means of transportation. The Bloc Québécois truly believed that the legislation to create VIA Rail should have been enacted and that this company would have had the opportunity to develop and to compete with airlines by providing Quebecers and Canadians with another quick and efficient form of transportation.

● (1245)

We were not talking about high-speed trains, but of the VIAFast concept. For those who remember, this was a rapid rail service that could easily have served the Quebec City-Montreal-Windsor corridor, and perhaps even the Quebec City-Montreal-New York line. We could have opted for development of this service and provided Quebecers and Canadians with a safe and rapid rail service which would not have taken anything away from the air system.

We must make efforts to continue to ensure the safety of air transportation and strengthen this market. However, we must also provide other means of transportation considered to be just as safe or safer to those who wish to travel. That was the objective.

Today, I find that what has been said does not line up with what took place. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca, did not mention that, in the end, Bill C-3 was tabled because Bill C-44 was not enacted. Yes, he did mention that fact, but he did not say why.

The Conservatives were dead set against new legislation that would have created VIA Rail. The Liberals were as well. The Liberal critic did not mention that Bill C-44, which his party had introduced, was never passed because many Liberal members were against legislation that would have created VIA Rail Canada.

As I have already said, there was a huge debate, a huge competition between the Martin and Chrétien camps. But Quebecers and Canadians are the losers today, because no investment was made. VIA Rail was not given a chance to develop fully and provide faster, safer rail transportation in order to compete with air and road transportation. It would be a good way to encourage travel, to help the economy run properly and to allow people to do business more expeditiously.

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Once again, there were internal debates among the Liberals and the Conservatives, who likely were keen to protect WestJet in western Canada. They were afraid that the airline would suffer serious financial difficulties, when it is actually in very good shape, and they knew it at the time. Quite simply, the Liberals and the Conservatives are digging in their heels, because their personal interests run counter to the public interest. That is what the Conservative government is doing, just as the Liberals did before it and are still doing today. Personal interests are taking priority over the public interest.

Members can be sure that this is not true of the Bloc Québécois members. They are always prepared to defend the public interest. That is what we are doing in the case of Bill C-3. We will therefore vote in favour of Bill C-3, which is but a small portion of Bill C-44, even though, as I said earlier, we have only one bridge that will be subject to this legislation, the Sutton bridge. In the event there should be other bridges in future, we have volunteered to monitor the situation.

I will review part of Bill C-3, which required some rather difficult and tough debates, because when the legislation was first introduced by the Liberals—and then reintroduced by the Conservatives—it included three major parts. Of course, the first part deals with the construction and alteration of bridges.

It must be realized that these international bridges come under the responsibility of a number of bodies, both in the United States and in Canada, and may include provincial or municipal governments. Sometimes, private owners are also involved. In each case, individual agreements are reached for every one of these bridges. I can understand why some members who have such bridges in their ridings were really affected by the debates on this legislation. Indeed, we wanted, among other things, to ensure that those who have an interest in these bridges would be able to express their views.

So, whether we were dealing with the construction, alteration, maintenance, security or safety of these bridges, provincial and municipal governments were included in the discussions. That was the purpose of the amendments that were made and that were supported by the Bloc Québécois. We want to allow the administrations, and all the stakeholders, which have to make decisions regarding these most important structures and which have to deal with these situations, to have a say. I believe that, ultimately, with the amendments proposed by the Senate, this objective will be achieved.

• (1250)

It is a case of being able to bring about change when making a decision. Indeed, the first sections that I referred to earlier, clauses 6 to 12, deal with construction and alteration of infrastructure. When alterations are to be made or construction is proposed, the Government of Canada must be informed. That was not the case previously.

We need to understand that many of these bridges are very old and date back to the 1900s. Agreements were signed by private companies who were the owners. They signed contracts with different levels of government. These were separate agreements. I believe that at some point we have to be able to do things and to say to all those bridge administrators that there is now a law that

transcends all those arrangements. In other words, regardless of the agreements signed in the past, the law now applies in the same way to everyone. I believe that idea was also well received by the witnesses who appeared before the committee and by the industry, with some minor changes or observations.

Plans for construction and alterations are therefore to be submitted. That is a request that will have to be enforced. Any time someone wants to make alterations to these structures or to build new ones, they have to contact the federal government and also discuss the matter with the provincial and municipal authorities concerned.

Next, in clause 13, *Maintenance and Repair*, through clause 16, *Operation and Use*, there is clearly a whole procedure dealing with operation. When work has been done and so forth, there is always a question about cost because many of these facilities collect a toll. Obviously, a whole structure of provisions has been incorporated into Bill C-3 to ensure that the federal government has something to say about the setting of prices. Moreover, a role was added for the provincial governments and municipalities because the places where these infrastructures are located should also have a voice in setting the charges and fees that are often related to the maintenance work that is carried out on these bridges.

The third important issue is the matter of security. Obviously, the government must be able to establish certain standards of security. Since September 2001, we have recognized that safety and security are of the greatest importance. It was time therefore to include in the law an obligation for the administrators of these bridges to meet standards of safety and security.

The only thing that may have hit a snag in committee was the question of hazardous materials. In fact the government did not want to go any further in this bill with respect to hazardous materials because there is already legislation for the transportation of hazardous materials. Still, I wish to make the same observation I made to the committee, namely that we are prepared to give it the benefit of the doubt. It is true that there is legislation respecting hazardous materials, but it might have been important to include this aspect in this bill. We will see.

The Bloc Québécois is going to be keeping a very close eye on this bill and I am going to do the same thing. I am going to urge my colleagues in the House of Commons to bear this bill in mind when problems arise concerning the transportation of hazardous materials crossing these international bridges and going through these international tunnels. We could have gone further with this bill, pushed things and even clarified the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act. We are told that there will be a future amendment to the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act and that we should not confuse things. In my opinion, though, always trying to go further and to see things more clearly does not confuse anything.

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However, we were good losers. We rallied the majority who did not want to see this point in this bill or to discuss the whole section on the safety of transporting hazardous materials. I still think there will always be a safety and security problem and obviously giving carriers clear standards and guidelines suits us. This also goes for the operators these bridges so that there are some very significant security standards when the time comes to transport hazardous materials. This has to be clarified in all the bills having anything to do with transportation.

This bill respecting international bridges and tunnels obviously affects the transportation of all products, people, goods and services, but also the transportation of hazardous materials.

We may understand why the government did so, but I would say the stronger the better. We could have added to the bill all the standards to be met by operators regarding hazardous materials and taken the opportunity, every time transportation and safety came up, to subject all these people to the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act and made things clear.

● (1255)

The title of the bill reads as follows: An act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act. This other act created various administrations to manage the bridges.

So it is amended. When we passed an entire clause on the transportation of dangerous goods, we could very easily have amended the 1992 Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act.

However, the officials at Transport Canada obviously did not see it this way. They managed to convince the other parties that the best approach was to deal with the transportation of dangerous goods in another act separate from the one on international bridges and tunnels. Apart from these small suggestions for our colleagues that we should closely follow the recommendations made by the operators of the international bridges and tunnels on the transportation of dangerous goods, the Bloc Québécois fully supports this bill. We are in favour of the amendments that were made.

I would like to return now to what I said in my introduction. I want it to be very clear to the Quebeckers and Canadians listening to us that when it comes to Bill C-44, they should not pay any attention to the parliamentary secretary when he says that the bill tabled by the Liberal Party, that is Bill C-44, died on the order paper. A bill often dies on the order paper because the parties do not all cooperate.

If Bill C-44 at the time, which was the original of today's Bill C-3, died on the order paper, it was because the parties did not all cooperate in the House. I said it before and will say it again: the Conservative Party was against Bill C-44 for one single reason. Obviously, it was not because of all the clauses on bridges and tunnels because they agree now and tabled a bill.

At the time, they introduced another bill on railway noise. They agreed with all of Bill C-44 except for the part enacting the Via Rail Canada act that was the heart of the bill.

The most important part of Bill C-44 was the act to create VIA Rail and give the company the support it needs to develop its service. It was as simple as that. VIA Rail would have been transformed from

a Crown corporation to a private company. It would have been called VIA Rail Canada and would have been an independent company subject to the Canada Business Corporations Act. It would have managed its own development and created VIA Fast, a project supported by the Bloc Québécois. VIA Fast would have been a fast train linking Montreal to Windsor or Quebec City to Montreal, thus offering an alternative to air travel and developing a safe rail transport network.

Bill C-44 did not go through. It died on the order paper. The Conservatives were against it and they did everything they could to make sure it did not go through. As for the Liberals, they were divided. Chrétien's camp was in favour, but those backing the member for LaSalle—Émard were not.

Earlier, I congratulated the critic on his new portfolio in the Liberal shadow cabinet, but he did not mention Bill C-44. I hope that he will be among those who support VIA Rail's development, not among those who oppose it. We will have opportunities to discuss this in future debates, debates that we hope will be marked by wisdom and transparency. Bill C-3 is fine, but the Bloc Québécois is very disappointed that Bill C-44 died on the order paper because it would have brought into force legislation creating VIA Rail Canada, thus enabling VIA Rail to develop and introduce fast train service between Montreal and Windsor. Eventually, it would also have introduced a fast train between Quebec City and Montreal and Montreal and New York.

On that note, happy debating in 2007.

● (1300)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few moments ago, I had a remarkable experience. I would like to thank my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois for making this possible.

Let me explain. A Bloc member just congratulated the Liberal Party and complimented it on initiatives taken in this area during the previous Parliament.

This is remarkable. He also wanted to underscore the fact that the Conservatives did not want a progressive, forward-looking piece of legislation, such as Bill C-44. I am almost speechless.

I have a question for my colleague, whom I have known for several years and who worked hard on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. By supporting Bill C-3, does he want the federal government to control transportation costs or does he simply accept the role that the government can play in cases of national interest?

● (1305)

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the introduction given by the Liberal Party's critic, I would like to make certain clarifications.

In my speech on Bill C-44, which was introduced by the Liberal Party, I applauded the merits of the section of Bill C-44 that had to do with VIA Rail.

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I also said that Bill C-44 did not go through but died on the order paper because some Liberal members were against making VIA Rail an independent company or independent Canadian corporation. That is the reality. That is why Bill C-44 did not go through. The Liberals are also to blame in this situation because the Chrétien team wanted VIA Rail to come into being, while the team supporting the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard was against it. Where did my colleague stand on the matter? I think that everyone who knows him knows the answer to that.

This bill would have been good for the community, for society and for Quebecers. VIA Rail could have developed VIA Fast, first with links between Quebec City and Montreal, and Montreal and Windsor, and one day, between Quebec City, Montreal and New York. That would have been advantageous, but that will not happen. The Liberals are partially responsible.

To answer his question, the Bloc Québécois worked to make sure that the federal government would not determine the fees, but would take part in negotiations. We want to make sure that the provinces and municipalities can hold discussions with the federal authority so that everyone together can help the operators choose fees that are in line with the neighbouring population's ability to pay.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc is absolutely correct to note Bill C-44 and the difficulty experienced on the VIA Rail project, in particular.

I had the opportunity to sit with the minister prior to the announcement of an \$800 million commitment to fast rail service throughout the Ontario to Quebec region. It was very important for passenger rail transportation. It was also important that the rail itself be upgraded for commerce and that other types of transportation be available to the public for travel, commerce and tourism.

He was quite right to note that as soon as the member for LaSalle—Émard became prime minister and leader of the Liberal Party he cancelled that project because it was seen as a legacy project from the Chrétien era.

Does my colleague believe that it is still worthwhile investing in this project, a project that could help with greenhouse emissions as well as transportation and trade development throughout the Ontario to Quebec region?

[*Translation*]

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

He is quite right. Investing in rail means in investing in the transportation of the future. We must also make sure that air transportation is secure. As I mentioned earlier, we went through that with Montreal-Trudeau. The airport had its share of security flaws. Reporters were able to go wherever they wanted, proving that evil doers could endanger travellers' lives.

This has created some anxiety about air travel. Some Quebecers and Canadians do not feel comfortable travelling by air.

Ongoing investment in air transportation is needed for security reasons, but at the same time, we have to enable a secure, competitive means of mass transportation to develop. That is what

the Conservatives and a segment of the Liberals did not want to do. They did not want to enable VIA Rail to develop transportation in the Quebec City-Montreal, Montreal-Windsor corridor more quickly. Once again, this clearly would have facilitated economic and tourism development, and with a more environmentally friendly means of transportation.

It was a bad decision by the Liberals at the time, the Liberals under the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, and the Conservatives are continuing to make the same bad decision. There has not been a bill to reopen discussion on the future of VIA Rail. Rest assured, knowing them, there will not be any bill on the matter. They do not want VIA Rail to be able to develop or compete with air transport or anything else. Let us be clear, it is not their personal interest or what they have invested in WestJet that is at stake. They have to rise above personal interest and ensure that the public, Quebecers and Canadians, are able to choose a mode of transportation in a reasonable and safe manner.

Rail transport is a very interesting solution that the Bloc Québécois supports. I want to thank my colleague for his question.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am being regaled with expertise on the functioning of the Liberal Party by those who are not associated with it, thank heavens. However, the issue of VIA and a fast train along the Quebec-Windsor corridor is one that goes well beyond the last administration and, indeed, the previous one before that. It is one that was raised in 1989 by the then Conservative government of the day and it was abandoned almost immediately. It was not even willing to do the environmental assessment and feasibility studies associated with enhancing that train travel or any kind of upgrade of the terrain and of the rail itself.

My colleague knows very well that about four years ago, during the Chrétien administration, there was a request by VIA Rail for additional funds to do the appropriate feasibility and environmental studies. Those were the ones being put forward and there was total agreement among Liberals to ensure that it took place. I especially thank him for having recognized that the Conservatives were so narrow-minded in their approach to transport issues and to political objectives in the House that they caused the collapse of Bill C-44, which would have gone well beyond where we are going today.

Will he move away from his desire to reflect on past Liberal Parties and think in terms of going forward with a Dion environmental technological approach to the new transportation modes tomorrow? Would he be so kind as to reflect on that continuity and say that he would like to join that process? There is room over here, by the way, if he says yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I remind the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence not to refer to other members by their names, but by their ridings or titles.

The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to know that I will talk to him about the future, but the past being an indication of the future, I want to remind him of what my colleague from Windsor West was saying earlier. I trust him since he is from Windsor and he is aware of the decisions being made on the matter.

Indeed, there was a Liberal government led by Mr. Chrétien that wanted to invest in VIA Rail and in VIA Fast. Then there was a Liberal government led by the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard who said no to this investment. This all happened under the Liberal regime. My colleague is trying to tell us that there is a new Liberal Party. As the critic, perhaps he should try to convince everyone, all his colleagues, that when his party is back in power one day, it will decide to invest in VIA Rail. It is far from certain. The debate was very important. It began very well, but ended poorly under a Liberal regime.

Indeed, rail is transportation for the future. We have to consider investing in this sector and putting the common interest above personal interest.

• (1315)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-3. Accountability has been a long time coming on some of our border processes.

Quite frankly, to continue the discussion on Bill C-44 and Bill C-3, there were some excellent things in Bill C-44, but I am glad at the very least that we are moving on Bill C-3. It is very important that we get some type of accountability.

That is what has been lacking on our 24 international bridges and tunnels that connect us to the United States. There has not been a standardized process to ensure safety, security, pricing, and a whole bunch of operational issues. That is why we want to see this bill pass in the House of Commons.

It is not the perfect bill. It is something that I tried to improve with a number of different motions. Some actually got through and some did not, but at the end of the day this is an opportunity to do something good for our commerce and our prosperity for the future. It is more than just the operations that we have to be concerned about. It is the investment.

I first want to outline the summary of the bill. It is important that people understand this context. It did not really come into the national perspective of the sensitivities and difficulties at border crossings until 9/11 in 2001 with the terrorist attacks and the shutting down of the border with the United States. We in Windsor, Ontario and many other jurisdictions across the country understood the infrastructure, operational and accountability deficiencies, but were unable to successfully penetrate it to a national level that would get it to the point where there would be action taken by any particular level of government. That was very important.

When that episode happened, new challenges began to emerge that became very important, not only to the people who lived around the immediate facilities of the border crossings but to those who live in an area that has four border crossings in total; who live along the

400 series highways, the Golden Horseshoe area; Montreal; British Columbia; and those who live in areas of border crossings right across the Prairies.

A number of different challenges began to emerge, but when it came to international bridges and tunnels, there was no actual mandate for the federal government to have some type of accountability standards or procedures and to ensure there was oversight. That is very important because there are border crossings that are privately held.

Two of the 24 are very unusual in the context of the overall infrastructure portfolio this country has, but they are very significant ones. Second to that, there was also no standardization for the other ones owned by the federal government, provinces and municipalities that had some type of vested stake in the actual border crossing. This brings a greater perspective for all of us in relation to this bill.

The summary states:

This enactment establishes an approval mechanism for the construction, alteration and acquisition of international bridges and tunnels and provides for the regulation of their operation, maintenance and security.

That is important to note. Looking at the titles of the different chapters, it is about interpretation and application for actual border crossings, construction and alteration, maintenance and repair, operation and use, security and safety, changes of ownership, and operational control. These are all things that are very important to how the border functions and operates.

As I was discussing earlier, it is not just about the operator of the border crossing, whether it be a public or private entity. It is about the repercussions that are faced by the goods and services trade, people and vehicular flow across these border crossings into other regions. The less efficient they are, the less accountability that happens with regard to public safety and investment in infrastructure to ensure it is preserved in perpetuity, the less investment there is to actually expand and meet the challenges and, on top of that, the less there is to do with accountability about pricing, which is an actual trade barrier to our country being successful with the United States. Whether it be the tourism aspect, where people pay a higher price by going along a certain border corridor or transport trucks being charged far greater than what they should be, all of these affect our economy.

What is important to note about that is that in the auto industry and other types of industries these are significant costs. At the border, for example, in Windsor, Ontario an automobile can quite literally cross the border six times before it is completely finished. Between all the parts and different operations that are exchanged, the vehicle will cross the border to Michigan and return to Ontario multiple times. If there is a lack of investment, all of these additional costs will have a significant impact not only on our current infrastructure and economy but also on decision-making.

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● (1320)

I have been involved in this since 1997 when I was a city councillor. We have been arguing for this investment as a way of showing Ontario and Quebec in particular that we could solve the border problem to ensure it was fast, safe and secure. This would enable goods to get to markets very quickly and it would be done in an accountable way. This would provide for possible plant expansions. I have heard from different corporations that they have withheld funding for plant expansions because of their concern about the border question.

We still have this problem in the Windsor-Detroit corridor despite all the rhetoric and all the bluster in many announcements. There is yet to be the political will to invest the capital to fix our current problems. We have not seen anything. It is important that we at least get the operational aspect under control. It is not sinister. It is not something one would think there would be problems with.

The fact of the matter is that we have to deal with the most important border crossing between Windsor and Detroit which is owned and operated by a private American citizen. We have to ensure that Canada's interests are represented. We have to ensure the infrastructure is safe and sound. We have to ensure the infrastructure is going to have the proper operational supports so in times of emergency there can be an appropriate response. We have to ensure that the planning process will be done in conjunction with the community and the province and country at large.

As a result of the previous administration's lack of political will, the Windsor, Ontario area has become a literal battleground with respect to who wants to own and operate the next border crossing. People are receiving letters. TV commercials, airwave commercials, propaganda of all sorts is being received by people in the area from private proponents about why one proposal should be supported over the other.

The previous prime minister promised that this would impact positively on the quality of life of citizens in the area. We wanted the trucks off our city streets. We wanted to ensure a free flow of economic goods and services without the hazardous materials and the pollution flowing through our streets. We are still being confronted with congestion and safety issues on a regular basis.

This bill would provide some remedies to these problems. There is actual incorporation. The member for Windsor—Tecumseh and myself have been pushing hard for amendments to make the local municipality engaged on this issue. This is one of my concerns about the bill. It would give the minister greater influence. However, we could not allow no accountability whatsoever.

As things stand right now we do not have any rights on private property where these privately owned and operated border crossings are located. Public crossings need consent. This is a problem. How can we assure the general public that proper procedures are being followed? How can we assure the general public that the necessary investment is being received?

The Ambassador Bridge in my riding has made millions of dollars over the years with respect to tolls. I do not have the official number but some of the estimates are \$50 million to \$60 million a year. This is significant. However, at the same time we have to ensure that

investment will be made to the infrastructure at the end of the day for perpetuity.

This is a definite problem because the toll rates at this particular operation are much more expensive than at other operations such as those at Sault Ste. Marie, Sarnia, the Blue Water area, and Niagara Falls. All of these areas have lower toll rates for passengers as well as for transport trucks. This has caused extra costs to be added to businesses, especially local and regional commerce, in order to compete.

Industries in Ontario, for example, have been suffering significantly from manufacturing competition from the United States because it has invested in these types of facilities in order to maintain them and to keep and grow the jobs. Canada has not been as aggressive. Beyond this is the issue of other developing countries which have really had a profound impact on the actual manufacturing base of our economy.

● (1325)

What is really important is that we are demonstrating, and Bill C-3 does this to a certain degree, that we are actually going to rein in some of the issues about the border. The second step to this which is very important and something I could not get through the bill but I believe is so important, especially for the Windsor economic region as well as the rest of Ontario and the Montreal area, is that in the Windsor corridor we need to get a border authority developed.

The border authority is something that New Democrats have been pushing for that area for a long time. Sarnia has one, Sault Ste. Marie has one, Fort Erie has one and Niagara Falls has one. Everywhere around the region are these border authorities. They are binational organizations that have representatives from different government agencies as well as the communities that provide solutions and ongoing contact about how to manage the border.

If we look at our most important corridor, being Windsor-Detroit where we have 42% of the nation's trade, we have an issue. We have a rail tunnel that is privately held. We have a city tunnel for vehicle traffic and transport trucks that is owned by the City of Windsor on the Canadian side which we just got back after many years. It is paying a profit back to the people and has lower fares and will do so in the future. The Detroit side of it is owned by the City of Detroit and outleased to Macquarie North American, a private infrastructure leasing agreement that was decided upon. The Ambassador Bridge is privately owned by an American citizen. We have the ferry system which is also owned by a private American citizen.

We have four different border crossings and there is absolutely no coordination whatsoever from an overall perspective. When we have issues develop, such as the unilateral action by the United States with the new bio-terrorism act that requires more standards and more procedures to be followed by commerce and particularly in goods and services from agriculture. That is particularly important for the County of Essex and Chatham and Kent as we have a big greenhouse industry that actually produces a lot of different vegetables that go to the United States market. If they are delayed there are additional costs which causes problems.

Government Orders

There is not only the effect of that legislation with the extra cost being introduced but second to that are new procedures for the physical infrastructure at the border and the processing that needs to be done. Therefore, we need a border authority to help coordinate and advocate for that.

I remember in the Niagara Region when the NEXUS program was introduced and the American customs officials on the other side of the border were opening every single trunk. For those who do not know what NEXUS is, one goes through a pre-clearance inspection. Persons are validated on who they are and agree to certain terms and conditions so they can traverse across the border more quickly than if they go through the regular channels. There are limitations on what they can bring and what they can bring back but it is a bonded agreement between the person and the department of homeland security.

The whole point of that is to move vehicles quicker. In the Niagara Falls area they were opening every single trunk which was basically defeating the whole point of NEXUS, after people had gone through all the screening. It has a commission that can advocate for the changing of that practice. That is what happened in that region which was very successful.

In the Windsor and Essex County area we need the same type of body to deal with legislation coming forth in the United States in terms of lobbying. The bio-terrorism act is a classic example. The then Minister of International Trade found out about it, did not bother to tell anyone, and later on the Canadian Trucking Association found out about it two weeks later with the general public and it caused quite a bit of havoc.

We need to ensure that we are going to present a common front together especially when legislation like that is not even warranted. I do not want to get into the details of that legislation, but it is one classic example of the challenges that we face.

The second thing that we tried to get into the bill which was very important for the areas that are affected by the border is a community investment fund. We have seen significant problems with backups and environmental degradation. In the Windsor *Star* today, our home town paper, a study is reported that came out of California which shows that if persons live along an area with traffic congestion within a 500 metre radius, they are more likely to have different types of diseases and can contract problems related to health, be it heart and stroke or a series of different problems.

We had wanted an investment fund on the environment so that the local communities would be able to actually extract remedies for their areas on the environment.

● (1330)

That is one of the big battles that is going on right now through the new process that we have on the border in Windsor and Essex County, the DRIC process. It is binational. The American federal and state governments and the provincial and federal governments on our side are trying to come up with a plan.

The environmental degradation of a new border crossing and where it would go is a big issue. The New Democrats want some type of investment fund so that local leaders, advocates and municipalities could cope with the problems on the border. That

would give people who live with those types of problems hope and an opportunity to participate in the betterment of their communities. On top of that, it would improve our image on the borders between Windsor and Detroit and all across Canada because everyone would be entitled to this type of support structure.

We also wanted to enshrine an open process for the border competition regarding what was going to happen in the future in terms of ownership and new crossings. That was very important to us but we were not able to pass that.

I hope no other community goes through this, but as I mentioned earlier, a ground war is going on in my community. The Ambassador Bridge is pushing ahead its particular proposal and the Detroit River Tunnel Partnership wants to ram a rail tunnel through an area. It has been a divide and conquer situation, basically spending a lot of money and requesting basically a public subsidy at the end of the day for their operations to move ahead with their particular proposal despite there being a planned process in place. We wanted to see that move to a more transparent level.

I have been calling on the government for public ownership of the next border crossing, similar to the one that is being built on the east coast, but there has not been a commitment. There have been many studies and evidence that public border crossings actually have lower fares. The most recent study was by Citigroup in the United States. It looked at the public benefit of corporation owned versus privately owned border crossings. It looked at interest rates, equity, corporate income and sales tax and compared the advantages of each different sector. It found that privately owned infrastructure facilities usually require toll rates that are 35% to 40% higher.

It gives me great concern that if we do not have the same commitment for the next Windsor-Detroit region border crossing to be publicly owned and operated, we would then add another cost factor into that infrastructure that would affect the viability of commerce going between our two nations. Once again, there is approximately \$1 billion a day in trade through this corridor. If we were to add on another layer of cost it would certainly be a net detractor from further investment in Ontario and other areas.

We want to make sure that the toll rates are low and relatively stable. More important, like many other publicly owned and operated crossings, we want to make sure that the money actually goes back into the management and operation of the facility and also toward future expansion and community issues. The Peace Bridge in Fort Erie has done a series of work for the community around it to help offset the impact on having the border there.

Government Orders

We also wanted more protocols regarding hazardous materials and procedures to be implemented for bridges and tunnels. Unfortunately that motion was defeated. There is enough evidence to warrant that we are not doing the best job we could on this. The government's logic was that this could be moved to the hazardous materials act. I am hoping it has a great interest in doing that. The government said that was going to move that forward quickly in this session and I would expect it to do so. I wanted it in this bill because we have a series of regulations that will involve those types of operations. People need to understand the significance of this.

In the United States a number of municipalities have worked to ban the transportation of certain gas materials and hazardous materials through their regions. Cleveland has done that. It could be anything, such as chlorine gas that could cause quite a bit of a difficulty. It is a safety issue for thousands of people.

I will wrap up by saying that Bill C-3 is just the start of the real accountability that is needed at our border crossings. It will improve things. It is not a perfect bill but it is necessary at least for the public safety and security of all bridges and tunnels in our great land.

• (1335)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be witness to a Confiteor of sorts. The member for Windsor West who is an otherwise intelligent man continued to talk about the kinds of things he would like to have seen in the bill. They did not get in because he helped to defeat the previous Liberal government, which was going in that direction. Now he objects to the parliamentary secretary and the Minister of Transport for not having read his dream sufficiently well to accord him the things he would have liked in the bill.

It is important for everybody who is watching the debate to understand that everybody should want political security, security against terrorism, economic security as well and to understand its complexity, and environmental security.

From what I gather, his concept of environmental security is to accelerate the time it takes for a truck to go through a particular border crossing without due consideration for the quantum of emissions that would spew from such a vehicle so that it is spread someplace else and not in any one specific place. He has not taken into consideration what we had already planned to do and which he agreed was a good thing but not good enough to support the government of the day so that now he bemoans the fact that now there is actually a government that is inimical to those issues.

I am sure he will find some way to turn himself into a pretzel and say, "We are going to support the government forever and a day because at the very least we were able to get something piecemeal, even though it is not anything coincident with our party's environmental policy, does not coincide with our party's economic policy, and really does not involve the local political process because we really did not want it. We wanted to involve the people directly. Finally, it would allow us to compete, maybe, because we really do not think competition is a good thing unless it is driven by the government itself. It will allow us to compete with some of the other border crossings at Fort Erie, Niagara Falls and Blue Water". I am not sure what he wants. Maybe he could take a couple of minutes and explain it to us and it will be typical NDP—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that the hon. member has embarrassed himself in the chamber again. Quite frankly, even if we had wanted to prop up his government, we did not have the votes. The member cannot count. He was not here for part of the process. We could not have propped the Liberals up even we had wanted to. Maybe he should count.

An hon. member: He should take his shoes off.

Mr. Brian Masse: He should take his shoes off, exactly. Count next time. We did not have the votes.

What is really important is that if we are to have good commerce and lower emissions, trucks should not be stopping all along the way. Part of his government's neglect was the constant lack of infrastructure improvement. The stoplights all along the corridors that have truck traffic are part of the problem.

Pre-clearance, like the auto industry does, has been very successful. Materials are inspected beforehand. They are pre-screened. The drivers are pre-screened. They are able to go through the proper process because they have the right paperwork. They move through the community much faster and that is a benefit that the member would not realize. It is a benefit because the trucks are not stopped, stalled and backed up all the way through the community that I represent.

Businesses cannot function and schools, churches and homes are affected because his government could not act. Despite all the promises from the member for LaSalle—Émard, and I got them a mile long, about how he was going to invest, that it was a number one priority, the Liberals did not do a single thing. The member was a cabinet minister in that government.

I always want a better bill. That is what I do when I come here every single day. I got some major amendments to the bill. It is a benefit because there is finally going to be some accountability at the border. The Liberal government never delivered on that. At least it is a start and I will fight like hell to make sure we get the rest of the job done.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by complimenting my colleague from Windsor West on a fantastic speech in terms of the clarity he brings to the issue. He has a deep profound knowledge on this subject and is one of the authorities on this issue in the House of Commons.

Not coming from a border crossing community myself, one thing that he raised particularly caught my ear. He pointed out that the Ambassador Bridge, being the key link between the two greatest trading partners the world has ever known for volume and scope of the amount of trade that goes over it, is privately owned by a single individual, an American citizen at that. I am wondering from a public policy point of view if he thinks it is wise to have this critical piece of infrastructure held in private hands by someone who is not even a Canadian national. Could he expand on that for us?

Government Orders

● (1340)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right. There are issues that we have to deal with. Our primary responsibility as members of Parliament is to make sure the public interest is protected not just in terms of commerce that flows, but also in terms of the safety of individuals especially at borders.

We have seen a number of different security measures being introduced. In Windsor as well as other areas in Canada, we have seen the introduction of Black Hawk helicopters, drone planes and river gunboats at border crossings.

When a border crossing facility is owned by a private American citizen we have to be accountable to our own citizens to make sure that the border crossing is inspected properly, invested in properly and is run for the benefit of not only individual Canadians crossing there but also the businesses that we represent. That should be the primary interest of any infrastructure that we have connecting ourselves and the commerce that is so important for the vitality of Ontario and other regions.

That is why this bill at least is a start. I am concerned about certain aspects of it just like other things in the legislature here, but it at least provides a level of accountability. We will be waiting to see what type of regulations the government comes up with and how quickly it does that. We certainly want to make sure that problems are avoided.

The most recent one I noted was the concern of the municipality as well as an aboriginal population that there was disruption of work on that piece of property which was on traditional lands. They are asking for some accountability. We are asking for specific things to provide Canadians with the necessary safety and security which they deserve.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member raised an interesting point about regulations. He knows there is the scrutiny of regulations committee to ensure that the appropriate enabling provisions are in the legislation which has been supported by all parties.

The real issue is that the bill had a lot of consultation with all of the stakeholders. No bill is perfect. I think the member will agree that the bill is an excellent start to move on in this very important area.

With regard to the Senate amendment which is what we are debating today, is the member aware whether that amendment is appropriate? On the other concerns raised by the Senate, is he satisfied that the proper review was discharged by the Senate prior to the bill being returned to the House?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, the member's excellent question brings forward the point that the amendments we are dealing with are more technical in nature. They are ones to which I do not have any objection. At the same time, I know that in the Senate process there were extra questions and concerns raised. In fact there were misunderstandings about what the bill was about, whether it was ownership and a few other things.

What is important is that we are going to move further past this process. Bill C-3 is just the start of cleaning up our borders in Canada. We must understand that right now we have no regulations, control or ability to have an influence on those things. This is

starting from there. We need to do the same thing with border authorities, community investment funds and also infrastructure funds for the areas around them.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the bill, particularly following my colleague, the hon. member for Windsor West, who has in many respects spearheaded a number of the issues that are addressed in the bill and a number that are not addressed in it, as we just heard from him. I will repeat a couple of those points.

For us in the Windsor-Essex county area, the legislation is crucial in terms of the need to have this for a lot of the time that has gone by. Issues that we have confronted at the local community level badly needed to be confronted at the national level but were not because we did not have the legislative infrastructure, which the bill will go partially toward addressing.

It is important to set in context the impact that the trade agreements have had not only on communities like Windsor and Essex county, but on the country as a whole in terms of the huge increase in truck traffic in particular and visitors, with passenger vehicles going back and forth across our borders not only in the Windsor area, although it is clearly by far the busiest one in the country, but in other places as well, such as the Montreal area and the Seattle, Washington to Vancouver area on the Pacific coast.

To use some examples of how significant it is, if we go back 20, 25 years before the trade agreements, on average 2,000 to 3,000 trucks would cross our borders in the Windsor area on a daily basis. That figure now, and there is some dispute between the people who follow it, is at least 11,000 a day. There are certainly days, particularly in the summer months, that figure will go up over 13,000 a day. Those are just trucks. Passenger cars are in addition to that.

This has caused horrendous problems from an environmental standpoint in the corridor that runs from the Trans-Canada Highway, the 401 in Ontario, through to the Detroit, Michigan side. It has caused a great deal of safety concerns.

Again, referring to our local newspaper, an article this week talked about a lawsuit settlement to a woman who was killed by truck traffic as she was trying to cross. She left a young family. We have had a large number of accidents, so it is both an environmental and a personal safety issue for us in our community.

Government Orders

Although they have been identified, those conditions have continued for at least a decade, if not more like 15 years. With the trade agreement, we knew the impact in terms of that increased traffic. We heard my colleague, the hon. member for Windsor West, say that just within the auto sector, because of the trade that goes on and the parts that move back and forth across the border, one part may cross the border five or six times before it is actually put into a motor vehicle. That traffic is a constant problem for our communities. It has spilled over into the streets of Windsor. It is not just the main thoroughfares, but our side streets, our residential streets, as well. It is a huge problem, one that has existed for quite some time. It has not been addressed anywhere near satisfactorily to the city council of Windsor, to the county council and to the residents of our communities.

When we think about it, both our major tunnel and our major bridge were built just before the depression. They were finished in the late 1920s, early 1930s. We have had them all that time. We could say the same thing about a number of other crossings across the country. There are 24 international crossings between Canada and the United States: 14 in Ontario, 9 in New Brunswick and 1 in Quebec. Of those 24, only five of them are owned directly by the federal government through Crown corporations. For the other ones we would pass, on an ad hoc basis, legislation that would authorize the construction of that crossing, not a satisfactory mechanism to provide controlled regulation of those crossings.

● (1345)

That became quite clear to the United States, and we followed a somewhat similar pattern in its history. A good number of years ago it went to national legislation, so it had that infrastructure. Even to this day we do not have that, but hopefully this legislation will go through in the next few days, on to the Senate for final confirmation and then go into force. It is a totally unsatisfactory situation, so it is quite important that the legislation go through.

Again I refer some of the points that my friend, the hon. member for Windsor West, made. This is not the be all and the end all. It will address some of the issues we have confronted in the Windsor area, as we have dealt with the proposals to construct a new crossing between Canada and the state of Michigan. It will go some distance I think, and I am hopeful, to addressing the major concerns that not only the automobile industry in particular has but also commercial interests generally have with regard to the problems we are experiencing at our border crossings in moving product in a speedy, efficient manner. That has been a major problem for us since 9/11 and it continues to be a major problem for us.

Those of us who are in leadership positions in our communities know that there is almost a freeze on investment, particularly in the auto sector, in our communities right now, waiting to see if there is the political will to address the problems and correct them. The major way we will do that is to construct a new crossing and do so in a brief period of time given all the issues that surround the problems of building a crossing that is internationally run, in dealing with four different levels of government on both sides of the border.

The bill will indicate that the federal Government of Canada is serious about addressing some of the issues. Hopefully we will see

additional legislation or policies at the very least come forward to address some of the other issues.

One of the roles of the federal government is to provide its country and citizenry, including commercial interests, with a secure working environment. We do not have that in our area at the present time. As I have already said, there are issues from environmental, personal safety and commercial standpoints that are not being adequately addressed.

There is a great fear in the Windsor-Essex County area of the political will on the Canadian side of the border to build an additional crossing. The process is underway. It is ongoing. It seems to be very slow. To some degree, this type of legislation answers the question of whether we are serious about addressing these problems.

I want to take a few minutes to talk about what is not addressed, in particular the role that the local community needs to play in the management regulation of border crossings. From some of the incidents that have taken place since we began discussing a new crossing some seven or eight years ago, we know about the perspective of the provincial government and the federal government and how significant it is to have local input and decision making to some degree on how a new crossing will be determined, constructed and then operated.

The attitude has been overwhelmingly one of arrogance on the part of upper levels of government toward local municipal councillors and mayor, one of "we know best", in spite of all, let us say, the negligent decision making that has gone on. For instance, in the 1950s we decided we would stop the cross-Canada highway on the outskirts of the city of Windsor and would run some 10 or 12 kilometres to the international crossing through city streets. That decision was made by upper levels of government.

● (1350)

I can repeat many times that kind of ignorance and that kind of lack of vision in decisions that were made.

With regard to our community, it has always been a band-aid approach, a piecemeal approach, as opposed to looking at it as being the most significant crossing in our country by far. Thirty per cent to thirty-five per cent of all trade between Canada and the United States goes through the Windsor-Detroit border crossing. It is still being treated as if it is a backwater. This attitude still exists to a significant degree both here in Ottawa and in Queen's Park in Toronto.

The legislation to some degree says this attitude is no longer satisfactory. It goes a long way in recognizing how significant these crossings are, not just in the Windsor area but in areas right across the country, and doing something about them. A significant change in attitude has to occur.

To recognize the significance on the local community of these crossings, we need to have a local border authority. We heard from my colleague that we have them elsewhere such as in Sarnia, which is some 50 miles away, and in Niagara, Sault Ste. Marie and further.

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

● (1400)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COMMEMORATION

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, January 27 was International Day of Commemoration to honour the victims of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust was the worst of human nature. It was the systematic murder of the European Jewish people by the Nazi regime. The casualty count for this horror is estimated at six million people. Many other ethnic, religious and cultural groups also suffered oppression and death. This must never, ever happen again.

As was stated at an international forum on the Holocaust, “We believe the Holocaust must have a permanent place in our nation’s collective memory. We honour the survivors still with us and reaffirm our shared goals of mutual understanding and justice.”

We all share a commitment to honour the victims of the Holocaust and those who stood against it.

It is said that those who forget the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them. Therefore, I call upon all members of the House to join our government in declaring “never again”.

* * *

[Translation]

SUMMER CAREER PLACEMENTS PROGRAM

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, young Canadians will soon be knocking on the doors of not for profit organizations looking for summer jobs. Given that the Conservative government has cut more than \$1 billion from programs that help individuals and communities—including cutting funding of the summer career placement program by 50% this year—it will be more difficult for students to find a job.

Most students who take advantage of the summer career placements program work for local not for profit organizations that provide vital community services. Last year, in my riding alone, the program funded 51 projects and 158 jobs.

The government has created uncertainty for not for profit organizations and has left young people wondering if, this summer, they will be able to earn money for their tuition fees by doing work that is meaningful to their community. The government should review this hasty and illogical decision.

* * *

MAISON CARPE DIEM

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is Alzheimer awareness month and I am pleased to congratulate Maison Carpe Diem, located in my riding of Trois-Rivières, for its excellent work.

From my perspective, this is not just a question of the nuts and bolts of how vehicles are moved over the crossing, although that is certainly very significant. This is also about national security. I know from talking to our local police, fire service personnel, our emergency personnel and some of our intelligence services at the border crossings, that the lack of coordination is appalling. It is a level of negligence that is simply not acceptable in light of 9/11 and in light of our responsibility to provide protection and security to our populace. The border authority would go some distance toward providing coordination.

We have a hard time communicating between ourselves and the security services on the U.S. side of the border. This is not only our fault; it is also their fault to some degree. However, we are moving ahead. If in fact we are serious, then we go with the border authority. We have to provide our local law enforcement community with some real authority to deal with these issues. The border authority would deal with a number of crossing issues such as getting vehicles across in an efficient way as well as dealing with security issues.

We would like to have seen how much it costs to cross the border at the present time and how much it will cost in the future. We may still see this to some degree in the regulations. There is a dramatic difference in fees between some of our crossings just between the major motor vehicle tunnel and the bridge. When we compare these fees elsewhere in the province, there does not seem to be any logical pattern as to why some tolls are higher than others. This issue needs to be addressed.

We would like to see either policy or outright legislation requiring the upper levels of government to provide local communities with specified funds to, in effect, mitigate the impact on new border crossings in particular and existing ones as well.

Our community suffers major environmental consequences as a result of the number of trucks going through it because the trucks are left idling and are not efficient as they move across the border. An idling truck will increase the amount of pollutants in the air by as much as 80%. This condition is being imposed on my community, on the city and the county. It is causing health problems across the populace. It could be corrected by the proper infrastructure, both physical and from a policy standpoint.

● (1355)

My colleague from Windsor West made the point about what we see occurring on the U.S. side of the border. I am not at all suggesting that we mimic that but we need to be in a position, from an administrative standpoint, where we have the infrastructure in place to say that this is proper and that this is the way we should proceed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh will have five minutes left at the end of question period to finish his speech.

Statements by Members

In 1995, without a grant or a long term budget, the board of directors decided to take a step forward by establishing a new approach to assisting and housing people affected by Alzheimer's.

First and foremost, Carpe Diem is a philosophy shared by an entire team—from the workers to the director, the secretary to the volunteers. This approach draws on humanistic psychology and is based on the respect for the individual in human relations: respect for their capabilities, the rate of accomplishment, the limitations, and the reality and dignity of others.

The Carpe Diem approach works and is now being exported elsewhere. Once again, congratulations.

* * *

[English]

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to bring attention to a serious problem in my riding of Surrey North.

Today there are people in Surrey who find themselves with no roof over their head. Many of my neighbours are just one or two paycheques away from losing their home.

Homelessness affects too many people: working families, people who cannot find work, seniors, single parents, people like us. As many as 25,000 people in this country will experience homelessness in 2007.

Last year I asked the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development what the Conservatives were doing to ensure that people in my community had a decent place to live. Not surprisingly, the answer is that the Conservatives are not doing enough.

The NDP has always fought to make life more affordable for everyday Canadians and we will keep fighting until decent, affordable housing is a right, not a privilege, because everyone in Surrey needs a safe place to sleep tonight.

* * *

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources recently announced the ecoenergy efficiency, technology and renewable initiatives. These initiatives are a set of focused measures to help Canadians use energy more efficiently, boost renewable energy supplies and develop cleaner energy technologies.

The \$300 million ecoenergy efficiency initiative will promote smarter energy use by improving energy efficiency in Canadian homes, small buildings and industries.

The \$230 million ecoenergy technology initiative will fund the research, development and demonstration of clean energy technologies; accelerating the pace of innovation in the technologies that are crucial to reducing smog and harmful emissions.

The \$1.5 billion ecoenergy renewable initiative will boost Canada's renewable energy supplies, helping us to be not just an energy superpower, but a clean energy superpower.

The ecoenergy initiatives are targeted, effective investments and another great example of this government getting things done for all Canadians.

* * *

● (1405)

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COMMEMORATION

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to remember victims of the Holocaust on the second annual UN Holocaust Remembrance Day. It is imperative that we never forget those who perished and suffered at the hands of the Nazi death machine and strongly condemn those who are today committing genocide, as in Darfur, and those who wish to.

Those who deny the Holocaust are not merely historical revisionists. They want to repeat it.

The President of Iran denies the Holocaust and threatens to wipe Israel off the map in the same breath. Let us never forget the Holocaust began with words of hate and anti-Semitism.

As we think of the victims and their immeasurable sorrow today, let us recommit ourselves and Canada to never again sit idly by and allow the systematic massacre of innocent men, women and children but rather do everything in our power to stop genocide in its tracks.

There can be no more powerful way to honour the victims of the Holocaust than to do that today.

As the survivors of these horrors, who have lost so much, show remarkable leadership and courage teaching the next generations, we can do no less.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COMMEMORATION

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, resolution A/60/7 of the General Assembly of the United Nations designates January 27, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, as the annual International Day of Commemoration in memory of victims of the Holocaust.

The goal of this commemoration is to prevent future genocides by reminding the world of the horrors visited upon the Jews and others by the Nazis over 60 years ago. The following passages from resolution A/60/7 seem therefore to be of particularly importance.

First, the UN “urged member states to develop educational programmes to inculcate future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust” in order to prevent future acts of genocide.

Second, the UN rejects any denial of the Holocaust as a historical event.

Third, the UN condemns without reserve all manifestations of religious intolerance, incitement, harassment or violence against persons or communities based on ethnic origin or religious belief.

I am confident that these goals are shared by every member of the House of Commons.

* * *

[Translation]

SUMMER CAREER PLACEMENTS PROGRAM

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, many community organizations are worried. In the round of cuts that began in 2006, the summer career placements program has now come to be targeted by the Conservative Party.

In 2006, 959 students from the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region, including 329 from my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, benefited from this program. Considering that, through this program, organizations pay only part of the cost of hiring students and that 95% of subsidized organizations are not for profit organizations, such an announcement is a tragedy.

The fact of the matter is that the program provides local work experience for thousands of young college and university students over the summer.

If the Minister of Labour is serious about standing up for Quebec and the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region, he must intercede with the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development to ensure that the \$97 million in funding for the program is renewed in full.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Standing Committee on National Defence and I had the honour of visiting our Canadian Forces personnel stationed in Afghanistan.

Our Canadian men and women took on the toughest job in the toughest part of the country and have stabilized the region to the point that Afghans are returning to their homes and villages.

The provincial reconstruction team is now able to move about the country with more freedom. Canadians are working directly with Afghan ministries adding our expertise to governance issues. RCMP members are helping to train the Afghan national police. Canadian Forces personnel are involved with training the Afghan national army and auxiliary police. As well, CIDA has dozens of projects on the go.

Work is progressing with local Shura councils to establish trust and to develop much needed infrastructure, creating jobs for locals. Every coalition soldier is considered a trainer, hand in hand with the Afghan people they are winning the battle for the hearts and minds.

I say to our heroes, the dedicated brave Canadian men and women in Afghanistan, “Godspeed and stay safe”.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

JEAN-PIERRE FERLAND

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he barely finished giving his farewell performance and he has already been inducted into the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame. I am, of course, referring to someone who is known as “le petit roi”, the little king, the great poet and singer Jean-Pierre Ferland.

His great sensitivity made him very popular with women. His words always struck a chord. His carefully composed texts have reflected the social and emotional evolution of Quebec over the past four decades.

He went from success to success since beginning at Radio-Canada. Throughout his career, he was a proud ambassador of the Quebec culture, both domestically and internationally.

I am inviting my colleagues to join me in paying a vibrant tribute to the long and brilliant career of Jean-Pierre Ferland, and in telling him, we are so lucky to have him among us!

* * *

• (1410)

MEMBER FOR ROBERVAL—LAC-SAINT-JEAN

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps we should congratulate the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, who will be seeking a sixth term in Ottawa as a member of the Bloc Québécois.

Yes, a sixth term.

Yet, on November 8, 1997, he stated in *La Presse* that the separatists did not intend to seek a third mandate in Ottawa. He said that, regardless of what might happen, the Bloc did not belong in Ottawa and it was not the Bloc's mission to settle there.

That was 10 years ago, in 1997.

Has the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean found his own road to Damascus? Has he converted, with the help of salary and benefits, to federalism?

* * *

[English]

MAURICE HUARD

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on January 5, the House of Commons lost one of our own with the untimely passing of Assistant Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms Maurice Huard.

Like all of his dedicated co-workers, Maurice executed his duties with dignity, pride and a profound respect for the institution of Parliament, but many of us remember him for his warmth, his joie de vivre, a great wit and an unfailing, if often mischievous, sense of humour. After a full and honourable career in the Canadian armed forces, we know that Maurice cherished the opportunity to continue serving his country in this place from 1993 on.

Statements by Members

I was proud to call Moe my friend. I thank him for the support and fellowship that he extended to me and to all members of the House of Commons.

I know that all of his colleagues and co-workers and all members of the House will join me in extending our heartfelt sympathy to his loving wife Maria, his stepchildren and his beloved grandchildren.

Maurice Huard was a truly kind and decent man. We will remember him and we will miss him.

* * *

CANADIAN SONGWRITERS HALL OF FAME

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to pay tribute to one of Canada's most influential musical artists, Joni Mitchell. On January 27, she was inducted into the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Joni's roots are deep in Saskatchewan, but her career has taken her to the very peak of the music world. From the folk sound of the 1960s, she evolved into one of the most influential artists of the 1970s and beyond. Songs like *Woodstock*, *Big Yellow Taxi* and *Help Me* captured a place and time and have become the soundtrack for an era.

She continues to perform, but this past weekend she was honoured for her songwriting. Thousands of groups and individuals, old and new, perform Joni Mitchell songs, including Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, Judy Collins, and Sarah McLachlan, to mention just a few. Joni's is truly a living legacy.

We are all very proud of this music icon from the Prairies who has enriched the cultural fabric of the nation. I ask all members to join me in celebrating the achievements of this outstanding Canadian artist.

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[*Translation*]

ABBÉ PIERRE

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week we were saddened to learn of the passing of Abbé Pierre at the age of 94. I would like to pay tribute to this illustrious man, a prophet for our time, who influenced several generations not only in his native France, but also around the world through his commitment to serving the poor and the destitute for more than 70 years.

Abbé Pierre nurtured a warm relationship with Quebec. In 1995, he received the Ordre national du Québec for his work and devotion.

As Pierre Foglia wrote last Tuesday, "Abbé Pierre was the last in a long line of good people who indignantly refused to accept poverty. ... Now that Abbé Pierre is gone, all we have left are good people. ... Without a sense of indignation, we become accustomed to doing good works instead of working for social justice." I would add that we need more prophets like him who are not afraid to be indignant and who work to achieve justice and equality for all.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I offer our sincere condolences to Abbé Pierre's family and friends.

● (1415)

MEMBER FOR YORK CENTRE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this evening the Montreal Canadiens will pay a well-deserved tribute to the member for York Centre by retiring number 29, the jersey he wore when he was their goaltender

[*English*]

Where do we begin the list of all his accomplishments? He is the only player ever to win the Conn Smythe trophy, awarded to the Stanley Cup playoffs most valuable player, before being eligible to win the Calder trophy, awarded to the rookie of the year, which he then won the following year. When he did this, he was barely out of Cornell University.

[*Translation*]

Ken Dryden helped the Habs win six Stanley cups. Naturally, Canadiens fans wished he had remained in nets longer.

[*English*]

Who could forget the 1972 Summit Series, la Série du siècle? He was the calm giant who stopped the formidable Soviet machine.

[*Translation*]

Today, this great goaltender is minding Canada's social conscience.

[*English*]

I urge everyone here to join me in congratulating the member for York Centre, le numéro 29 pour toujours.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the leader of the opposition was asked whether or not the Liberal Party would take back Marc-Yvan Côté, a man who admitted that he gave out \$120,000 in cash in Quebec during a federal election. The member answered that they could not shun forever those who make mistakes. He also added that his punishment was excessive. This is very serious.

Just one year ago, Canadians asked for change. They demanded it. The leader of the Liberal Party does not understand that Canadians rejected that type of Liberal government, rejected the type of corruption and dishonesty that he wants to return to the Liberal Party by taking back Mr. Côté.

The leader of the opposition is showing his blatant lack of judgement and direction.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada currently has a Prime Minister who does not believe in the science of climate change and sides with the skeptics. He has described this science as a controversial hypothesis, and on December 9, he referred to so-called greenhouse gases.

Canadians want to know whether the Prime Minister will admit that he was wrong and whether he recognizes now that climate change caused by human activity represents a serious threat to humanity.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, I told the leader of the Liberal Party that it is not sufficient to recognize climate change; it is necessary to act. That is what this government has done with the ecoenergy initiative, with its renewable fuels initiatives and with its investments in public transit. It is necessary to act. He refused to act. This government is taking action.

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he actually is just nullifying the cuts he made, no more.

I gave the opportunity to the Prime Minister, in French, to say to Canadians that he is no longer a climate change denier. Let us try again in English.

Will the Prime Minister admit that when he cut \$5.6 billion in climate change programs, broke Canada's word on Kyoto, and went to Vancouver to announce a so-called clean air act that was so weak he had to fire his minister a few weeks afterward, it was because he does not believe in the science of climate change?

● (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, on the contrary, it is not sufficient to simply believe in something. One has to actually do something about it to prove that one is serious.

That is why this government has introduced the ecoenergy initiative. It is why this government introduced a major plan on renewable fuels. It is why this government made major investments in public transport.

It is that member who, when in power, signed the Kyoto protocol and then for a decade did nothing to get it done and left Canada with the worst record under Kyoto in the entire world. He did not get it done.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when he was in opposition, the Prime Minister opposed any initiative the Liberal government was doing to fight climate change. He was, for instance, adamantly opposed to any regulations on greenhouse gas emissions. He threatened the Liberal government with calling an election to stop our initiative on it. In the last election, he campaigned on any regulations against greenhouse gas emissions.

Will he now commit to putting in place strong regulations and caps on industry?

[Translation]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government did not create any initiatives to implement the Kyoto protocol, nothing at all. This government, on the other hand, was the first to introduce clean air legislation, which the Liberal Party is trying to block in committee. The leader of the Liberal Party had his chance for 10 years, but he did not take it.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year, the former environment minister in this Conservative government announced in Nairobi that Canada was backing away from its international obligations and no longer wanted to do its part to fight global warming.

Will the government promise today to again make Canada an international leader, and will it again commit Canada to honouring the Kyoto protocol?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have learned a lot about the inaction of the Liberal government thanks to the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

During the Liberal leadership campaign, he was very clear that the leader of the Liberal Party, the man sitting next to him, did absolutely nothing to reduce greenhouse gases.

The former government did not do the right thing, so the current government will.

[English]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at least the Liberal Party knows it has a job to do. The government spent a year pretending it had no job to do at all.

Let me ask the question again. Last week the United Kingdom special envoy on climate change pleaded with Canada to stop ignoring the issue and to rejoin international efforts to develop a plan for long term action on climate change. Will the Minister of the Environment work with our international partners to develop a binding international long term plan?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that question is yes. Canada will accept its responsibilities around the world to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but it is more than giving lectures abroad. It also requires that we take real action here in Canada, real action to reduce greenhouse gases, real action to ensure our air is clean, and real action to manage chemicals which have a huge relationship between health and our environment.

* * *

● (1425)

*[Translation]***AEROSPACE INDUSTRY**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we recently learned that the government awarded Boeing a contract worth several billion dollars without going to tender or providing any guarantees with respect to economic benefits for the Quebec aerospace industry, which represents nearly 60% of the Canadian industry.

Oral Questions

How could the government award without tender a contract worth several billion dollars without first ensuring that 60% of economic benefits go to Quebec, as they should?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government intends to rebuild the Canadian Forces. We are in the process of negotiating contracts for several types of equipment for the armed forces.

Our government intends to secure benefits for every part of Canada. It does not intend, however, to interfere in the contract award process, which is based on the contractors and their relationships within the industry.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government does not interfere in the process, does not go to tender and selects a company that will decide under which conditions the government will be purchasing aircraft. The control is in Boeing's hands, not the government's. That is flying pretty low.

If the auto industry can be concentrated in Ontario, then it should be possible to respect the fact that 60% of the aerospace industry is in Quebec. Why was that not part of the terms and conditions?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Boeing is the only company in the world with a certain type of large aircraft.

I can say with certainty that Quebec and the other regions will derive benefits. Should the Bloc Québécois achieve its goals of separation, however, I can assure the hon. member that the benefits to Quebec will be nil.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we will no longer have to pay for Canada's planes, we will buy our own and have them made where we see fit.

The Minister of Industry and the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities have refused to stand up to protect Quebec's aerospace industry.

By refusing to impose conditions, does the government not realize it is leaving it up to Boeing to use our money and decide for itself where aerospace development will take place in Canada over the next few years? This is unacceptable.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind my colleague that on January 23 last year, Quebecers and Canadians voted to change the former government. They had had enough of the previous Liberal government's policy of interference and patronage.

The current government is being asked to engage in patronage and to dictate to the contract winner where the contracts should go. We are not in politics to interfere in private contracts. I assure you that all the Canadian companies will benefit from these military contracts.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can a Minister of Industry come and tell us here in the House of Commons that he is not interfering in a \$3.4 billion contract that he handed out without a call for tenders?

He chose Boeing and told it that it could develop where it wanted. That is not what we would call responsible. It is irresponsible and that is not what Quebecers expected of him.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. members of the opposition that our priority is to give the Canadian Forces the equipment they need at the best possible price. That is what is important.

Furthermore, thanks to these military contracts, we will have industrial spinoffs throughout Canada that will benefit the country's entire aerospace industry.

However, let us be clear, this government and the Minister of Industry will not interfere in decisions of a private nature.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to Environment Canada, in Canada the temperature is warming up twice as fast as in the rest of the planet. The year 2006 is the second warmest ever in Canada. Over the last nine years, the temperature for all the seasons, except for one, was above normal.

Will the Prime Minister finally take quick action to speed up the process involving the special committee on climate change, yes or no?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has already taken urgent action regarding climate change through our ecoenergy initiatives, the development of renewable fuels and also, as I just mentioned, the investments we made in public transit in our first budget.

We are taking action and we hope the House will help us do our job.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the announcement of initiatives of such a pathetic nature, because they were drawn, frankly, from the terrible record of the previous administration, does not amount to rapid action.

In fact, what we are seeing from the Conservatives right now is exactly the same strategy we saw from the previous government. They brought forward 40 witnesses to tie up the committee for months and the Liberals have brought forward 41 witnesses. They both should get a delay of game penalty, for Heaven's sake. Let us get moving.

Will the Prime Minister instruct his team to get moving on real action on climate change?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can just mention that this government has recently put \$230 million into clean technology with the ecoenergy technology initiative, \$1.5 billion for the ecoenergy renewable initiative for renewable energy technologies, \$300 million for the ecoenergy efficiency initiative, and \$30 million to help protect the Great Bear Rainforest. These announcements were all well received by Canadians, by stakeholders, and this government will continue to act.

Oral Questions

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been demanding action from the government over here for at least a year. It is now clear that the Prime Minister did not have the political will to do anything. He was even prepared to sacrifice his first Minister of the Environment to disguise his own failures. It is pathetic.

Thanks to the former Liberal government, the new Minister of the Environment has every tool he could conceivably want at his disposal to fight climate change. Will the minister act now and not wait for a so-called clean air act and declare greenhouse gases to be toxic and strictly cap all of these emissions in Canada immediately?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we realize the urgency to act on the issue of greenhouse gas emissions. We believe that climate change is a huge environmental challenge facing the world. That is why this government is the very first government in Canadian history to come forward with a notice of intent to regulate industry, to ensure that we deal head on with the challenges of greenhouse gas emissions. We can also at the same time work to reduce pollution and smog, another example of the Liberal government's inaction over the last 13 years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it looks as though the Minister of Natural Resources is trying to rebuild his image. However, Canadians will remember that it is this same minister who abolished the EnerGuide program and who is now proposing a watered down version. It is this same minister who also abolished the incentives to produce wind energy and who is now coming up with a weaker version of the program.

When will the minister stop being arrogant and admit that he was wrong to abolish all these programs last spring?

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us just look at the record. I have the budget of 2005 which shows \$200 million for wind energy. How much of that was delivered? Not a dime. It shows \$200 million for sustainable energy, for technology. How much of that was delivered? Not a dime.

The old Liberal government had 13 years to deliver. It did not get the job done. In less than one year this new government has delivered action for Canadians to reduce greenhouse gases.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only thing they have done is reintroduce Liberal programs that were working which they had frozen for a year.

In a rush to please the Bush administration, the Prime Minister has offered up an expansion of the oil sands. On October 28 he said that oil sands production was on its way to three million or four million barrels a day. At that rate experts predict that oil sands production will account for roughly 25% of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions by 2010.

While the Conservatives went on a two week regifting spree, giving back some of the environmental programs they had slashed, their "hosed in Canada" plan was revealed.

Given his oil sands plan, will the Prime Minister now acknowledge that even his pathetic targets cannot be met?

•(1435)

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the programs were not working. Let us just listen to the Commissioner of the Environment. On the EnerGuide for existing houses, we found that they were complex and confusing. We found a number of Treasury Board decisions. The programs were not working. We are delivering initiatives that are delivering concrete results on greenhouse gas emissions.

I know the new leader of the Liberal Party pretends holier-than-thou that he is a great environmentalist. Why did he not do something when he had a chance?

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only thing the Conservatives have done is reintroduce Liberal programs.

While our then environment minister was bringing the world together to work on the post-Kyoto environment, they were sitting there pretending that climate change did not exist. In fact, the only thing the Conservatives have done is to copy Liberal programs. If they are going to keep copying us, they should just put on a green scarf and get out of the way.

Two weeks ago the natural resources minister stated that his carbon bingeing was simply not aggressive enough. He said the oil sands should see a potential increase of four or five times. Will the Prime Minister admit his real priority—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of discussion on this side of the House as to whether a Liberal plan actually existed. I am pleased to tell the House today that they did have a Liberal plan. The plan was to host a \$50 million talkfest. The plan was to spend \$5 billion on buying hot air credits in Russia while not improving our environment today. Finally, buy a dog, name it Kyoto, and call it a day. That is not good enough for Canadians.

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[*Translation*]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Michael Fortier, wanted at least 40% of the contract awarded to Boeing to come to Quebec. That was not a lot, considering that nearly 60% of the aerospace industry is based in Quebec and that this reflects the demand in Quebec.

How can the Prime Minister justify so disrespectfully undermining his minister, thus confirming that the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, like his colleagues from Quebec, has no real power in important decisions made by this government?

Oral Questions

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat this once again. The Liberal Party's culture of political interference is not a culture that is shared by this new government.

We award contracts to the best possible bidders and they will respect our industrial development policy in order to ensure the best results for Canada.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it definitely does not offer contracts to the best because it does not even have the chance to choose. It awards them without tenders.

In the mid 1980s, Brian Mulroney's Conservative government made sure that the spinoffs from the F18s went primarily to Quebec, thus reflecting the fact that Quebec played a major role in the aerospace industry.

How can the current Conservative government simply refuse to do justice to Quebec in this contract, as the Mulroney government did? Should this be seen as unwillingness or a flagrant lack of courage?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the members of the opposition, I believe that the Quebec aerospace industry is made up of competent businesses and credible people who have proven themselves on the international stage. I am certain that Quebec, in the long term, will reap the necessary benefits from the contracts.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister complained to CBC Radio-Canada after it aired a report criticizing the Minister of Natural Resources' intention to increase the Alberta oil sands production fivefold.

Instead of getting angry at the CBC Radio-Canada, can the Prime Minister tell us if he agrees with the working group's conclusions, which recommended not only extracting five times more oil, but also simplifying environmental regulations to make it happen?

• (1440)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of concerns about the CBC Radio Canada program that stated clearly that this government signed an agreement with the U.S. government concerning the Alberta oil sands.

The truth is that the Liberal Party held those meetings with the United States, and that the proposals were made when the leader of the Liberal Party was Minister of the Environment. Perhaps the leader of the Liberal Party can tell this House very clearly who was there and who agreed to the proposal?

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the fact that the Minister of Natural Resources said he supports increasing oil extraction in Alberta to five million barrels a day proves that the government supports the conclusions in the report.

How can the government allow Alberta to contribute to increasing greenhouse gas emissions by producing five times more oil, then make Quebec and the other provinces bear the burden of reducing pollution?

[English]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is simply not true. We should look at the facts. On the books, there are probably in total around two million barrels a day in the next five to ten years of projects in the oil sands.

However, we all need to work together. We need to develop science and technology on reducing greenhouse gases. We have to become more energy efficient. I look forward to working constructively together with the member opposite on her ideas. However, to suggest that we had anything to do with this meeting is absolutely, patently ridiculous.

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[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians are asking themselves what our soldiers are doing in Afghanistan. Many believe, and rightly so, that they are there to protect the fundamental liberties of the people of Afghanistan. And now the Minister of National Defence tells us that we are in Afghanistan, but instead, in the spirit of vengeance, for retribution.

Was the minister speaking on behalf of the Prime Minister when he made that statement? Is this a sign of a change in Conservative policy for Afghanistan?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are in Afghanistan for three reasons. First, the president and the people of Afghanistan want us to be there. Second, we have a responsibility to help failed or failing states. Third, there is a UN mandate for Afghanistan to ensure that the Taliban do not come back.

When I referred to retribution, I was talking to the Chrétien government's initial actions in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this subject is too serious and this mission is too important to leave any lingering doubts about its objectives. The Minister of National Defence himself used the word "retribution" to define the objectives of this mission. Canadians do not need any further confusion. They need clarity with respect to this mission.

My question, therefore, is for the Prime Minister. Can he clearly tell us himself if the mission in Afghanistan is a mission for retribution, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I did not use that word, at least as translated. As I said before, a famous statesman here in the House said, "a proof is the proof, is the proof", and I am going to give the proof.

The Taliban government was in charge of Afghanistan. It sponsored the al-Qaeda terrorist who launched an attack from Afghanistan, attacked the Twin Towers and killed nearly 3,000 people, among whom were 24 Canadians.

Oral Questions

A number of countries, among those Canada, returned to Afghanistan, overthrew the Taliban government and replaced it with a democratic government. And that is the proof.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the “minister of vengeance”.

Yesterday, the CBC made public a document obtained through access to information. The document reveals the Canadian Forces' communications strategy for the next five years with regard to the mission in Afghanistan.

The document is dated May 2006. If I am counting correctly, five years takes us to 2011.

Why was there a five-year plan, when the mission is scheduled to end in 2009?

Did the government commit to a longer mission without telling Canadians? When will our soldiers really be coming back home?

• (1445)

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is referring to the CF campaign plan, which is based on the Afghan compact and government direction. The government, and the member will find if he actually reads the campaign plan, recognizes that we are committed to the end of February 2009.

I would like to congratulate the member opposite for his recent appointment as critic. I hope he spends many years fulfilling that task.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he has to come clean with Canadians on the true nature and length of Canada's commitment in Afghanistan.

We have also obtained a briefing book prepared for the minister that suggests Canadian troops will remain in Afghanistan until 2011.

Could the former military lobbyist truthfully tell the families of Canadian soldiers fighting in Afghanistan when Canadian troops will be coming home, or is it another case of “we can't handle the truth”?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, there was no briefing book for me. This is a military plan, internal for the military. It has directions that we are committed until the end of February 2009, and that is our commitment.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Natural Resources Canada recently released an internal audit showing serious faults in the operation of a 2003-2005 climate change program. The program was designed to cut greenhouse gases in the transport sector, including anti-idling in commercial truck engines and the promotion of alternative fuels, such as biodiesel.

Could the Minister of Natural Resources elaborate on the findings of this most important audit?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes, this was in fact a \$32 million climate change program under the old Liberal government. Once again, it was a scattered approach to climate change, but even worse, a climate change program that did not work. It was fraught with administrative errors. There were numerous problems.

Immediately upon finding out, I instructed my deputy minister to immediately tighten up the financial procedures. The person in charge of this program was immediately relieved of those duties.

Our government is committed to bringing the greatest and the highest standards of accountability, unlike the old Liberal government.

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FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every day in Canada working families are being gouged by the big banks. Average people everywhere are being forced to pay for access to their own money through outrageous ATM fees.

Considering how hard it is for Canadians to make a living and scrape together what they need to make ends meet and considering the banks' record breaking profits, will the Minister of Finance support NDP changes to the Bank Act and pledge his support to ban ATM fees?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an issue which the member raised previously in the House. At that time, I said that I would raise the issue with the banks, which I did. I look forward to further response from them.

The government does not regulate the day-to-day transactions of financial institutions with respect to fees and services, but we do believe in competition and choice for consumers. I would be pleased to report to the House and to the member further on the subject.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is it, after 49 days since we raised this question in the House, the minister promised some action.

All the polite questions in the world will not make ATM fees disappear, and it certainly will not put any more money in the hands and pockets of ordinary Canadians. The CEOs of Canada's big banks make more money in a few hours than average working families make in a year.

Why will the minister not just simply legislate a ban on ATM fees?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Quite Frankly, Mr. Speaker, it is not the role of the government to just simply legislate a ban on ATM fees.

I appreciate the question was asked in the House some time ago. The hon. member wrote me about this. I received the letter January 26, which is three days ago, or Friday.

Oral Questions

However, we try to act quickly. I will get right on it again and get back to the member as soon as I can.

* * *

• (1450)

PASSPORTS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservative incompetence has left thousands of Canadians unable to get a Canadian passport in a timely manner. Everyone knew about the American passport deadline, yet nothing was done to prepare.

Of course the Prime Minister does not care. Way back in March, he got his red passport in four days.

Why did the Minister of Foreign Affairs spend January travelling overseas without doing something, anything, to ensure Canadians got the travel documents they needed urgently?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as it stands, over 20,000 applications are being received daily. As a result, to deal with this increase in applications, some time ago Passport Canada hired 200 new administrative and clerical staff in the year 2000. Another 300 are being hired and Passport Canada has recalled retired examiners and moved former passport examiners into other areas of the agency.

These people are working 24/7 to deal with the increase in applications. They are doing everything they can. The government is supporting them in that effort and will continue to do so.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would say too little, too late. People lining up at 3:40 a. m. at the Edmonton passport office is simply not acceptable.

Joanne Scott was trying to take her family to Disneyland. "It is horrific," she said of the government's efforts. She does not believe Canada's minority government when it says that everything is going great.

Why was the Conservative government so incompetent that nothing more was done to prepare for a passport crunch that everybody saw coming?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I outlined the steps that Passport Canada has taken. I think the member opposite and members of the previous government must have been in Disneyland to not foresee some of the impending crisis that would occur as a result of the western hemisphere travel initiative.

We will continue to do everything we can to deal with this crunch. Canada has been advancing our interests when it comes to the United States and the implementation of this initiative. We will continue to do so.

We are on the file. Unlike the previous government, we do not sit back and wait for things to happen.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the Wheat Board, the government just cannot help but be deceptive.

Finally, after relentless pressure and after his gag orders, propaganda campaigns and firings, the minister has put forward nothing but confusing questions. One report called them intellectually dishonest.

The House supported questions written by western farm organizations. Why has the minister ignored the will of the House and why is he attempting to perpetuate a fraud on farmers with deceptive questions?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that could not be further from the truth. The member opposite, as well as many farmers and this party, wanted to go ahead with a consultative plebiscite. We have done that. We also have promised we will not make any changes on the wheat portion until we have an other plebiscite later on.

On this one, there are really three options for farmers. The status quo. They have a question that supports the status quo. They could abolish the board. That is not our position, but it is a fair question. The third one is, would they like to use the board when it suits their business practices?

We want a strong Canadian Wheat Board, but we want it to be voluntary in the best interests of all western Canadian farmers.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government pretends that it has no intention of undermining supply management as it did with the Canadian Wheat Board, but on December 21 the Minister of International Trade confirmed the government's real agenda: Supply management is already on the chopping block at WTO.

When will the Minister of International Trade own up to his actions and admit to Canadians that the government has already put supply management on the table as a bargaining chip?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will not get into any more Disneyland comments, but the members opposite are living in a dream world. Again, our party policy is to support supply management. We campaigned on that. We have consistently promoted that.

This weekend the Minister of International Trade and myself were in Davos having discussions both bilaterally and multilaterally with our WTO partners. Consistently, both of us brought forward the Canadian position. We support supply management, we support protection of sensitive industries and we are taking steps to ensure that happens.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the former Minister of the Environment promised to announce the greenhouse gas emission reduction targets in mid-January. We are still waiting, yet the new minister has further delayed the announcement and is saying that the targets will not be known for weeks or even months.

Is the new minister aware that if the government wants to be credible as it goes green, the first thing it should do is set targets, or else it may not reach its objectives?

• (1455)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last October, our government was the first in Canadian history to say that it would deal with industry. This is very important.

It was very clear in October that this government would regulate greenhouse gas emissions and air quality. Last week, the Prime Minister said that this announcement would be made in the coming weeks or months. Bill C-30 is a very important part of this.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government has been delaying its commitments for weeks and months, and this is unacceptable. This government, which claims to be in favour of a free market, should be in favour of establishing a carbon exchange. It makes sense.

Does the minister understand that by refusing to set precise targets, he is jeopardizing the establishment of a carbon exchange in Montreal?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is very interesting. Last year, the Bloc Québécois voted in favour of a resolution that supported national unity, and now, the Bloc Québécois critic is supporting a request from the oil companies in Calgary. This is very interesting.

Of course, we are willing to work with all the members, even the Bloc Québécois, on the committee studying Bill C-30. The committee begins meeting today. I hope that it will look at real solutions and support our goal: to deal with industry in Canada.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, regarding the new Ambassador for Fisheries Conservation, over the weekend in his statement the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans was angry that we questioned the appointment, saying that this was a Liberal initiative of 2005. Finally someone on the other side now admits that when it comes to environment and conservation, the government just cannot stop stealing our ideas.

But the job was not posted. That is the question for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. How many people were considered for the posting and why did the appointment not go through the parliamentary vetting process, as promised by the Prime Minister?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr.

Speaker, I am a little confused by the member's question, because on the one hand he is praising us for following his party's initiative in recognizing that we need a fisheries ambassador because of the importance of fisheries to his province and to the country.

We have Mr. Sullivan, with 15 years of public service, a man who grew up in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, a man who understands well the fisheries, who will represent his province and Canadians with pride and ability and who will bring this issue to the forefront, working with the very able Minister of Fisheries and Oceans we have already.

That member should be ashamed to be dissing his own province and this initiative and should be praising the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government made a historic announcement that we would finally clean up the Sydney tar ponds. Could the government tell the House why we can be assured that this will finally help alleviate the worries of the residents of Sydney by resolving this longstanding health issue?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased yesterday to be in Sydney to make the announcement with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment as well as the Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

After 13 years of inaction on the file, finally we have a plan that follows the recommendations of the panel to use the safest option, involving solidification, containment and capping of contaminated soil. There will be a monitoring process to follow.

The residents of Sydney have waited far too long. They got nothing from the party opposite. We are doing something. We are getting things done to protect the environment and to protect health in Sydney. Across the country, this government is getting it done.

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AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a recently released memo from the Chief of the Defence Staff makes it clear that the government wants our troops in Afghanistan long after 2009.

Clearly the government is preparing the military for a long war, and that is not what Canadians have been told. Will the minister tell us what the exit strategy is and will he tell us whether or not our troops will be in Kandahar after 2009?

Oral Questions

● (1500)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the document referred to used the Afghanistan compact and government direction. The Afghan compact deals with time-frames of 2010-11. The government, however, has committed to the end of February 2009. The military knows that. If the member had the complete details of the plan, she would see that the military is committed to the end of February 2009.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP recently obtained a confidential briefing document on the government's communication plan for Afghanistan. It indicates a decline in public support and it criticizes the media for covering the combat operations of the mission too much.

The report says that recently returned soldiers should be used by the department to boost support for the mission. Why is the minister using our brave men and women for propaganda rather than them telling the truth about the mission?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am amazed that the member was actually in Afghanistan for a week. She saw the troops. She talked to the troops. In fact, in one of her conversations she admitted that she was impressed with what was going on but that when she returned to Parliament she would have to toe the party line, and that is what she is doing.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

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JUSTICE

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Québec publicly stated that he was concerned about the fact that the arm's length status of screening committees could be changed.

Will the minister take into consideration the criticisms of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, of the Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Québec, and of judges and lawyers across the country? Will he stop appointing to judicial advisory committees only those people who are affiliated with the Conservative ideology?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been a process in place since 1988, I believe, with the judicial appointments committee. It has worked very well. There has been a number of modifications over the years. I applaud those modifications that were brought in by my predecessor. The criteria will continue to be people who have a first class legal mind who are competent to do the job.

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LITERACY

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday was Family Literacy Day. Canadians

know that our government is focused on programs and projects that actually deliver results for ordinary Canadians.

Can the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development please share with the House what investments our government is making to help adults improve their reading and writing skills?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new government is committed to helping people learn to read and write. The Canadian Council of Learning has just released a study which concluded that since 1994 there has been no improvement in literacy skills in Canada.

We do not want to repeat that sorry record, so we are making changes. On Saturday, I announced a grant to the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators to help them reach 350,000 municipal workers to give them the skills they need.

* * *

INCOME TRUSTS

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, in the gallery today is Bill Barrowclough, a retiree from Peterborough—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member knows that it is out of order for members to make reference to the presence of individuals in the gallery. The hon. member for Halton will put his question.

Hon. Garth Turner: Mr. Speaker, the wife of this particular voter died in a car crash six years ago. He invested the money from that insurance settlement in an income trust for the benefit of his grandchildren, but much of that money has now disappeared because of the government's action.

I am wondering what the Minister of Finance might be able to say to this particular gentleman and if he will agree to meet with him after question period.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to answer the second part of the question first, of course I will meet with the person mentioned by the member after question period. I am happy to do that.

The decision with respect to income trusts, I note, was the subject of a ways and means motion in this place, which, as I recall, the member for Halton supported.

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● (1505)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Juan José Salazar, Minister of Agriculture for the Republic of Peru.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Janusz Krupski, Secretary of State of the Office for Veterans Affairs and Repressed Persons for the Republic of Poland.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Routine Proceedings

The Speaker: Also, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable John van Dongen, Minister of State for Intergovernmental Relations of British Columbia, the Honourable Mel Knight, Minister of Energy of Alberta, and the Honourable James Kenyon, Minister of Economic Development of Yukon.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today in question period the new Minister of the Environment read from a particular piece of paper and accused the former Liberal government of spending some \$5 billion buying hot air from Russia. The former Conservative minister of the environment got into rather deep trouble for providing the House with false information, including this same false allegation, which in fact has been declared false by the Commissioner for the Environment.

Will the new Minister of the Environment withdraw this untrue assertion and table that specific piece of paper that he was reading from during question period when he made the allegation?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are getting into here is clearly debate. There is no doubt that there was the provision and potential for that to be done by the government. We have been told by many people that it was the only way that the Liberals could possibly have met the Kyoto commitment. I, therefore, do not see that we have any issue to discuss.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during question period today, the Minister of National Defence attributed some comments to me that I never made and I would like him to apologize.

What I did say while I was in Afghanistan was that I was incredibly impressed with the calibre of the men and women in the Canadian armed forces. I was impressed with their education, their ability, their training and their professionalism. I never at any time indicated that I did not support my party position. In fact, my party position is my position and a position that I support.

I am offended by what the minister said and I was actually quite surprised that he would make those kinds of comments in the House today. I ask him to apologize.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am quite sure what the Minister of National Defence was suggesting is that our troops need to be supported both in Afghanistan and back here in Canada. We know the members opposite have a habit of saying one thing when they are meeting the troops and another thing when they are in front of the cameras. I believe that is an entirely accurate assessment of the situation.

● (1510)

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, I find that difficult to accept as any kind of an apology. I would expect better of the government side of the House.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, on two occasions now arising from question period, one raised by myself and the other by the NDP, government ministers have been demonstrably in the position of providing false information. It is not good enough for some other member of the cabinet to rise in his or her place and say, "Oh, tut, tut, it is not true". It is true and the ministers need to recant.

The Speaker: The ministers may need to repent, as the hon. member for Wascana said, but they are not present in the chamber, and I can say that but nobody else can, and we will need to wait until we hear from them. There may be other submissions. Obviously the government House leader and his parliamentary secretary have done their best in the circumstances. There may be something else to say—

Mr. Ralph Goodale: It is not good enough.

The Speaker: It may or may not be but we may hear more later. The Chair has infinite patience and is prepared to await the return of these people in case they have something to say on this point before the Chair makes any decision on the issues that have been raised. I will review the matter and if a decision from the Chair is warranted and important there will be one forthcoming. I can assure the hon. member that this will not just go under the carpet despite his outrage.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 176 petitions.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, 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 Canadian delegation of the Canadian group of the Interparliamentary Union respecting its participation in the annual parliamentary hearings at the United Nations held in New York on November 13 and 14, 2006.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

Routine Proceedings

In accordance with the order of reference of Tuesday, October 17, 2006, your committee has considered Bill C-252, An Act to amend the Divorce Act (access for spouse who is terminally ill or in critical condition), and agreed on Wednesday, December 13, 2006, to report it with amendment.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to designate Thursday, February 1, as an allotted day.

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PETITIONS**MARRIAGE**

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first one is with regard to marriage and that marriage be between one man and one woman and none other.

● (1515)

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition signed by constituents in my riding asking that the age of consent be raised from 14 to 16.

MARRIAGE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present petitions from hundreds of people across Manitoba on the marriage issue. These petitions continue to come into our offices.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to reopen the issue of marriage and amend the marriage for civil purposes act in order to promote and defend marriage as the lawful union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

AGE OF CONSENT

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also would like to present a petition signed by literally hundreds of petitioners. The petitioners call upon Parliament to amend the Criminal Code. The petitioners draw the attention of the House to the fact that youth under the age of 16 are more vulnerable to be pressured into sexual acts than that of youth older than 16, and that currently any adult can legally partake in a sexual act with a minor as young as 12.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon Parliament to enact legislation to protect our children by raising the age of consent to 16.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present another petition of 178 signatures from my riding organized tirelessly by the BC Sustainable Energy Association.

The petition calls upon the government to honour Canada's commitment to the Kyoto accord and to create a plan to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050.

The NDP's success in pressuring for an all party committee is because of the endless commitment of Canadian citizens and community groups who have raised their voices in protest and forced the issue of climate change to bring it to the federal spotlight. I applaud the BCSEA and all Victorians who have pitched in on this historic campaign.

LABELLING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of a number of constituents and concerned Canadians, we are not happy with the fact that the issue is still before Parliament. I refer to a motion that was passed by the House on April 23, 2001, almost seven years ago, when this House almost unanimously supported my motion for warning labels on beverage containers which would read, "WARNING: Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause birth defects".

Here we are, almost seven years later, and nothing has happened, the past government and the present government included.

The petitioners call upon the government to finally live up to its earlier promise and agree to Canadians' demands that action be taken with respect to trying to stop the spread of fetal alcohol syndrome disorder.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 115, 116, 117, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129 and 130.

[Text]

Question No. 115—**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:**

With regard to unpaid taxes on corporate profits transferred to foreign jurisdictions with lower rates of taxation: (a) how many investigations are currently active; (b) what is the current estimated value of recoverable taxes; (c) what is the current cost per day to the government of monitoring and pursuing the full recovery of these taxes; and (d) what is the total amount of tax recovered from corporations in this regard in each of the past five fiscal years?

Hon. Carol Skelton (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Revenue Agency, CRA, has included the following contextual information to provide a framework for its response to the honourable member's question.

Canada is part of a global trade and financial system. Countries compete to attract investors and trade partners, and this competition extends to tax systems. Countries offer tax concessions and favourable tax rates to all or some industries/investors. Some of these competing countries are tax havens. Every country has the right to structure its tax system to meet its needs and these are issues of tax policy for each country, not for tax administrations.

Routine Proceedings

Residents of Canada must report and pay tax on their worldwide income. The CRA has no view on where Canadian businesses or individuals invest so long as they report their income and pay taxes as required under Canada's tax laws. The CRA's concern lies with the abusive use of tax havens; i.e., when taxpayers use bank secrecy laws, or the absence of effective exchange of information with other countries, to conceal assets and income that should be taxed.

The abusive use of tax havens is an element of what is known as "aggressive tax planning". Aggressive tax planning consists of transactions that offend the object and spirit of the Income Tax Act, the Excise Tax Act, or of treaties. As part of the strategy to combat aggressive tax planning, the CRA established 11 "centres of expertise" across the country in 2005-2006, and created teams of experts from the specialized audit areas of international tax and tax avoidance to, among other things, combat aggressive tax planning and the inappropriate use of tax havens and tax shelters, both domestic and international.

a) In the context mentioned above and at any given time, the CRA has a number of active audit cases of corporations whose business transactions include offshore jurisdictions (though not necessarily lower rate jurisdictions and/or tax havens). As of the end of November 2006, there were 305 such audits underway. (Please note that the CRA uses the term "investigations" to describe suspected cases of criminal tax fraud, whereas "audits" are carried out to ensure compliance with tax laws.)

b) In this context, the CRA refers to "additional taxes assessed" rather than "recoverable taxes". The value of additional taxes assessed is only known when audits are completed. In 2005-2006, the CRA assessed additional taxes of \$174 million directly related to aggressive international tax planning and, in the first six months of 2006-2007, the CRA assessed additional taxes of \$215 million.

c) As the number of audits, auditors, and the amount of time spent each day on any specific file can vary at any given time, the CRA does not monitor the cost per day of carrying out its compliance activities. Rather, the CRA captures the total audit time on a file.

d) While the CRA does capture information on the component parts of additional tax assessed for each completed audit, it does not aggregate each of the components across all 300,000 plus compliance actions each year. The CRA does report additional tax assessed in total and for each of its programs such as large business and GST/HST audits in its annual report.

It should be noted that the 2005 federal budget allowed for specific funding for the aggressive international tax planning program. In 2005-2006, the CRA began tracking results related to aggressive international tax planning separately. Statistics are not available for years prior to 2005.

During 2005-2006, the CRA assessed additional taxes of \$174 million directly related to aggressive international tax planning and, in the first six months of 2006-2007, the CRA assessed additional taxes of \$215 million.

Question No. 116—Mr. Robert Bouchard:

With regard to the use of CF-18s: (a) what are the international training standards for the CF-18s used in Canada for training on firing ranges; (b) what benefits could

CFB Valcartier offer with regard to the international standards for CF-18 training; and (c) regarding the exemption granted in 2005 to allow some air-to-ground missions to be carried out at the Valcartier firing range for the CF-18s from CFB Bagotville, what are the restrictions pertaining to this exemption?

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

a) CF-18 aircrew use the North Atlantic Treaty Organization training standards to qualify air personnel in air-to-ground delivery of weapons on firing ranges. These standards are based on North Atlantic Treaty Organization Allied Command Europe Force Standards Volume 3, Annex A to Chapter 2, which describes weapons employment standards for weapons in the CF-18 munitions inventory declared to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

b) CFB Valcartier is used for air-to-ground training by the CF-18 aircrew based at CFB Bagotville, Quebec. Access to the range allows the aircrew to train in order to be able to meet the internationally recognized North Atlantic Treaty Organization training standard adopted by Canada. Although the range at CFB Valcartier is one of a number available for required training, it is considered extremely valuable because it is the only range within flying distance of CFB Bagotville, where a number of CF-18s are stationed. Without access to the CFB Valcartier range, CFB Bagotville CF-18s would have to deploy from their main operating base, an expensive proposition in terms of time and financial resources.

c) The exemption highlights different safety standards of the army and air force at CFB Valcartier due to different training needs. The CFB Valcartier air weapons range is safe for bombing exercises, and that is why it was issued an exemption. Under the existing waiver, the air weapons range at CFB Valcartier is authorized for strafe, rockets, and single release of Mk-80 series bombs, both live and inert. There are also a series of risk mitigation actions for the use of live weapons, including restricting access to the range and currency requirements for the aircrew. Additional restrictions, to increase safety at the range, include the following:

1. The secondary tower is unmanned during live bomb deliveries;
2. Only essential personnel are allowed into the master tower for all missions;
3. Visual confirmation by the range safety officer, RSO, that the aircraft is lined up properly must be achieved prior to the aircraft arming its delivery system; and
4. In order to develop range familiarity, each pilot must practice inert bomb deliveries prior to a live drop.

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 117—Hon. Larry Bagnell:**

With regard to the purchase of high frequency, surface wave radar systems to monitor off-shore activity in the Canadian North: (a) did the Department of National Defence cancel this purchase and, if so, was it curtailed (i) because of funding cuts, (ii) because the Department is looking for new frequency bands so that these monitoring systems can be implemented, (iii) because of other reasons; (b) how soon can these systems be implemented and the cancellation of this purchase rescinded; and (c) what role will these systems play in relation to existing monitoring and surveillance systems in Canada's Arctic as well as the preservation of our Arctic sovereignty?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was never any intent to establish northern sites with the high frequency surface wave radar, HFSWR, network project. The sites under consideration for the network project as outlined in the statement of work in June 2004 included: Flagstaff Point, Nfld.; New Harbour Head, N.S.; Hartlen Point, N.S.; Estevan Point, B.C.; and Topknot Point, B.C.

a) The high frequency surface wave radar network project was cancelled by the Government of Canada primarily because the Department of National Defence was unable to secure unrestricted operational use of the technology due to commitments under an international agreement on the use of the radio frequency spectrum. This added significant and unacceptable risk to the project.

The future of the high frequency surface wave radar hinges on evolving the technology from its current state to one that not only meets the operational requirement, but that also satisfies Canada's obligation under international agreements. As research and development was not the stated goal of the high frequency surface wave radar network project, the project, as it was originally conceived, was cancelled.

b) As discussed above, the current technology will not be considered for implementation, due to obligations under an international agreement on the use of radio frequencies.

c) There is no body of evidence that indicates high frequency surface wave radar technology provides capability in the northern environment. The technology was developed on the east coast of Canada, and was developed to accommodate the environmental, ionospheric and geographic conditions of Atlantic Canada. While it is scientifically reasonable to assume that this technology would function reasonably well on the Pacific coast, there is no such assurance that this could be applied in the north, given that high frequency surface radar technology would be impacted by the significantly different operating conditions in the Arctic. For this reason, northern sites were never considered for the HFSWR network project.

Question No. 124—Ms. Dawn Black:

With regard to programs and spending by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) within the riding of New Westminster—Coquitlam: (a) what was the amount spent in 2006; (b) what is the projected budget for 2007; (c) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families currently exist; (d) how many new CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families are planned for the remainder of 2006 and 2007; and (e) what is the amount that CMHC has provided to housing co-ops in the riding for maintenance over the last two years and what will be the amount over the next two years?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to programs and

spending administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, within the riding of New Westminster-Coquitlam:

Social housing: CMHC currently administers 342 co-operative housing units which provide housing for singles and families. These co-ops receive annual subsidies of \$518,383. Under program design, there is no CMHC funding specifically earmarked for maintenance. Co-operatives set housing charges at levels sufficient to cover project operating costs including maintenance expenses and the provision of an allocation to a capital repair reserve fund. The funding provided by CMHC is used to offset or reduce these project operating costs and/or to subsidize housing charges for households in need.

In addition, CMHC provided funding to another 967 units in the riding of New Westminster-Coquitlam, committed under various programs, which provides housing for singles and families. Of this total, there are 552 units benefiting from a preferential interest rate and some of these units are also benefiting from a forgivable capital contribution grant equivalent to 10% of the original project cost. The remaining 415 units are currently receiving annual funding of \$902,637. On June 19, 2006 CMHC signed a social housing agreement, SHA, with the province of British Columbia. CMHC annual funding contained in the Canada-B.C. SHA is currently some \$140 million. British Columbia also received this year a one-time lump sum amount of \$24 million for risks associated with future inflation, changes in interest rates and loan losses. The administration of these units was transferred to the province on January 15, 2007.

There may be additional units receiving on-going federal assistance under various federal-provincial programs already administered by the province of British Columbia which are not included in the above. The province has the lead role for these units and does not report subsidies by project to CMHC. For the first nine months of the year the Province had claimed federal funding of some \$75 million on these programs, covering some 27,000 units across the province.

Renovation programs: On December 19, 2006, the Government of Canada announced a \$256 million, two-year extension of the housing renovation and adaptation programs, effective April 1, 2007. The funding will help improve the quality of housing for an additional 38,000 low-income households in all regions of Canada. For 2006-2007, British Columbia's allocation for these housing renovation programs is approximately \$16.2 million.

Under federal renovation programs in the riding of New Westminster-Coquitlam, some \$218,870 has been committed for 23 units between January 1, 2006 and December 20, 2006. CMHC is unable to provide a forecast of how many units and dollars will be committed in 2007, since this will depend on the number of applications approved.

Routine Proceedings

Affordable housing initiative/Canada-B.C. affordable housing program agreement: Under the \$1 billion affordable housing initiative, AHI, over \$130 million has been allocated to British Columbia. As of September 30, 2006, 4,404 affordable housing units had been committed or announced, representing federal funding of \$126.6 million. The province of British Columbia and others are matching federal AHI investments.

British Columbia Housing, B.C. Housing, administers the Canada—British-Columbia affordable housing program agreement. According to information provided by B.C. Housing, there have not been any commitments under this program in the riding of New Westminster-Coquitlam in 2006. B.C. Housing is not required to provide forecasts of units planned by riding to CMHC, but it does report on projects approved during the year.

Housing trusts: The 2006 budget provides for a one time investment of \$1.4 billion towards helping Canadians find safe, adequate and affordable housing in all provinces and territories. This investment is being made through three housing trusts with provinces and territories to invest in affordable housing. This includes an affordable housing trust of \$800 million, a northern housing trust of \$300 million and a trust for off reserve aboriginal housing of \$300 million. Funding for these housing trusts, which was confirmed on September 25, 2006, will be allocated over three years. B.C.'s share of this funding is \$156.9 million.

Question No. 125—Mr. Charlie Angus:

With respect to programs and spending administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) within the riding of Timmins—James Bay: (a) what was the amount spent in 2006; (b) what is the projected budget for 2007; (c) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families currently exist; and (d) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families are planned for the remainder of 2006 and 2007?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to programs and spending administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, within the riding of Timmins-James Bay:

Social housing: CMHC currently administers 467 units in the riding of Timmins-James Bay, which provides housing for singles and families and committed under various programs, representing current annual funding of \$2,860,340. It is to be noted that the responsibility for the administration of the bulk of the CMHC subsidized projects off-reserve was transferred to the province of Ontario under the Canada-Ontario social housing agreement, SHA, signed in 1999. CMHC annual funding contained in the Canada-Ontario SHA is currently \$521 million. There may be additional units receiving on-going federal assistance under the social housing agreement administered by the province of Ontario which have not been included above. The province has the lead role for these units and does not report subsidies by project to CMHC.

Renovation programs: On December 19, 2006, the Government of Canada announced a \$256 million, two-year extension of the housing renovation and adaptation programs, effective April 1, 2007. The funding will help improve the quality of housing for an additional 38,000 low-income households in all regions of Canada. For 2006-2007, Ontario's allocation for these housing renovation programs is approximately \$38.4 million.

Under federal renovation programs in the riding of Timmins-James Bay, some \$926,530 has been committed for 85 units between January 1, 2006 and December 20, 2006. In addition to the above, there were 10 units committed in 2006 under the section 95 on-reserve rental housing program. These units will receive in total \$47,566 in annual subsidies once under administration. CMHC is unable to provide a forecast of how many units and dollars will be committed in 2007, since this will depend on the number of applications approved.

Affordable housing initiative/Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement: Under the \$1 billion affordable housing initiative, AHI, over \$366 million has been allocated to Ontario. As of September 30, 2006, 8,459 affordable housing units had been committed or announced, representing federal funding of \$140.4 million. The province of Ontario and municipalities are matching federal AHI investments.

The province of Ontario administers the Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement. According to information provided by the province of Ontario, there have not been any commitments under this program in the riding of Timmins-James Bay in 2006. The province of Ontario is not required to provide forecasts of units planned by riding to CMHC, but it does report on projects approved during the year.

Housing trusts: The 2006 budget provides for a one time investment of \$1.4 billion towards helping Canadians find safe, adequate and affordable housing in all provinces and territories. This investment is being made through three housing trusts with provinces and territories to invest in affordable housing. This includes an affordable housing trust of \$800 million, a northern housing trust of \$300 million and a trust for off reserve aboriginal housing of \$300 million. Funding for these housing trusts, which was confirmed on September 25, 2006, will be allocated over three years. Ontario's share of this funding is \$392.5 million.

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 126—Mr. Tony Martin:**

With respect to programs and spending administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) within the riding of Sault Ste. Marie: (a) what was the amount spent in 2006; (b) what is the projected budget for 2007; (c) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families currently exist; and (d) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families are planned for the remainder of 2006 and 2007?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to programs and spending administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, within the riding of Sault Ste. Marie:

Social housing: CMHC currently administers 234 units in the riding of Sault Ste. Marie, which provides housing for single and families and committed under various programs, representing current annual funding of \$523,437. It is to be noted that the responsibility for the administration of the bulk of the CMHC subsidized projects off-reserve was transferred to the province of Ontario under the Canada-Ontario social housing agreement, SHA, signed in 1999. CMHC annual funding contained in the Canada-Ontario SHA is currently \$521 million. There may be additional units receiving on-going federal assistance under the social housing agreement administered by the province of Ontario which are not included above. The province has the lead role for these units and does not report subsidies by project to CMHC.

Renovation programs: On December 19, 2006, the Government of Canada announced a \$256 million, two-year extension of the housing renovation and adaptation programs, effective April 1, 2007. The funding will help improve the quality of housing for an additional 38,000 low-income households in all regions of Canada. For 2006/2007, Ontario's allocation for these housing renovation programs is approximately \$38.4 million.

Under federal renovation programs in the riding of Sault Ste. Marie, some \$512,357 has been committed for 60 units between January 1, 2006 and December 20, 2006. In addition to the above, there were 44 units committed in 2006 under the section 95 on-reserve rental housing program. These units will receive in total \$131,800 in annual subsidies once under administration. CMHC is unable to provide a forecast of how many units and dollars will be committed in 2007, since this will depend on the number of applications approved.

Affordable housing initiative/Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement: Under the \$1 billion affordable housing initiative, AHI, over \$366 million has been allocated to Ontario. As of September 30, 2006, 8,459 affordable housing units had been committed or announced, representing federal funding of \$140.4 million. The province of Ontario and municipalities are matching federal AHI investments.

The province of Ontario administers the Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement. According to information provided by the province of Ontario, there have not been commitments under this program in the riding of Sault Ste. Marie in 2006. The province of Ontario is not required to provide forecasts of units planned by riding to CMHC, but it does report on projects approved during the year.

Housing Trusts: The 2006 budget provides for a one time investment of \$1.4 billion towards helping Canadians find safe, adequate and affordable housing in all provinces and territories. This investment is being made through three housing trusts with provinces and territories to invest in affordable housing. This includes an affordable housing trust of \$800 million, a northern housing trust of \$300 million and a trust for off reserve aboriginal housing of \$300 million. Funding for these housing trusts, which was confirmed on September 25, 2006, will be allocated over three years. Ontario's share of this funding is \$392.5 million.

Question No. 127—Ms. Chris Charlton:

With respect to programs and spending administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) within the riding of Hamilton Mountain: (a) what was the amount spent in 2006; (b) what is the projected budget for 2007; (c) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families currently exist; and (d) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families are planned for the remainder of 2006 and 2007?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to programs and spending administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, within the riding of Hamilton Mountain:

Social housing: CMHC currently administers 329 units, committed under various programs which provide housing for singles and families, representing current annual funding of \$422,694. It is to be noted that the responsibility for the administration of the bulk of the CMHC subsidized projects off-reserve was transferred to the province of Ontario under the Canada-Ontario social housing agreement, SHA, signed in 1999. CMHC annual funding contained in the Canada-Ontario SHA is currently \$521 million. There may be additional units receiving on-going federal assistance under the social housing agreement administered by the province of Ontario which are not included above. The province has the lead role for these units and does not report subsidies by project to CMHC.

Renovation programs: On December 19, 2006, the Government of Canada announced a \$256 million, two-year extension of the housing renovation and adaptation programs, effective April 1, 2007. The funding will help improve the quality of housing for an additional 38,000 low-income households in all regions of Canada. For 2006/2007, Ontario's allocation for these housing renovation programs is approximately \$38.4 million.

Routine Proceedings

Under federal renovation programs in the riding of Hamilton-Mountain, some \$294,597 has been committed for 52 units between January 1, 2006 and December 20, 2006. CMHC is unable to provide a forecast of how many units and dollars will be committed in 2007, since this will depend on the number of applications approved.

Affordable housing initiative/Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement: Under the \$1 billion affordable housing initiative, AHI, over \$366 million has been allocated to Ontario. As of September 30, 2006, 8,459 affordable housing units had been committed or announced, representing federal funding of \$140.4 million. The province of Ontario and municipalities are matching federal AHI investments.

The province of Ontario administers the Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement. According to information provided by the province of Ontario, there have not been any commitments under this program in the riding of Hamilton Mountain in 2006. The province of Ontario is not required to provide forecasts of units planned by riding to CMHC, but it does report on projects approved during the year.

Housing trusts: The 2006 budget provides for a one time investment of \$1.4 billion towards helping Canadians find safe, adequate and affordable housing in all provinces and territories. This investment is being made through three housing trusts with provinces and territories to invest in affordable housing. This includes an affordable housing trust of \$800 million, a northern housing trust of \$300 million and a trust for off reserve aboriginal housing of \$300 million. Funding for these housing trusts, which was confirmed on September 25, 2006, will be allocated over three years. Ontario's share of this funding is \$392.5 million.

Question No. 128—**Mr. David Christopherson:**

With respect to programs and spending administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) within the riding of Hamilton Centre: (a) what was the amount spent in 2006; (b) what is the projected budget for 2007; (c) how many CHMC-funded housing units for singles and families currently exist; and (d) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families are planned for the remainder of 2006 and 2007?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to programs and spending administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, within the riding of Hamilton Centre:

Social housing: CMHC currently administers 199 units, committed under various programs, which provides housing for singles and families and representing current annual funding of \$260,890.

It is to be noted that the responsibility for the administration of the bulk of the CMHC subsidized projects off-reserve was transferred to the province of Ontario under the Canada-Ontario social housing agreement, SHA, signed in 1999. CMHC annual funding contained in the Canada-Ontario SHA is currently \$521 million. There are additional units receiving on-going federal assistance under the social housing agreement administered by the province of Ontario which are not included above. The province has the lead role for these units and does not report subsidies by project to CMHC.

Renovation programs: On December 19, 2006, the Government of Canada announced a \$256 million, two-year extension of the housing renovation and adaptation programs, effective April 1, 2007. The funding will help improve the quality of housing for an additional 38,000 low-income households in all regions of Canada. For 2006/2007, Ontario's allocation for these housing renovation programs is approximately \$38.4 million.

Under federal renovation programs in the riding of Hamilton Centre, some \$2,103,340 has been committed for 249 units in the riding between January 1, 2006 and December 20, 2006. CMHC is unable to provide a forecast of how many more units and dollars will be committed in 2007, since this will depend on the number of applications approved.

Affordable housing initiative/Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement: Under the \$1 billion affordable housing initiative, AHI, over \$366 million has been allocated to Ontario. As of September 30, 2006, 8,459 affordable housing units had been committed or announced, representing federal funding of \$140.4 million. The province of Ontario and municipalities are matching federal AHI investments.

The province of Ontario administers the Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement. According to information provided by the province of Ontario, there have been 2 commitments totalling 162 units and \$1,940,845 under this program in the riding of Hamilton Centre in 2006. The province of Ontario is not required to provide forecasts of units planned by riding to CMHC, but it does report on projects approved during the year.

Housing trusts: The 2006 budget provides for a one time investment of \$1.4 billion towards helping Canadians find safe, adequate and affordable housing in all provinces and territories. This investment is being made through three housing trusts with provinces and territories to invest in affordable housing. This includes an affordable housing trust of \$800 million, a northern housing trust of \$300 million and a trust for off reserve aboriginal housing of \$300 million. Funding for these housing trusts, which was confirmed on September 25, 2006, will be allocated over three years. Ontario's share of this funding is \$392.5 million.

Question No. 129—**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:**

With respect to programs and spending administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) within the riding of Winnipeg North: (a) what was the amount spent in 2006; (b) what is the projected budget for 2007; (c) how many CHMC-funded housing units for singles and families currently exist; and (d) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families are planned for the remainder of 2006 and 2007?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to programs and spending administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, within the riding of Winnipeg North:

Social housing: CMHC currently administers 11 units, committed under various urban native programs, which provides housing for families, representing current annual funding of \$106,489. It is to be noted that the responsibility for the administration of the bulk of the CMHC subsidized projects off-reserve, including co-operative housing, was transferred to the province of Manitoba under the Canada-Manitoba social housing agreement, SHA, signed in 1998. CMHC annual funding contained in the Canada-Manitoba SHA is currently some \$70 million. There are additional units receiving on-going federal assistance under the social housing agreement administered by the province of Manitoba which are not included above. The province has the lead role for these units and does not report subsidies by project to CMHC.

Renovation programs: On December 19, 2006, the Government of Canada announced a \$256 million, two-year extension of the housing renovation and adaptation programs, effective April 1, 2007. The funding will help improve the quality of housing for an additional 38,000 low-income households in all regions of Canada. For 2006/2007, Manitoba's allocation for these housing renovation programs is approximately \$9.3 million.

Under federal renovation programs in the riding of Winnipeg North, the province has the lead role in delivering and administering these programs off-reserve, and does not provide details at the riding level.

Affordable housing initiative/Canada-Manitoba affordable housing program agreement: Under the \$1 billion affordable housing initiative, AHI, over \$36 million has been allocated to Manitoba. As of September 30, 2006, 1,811 affordable housing units had been committed or announced, representing federal funding of \$23.9 million. The province of Manitoba and municipalities are matching federal AHI investments.

Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation, MHRC, administers the Canada-Manitoba affordable housing program agreement. According to information provided by MHRC, there have been 2 commitments for a total of 13 units under this program in the riding of Winnipeg North in 2006. MHRC is not required to provide forecasts of units planned by riding to CMHC, but it does report on projects approved during the year.

Housing trusts: The 2006 budget provides for a one time investment of \$1.4 billion towards helping Canadians find safe, adequate and affordable housing in all provinces and territories. This investment is being made through three housing trusts with provinces and territories to invest in affordable housing. This includes an affordable housing trust of \$800 million, a northern housing trust of \$300 million and a trust for off reserve aboriginal housing of \$300 million. Funding for these housing trusts, which was confirmed on September 25, 2006, will be allocated over three years. Manitoba's share of this funding is \$61.5 million.

Question No. 130—**Hon. Jack Layton:**

With respect to programs and spending administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) within the riding of Toronto—Danforth: (a) what was the amount spent in 2006; (b) what is the projected budget for 2007; (c) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families currently exist; and (d) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families are planned for the remainder of 2006 and 2007?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to programs and spending administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, within the riding of Toronto-Danforth:

Social housing: CMHC currently administers 519 housing units, which provides housing for singles and families. Of this total, 335 units benefit from a preferential interest rate and a forgivable capital contribution equivalent to 10% of the original project costs. The remaining 184 units currently receive annual funding of \$236,417.

It is to be noted that the responsibility for the administration of the bulk of the CMHC subsidized projects off-reserve was transferred to the province of Ontario under the Canada-Ontario social housing agreement, SHA, signed in 1999. CMHC annual funding contained in the Canada-Ontario SHA is currently \$521 million. There are additional units receiving on-going federal assistance under the social housing agreement administered by the province of Ontario which are not included above. The province has the lead role for these units and does not report subsidies by project to CMHC.

Renovation programs: On December 19, 2006, the Government of Canada announced a \$256 million, two-year extension of the housing renovation and adaptation programs, effective April 1, 2007. The funding will help improve the quality of housing for an additional 38,000 low-income households in all regions of Canada. For 2006/2007, Ontario's allocation for these housing renovation programs is approximately \$38.4 million.

Under federal renovation programs in the riding of Toronto-Danforth, some \$614,608 has been committed for 73 units between January 1, 2006 and December 20, 2006. CMHC is unable to provide a forecast of how many more units and dollars will be committed in 2007, since this will depend on the number of applications approved.

Routine Proceedings

Affordable housing initiative/Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement: Under the \$1 billion affordable housing initiative, AHI, over \$366 million has been allocated to Ontario. As of September 30, 2006, 8,459 affordable housing units had been committed or announced, representing federal funding of \$140.4 million. The province of Ontario and municipalities are matching federal AHI investments.

The province of Ontario administers the Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement. According to information provided by the province of Ontario, there has not been any commitment under this program in the riding of Toronto-Danforth in 2006. The province of Ontario is not required to provide forecasts of units planned by riding to CMHC, but it does report on projects approved during the year.

Housing trusts: The 2006 budget provides for a one time investment of \$1.4 billion towards helping Canadians find safe, adequate and affordable housing in all provinces and territories. This investment is being made through three housing trusts with provinces and territories to invest in affordable housing. This includes an affordable housing trust of \$800 million, a northern housing trust of \$300 million and a trust for off reserve aboriginal housing of \$300 million. Funding for these housing trusts, which was confirmed on September 25, 2006, will be allocated over three years. Ontario's share of this funding is \$392.5 million.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 131, 132 and 133 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 118—**Hon. Roy Cullen:**

With regard to the decision of the Minister of Natural Resources to discontinue the funding of the Very Long Base Interferometry (VLBI) System: (a) what are the statistical or empirical data, the rationale and the evidence to support the discontinuation of the funding of this program; (b) what are the details of the cost benefit analysis or the financial estimates compiled for, or by the Department of Natural Resources relating to the cancellation or discontinuation or otherwise withdrawal of funding for the said program; (c) what information was provided to the Minister of Natural Resources or his staff by way of analysis prior to this decision; and (d) what recommendations were made by Natural Resources Canada to the Minister of Natural Resources, or his staff, relating to the decision to discontinue funding of this program.

(Return tabled)

Question No. 119—**Ms. Alexa McDonough:**

With respect to landmines, cluster bombs and other explosive devices: (a) how many civilian and military Canadian Forces (CF) members have been killed or injured annually since 1995, by landmines, cluster bombs and other explosive devices in (i) Afghanistan, (ii) other countries annually; (b) how many landmines have been removed annually since 1995, by (i) CF members, (ii) other personnel under contract with the government; (c) how many cluster bombs remain in Canada's munitions stockpile and, if any, does the government intend on destroying these

cluster bombs and, if so, what is its declared timetable for their destruction; and (d) what is the government's policy on the use of cluster bombs.

(Return tabled)

Question No. 120—**Ms. Dawn Black:**

With regard to tender reference PW-TALC-002-13708 – Medium to Heavy Lift Helicopter: (a) how many submissions of statements of capacities did the government receive; (b) what were the names of the contractors which submitted statements of capacities; (c) what are the names of the aircraft submitted in the statements of capacities; (d) has the Boeing CH-47 Chinook been considered to be the only aircraft that met the mandatory capacity requirements prior to announcing the tender, and, if so, which other aircraft were considered before reaching the conclusion that the Boeing CH-47 Chinook was the only aircraft that met the mandatory capacity requirements; (e) if it has been established that the Boeing CH-47 Chinook was the only aircraft that met the mandatory capacity requirements, which criteria were used to make this decision; (f) when is the contract expected to be awarded; (g) what is the expected cost of this contract; (h) which companies gave presentations to the Department of National Defence and/or the Department of Public Works and Government Services in regards to medium to heavy lift helicopters before the announcement of the tender; (i) with which companies were the Department of National Defence and/or the Department of Public Works and Government Services in contact in regards to medium to heavy lift helicopters before the announcement of the tender; (j) where are the aircraft expected to be based; (k) will the decision on where to base the aircraft be dependant on the type of aircraft purchased; (l) have any officials from the Department of National Defence, the Department of Public Works and Government Services and/or the Canadian Forces requested a test flight of any of the proposed aircraft; (m) if test flights have been requested, which aircraft have or will be involved, and on which dates; (n) which product information handbooks did the government receive before the tender was announced; and (o) which product information handbooks has the government received since the tender was announced?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 121—**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:**

With regard to each of the grants and contributions awarded by Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions since the beginning of the fiscal year 2004-2005: (a) which were the recipient organizations; (b) on what dates were they awarded; (c) what were the amounts of the grants and contributions; (d) what were the names of the programs being supported; (e) in what federal ridings were the recipient organizations located; and (f) what was the nature of the grants and contributions?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 122—**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:**

With regard to the leases on the government's building inventory from the beginning of the fiscal year 2003-2004 to November 2006, for each fiscal year, or month in the case of an incomplete fiscal year, and for each lease: (a) what are the names of the properties for which there were leases; (b) what are the addresses, municipalities and provinces of these properties; (c) the start and end of month dates; (d) the rentable space, in metres³; (e) the original annual contract rent; and (f) the names of the owners?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 123—**Mr. Tony Martin:**

With respect to Passport Canada and the number of passport applications it receives and passports it issues at various centres across Canada: (a) which communities in Canada sharing a border with the United States, i.e. within 15 kilometres of the border, have full Passport offices and how many have Passport desks; (b) how many passport applications and how many passports were issued by Passport Canada in each of its Passport offices and Passport desks in the last reporting year; (c) for Passport Canada's Sault Ste. Marie region, how many passport applications and how many passports were issued in each year since 2000; and (d) for each community with Passport desks, what is the kilometre distance to the nearest Passport office?

(Return tabled)

*Government Orders*Question No. 131—**Mr. Tony Martin:**

With respect to Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), what projects, grants, contributions and any other funding support has HRSDC funded for the riding of Sault Ste. Marie since January 1, 2006?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 132—**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:**

With respect to the provision of humanitarian and reconstruction aid to Lebanon, what has the government, more specifically, the Minister of International Co-operation, done to provide assistance to the people of Lebanon to help them rebuild their shattered lives and to provide assistance to the government of Lebanon to help it rebuild its infrastructure and help clean up the environmental damage?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 133—**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:**

With respect to the listing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as a terrorist organization, on April 8, 2006, what has the government done to ensure that law abiding Canadians of Tamil descent are not being subjected to undue scrutiny?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL BRIDGES AND TUNNELS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-3, An Act respecting international bridges and tunnels and making a consequential amendment to another Act.

The Speaker: Before question period the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh had the floor. There are five minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I was so pressured with trying to get my speech in before question period that I used up all my points. However, I took advantage of the break for statements by members and question period to come up with a few additional ones and I will be able to use up my final five minutes.

I was remiss in not noting in my opening comments the very hard work that my colleague from Windsor West did on this legislation and the whole issue of border crossings, tunnels, bridges and other methodology. I did not point out the specifics of his work with regard to pressuring the government for amendments to take into account our responsibility at the federal level and the role that the municipal governments and local authorities have with regard to border crossing issues.

He was able to convince the House that it would be appropriate given the proper set of circumstances that the federal government, in particular the minister responsible for the legislation, would consult.

I praise him for his success in having amendments made to clauses 7 and 15 of the bill so that local communities and municipal governments in particular would have the opportunity to consult with the minister on issues around construction and operation of border crossings in Canada.

We discovered just how important that was when we began dealing with the idea, which is all it was at that point, of having a new crossing in our community in order to deal with the congestion and related problems. It was amazing how difficult it was to get any serious attention from both upper levels of government for the local community. There seemed to be a willingness on the part of the federal government and the provincial government to throw away the concerns of the local community, especially with respect to the environment and safety. They seemed to procrastinate, indefinitely at times, on the commercial interests around speeding up the shipment of cargo and enhancing trade opportunities at our crossing.

In that regard, these amendments did not go as far as we wanted them to go. We would have wanted a mandatory consultation process. However, it was as far as we could push the government and the official opposition on the issue. It is one of those we will experiment with over the next few years. If it is wanting, we will be back before the House proposing amendments to the legislation to bring into line the needs of our community at the local level vis-à-vis the issues that are encompassed by the legislation.

I would also like to address the regulations that are coming under the legislation and the need for government regulations to address the issue of the tolls, the fees that are charged at our border crossings. The variation in fees that are charged at various points across Canada is quite shocking. We feel this most particularly in the Windsor area because of the level of fees that are charged at the Ambassador Bridge, which is a privately owned consortium. It is privately managed. Before this legislation, there was very little ability on the part of the federal government to in any way control the operation of that bridge crossing. It has resulted in a huge variance in the fees that are charged for trucks and passenger vehicles as opposed to what is charged across the country. We will be watching as the regulations come down to see that the government addresses this issue.

● (1520)

I want to praise the work that the member for Windsor West has done on this legislation. We will be monitoring the bill on an ongoing basis.

● (1525)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many other members are going to speak, but the member is the second member from the NDP to have spoken. I am still pleased that they are prepared to compliment the previous government's action in this regard but I do want to set some of the record straight.

Government Orders

Much praise is being given for the authority being provided to the minister to consult. The previous government did not need the authority to consult; it actually did it. The member opposite knows quite well that the mayor of the city, every member on the regional council, the member himself and the other member of Parliament for the Windsor area had the opportunity to speak with the minister responsible for the Canada Border Services Agency, the transport minister, the minister responsible for the area, the minister responsible for the environment and the people working with the binational panel on both sides of the border.

What I am trying to get at is that we had a formula in place to take into consideration all of the interests in the area, including the interests of the aboriginal communities and all private citizens. All those opportunities were taken advantage of by those seriously interested in the development of the economic potential of those border crossings, of the economic directions of the industries related in that area and as far away as Montreal as indicated earlier, those in the trucking industry, the auto industry and the service industry. All of them were always brought to the table. There is nothing new here. What is new is that now the minister has the obligation to do it whereas before we were doing it because we believed in good government.

Why did the NDP not support the government of the day? Earlier I heard someone say they did not have the numbers so they could not have had an impact on the government of the day. Because the government of the day did not have the numbers and could not keep the government in place, the NDP decided to support the other side because with them they could have the numbers and defeat the government. The member delayed the opportunity to do something for his own community a year and a half ago. The member should be ashamed.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I have three comments. One, I am definitely not ashamed. Two, I would ask the member, a former minister of the Liberal government, to stop whining in the House. It is really getting sickening. It was not the NDP, it was not the Bloc, it was not the Conservatives who threw his party out of power. It was the people of Canada who threw his party out of power because of his party's corruption and incompetence. I could go down the list. It really is revolting the amount of whining that goes on in the House by the Liberal Party on that issue. It is time that the Liberals focused on what really happened.

As I was listening to the member I could not help but think of George Orwell's *1984*. The member is rewriting history from his own perspective and his own desire of what he thought he would like to have seen go on.

Let me assure him and the House that the consultation process, so-called by the former government, around this issue with the city of Windsor and the county of Essex was almost totally meaningless. Whenever there was any discussion, it was ignored by the Liberal government. I will use one example. At one point the Liberal government dumped on the municipal council of the city of Windsor what was called a nine point plan. It was supposed to be the solution. It was a joke. It had been repudiated by council long before it was ever presented formally, point by point. They said it could not be done for this reason or for that reason, but they went ahead, both the

provincial government in Queen's Park and the federal government. That is one example. That was repeated over and over again.

The fact that this legislation will have some mandatory consultation available to the minister is definitely an improvement, but it does not in any way reflect the quality of what occurred under the former Liberal administration. The Liberals did not consult in any meaningful way with the community that I come from.

● (1530)

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to, amendments read the second time and concurred in)

* * *

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC) moved that Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today in my new role for the first time to talk to Bill C-36, a bill that proposes amendments to two of our foundational social programs, the Canada pension plan and old age security.

At the very outset, I want to begin by thanking the opposition parties for their support for the legislation. I think it enjoys broad support because it really does strengthen both the Canada pension plan, through improvements to allow people to get their disability pension, and old age security, through improvements so people will automatically receive guaranteed income supplement as their income rises and falls. I will say more to that in just a moment.

This is part of a larger agenda the government has to affirm our support for the Canada pension plan, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. These are extraordinarily important parts of Canada's social safety net. Even more to the point, they really do in a way show our government's commitment to seniors and our determination to ensure we do everything we possibly can to stand up for Canadian seniors who have done so much to build our country.

It is no exaggeration to say that because of the efforts of those who have gone before us we stand today in this great chamber. This country is built on a tradition of supporting human rights and democracy and ensuring we do everything we can so all Canadians get a fair shake, that they get an opportunity. For those people who, for whatever reason, can no longer participate in the labour force, they will still enjoy some support from the government and will have a decent standard of living.

Government Orders

I think fair-minded members on all sides of the House understand the importance of those kinds of social programs, and that is certainly true of the new government and the Prime Minister as well. In fact, the Prime Minister has gone to some lengths to underline his support for seniors by appointing a new secretary of state for seniors, Senator Marjorie LeBreton. I am thrilled to be working with her as she works with seniors, listens to their concerns and finds ways to support the programs that serve them.

Before we get into the actual amendments, it is important to point out just how important these programs are. The Canada pension plan today serves three million Canadians. It is one of the cornerstones of our social programming for seniors. The old age security goes to four million Canadians. The guaranteed income supplement goes to 1.5 million low income seniors, who are mostly women.

The Canada pension plan and old age security pays out \$50 billion a year. GIS pays out \$6.2 billion a year. We understand, as Canada's new government, how important those programs are. We want to build on those programs, make them better and make them stronger so we have them today and in the future. In fact, as I speak of the future, I need to point out that we are facing some big challenges as we go forward today. Roughly 12% of Canadians are seniors. In 25 years those numbers will double. It is very important that we have strong and sustainable social programs going forward.

The point of the amendments today are twofold. We want to modernize and streamline how benefits are delivered, and that really brings me to the first amendment.

The amendment has to do with changing the rules surrounding old age security so when seniors apply for it, they will only ever have to apply once in their life and at the same time will automatically receive the guaranteed income supplement if their income warrants it.

These amendments will change the rules so in the future we will take tax information from peoples' tax forms and use that to help us determine who should get guaranteed income supplement.

• (1535)

Today it works this way. If seniors are a recipient of the guaranteed income supplement and all of a sudden their income rises, making them ineligible for guaranteed income supplement in the following year, they will then have to reapply the year after to qualify if their income falls again.

These changes, supported by my friends in the opposition, will end that, and that is important. Seniors have more important things to do than spend a lot of time filling out paperwork to reapply. In some cases the sad fact is that people do not reapply and do not receive benefits for which they are eligible. These changes will largely end that. It will mean that seniors will automatically requalify should their income fall below that threshold according to their tax information. This is extraordinarily important. This really modernizes an important piece of legislation.

The government acknowledges as well that not everyone fills out a tax form every year. We will continue to do the outreach we are vigorously doing today to ensure that seniors are aware of these programs and that they understand how they work so if they do

qualify and have not filled out a tax form, they can still get the guaranteed income supplement.

The other amendment that is very important has to do with the disability portion of Canada pension plan. As we know, the Canada pension plan, through the disability portion, provides thousands and thousands of disabled Canadians with an income supplement, which is critical for them to manage and maintain a lifestyle. The changes that we are proposing in the legislation will make it easier for disabled Canadians to qualify for Canada pension plan disability. As the rule stands today, we have to be contributors for four of the last six years we pay into CPP before our disability makes us unemployable and takes us out of the labour force.

We propose to change that from four years to three years. We project this will bring another 3,700 people into eligibility for Canada pension plan disability by the year of 2010, plus another 1,000 of their children, according to the data we have at present. This will ensure that more people, who cannot qualify because they have been knocked out of the workforce early by their conditions, will now be able to receive this important disability pension. This is a very important step. It demonstrates that Canada's new government is committed to helping people with disabilities.

Not long ago I was in Vancouver where I sought a meeting with Rick Hansen, who is a well known advocate on behalf of disabled Canadians. He was first made famous as the "Man in Motion" when he travelled the world in his wheelchair to draw attention to the devastating impact of spinal injuries. He has since established a foundation and has become a tremendous spokesman and an inspiration for people around the world on issues of disability. He is doing a tremendous job of drawing attention to these issues. He gave me great insight into the challenges that people in the disabled community face, and we will use those to help us guide our government as we move forward.

As someone who represents the community of Medicine Hat, which has twice as many seniors as the national average, I understand the challenges that seniors face. I think all members understand that and appreciate the contributions that the seniors who have gone before us have made. Many of today's seniors are people who have gone through the Great Depression, the second world war, Korea and the social unrest of the 1960s. They have seen and done a lot of things. They have raised families. In many cases they have gone without so their families could have a higher standard of living and a chance to have an education. We really do owe them a great debt of gratitude.

Government Orders

• (1540)

Bill C-36 underlines the importance that the government places on recognizing the contributions of seniors. That along with some of the other steps we have taken to raise the age credit, to allow pension income splitting, to cut the GST are all indications of how important we see the role of seniors in society today. We want to recognize them with this important legislation.

I thank members on all sides for their support of the legislation. I commend the legislation to the House and trust that it will pass quickly so we can deliver these important changes to seniors and to the disabled as soon as possible.

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we share in my colleague's, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, recognition of the contribution of the seniors who have, as he has pointed out, played a significant part in the history and the development of Canadian society. They did this at a time when we had many challenges, not only on a global scale, but internationally.

Could he let us know a bit more about how those seniors who worked very hard as individuals, as families, as parents, contributing not only to the next generation but to our country? We have to ensure that tradition is passed on to this generation and the next generation.

Maybe the minister could give us a little more information, fill in a little more about how, as baby boomers move on to become seniors, that will benefit all Canadians?

Hon. Monte Solberg: Mr. Speaker, I state the obvious when I say the contribution of seniors is extraordinarily important, but maybe it is so obvious that sometimes we take it for granted.

We live in the best country in the world. That did not happen by accident. Many countries in the world have a wealth of natural resources, just like this country does. Many countries have enjoyed relative periods of peace, but not every country enjoys the standard of living that this country enjoys. Not every country enjoys a commitment to human rights, democracy and ensuring that we look after our neighbours, like this country does. That reflects the values of the people who went before us. We stand on the shoulders of giants. Any time we make a contribution today to making things better in this world it is because we build on the foundation laid down by the generation that has gone before us.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would not like this question and comment period to be solely for friends of the government and government members. That is why it is important that members of the opposition be able to put other questions to the minister concerned.

For the moment, I would like to draw the minister's attention to a subject that is very important for the people of Quebec and for seniors throughout Canada. I refer to the guaranteed income supplement. Unfortunately, a great deal of money has been, I would dare to say, withheld and in the end these people have not seen a single penny of this money. But they were entitled to it. Now, I believe that they deserve some social justice. These people who are

hard up, who need this money, deserve to recover that money that quite simply passed under their noses.

I would like the new minister responsible for this matter to tell us what he intends to do about the error that was made concerning seniors and the guaranteed income supplement.

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg: Mr. Speaker, obviously some of the things that have occurred in the past are part of what motivates the legislation. The legislation is really designed to do everything we can to ensure that people who qualify and are entitled to guaranteed income supplement automatically get it.

This will not fix every possible situation where people are entitled to it and do not get it. However, we are taking the most important step we can to reach as many seniors as possible so we do not leave anyone behind who does qualify according to income, but yet, because they are not aware of it, do not apply. This is an important change that starts to address some of my friend's concerns.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the advantages of being here for a while is that we get to hear people when they were in different positions in the House of Commons.

I remember when the Reform Party's environment critic said that global warming was a myth. I remember its agriculture critic saying that marketing boards were not a good system for the markets and that we needed to get rid of marketing boards. Those two things have now changed.

I also remember hearing that particular minister, when he was the finance critic for the Reform Party, talking about the Canada pension plan and how it needed to be radically changed or eliminated and maybe let the people use the money they invest in the Canada pension plan in a private RRSP.

Now I hear the minister, on his road to Damascus, saying that the Canada pension plan is a very important vehicle for seniors. I congratulate him for that because he is absolutely correct.

Last year Statistics Canada made an error in calculating the certain percentage of CPP compared to OAS. Many people have been asking whether the government will correct that error and allow the certain percentage of CPP-OAS contributions to increase more than the 0.5% they have received, in fact the 1.5% to the 2% that they have been asking for, which is the correct Statistics Canada figure.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Mr. Speaker, the government commitment was to increase these amounts according to the published inflation numbers from Statistics Canada, which is what we have done.

Government Orders

However this government has moved in other ways to ensure that seniors are allowed to keep more of their income. One of the most important changes and one that sometimes people do not consider to be part of social programming is the cut to the GST. Approximately 30% of Canadians who do not pay income tax benefit by the cut in the GST, and that certainly applies to seniors. It goes some distance to helping them cope with the everyday difficulties of making ends meet. That is only one of a number of initiatives that this new government has undertaken, but we are doing what we can to ensure that seniors enjoy a better standard of living.

● (1550)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin today by saying how thrilled I am to have been asked by our leader to assume the position of critic for seniors, Canadians with disabilities and the social economy. Seniors and Canadians with disabilities are some of the most engaged citizens we have in this country. I look forward to working with them and to ensuring the solutions they have been working on for a long time will be presented to the government. In my experience as chair of the subcommittee on persons with disabilities, I hope this can be a non-partisan issue in which we do the most we can for our most vulnerable Canadians.

As is shown by the combination of the bill presented today, the issues around full citizenship, the ability to contribute and the issue around income security are things shared both by seniors and persons with disabilities. It will be extraordinarily important for us to understand the complexity of this and the need for the government, the provinces and the territories to work together. I think all of us who have worked in this area know that one of the real problems has been the gridlock involved in the fact that income security and human rights can be seen as a federal issue, but the supports and services are very much provincial and territorial. It becomes a real problem if we cannot work across government departments and across jurisdictions to do what the people who need us most know needs to be done.

The Canada pension plan is the basis of Canada's retirement income system. As the minister has said, there were many irritants and difficulties in the administration of that. We are grateful to the minister for bringing in these changes that will make the application of these benefits much simpler. As we know, it provides the retirement pension, disability benefits, benefits for survivors, children's benefits and a death benefit. As the minister alluded to, in 2005-06, four million people received benefits totalling \$25 billion.

We know that the Liberal Party is the party of income security. Lester Pearson and Paul Martin Senior brought in the CPP program in the first place. It was the policies of Prime Minister Chrétien and the former finance minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard, that stabilized the pension funds and guaranteed a secure public pension system for the next 75 years.

It is also important that we mention the issue of guaranteed income supplement, old age security and the retirement benefits under the Canada and Quebec pension plans which provide our senior citizens with monthly taxable benefits. For seniors without other income, the amounts received from these programs are, unfortunately, very modest.

The guaranteed income supplement was first introduced by the Liberal government under Lester Pearson in 1967 to help improve living standards for lower income seniors. The GIS is a monthly benefit paid to residents of Canada who receive full or partial OAS pensions and who have little or no other income.

I am pleased to see the proposal to waive the requirement for a renewal application for the GIS once an initial application has been made. Many seniors forget to reapply for their GIS or are late in their reapplication which results in a decrease in income for the following year. Administrative process should not be an obstacle to deserved benefits and I am glad to see that the government has recognized that.

I am proud to state that the Liberal government increased the guaranteed income supplement for seniors by \$36 per month for single seniors and \$58 per month for couples. This was a \$2.7 billion investment that directly benefited 1.6 billion Canadian seniors. Unfortunately, as all parties in this House have recognized, there are many difficulties in ensuring that all seniors who qualify for GIS apply for it and receive it.

● (1555)

Many seniors fail to apply for GIS because they have no taxable income or they have health problems, mental or physical limitations, or literacy and language barriers. In fact, estimates by policy analyst, Richard Shillington, in 2001, with the help of Susan Pigott at St. Christopher House in Toronto, suggested that 320,000 eligible Canadians were not receiving the GIS and associated spousal and widow's allowances.

Under the last Liberal government there was a fantastic partnership between Human Resource Development Canada and the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency which helped provincial organizations and grassroots volunteers to educate seniors about the GIS. There is no point having a program that seniors do not know they can access. It is the responsibility of governments to ensure everyone entitled to a program gets what they are entitled to, which means serious efforts must be made for outreach and education.

I hope the government will undertake a similar initiative to ensure that seniors are knowledgeable about the supports available to them. Failing to reach low income elderly people with funds that can make the difference between comfort and privation is a serious concern.

[*Translation*]

In 1997, the Canada pension plan was restructured to respond to the growing needs of an aging population, to ensure its viability and to stabilize contribution rates. Experts said that, as a result of those changes, the CPP would be viable for at least another 75 years.

Government Orders

[English]

As a family doctor, I can testify as to how important the changes are in this bill in terms of the flexibility in the Canada pension plan disability. It is a huge deal to someone who has become slightly disabled and whose attachment to the workforce has become less regular. The difference between qualifying with three out of the past six years as opposed to the previous four out of the past six years is huge to so many Canadians.

The Liberal record on income security is clear. Although I am supportive of Bill C-36, we must hold the government to account on this issue.

[Translation]

If the Canadian retirement income system is to work, it is essential that everyone contribute as much as he or she can for as long as he or she wants to or can.

Afterwards, when it is time to rely on the community, everyone will be confident that he or she will be considered and treated with respect and dignity; and each person will have a real sense of belonging.

That means that we have to avoid bureaucratic nightmares. Canadians must be able to receive what they are entitled to without a lot of administrative red tape.

[English]

We on this side are supportive of all of the proposed amendments: the simplification of access to and delivery of benefits of the OAS, the ongoing renewal, the agreements to co-administer similar provincial benefits to simplify the reporting of income for couples and seniors and the OAS-consistent benefit entitlements, the OAS clarity of legislation and the proposed amendments to the Canada pension plan, both the full funding and the CPP tri-annual review, the long term contributors Canada pension plan disability, and the CPP business transformation amendment, the administrative amendment as well as the proposed common OAS-CPP amendments.

The provision for electronic services is hugely important now and the charging of interest, I think, is an important provision, as well as the penalty provisions and the information sharing.

In 1918, Dr. Charles Hastings, the physician responsible for public health for the city of Toronto, said at the American Public Health Association that:

Every nation that permits people to remain under the fetters of preventable disease and permits social conditions to exist that make it impossible for them to be properly fed, clothed and housed so as to maintain a high degree of resistance and physical fitness; and, who endorses a wage that does not afford sufficient revenue for the home, a revenue that will make possible the development of a sound mind and body, is trampling on a primary principle of democracy.

That being said, we know that both seniors and persons with disabilities are still fighting the major challenge of poverty. Income security programs must ensure that income is secure. It is extraordinarily important that when we are evaluating these income security programs we are always asking the question: does this Canadian feel that his or her income is secure and that he or she will be able to continue with his or her housing?

I think it is really important that we continue to listen to fabulous organizations like the National Advisory Council on Aging and the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. These partnerships have been very important in setting the priorities from the bottom up and in listening to the Canadians who will be most affected by the policies. I believe the bill today shows that the government is listening, or at least is doing what we as a government have heard before.

With seniors the fastest growing age group in the country and the increase in their numbers in the last 10 years being enough to populate mid-sized Canadian cities, we have to understand that we also must look carefully at the disaggregated data in terms of where poverty exists. And the poverty exists for women.

•(1600)

[Translation]

The Daily, Women in Canada 2005 published July 10, 2006, reported as follows:

Older women tend to have lower incomes than men because they participate less in the paid labour force, and, if they were employed, their wages were less on average. In 2004, about one in five senior women had never worked outside the home. Further, because women live longer they are at greater risk of running out of savings over their lifetimes.

According to a new study, senior women suffer much more financially from widowhood than do senior men. Over a 10-year period, senior widows saw their income decrease in the five years after the death of their husbands, while widowers' income increased in the five years after the loss of their wife.

[English]

It is going to be extraordinarily important as we go forward to make sure that we continue to bring together these uncoordinated income based programs, according to the National Advisory Committee on Aging and its report, "Aging in poverty in Canada". It is this multitude of uncoordinated federal, provincial and territorial income based programs that is a nightmare for our seniors.

At one time, my twinned riding was Calgary Centre. There, we can look at the Kerby Centre and how it began by having a kiosk that seniors could come to in order to find out what level of government handled each program. If we look at that centre, we can begin to see that if we create programs from the bottom up and listen to seniors, we can start to bring these things together, as I hope this bill begins to do today.

In the worst case scenario, sometimes the cumulative effect of additional income may well be a net loss of an income. Seniors with low incomes are trapped due to the disincentives mentioned. They are discouraged from earning additional income to make their lives more enjoyable, or indeed, they may no longer qualify for subsidized housing or for the additional benefit. I think it is extraordinarily important that we as governments and as Parliament understand that the devil is in the details and that the net losses or the incomes from our programs have very real people attached to them in terms of their stories and whether they are actually better off or worse off. It is extraordinarily important that we listen again to these people who know best and hear their priorities for action.

Government Orders

The National Council on Aging has said that we must increase the GIS so that the combined GIS and OAS benefits are equal to or greater than the low income cut-off. We must correct the GIS shortcomings and decrease the number of late applicants and not unduly penalize them.

We must, as we have said, improve the coordination of income based programs and ensure automatic or compulsory sharing of pension rights under the Canada pension plan, employee pension funds and retirement savings plans following divorce or legal separation.

Again, our partnership with the Council of Canadians with Disabilities brings to our attention the fact that, with the aging of the population, people with disabilities make up a growing proportion of the Canadian population. One-third of aboriginal Canadians are living with a disability. Canadians with disabilities are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than other Canadians and they face exclusion from quality education, employment and participation in their communities.

The first step in combating poverty and exclusion is to ensure that people have access to disability related supports and services. This is something that we as parliamentarians and the federal government need to do in partnership with our provincial and territorial partners. This is just too complex for us to allow people to fall through the cracks and for us not to work together to understand that it is only in consultation with persons with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities that we are going to get this right.

CPP disability deals only with Canadians who had a previous attachment to the workforce. We learned in our subcommittee that to go forward we need to ask, first, if a person can work and, second, whether that person would be able to work with appropriate training or education. If the answer to both these questions is no, then the federal government needs to work together with the provinces and territories and find a secure income for these people. CPP disability was only ever designed as an adjunct and it is still only those who had a previous attachment to the workforce who qualify.

•(1605)

[*Translation*]

The Council of Canadians with Disabilities and the Canadian Association for Community Living are calling on the federal government to show committed leadership and principle to overcome poverty and the exclusion of Canadians with disabilities.

[*English*]

Again, it is so important. I have some concerns that both the Minister of National Revenue and the Minister of Finance do not understand how important that technical advisory committee was on things like disability tax credits. To have disbanded the advisory committee that we fought so hard to put in place means that we will get it wrong when it comes to coordinating the net benefit to Canadians with disabilities.

[*Translation*]

The technical advisory committee on tax measures for persons with disabilities has said:

Going Forward...Priority should be given to expenditure programs rather than tax measures to target new funding where the need is greatest.

The technical advisory committee on tax measures for persons with disabilities, which was eliminated by the minister, conducted consultations with provincial and territorial administrations and the community of persons with disabilities.

[*English*]

It is really important to listen to them in terms of how they would evaluate their success. I believe they are asking us to look forward. They are asking us to reduce by half the annual income gap between Canadians with and without disabilities, to reduce by half the poverty rate of adults with disabilities, to reduce by half the labour market participation gap between Canadians with and without disabilities, and to reduce by half the non-reimbursed costs faced by persons with disabilities.

As we go forward, I encourage the minister to look at the extremely important and extraordinarily good report of the Subcommittee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities from the 37th Parliament and see what we learned in our report entitled "Listening to Canadians". There were eight recommendations. I hope the minister will look at those recommendations and will bring together the kind of flexibility that it is going to take to actually incorporate into our society persons with cyclical diseases like mental illness, HIV-AIDS and MS.

There is a lot more to do, because we have to work together on the quality of life of all Canadians, on their dignity and respect. How we treat our most vulnerable is indeed the measure of a society. Together with the expertise of the seniors and the persons with disabilities of this country, I hope we will go forward. This bill is just one tiny step.

•(1610)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her speech and also for supporting this very important bill. As I listened to the member go through the different points on why she was supporting Bill C-36, I could not help but think that she certainly does understand how important this bill is.

Bill C-36 really takes us forward in serving our seniors in the future with some of the changes that are being made. Albeit some are technical, they will certainly make a difference.

Most of all, we are talking about some of the seniors who, unfortunately, we find difficult to reach with regard to the guaranteed income supplement. The member spoke to that. I would like to know if she has any suggestions on how we can reach the people who do not know about the guaranteed income supplement. We know that because this is income tested, we can use Revenue Canada, but I am wondering if she can make some suggestions as to how we reach the percentage of persons who are not able to get the guaranteed income supplement because they do not know it is available.

Government Orders

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I think there is now evidence to show that if we do everything we can to get every Canadian to file an income tax return, we could then find out who is entitled. That is because of this agreed upon partnership between the tax system and HRSD. I think that becomes a really important partnership, but I also think that in terms of the community we have come to understand that social isolation is as detrimental to Canadians' health as smoking.

We must do whatever we can to get seniors participating in places like St. Christopher House or the Kerby Centre in Calgary, the places that have the supports and services. If we can get seniors connected in the community, not only is it good for their health, but it is good for their income in terms of how they then come to find out about these things they are properly entitled to.

I think that it is probably that two-way approach we need. One way would be to encourage all Canadians to file an income tax return, because they may be surprised and get something back. As well, we must really, throughout the country, try to do everything we can to give this sense of belonging that we know is extraordinarily important for peoples' health, particularly their mental health and well-being.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech and he startled me somewhat.

I do not know if the same thing happened in the rest of Canada, but I do know that, in Quebec in particular, when the situation arose because the government did not wish to identify the individuals and the research regarding the guaranteed income supplement—which deprived many seniors of income to which they were entitled—we did everything to contact them. I wonder if my colleague agrees with me in this regard.

I also wonder what solutions will be adopted to ensure that seniors who were entitled to the guaranteed income supplement will receive it. Although I am very concerned about the guaranteed income supplement, I am much more concerned about aboriginal Canadians who worked and, as we know, who often live on a regular basis in so-called isolated communities.

In the bill before this Parliament, will mechanisms be implemented? Can my colleague list the means that will be implemented to contact these aboriginal individuals who are entitled not only to the guaranteed income supplement that they do not receive but also to an old age pension for which they have not applied.

• (1615)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. I too am worried about the quality of life of aboriginal Canadians. Through a true partnership with them and also because of their leadership, we will find a solution to this problem.

Furthermore, housing and income security are very important to all Canadians. We can only discuss income after having covered the cost of safe housing. I believe that this applies to aboriginal peoples and to all Canadians.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a question concerning aboriginal people. In "Pensions In Canada: Policy Reform Because Women Matter" produced by Women Elders in Action in Vancouver in December 2004, it talks about the fact that first nations women who have lived a traditional rural life were especially vulnerable to economic hardship. The average annual income of an aboriginal woman is \$13,300 compared to \$19,350 for a non-aboriginal woman. As well, discrimination, childhood poverty and lower educational achievement exacerbate their already poor economic status into old age.

I know that in part this bill deals with housekeeping, but again, first nations, Métis and Inuit women are largely absent from the discussion in terms of how they would access Canada pension, old age security and any kind of livable income. I wonder if the member could speak specifically to that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. One of the problems with the Canada pension plan is again the attachment to the workforce that is required and the fact that women's attachment to the workforce tends to be much shorter because of child bearing or whatever. Also, women who have stayed home to raise their children, including aboriginal women, end up having much less at the time of retirement and, as we have seen in some of the other studies, particularly if their spouse dies.

So many papers have looked at how we will ensure the income of women, whether with spouses, without spouses or whatever, and how we would go forward on this. Our responsibility to aboriginal people and aboriginal women in particular is clear. We are not there yet and it will only be in consultation with elders and aboriginal women that we will sort out a system that would work for them.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, we have many elderly women who have looked after elderly veterans for a long time and as she knows very well, many veterans' pensions, for example, are usually clawed back or deducted from other sources of income. Thus, when the veteran passes on, the spouse is only left with 50% of that reduction. That puts that individual into a big hole.

The last thing any of us in the House want to see are those caregivers, who looked after our greatest heroes, slipping into dire poverty. Could the member comment on that? What would her party recommend in order to alleviate that serious financial problem for the caregivers of our greatest heroes?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has worked a lot on these issues and I think that it is going to be hugely important as we go forward, that we get that particular problem rectified.

I cannot help but remind the new Canadian government that I believe it was the widows of veterans who were successful in their court challenge. It is for issues like this that we actually do need the court challenges program. Sometimes there are things that are just quite unfair and some of these widows are the people whose voices have not been heard.

Government Orders

•(1620)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House and speak to Bill C-36.

First of all I would like to say that I am very proud to transfer the file on seniors and persons with disabilities to my new colleague from Repentigny, who I think will defend this file with as much enthusiasm, passion and determination as I did, and as all my colleagues of the Bloc Québécois who held the file before me have done.

This is a very important bill, which for us in the Bloc Québécois answers some of the requests that we have been making for many years and certain demands that we have concerning seniors, the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our society.

However, I have to say that there are still some shortcomings in this bill. As in all bills that interest us, we have done our homework. We have been in touch with the various seniors' associations, the various organizations of seniors in Quebec and even some in Canada, to check with them and their representatives whether the bill was satisfactory in their view, if it met their needs, their concerns, and whether we could go ahead and support it.

At the outset, when we had the first information session, I was very pleased to see that finally this request made for so long concerning the guaranteed income supplement had been met, that is, that the supplement should become automatic, that people should have to apply for it only once and then it should become automatic.

From the first day, I was ready to say yes, to support this bill, to fast-track it and pass it right away so that people could start receiving their income and money in time for Christmas, so that they would be pleased to see that the guaranteed income supplement had become automatic.

I reminded myself that we should never be in too much of a hurry and that we have to be very careful, even if sometimes something looks like an excellent solution overall. Indeed the automatic GIS was the good news we had been waiting for for nearly ten years.

However, other aspects of this bill, which could harm seniors and might be negative for them, told us we had to be careful before giving our assent too quickly, because we wanted at all costs to be right concerning the guaranteed income supplement.

This shows once again that when the Bloc Québécois deals with an issue that affects Quebecers and Canadians and a segment of society that is very vulnerable and fragile, it pays attention to what it is doing and the decisions it makes. We are very careful. I think it is worth it.

We certainly support this bill in principle. It is hard to be against virtue itself. However, the hon. members will recall a few years ago my colleague Marcel Gagnon, who is no longer in the House, defending this cause with great determination and courage. He toured all of Quebec and even some parts of Canada. He defended the guaranteed income supplement and the need to find people to whom it was owed. We managed at the time to find about 40,000 of the 68,000 people there were in Quebec. We suspected that there were 68,000 people just in Quebec who were entitled to the GIS but

were not getting it because they did not know it existed. We found 42,000 of them. This means that there are still 24,000, 25,000 or 26,000 who have not been found yet.

What is being done for these other people who have not been found yet for all sorts of reasons? They are people who never applied for the GIS because of a physical or mental health problem, a physical limitation, illiteracy or a linguistic barrier.

•(1625)

Some citizens were even deprived of considerable amounts of money and did not get the GIS even though they were entitled to it. The Department of Human Resources and Social Development apparently had difficulty contacting particularly disadvantaged clientele such as people who have never worked outside the home, people who do not file income tax returns, natives, residents of remote communities, people with few literacy skills, people who do not read or speak either official language, people who are handicapped or ill, and finally, the homeless.

When we think of all the people involved, we have to wonder whether this bill will give use the tools we need to contact them and give them the money they are owed.

As I said earlier, we consulted various organizations and groups that work with seniors in Quebec. One of them, the Conférence des Tables régionales de concertation des aînés du Québec, took time to read the bill, study it and send us their thoughts on it.

It should be remembered that this is a rather large association that includes most Quebec seniors, since it is made up of Quebec's 17 regional round tables. As we know, Quebec is divided into 17 regions. This is the only group that covers all of the Quebec territory. It also has a key link with the Quebec seniors council and helps it fulfill its mandate by supporting its initiatives in the regions. We also know that the conference and the round tables are the primary contacts of the Quebec Minister of Family, Seniors and Status of Women. This is important. When these people talk, or when they look at a bill, we listen very carefully to what they have to say.

We can already tell the House that, for a long time now, regional tables for seniors had been asking to group together applications for old age security and guaranteed income supplement, so that a single application would be necessary for those who are entitled to both amounts. This is what Bill C-36 purports to do, and we are very pleased about that. As for the changes to the disability insurance, we think that this insurance is well adjusted to today's labour market.

Government Orders

There was nothing either on the fact that interests can be collected on overpayments—which is normal—but the government should also pay interest on the money that it owes to pensioners, because this is also as it should be. If one wants to get something, one should be prepared to give something. This works both ways.

Clauses 11 and 25 make it possible for a larger number of third parties to have access to personal information on the contributor. This raises privacy issues and requires the establishment of strict rules to ensure a monitoring process, so that not everyone has access to such information. It is a good thing that the requirement for spouses or common law spouses to provide information on their income or family status was abolished, when that information is already provided by the other spouse or common law spouse. This will make it simpler to file income tax returns. However, there is no indication of the Canada pension plan, the old age security benefits or the guaranteed income supplement being indexed. It is also most unfortunate that there is no retroactive measure regarding the guaranteed income supplement.

FADOQ is another seniors group in Quebec that serves hundreds of thousands of people, which is not a small gathering that can just be ignored. Hundreds of thousands of seniors belong to this group. Their concerns are the same, but we believe there may be room to make other changes to the Canada pension plan.

Among other things, they are saying that the measures proposed in Bill C-36 only concern the continued renewal of the guaranteed income supplement application and not the initial application for receiving the GIS for the first time.

• (1630)

The purpose of the bill is not to reduce the number of seniors who are eligible for the guaranteed income supplement, but to reduce the number who do not receive it. However, in Canada in 2003, despite the progress made in the past few years, 37,000 seniors who were eligible for the guaranteed income supplement still had not received it. These uncollected benefits totalled \$204 million in 2003, for all of Canada—\$204 million! Since the guaranteed income supplement is used as an eligibility criterion for a number of other programs, non-participants also miss out on the benefits the provinces and territories give to low-income seniors.

In Laval we have 40,000 seniors 65 and older of whom 38% are over 75. That is a significant number. In other words, many people who are over 75 are likely entitled to the guaranteed income supplement. It is not always easy to find these people since they are not used to asking for services; they are used to taking care of themselves.

Another problem is the fact that Bill C-36 says nothing about the clawback of old age security benefits imposed since 1989 on high income seniors, whereby they have to give some back. With respect to those seniors who have already reported high incomes and seen their pension clawed back after filing their income tax returns, the federal government seems to take for granted that their income level will remain unchanged, and advance pension deductions are made the following year. This means that, while these seniors do receive a monthly pension, the amount received is reduced based on the previous year. Members know that the income of seniors often varies, which makes this practice unworkable. Some seniors have

told us that such a measure was likely to deprive them of a part of their income to which they are entitled.

At present, seniors who foresee significant changes in their income have to file pro forma tax returns with the Canada Revenue Agency. It might be simpler and more appropriate to have them report their income directly to the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, since that is the department responsible for administering the old age security program.

Since the late 1990s, the FADOQ, Mouvement des aînés du Québec, has been calling for the OAS clawback rate to be lowered, as it reduces excessively the income of retirees who have managed to put a little money aside. The FADOQ even suggested increasing the threshold in personal income beyond which benefits may be clawed back through income tax.

In spite of all these shortcomings and oversights, the Bloc Québécois recognizes the very exciting measures contained in this bill. We will support the bill in principle, so that it can be referred to committee, where it can hopefully be amended to some extent to make it even more exciting for our seniors, who are for the most part disadvantaged people.

Given that Bill C-36 will make it easier for disadvantaged seniors to benefit from the guaranteed income program by allowing for automatic application renewal and payment of the guaranteed income supplement to couples on the basis of only one spouse's income tax return; given that Bill C-36 enables seniors who are faced with a sudden drop in their employment or pension income during the fiscal year to apply for the guaranteed income supplement using an estimate of their employment and pension income; given that Bill C-36 explains and clarifies sections of the Old Age Security Act to correct inconsistencies; and, finally, given that Bill C-36 makes changes to the Canada Pension Plan—which does not affect Quebec and its constitutional jurisdictions—we will support this bill in principle.

However, the Bloc Québécois is opposed to broadening restrictions on new Canadian citizens who immigrated to this country.

• (1635)

To the Bloc Québécois, there cannot be different classes of Canadian citizens, regardless of how they came to be here. Every citizen has access to the guaranteed income supplement.

The following clauses pose a problem by creating different classes of Canadian citizens: 11(4), 19(3), 19(6)(d)(ii), 20 and 21(9)(c)(ii), which refer to persons in respect of whom an undertaking by a sponsor is in effect as provided under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. These clauses exclude new Canadian citizens who are still being sponsored.

Government Orders

The committee and the Bloc ask that the committee amend the bill so as not to limit the rights of new citizens, as referred to here. The obligations of the sponsor, who vouches for and looks after a person who has immigrated here, generally take effect as soon as the sponsored person obtains permanent resident status. This commitment cannot be terminated, and it remains in effect when the person obtains Canadian citizenship, separates or divorces, or a moves to another province. It would remain in effect even if your financial situation were to deteriorate.

Can we allow ourselves to leave seniors destitute, simply because the person who was supposed to sponsor them has suffered a loss of income or has lost his or her job? Many textile factories are closing their doors because the government did not think to support the textile industry. Furthermore, many people will not have work in certain areas, such as at Bell Helicopter, because the government did not bother to confirm with the United States whether something could be done to ensure that people from various cultural communities could obtain the contracts offered by Bell Canada.

Many other jobs are being lost in the wood products and forestry industries. People born outside of Canada often hold these jobs. These people often act as sponsors of another individual whom they have helped come here. Unfortunately, and through no fault of their own, they can no longer properly take care of the senior whom they have taken into their home.

Will we simply leave these people in need, in difficult situations, because the person hosting them is also having difficulties? In my opinion, we must pay attention and ensure that everyone who decides to live here has a decent minimum income.

The Bloc Québécois also recommends that the committee examine the obligation to pay the full retroactivity. Last year in this Parliament, in 2005, we decided unanimously to reimburse individuals and give them full retroactivity. What has happened since then? A government, a new government, which had voted in favour of the motion of my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain, has now decided that it will not respect its commitments.

We are asking the government to pay the full retroactivity, or at least that the committee study the obligation to pay the full retroactivity and to not limit it to 11 months, as provided by law regarding the guaranteed income supplement and spouse's allowance. This policy would allow for retroactive payment covering the full period of eligibility.

The Bloc Québécois will also ask that the Privacy Commissioner testify with regard to the broadening of the third-party group to which the contributor's personal information may be forwarded. We will also ensure that amendments to the current regulations will not restrict the scope of the guaranteed income supplement. We will continue our longstanding fight against the government to have it put in place all the elements required to ensure that seniors who qualify for the guaranteed income supplement have access to it.

• (1640)

With regard to interest on overpayments, we will ensure that this bill treats all taxpayers fairly. Finally, we will ensure that the time limit in which the government may reclaim overpayment of benefits is proportional to the period in which individuals may seek a—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order please. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, Court Challenges Program; the hon. member for Mississauga South, China.

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated my colleague's comments because, like her, I attended the same briefing. We were both absolutely committed to achieving meaningful results for seniors. Like her, I found there were serious flaws with the bill, despite the fact that we share a commitment to make it easier for seniors to access the GIS.

I was also listening to our colleague from St. Paul's earlier. I was not here in previous parliaments, but I know that the member was and I wonder whether she could reflect on the comments of the member that she understood the studies on disability issues from the 37th Parliament. We are now in the 39th Parliament. She understood the problems with the GIS in 2001. It was her party that was in government then.

The member opposite was here at that time. I wonder if she could explain the Liberal government's complete inaction on these very serious issues that have increasingly thrown seniors in our country into poverty when there was absolutely no need to do that. The member will probably share my view that the Liberals have found religion on this issue a little late.

I am glad to see that this bill at least will get the support of most parties in the House, at least so that the GIS will be accessible for the seniors in our country who need it very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

It seems to me that sooner or later, all parties that have been in power in this House have found religion with respect to the guaranteed income supplement. The New Democratic Party agreed to join us in proposing full retroactivity for those eligible; the Conservative Party also agreed and voted with us; the Liberal Party voted with us. The parties all vote for what is right when it suits them. When they are in power and it no longer suits them, they forget that they voted for what is right.

I realize that there are now many members of this House who support the guaranteed income supplement. I hope that their support will not be in vain, that it will really happen this time, and that people will have access to the money they should have received a long time ago.

Government Orders

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I listen to the debate, I understand some of the concerns that members have, but this particular bill would be so beneficial to all of our seniors. Passing this bill could solve a lot of the problems that have been created because of past mistakes.

We are debating beyond the scope of the bill. We want to get the bill through. We are not trying to do something that would be unfair to seniors on low incomes. As was said by the minister and other members, we are trying to help seniors access these support systems more easily. They are in line with what provinces are doing with retroactivity. They are consistent with federal and provincial income support programs such as the one in Alberta, the Ontario guaranteed income supplement and Quebec's family allowance.

I am not sure if this is where the debate should go. The debate should be focused on making it understood how important it is for seniors to have the bill go through as quickly as possible.

We could not consider retroactivity without having some cost analysis. I wonder whether the member in making the suggestions in all the different amendments she has made has made any cost analysis. It would close down the debate if we had to think of how much this might cost us.

I wish the member and all members would think about how important it is to get the bill through so that we can start working on other seniors issues.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I do not doubt the good faith of my hon. colleague from Blackstrap. I know how important the issue of seniors is to her and how familiar she is with their plight.

I understand the need for a cost analysis of our proposed amendments, but the bill first has to be brought to committee so that its substance may be discussed. Then, the issue of a cost analysis and what it might entail can be addressed.

In the past year alone, the government saved \$204 million because, for many years, some seniors did not have access to the guaranteed income supplement they were entitled to. How long has the government been pocketing this kind of money, which should have been paid to those seniors who were entitled to it but never got it?

That has to be taken into account. The individuals to whom this money is owed have given their all. Several of them are war veterans. Several have had very little money on which to raise their family. Several have managed to put their children through school in spite of very serious financial difficulties. They have made it possible for us today to have a health system, an education system and all that we need to realize our potential. It would be only normal and reasonable for seniors to live out their later years in dignity, with the respect they are owed.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague on her remarks, which were not only very generous but also very sincere. She has just been appointed status of

women critic for the Bloc Québécois. That is a great honour that our leader bestowed on her.

In her previous comment, she touched on the impact of the lack of women-specific measures, women having a longer life expectancy than men. I would like her to elaborate on that.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Joliette is perfectly correct.

Unfortunately, too often when we talk about seniors, we talk about seniors in general, and very often we forget that, for the most part, seniors are women. That is because women have a much longer life expectancy than men. Yet, despite all the difficulties that women face it is hard to go into great detail on this subject.

As I stated earlier, 38% of seniors in my riding are over 75. That means that most of them have never asked for any kind of help. These people have always been self-reliant. They have always managed to get by and, unfortunately, today they find themselves in a difficult and deplorable situation. We do not have access to these people because, having never asked for help, they are not known to local health agencies and welfare groups, or to social workers. They do not know that they are entitled to help and that they have a right to GIS benefits. They are in dire straights because they are not aware of their rights. They do not know that if they had access to the guaranteed income supplement they might be able to eat better instead of spending their money on medication. They could perhaps decide to spend money on heating instead of having to wear layers of clothing because they do not have the necessary financial means to pay for housing, medication and food as well as for heating. Frequently, these people have to do without a telephone. Often they have no visitors because they have been predeceased by other family members.

Not many years ago, when someone retired at 65, it was thought he or she would be around till age 75 or 76. They had put aside enough money for 10 years or so. Today, these people are 90 or 95. What they managed to save, often with great difficulty, has vanished.

The interest rates that banks pay are not very generous. Indeed, our banks are very stingy. In fact, interest rates have been reduced to 1%, 2%, or a generous 3%. As a result, these people have neither capital nor income. They do not know whom to turn to for their basic needs. It is essential that we do our utmost for—

• (1650)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the NDP caucus, I welcome the opportunity to enter the debate on Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act. Our caucus will support the bill at second reading so that it can go to committee where we can move significant amendments.

Government Orders

Earlier this afternoon I listened carefully to the minister's comments. Judging by the rhetoric, he would have Canadians believe that through this single piece of legislation, he has once and for all ensured that seniors no longer need to worry about their economic security in retirement. No one more than I do wishes that were true.

Seniors across our country are profoundly and legitimately worried about their retirement incomes. They are worried about the solvency of their private pensions. They fret about the adequacy of both CPP and public income supports. They are keenly aware that the rate of inflation is higher for seniors than it is for other Canadians.

What is the government's response to these very legitimate fears? It introduces a bill that is essentially just housekeeping in nature. It is administrative. It streamlines some services and application processes but it does nothing to redress the inadequate benefit levels of seniors' incomes.

Politicians on all sides of the House pay lip service to the fact that seniors built our country and that we owe it to them to ensure that they can retire with the dignity and respect they deserve, but in reality, through successive Liberal and Conservative governments, seniors are falling farther and farther behind. In my hometown of Hamilton, one-quarter of all seniors are living in poverty and senior women over the age of 75 have a poverty rate of 36%. Nationally, over one-quarter of a million seniors are living under the low income cut-off, or as we call it, living below the poverty line. In 2004 about one-third of seniors, most of whom were single women, had little other income and were dependent on OAS and GIS for an average annual income of just \$12,400.

Living in poverty is hardly a retirement lived with dignity and respect. That is compounded by the fact that increases in the cost of living hits seniors disproportionately harder than any other segment of the population.

When Statistics Canada determines the annual cost of living upon which adjustments are based, its basket of goods includes electronics like iPods, plasma TVs and computers, all goods which are coming down in price and reducing the cost of living figures. Frankly, those are also the goods which seniors are not buying. The items seniors are spending money on are essentials like heat, hydro, food and shelter, the increasing costs of which are all outpacing their incomes. What is the government doing to address that issue? Absolutely nothing, not in this bill and not in any other piece of legislation that the Conservatives have introduced in the House to date.

In fact, I would like to remind members of the government of an issue that I raised with them in question period before the House rose in December. Statistics Canada has miscalculated the consumer price index since 2001. In response to my question, the then minister of human resources and social development acknowledged that this error meant seniors had been shortchanged for years in the increase to their CPP, OAS and GIS entitlements.

The government is continuing to make seniors pay for its mistake. Admittedly, that mistake originally happened during the Liberals' 13 years in government, but expecting the Liberals to act responsibly

with taxpayers' money is, as Justice Gomery reminded us, like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse.

However, the Conservatives started with a blank slate and they have now tabled Bill C-36, purportedly to deal precisely with CPP, OAS and GIS. Yet nowhere in the bill nor anywhere in the minister's comments does one find any reference to righting this wrong for retirees.

I have started a national petition campaign on this issue. I would encourage the millions of Canadians who I know are watching this afternoon to go to my website, download a copy of that petition and send it back to me, or they could write to me postage free here at the House of Commons and I will personally send them a copy to circulate among their friends. Surely in what may well be an election year the government will not be able to ignore the voices of millions of Canadian voters, but judging by Bill C-36, the government will need to be pushed to do the right thing.

Last June I had the privilege of introducing on behalf of our caucus a motion in the House of Commons to create a seniors charter of rights. One of the enumerated rights in the charter is the right of all seniors to income security. To my surprise, the Conservative government supported my motion and the motion was passed by a vote of 231 to 52. However, the Conservatives have neither introduced nor supported a single legislative initiative in the seven months since the motion was passed to enact any of the rights the seniors charter guarantees.

● (1655)

We need the government to do more than talk the talk. It is time that it walked the walk.

To date, the Conservatives have been disinclined to help seniors living in poverty. In the last federal budget, the one and only item that came even close to addressing the income of seniors was an increase to \$2,000 in the pension tax credit. Who benefits from that tax credit? Not a single senior whose only income is CPP, OAS and GIS. The tax credit only applies to private pensions. The seniors who need the money the most get no help from their government at all, not a single red cent for the neediest in our communities.

Similarly, the Conservatives increased the income tax rate in the lowest bracket from 15% to 15.5%, which means that many seniors are now getting \$10 less on their monthly CPP cheques. They would have to spend \$1,000 a month to recover that money from the much talked about 1% cut to the GST.

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The federal government reported a surplus of \$13 billion in its last federal budget and yet it did not spend a dime on alleviating poverty for seniors. I ask that I be forgiven for not doing cartwheels over the administrative tinkering that is before us in Bill C-36. It simply represents a missed opportunity.

Is there anything of value in the bill at all? Yes, there is. For example, I welcome the fact that the government will finally waive the requirement for a renewal application for the GIS and allowance benefits after an initial application has been made. That change, of course, was long overdue. What about the 130,000 seniors who are eligible for the GIS but are not receiving it? Why not just eliminate the application process altogether so that every eligible senior will be getting what is rightfully theirs?

I have proudly been working with the seniors and poverty working group in Hamilton which made it its mission last year to do the necessary outreach to ensure that seniors became aware of their public income entitlements and provided assistance to access them. It has been an absolute privilege to work with this dedicated group of community activists but it has also been an eye-opening experience to observe how community leaders who are already overworked have been forced to step up to the plate because the government has dropped the ball.

Just as seniors are not getting timely access to the GIS, so are many of them failing to apply for all of the benefits to which they are entitled under other income supports. CPP and OAS are the other two major programs that millions of aging Canadians rely on for income security in retirement. The same barriers exist for these programs as for the GIS.

One cannot simply refer seniors to a website and assume they can navigate their way through the information highway. In-depth counselling is often a prerequisite to seniors learning about all of their entitlements and ensuring that they fill out their applications properly and in a timely manner. That job used to be performed by government specialists who worked for Services Canada. These were people like Irene Smith in Hamilton who contacted me and my colleague, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, last November to inform us that she and her small cadre of colleagues were no longer permitted to give specialized attention to individuals seeking in-depth pension counselling. Instead, her job description was rewritten to make her a generalist who deals with everything from boat licences to EI. This will lead to hundreds and potentially thousands of elderly Hamiltonians being unable to access all of the financial benefits to which they are entitled in a timely fashion.

Often, restrictive clauses on retroactivity make it impossible to recover from early filing errors. These clauses too need to be changed but Bill C-36 offers absolutely no redress. Depriving seniors of what is rightfully theirs is hardly retirement lived with dignity and respect.

As we debate Bill C-36 here today, we need to ask ourselves who will ensure that current and future retirees will be made aware of their entitlements. Who will help them access what is rightfully theirs? Why is Bill C-36 silent on these crucial elements of implementation?

It is good to note that the bill would facilitate the application process for seniors who apply for income tested benefits and who have suffered a loss of income due to termination or reduction of employment or pension income by requiring that seniors report estimated pension and employment income only. However, who will be there to explain to them what that means? Who will explain to seniors when it might be advantageous for them to withdraw an OAS application where the pension has not yet been paid? I know that for some this will prove to be a positive change in the legislative framework but only if they are aware of how to access that permissive clause.

Who will explain the expanded restrictions on income tested benefits for immigrants subject to sponsorship agreements or does the minister hope that nobody will notice that part of the act?

• (1700)

Seniors whose sole income support is OAS and GIS are hardly in a position to hire lawyers and accountants to figure it out for them. That is why the NDP's seniors charter included the creation of a seniors advocate, someone who would be dedicated to conducting public education and awareness initiatives on the rights of seniors. Without that, a right that cannot be accessed is, frankly, no right at all. However, we can bet that the government has already put plans in place to enforce the punitive provisions of Bill C-36.

The bill strengthens the ability of the ministry to recover overpayments and interest where it has accrued, both with respect to OAS and CPP. We can bet our bottom dollar that those provisions have a staffing plan in place and yet why is there not even a mention of reimbursing pensioners with interest when an error of underpayment is made by the government? Seniors deserve better. Seniors have worked hard all their lives and have played by the rules but now that they need the system that their tax dollars helped to build, they are confronted by barriers to access.

If the government wants to be taken seriously with respect to its treatment of seniors, it needs to do more than talk the talk. It needs to walk the walk. It needs to live up to the commitment it made by voting for the seniors charter. It needs to ensure that seniors have timely access to all federal government services and programs. It also needs to ensure that seniors can rely on protected pensions and indexed public income supports that provide a reasonable state of economic welfare. Only then will seniors finally be able to retire with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my NDP colleague from Hamilton for the tireless work that she has been doing on behalf of seniors, being, if I may say, a lone voice, in many cases, in the House of Commons reminding us of the need to be true and to keep faith with the seniors of our country and to represent their needs in times like this when we are debating a bill such as this.

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She raised the alarming figure regarding the incidence of poverty among seniors in spite of genuine efforts in the last couple of decades to address and eradicate the embarrassingly high incidence of poverty among seniors.

There is one mitigating factor that I would raise and ask her to comment on. In the first Conservatives' budget, they did not reduce taxes for low income seniors. They actually raised taxes to low income seniors in two ways. First, the lowest tax rate went from 15% to 15.5%, a seemingly small amount but significant when one is living hand to mouth. The second thing they did was to lower the basic personal exemption for everyone by \$400 a year.

If a person is collecting another pension from another source, which may have been offset by a break they gave to pensioners of \$1,000, but if one's sole source of income is OAS and guaranteed income supplement and the basic personal exemption was reduced by \$400, it means one is paying taxes on \$400 more per year. When I work that out at 15.5% it amounts to about \$62.50. That does not sound like much per year but that is \$5 a month and, because it happened July 1, the Conservatives doubled it for the six months of the year, which makes it \$10 a month. That is half of a week's groceries for a person living on GIS and OAS.

Would the member comment on the double whammy that actually affected seniors when the Conservatives put their hands in their pockets and raised the taxes of our lowest income Canadians?

● (1705)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right when he says that \$10 a month extra out of the pockets of our poorest seniors is simply unaffordable.

As I said in my comments earlier, they would need to spend \$1,000 to recoup that money from the 1% GST cut that was also in the budget. They do not have \$1,000 a month to spend. In fact, they are in very real danger, and many of them have, of losing their homes, not because they still have mortgage payments that they are confronting but because their basic costs, such as property taxes, heat and hydro, have risen at a rate that has simply outpaced their incomes.

We have a government that talks the talk about wanting to help seniors but in fact for the most vulnerable seniors in our country they are taking steps back every single day. What we need to do in the House, which we have called for it by putting a motion on the order paper, is to have a comprehensive review of the public income supports on which seniors rely so that they can be lifted out of poverty. Our seniors built this country and they now need this country to stand up for them and ensure they can live out their years of retirement with dignity and respect.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member would agree that we should pass this bill through as quickly as possible so we can perhaps study some of the issues brought forward today. However, we should first move the bill forward so we can begin streamlining access to seniors benefits and making it easier for those who apply to apply only once. The new three out of the six years requirement for a disability pension will make it so much easier for everyone.

I hope the member will try to get the bill passed so we can improve things for seniors for today and for the future.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, as I said at the outset of my comments this afternoon, we do support the bill in part because we owe it to seniors who so desperately need easier access to the GIS. We know that 130,000 seniors this very minute could access the GIS if the process were simpler.

However, it is a bit ironic for the member to suggest to us that she needs a commitment from me today for speedy passage when I gave a commitment to the government prior to Christmas that we would be happy to debate the bill before Christmas, before the House adjourned for a six week break. If the government had taken us up on that offer, seniors would be accessing their entitlements today instead of the member standing here encouraging me to speed up the process.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, seniors from coast to coast to coast and certainly in my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan are very concerned about housing and health care.

I want to ask a question about women. A December 2004 report by Women Elders in Action talked about the fact that women live significantly longer, that women are the most numerous recipients of publicly funded pensions and that they are also the ones with the greatest need over an extended period of time.

This legislation does not deal with the long-standing issues around income security for women who rely, to a large extent, on OAS and CPP for their sole pension. I wonder if the member could comment on that issue.

● (1710)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. Poverty among seniors is disproportionately large for women in our community. The reason for that is that many women were not in the workforce and therefore do not have CPP to supplement their OAS which would make them eligible for the GIS. It is one of the reasons that poverty is rampant and about one-third of seniors who are living in poverty are women.

When we look at policies such as these and legislation that we want to bring forward, we need to do a gender analysis. The reason members of the House supported my seniors charter last June was that it contained provisions to look at income security, to look at affordable housing and to put an advocate in place who could inform seniors of their rights. Those are things that would help senior women in our country tremendously. I would urge all members who voted for the motion to take their commitment seriously and to act on it. I ask them to not let their record on that one vote to be their record on senior's issues.

Government Orders

We need to give meaning to those rights and we need to ensure that seniors access their rights. If we do not do that then the charter will become meaningless. We need to do this together. Members have expressed their will by voting for the charter, now let us walk the walk.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Hamilton is probably aware that the NDP was horrified to learn recently that as many as 300,000 Canadians who are eligible for guaranteed income supplement were not getting it even though the government knew who they were by virtue of their tax returns.

When we finally addressed the issue, the Liberal government grudgingly agreed but only with retroactivity for 11 months. The Bloc was very concerned with this issue as well. Is there any movement within the parameters of Bill C-36 or possibility to lift that ridiculous freeze and give the money to those people who were deserving of it and eligible for it all that time for the whole period they were eligible?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately there is nothing in Bill C-36 that addresses retroactivity. I have a bill on the order paper that speaks to precisely that issue.

This is one of the reasons why the bill needs to go to committee. It has all the punitive provisions whereby the government can grab overpayments. It has no problem doing that in a retroactive way. However, where seniors have been ripped off and shortchanged, there is absolutely no attempt to deal with retroactivity at all in the bill.

Again, it goes back to the same issue that I raised with respect to the mistake made in the Consumer Price Index and the impact that has had on increases in CPP, OAS and GIS. The government has admitted the mistake. It was not even its mistake. It happened under the Liberal administration, but the government admitted it happened. Again, is it willing to deal with it retroactively? Not at all. It owes seniors an explanation.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my remarks, I want to take the opportunity to congratulate the member from Hamilton on her passionate speech and her work on behalf of seniors, along with the member for Laval who spoke, and also on her new critic post on behalf of the Status of Women.

I am pleased to stand in the House today to speak to Bill C-36 both as the member of Parliament for Brampton—Springdale and also as the new critic for social development for the official opposition. As the critic for social development, I look forward to working on behalf of Canadians to ensure our youth, seniors and Canadian families have the tools and resources they need to succeed and to ensure they can actively contribute to their communities.

Today I will be speaking on Bill C-36, a bill that amends the Canada pension plan and the Old Age Security Act, on behalf of our caucus. However, all of us must remember and perhaps take a look at some historical facts. One of Canada's greatest achievements, and our hallmark, is its retirement income system for seniors. It is a program, as has been mentioned before, that has helped millions of seniors across Canada. I know that not only our party, the Liberal Party, but all other parties in the House have always promoted investments with and for our seniors.

Every previous Liberal government demonstrated this commitment by investing in our seniors and ensuring they would have the very best and lived their lives with dignity and respect. It was a previous Liberal government that implemented the old age security program, the Canada pension plan, the guaranteed income supplement and reinstated the new horizons program. It did this to ensure seniors would live with respect and dignity.

The previous Liberal government also wanted to ensure that seniors would have a voice at the cabinet table. This is why the former Liberal government appointed a minister of state for seniors. In 2005 it also announced the creation of a seniors secretariat to ensure there would be a focal point within the federal government for collaboration to address many of the issues highlighted here in the House today.

In the 1990s the Liberal government demonstrated its commitment towards seniors and ensured long term stability in the funding for Canada pension plan and old age security. Today, the Canada pension plan fund itself stands at over \$100 billion and remains safe for many generations to come.

In 2004 the Liberal government also increased the guaranteed income supplement by \$2.7 billion over two years. This alone was the largest single increase that had ever been made since 1984. This increase directly benefited the many low income seniors, who we have mentioned here in the House today. It is due to the 13 years of Liberal government, its commitment and its investment in seniors that fewer Canadian seniors are now living in poverty. Public pension benefits such as the old age security, the guaranteed income supplement, the Canada pension retirement plan, survivor and death benefits have been vital components of Canada's retirement income system.

Canada's retirement income system has successfully and dramatically reduced the rate of low income seniors. Low income among Canada's seniors who are over the age of 65 has been reduced from 11% in 1993 to 5.6% in 2004. Even though this is a lower percentage, we all realize there are still many single seniors who live in urban areas and many seniors, who are single women, who still continue to face significant challenges. Due to the fact that many seniors continue to live on fixed low income, they are likely to remain in low income for an extended period of time.

Even though the previous Liberal government increased the GIS benefits for low income seniors, it is imperative in moving forward that we, as parliamentarians in the House, continue to ensure we invest in Canada's retirement income system to ensure that the policies and programs the new government is creating will ensure that a greater number of seniors actually live their lives with dignity, with the resources and tools they need and to not live in poverty.

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The Conservative government, unfortunately, cannot claim to be the defenders of a sound public pension system when the Minister of Finance has launched an attack on the vital CPP funds by linking the CPP account to the national debt.

• (1715)

CPP funds must be used for one purpose and one purpose only, and that is for future pension payments. With the economic update that was put forward in the House in the fall of 2006, the Conservative government actually set a goal to eliminate Canada's net debt by 2021. While on the surface this sounded like a great idea and a very laudable goal, the reality of it is that it is a very different picture. Canada's national debt currently stands at about \$480 billion. In the past decade, again thanks to years of Liberal fiscal management, it has decreased dramatically from its record high of more than \$560 billion.

The Conservatives have pledged to pay down \$3 billion per year on the national debt. However, a simple calculation shows us that at this rate the national debt will be eliminated by the year 2166. However, this is where the difference between the net debt and the national debt comes in.

The national debt is the amount of money that the Government of Canada actually owes to its creditors, mostly international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It is basically the equivalent of a national mortgage and the accumulation of all past deficits and surpluses. Net debt is a national debt and all the other liabilities held by government plus all of the national assets.

The single largest national asset that is held by the Canadian government is the Canada pension plan. It is currently at a value of more than \$100 billion and by 2021 will reach a value in excess of \$400 billion. At current trends in 2021, the nominal values of the national debt and the CPP fund will converge, essentially cancelling each other out since one is a negative and the other is a positive. This is what has allowed the Conservatives to announce their goal of elimination of the net debt by that particular year.

However, it is completely misleading and irresponsible to attach the CPP fund to the national debt. Implicitly, the government has announced that the CPP fund will be used as collateral for future borrowing when in fact we in the House all know that the CPP fund exists for one reason and one reason only, to pay future CPP benefit payments.

Net debt has been the accumulation of all assets and all liabilities. In making their pledge to eliminate the net debt, which incidentally did not contain anything new since paying down \$3 billion per year on the national debt had already been booked well into the future by the previous Liberal government, the Conservatives have ignored one of the biggest liabilities that face the government, future CPP payments which continue to increase on a daily basis as our Canadian population increases and ages.

Between now and the year 2030, the population is projected to grow to 38.6 million. By 2030, the median age, which is currently at 38, is also expected to increase to 44. During this period the proportion of retirees will also increase significantly from 13% to 23% or almost nine million people. Those 80 years or older will also

significantly increase from the current 3% to 6% of the general population. This group represents one of the fastest growing segments of the population.

In 2003, when we take a look at the statistics, there were 21 retirees for every 100 people of working age. By 2030, it is expected that this ratio will almost double to 41 retirees for every 100 persons of working age. These demographics and this research highlights the necessity for the government to be able to respond to the changing conditions and our aging population.

Government must be committed to poverty reduction among seniors, single women seniors and our aboriginal seniors. Government must ensure that all seniors can maintain their standard of living in retirement. Public policy must be able to respond to the financial future pressure on the public pension system so that all seniors from all walks of life, not just high income seniors, are guaranteed a decent quality of life in their latter years.

Less than 50% of seniors benefit from a private pension plan. Women are far more likely to depend on the old age security and the guaranteed income supplement as important sources for their income. Both of these programs together account for 32% of women's income versus a men's income.

• (1720)

Despite the improvements the bill is going to make to ensure some efficiency, the government's policies have not helped Canada's seniors since the Conservatives have been in power. We need only look at the issue of income trusts. On October 31, 2006, the Conservative government broke its promise to Canadian seniors and actually started to tax income trusts, another promise broken by the Conservatives.

Many Canadians throughout the country had invested their money based on this promise. I know that many of my own constituents, many seniors in my own constituency of Brampton—Springdale, had invested their hard-earned life savings in income trusts. Many of them depended on and took the Conservatives at their word. On the day the decision to tax income trusts was announced, many constituents and many seniors across Canada lost their hard-earned savings. They were wiped out in a matter of moments.

It was ironic that when the Prime Minister appointed Senator LeBreton Secretary of State for Seniors, she herself could not see the devastating impact that the decision on income trusts actually had on seniors and stated, "I have not seen any evidence that people have individually lost large sums of money". This was absolutely no consolation to the thousands of seniors who lost their hard-earned savings.

This is also the same government that less than a year ago proposed to the provinces to put all future federal surpluses into the CPP account. This was widely shot down by many of the premiers, who did not want or were wary of any type of political interference in the fund, because they also believe that the CPP fund should be kept at arm's length from government and managed by the CPP Investment Board.

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We must ensure that the principles behind the CPP account cannot be compromised. I know that many of my hon. colleagues in the House have spoken about increasing efficiency, about ensuring that the most vulnerable seniors who need access to the GIS, the guaranteed income supplement, actually have the opportunity to get access, but I think we must also ensure, moving forward, that we provide access to the many thousands of seniors across Canada for whom English or French is perhaps not their first language. We must be able to reach out to the cultural communities to ensure that they also have the opportunity to learn of the benefits and the resources available to them.

Even though we will be supporting Bill C-36 today, I think it is imperative that we all work collectively in the House of Commons, as I believe ensuring the respect and dignity of our seniors is really a non-partisan issue. Many of the members of the House have put forward great initiatives, policies and program ideas. I hope that we all work together to ensure that our seniors have the very best.

Seniors must not live in poverty any more. There must not be low income seniors. We must provide policies, programs and resources to ensure that they actually live outside of poverty and have the very best, that they live in an environment of dignity and respect.

• (1725)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague would agree with me that the plight of women pensioners living in poverty was exacerbated terribly when the former President of the Treasury Board used the entire surplus of the public service pension plan to pay down the debt and to give tax breaks to wealthier Canadians in the year 2000.

My colleague was not here then, but we remember it very well. Statistically, most of the public service pensioners are women and their average income is \$9,000 per year, but when the Liberals froze the wages of public servants for seven years straight, the actuarial impact was to create a \$30 billion surplus in the plan. Rather than saying that they would improve the plight of these people making \$9,000 a year, largely women, and distribute it among the beneficiaries, they said, "Hey, we found \$30 billion. Let us use it to give \$100 billion worth of tax breaks to our wealthy friends and corporations".

Would the hon. member agree with me that this mindset dramatically affected in a negative way the standard of living of some of Canada's poorest Canadians, the women who were in fact pensioners from Canada's public service, many of whom are in Ottawa, many of whom are living in my riding, and many of whom, I am sure, live in her own riding?

If I could just add to and qualify this, at the same time, Bell Canada had a pension plan surplus. Bell decided that it would take one-third for the company, have one-third for future use and give one-third to the beneficiaries of the plan. In fact, one-third was a credit, I suppose, a contribution holiday. Would the hon. member not agree that this would have been the humane and decent thing to do for the pensioners with the \$30 billion surplus instead of the government taking it all and not one penny going to the beneficiaries of the plan?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned that I was not here during that particular time, but I can say that when the

Liberal government was in power it did invest in seniors. It had a commitment to seniors. I know that many reforms took place in the late 1990s to ensure that there would be security and stability for the Canada pension plan. Over \$28.5 billion was invested in the old age supplement. There were also the guaranteed income supplement benefits in budget 2005. Numbers of initiatives for seniors were announced. There was a commitment of over \$2 billion a year in direct tax credits such as the age credit and the pension income credit.

I know that under the Liberal tenure there was a variety of investments. Commitments were made on behalf of seniors. I know that many of my colleagues in the Liberal Party want to ensure that we have seniors who do not live in poverty. Seniors should not live on low incomes. We tried to ensure that there were resources and tools available to them at that particular time. I would hope that in moving forward the Conservatives would also start supporting that investment and that commitment to our seniors.

• (1730)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to state my sincere congratulations to the member on her new position as critic and also congratulate her for her fine speech, made with passion in this House. Of course, all of us are concerned about this issue, and it is a very important one for which I think we will probably find support in the House among members of all parties.

Sometimes we have to remind members of the House and the public that the Liberal Party is the party of old age pensions and the party of old age security. I recall vividly having a discussion with my friends on this very issue about seven or eight years ago. Many people, and certainly people of my generation, have felt that there probably will not be a pension when people of my generation retire. I think that probably if we had listened to the NDP's recommendations we would not have a pension plan now nor would we for future generations.

We Liberals in fact brought about great stability. The member for LaSalle—Émard, when he was Minister of Finance, brought incredible stability to the pension plan and today we can say that it will be there for the next 75 years and hopefully for many more years to come.

We have to keep straightening out the record because my hon. colleague from the NDP, when he asked his question, certainly was forgetting the fact that the system was practically bankrupt and that my generation would not have been able to benefit from the plan we have today. There was an incredible amount of work done, and there were some sacrifices, yes, but we brought stability to it and in fact the plan that we have today is guaranteed. That guarantee would not have been there. This is something the NDP member somehow always forgets to mention when he states his facts.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for actually reminding others in the House of the Liberals' commitment to our seniors and also to the Canada pension plan in ensuring its stability for the long term. As he mentioned, the member for LaSalle—Émard, at that time the prime minister, ensured stability for at least 75 years. We hope it lasts for years to come.

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If I may, I will continue with our achievements, our commitment and the investments made by the previous Liberal government. In the economic update of 2005, the basic personal amount was increased by \$500. This helped tens of thousands of seniors living on low incomes go from below the poverty line to lower income levels.

We can also take a look at the other achievements. There were tax reductions for individuals and adjustments to our tax system that also benefited thousands of seniors. There was the launch of the new horizons program for seniors, which allowed funding for community projects in order to reach out to vulnerable seniors.

We hope the Conservatives are going to continue some of these great programs and initiatives.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if I could take just one more moment of time, I would like my colleague to explain to me by what convoluted pretzel logic the Liberals thought they were protecting the privacy of low income seniors in not giving them their guaranteed income supplement. How did they rationalize that?

My question finds its origins in the fact that the government knew there were 300,000 seniors who were eligible for the guaranteed income supplement—it knew this by their tax returns—but who had never applied. The onus to apply was on them. When we complained to the government, it said it could not just tell them that they were eligible as it would violate their privacy to use their tax returns for any reason other than taxes.

Now, did it rationalize that kind of pretzel logic in that it was doing people a favour by not giving them the income supplement to which they were entitled, especially when we consider that they are the lowest income people in the country? People do not even qualify for a guaranteed income supplement until there are earnings of \$12,000 a year, and up to, I believe, \$22,000 total, or in that range.

I am not satisfied with the answers I have received so far regarding the guaranteed income supplement and what the thought process of the Liberals would be in denying worthy and deserving seniors the income supplement they are entitled to and then only going retroactive for 11 months even when they are guilty into it.

• (1735)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, I must remind the member that in 2004 it was the Liberal government that made one of the largest single increases to the guaranteed income supplement for our seniors, to the tune of \$2.7 billion. For many seniors across the country, that resulted in an additional almost \$36 per month for a single senior and \$58 a month for couples. For seniors who are living in poverty, that is a substantial amount of money. This \$2.7 billion investment was made because of our commitment to seniors and to ensuring that they would have the very best.

We have all agreed in this House today that we must reach out to those seniors who do not have the information or the resources that allow them to realize that they can actually apply for the GIS. I would think that it is the responsibility of all parliamentarians in this House to reach out to those seniors, to reach out to those constituents, to ensure that we educate them, and to ensure that if they are entitled to GIS they will be able to apply for the program.

I must say that during the previous Liberal government there was a great partnership between Human Resources and Social Development Canada and the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, which allowed provincial organizations and many other grassroots volunteers to reach out to seniors and educate them about the GIS.

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I apologize for interrupting the proceedings. I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to present a report from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table the report?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 27th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of the committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I move that the 27th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs concerning the membership of the committees of the House, presented to the House at this moment, be concurred in.

As well, in order not to inconvenience any committees presently meeting, I would also move that the membership changes contained in the 27th report take effect beginning Tuesday, January 30.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

CANADA PENSION PLAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will split my time with the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi. I am taking this opportunity to wish a happy new year to my constituents in the riding of Compton—Stanstead, who elected me for a second time last year.

I am pleased to address Bill C-36. The Bloc Québécois and myself feel that this legislation includes some interesting improvements for our elderly who—and we tend to forget it all too often—built this country.

After being elected for the first time, I quickly realized how the federal government was so incredibly indifferent to the plight of the elderly, particularly the most vulnerable ones. The government tends to be more receptive to the demands of groups that are more powerful, more vocal and more organized. Therefore, the most vulnerable and isolated seniors in our society are not a real priority for the federal government. This is one of the reasons why the Canada pension plan and the Old Age Security Act were flawed in a number of ways. Fortunately, Bill C-36 seeks to correct several of these flaws, particularly as regards the guaranteed income supplement.

We know that until the Bloc Québécois began to work on it in recent years, this guaranteed income supplement was anything but guaranteed; it was pretty hit-and-miss. One had to be unusually motivated and prepared to battle in order to get it. In 2001, the Bloc Québécois made sure that the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities studied the guaranteed income supplement file. Again it was the Bloc Québécois that organized a huge operation to identify the seniors who were entitled to the guaranteed income supplement, but who were being kept in the dark.

In 2001, it was estimated that over 68,000 seniors in Quebec and 270,000 seniors in Canada were not receiving the guaranteed income supplement although they were entitled to it. The parliamentary committee looking at the question pointed the finger at administrative complexity, ineffective, inadequate and poorly targeted advertising, over-zealous public administrators and, more generally, the conflict of interest caused by the astronomical sums saved by the federal government at the expense of the most disadvantaged.

Those are the reasons why so many seniors were deprived of the guaranteed income supplement. Between 1993 and 2001, close to \$3.2 billion in all of Canada, including \$800 million in Quebec alone, was not paid to seniors who were entitled to it and was reallocated to other purposes by the government of Mr. Chrétien, the member for LaSalle—Émard and the leader of the official opposition—I cannot mention their names.

Misappropriation of employment insurance, misappropriation of support for seniors and dumping of problems onto the provinces, these are the three pillars on which Ottawa's zero deficit and debt reduction were built. What an edifying and inspiring example for future generations.

Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of the Bloc Québécois, close to 42,000 of these people were discovered in Quebec alone. This effort accounts for some \$190 million more that has been redistributed to the people who need it most. In 2004, when I was elected to the House, I quickly saw that the main problems of access to the guaranteed income supplement involved lack of familiarity with the program and the hugely complex application form.

I visited seniors' centres in my riding and met dozens of struggling individuals, in order to tell them about the guaranteed income supplement. Those few thousand additional dollars were enough to relieve much misery. I can guarantee that. However, once individuals are identified, not everything is solved. The question of renewal also posed a problem. For many seniors, especially those with less

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education, having to fill out complicated forms year after year constitutes a heavy burden.

● (1740)

Many of our seniors did not have the opportunity to learn to read and write. They have managed to get through life despite these limitations, but they are very discouraged by the complicated forms found on the Internet.

In recent years, I have been very happy to see that these forms have been simplified and that, finally, Bill C-36 introduces an automatic renewal system. It was about time.

That said, Bill C-36 introduces another important element, namely, the adjustment of the guaranteed income supplement if there is a drastic drop in the recipient's income.

Last year, one of my constituents came to my office. This gentleman, who worked part time in a sawmill, saw his hours drop from about a dozen hours a week to none at all. At that time, he had to wait eight months for his guaranteed income supplement to be adjusted to his new situation, which had a direct impact on his income and his quality of life, and caused him considerable stress that he could have done without.

I would also like to be very clear on one point. The Bloc Québécois supports this bill because it is a step in the right direction. However, I would like to see the government take the next step and launch an information and awareness campaign about the guaranteed income supplement. Older people who are eligible for this benefit but who are still not receiving it should automatically have access to it.

Furthermore, the Bloc Québécois will continue to fight for full retroactivity of the guaranteed income supplement for everyone who has the right to it.

For years, the federal government withheld much-needed money from our poorest seniors. By failing to ensure awareness of this program and by producing forms that were not well-suited to older people, the federal government made things even worse for the most vulnerable members of our society.

A total of \$3.2 billion was not distributed to the people who contributed so much to building this country. This is a flagrant violation of two major principles: inter-generational equality and the gratitude these builders deserve.

The only way to correct this situation and make amends is to give these older people full retroactivity. Full retroactivity. For the Bloc Québécois and for me, this is about honour and justice.

It is upsetting to learn that for all these years, both Liberal and Conservative governments have allowed a profoundly unjust and cruel situation to persist.

Yes, Bill C-36 will bring about some progress. Still, we will continue the fight to ensure that the federal government gives the people who made Quebec and Canada the nations they are today what they deserve.

Government Orders

• (1745)

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her comments. We serve together on the parliamentary committee on the status of women. I want to put a question to the member.

Bill C-36, like many other pieces of legislation that have come before the House, lacks a gender-based analysis. We know that women are disproportionately impacted by decisions that governments of any political stripe make.

Could the member specifically comment on the fact that women are poorer and that women are disproportionately in receipt of old age security because they do not have the kind of income that would mean they would have private pensions? Could she comment on what a gender-based analysis would mean to a bill like Bill C-36?

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question.

It is true that women who today are 70 or 72 years old were never in the labour market 50 or 60 years ago. Many of these women were farmers' wives and thus had no income.

Today, according to Statistics Canada, women represent 52% of the population. Statistically speaking, as women age they become increasingly poor. Women live to the age of 82 or 85 and these women are poor. They are not in the habit of looking for information because they had no money prior to that point. They reach the age of 65 and they receive a pitiful pension. Furthermore, these individuals feel rich because the meagre amount of \$450 per month is sufficient given that they had nothing before. Yet, we must explain to them that they are entitled to a guaranteed income supplement in order for them to have a certain quality of life, and not in an attempt to manage poverty, which is not self-evident.

For these reasons this bill must be adopted in order to help these women, especially these women and these men who built this country and who brought up those sitting here today.

• (1750)

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in my colleague's views about an issue that has been raised many times by the Bloc Québécois and something that I know was of great interest particularly to a former member who is no longer with us in the House of Commons. It deals with the guaranteed income supplement, and the fact that 300,000 Canadians were eligible for this guaranteed income supplement. The government knew they were eligible, but chose not to tell them and never did pay them.

In cooperation with the Bloc and NDP, when we finally forced the Liberal government to reinstate the guaranteed income supplement to Canadians, it only agreed to retroactivity for 11 months instead of the full reinstatement. Can the member explain or help enlighten us by what cruel logic the Liberals would decide they would only reimburse people for 11 months of what they owned them whereas if people owed taxes from five years ago, the government would go

back retroactively until time began to get back taxes? Could she enlighten us, please?

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Speaker, I wish I had the answer to the member's question, but I represent the Bloc Québécois and I do not have the Liberal mindset. I am therefore unable to explain why these people are trying to hold money back from those it is owed to. If you want to know why they did not agree to retroactivity, I suggest you ask them. If I had my way, this would all have been resolved a long time ago.

Looking at the new government, while the Conservatives keep blaming the previous government, the fact is that their party has been in office for a year. Where I come from, new means a short time, not a year and a half. It is their role now to form the government and, as such, to give seniors what they are owed. They should stop blaming the previous government. The Conservatives ought to play their role properly and pay these people their guaranteed income supplement retroactively.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today on Bill C-36 concerning the guaranteed income supplement in particular. Actually, I have had to deal with this in my own riding because some people did not even know it existed. Some older people applied for it but after a year still had not received it. We had to help these people for several months. There are still people in my riding, though, who have not yet received the guaranteed income supplement.

It is important, therefore, to implement this legislation so that the government realizes that this guaranteed income is fair and equitable for everyone entitled to it.

The guaranteed income supplement report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities was adopted in December 2001. Unfortunately, it is still pertinent after five years of Liberal rule during which nothing was done to implement it. The Conservatives have been in power for one year and only now are they starting to think about it. This is a serious problem that should be corrected as soon as possible.

The committee provided an interesting overview of the situation, which we should review today along with the necessary solutions. The Department of Human Resources and Social Development administers three income-maintenance programs for seniors, namely the old age security pension, the guaranteed income supplement, and the Canada pension plan. We are going to focus on the one that is closest to us.

The guaranteed income supplement was designed to provide an additional benefit to low-income retired people residing in Canada. The money is added to the old age security pension. I did mean low-income people. I am very close to some people who are having difficulty. It would be only natural for us to help all low-income people so that they can finish their lives in a dignified, equitable way.

Government Orders

The problem is that people now have to apply every year. These renewals are usually made when eligible people file their income tax returns. This is a source of grave injustices, however, because many people do not file income tax returns or are illiterate and have difficulty understanding what needs to be done to get the supplement.

It has been estimated that in the past, 15% of seniors used food banks and never received the guaranteed income supplement. These less fortunate people never received this supplement. Imagine how important an income supplement is to the survival of someone who uses a food bank.

The question is simple. Why do so many people not apply for the guaranteed income supplement, which could be of great help and perhaps even necessary? Filling out an application is not easy for a person with an inadequate level of literacy. The current government is cutting literacy programs and will create even more illiterate seniors. This system absolutely needs to be made as simple as possible, unless we can teach people to read and write or provide them with other ways to obtain this supplement.

Some will say that people can consult the Web site. Have you ever seen a food bank user able to use the Internet at that age? They are not familiar with this new technology.

Physical or mental health problems, physical limitations and language barriers have deprived a number of people of significant amounts of money. That is why so many people did not receive the guaranteed income supplement to which they were entitled.

• (1755)

It makes us wonder who makes up the client base. Who are these people that did not receive the supplement? They are people who never worked outside the home, people who did not file income tax returns, aboriginals, residents of remote communities, poorly educated individuals, who do not read or speak either of the official languages, or people who are disabled, sick or homeless. I want to emphasize that, because there is a growing number of homeless people over the age of 65.

During my tour of Quebec last year, I met homeless people who were 70, 75, 80. These people are increasingly being kicked out of their homes. Since they have no fixed address, they cannot receive the minimum required to live a decent life.

One thing stood out to the committee addressing this issue: the fact that Human Resources and Social Development Canada was aware of the under-subscription to the guaranteed income supplement. This has been a problem since at least 1993. What did the Liberal government do about it at the time? It did nothing, even though it knew about the problem.

The solution to this problem is to take action to help people directly. That is important.

Consequently, the Bloc is also proposing and recommending that the committee look at requiring the government to pay full retroactive guaranteed income supplement benefits, rather than a maximum of 11 months, as the legislation provides. This would mean a retroactive payment covering all eligibility periods.

How can the government have a double standard, requiring taxpayers to retroactively pay long overdue sums of money, yet refusing to do the same when it owes them money? It makes no sense. It is unethical and unfair. It is truly immoral.

The Bloc Québécois will also make sure that the amendments to the current legislation do not restrict eligibility. The guaranteed income supplement should be available to everyone who needs it. The Bloc Québécois will ask the Information Commissioner and the Privacy Commissioner to testify about expanding the group of third parties to whom personal contribution information could be provided. Because there are people who do not understand, others must ask questions on their behalf.

The Bloc Québécois will continue the fight it began long ago so that the federal government—we could even talk about the two successive governments—ensures that all seniors who are entitled to the guaranteed income supplement can receive it easily and on an ongoing basis.

There is also the matter of interest charged on overpayments. The Bloc Québécois will make sure that this bill treats all taxpayers equally and that there are no abuses by the government.

Lastly, the Bloc will make sure that the limitation period for claims of government overpayments is proportional to the period during which individuals can claim amounts owing. The government is not proposing full retroactivity, yet it seems to do away with any limitation period when it comes to the money it is owed. As I said earlier, this is true especially of income tax. It could even be said that the government has a double standard: it acts one way when it is owed money and another way when it has to pay money to people who have been paying their taxes for years.

It is a question of ethics and setting a good example. The government should hold itself to the same rules as others. I would also like to say that the guaranteed income supplement should be available to everyone who needs it and that the application process should be simpler, so that people are not required to apply every year. It must be paid on an ongoing basis.

• (1800)

[English]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member about retroactivity and how the provinces and federal income support programs handle it. British Columbia does not allow it. Its senior supplement is for one year. The widow's pension is for one year in Alberta. Saskatchewan has an income plan for one year. Manitoba has a guaranteed annual income for one year. Ontario's drug plan program is for one year. Quebec, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia all do not have retroactivity payments when it is a public program such as this one.

Government Orders

Is there a program in any jurisdiction that we could compare this to so that we could understand how 11 months would not be generous enough? Already the guaranteed income supplement allows an 11 month retroactivity clause. Could the member tell us about a program in any jurisdiction that allows retroactivity and how it works?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question. My hon. colleague opposite would like me to provide some examples from Canada. It is true that in Canada, this is not a very common approach. However, this approach exists elsewhere, in Europe in particular. In Europe, when the government owes the individual something, it pays in full. It treats others as it would have others treat it.

I think we should apply this same reasoning. We cannot resolve an injustice by creating another one. Just because some provinces have injustices like that does not mean the federal government should follow suit and carry on in this way.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the aging population in our country is one of the biggest, most underappreciated challenges to public policy making today. As we look to the future we will have three to four workers for every retired person. Some 20 or 30 years ago it was seven to eight workers for every retired person.

I want to ask two questions. The first question deals with the issue of those seniors who live in quiet desperation because they simply do not have enough money to make ends meet and with medical and other challenges they have they will need a supplement. Would the member's colleagues support a low income supplement of up to \$2,000 per year for those who make less than \$20,000? Second, would his party like to work with many of us to abolish the mandatory retirement age of 65?

•(1805)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his question.

We are currently in the process of creating fear about the fact that there will be more seniors than before. Yes, it is true that we have never on Earth experienced this situation in our capitalist system.

We have to remember one thing: for every income received in society, no matter how small, this income is multiplied by three in terms of spending. It is not just a loss: it gets people working, employs everyone and fuels the economy. Thinking that only producers of goods and services fuel the economy is a very bad way of seeing things. That was the argument used in Ontario when a number of teachers were laid off. It soon became clear that the economy was taking a hit because the money the government used to pay the teachers was money that multiplied by three.

We do not need to fear population aging. Generally speaking, people are aging with a lot more money than before and will be able to take care of themselves. For those who will not be able to do so, for the less fortunate, we have to ensure that the measures are in

place. Those measures will be economically viable and will add to our economy.

[*English*]

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act. I am also very happy to have the opportunity to rise in the House on the first day we are back. I hope all of my colleagues had an enjoyable holiday season. I look forward to catching up with them over the coming days.

I look forward to continuing my work on behalf of the riding of Oak Ridges—Markham. Last year I raised several of my riding's concerns on the floor of the House and I continue to work with my caucus colleagues on such important subjects as the environment, the Kelowna accord and criminal justice issues.

The bill before us today aims to make a number of changes to the Canada pension plan and Old Age Security Act. The bill will implement the existing full funding provision for new benefits and benefit enhancements. It also provides for public reporting of costs and integration of those costs into the process for setting the contribution rate. Any new benefits or enhancements to existing ones will have to be met with an appropriate increase in premiums.

Bill C-36 changes the contributory requirements for disability benefits under the Canada pension plan for contributors with 25 or more years of contributions to the plan to require contributions in only three of the last six years in the contributory period. In addition, this enactment amends the Old Age Security Act to authorize the governor in council to make regulations respecting the payment of interest on amounts owing. The enactment also eliminates the ability of estates or successions to apply for income tested benefits and ensures that sponsored immigrants are treated the same for the purpose of determining entitlements to income tested benefits.

On the whole, this is a bill that I will be able to support. I welcome the increase in accessibility to disability benefits as stipulated in this bill. I am pleased that sponsored immigrants will be treated the same for the determination of benefits.

A rich industrialized country like ours must ensure excellent standards of living for senior Canadians so that they can live out their golden years in dignity and comfort. Seniors in Canada have worked all of their lives and they should not have to worry about financial issues when they retire.

Government Orders

The Liberal Party is the party of the Canada pension plan and old age security. Our party continues to recognize the duty we owe to those Canadians who have worked for so many years and made so many valuable contributions to our communities.

Liberal policies in the 1990s returned the Canada pension plan funds to stability and ensured a reliable public pension system for 75 years to come, the longest we can possibly forecast. The Canada pension plan fund currently stands at over \$100 billion. It is safe for generations to come. This is no small feat as just a few years ago many were predicting its demise. Due to good management by the previous government, future generations of Canadians can depend on the Canada pension plan as previous generations have for four decades.

As a member of Parliament I often meet with seniors in my riding. Seniors in Oak Ridges—Markham are worried about their pensions, savings, health care and day to day living issues. Unfortunately, many seniors in Canada are nervous about the policies of the Conservative government. I wish to explore these areas of concern.

● (1810)

The first is an issue with which the House is very familiar and that is rural mail delivery. In October the House unanimously supported my motion to have rural mail delivery restored. Losing one's mailbox delivery is inconvenient for anyone, but it is especially hard on the elderly. Elderly Canadians rely on mail delivery for communicating with friends and family and for receiving their pension cheques and other important material. Elderly Canadians were disproportionately affected by the cessation of rural mail delivery.

I am pleased that the government has directed Canada Post to reinstate this unique mode of delivery. The minister has set a timeline of an additional 18 months before delivery is back. It has already been 12 months since my constituents lost rural mailbox delivery. This is much too long a period for elderly Canadians to wait.

The second matter I wish to raise this afternoon that has greatly concerned seniors is the government's income trust decision on October 31. The decision to tax income trusts wiped out more than \$25 billion in savings overnight and reversed a key Conservative campaign promise. Many seniors invested their money based on this promise and their faith in the Conservatives cost them thousands of dollars of their hard-earned savings. This kind of move really hurt the trust and confidence seniors have in the government. Many do not believe that the government has their interests at heart.

The third Conservative policy that is of concern regards what this bill fundamentally involves and that is the Canada pension plan. The Conservatives cannot claim to be the defenders of a sound public pension system. The Minister of Finance launched an attack on vital Canada pension plan funds with his net debt goal announced last fall. It is unwise and potentially dangerous to tie the Canada pension plan account to the national debt.

I fully support reducing Canada's national debt. Reducing the debt frees up interest payments and allows us to make important investments in Canada's social safety net and to decrease taxes and to make sure that Canadians are able to enjoy more of their hard-

earned dollars. That being said, I do not believe that Canada pension plan funds should be used to lower the national debt.

The net debt announcement attaches Canada pension plan funds, the contributions of taxpayers, to our national debt to artificially balance the books. This is another attack on the security of pensioners. That money is not for debt repayment or future collateral to borrow funds. It is for pension payments. Future payments from the Canada pension plan fund represent a massive liability on the fund, a liability that was not considered by the minister in his net debt policy move.

The previous Liberal government reduced the debt, lowered taxes and ensured the long term sustainability of the Canada pension plan. Why is the Minister of Finance so determined to attack the Canada pension plan? Why does he want to use it for ends for which it was not intended? A balanced approach ensures the survival and sustainability of taxpayers' pensions while reducing taxes and investing in the priorities of Canadians.

I am pleased that we have Bill C-36 in front of us. It allows us an opportunity to debate and to discuss the overall theme of pensions. I welcome what the government intends to do in this bill, but it must remain mindful of its responsibilities toward Canadian seniors. This means ensuring they have a decent quality of life, have access to sound investments over which promises are not broken, and can fully depend on all pension plans.

I look forward to hearing the comments of my colleagues and following this bill as it makes its way through Parliament.

● (1815)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed much of the speech by the member for Oak Ridges—Markham, but to do justice to the debate on Bill C-36, we need to start from the same base level of historical accuracy and information.

I noted that the member for Oak Ridges—Markham said it was the Liberal Party that created the old age security system as we know it today. In actual fact, I would point out that in 1926 it was the member for Winnipeg Centre at the time, the founder and first leader of the CCF, J.S. Woodsworth, who went to the minority Liberal prime minister of the day, William Lyon Mackenzie King, and cut a deal with him that the CCF would support the Liberal government if it finally yielded to its demands and introduced some measure of old age security.

The member for Winnipeg Centre at the time was smart enough to get that in writing. A letter exists today in the archives of the New Democratic Party. Kicking and screaming, the Liberals were forced to introduce some measure of old age security for seniors back in 1926. My colleague, the member for Saint Boniface, remembers that; apparently, he is older than I thought he was.

Government Orders

In actual fact, something that he might remember is that in 1942 the hon. Stanley Knowles took the place of J.S. Woodsworth as the member for Winnipeg Centre. Stanley Knowles was widely agreed to be the father of the Canadian pension system because he dedicated his career from 1942 to 1966 fighting and struggling to get the old age security Canada pension plan that we know today introduced by a Liberal minority government under Lester Pearson at that time.

It was Stanley Knowles who finally levered the Liberals into acting like Liberals in introducing the Canada pension plan. Then he spent the rest of his career, from 1966 to 1984 when he suffered a stroke, trying to get the pension plan indexed to inflation, another huge victory for Stanley Knowles and the party that I represent.

It is disingenuous, if not revisionist, to say that the Liberal Party was responsible for the introduction of the old age security system, the guaranteed income supplement or the Canada pension plan. It was those two great men who represented the riding that I am honoured to represent now whom we can thank for that.

I believe my colleague, the member for Oak Ridges—Markham, is too good a member of Parliament to believe the speech he was given to read in the House today. I honestly believe, at least now that he has been enlightened as to the history and origins of our old age security system, that he may want to revise his comments.

• (1820)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Mr. Speaker, good ideas come from everywhere. Good governments are not around every day. We saw that in the last Parliament when the New Democrats tried to take credit for what the good Liberal government had done at the time. It takes a smart Liberal government to implement the good ideas that come from within the House.

I may not be as old as I look, but I am definitely not as old as the member across the floor to remember all the policies that were brought in by the NDP. However, I remember that there has never been an NDP government in Canada to implement any sort of policies.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, speaking for my colleagues, we are all very happy that the hon. member is back again to faithfully represent his constituents in the House.

Could the member comment on the fact that seniors' issues are being neglected by the government and the fact that the Liberal government in the 1990s did something that very few other western countries had done, and that was to put pension stability first and foremost, successfully putting our public pensions on a firm fiscal footing? That has not been done, to my knowledge, by any other western nation. Our former finance minister deserves a great deal of credibility for that.

Does the member not think that seniors' issues, in particular health care, is being utterly neglected by the government? In fact, it has abrogated its responsibility to deal with that, which is the number one issue affecting Canadians from coast to coast. Poll after poll show that health care is the number one issue affecting Canadians. Yet since the government has come into power it has not, to my knowledge, introduced one single innovative series of solutions. Nor has the government or the Minister of Health called together his

provincial counterparts to work together to put our public health care system on firm financial and stable ground.

Does my hon. colleague not think the government should get with the program and start putting health care at the top of its list of priorities?

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Mr. Speaker, on the first issue of the viability of the Canada pension plan, I was in private business in the nineties. I had clients come into my office to discuss the Canada pension plan. They were aware that the Canada pension plan would not be around to serve them, let alone their children.

I was not privileged to be in the House at the time and I do not know what the discussions were, but I can tell the House that on the streets in Canada the word was that the Liberal government at the time had fixed the problem of the Canada pension plan for many years. I saw that and heard it from many Canadians across the region.

In terms of the health care issue, I would agree with my colleague that the Conservatives have been unable to tackle the one issue that was put forth initially in its platform, and that was the wait times. They have been unable to gather the first ministers of health, provincial and territorial, to give them some kind of direction and to demand some kind of a timeline to fix the wait times within Canada.

• (1825)

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Oak Ridges—Markham mentioned over and over, and it needs to be repeated, about the security of today's Canada pension plan, and it took Liberals to look after the mess that was left after many years of neglect by the Conservative government.

I think he mentioned something like quite a number of years in the future that we have protection and security. My question is going to be about confidence. We all know how hard it is to keep and maintain confidence in the ridings. We face that every day.

We have heard the current comments of the so-called new Conservative government and what it will do. We have looked at some of the issues which it is going to deal with such as the Canada pension fund and whether it will use it to balance the books.

Who is he hearing that the people have more confidence in when he travels in his riding? Do they have confidence in the Liberals, the ones who looked after the mess left by the Conservatives, or do they have confidence in the Conservatives to mess it up again? I wonder what he hears from his constituents.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Mr. Speaker, the question begs a very biased answer, but I am not going to engage in that. It has been said quite clearly that it was in the nineties, after the Conservative government, when the Canada pension plan program was secured for the next 75 years.

Adjournment Proceedings

In terms of attaching the Canada pension plan fund to the national debt, I have studied many ledgers. I have looked at many balance sheets. This is a new improved, I guess, Conservative plan that not too many accountants or financial planners would have any familiarity with it. When we look at our Canada pension plan fund and add it into the mix of the national debt, it creates such a big mess that is unbelievable. It is very unfair for Canadians to look at the national debt, the way that it is stated by the current government.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Victoria.

Before I get into some specifics around Bill C-36, much has been talked about in terms of the Canada pension plan and how its investment in the stock market has been such a good thing. Yet when members raise issues around health care, how do they address the fact that the Canada pension plan has money invested in tobacco companies? We know there are links between various kinds of cancers and the impact they have on our health care system. On one hand, we are putting money into CPP. On the other hand, we are paying it in health care costs. One would wonder about the wisdom of that kind of situation.

With regard to Bill C-36, the New Democratic Party will support having this bill go to second reading, but we have some concerns about the things that were omitted from the legislation. We hear a lot from seniors in my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan. My riding happens to be a destination of choice for people to retire. Although rising numbers of seniors are moving to the riding, we also have rising housing costs, reduced access to rental accommodation, increased concerns about health care in terms of access, long wait lists and lack of access to things like resident home support and to long term care beds.

Many issues are facing seniors. We also hear from them about things like transportation, for example, and that is certainly an environmental issue. It is also very much an issue for seniors. They want the ability to maintain their independence, yet in many of our communities there is lack of access to adequate public transportation, which really limits their ability to maintain that independence.

We also have heard from seniors about livability and affordability in their communities, and that leads me directly to income.

I see that my time is up for the day.

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Unfortunately, I will have to interrupt, but the honourable member for Nanaimo—Cowichan will have eight minutes left in her allotted time.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*Translation*]

COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 25, the Conservative government announced that it was doing away with the court challenges program, a decision made without debate or consultation and which violates the Official Languages Act.

I travelled across Canada, from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Vancouver, with the Standing Committee on Official Languages. In every province of the country, there was not a place where the francophone minority did not ask why the federal government had abolished the court challenges program.

The question that I put to the President of the Treasury Board at the time was important for people using both official languages of our country, so that they could thrive and have access to services.

Today, in Canada, we can see that francophone minorities were able to get schools in Prince Edward Island and in Nova Scotia. People were able to get services in both languages in New Brunswick. We were able to put a challenge to increase bilingualism in the RCMP in New Brunswick, or to fight for food inspectors in Shippagan, who were going to be transferred to Moncton. There is also the riding of Acadie—Bathurst which was to be split and be linked to Miramichi. It is thanks to the court challenges program that we were able to debate the issue and go to court. Here in Ottawa, the battle to keep the Montfort Hospital was also waged through the court challenges program.

Everywhere we went, even in Toronto, in Sudbury, in British Columbia, in Saskatchewan, in Manitoba and in Regina, we found that it had given people the opportunity to test the Official Languages Act in court.

By cutting funding for the court challenges program, the government is preventing these organizations from going to court. Across Canada, people are protesting this cut.

I asked the President of the Treasury Board why the government cut the program, but he did not answer. He just said that his government would obey the law. But what if it does not? How can these people, these organizations, go to court to represent citizens?

This gives us the impression that the Conservative Party thinks this is a simple issue and that they can do things like the American government does. The party leaves it up to the people to get organized. It does not believe in community; it thinks it can leave groups to their own devices. The Conservative government also said in this House that it did not see why it should give money to groups to take the government to court.

But who is the government? It exists to represent the people. If a law must be challenged, we must ensure that people have the opportunity to challenge it.

Adjournment Proceedings

That is why I asked the President of the Treasury Board that question, but he did not give me an answer. He merely said that his government would obey the law. But that is not happening. This is a big country. Sometimes, mistakes happen and people have to go to court with the support of the court challenges program. The government, this Conservative government, took away the tools that let them do that.

I would like an answer to my question tonight.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very important to underscore the government's support for linguistic duality and the development of official language minority communities throughout Canada.

Unfortunately, this matter is currently before the courts and it would be inappropriate for the government to respond until the case has been resolved.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I can only imagine the magnitude of the problem. When we talk about the Conservatives' cuts to the court challenges program, we are talking about the minority groups who must appear in court. The Conservatives accused the Liberals of using that money to pay their friends the lawyers, while people like professors at Moncton University were working for free for Canadian minority groups and francophones.

Now, once again, people who must defend themselves against the government must use their own money to go to court because of the decision of the government. I have a proposal for the government. When a citizen challenges Canadian legislation in court, the government should not use taxpayers' money to appeal the decision. That would be fairer. What the Conservative government did is totally unfair. Instead of going to the courts, it should—

• (1835)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for bringing this issue to the House but, unfortunately, as was stated, the case is currently before the courts and it would be inappropriate for the government to respond.

CHINA

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to ask the government a number of questions related to our relations with China and with regard to a specific case of a Canadian citizen by the name of Huseyincan Celil who was picked up in Uzbekistan and was extradited to China. At this point we do not know his condition. We do not know where he is. We do not even know whether he is alive. This is a Canadian citizen who, unfortunately, has not been afforded under international law his basic human rights.

Relations with China, according to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, are "in a shambles". We need to restore our relationship with China so that we can carry on a dialogue, whether it be for

trade, for cultural exchange or for other diplomatic affairs such as this one for Mr. Celil.

The government has constantly said that things are in good shape with China but we know very well that it continues to send people over there as recently as during the break to mend fences. It has even contradicted itself by its own representations.

The key here is that when Mr. Celil was picked up in Uzbekistan, the request by China to extradite him to China was preceded by a statement by the Uzbeks that they would have preferred to have Mr. Celil released to Canada but that Canada had not expressed sufficient interest in Mr. Celil. That is from the Uzbek officials. He was therefore extradited.

Now we do not know where he is. We do not know whether he has been tortured. We do not even know whether he is alive. The ministry has written to people to say that it has worked tirelessly on the file. An official of the prison in which Mr. Celil was held in Uzbekistan told his family members that there were assurances that Mr. Celil would not be executed if he were extradited to China. That was not a representation from China. It was not a representation from the government of Uzbekistan. It was from a prison official. This is second or third-hand information.

Since that time there has been no new information on the situation with Mr. Celil and yet the government continues to say that it is working tirelessly. It has been working tirelessly since last March and there is no new information even though the Conservatives continue to write letters that they have done things. They have done nothing and that is why I am raising this again. It is important.

Today's press reports state that China has alleged that there are people from China who have come here who have allegedly broken the law in China and China is asking for them to be extradited back to China. In my view this is the kind of situation that calls out for a sit down behind closed doors with Chinese officials to work out the problems and the relationship with China so we can carry on a dialogue on matters of mutual interest.

We need to respect the Vienna Convention. We need to respect our bilateral diplomatic affairs agreement with China. They do not recognize Canadian citizenship if the person has dual citizenship with China. As a consequence, China has said that they have no rights as far as Canadian law goes. This is precisely what we should talk about in a clear, open and transparent fashion with the officials and translators. That has never happened and it is time the government took the opportunity that we have today to sit down to repair the shambles it has created in the relationship with China so that we can deal with Mr.—

• (1840)

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

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the hon. member for Mississauga South for raising this issue.

When Canadian citizens find themselves imprisoned in foreign lands, it is our responsibility to ensure that they are treated fairly and afforded due process.

Mr. Celil's case has indeed been in the forefront of our minds and it is being continuously raised in discussions with our Chinese counterparts. These efforts will not stop until we receive satisfactory assurances from the Chinese that they will afford Mr. Celil due process and that they will permit Canadian Embassy staff to visit him.

As the member already knows, the Prime Minister has raised this case personally with the Chinese President. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has raised this with his Chinese counterpart three times, the most recent being during the APEC meeting in Vietnam. At every given opportunity, whether it be an elected official or a Government of Canada employee, this issue is raised with the Chinese. We will continue to seek other means that we deem appropriate to acquire information about and access to Mr. Celil.

From the moment that we were advised of the possibility that Mr. Celil would be extradited from Uzbekistan to China, we advised the Chinese government of our interest in Mr. Celil's well-being as he is a Canadian citizen. They continue to insist that Mr. Celil is a Chinese citizen and subject to Chinese laws. China refuses to acknowledge his Canadian citizenship and maintains that Canada has no consular rights. They also refuse to advise us of the location of his incarceration or provide any information about his well-being.

However, the Chinese foreign minister has reassured the Minister of Foreign Affairs that they will abide by their commitments to the Uzbeki government made at the time of Mr. Celil's extradition. Those commitments were to abide by the international convention against torture and not to seek the death penalty for crimes allegedly committed in the territory of China. Chinese officials have advised us that their investigation continues, that no trial has taken place and that no sentence has been pronounced against Mr. Celil.

The Government of Canada will continue to engage the Chinese authorities to ensure that Mr. Celil's rights are upheld and respected. I can assure the hon. member that repeated representations have been made and will continue to be made to the Chinese authorities. In fact, in the first weeks of January of this year, the Minister of International Trade and the Minister of Finance visited China and raised Mr. Celil's case. At the same time, a parliamentary delegation consisting

Adjournment Proceedings

of MPs from both sides of the House raised this case on multiple occasions.

I can assure the member that Mr. Celil's case remains top priority for the Government of Canada, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs will continue to be involved personally in this case.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the government continues to invoke the name of Huseyin Celil as a poster boy for its no action on this diplomatic file.

He is a Canadian citizen. His rights have not been protected. The government does not know where he is. The government does not know whether he has been tortured. The government does not even know whether he is alive. Those are the issues.

The gentleman is a human being who has basic human rights under international law. This is an opportunity for us to restore our healthy relations with China so we can have these discussions and make sure that this Canadian citizen is given due process and that ultimately he is discharged and is reunited with his family.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, again I tell my hon. friend that the Chinese government has assured us that it will abide by the international convention against torture and that it will not seek the death penalty for crimes allegedly committed in the territory of China.

We continue to seek reassurances from the highest level of the Chinese government regarding his continued well-being. We continue to raise this case at every opportunity.

Privacy concerns will not allow us to discuss the specifics of individual consular cases. Communications between sovereign states are confidential and we do not release this information.

• (1845)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): A motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 6:45 p.m.)

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