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Monday, February 19, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 19, 2007

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1100)

[English]

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 262

That a special committee of the House be created to continue the work on electoral reform as outlined in the 43rd Report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs from the 38th Parliament and to make further recommendations on strengthening and modernizing the democratic and electoral systems; that the membership of the special committee be established by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and the membership report of the special committee be presented to the House within five sitting days after the adoption of this motion; that substitutions to the membership of the special committee be allowed, if required, in the manner provided by Standing Order 114(2); that the special committee have all of the powers granted to standing committees by Standing Order 108; that there be a maximum length for speeches by members of the special committee of 10 minutes on any single item; that the special committee be authorized to hold hearings across Canada; that the special committee be allowed to look into creating a citizens' consultation group and issue an interim report to the House on this matter within six weeks of the special committee being struck; and that the special committee table its final report in the House of Commons no later than March 1, 2008.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce a motion that seeks to continue the important work started in the last Parliament to follow up on the recommendations made in June 2005 by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and to move Canada forward on reforming our electoral system.

Motion No. 262 calls for the creation of a special committee of the House, as well as a citizens' consultation process to make further recommendations on strengthening and modernizing the democratic and electoral system of Canada.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the former leader of the NDP and long-standing parliamentarian, Ed Broadbent, who has been working on electoral reform for more than 50 years. Ed Broadbent was instrumental in the procedure and House affairs committee that made recommendations to the House, recommendations that were unanimously passed with the support of parties but were never acted upon.

I want to publicly thank Ed for his perseverance on the issue of electoral reform, to bring our country in line with most of the world's democracies to make Parliament more accountable to voters.

In a speech at Queen's University in March 2005, Ed Broadbent gave the following summation of why electoral reform is so necessary.

The truth is that the most seriously flawed component of our democratic society is our profoundly undemocratic electoral system. We have impartial courts and the rule of law, a Charter of Rights & Freedoms, a vigorous independent civil society and an independent press, but our electoral system is an outdated, non-representative, conflict-prone, gender discriminating, regionally divisive mess, bestowed to us from a pre-democratic era. The good news is that governments in six provinces have begun to embrace this issue and are calling for major reforms in their electoral systems. And with a minority government in the House of Commons, federal electoral reform, initiated by the New Democratic Party, has at last been put on the Parliamentary agenda.

I am pleased to carry on the work of Ed Broadbent and other NDP MPs like Lorne Nystrom and, once again, also in a minority Parliament, place electoral reform on the parliamentary agenda. It is possible to get work done in a minority Parliament and the time for electoral reform is long overdue.

People in my riding of Vancouver Island North and all across Canada want the House to move forward and decide how to reform or modernize our electoral system because our current electoral system is outdated and unfair. It has been in place for more than 100 years. When it was created, there were only two major political parties and now there are five. It came into effect before we had electricity, before women were persons under the law and before first nations had the right to vote.

In 1974, we made changes to Canada's political financing laws. We introduced the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 and the Access to Information Act in 1983. We changed parliamentary processes along the way, including the election of the Speaker by secret ballot and overhauled the Canada Elections Act in 1996. Further political financing reforms were passed in 2003, and in 2004 changes were made to candidate registration.

We have been studying the question of reforming our electoral system for over 25 years through various government task forces and royal commissions. We had the Pepin-Robarts task force in 1979, the Macdonald Royal Commission in 1985 and the Lortie Commission in 1992.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs did extensive study in 2004 and 2005, hearing many witnesses and travelling around the world to study other parliamentary systems. Its report to Parliament in June 2005 forms the basis of the motion I am presenting and that I am urging all parties to support.

Private Members' Business

In its Speech from the Throne in 2005, the previous Liberal government pledged:

To examine the need and options for reform our democratic institutions, including electoral reform.

• (1105)

In response to the 43rd report, the previous Liberal government said:

Nevertheless, it is essential for every democracy to take stock regularly, to ensure that all aspects of its system of governance meet the needs and aspirations of its citizens. The Government of Canada has a duty to build on Canada's strong democratic traditions by modernizing our democratic processes to ensure that they reflect the values and interests of Canadians.

Motion No. 262 calls upon the government to continue the work that was started in the last Parliament, to follow the recommendations of the procedure and House affairs committee's 43rd report to Parliament to strike a special committee to hold hearings across the country and to make further recommendations on strengthening and modernizing Canada's electoral system. However, the most important part of the motion is the creation of a citizens' consultation process.

Following the recommendations of the 43rd report, the citizens' consultation group would make recommendations on the values and principles desired in Canada's democratic and electoral systems. As Nathalie Des Rosiers, a witness at the 2005 procedure and House affairs committee, said:

There's a gap between Canadian values and results, and that troubles a lot of Canadians.

If we are to hear what Canadians want, then we must engage them at the grassroots level on the values that they want to see represented and design a system that meets those goals. Everyone counts and so should our votes but, more and more, Canadians feel that their voices and choices are not heard.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, in its report to Parliament in 2005, found that:

A major source of worry for many Canadians, and many Parliamentarians, is decreasing voter turnout in Canadian elections. It is a particular concern that young people, and certain ethnic and social groups, are less likely than others to vote.

Between 1988 and 2004, voter turnout dropped dramatically in federal elections. In 1988, it was 75.3%. In 1993, it fell to 69.9%. In 1997, we saw a further drop to 67%. In 2000, it was 61.2%. In 2004, only 60.9% of Canadians bothered to vote. Last year, in 2006, the turnout rose slightly to 64.7% but this is still not anywhere near acceptable.

The Law Commission of Canada, in its 2004 report "Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada", states:

For the past decade or so, Canada has been in the grip of a democratic malaise evidenced by decreasing levels of political trust, declining voter turnout, increasing cynicism toward politicians and traditional forms of political participation, and growing disengagement of young people from politics.

It contributes to the under-representation of women, minority groups, and Aboriginal peoples. Critics maintain that countries with first-past-the-post systems routinely under-represent women and minority candidates.

It prevents diversity within the House of Commons. As a result of regional concentration, disproportionate votes to seats, and an under-representation of women and minority candidates, legislatures within this system lack a diversity of voices in political decision-making processes.

This system favours an adversarial style of politics.

That is something that we see daily in this House.

The Law Commission further states:

—many citizens want to be involved, want to have a real voice in decision making, and would like to see more responsive, accountable, and effective political institutions.

This is something I have heard from many of my constituents and from people all across the country. Canadians are telling us that every vote should count. However, in the last election, 665,940 votes for the Green Party elected zero MPs, while only 475,114 votes in Atlantic Canada elected 22 Liberals. It took 89,296 votes to elect each NDP MP, 43,339 votes for each Conservative member, 43,490 for each Liberal and 30,455 for each Bloc MP to get elected.

When ordinary citizens feel disenfranchised from the process, they tend to not participate. They feel their votes do not count.

• (1110)

When we look around the world, we see that other industrialized countries have embraced a fairer system of electing their representatives. We can look at the example of other Commonwealth countries such as New Zealand, a longstanding Westminster democracy that adopted proportional representation in 1993. Nigel Roberts, in *New Zealand: A Westminster Democracy Switches to PR*, said:

—the change can be regarded as a good example of how to move from one voting system to another. It was done only after a great deal of research, debate and public consultation. Most experts on electoral reform would agree that major electoral reforms should not be undertaken lightly, and the move to...PR in New Zealand was certainly not undertaken lightly.

New Zealand's Royal Commission on the Electoral System sat for over a year before releasing a detailed report in which it defined the following criteria for testing both first past the post and other voting systems: fairness between political parties; effective representation of minority and special interest groups; effective Maori representation, the Maori being New Zealand's indigenous ethnic minority; political integration; representation of constituents; voter participation; effective government; effective parliament; effective parties; and legitimacy.

At the same time, however, the royal commission stressed that no voting system can fully meet the ideal standards set by the criteria and pointed out that the criteria were not all of equal weight. New Zealand's parliament is an example of how we can have diversity. As Nigel Roberts again points out:

Six parties are represented in the [New Zealand] new Parliament, each in close accord with the share of the votes it won throughout the country as a whole; the system is highly proportional. There are now 15 Maori in the House of Representatives, and Maori are represented in the New Zealand Parliament in rough proportion to their numbers in the population as a whole. The same is true of Pacific Islanders, and the country's first PR election also saw the election of the country's first Asian MP. In addition, the overall proportion of women in Parliament rose from 21 per cent in 1993 to 29 per cent in 1996..Furthermore, voter turnout in New Zealand was even higher in 1996 than it had been in either 1990 or 1993.

Private Members' Business

There are many members of Parliament who know it is time to change our electoral system. In its throne speech, the current government talked about electoral reform, saying:

—this Government will seek to involve parliamentarians and citizens in examining the challenges facing Canada's electoral system and democratic institutions.

The Law Commission of Canada agrees:

While there is no single magic bullet that will instantaneously stimulate Canadians' involvement in the political system, a consensus appears to be emerging among political parties of all stripes, experts in electoral behaviour, and grassroots organizations that electoral system reform is a good starting point for energizing and strengthening Canadian democracy.

I urge the government to implement the recommendations of the 43rd report of the procedure and House affairs committee to have open, meaningful engagement with the citizens of Canada and have their values and principles reflected in an electoral system that works for all Canadians.

The people of Canada are concerned about many issues: climate change and the environment, fairness and affordability for working families, and the war in Afghanistan, to name but a few. I share their concerns and I believe that a fairer, more representative voting system will give us a government that is more responsive and accountable to their concerns.

The makeup of our Parliament should reflect the will of the voters and the diversity that is Canada. The time has come to change our electoral system for the better. Everyone matters. Every vote should count.

• (1115)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her excellent presentation and for putting this motion forward to the House. I applaud her for laying out the history of this issue, particularly the work done by my predecessor, the former representative from Ottawa Centre, Mr. Broadbent.

I want to ask the hon. member about one of the things that is critical in this issue and was cited by her: civic participation. In the report that we are asking to be implemented, all parties called for citizen engagement. I wonder if she would shed some light on that. The government claims to have a process in place. Would she comment on that?

Ms. Catherine Bell: Mr. Speaker, to answer the question from the hon. member for Ottawa Centre, I know that the Conservatives have said they want to have a citizen consultation process, but as for what their process is, it is a contracted out process to their hand-picked friends. It is a closed process. They do not want, as they say, special interest groups to take over.

I have to ask, though, who are these special interest groups? Women? First nations? Ethnic minorities? These are exactly the people we need to hear from. That is why the recommendation from the 43rd report is for a consultation process that is very broad. We want to have the values and principles that Canadians want to see in an electoral system.

• (1120)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in her motion, the hon. member for Vancouver Island North states that there would be “a maximum length for

speeches by members of the special committee of 10 minutes on any single item”. It may make sense, but I am puzzled by it. I am not sure what that means, given that the special committee will be needing nationwide reporting back in more than a year from now. What is the point of this particular item that just seems out of place in this motion?

Ms. Catherine Bell: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the time limit referred to as required in the manner provided by Standing Order 114 (2) is a rule of the House for the length of speeches in committees.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has essentially said, by eliminating all of its funding, that the Law Commission of Canada does not perform useful work. The member mentioned one useful example on electoral reform. I am sure that the commission also is essential for women's issues.

I wonder if the member believes that the Law Commission of Canada does useful work. If she believes it does useful work, I wonder if she could give us some examples.

Ms. Catherine Bell: Mr. Speaker, I was able to refer in my notes to a fabulous report that the Law Commission did about electoral reform in Canada. The Law Commission did an extensive study on the impact of the unfair, archaic voting system and made recommendations to the procedure and House affairs committee to reform our democratic system. I hope the House will pass this motion so that these recommendations now can be implemented.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, PR seems like a great idea. Being a neighbour of Prince Edward Island and now physically linked to the Island, where politics are like religion and are taken very seriously, I think that one of the reasons the experiment failed was that it became very complicated. When we get talking about MMP, STV and SMP, all the various methods of PR, is there a way of making this more communicable to the Canadian public and therefore more acceptable?

Ms. Catherine Bell: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is a very complex issue, but it can be simplified. When we go out to ordinary Canadians about the values they want to see in their electoral system, we can come up with something that would work for Canada, that this House could put forward, and we could explain it. It would not be that hard. We had a citizens' consultation process in British Columbia and came up with the STV system, which 57% of Canadians—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the gist of my presentation today will be to point out that in view of the very aggressive set of initiatives already introduced by the government on the subject of electoral democratic reform, both in this chamber and for application to the upper House, the motion by the hon. member for Vancouver Island North is effectively redundant.

Private Members' Business

I want to start my comments by pointing out that the government in its throne speech indicated that it was going to focus intensively on the challenges faced by Canada's electoral and democratic systems. This was done in part in response to the 43rd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in the last Parliament.

Seeing as the New Democrats are talking about the report of this committee as if it is holy writ or, indeed, brought down from Mount Sinai by Moses, I note that in fact it was not; it was brought down by a group of us, including me.

Let me just read for members what the report said, because it does not say quite what the New Democrats represent it as saying. It states that a "citizens' consultation group", along with the parliamentary committee, should:

—make recommendations on the values and principles Canadians would like to see in their democratic and electoral systems...[this] would take into account an examination of the role of Members of Parliament and political parties; citizen engagement and rates of voter participation, including youth and aboriginal communities; civic literacy; how to foster a more representative House of Commons, including, but not limited to, increased representation of women and minorities, and questions of proportionality, community of interest and representation;....

Some of this is being taken care of through the citizens' consultation process that is currently under way, as the government has announced, and which has a much broader mandate than what the hon. member is proposing in her motion, but it is a mandate that reflects accurately what was proposed by this committee when it made its report in June 2005.

Indeed, we have made sure that the consultation group reflects what the committee wanted. At the time when I sat on that committee, I was not a fan of that process, but Ed Broadbent, who is constantly cited in the NDP's arguments, spoke in favour of that particular type of process. I said that we would have the usual suspects showing up at this process, and he said, "Sure, it will be the usual suspects, but they have a lot to say, and it is a good process". The committee voted for it and the government is following through on the recommendations of the committee.

Now the New Democrats have discovered that they really favour another proposal, the citizens' assembly proposal, which Mr. Broadbent fought against vigorously when it was brought up by the Conservatives and which is why the Conservatives put a dissenting report advocating that proposal into the 43rd report of the procedure and House affairs committee. Thus, when the NDP members refer back to this through a revisionist version of history, we must recall that it is a little bit different from the way it actually worked when it happened.

I now want to list some of the legislative initiatives that the government has moved forward with on the subject of democratic reform, because this is really an extraordinary push forward. We are doing more on this issue than any previous government has ever done.

I will start by pointing to the Federal Accountability Act, which changed the rules for financing. It made them much more restrictive, eliminating corporate and union donations and reducing individual donations to \$1,000 per capita, ensuring, in other words, that money and affluence are not the determining factors in financing political

parties, and therefore ensuring that parties can operate on a level playing field.

We have moved forward on a number of items that deal with making the electoral system fairer, such as Bill C-31 to get rid of electoral fraud, a bill that the NDP opposes although all other parties in the House support it. It is a bill that will do a great deal to make the system much fairer and will ensure that no Canadian is disenfranchised, because electoral fraud disenfranchises everyone who is affected by a vote outcome that can be determined fraudulently, and that is a real problem.

The increased electoral fairness through Bill C-16, which is now in the Senate, having been passed by the House, will ensure that elections occur once every four years, not when the Prime Minister chooses to call them based upon whether his or her party is high in the polls. That was a terrible wrong. It was abused by the previous government repeatedly. This initiative will ensure that it is not abused again. This follows, of course, a series of legislative initiatives adopted at the provincial level, first in British Columbia and then in Ontario, to ensure that provincial elections are also on fixed four year dates.

• (1125)

We have also moved forward on Senate reform. Bill S-4 limits the tenure of senators to eight years. We are having a tremendous problem getting that bill through the Liberal controlled Senate. The government has initiated this bill. It makes sense. It is going to ensure that senators are not effectively appointed for life. Frankly, this is the first time we have seen any serious attempt at Senate reform in the history of this country.

Bill C-43, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate, would allow for elections of senators. They are called consultative elections because we have to respect the constitutional prerogative of the Governor General to appoint senators.

That bill is interesting not only because it would allow for democracy to finally reach into the Senate and elections to occur within the Senate, but elections under this legislation would not be by means of the first past the post system. Rather elections would be by a single transferable vote system, in short, a proportional system that attempts to ensure that broader preferences come forward and are represented in choosing a senator. It would have the same effect in the Senate as what occurs in the Australian senate, for example, which uses a similar system where a broader range of preferences is expressed. This is a tremendous step forward.

I find it interesting that when talking about proportional representation the New Democrats always take great pains to avoid talking about the one piece of electoral reform legislation that is actually before the House right now, the attempt to introduce proportional representation in the upper house of Canada. In listening to the New Democrats talk about this, one would think there is nothing going on there at all and that it is not worth discussing.

Private Members' Business

Focusing on something that can happen right now in this Parliament is very important. The issue came up when the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London introduced a motion in the procedure and House affairs committee last week asking that the committee consider a variety of democratic and electoral reform issues, including the issue of proportional representation in the upper house. The New Democrats on the committee voted against it. They ensured that the motion would be defeated.

I do not detect a pattern of behaviour that is logical and actually beneficial toward moving forward on the democratic reform file. The New Democrats are trying to focus on a single hobby horse in a way that suits their interests best.

I find it interesting that Ed Broadbent advocated the idea of electoral reform. During the election campaign when the New Democrats released their election platform, that party moved from favouring more proportional representation as a general theme and letting Canadians look for the best solution, to directly choosing the solution that would be given to Canadians, the multi-member proportional system.

That system has some merits. That system is used in Germany and New Zealand, both of which are respectable democracies, but it is not the only available proportional system. For example, it is not the system used in Australia's upper house, which is proportional. It is not used in Malta or Ireland. All of those countries have a single transferable vote system. It is also not the system used in Australia's lower house which uses the alternative vote system. It is not the only proportional system, but it was the only one that the NDP wanted to advocate.

The New Democrats were actually advocating it. They were saying it was essential to move from our system to that system when the MMP system, the multi-member proportional system, had just been defeated in P.E.I., where it received less than 40% of the vote, and an alternative system, the single transferable vote proportional system, had been adopted by almost 60% of British Columbians in another referendum.

We have to be careful. When we look at what the New Democrats are proposing we have to ask ourselves, do they favour proportional representation? Do they favour changing the electoral system in a way that reflects what Canadians want, which means maybe not choosing that system up front, or do they favour the system that is likely to produce the best result in terms of numbers of seats for New Democrats if their vote total does not change? In other words, the NDP is saying, "Without actually changing our appeal to the Canadian people, how can we get more seats in the House of Commons?"

That is not a beneficial approach. We have to work on allowing Canadians to make these decisions themselves.

• (1130)

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues from the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party for their speeches on this important issue.

For all of us it is a question of demonstrating to Canadians that our electoral system bears a reasonable proportion of the seats received

to the votes cast. We have heard reasons for that. It is a direction we are going in for sure.

The Law Commission of Canada issued a report in the spring of 2004 which recommended a mixed proportional system. I must underline that the Law Commission of Canada statute requires it to engage in the fullest possible public consultation, as well as deep social research, both of which went into that massive report. It is perhaps the most comprehensive review of voting systems in the Commonwealth if not the broader democratic world. So, a lot of the work has been done. I will come back to that in a moment because it is important.

Following that commission report, we heard in the 2005 Speech from the Throne, with communication between the NDP and the Liberal government at the time, that we would look toward reforming the electoral system. The procedure and House affairs committee has come up with its report. Whether we go ahead with a special committee of the House or whether it is a subcommittee of the procedure and House affairs committee or that committee as a whole, we are inexorably moving forward under all of these demands and recommendations to seriously consider electoral reform in this country, not the least because six jurisdictions in Canada are looking at it very seriously.

British Columbia already looked at it once through its citizens assembly. It held a referendum at the time of its last fixed term election. My hon. colleague from the Conservative Party mentioned that it was barely passed; it was actually barely not passed in that it received 58% of the vote, a majority of course, but there was a 60% threshold put on it. That will be proceeded with in the next provincial election in British Columbia. The question will be put again. That was between the preferred single transferable vote system that the citizens assembly came up with and the current first past the post system.

Ontario is having a citizens' assembly as well. That is pushing us inexorably toward considering it federally. As well there are four other jurisdictions considering it.

I would equate this to the rise of medicare and our public health system which started at the provincial level. There was, I guess, a lot of resistance in Saskatchewan when that was put forward, but then in operation it became a model for the whole country.

I think the provinces have already started this process on its way and, as I say, through the House committee, through the Speech from the Throne and through the Law Commission of Canada, we have actually started on that route ourselves.

Private Members' Business

The purpose is to get some relative proportion between the number of votes cast and the number of seats obtained. Other members have mentioned the underlying even greater importance, the reason for that basic need is so we do not have groups in our society who are underrepresented because there are some barriers in our electoral system to their full participation.

I would add the outcome of regional disparity. Under the simple first past the post system, we have a huge disparity between the number of seats in any one region or province and the number of votes cast there for any particular party.

I have great sympathy for the NDP's long-standing interest in proportional representation because that party is disadvantaged. The NDP historically has been getting a lesser proportion of the seats than that party's proportion of votes. This is common for third parties in Westminster-style first past the post systems. The concern comes from that.

• (1135)

In that regard the current prime minister, Tony Blair, before Britain's 1997 election thought, as the mythology goes at least, that he was going to get a minority government and he needed the support of the Liberal Democrats in order to hold government. He made a deal that if he formed government, he would have a royal commission on electoral reform and put that to a vote against the current system.

Roy Jenkins, a former minister of the crown and wonderful biographer of some of the most important people in British history, including his most recent work on Winston Churchill, was made royal commissioner. In 1998 he came up with a breathtakingly sensitive, wise and tested system to blend the first past the post system with proportional representation. He very effectively shielded out all of the shortcomings of each and reinforced the strengths of each in a mixed member proportional system, which bears some real resemblance to the Law Commission report.

In passing, the member for Vancouver Island North mentioned the Law Commission of Canada and its president, Nathalie Des Rosiers, who is a former fellow law commissioner of mine before I entered politics. The question was asked as to what kind of work the commission has done.

The commission did the monumental study, after consultation and research, that was probably more extensive than anything done in this country on institutional child abuse. The centrepiece of that was the residential schools abuse which became the basis for the residential schools settlements, reconciliation and a number of reforms, awareness and recognition of that injustice in our country. The commission also opened up the debate on the same sex marriage issue by doing a major report in the late 1990s on civil unions. It looked at a lot of the complicated issues in a highly intelligent way as to the state's role versus the church's role in the solemnization of marriage. The commission has done a lot of breathtaking work on restorative justice as well.

As my colleague, the hon. member for Yukon, mentioned, it is passing strange in a way to see the budget of the Law Commission of Canada cut to zero, which may not actually be possible for the government to do without the consent of the House. It is a statutory

and independent institution. It has statutory responsibilities to fulfill. If the government is able to reduce the commission's budget to zero, there is an issue of legal capacity that we have to carefully look at.

A new citizen consultative process has been announced by the government. The Prime Minister mentioned it about three weeks ago and it was mentioned again today. This is curious for a number of reasons.

We have a parliamentary process through the House committee which is just getting going again after the last, might I say, unnecessary election, but it also is subsequent to what has already been introduced. The member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington mentioned the democratic reform issues that the government has already brought forward. Whether it is terms, election of senators, fixed elections dates or the political financing aspect, how can we possibly take the government seriously when it says it is going to consult Canadians after it has already introduced all of these changes? It seems to be a little backward.

Let us do something meaningful and substantive with the citizens consultation. There are two models in Ontario and British Columbia that are highly representative and deliberative. Let us not just use a polling firm and a think tank to go out and have a few discussions across the country. Let us look to what the Law Commission has done. It is a statutory, independent public institution. Let us look to our parliamentary direct responsibility and role through our committees. Then let us have discussions with Canadians in a really fulsome way without barrelling forward with changes that do not benefit from that wide consultation and acceptance by the public. Let us do it in a way that will encourage the public to take part fully in elections in the future.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak on Motion M-262 put forward by the hon. member for Vancouver Island North. I thank her for having proposed this motion.

First off, let me say that the Bloc Québécois will not be supporting this motion proposed by the hon. member for Vancouver Island North because it duplicates the work done by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Considerable work has been done, and the committee has expended a great deal of time and energy as well as taxpayers money to produce its 43rd report, pursuant to the order of reference of November 25, 2004, that, further to the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs recommend a process that engages citizens and parliamentarians in an examination of our electoral system with a review of all options.

In March 2005, members of the committee divided into two groups and travelled to several countries in order to examine at first hand the experience of electoral reform and to see how those countries had consulted and engaged citizens in the reform process. Seven members travelled to Scotland, England, and Berlin, while six other members travelled to New Zealand, and Australia. During these trips, the members had the opportunity to meet with a wide variety of politicians, academics, representatives of political parties and electoral commissions, and persons involved with electoral reform, and to study at close hand the systems and reform processes used, if any.

The committee approached this study resulting in the 43rd report by hearing from a number of witnesses. These included representatives of the Law Commission of Canada; representatives from various groups involved with public policy; academics who have studied issues relating to electoral reform and public consultations; and representatives of various provincial initiatives involving reviews of electoral systems. All of these individuals and groups have been extremely helpful in providing members of the committee with valuable insight on how to approach the issue of electoral reform, the ways in which to review the existing electoral system, and how best to consult with and engage citizens.

Moreover, a call for tenders for public consultations on Canada's democratic institutions and practices went out on January 9 in response to the April 4, 2006, Speech from the Throne, which stated that:

Building on the work begun in the last Parliament, this Government will seek to involve parliamentarians and citizens in examining the challenges facing Canada's electoral system and democratic institutions.

The consultations will address various issues, including political parties, the electoral system, the House of Commons, the Senate, and the role of citizens. These consultations are to begin March 9, 2007, and an interim report is to be tabled by May 23.

The motion tabled by the member for Vancouver Island North proposes a number of elements already included in Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act, and in Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act. Let us take a look at some of these elements.

Bill C-16 would relieve the Prime Minister of the prerogative to call a general election at the most auspicious time for the political party in power.

This bill has other positive spin-offs. It supports the work of Parliament by enabling elected representatives to better plan their work and by preventing elections from interfering with the adoption of the estimates. It also promotes voter participation. Contrary to what the Conservative government would have us believe, democratic reform as set out in Bill C-16 will not lead to an upheaval because it will not bring major changes to the status quo.

● (1145)

In a minority government, the opposition will still be able to overthrow the government and trigger an election at any time because this bill does not challenge the fundamental principle that a majority of parliamentarians can decide to trigger an election if they feel it is necessary.

Private Members' Business

A fixed election date system only works if the government in power agrees to it. Since the Prime Minister retains the right to recommend that Parliament be dissolved at any time before the fixed date, he can call an election whenever he chooses, with a good reason to do so.

The other element in motion M-262 relates to Bill C-31, which seeks to reduce the opportunity for fraud or error, improve the accuracy of the national register of electors, facilitate voting and enhance communication between election officials, candidates, parties and voters.

Bill C-31 was the product of close cooperation among the political parties. The government listened to the opposition parties when it introduced Bill C-31. The Conservative government should take the same approach to other issues, instead of stubbornly pushing its law and order agenda, and it should listen to the Bloc Québécois, which is calling for rehabilitation rather than repression. Moreover, instead of insisting on dismantling the gun registry, the minority Conservative government should listen to the Bloc Québécois, which is calling for better control over the registry costs.

As I have already said, the purpose of this bill was to improve the integrity of the electoral process by reducing the opportunity for fraud or error. As a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I participated in the work leading up to the introduction of this bill in the House of Commons, so I can say that a lot of work went into it.

The committee includes representatives of each political party, all of whom cooperated effectively, thus enabling us to achieve our goal of improving the electoral process and strengthening the public's faith in it.

The bill also proposes another change that the Bloc Québécois has long been calling for: assigning each voter a unique identification number. This unique identifier will appear on the voters' lists, eliminating duplication and making for better lists. It is important to point out that this unique identifier will be randomly generated and assigned by the chief electoral officer.

In our opinion, other concerns are more pressing than motion M-262, such as the fiscal imbalance, which the Bloc Québécois, on behalf of all Quebecers, is calling on the government to correct by transferring \$3.9 billion to Quebec.

There is also the crisis in the manufacturing sector. The Conservative government's economic *laissez faire* approach is no response to the challenges manufacturers face to modernize, innovate and equip themselves better in order to compete with foreign companies.

These are just a few of the issues that we think are more urgent than creating a special committee to continue the work of electoral reform, because, as I said a few minutes ago, that work has already been done, and at a considerable cost.

● (1150)

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for bringing this motion to the House of Commons for us to debate and to vote on.

Private Members' Business

I begin by referring back to some comments made by other members. In particular, I challenge the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington who said that the motion did not address electoral reform as put forward in committee. He also indicated that Mr. Broadbent was not in favour of the consultation process. He might want to change his take on this. We know Mr. Broadbent fought vigorously in committee for a parallel track so we could have citizen consultations. No one else did that. It was his work that allowed us to have the process in place. I want to put that on the record.

The government is trying to hijack electoral reform for its own purposes. Ironically, it is saying that it knows better than citizens. Let me explain that.

Before the Christmas break, my party put forward its intention to bring this issue to the House of Commons. We were being transparent, as we have been consistently. We let Canadians and Parliament know that we would bring this motion forward in the House. It was no secret.

Interestingly enough, after Christmas the government scurried and found a process to allow it to say it would move on the issue. It attempted to take it out of the hands of Parliament and therefore Canadians, because Parliament represents the interests of Canadians. The government said it knew better. It talked to its friends in consulting firms and lobbyists and put together a package. By doing this, it could say that it consulted Canadians. This was not good enough.

The terrible irony is that is not democratic. The whole point of the 43rd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in the last Parliament was to ensure that Canadians would be heard, not only by their MPs, but through genuine citizen consultations as well. We know the previous government dithered on this, did not get to it and was unable to meet the commitment.

We are asking this Parliament to honour the commitment of the previous Parliament and deal with this issue. In the 2005 Speech from the Throne and the 2006 Speech from the Throne both governments, different political parties, claimed they would honour electoral reform. We are providing that opportunity for all parties.

It is passing strange that the Bloc Québécois says that everything has been done. It sounds to me like those members receive their message track from the government. Maybe this gives us an indication of more things to come with respect to the budget. They have said that all the commitments in the 43rd report from the procedure and House affairs committee have been honoured. They forgot to tell the House that the most important part of the report was to have MPs consult with citizens as well as to have citizen consultations.

I know the first past the post rewards the Bloc Québécois, and maybe that is something it does not want to encounter. I do not know. It is strange that those members would give us the impression that all the concerns, which were laid out in the report, and the commitments made to Canadians for a process occurred when in fact they had not.

The motion of my colleague is like a concurrence motion. It asks this Parliament to commit to something it did not get to in the

last Parliament. Canadians are very concerned. My predecessor on this issue, Mr. Broadbent, clearly outlined measures. He said that it was important to have ethics and accountability in government, and that might include a ban on floor crossing, which has not mentioned by the Conservative government. The Conservatives are concerned about electoral fraud vis-à-vis the opportunity for voter fraud. However, they do not mention candidate fraud, for example, when a candidate runs for the Liberals and then the next day becomes a Conservative.

● (1155)

Canadians are more concerned about candidate fraud than they are about this supposed potential for voter fraud of which there has been very little, in fact four cases over three elections. We have had more candidate fraud than we have had voter fraud, so that has to be addressed.

On the point of electoral reform, Mr. Broadbent along with others argued that the antiquated first past the post system will require major democratic reforms. To reach a degree of fairness in our present electoral system, he reasoned that a mixed system of individual constituency based MPs like we have now and proportional representation is necessary to erase the imbalance in the House of Commons.

I should note it is the model in New Zealand. New Zealand used to have a Canadian style system of concentrated power and there the voters rebelled against the alternating Labour Party and National Party dictatorships. Electoral reform now ensures coalition cabinets.

The present Prime Minister, in a paper with Mr. Flanagan, wrote:

In New Zealand, which used to have a Canadian-style system of concentrated power, the voters rebelled against alternating Labour party and National party dictatorships: electoral reform now ensures coalition cabinets.

Those are his words, not mine. That is our present Prime Minister writing that not that long ago, in 1997.

I agree with him that we have tired of this kind of dictatorship, this benevolent dictatorship as some have called it, where a party can receive 38% of the vote and have a big fat majority.

The problem is that the government along with the Bloc does not want to actually encounter this issue with Canadians because we need to deal with this issue.

I want to speak about the issue of democratic reform vis-à-vis the problems in terms of regional representation. In our system, where there are only votes that transfer into seats and are those which are cast for the candidate who gets the most votes, which is our first past the post system, the major disadvantage is for opposition parties.

Remember that under Preston Manning the Reform Party was shut out of seats in Ontario despite the fact that it received 20% of the vote. The system is also bad for governing parties. In the 1980s, for instance, the Liberals under Mr. Trudeau received 23% of the popular vote in western Canada. This should have meant 20 MPs from the west instead of the two who were sent to Ottawa.

As an anecdote, Mr. Broadbent, who was the leader of the NDP at the time, was approached by Mr. Trudeau and asked if he would not mind having a coalition government because Mr. Trudeau was so worried about the lack of representation in the west. Mr. Broadbent looked at the menu of choices Mr. Trudeau was offering policy-wise, and thanked him but said, not this time. A wise choice.

If we were to have a system structured as such, we would have regional representation built in. I turn to the examples of the last election. What happened in Montreal and Vancouver was a travesty. We had highway robbery of the democratic system by the Conservative government.

In the case of Montreal, Mr. Fortier was taken out of the back room and thrown into the cabinet with a portfolio of great importance. In Vancouver we saw what happened with candidate fraud with the Minister of International Trade. He was a Liberal one day and of course became a Conservative the next day.

If we had a system similar to New Zealand which would take away from the concentrated power that is a dictatorship, as the Prime Minister stated in his paper, we would have a system which would represent regions as well. That work has been done.

The work we have put forward is the mixed member, not the multi-member as the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington suggested. That would allow members to be elected first past the post so they would be representing their riding and to have people assigned proportionally.

That is exactly the system that would ensure that we would not have these dictatorships as the Prime Minister suggested and it would ensure that we have regional representation. The Conservatives, having won power, could have had someone representing those regions where they were not successful, in the urban areas like Vancouver and Montreal, and they would have the legitimacy of having an elected person in cabinet.

• (1200)

I am delighted that we are debating this issue. I look forward to the vote and encourage all members to vote for what is a very progressive, insightful and important motion.

[*Translation*]

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

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-293—DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT—
SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader on February 16, 2007, concerning amendments reported by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on February 1, 2007 to Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of development assistance abroad.

Speaker's Ruling

[*English*]

The parliamentary secretary referred to my previous ruling of September 19, 2006, where I addressed the need for a royal recommendation for this bill. At that time, I identified several clauses in the bill which contained the provisions for the authorization of new spending for a distinct purpose.

To quote from the ruling:

The Chair has reviewed this matter carefully and agrees that the establishment of the advisory committee for international development cooperation provided for in clause 6 clearly would require the expenditure of public funds in a manner and for a purpose not currently authorized.

Similarly, the provisions in clauses 7 to 10, which describe the functions of the advisory committee with regard to the process of petitioning and reporting, are also functions which would require the authorization of spending for a new and distinct purpose.

As such, clause 6 and clauses 7 to 10 cause the bill as a whole in its current form to require a royal recommendation. Accordingly, I will decline to put the question on third reading of this bill unless a royal recommendation is received.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

In his intervention, the Parliamentary Secretary asked for an assessment of the effect of committee amendments on the clauses identified by the Chair. He also raised questions concerning the operation of clauses 3 and 4 which he contends affect the terms and conditions attached to the original legislation.

The Parliamentary Secretary cited previous rulings which underlined the need to adhere to the terms and conditions of the royal recommendation and not only to the amount of spending.

Finally, he referred to the fact that the Chair did not consider clauses 3 and 4 in its ruling of September 19, 2006.

[*English*]

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development adopted a number of amendments to the bill following my ruling on September 19, 2006. Notably and most importantly the committee deleted clause 6 which created the advisory committee. The committee also deleted clauses 7, 8 and 10 which dealt with the functions of the advisory committee, and amended clauses 3 and 9 so as to remove references to the advisory committee.

Therefore, the provisions which were earlier identified by the Chair as requiring a royal recommendation because they were related to or were dependent upon the establishment of the advisory committee were removed from Bill C-293.

I will now turn to the issues involving clauses 3 and 4 of the bill as addressed by the parliamentary secretary.

Clause 3 is known as the interpretation clause and contains definitions for the terms used in this piece of legislation. The parliamentary secretary notes that the committee introduced a definition for "official development assistance" which reads as follows:

"official development assistance" means international assistance

(a) that is administered with the principal objective of promoting the economic development and welfare of developing countries, that is concessional in character, that conveys a grant element of at least 25%, and that meets the requirements set out in section 4; and/or

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(b) that is provided for the purpose of alleviating the effects of a natural or artificial disaster or other emergency occurring outside Canada.

He argued that this definition and similar provisions in clause 4 alter the terms and conditions of the original legislative authority and consequently cause the bill to require a royal recommendation. The parliamentary secretary raised some important points that the Chair wishes to address, the first being that provisions in subclause 4.(2) oblige the minister to consult.

The Chair is of the view that this sort of provision does not create new spending for a distinct purpose. Consultations like this fall within the ongoing mandate of the minister. The Chair, however, does have serious concerns about the claim that provisions in the definition add new conditions and criteria to official development assistance that is, “concessional in character, [and] that conveys a grant element of at least 25%”.

The parliamentary secretary argued that these provisions alter the conditions and qualifications originally attached to assistance for developing countries as found in subsection 10.(3) of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Act which reads as follows:

The Minister may develop and carry out programs related to the Minister's powers, duties and functions for the promotion of Canada's interests abroad including:

(b) the provision of assistance for developing countries.

As this is a fairly broad statutory provision, the Chair conducted some further research, to better understand how existing official development assistance, as presently authorized by acts of Parliament, was currently being provided.

The Chair turned to the departmental performance report for the Canadian International Development Agency for the year ending March 31, 2006. On page 8 it states:

In 2005-2006, CIDA's authorized budget was \$3.3 billion and its actual spending was \$3.1 billion, disbursed mainly through grants and contributions...CIDA's budget is part of the International Assistance Envelope (IAE), a jointly-managed envelope which funds official development assistance (ODA), as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee.

I will not give all the letters for those but I am going to refer to them now.

[*Translation*]

And in footnote 4, it says:

ODA is defined by the OECD-DAC as funding transferred “to development countries and multilateral institutions provided by official government agencies which meets the following tests: (a) it is administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective, and (b) it is concessional in character and conveys a grant element of at least 25%”.

● (1210)

[*English*]

The Chair notes that the criteria presently used for the disbursement of grants and contributions for official development assistance, as explained by the government in the departmental performance report, is identical to the criteria found in clause 3 of Bill C-293.

Bill C-293 at first reading only contained a reference to the OECD-DAC in clause 3. Amendments adopted in committee simply inserted in the interpretation clause the full text of the existing

criteria used by the government. The Chair therefore must conclude that the conditions and qualifications, which were attached to the original authorization for spending, have not been altered in any manner. If anything, the bill reinforces the criteria presently employed by the government itself. Consequently, in the unique context this bill presents, and despite an impressive demonstration of scholarly research by the parliamentary secretary who quoted from previous rulings of mine and of Mr. Speaker Fraser, I must conclude that these provisions in Bill C-293, as amended, do not cause the bill to require a royal recommendation.

The Chair has examined carefully all other amendments adopted by the standing committee and can confirm that none of these additional modifications would require a royal recommendation.

To summarize then, the deletions made by the committee eliminated the problematic issue set out in my earlier ruling last September. Consequently, debate on this bill may proceed and the Chair will put the question on third reading of the bill in its present form, which requires no royal recommendation.

I thank all hon. members for their patience in listening to this rather lengthy explanation and ruling.

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[*English*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

The House resumed from February 7 consideration of the motion that Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me clearly state my support for the bill in principle. The repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act is long overdue. Initially, the section was implemented as a temporary measure. However, temporary has turned into many years and it is time to rectify the situation. It is time to ensure all first nations have the protection that most Canadians take for granted.

For too long first nations people have been subject to lesser standards than non-first nations people. Deplorable living conditions, substandard educational facilities and the lack of adequate health care highlight the vast gap that exists between the first nations and non-first nations people of Canada.

The previous Liberal government had set out a comprehensive consultative process to begin to address this gap. The process culminated in the signing of the Kelowna accord, an accord signed by all national first nations organizations, all provincial and territorial governments and the Government of Canada. The Kelowna accord was abandoned by the Conservative government. This really had the effect of shaking the confidence of the first nations people across Canada.

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In my riding communities such as Sandy Lake, with Chief Pardemus Anishinabie, Fort Hope, with Chief Charlie O'keese, and Kasabonika, with Chief Gordon Anderson, all felt that this would be first step in ensuring that the gap was addressed. They felt the Kelowna accord was something that they could support and it was something that would make a difference on the streets of their communities.

Many believe the Kelowna accord was just a starting point. Again, the goal was to narrow that gap and ensure that they could enjoy some of the benefits that mainstream Canada enjoyed. The reality is much different on the first nations. Sometimes that is quite a harsh reality.

Section 67 contributes to this gap. By not allowing first nations people on reserve to file human rights complaints, the government continues to send the message to first nations people that they are not treated equally. This is not acceptable and the repeal of section 67 is a step in the right direction filling this gap. However, there are serious concerns that I have with the government's approach to the implementation of the bill.

I have had the chance to discuss the bill with the Grand Chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Grand Chief Stan Beardy represents Treaty No. 9 in northern Ontario. The Grand Chief has worked tirelessly to improve the living conditions for his people. I have been fortunate to receive his advice and counsel on specific issues facing the constituents of my riding of Kenora. He represents 49 first nations communities, many of them remote in nature, spanning a territory that is close to two-thirds of Ontario. With a constituency of over 45,000 people, the Grand Chief is acutely aware of the needs and priorities of his people. His comments regarding the bill were very direct, "There must be more consultation".

We have been witness to the ineffectiveness of legislation that has been imposed on first nations without proper consultation. We must learn from the past, and this is too important an issue to proceed too hastily.

I have also been fortunate to have the counsel of Grand Chief Arnold Gardner, Grand Chief for Treaty No. 3 first nations in my riding. He echoed these sentiments for consultation, believing that consultation would be the only way to move the first nations' concerns forward. I agree. The government must stop its paternalistic approach when dealing with first nations.

I spoke about the remoteness of some of these communities and I will take a moment to explain that. Many think it is a community on the end of the road, but when we drive to communities in my riding, like Red Lake and Pickle Lake, which are several hundred kilometres north of Highway 17, the main Trans-Canada Highway, at the end of that road we have to be prepared to fly 500 miles farther north just to get to the edge of the riding.

In that area there are 21 remote communities such as North Spirit, Poplar Hill and Webequie. They all do not expect the government to be part of the consultation in their own small communities, but they want to ensure that their leadership is listened to and they want to ensure the government pays attention to their concerns. They want their leaders involved and they want to know that Stan Beardy and Arnold Gardner have been heard.

The lack of consultation was not the only thing the government overlooked in its haste. The Canadian Human Rights Commission, an authority on the topic of human rights, recommended that a transition period be a minimum of 18 months. The government however has ignored this recommendation and has reduced the transition time to only six months.

First nations communities are already overextended in providing basic needs for their people and now the government would add to this burden by exposing first nations to new liabilities without providing adequate time for a transition period.

Consultations would provide a better picture of how this legislation would affect first nations. We would also have a better understanding of the concerns that first nations have with the bill.

●(1215)

One concern that has already arisen is how the repeal of section 67 will impact existing treaty rights. This is an important question, one that deserves to be answered before the government decides to implement the bill.

The government has decided to examine the constitutional impact of the bill after it has already passed it into law. This is just another example of the government's unwillingness to properly address the concerns of the first nations people. Why not conduct proper consultations with first nations organizations while at the same time examine the legal ramifications of the bill for the existing treaty rights?

I am not surprised to find that the bill did not mention the need to provide first nations with the resources to prepare for this change. I have observed a troubling pattern with the Conservative approach to working with first nations. Conservatives believe it is enough to announce a program without the resources to back it up. We were witness to this with their announcement to improve the water quality on first nation reserves. The Conservatives announced new standards, but did not bother to provide the resources for the first nations to achieve these standards.

Many communities in my area have existing water and sewer plants. They have the infrastructure in the ground, but the new regulations require new upgrades or retrofits and these are expensive. I have already explained the seriousness of the remote sites. In all the communities the infrastructure needs to be improved, but when they are in the far flung areas and can only be accessed by aircraft, the costs are very high.

It is typical of the government: no consultation and new rules with no money or resources to follow them through. Many small first nations want to be heard. The people of Fort Severn, Bearskin Lake and Muskrat Dam in my riding all want to know, whether it is water or section 67, that the government of the day will listen to their concerns.

We see this approach again with this bill. The government would like for section 67 to be repealed, but it is unwilling to provide the resources needed for the first nations to prepare such claims. The Assembly of First Nations mentioned the example of the lack of access to public buildings on reserves for people with disabilities.

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With the repeal of section 67, first nations would be exposed to a liability under that circumstance. However, many first nations do not have the resources to make improvements according to these standards. Without providing resources needed, the government will only exasperate the current situation whereby first nations are already struggling to provide for the people who live in the communities and on the streets.

Another concern with the legislation is a lack of an interpretive clause. The measure had been recommended by the Canadian Human Rights Commission and again the Conservative government ignored this advice. An interpretive clause would assist the Human Rights Commission and Human Rights Tribunal in reviewing claims against first nations governments, agencies and institutions. AFN has argued that it is imperative to include such a clause to ensure the balance between the collective rights and the rights of the individual. This is an important balance that any future legislation should not infringe upon.

While discussing the need to strike a proper balance between collective rights and the rights of the individual, the issue of jurisdiction is inevitable. Who should be responsible to address human rights claims arising from first nations individuals? The Assembly of First Nations is a proponent of the creation of a first nations human rights tribunal. However, the government has once again ignored the advice of AFN. There is no mention of such a tribunal in the current legislation.

I reiterate my support for the repeal of section 67, but I repeat the need for fundamental changes to the legislation. The issue is too important and we have waited too long for them to bring this legislation forward in haste. We must do it right. Every person living in Canada should have the same right to bring forward human rights complaints. This will be a positive step toward building a stronger relationship between the government and the first nations people. Beyond this, it is the right thing to do, so let us make sure we get it done right.

I reinforce the comments made to me by Grand Chief Stan Beardy and Grand Chief Arnold Gardner about the need for consultation. They want to be heard. As such, I would encourage the government to commence consultations with the representatives of the first nations community to better understand the impact that this legislation will have.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this bill was introduced and given first reading on December 13, 2006, although—as I must point out to or remind all members of this House—this was in spite of the promise made by the Government of Canada to strengthen ties between the government and first nations peoples.

That promise included improved cooperation and discussion with first nations peoples in order to develop federal policies that affect or have important specific repercussions on members of the Assembly of First Nations.

The promise was made on May 31, 2005, and was part of the follow-up subsequent to a promise made by the Prime Minister on

April 19, 2004, at the Canada-aboriginal peoples round table. The then Prime Minister himself said:

It is now time for us to renew and strengthen the covenant between us.

He also added, and I feel this represents another promise:

No longer will we in Ottawa develop policies first and discuss them with you later. This principle of collaboration will be the cornerstone of our new partnership.

To my knowledge, the Prime Minister did not refer to just any partnership, rather, a new partnership and, as far as I know, no other new partnership agreements have been suggested or put forward to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, on which I sit.

However, on December 13, 2006, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs issued a press release to announce the introduction of a bill to repeal section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act.

If there was consultation with the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Women's Association of Canada or perhaps other aboriginal associations unknown to us, the minister has a problem, unless of course, he himself is aboriginal. He should not be ashamed. That would be completely honourable. There would only be a problem if he considers himself an authority with the power to negotiate on behalf of aboriginals.

But he is the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and as such, we know that we do not need to remind him that it would be a conflict of interest, especially since, in 2004, the government promised to strengthen ties between the government and first nations peoples. Accordingly, in the future, the government must consult first nations peoples before developing any policies concerning them.

According to a joint press release issued by the Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Mr. Phil Fontaine, and the Native Women's Association of Canada on the same day that this bill was tabled, it seems that after 30 years of lobbying, they agree with the principle of repealing section 67, but only after due consultation has taken place.

Even though this had been in the works for 30 years, the government did not consult the first nations, the Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations stated. As the government's representative, the minister also did not respect the promise made on May 31, 2005.

In 1977, the Minister of Justice, Ron Basford, considered section 67 to be temporary because, even at that time, the government had promised not to amend the Indian Act without consulting them at length.

In the opinion of the Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, there had been no working meeting of any sort with the Assembly of First Nations or the Native Women's Association of Canada or with both organizations together in order to discuss Bill C-44.

We must consider this approach as a slap in the face or even worse. Personally, I would consider it an insult, a measure to delay the final and complete recognition of native peoples.

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What can we expect from a government that voted against adopting the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, a government that refused to recognize the Kelowna accord and that, today, is attempting a diversionary tactic for the sole apparent purpose of delaying recognition of the rights of native peoples of Quebec, Canada and the provinces?

This government should not claim that it is surprised to have an increasing number of chiefs, associations and native leaders demand the autonomy needed to develop by joining, in Quebec in particular, the national movement for autonomy and sovereignty over their land and their nation, a Quebec movement which is very much in keeping, one can understand, with their vision and their aspirations.

• (1225)

Moreover, why should we be surprised by the astronomical costs of negotiations between the various departments and the first nations, when the laws and regulations that relate to them are developed without consultation?

Why should we be surprised by the waste of human energy in all the efforts made by aboriginal people to be recognized, when the laws that relate to them are either incomprehensible or ill-suited to the facts or situations?

What can possibly be gained from all these strategic little battles to stifle these people economically, if it is not just to make the talks drag on long enough so that, at the end—perhaps in 100 years—there will be no one left to whom this applies or, if there are some left, these people will be so much in debt that they will have to give up their rights to pay off the money they owe?

I am making this point, because the government's strategy is to force their associations or communities to give up their claims, or else face bankruptcy, so that in the end, it can impose its vision on these people and leave them to fend for themselves.

Quebec has had to endure this stifling treatment for a long time, and it is still, to this day, at the mercy of some drawers of water who are putting up all sorts of obstacles in its path. That was the case just recently, when two ministers from Quebec cowardly betrayed the people who voted for them in order to allow a centralizing government to put the Quebec nation in a position of weakness.

Indeed, who is not aware of the fervour shown by this government with taxpayers' money—25% of which comes from the Quebec nation—to protect Ontario's monopoly over the auto industry? However, when the time comes to protect Quebec's primary sector, namely the aircraft industry, we see two yes-men from that province take it upon themselves to make them admit that they are opposed to the vision of their anglophone colleagues to not protect that industry, contrary to what they do for the auto and oil industries. That is sad.

Who is not familiar with the statement made by a certain Prime Minister, who is still often quoted, to the effect that, when it comes to the auto industry, we are talking about Ontario. In Quebec, it is the aircraft industry? The agreement that was just signed benefits that industry in Ontario and in the western provinces, at the expense of Quebec.

All Quebecers are ashamed to see, even in this day and age, fellow citizens proud to betray them and, more importantly, proud to

do so publicly, in the hope of gaining some prestige, and to come and tell us that, when it is good for Ontario and western Canada, we must not interfere with a free market.

I happen to think that the auto industry was, and still is, also a free market. Oil companies have always been a highly subsidized free market reserved for Ontario and certain specific provinces.

Did we not also see this weakness in a Conservative member from Quebec just last week, when the Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages tried to justify, quite awkwardly, but agreed to giving more privileges to unilingual anglophones in the army, while denying unilingual francophones the same privileges and appointments?

What are we to make of all these Conservative members from Quebec who turn themselves inside out to go against the interests of Quebecers, even giving them the finger during a vote on supply management?

What a shame for all of Quebec to see some lazy people publicly claim to represent their voters, but devote their energies to destroying them, in order to get a few crumbs. All these free thinkers elected in the Conservative Party under false pretenses have become a major hindrance to the economy and to the development of Quebec. Perhaps they could try to find work in this country after the next election.

I understand full well the mistrust of the aboriginal people toward this government. Quebecers feel it as well, and the few voters who thought it might be worth a try will change their minds once they become aware of the scandalous behaviour of those in whom they put their trust.

In my opinion, the day the country of Quebec recognizes all these aboriginal nations, a number of other countries will be inspired to follow suit. However, to do so, it will take a decision by a nation that has had the same problems that all aboriginals are currently experiencing across Canada.

I am proud to have the Cree nation in my riding.

• (1230)

I am proud of the progress they made, first through the James Bay Agreement and then through the peace of the braves agreement. The latter, which reflected the utmost respect for the aspirations of first nations people, was achieved thanks to the understanding shown by the Parti Québécois under their visionary leader Bernard Landry. That kind of understanding is typical of Quebec. Quebecers, just as the Cree, are just waiting for some kind of recognition similar to the peace of the braves on the part of the federal government to propel the dynamic Quebec nation towards new challenges.

Is it really possible that today, in a country that a recent Prime Minister called the best country in the world, we are still discussing such a fundamental right as the right of first nations people to the most basic protection guaranteed by the Canadian Human Rights Act, from which they are excluded under section 67, originally subsection 63(2), which reads as follows: “Nothing in this Act affects any provision of the Indian Act or any provision made under or pursuant to that Act?”

Government Orders

According to Ron Basford, then justice minister, this provision was necessary in 1977 because of the government's commitment not to review the Indian Act while—and he did say while—consultations with the National Indian Brotherhood and other organizations were still underway.

This provision was controversial from the moment it was introduced. It was thought to be particularly prejudicial to first nations women who were already deprived of status under the existing Indian Act that was considered discriminatory.

During consideration of that bill, which was known as Bill C-25 and which was to become the new law, several witnesses were called upon to appear before the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. They said that this exception was unfair and reprehensible, that it was an insult and that it showed the worst kind of indifference about human rights.

The minister even considered section 67 as a temporary necessity, suggesting that Parliament would not be in favour of maintaining this exception indefinitely or very long.

He misjudged the parliamentarians who came after 1977 and even 1985. Would we be wrong to think that the various governments prior to 1985 were more democratic than today's governments, especially having known the Liberal majority governments, the Liberal minority government in 2004 and the Conservative minority government that has been in power since 2006 and defies majority decisions of Parliament?

It may be that, after 13 consecutive years in power, the Liberals lost touch with reality and thought they were invincible. That is what usually happens when a party governs with ignorance and indifference. The Liberals likely realized that when the voters punished them.

As for the current minority government, it is disturbing to see this inexperienced government, with limited skills and members from Quebec who represent their constituents' interests neither bravely nor ethically. To see this government defy the will of Parliament, the will of the people of Quebec and Canada, with even more arrogance than the previous government raises concerns about democracy.

I believe that the Assembly of First Nations and the Native Women's Association of Canada were right to come out in favour of repealing section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, provided that the government honoured the commitment made on May 31, 2005, following the promises the Prime Minister made on April 19, 2004, to hold discussions with the first nations in order to develop federal policies pertaining to them.

Do I have to repeat what the Prime Minister said at the Canada-aboriginal peoples round table on April 19, 2004 to remind this House that this bill, in both form and substance, runs counter to existing agreements and would lead to further disagreement?

Reaction from the people most directly concerned was not long in coming, and on the very day this bill was introduced, the Assembly of First Nations and the Native Women's Association of Canada issued a press release reiterating the conditions for recognition of any bill concerning them, even though they were very anxious to see this section disappear after 30 years of lobbying.

Knowing the astronomical costs of negotiating with aboriginal peoples and the differing interpretations of existing legislation, as well as the government's promises regarding the procedure for enacting new legislation or entering into new agreements that concern aboriginal peoples and have a specific impact on them, it is obvious that the government acted without due regard to the unique legal context and development of associated capacity for first nations relating to the Canadian Human Rights Act both in tabling this bill and following its introduction.

• (1235)

Understandably, it is difficult to believe in the good faith of this government, which has also opposed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and killed the Kelowna accord.

Like me, many of my colleagues represent aboriginal and Inuit constituents and, contrary to the members and ministers from Quebec in this government, they do not feel the need to double cross them to win over their less interested colleagues or their leader, who does not seem to be interested at all.

My colleagues and I will maintain our unwavering commitment to our constituents as well as our solidarity with other peoples like ours, which yearn for self-sufficiency, their most fundamental rights and loyalty from their elected representatives.

Naturally, we will consider the current approach so that we can define our position with respect to it. Should we ever decide to support it, we will do so only to be able to study it in committee, make amendments and hear evidence from first nations peoples.

[*English*]

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc mentioned that the minister thinks he is an authority on all first nation issues. I would dare say that he is the only one who would think that.

The 42 communities I represent have very little or no access to the minister. I would like to say for the record that we had total access to the previous minister, with whom I had chance to serve, in the Liberal government. He was in my riding and in the communities. The grand chiefs, both three and nine, had separate meetings with him.

Whether it is with regard to section 67 or any other issues in his area of Quebec, has my friend from the Bloc had any access to or consultations with the minister? Is there any access at all to this level of government that the minister is supposed to represent to ensure we hear the concerns of first nations?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge, there have been no consultations with aboriginal peoples concerning this bill. In fact, they said so themselves in a press release issued the very day the bill was introduced.

They will approve the repeal of section 67, after 30 years of lobbying for this, only after they have been consulted about their vision and aspirations with respect to this bill and the amending of the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Government Orders

I have had discussions with the Liberal government's Minister for Native Affairs, a very nice man with whom I got along just fine. He is from the regions, where there are aboriginal people.

The current minister is originally from a region where there were aboriginal people, but I am not sure if there are any where he is working now. He does, however, have the ability and authority to meet them. Unfortunately, he does not seem to have done so.

• (1240)

[English]

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join my colleagues and speak to Bill C-44, a bill that seeks to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act by repealing section 67 that pertains to the Indian Act. Section 67 reads:

Nothing in this Act affects any provision of the Indian Act or any provision made under or pursuant to that Act.

At the outset I can say that I am a very staunch supporter of human rights. I have spoken publicly on this topic many times. Therefore, I support the bill in principle. What I do not support is the lack of sensitivity and understanding of the perimeters of the bill and its implications on the aboriginal way of life.

I am also saddened by the fact that the Conservative government failed to listen to many interventions already made in the past about the approach to take with the step to repeal section 67 that no one is arguing with, mainly the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Canadian Bar Association, to name a few.

I am also disappointed that the government failed to work with the very people who will be impacted by this legislation to draft a bill that has their blessing, the first nations of Canada.

Many members have spoken to the technical aspects of the bill. I will speak more to the human elements and the fine balance of collective rights versus individual rights. I will also speak to the need for an interpretative clause, as recommended by the Human Rights Commission in more than one report.

In its report entitled, "A Matter of Rights:", the Canadian Human Rights Commission review panel amplified that point by saying:

In repealing section 67, it is important to ensure that the unique situation and rights of First Nations are appropriately considered in the process of resolving human rights complaints.

The commission stressed that there be an additional clause that provides an interpretation of how individual rights do not ultimately discriminate instead on legitimate collective rights.

I will read an insert from AFN's report which states:

In previous submissions on section 67 the AFN has strongly advocated for the inclusion of an interpretative clause. Our rationale for doing so relates to our concerns about the effect of federal legislation in undermining our collective rights and its strong interest in achieving an appropriate balance between individual and collective rights.

The Indian Act is an instrument that has been used to undermine the "collective" economic, social, cultural and political rights of First Nations Peoples in Canada for more than 100 years.

This same CHR report spoke strongly of the need for provisions to enable the development and enactment in full consultation for first nations. It was also sensitive to the timeframe required to implement

the changes and gave a more realistic transitional period of between 18 and 30 months so that first nations and the commission are ready and prepared to work to resolving complaints efficiently, effectively and quickly. There needs to be time given to adapt to another fundamental change to a different way of doing things.

Aboriginal people suffer constantly because of decisions made somewhere else that do not give us any opportunity, first, to be part of the process that leads to that decision. Then we must live with it and are usually not given any chance to phase in the change. Canadians wonder why we are suffering social consequences.

Governments have had over 100 years to implement the Indian Act, as imperfect as it is. Now they are asking bands to implement Bill C-44 in six months. Where is the fairness in that?

The previous Liberal government was building a strong relationship with the aboriginal communities and worked with concerned people on the scope of legislation before it was tabled in the House.

• (1245)

First nations should also be given resources, not only to implement this change but to help develop the interpretive clause so sorely needed with this legislation: funds to do capacity-building, funds to explain the changes to everyone, funds to develop procedures and implementation systems, funds to phase it in and to do the work in the language required to reach the people who will be affected.

We see examples already in the world of fundamental changes happening, but also of how the people are slow to follow in the actual practices. The western world rejoiced in the fall of the Berlin wall and also when Communism was no longer a way of life in Russia, but we know that people have been slow to exercise their new freedoms. There is always a need for transitional time for life changes. Six months does not cut it.

I am sure we can go to these countries and see the people still learning to embrace their new freedoms and exercise their democratic rights. Why would the Conservative government think it would be any different for first nations? Does it think they are not the same as other human beings, which would then, of course, defeat the whole purpose of repealing this section? I say this because the Conservative government is sending mixed message to the aboriginal peoples of Canada in how it is treating all its aboriginal files, without any sensitivity and true deliberation on the issues.

I also want to address briefly the issue of individual rights versus collective rights. I know this is a difficult concept for our Conservative friends to understand but it is a real concern for us, as aboriginal people who stand firmly on the issue of our collective rights.

Government Orders

In my riding of Nunavut, we chose within our modern day treaty to own the land collectively and not individually. This is a fundamental difference in our way of dealing with real estate than most Canadians. One of the things that I am really worried about with this legislation is that it may be a first step to putting the land under fee simple, which would then cause a total erosion of aboriginal claims among the first nations people.

Also, when there is an economic opportunity, like a park or a mine opening, most aboriginal people want the collective to benefit rather than a select few. How we achieve this can be in the area of hiring practices or in awarding contracts and giving preferences to our members, or in providing programs and services exclusively or on a preferential basis to members where justifiable. This is done for members who are usually not benefiting from this economic activity or prosperity of their region.

Sometimes there is a need for affirmative action programs for a group of people who are already disadvantaged in order to get them to a level playing field. We need to ensure that first nations have that flexibility within reason to address the social dilemmas facing many of our aboriginal communities. First nations must be given that option.

One example I can give with my own modern day treaty is that we need to get mining companies or even the different governments to have an impact benefit agreement with the people who live there. That would ensure that the benefits are reaching and benefiting the people who live there and not all of the money is going out of the territory.

However, I am very sad to say that this legislation chose to ignore that and I must question why. Is there another reason for this? Because there is no provision for that in this legislation, I can stress the lack of sensitivity to the realities of our lives as aboriginal people.

I strongly urge the government to make the bill more user friendly and not another imposition and another change in which they had no opportunity to be part of the decisions leading up to this change. I had thought we were past that stage in Canada's history. Do not make us live it again.

• (1250)

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member's intervention on this important piece of legislation.

I am struck by the fact that it has been 30 years since human rights became law in Canada. It was implemented in 1977. Initially section 67 was brought in as a temporary measure to provide time, presumably, for consultations that were going on. Over the ensuing 30 years there have been several attempts to correct what was supposed to be a temporary measure. The difficulty is that when the consultations have been engaged, they drag on to the point where parliaments have not been able to fix this as it should be done.

Considering there has been so much delay in getting section 67 corrected, would the way that has been proposed here not be better, that it go into committee, be subject to testimony, and there be six months for implementation. This at least puts a deadline on moving this process forward. I would like her comments on that.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: Mr. Speaker, we do not oppose this change. It is how it is being done.

People have to understand that some of these communities are barely given enough funds to cover their operations, such as, providing housing, education, clean water, keeping the facilities up to par, just the funds for a band. We will have to explain to people what this change will mean to them. Processes have to be put into place. We will need to do capacity building in the communities.

Some of the bands and reserves are not big operations. Some of them are very small communities. Even though we do not have bands in my territory of Nunavut, I can relate to some of these communities. When only 300 people live in a community, we have to serve our residents on all levels. If we are asking people to fundamentally change how they operate, they have to be given time to deal with the change. Resources and a process are needed to deal with the complaints, and I just do not see six months as a reasonable time to deal with it.

If we look historically at what has happened with some of the procedures, parliament has gone into elections and bills have died on the order paper. This is beyond the control of the people who are trying to pass the legislation.

The AFN, the Native Women's Association and even the Canadian Bar Association are asking that there be an interpretive clause in the legislation which we do not see. We are very worried that there will be an unjust balance in how these complaints are taken care of if we do not have that kind of interpretive clause.

We are not against people having their human rights defended, but there needs to be ample time to phase it in and also an opportunity for the people who are affected to make sure that there is a good understanding of collective rights versus individual rights.

• (1255)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Nunavut brings an honest and sincere attitude as well as a great deal of respect to this issue. She speaks with great knowledge.

We on this side of the House see a theme emerging from the government. The government has no will to consult with stakeholders on any piece of legislation. We saw that on income trusts. There was absolutely no consultation with the financial community. I am very leery about the fisheries act that will be coming forward in the next number of weeks and the sheer lack of consultation. An essential basic aspect of developing legislation is to include people in the process.

My colleague from Nunavut is a very respected member with respect to a number of aboriginal issues and is very much dialled in with many national aboriginal groups. I would like to ask her what the response has been from these groups. Have they been consulted? Has there been any respect shown for the concerns they have brought forward?

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: Mr. Speaker, that is the crux of the interventions on our side. I thank other opposition members for also speaking to this issue.

Government Orders

Lack of consultation is a great worry for all of us on every file, but especially on aboriginal files. The former Liberal government encouraged real relationship building between aboriginal peoples of Canada and the Government of Canada. Not only were cabinet ministers engaged in consultations with our people, but our former prime minister took it upon himself to make it a personal mission. He told every cabinet minister that they would not be making legislation without people's input. We were very comfortable with the steps that we were going through in our consultations on different files with the former government.

It is hard not to mention the Kelowna accord. That process engaged many aboriginal people in this country. We were right at the national table speaking with the people who had the ability to change legislation or policies. I do not think we will ever stop regretting that lost opportunity.

The lack of consultation was also very painful for communities that were given the hope that they could be engaged. It is a sad situation when hope is taken away. Hope is one thing that is needed in our aboriginal communities, hope for a better future, hope for better opportunities in education and economic development. I just do not see that right now in the discussions the Conservative government is having with aboriginal people. Even to say that they are having discussions is pushing it. This legislation was introduced obviously without any input from the aboriginal communities. Otherwise there would have been an interpretive clause and more of a phase-in period that would have been realistic to bringing in such a change to communities.

• (1300)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could comment on the resources available to aboriginal and Inuit communities in her area because this will obviously take aboriginal governments and communities some resources to implement.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: Mr. Speaker, this does not affect my riding directly because we are not covered under the Indian Act, but I can understand what the communities will be facing if they are not given the resources to deal with this change.

Any change is difficult for all of us. In order to implement changes the proper resources are needed to make sure people understand exactly what it is that is changing, what opportunities are being opened up to them. People will be trying to understand what this means for them and their communities.

As I said in my speech, not everyone is going to realize what they can do to improve their lives if they feel that they have been discriminated against. Unfortunately, some people have lived with that situation for so long that they accept it as a way of life.

We are going to have to teach the people how to embrace this new freedom, for lack of a better word. We need to do it also in the language that people can understand. Not everyone in aboriginal communities speaks English or French, so it has to be explained in the language that they work with and live with and that takes a lot of resources.

There is going to have to be capacity building. There is obviously going to be paperwork involved. Some bands are already having

great difficulty with all the administrative challenges, so resources will be needed with respect to this legislation.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I want to spend my 20 minutes explaining that this is not going to be as easy a process as people might think. It appears to simply be taking a clause out of bill; obviously it is a motherhood clause whereby we would give everyone human rights. That seems pretty simple and straightforward, and a lot of us in this House agree with that.

For a number of reasons, this is not going to be that simple. I do not think the media, a lot of whom have tuned into this, or some members of Parliament realize the important debate underlying this particular removal of one simple clause. We are talking about the coming together and cooperation of two entirely different cultures. They have different linguistics, rituals, forms of government and collective rights, and different ways of governing, and we are going to apply legislation related to a right from one onto the other.

Mark my words: this is going to involve a very serious debate on this issue in committee and, as this bill is being discussed, on this larger issue. Some of the problems that some of my colleagues have already outlined, and which I will again emphasize, simply are created by the inappropriate preparation of this legislation. The government could have reduced a lot of the amendments that will have to be made to make it more reasonable and appropriate.

Bill C-44 is related to an amendment to the Human Rights Act. The Human Rights Act, passed in 1977, prohibits discrimination during employment or provision of services by governments. This bill would remove a clause that basically says discrimination caused by the Indian Act is okay and cannot be charged against. I am going to just go through some of the issues I see here and some of the things that have to be taken into account for this very worthy cause to be successful and to be undertaken properly.

First, of course, is resources. If we were to try to implement laws in Canada today without any police or prosecutors, to some extent like we are trying to do in Afghanistan, obviously it would not work. These things are involved when we are implementing a new law. As for ignoring this issue completely, unfortunately this government seems to have a habit of doing this. I think we have asked different justice ministers about this three times. On each occasion, the answer was no, there was no provision and there was either no calculating or insufficient calculating of resources. I remember that in regard to the two times I asked, the first time he said that the improvements to society because of this bill will pay the costs.

First, with regard to this particular bill, the witnesses suggested there would be more costs to society and it would be a backward step, so that would not work, and even if it did, of course, the Financial Administration Act does not work that way. We cannot take some general improvement in society to pay for the implementation of a bill. In the other act, the Minister of Justice just said that it was the public safety minister's problem and he can pay for it. If a government seriously wants legislation to pass, to be implemented and to work, it is obviously going to analyze the resources.

Government Orders

In regard to this particular bill, first nation governments and institutions, especially as strapped as they are, will need training. They are going to need implementation funds. There are all sorts of costs to bringing in laws, obviously, both for them and for the federal government.

Of course, the federal government has a big purse for defending itself. It has a lot of lawyers itself. All governments are always defending themselves. But what resources do first nations have? People think they just add things to first nation governments or aboriginal governments and there is a wealth of resources, but they are strapped for cash. They do not have resources for anything except for what has been given to them for specific reasons by other levels of government. On a day to day basis, they are scrambling to implement the things they have to implement now.

If we impose more demands on those resources, like we would by this act, where are they going to take the resources from? From the things that we have already found wanting, such as housing, education and even safe drinking water? They have no other resources and there are none contemplated here. Just imagine, for instance, the number of buildings and facilities in first nations communities across the country that are not wheelchair accessible. In regard to this bill, there are all sorts of potential costs to first nations with no analysis of what they might be, with no provisions, and with no suggestion by the federal government that they would be paid for.

● (1305)

Another very important area, as mentioned by some of my colleagues, is an interpretive clause. I will discuss it more later, but when we have, in a cooperative, diverse society such as ours, a coming together of two entirely different cultures, we are going to need, and the experts have suggested it, an interpretive clause as to how this would be applied to first nation governments and institutions. This has come out before, in many recommendations

The third major area that will require discussion and improvement is consultation. I do approve of the government's clause in the bill that there will be a review after five years, but that is too late. In this day and age, it would be insane for any government, both politically and legally, not to consult with first nations on such a major issue as this, which is entirely in the essence of the philosophy of defining collective and individual rights. Consultation is just mandatory now when major changes are made. Court case after court case has indicated that with first nations we must do consultation. It would make no sense at all to go forward without consultation, as the government seems to be doing. A number of members have already spoken to that point so I will not go on at length.

The next is the time needed to put this into place. The government is giving six months. There is no possibility that such a major change could be in place in six months given all the training and resources that the government has not come up with yet, given the interpretation that it has not come up with yet, and given the preparation and training of first nation governments to deal with these complaints under the human rights commission. No one, including the government, has suggested that six months would work for the training of police and setting up of systems in Afghanistan, so for this there should be a far more reasonable time. I

am suggesting 30 to 45 months to put all the pieces in place, pieces that have not even been started yet.

The next area that I think needs to be discussed is the area of aboriginal and treaty rights and the effects on aboriginal treaty rights. These are longstanding and very complicated. Some are constitutional. Some are a moral imperative. They have to be looked at and analyzed and there is no sense that it has been done in the development of the bill. We have been given nothing whatsoever in regard to the effects of this bill on these complex situations, nor has there been analysis of the effect of the bill on those rights. I am not saying it cannot go ahead, but obviously we have to analyze those effects, make sure this can go ahead legally and morally and see if any adjustments have to be made.

In the modern treaties, it is not so much a problem, because in most of the modern treaties the first nation or aboriginal people have to come under the human rights legislation. For those aboriginal people who are worrying about whether it is possible, we can see good examples of this, such as the Cree, the Tlicho, many of the Yukon first nations, the Nisga'a, and the Westbank, who do fall under human rights legislation. We can see that it is working, but it is all the other situations that have not been analyzed.

That leads to a very worrying aspect of the development of legislation by the Conservative government. Normally, legislation is developed through a very thoughtful process, after long study by the officials in the bureaucracy. They finally come forward, after having looked at all the things I am talking about, with recommendations in all of these areas and with the effects of a bill. That just does not seem to have occurred this time, obviously, or all these things would have been looked at and addressed one way or another. This is a very serious charge.

When we were doing the justice committee in Toronto, we heard from a person who told us that basically this was also not occurring with the preparation of justice bills. Previously there had been vast public consultation, with officials from the bureaucracy looking at all aspects of a bill and then bringing it forward. This was not being done in the justice bills that were being so widely criticized by a vast majority of the witnesses. That was obviously why they were being so widely criticized: they had not gone through the proper preparation.

● (1310)

I want to talk about the sixth area of concern. It is related to institutions. It may be more appropriate to have an aboriginal institution deal with charges against aboriginal governments and institutions. Most members who have been in the House for a few years realize that a number of bills have been passed recently that have very appropriately expanded the institutional operation of first nations, and they have created a number of first nations institutions to have them deal with new powers given to aboriginal people rather than existing institutions that may not be as sensitive or knowledgeable about the area. That is a whole area that has not been looked at and commented on.

Government Orders

There are other areas in justice development that of course need priority attention from the government. In my area, the Teslin Tlingit Council has been negotiating for years to get its justice system into place. It has evolved through land claims. As well, the Carcross Tagish First Nation is working on new family law that it needs support for.

I want to make it clear for those watching that the exemption that would be removed only allows it to be about discrimination that is caused by the Indian Act, so that aboriginal people on treaty land can continue, as they do about 40 times a year, to lodge complaints against the Human Rights Commission if it is for other human rights violations in their communities. This is just a narrow scope. Although the Indian Act is fairly large and pervasive, it is only the actions relevant to the Indian Act.

As my colleague, the hon. member for Nunavut, was explaining, this would not apply to self-governing first nations that no longer come under the Indian Act, because there would be no discrimination caused by the Indian Act.

As I said, I think this is a far larger debate than the media and some MPs think it might be, because of the great debate it brings up between collective and individual rights and the differences between the two societies. I think of the collective ceremonies of potlatches and sun dances, and I think of the family law being developed by the Carcross Tagish Band, where family relationships and who is responsible are much broader and different in first nations.

I think of first nations people not “owning” the land. What says that kind of system cannot work? I represented Canada in Mongolia recently. It was Mongolia's 800th anniversary. No one owns the land. Vast herds move around on unowned land. There are very successful producers. There is nothing to say that any type of society's laws, institutions or procedures cannot work or that any one is better than another, but I believe that in Canada we can come up with a made in Canada solution. We can compromise and work together to accomplish something that will work in a practical way for all of us.

I want to talk a bit about the history of the development of this exemption. This is not the first time it has been tried. In talking about that, I also want to show support for some of the changes I have recommended in the first part of my speech.

This has been brought forward a number of times since the Canadian Human Rights Act was implemented in 1977. In 1992, Bill C-108 was put forward but did not pass first reading. The second time was in the year 2000. There was a report called “Promoting Equality: A New Vision”. All the aboriginal groups at the time had asked for a repeal but thought a blanket repeal was inappropriate, and once again, they thought an interpretive clause was required for the very reasons I set out earlier. That supports one of the points I have made.

The third time it came up was under Bill C-7. The women, who were probably the most drastically affected by this, still brought up the question of collective rights. Bill C-7 did not go through, but it was a much larger bill so there were other elements that prevented it from getting through.

●(1315)

The fourth time it came up was in a report in a special study on the repeal of section 67, entitled “A Matter of Rights” in 2005. Once again it hit the nail on the head when it said there should be an interpretive clause in order that individual claims, to be free from discrimination, are considered in light of legitimate collective interest. It also talked about the need for consultations which a number of us have already explained that are so sorely lacking. It recommended 18 to 30 months for implementation, not the 6 months in the bill or the 30 or 45 months that I was suggesting. It also talked about institutional adjustments, which support the six suggested areas that need improvement, study, additions or amendments that I spoke about earlier.

The report also talked about resources which was my very first point, so we are not taking this money from areas that are already in dire need in first nation communities: health, education and housing.

The fifth time it came up was in 2006 in a report entitled “Access to Justice and Indigenous Legal Traditions”. Once again the report suggested that there a multi-year plan to fully engage and meaningfully consult with first nations and aboriginal communities on the repeal of section 67 and again there was no consultation. It talked about a comprehensive multi-year plan and access to resources, and other points that I made earlier which would be needed to make this work at all.

If the bill goes into effect and there are no resources, obviously it will not work. Some might say that aboriginal women in remote areas could perhaps access legal aid to put their complaints forward to make it work or the court challenges program or the Law Reform Commission. Lo and behold, the government has cut all those programs either entirely or in part. Therefore, what type of resources is the poor aboriginal woman in some remote community going to use to engage in these new-found powers and abilities to protect herself?

The UN has also brought up the potential repeal of section 67 in 2004 by the special rapporteur, in 2006 by the human rights committee and in 2006 by the committee on economic, social and cultural rights. All were in favour of the repeal of section 67.

I want to talk about the reaction of various groups. The Native Women's Association of Canada and similarly the AFN said that this would be a disaster without consultation for the various reasons I have mentioned on numerous occasions already.

Government Orders

The AFN suggested the need to look at an aboriginal institution for the implementation in the aboriginal community. It talked about an interpretive position once again to safeguard the important collective rights while balancing the rights of the individual. It talked about resources, so we can see over and over again the six points I made at the beginning of my speech are being supported by all sorts of experts in other areas. The input and consultation, if it was done, was not taken into account in what has been presented to Parliament. It talked about how it would affect the housing shortages if resources were taken away to implement this law in order to train people and to have their officers working to defend them on claims under the bill. It talked about a minimum of 30 to 45 months for implementation which is exactly what I recommended earlier in my speech.

Other supporters of the repeal of section 67 were the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and the Grand Chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. In general, there has been editorial support for this in all regions of the country.

I would like to summarize the six serious points I have given with all sorts of backup from experts, from previous reports and from first nations consultations. We need the resources. We need to look at interpretive cause under this coordination of cultures. We need to look at consultation that should have been done long ago. We need to look at the timeframe to realistically implement this. We need to look at the potential impacts on aboriginal treaties and rights. We need to look at aboriginal institutions to possibly implement this.

● (1320)

Finally, this is a much larger issue. We can support this and come up with a made in Canada solution, but we have to have a very sensitive and open discussion, and understanding among Canadians where collective rights are viewed with importance but come together with a practical Canadian solution so that this can work for everyone's benefit.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague brought out two points that I would like more information on. I asked my colleague from Nunavut about consultation, or the lack thereof, throughout this process and on this piece of legislation. Could the member comment on the groups and various agencies he has been in contact with and the concerns that have been raised over consultation or the lack thereof with moving this piece of legislation forward?

The other issue I would like the member to comment on, and he mentioned it twice through his presentation, pertains to the resources that are going to be needed by the various communities in order to build capacities to address this. I understand fully that these communities are not in a position that they can draw any moneys from their A-based budgets, and that they should be given the opportunity to have access to additional funds should this legislation go forward.

Is there any indication of where that would come from? Is there any indication of what kind of money we are talking about? What are some of the costs to the community that may arise by the passing of this legislation? Does this legislation do anything to help the communities deal with those types of challenges? Could my colleague please comment on those two areas?

● (1325)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, on the first question of consultation, that is a very important point. Court cases after court cases have indicated, and fairly so, that when we are impacting first nations, aboriginal, Inuit and Métis people, we have to consult. Obviously, in a law such as this that has such a dramatic effect on their whole way of life, on their whole world view of life, we need to consult. Was this in any of the documents and in any of the government's speeches that this had been done?

The people most affected, some of the biggest stakeholders, the Assembly of First Nations and the Native Women's Association of Canada both basically said that this law would be a disaster without that consultation. The reason is that they would bring up in their consultation many of the points I brought up in my speech.

It is inconceivable in this day and age, with what we have been through with first nations in the last decade in reviewing them on a government-to-government relationship, that such an important bill and concept would be brought forward without consultation, especially a bill like this where they are generally supportive of the principle.

In relation to the member's second question on the cost, the Government of Canada would not survive a day if we did not fund our prosecutors, if we did not fund our lawyers to defend it, if we did not fund our policemen, or if we did not train all of these people to implement laws.

People do not understand that first nations do not have any money. They do not have the revenue generation that we do. Many of them have higher levels of unemployment, but they do not even have the tax base that we do. They only have government grants for a specific function that the government has given them.

What are we going to do? Are we going to tell them to break the law and take away money from housing to defend themselves because there are going to be a lot of cases here? This would not have come up if there were not a lot of cases that are going to come forward. There have been many instances. As I said, there are already 40 a year, the Indian Act being very pervasive. Imagine the number of cases relating to employment or the provision of its services or the provision of housing.

Look at scarce housing resources. The first nations have to give those to someone. Are they going to be charged a number of times? They are going to need lawyers. They are going to need to train their staff. All this costs money. As I said, they would be acting illegally if they took it from some other purse. I ask the government to please look at this and come up with some resources to go with this act, so it can be successfully implemented.

Government Orders

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question concerning consultation. The member made this one of the key elements, that is, the lack of consultation by the government, particularly with a group that is most affected by the piece of legislation being discussed.

It is reminiscent of what had happened, and on which we heard testimony just recently, on another government bill, Bill C-30, the alleged clean air act, where the AFN came before the committee and was asked directly by myself and others what level of consultation it had received. The government had made a whole series of presumptions about first nations involvement around the environment, particularly around carbon sinks and the use of massive tracts of land. The AFN had a longstanding dispute with the previous Liberal government and the current Conservative one. The element of consultation had been left off the table. The government just proceeded to go ahead with legislation and decision making before consulting.

Many Canadians watching this will be confused. The reason this is such a critical point is it has been proven time and time again in the courts, from coast to coast to coast in this country. First nations have gone to seek rights and due diligence from government, and the courts have interpreted our Constitution and our laws, and said that the government has an obligation to consult prior to making those decisions.

I know the member has a number of first nations in his riding. With respect to mining in particular, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, which his government brought in, had no real basis for serious and concrete consultation, which led the Tahltan and the TRT, the Taku River Tlingit, and a number of other groups, to long litigation battles, seeking just the common decency of consultation.

Is it not time that we do a broad cast across a number of pieces of legislation, not just this badly designed one, but a series of them, because government is clearly not willing to listen, no matter which political side of the spectrum it is, to the courts, to the first nations people? Should we not truly engage in real consultation with the first nations people?

• (1330)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague entirely. What is needed is basically a whole change in attitude by government on consultations with first nation people. We are moving into the modern world.

In my particular riding, we have signed land claim agreements in which consultation was mandatory on items that affect first nation people. To some extent, the Department of Indian Affairs understands this, but time and time again we have other departments that just move ahead and on occasion forget that there is a mandatory requirement to consult.

Some members are wondering why their bills do not go through, why there are problems, and why the opposition is against them. They would have a lot better defence for these bills had they done this required consultation with first nations and other groups in advance.

Let me just read what the Assembly of First Nations said on consultation about this particular act:

The Government of Canada has not consulted First Nations, even though this action was anticipated almost three decades ago. Now, the government intends to simply repeal this section without due regard to the unique legal context and development of associated capacity for First Nations relating to the CHRA.

I do not think I need to say any more.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I feel very privileged to have the opportunity to speak on the subject of Bill C-44. This is an important bill because it addresses an important aspect of first nations' organization and shared reality: their relationship to human rights and freedoms.

Any Quebecker who thinks about first nations cannot help but think about René Lévesque who, as we all know, was not only the founder of the sovereignty association movement, but was also a man with a very generous vision of our relationship with first nations.

When he was premier, René Lévesque introduced a motion in the National Assembly to recognize Quebec's 11 aboriginal nations as nations. The word "nation" implies recognition of a people's history, language, institutions, will to live, and territory. It implies that they deserve to be considered not just a society, a minority or a group, but a nation.

The term "nation" also implies self-determination. Self-determination is the right to decide one's own future, the right to decide one's own destiny, and the right to create one's own vision for progress.

We must support Bill C-44 in principle. This reminds me that a former Supreme Court justice, Justice La Forest, was given a mandate by Allan Rock or Anne McLellan. One of those former justice ministers chose him to oversee a working group on the modernization of the Canadian Human Rights Act. Justice La Forest came to two major conclusions. Like all New Brunswickers, he is very endearing.

Justice La Forest concluded that social condition should be added to the Canadian Human Rights Act as prohibited grounds for discrimination. As unbelievable as it sounds, social condition is not currently grounds for discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act. Eight provinces and territories have it. Quebec was the first to include it. Yet the federal government never updated the Canadian Human Rights Act by including social condition.

Since 1997, I have repeatedly tabled bills to ensure that this is done. Other members have done this as well. I know that in the other chamber, in the Senate, Senator Kinsella, who has become the Speaker of the Senate and is a professor specializing in human rights, has also tabled a bill to this effect.

Government Orders

Judge La Forest's second recommendation was to remove the exception made under section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act so that the act would apply. All Quebec and Canadian citizens, no matter what their origin or position in society, whether or not they are a members of a first nation, are subject to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

First, a distinction must be made. The Canadian Human Rights Act is not the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter is a constitutional document adopted in 1982. You will recall that this was a very unhappy time for Quebec because the charter was adopted without the agreement of the National Assembly.

● (1335)

At the time, under both René Lévesque and Claude Ryan, everyone was well aware that this was no the way to treat one of the founding peoples of Canada, that is, Quebec, which had significant experience in the protection of human rights; in 1977, it instituted the Quebec charter of human rights and freedoms, which continues to this day to guarantee judicial, social and economic rights. It is considered to be one of the most thorough documents on human rights. The Canadian Human Rights Act protects individuals who receive the services of the federal government or in areas where it has jurisdiction, such as banking, national transportation, financial institutions, the RCMP and the federal government itself.

Anyone who believes they are the victim of discrimination by a federal institution, agency or office can invoke the Canadian Human Rights Act, which has significant repercussions for intergovernmental affairs.

It is a pleasure for me to note how well my caucus is served in intergovernmental affairs because the member for Trois-Rivières is our critic and looks after this file with sensitivity and wisdom.

The Canadian Human Rights Act lists 11 prohibited grounds of discrimination. I am going to mention them for everyone's benefit. They are: race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion—regarding which the Supreme Court has handed down some landmark rulings—age, sex and sexual orientation. I was in this House when we amended the Canadian Human Rights Act. This was in response to court rulings and to representations from all the groups involved in the protection of major civil liberties. It was the then Minister of Justice, Allan Rock, who amended the Canadian Human Rights Act. Later on, he was appointed to the United Nations by the Liberals but, unfortunately, the Conservatives did not renew his mandate at the UN.

The Canadian Human Rights Act protects our fellow citizens who receive services from the federal government, or its agencies, against discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status—whether or not one is married; as we know, some very important rulings were made by the Supreme Court, including on custody and income—family status, disability and, what is more unusual, conviction for which a pardon has been granted.

When that act was passed, section 67 provided the following:

Nothing in this Act affects any provision of the Indian Act or any provision made under or pursuant to that Act.

When we passed the Canadian Human Rights Act, why did we want to exclude the first nations from its scope, and particularly people who live on reserves? This was meant to be a transitional provision, because we wanted to negotiate with the first nations to prepare them to develop conciliation methods, to prepare them for the fact that complaints might be made to the Canadian Human Rights Commission and, ultimately, a notice to appear before the Human Rights Tribunal might be issued.

Section 67 was meant to be a transitional, temporary provision, not a permanent one. The various governments that have been in office have all failed in their responsibility to negotiate with the first nations.

● (1340)

It is not the first time, as my colleague from Chambly just reminded me. He could give us countless examples, himself, with regard to employment insurance and the POWA, the Program for Older Worker Adjustment. Examples abound of governments that renege on their commitments.

The government did not negotiate to create any mechanisms suited to the first nations. We are talking here about areas such as culture, heritage, traditions and the justice system. How can we not think, for example, of what justice means to our aboriginal people?

As a matter of fact, the Law Reform Commission tabled an excellent report on the subject. The Conservatives have abolished that commission. Could we have ever thought that a government would be so mean-spirited as to abolish such an important consultative body? May I add that that body was chaired by the dean of the University of Ottawa law school, Nathalie Des Rosiers.

It was with astonishment that we realized that this government is not keen on doing intellectual work. It does not want to create situations where it would be confronted with its values and its vision, which is we know is a right-wing vision. That is the difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals. I am not saying that the Liberals are above reproach, but since coming into office, the Conservatives have proven that not only the economic right is alive and well, but also the social right. We had not seen that from a government in a long time.

How can we not be outraged, for example, by the fact that the government is planning to cut \$2 billion, not from tax shelters or subsidies to oil companies, but from literacy programs, from Status of Women Canada and from programs aimed at helping those in need?

Government Orders

Coming back to Bill C-44, what is really sad about this bill is not the principle. We recognize that aboriginal nations are different—as I pointed out—in terms of justice. On that, the Law Commission of Canada pointed out that restitution is possible, and not merely restitution in the form of fines and imprisonment. When an offence is committed in an aboriginal community, people sit down together and figure out how restitution can be achieved. Restitution could involve the offender putting himself or herself at the direct service of the victim. There are all sorts of innovative and more interesting ways to look at justice than our conventional sentencing mechanisms.

We can surely agree, in 2007, that the specificity of aboriginal peoples cannot preclude offering impervious guarantees concerning human rights. We can no longer tolerate the notion of two categories of citizens: those who are protected by the Canadian Human Rights Act and can invoke it when discrimination occurs, and those who are excluded.

The Bloc Québécois agrees that section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act should be removed from the act, as Justice La Forest recommended.

However, there is one thing we do not understand. Our critics who sit on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development know what this is; we do not understand why there was no prior consultation with aboriginal groups and the first nations.

• (1345)

It is true that the bill provides for a six month transition period as soon as section 67 is repealed. Nonetheless, that is not very much time considering the adjustments that will be necessary.

Furthermore, the Supreme Court, in *Delgamuukw*, in *Mitchell* and in so many other cases, reminded us that the federal government has a specific responsibility toward aboriginals: it is their trustee. When the charter was passed in 1982, section 35 recognized specific ancestral rights for the first nations stemming from the fact that they were the first inhabitants of this land. It is unacceptable that the federal government, in its capacity as trustee—as part of its fiduciary responsibilities—is not consulting the first nations.

Again, the Bloc Québécois does not have a problem with the principle of the matter. We agree that 30 years after the Canadian Human Rights Act was passed, it is conceivable, normal and desirable for the first nations to enjoy the same protection, same rights and the same constitutional guarantees. When discrimination occurs, they have to be able to lodge a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission, and ultimately call for a human rights tribunal, if necessary.

This is the federal government's responsibility as a trustee. Moreover, if the member for Abitibi were with us today, he would remind us of that fact. Our colleague who sits on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development would do the same. If the federal government has one fiduciary responsibility, it is that it must never take action without first consulting extensively.

This is what is so sad about the current situation. No one in the first nations was consulted, be it their authorized spokesperson, Phil Fontaine, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, the women's

groups or young people. We believe that this is not the way to do things.

Failing to consult these groups is a black mark on the federal government in its relations with the first nations. Obviously, it is not the only one. We know that this government has a very poor record when it comes to the first nations, especially on the issue of housing.

We know that the first nations are a young people. Demographically and statistically, they are undergoing great changes. They are a people with an extremely high birth rate. Young people make up a large segment of the aboriginal population. This reality raises the whole issue of equitable access to housing.

The government has a fiduciary responsibility to the first nations. Sadly, it is doing a very poor job of living up to its responsibilities and has not put sufficient resources for housing on the table.

Since I see that my time is almost up, I will conclude by saying that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill C-44. It was in favour when Justice La Forest issued his recommendations in 2002. We believe that human rights and freedoms should apply equally to first nations people living on reserves and people living throughout Canada and Quebec. Nevertheless, it saddens us that the first nations were not consulted. We hope the government will learn its lesson and will not introduce other legislation without holding consultations.

• (1350)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague. I listened to his comments with interest.

Last month, my colleague and I were in Africa together where we visited three of the poorest countries in the world: Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali. We took part, with local parliamentarians, in seminars chaired by the Speaker of the House. We travelled together in an effort to support democratic development in Africa.

I would like, if I may, to put three short questions to my colleague. Firstly, I noted that Conservative members have not said a word about that today. Does it mean that they have absolutely no interest in this issue? Does my colleague believe that such is the case?

Secondly, I know that the Canadian Human Rights Commission recommended a transition period so that aboriginal communities would have time to adapt to the change and to interpret the Human Rights Act. Does he agree that there should be a transition period?

Thirdly, does he think that the government should try to meet the actual needs of aboriginal communities in terms of education, jobs, poverty, drinking water and health? Does he agree with me that not honouring the Kelowna accord is a sad a terrible thing? I am very disappointed about that. Does he agree with me on that?

Statements by Members

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his questions. First, I too recall with great pleasure our trip to Benin, Mali and Burkina Faso to do training in the democratic practices that must form part of a parliamentary democracy. I have very fond memories of that trip and I am impatiently awaiting his photographs.

Second, of course, my colleague is entirely correct. It is disturbing to see how things are being done. Once again, the issue here is not the principle. However, it would have been worthwhile to hold consultations with the aboriginal peoples. Yes, I think that the transition period provided for in the bill is inadequate, considering what the Canadian Human Rights Commission recommended. And yes, it is unfortunate that the Kelowna accord, to which \$5 billion had been allocated, if memory serves me, has been abandoned.

I know that our critic, the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, has brought a lot of pressure to bear regarding this. I know that he is also following the work being done by the United Nations on a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples very closely.

So obviously this government does not have the best track record when it comes to respect for the rights of the first nations.

• (1355)

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for my hon. colleague from the Bloc. Three parties have been calling for more consultation on this bill or they have been saying that the consultation has been inadequate. I agree completely with that. For parliamentarians to understand the complexity of the changes that this will require in a lot of the practices of first nations across the country, this can only be gleaned through proper consultation. It is complex. It fits with many of the practices and customs.

If we move this bill along, how does the member think we will be able to achieve any kind of goals of consultation within a committee process?

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague for his question. I would repeat: the Bloc is greatly saddened by the fact that this bill has been brought before us so hastily.

Our colleague is correct to point out that the fiduciary duty that the federal government has to the first nations would have called for them be consulted. I think that the Chief of the Assembly of First Nations has expressed his disappointment in this regard. Once again, I think that the issue is not the principle of the bill, it is the fact that there have been no consultations. If the bill is adopted, there will be repercussions if the first nations are not allowed sufficient time. When a government behaves too stubbornly, when it is unduly obstinate, I think that this is never in the interests of our fellow citizens.

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Hochelaga has really echoed a number of the concerns that have been brought forward to the floor with regard to the implementation time and the transition period.

We are looking at the six month period for transition with the bill as put forward by the government. However, the Canadian Human Rights Commission has recommended an 18 to 30 month transition period, so that is obviously of concern. A lack of consultation is another concern.

One concern my colleague did not address was the cost. These aboriginal communities are those least able to accommodate this type of change. Within their A based budgets, within their annual operating budgets, I cannot see them taking money from an important aspect of running their communities such as housing, social program or whatever it might be. That money has to come from somewhere and it could be substantive.

Perhaps my colleague could make a comment on that. Will there will be costs? What kinds of costs will there be? Where should the money come from?

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but the hon. member for Hochelaga will have to respond to the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso when we return to this bill.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

RIDEAU CANAL

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is appropriate that I am speaking about the Rideau Canal on Heritage Day.

Stretching from Ottawa to Kingston, the canal opened 175 years ago. It encompasses many communities, all with unique heritage: Seeleys Bay, Newboro, Westport, Portland, Perth, Rideau Ferry, Smiths Falls, Merrickville, Burritts Rapids, Kemptville and Manotick.

The canal was built to move troops and supplies from Montreal to the Great Lakes without fear of attack by Americans along the St. Lawrence River.

Lieutenant Colonel John By set up camp just a few hundred metres from where I stand today to begin this remarkable project.

Over the years, this oldest continuously operating canal of its type has become a major tourist attraction. It is a heritage river, a national historic site and, hopefully, will soon be a world heritage site.

I encourage everyone to learn more by searching on the Internet for the Rideau Canal and visiting all the sites listed there.

* * *

• (1400)

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the poppy eradication program that just began in southern Afghanistan by the U.S. and the U.K. will be an unmitigated disaster that will dramatically increase the threat against our troops. Destroying this crop removes the only source of income for poor Afghan farmers, will undo years of development work and will drive the population toward the Taliban.

Instead of being silent, why has the Prime Minister not picked up the phone and called President Bush and Prime Minister Blair to tell them to stop this colossal blunder? Why does our government not lead an effort to work with the Afghans to use the poppy crops for the production of pharmaceutical grade narcotics that are desperately needed in developing countries? Why does the government not support this plan that will protect our troops, provide Afghan farmers with money to feed their families, Afghanistan with a value-added industry, and the developing world with the medications they desperately need?

The Conservative government must speak out against this quietly unfolding disaster and do it now.

* * *

[Translation]

ALEXANDRE MORIN

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week, any mother or father of a teenager would have empathized with the family of Sillery's Alexandre Morin.

Sixteen-year-old Alexandre Morin, an athlete, did not come back from a routine run last Wednesday during a snowstorm. Emergency personnel and hundreds of volunteers helped search for the teenager. These people gave generously of their time and energy as they searched competently, methodically and patiently, fervently hoping to find Alexandre alive.

Saturday morning, they learned that Alexandre had died. He was found buried under the snow at the bottom of a cliff.

The Bloc Québécois and I would like to offer our sincere condolences to his tragically bereaved parents, as well as to his friends and the volunteers.

We would like to express our admiration for the solidarity shown by all of those who tried to save Alexandre and who sought to console his family and friends.

* * *

[English]

PASSPORT OFFICES

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as in many other rural areas of Canada, constituents in my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan are experiencing long delays in the processing of their passport requests. The nearest passport office is in Victoria which serves all of the residents of Vancouver Island.

One constituent, a senior, told me that he had arrived at 7 a.m. to line up for the day and was turned away when he reached the front of the line at 3:30 p.m.

Compared to southern Ontario, British Columbia is woefully underserved by passport offices, with only four in British Columbia, one in Victoria and three in the greater Vancouver area. In comparison, there are 13 passport offices in southern Ontario.

Unlike people in southern Ontario, British Columbians face geographic barriers, including mountains and ferry crossings, to visit their passport office. If it is too busy, there is no other option, unlike people in southern Ontario.

Statements by Members

British Columbia is rapidly growing, especially in an area like the Cowichan Valley with a population that increases dramatically from year to year. It is time the minister opened a passport office to serve central Vancouver Island.

* * *

CANADA WINTER GAMES

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in less than a week's time, Canadians will discover true northern hospitality when Whitehorse plays host to future Olympians and the Canada Winter Games.

As the member of Parliament for Yukon, I am thrilled that my riding will be home to Canada's largest sporting event this year. It is also the first time that a community north of the 60th parallel will showcase a sporting event this big.

As Canadians watch for the first time, many will witness traditional Inuit and Dene games in sports as challenging as they are fascinating, sports such as the knuckle hop, the head pull and the one foot high kick. There will be stick gambling, swing kicks, the snow snake, moose skin ball and the pole push.

Canadians will also discover northern culture with exhibits from artists, dancers and musicians, the finest of the north, for all to enjoy during an incredible 14 days and nights in Whitehorse. I urge all Canadians to tune in on their television.

Let the games begin.

Massi cho, merci, gunalchish.

* * *

TERRORISM

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to condemn the actions of terrorists who blew up the train in northern India killing at least 66 innocent people. These terrorists who seek to kill and to destroy must be brought to justice.

As Canadians, we condemn this act of terrorism and the loss of human life. I wish to extend condolences to the families of the victims. I trust the governments of India and Pakistan will conduct a full investigation.

This attack is an obvious attempt to undermine the improving relationship between the neighbouring countries. This train, known as the Samjhauta Express, the friendship train, is seen as a symbol of the budding peace process.

In this globalized age, there is an increased danger of transnational elements who have the ability to transport terrorism.

By now it must be obvious to all parties that we must remain vigilant and continue to safeguard our security and protect our citizens.

Statements by Members

● (1405)

[Translation]

JUTRA AWARDS

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the ninth annual Jutra awards gala was held yesterday in Montreal. Every year, these awards showcase the creations of Quebec's film industry.

Our government wishes to congratulate the artists working in Quebec's film industry for their outstanding contribution to the development of Canadian cinema and its presence around the world. This year, a number of feature films were nominated in various categories.

The Government of Canada salutes all of the winners honoured during yesterday evening's ceremony, especially the artists who created *Congorama*, which took home the Jutra for best picture of 2006.

We are proud of Quebec's film industry and we hope it will continue to flourish as it showcases our country's creative talent and cultural diversity at home and around the world.

Once again, congratulations to all of the artists and winners honoured last night at the Jutra awards.

* * *

OLDER WORKERS

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the Conservative government says, not all workers over 55 can find new employment after the plant they worked at has closed.

We have a delegation of such workers on Parliament Hill today. In December 2005, the Olymel plant in Magog shut down. Seventy out of the 450 employees were over 55. All have undergone retraining over several months. Yet, 48 of these 70 have been unable to find new jobs, for lack of job offers. That is the reality.

There are textile factories in Cowansville and Magog where more than one third of the workers are 55 and over. Imagine what would happen to them if these factories were to shut down.

* * *

[English]

TERRORISM

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Canadian Coalition Against Terror called on all MPs to support the extension of two critical anti-terrorism measures. They state:

We are deeply dismayed that Canadian MPs are talking about significantly diminishing Canada's capacity for fighting terrorism by removing critical provisions from Canada's Anti-terrorism Act.

We urge all MPs to approach this vote with the security of Canadians in mind.

They go on to state, "We hope that federal MPs will join fellow Liberals, such as the members for Mount Royal, Etobicoke North and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, in supporting such an extension".

Our government is concerned with maintaining the safety and security of all Canadians. It is unfortunate that the Liberal leader has stated his opposition to extending these measures despite the advice of his colleagues. Perhaps he will heed the advice of those Canadian victims of terror.

* * *

HERITAGE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are marking Heritage Day, a national celebration created by the Heritage Canada Foundation and observed on the third Monday of every February.

Heritage Day brings attention to some of the neighbourhoods and landscapes that reflect Canada's rich cultural heritage, for instance, in urban places like The Main in Montreal, or the Byward Market and St. Brigid's Roman Catholic Church in Ottawa—Vanier, the riding I have the honour of representing, or in rural places like Tilting on Fogo Island in Newfoundland, and the Ukrainian Four Corner Settlement in Gardenton, Manitoba.

In response to the government's cancellation this past September of the commercial heritage properties incentive fund, the Heritage Canada Foundation and its partners are calling for federal financial incentives for rehabilitation that would help Canadians protect their built heritage landmarks instead of seeing them end up as landfill.

* * *

● (1410)

TERRORISM

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Air-India Victims Families Association is asking the Liberals to support their own legislation. They demand that Parliament extend the Anti-terrorism Act, that the Liberals stop their political gamesmanship and that the Liberals once again support the Anti-terrorism Act for another three years.

The victims say:

We believe that Prime Minister...is doing the right thing for the security of Canadians by attempting to extend this act.

If Parliament decides not to grant an extension to the Anti-terrorism Act, [we worry] that the federal government will lack the teeth to catch suspected terrorists and stop future attacks. This will also seriously impact the ongoing Air India investigation".

We speak from first hand experience that Canada is not immune from terrorist attacks.

If the Liberals will not listen to the government, will they respond to a collective of over 200 victims family members who lost 329 loved ones in an act of terror?

*Statements by Members***AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY**

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, in what has become an all too common occurrence in the auto sector, DaimlerChrysler announced massive job cuts. These layoffs will affect thousands of workers and their families, further impacting an already devastated sector and community.

The Windsor region now has the highest unemployment rate of any major region in Canada and faces a very uncertain future.

Sadly, when we abandoned the auto pact we started to see jobs disappear. Now, for the first time in 18 years, Canada has an auto trade deficit and there is a real possibility that we could be on the verge of losing our auto sector.

Despite this possibility and the disappearance of more than 200,000 manufacturing jobs in both Ontario and Quebec in the last two years, there does not seem to be any sense of urgency on the part of the Conservative government.

Instead of pursuing free trade with such low cost countries as South Korea, the federal government should be negotiating sectoral trade deals.

I call on the government to live up to its rhetoric of action and do what the previous Liberal government failed to do: Implement an industrial strategy to address the problems facing the automotive sector.

* * *

[Translation]

JUTRA AWARDS

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the Jutra awards gala last night, the Outaouais region was in the limelight, which thoroughly pleased my hon. colleague from Hull—Aylmer. Winning the award confirmed the triumph of *Congorama*, a film written for screen and directed by Philippe Falardeau.

Nominated in six categories, Mr. Falardeau's film eventually took away five Jutra awards. Best film, best director, best screenplay, all achievements Mr. Falardeau can be proud of today. Clearly, he knows how to pick his cast, with two of members of the cast taking home best actor and best supporting actor respectively.

On the downside, demerit points ought to be given to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The minister reminded us of a certain Kim Campbell when she stated that this evening honouring Quebec cinema was not an appropriate time to discuss the funding crisis it is facing, a crisis for which she is directly responsible. Sadly, one always wonders whether she has seen any of the nominated films.

* * *

JUTRA AWARDS

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, cinema, with its many forms of expression, represents a fundamental affirmation of Quebec's cultural identity. It allows us to organize ourselves and develop as a people. It is the essential aspect of our feeling of belonging to a shared homeland.

An event last night served as a wonderful reminder of this, as members of the Quebec film family came together to underscore the excellence of its work, for the Jutra tribute awards. The Bloc Québécois would like to heartily commend the creative genius of those artists and artisans who were honoured at the gala.

The gala was also the perfect opportunity for a few articulate individuals to denounce the inaction of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, which has been a major obstacle to the development of Quebec cinema.

However, Pierre Curzi made an especially relevant comment and I would like to repeat his message here today. He said that, for a society to fulfill itself, it must be a reflection of the nation, a reflection of Quebec—proud, free and sovereign.

* * *

[English]

EAST COAST MUSIC AWARDS

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, Nova Scotia, more specifically Halifax, was the scene of the 19th annual East Coast Music Awards.

For the benefit of the foreign affairs and ACOA minister, it took place in Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia was one of the first provinces in Canada and our capital is Halifax, not Toronto.

The East Coast Music Awards honour some of the country's most talented individuals who just happen to come from the great east coast.

There is no place like the east coast as a hotbed of musical talent and diverse is the word that best describes the leading winners at Sunday night's award show as country singer, George Canyon; traditional artist, JP Cormier; and the alternative rock bands, In-Flight Safety and the great Joel Plaskett Emergency, each took home three awards.

The night also paid tribute to three icons of the east coast scene: Dutchie Mason, the prime minister of the blues; Denny Doherty and our good friend, John Allan Cameron, all who were lost this last year, and, over the weekend, Dermot O'Reilly of Ryan's Fancy who also passed away.

Though Satan won no prizes, Halifax had a devilishly good time recognizing the greatest array of musical talent on this planet.

* * *

● (1415)

ANTI-TERRORISM ACT

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is opposed to extending the two anti-terrorism measures his own government brought in. He is still having trouble picking priorities.

A long list of Liberals, such as Anne McLellan, John Manley, and the Liberal human rights critic, the member for Mount Royal, all say that preventive arrests and investigative hearings are important tools for law enforcement and prosecutors.

Oral Questions

Steve Sullivan, president of the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime said, "If these provisions are not extended and more Canadians are murdered by terrorists, someone will have to explain to them why Canada did not do everything we could to prevent such an attack. Before you vote on this issue in Parliament, I urge you to think about how you will answer that question".

I urge the Leader of the Opposition to rethink his decision and make the safety of Canadians a top priority.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more than 60 days have gone by since the accountability act received royal assent, but the Prime Minister has still not acted to deliver on its key provisions: restrictions on lobbying, not yet in force; conflicts of interest rules, not yet in force; a public appointments commission, promised, but nowhere to be seen. We have here on accountability the illusion of action, but Canadians want something real.

Why is the Prime Minister failing to deliver on his party's number one election promise?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members know, the accountability act received royal assent just before Christmas. The government and the President of the Treasury Board have been moving quickly to implement its provisions. We hope to have most of them in force by around April 1.

I would say that this is certainly a positive change on behalf of the Liberal Party, which fought this for nine months, which dragged it out, which resisted a public appointments commission and which, of course, delayed passage of the Federal Accountability Act to make sure that new fundraising limits would not apply in the last fiscal year.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister well knows we tried to improve the legislation consistently.

We want to know why, if it was such a priority, the government cannot get it enacted until April 1. If accountability was such a priority, if it was so important, will the Prime Minister explain why he continues to drag his feet on public appointments, on the lobbying ban? Why is he still dragging his feet?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is very proud of the Federal Accountability Act. Indeed, I had an opportunity to speak with the NDP member of Parliament for Winnipeg Centre, whom I briefed on the issue. He assures me he is concerned about the act coming into force. I have indicated to him that I look forward to hearing input from him.

We would be proud to sit down with members of the Liberal caucus to actually show them how the implementation is occurring. We are very proud of what is happening, as opposed to the delaying and foot dragging that occurred on the other side.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has still not acted on several key provisions of the federal accountability act, even though it received royal assent more than 60 days ago. We have seen no restriction on lobbying. We have seen no rules concerning conflict of interest. The Prime Minister delivers great speeches, but he does not deliver the goods.

When will the government honour its commitments in terms of accountability?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, passing the federal accountability act has been a major priority for this government. We are proud of our work.

It is the Liberal Party that was opposed to passing these measures, most of which will take effect beginning April 1. It has not happened sooner because the Liberal Party opposed this legislation for nine months. This is quite a change. Now the Liberals want to support accountability. We already do.

* * *

● (1420)

JUSTICE

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few months ago, the Conservatives made ideological cuts to certain programs, such as the volunteer support program, the court challenges program and the literacy program. Now, the Prime Minister wants to once again impose his right wing ideology by appointing only judges who share his philosophy of social repression.

Could the Prime Minister tell us which of our rights judges will stop defending? Those of women, or those of minorities?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a bunch of nonsense. The change we made is to put police officers on the judicial advisory committee.

I want to know what the Liberals' problem is with police officers. They started off the beginning of last week wanting to take away the tools that police officers need and want under the Anti-terrorism Act. Then they spent the rest of the week complaining about police officers on the judicial advisory committee.

That is the difference between us: the Liberals keep going after police; we will keep going after criminals.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the decision to impose his ideology on the judicial appointment process goes far beyond criminal justice. The Conservatives are clearly opposed to the rights and freedoms protected by the Canadian Charter.

The Prime Minister feels that we are granting too many rights to victims of discrimination, to minorities and to women.

Is the Prime Minister prepared to rise in this House and say loud and clear that he supports equality for women and free choice?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals always get it wrong. They always go after the wrong target. When they hear there is a problem with guns, they want to go after duck hunters. If there is a problem with crime, they want to go after police officers. I have actually warned my colleague, the Minister of Health that when they start talking about health services in this country, my guess is they will want to crack down on nurses.

* * *

[Translation]

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is now abundantly clear that the Prime Minister wishes to meddle in the judicial appointment process in order to ensure that the judiciary is a reflection of himself and shares his values and ideas. This conduct threatens the separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary.

Will the Prime Minister finally listen to reason and suspend his decision to meddle in the judicial appointment process?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government made one change to a judicial appointment advisory committee. This government ensured that, in future, there will be a more inclusive representation with the participation of groups such as the police and victims. We believe that it is important that these perspectives be included in the process.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois moved a motion urging the Prime Minister to suspend his decision with regard to the composition of the judicial appointment committee so that the Standing Committee on Justice could hear witnesses and debate the issue.

Will the Prime Minister listen to the voice of the majority and allow the Standing Committee on Justice to make recommendations to him on the judicial appointment process?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is responsible for having a judicial appointment process.

This government has taken action and assumed its responsibilities. We do not intend to have advisory committees that are less inclusive than at present.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to the statements by Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Beverley McLachlin, against the government's decision to steer judicial

appointments, we had the negative comments by former Chief Justice Claire L'Heureux-Dubé and former Chief Justice Antonio Lamer.

In light of these comments from great legal minds, would the Prime Minister not be better advised to defer his plan and hold consultations with the judiciary, the provincial bar associations and various experts on legal and institutional matters, instead of diving head first into a ridiculous plan to select judges in his own image?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I read with interest the comments by the former chief justice of the Supreme Court. He is in favour of committees that have no representation from the non legal community. That was not the process, even in the former Liberal government. We believe there should be representatives from outside the legal community, in order to have more inclusive representation.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, former Chief Justice Antonio Lamer said that the Prime Minister was going down the wrong path by wanting to change the appointment process, which affects judicial independence.

Should the Prime Minister not return to the path of common sense and not use judges to make up for his inability to get his right-wing legislative agenda through?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of the government, the executive, to have a judicial appointment process. It makes a whole lot of sense for victims and the police to be represented. It is the Bloc ideology that opposes these measures.

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[English]

FOREIGN CREDENTIALS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by not recognizing its own credentials of new Canadians, the government is treating new immigrants like second class citizens. It is failing the new Canadians in our country because it does not allow them to use the skills, the talents, the experience and the credentials that they have brought with them.

Last year the Conservatives said that they would come up with \$18 million and they would create offices to help sort this out so people could use the skills they brought to the country to help build Canada, but that simply has not happened.

Why does the Prime Minister want to let that prosperity gap continue to grow, leaving more and more new Canadians, hard-working immigrants behind? Why will he not take action as he promised to do?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the leader of the New Democratic Party, that this is a very serious matter. We cannot afford to have the foreign credentials of new Canadians not properly used. It is a tragedy for those people and a loss for our country.

Oral Questions

That is why the government in the last budget set aside funds to create a new foreign credentials recognition process for the federal government. Because this matter overlaps jurisdiction of the provinces, we have been consulting carefully with them to ensure the new agency is effective. We will have an announcement on that very shortly.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is so much that could be done by the federal government itself, if it could just sort out the relationships between the offices that give the visas and points to these immigrants and the federal departments that try to connect up people with jobs. Then we would not have so many people living in poverty, earning minimum wage, driving cabs when they are doctors and working in restaurants when they are engineers.

The Conference Board of Canada has shown that there are half a million Canadians in this category and that they could be earning \$5 billion more of revenue, lifting all kinds of families out of poverty.

Where is the \$18 million that was promised? Where are these offices? All the government does is talk. We want to see some action for the new Canadians.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP is right when he identifies the losses that are occurring to the country because of this problem. He is not correct when he suggests that this problem could be totally resolved by the federal government acting itself. He should know, and all members of the House should know, that many professional and other credentials are recognized at the provincial level, not at the federal level. This is why we are coming up with something that will work well with the provinces to achieve these objectives.

The leader of the NDP has been a patient man for many years. If he waits just a little while longer, he will get a promising announcement in this regard.

* * *

LOBBYISTS

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like the report from the Prime Minister's special adviser to the Middle East, the Conservatives' promised action on lobbyists seems to be lost.

The Federal Accountability Act requires lobbyists to disclose their activities and prohibits public office holders from lobbying the government when they leave. Yet two months after the act passed, the government has done nothing. The act still waits to be brought into force.

Could the Prime Minister explain his motives in delaying the enactment of the bill when he was once so anxious to see it passed? Why is he stalling on his biggest promise?

• (1430)

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for nine months that member and his party stalled the legislation to ensure that it did not come into effect when their leadership convention was going on. They simply did not want the rules to apply.

When I became President of the Treasury Board a short while ago, I was impressed at the progress my predecessor had made on the file, and we are moving in that direction. My mandate is to implement the act, not to stall it.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives had a year to get ready and they did nothing, and perhaps this is why.

Lobbyists like David Salvatore and Kevin MacIntosh, who recently worked for ministers, have even been allowed to lobby their former bosses. In fact, last week Kevin MacIntosh, the justice minister's former executive assistant, registered to lobby over a dozen departments, including the PMO and justice, on behalf of 12 Canadian firms.

When did the justice minister stop sharing an Ottawa apartment with Mr. MacIntosh? Does he still have any business ties to him, including property ownership? How many times has he met his former roommate, turned super lobbyist, since the act passed?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I see the member has moved on from trying to destroy the Canadian economy by shutting down economic growth to now making those kind of scurrilous accusations. That is the type of member he is.

Other members in the House are concerned about the issue of lobbyists. For example, I met with the member for Winnipeg Centre to explain where the government was going on that issue. I am prepared to sit down with other members. If they wish to talk about it in a rational, reasonable way, I am prepared to discuss that as well.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last election the Conservatives deceived Canadians when they promised to be as pure as the driven snow. That was before they made over 50 partisan appointments.

Could the Prime Minister explain why, then, he named the Mississauga—Streetsville Conservative candidate, Raminder Gill, as a citizenship judge and why did Mr. Gill not have to go through the normal screening process?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as all members of the House know, the appointments that we have made are all very qualified, including those who have been made to that board. In fact, the chief official on that board, who was responsible for screening, told the committee of Parliament that the individual in question was indeed qualified to do that job.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): What he did not say, Mr. Speaker, and he said so to the media, is in actual fact that gentleman never appeared before the board in order to be screened.

We are still waiting for the Conservatives to keep their promise to create an appointments commission and establish criteria to ensure all appointments are non-partisan and based on merit. We are also waiting for the Federal Accountability Act to be brought into force.

The government will not explain Mr. Gill's appointment. Could it explain the appointment of former Alliance candidate, Kerry-Lynne Findlay? Can it justify appointing such a neo-Conservative ideologue to the Human Rights Commission?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, all appointments are very qualified. We did attempt to put in place a public appointments commission, with the person in charge to be one of the most qualified and respected individuals in the country. Unfortunately, the members of the opposition united to dismantle the reputation of that man. As a result, that has been delayed. Otherwise that process would have been in place already.

The difference is, under the Liberal Party we saw appointments like Allan Rock, Karen Kraft Sloan, John Harvard, Yvon Charbonneau, Sophia Leung and a series other former MPs who were given going away parties, including some fellow name Gagliano to Denmark.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Tony Blair's adviser, Nicholas Stern, met with David Suzuki today, and the two joined forces to remind the government that environmental issues have major economic implications in addition to environmental and social implications.

How many warnings from international experts does it take for the Minister of the Environment to open his eyes and understand that he must set precise, significant greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets immediately?

•(1435)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government does not need warnings from environmental leaders. We are taking action. The only reason is that we are the first government in Canada's history to say it is ready to bring in regulations to reduce greenhouse gases and improve air quality. That is our priority. We on this side of the House are taking action.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, setting precise reduction targets is the prerequisite for setting up a carbon exchange.

Will the Minister of the Environment acknowledge that the carbon exchange must be established in Montreal because that is where derivatives are now being traded?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said last week to my colleague from Montreal, I have already met with representatives of the Montreal Exchange. I have listened to what they have to say. Of course, some of them want it to be in Montreal and others want it to be in Toronto. If I were to ask my colleague, the Minister of Labour, he might suggest Jonquière or

Oral Questions

Alma. We are in the process of making a decision. More information will be supplied as soon as possible.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the army refuses to provide medical treatment to reservists who fought in Bosnia and who are suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. Simon Boies, a member of the Hull Regiment, is one of them and he wants to remind the Prime Minister of the commitment he made in November, when he said that his government would not treat our soldiers the way they were treated in the past, but that it would treat them properly upon their return from missions.

How can the Prime Minister justify the fact that the army is not able to properly care for its reservists? After all, he made a commitment in that regard.

[English]

Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We are spending \$352 million more this year than last year on behalf of veterans affairs. We have opened a number of clinics across the country.

We are working very closely with DND to recognize symptoms very early so treatment can begin earlier. The health of the soldiers is the most important factor, no question about that.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN TELEVISION FUND

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, cable distributor Shaw has suspended its contributions to the Canadian Television Fund. Shaw is demanding guarantees that changes will be made to the fund before it resumes making payments.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage remind Shaw that no guarantees can be offered as long as it refuses to meet one of the conditions of its licence, which is to pay its dues to the Canadian Television Fund?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is committed to Canadian content.

Last week, I asked Vidéotron and Shaw to resume their payments. I am happy that Vidéotron has resumed payments. Shaw has indicated that it is willing to work with the CRTC and the government to improve the system.

I am happy that all the parties are working together to make the system better.

* * *

[English]

MINISTER OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is another example of how Conservatives waste taxpayer dollars.

Oral Questions

This past July the former human resources minister went to Winnipeg to present a fake \$100 child benefit cheque. Her flight alone cost 20 times the monthly child care benefit. Now we learn that she exceeds the Juno joyriding heritage minister for her love of limousine travel.

While on a junket, she spent \$750 on limousine rides, almost eight times the worth of her so-called child care benefit. The cheque was fake; her expenses were not. How can she justify them to Canadian parents who she has shortchanged?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, going to Winnipeg to make the announcement was part of our campaign to ensure that all parents who were eligible for the universal child care benefit were aware that it had been launched and how they could apply for it.

All my expenses were perfectly within the guidelines.

• (1440)

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, back home we would say that the bottom is gone right out of her.

The same minister blew another \$800 on limousine service to a Confederation Club luncheon on April 20. Last March she wasted \$1,300 on airfare and, yes, another limo ride to promote the student summer job program. Some promo, this is the same program her government slashed by \$55 million, eliminating 25,000 student jobs.

Why do Conservatives value limo rides more than they value Canadian students and Canadian parents?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, all my expenses were completely within the guidelines for ministerial expenses.

However, there is a question I would like to ask. Why are those members so concerned about those expenses, which they are comparing to the universal child care benefit, when it was their leader who said that he would take away the universal child care benefit?

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not all. To arrive in style at a country fair last September, the very same minister rented yet another limo, spending \$862 so she could take in the sights for four hours.

The minister spent more on one four hour limo ride than her Conservative government gives to parents in one year. How does she justify that?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, where I live and where I travel there is often very limited access to public transit. Where I live there is no public transit. We have a choice of a taxi drive. That is it. We do not have access to airplanes as they do in Montreal.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a taxi costs \$3 per kilometre.

On September 7, 2006, just before she went to a festival, she made an announcement in Toronto about social housing. Again, she spent \$1,000 of taxpayers' money on limousines for two days and \$300 to go from Pearson Airport to downtown Toronto.

How can this government justify the image of injustice projected by this waste of public funds?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the difference between our government and the previous government is the use of Challenger jets.

[English]

The biggest difference is that every time the Liberal ministers wanted to go anywhere, home for the weekend or otherwise, they were not getting into a car. They were getting on a Challenger jet for the occasion.

In fact, the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie had no trouble having the Challenger fly empty to Montreal to pick her up for a cabinet meeting, when there is a commercial flight maybe every hour. That is the real difference.

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AIR-INDIA INQUIRY

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the head of the Air-India inquiry is threatening to shut down the investigation. Can the Prime Minister respond to former Supreme Court Justice John Major's statement that he is receiving heavily censored documents and this practice will seriously hurt the progress of the inquiry?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was a little surprised at today's story. Let me be clear. As I have instructed, it is my understanding that Justice Major has been given, unedited, all documents that related to the Air-India inquiry.

What is at issue in about 10% of the cases is a dispute about what, by law, can and cannot be made public. I have instructed my national security adviser to meet with people in the various departments to impose a non-restrictive interpretation of the law and to expedite resolution of this dispute as quickly as possible.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has refused the NDP request to set a time for a debate and a vote on whether or not to extend the mission in Afghanistan beyond 2009. Documents I have obtained through access to information show that the Chief of the Defence Staff is already way ahead of the government. The CDS has detailed plans going until 2011 for deployments.

Will the minister tell the members of the Canadian Forces and their families what General Hillier has planned for them?

Oral Questions

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have answered this question a number of times. The member again is confusing the military internal plan, which is based upon the Afghanistan compact, and government direction. If she reads the plan in detail, she will notice that the military acknowledge that they are committed to the end of February 2009. However, they plan beyond those dates because the Afghan compact goes until 2011.

• (1445)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government needs to come clean on this. Will the Royal Canadian Regiment be returned in February 2010? Will the PPCLI be returning in August 2009 for their third or fourth rotation? Will the Van Doos return for their third rotation in August 2010 as General Hillier's planning documents indicate?

It is hard to see where civilian oversight is taking place at DND. How can the military plan rotations that Parliament has not approved?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has said that we are committed to the end of February 2009. No further decision has been made. The government, when it finds it appropriate, will make the decision on what happens if and when the events occur after 2009.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government promised a child care program that was supposed to give parents some choice, but in over 12 months it has failed to deliver even one new child care space.

My municipal government has just reported a shortage of 9,000 spaces, and it is the same across the country. If parents in my constituency need a child care space, what choice is the government giving them?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this new government did of course deliver the universal child care benefit within five months of coming to power.

We did commit to creating spaces through the child care spaces initiative, starting in 2007-08, but I point to a quote from the former deputy prime minister, Sheila Copps, who said, "The last agreement saw some provinces rake in millions without creating one day-care space". She was speaking of her own government.

What hypocrisy.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Not surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, the government continues to boast about its measly \$100 per month cheque, but parents are now receiving the notice of taxes due on this money. Single parents will have to pay the highest rate.

The former minister spent \$750 on a limousine to deliver the first cheque, but now it is tax time and the government has come collecting. Will the current minister be spending hundreds of dollars on limousines to collect the tax from the Winnipeg family that received the initial cheque?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should really direct that question to her own leader. It is her leader who said he would take back 100% of the universal child care benefit, something that today goes to 1.4 million families on behalf of 1.9 million children, for \$10 billion over the next five years.

That is something the leader of the Liberal Party said he would take away from Canadian families. Shame on him.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while parents are receiving a notice of taxable income as a result of the Conservative plan, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development is announcing virtually nothing for families.

Parents are still waiting for the child care spaces promised by the Conservative government, but nothing has been delivered. Another promise broken by this government.

For the umpteenth time, can the minister tell us where these new child care spaces are that he promised in 2005? Where are they?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would just point out again that according to the deputy prime minister of the old Liberal government their party did not create one space in 13 years.

I say to the member again that we did make a commitment in 2007-08 to start delivering on these spaces. That of course will come on top of the \$10 billion that will go to families over the next five years through the universal child care benefit.

We are delivering choice to Canadians, something the leader of the Liberal Party says he will take away from Canadian families. The Liberals should be embarrassed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is clear. The government has not managed to give even one additional child care space to Canadian families.

Parents who need child care in Atlantic Canada and across the country must place their names on waiting lists for their child to have a space in daycare. They have no choice, because there are no spaces available. Some child care services even report that the situation is getting worse.

Will the minister admit that his government has made the situation worse for Canadian families? I would like to hear him admit it, once and for all.

• (1450)

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what makes it worse is that the leader of the Liberal Party will go to 1.4 million families and say to them, "We are going to take away your choice in child care". It is the Liberal way: our way or the highway.

Oral Questions

This government will not put up with that. That is why we are here to support Canadian families with \$10 billion over the next five years. We are delivering for Canadian families.

* * *

[Translation]

OLDER WORKERS

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the past year, several thousands of workers have been laid off in the Eastern Townships and hundreds of them are workers 55 and older who are without work in my riding. This is the case for former employees of Olymel in Magog, the textile plants in Magog and soon others in Cowansville and Farnham.

What is the government waiting for to remedy the situation and set up a real program to help older workers who are victims of mass layoffs? Obviously, under the circumstances, the targeted initiative for older workers—the TIOW—is ill conceived and totally ineffective.

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Obviously, Mr. Speaker, whenever there is a layoff it is a tragedy for those involved. That is why this government has moved very quickly to put in place a number of different programs and measures to help them. Service Canada reaches out to these employers.

We have also moved forward with a targeted initiative for older workers, a program that members in the House supported initially. It is designed to make sure that people do have options once they are in that situation and that we do not just pension them off and cast them into the dustbin, like some other parties would have us do.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government keeps conducting studies. For a year now the Conservative government has been giving us the same speech as the previous government, saying that it is looking into the implementation of an income support program for older workers. It even set up another committee on January 23. In the meantime, older unemployed people and their families are paying the price. There is no need for a committee: the studies have been done and the needs are known.

Why does the minister not immediately implement an income support program for older workers, as his government promised to do in the last budget?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to answer the member's question again, we have implemented a program for older workers with the targeted initiative for older workers. It is true that we have undertaken a study to look at this very important issue. It is a serious issue. But we have gone beyond that. We have also extended benefits in areas of high unemployment. We have extended the benefits so that they fill out the entire income year, the entire working year.

This government, in 13 months, has done more for workers and the unemployed than the previous government did in 13 years.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I participated in a conference with survivors of the Ile-à-la-Crosse boarding school. They are frustrated that the Prime Minister will not honour his repeated promise to compensate them. Why? Because the Prime Minister was too negligent to check if the school qualified for the settlement and then proceeded to trample on their spirits.

A recent Meadow Lake *Northern Pride* editorial stated that “the Ile-à-la-Crosse survivors are victims of not only physical, sexual and emotional abuse...but also of the [Prime Minister's] negligence”.

The Prime Minister directly promised compensation in radio ads in my riding. When will he honour his agreement and his promise?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the residential school agreement continues to work its way through the court system, with the anticipated date of completion being this fall.

The school that my friend refers to actually burned to the ground in 1905. There are no survivors from that school. There is an application process under the agreement, article 12 as I recall, by which survivors can apply for inclusion. I have met with the individuals to which my friend refers and have encouraged them to pursue that application, but I have warned them that they will not qualify.

* * *

ANTI-TERRORISM ACT

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Air-India Victims Families Association, the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, and the Canadian Coalition Against Terror all called on parliamentarians to extend two crucial anti-terrorism provisions brought in by the former Liberal government.

Several prominent Liberals and a growing number of Liberal members of Parliament have stated their support for extending these measures.

Can the Minister of Public Safety explain to the House the importance of these measures for the safety of Canadians?

● (1455)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, up until 9/11 Canada had the tragic record of being the country that had the most citizens killed in a single terrorist attack. That was, of course, the horrendous Air-India bombing. Families have an opportunity to find out about what went on, but the Liberal leader wants to take away the very provision in the Anti-terrorism Act that would allow authorities to get to the bottom of this.

I am just asking, if he does not want to accept the advice of former deputy prime ministers of the Liberal Party, and if he does not want to accept the advice of the Supreme Court, which has upheld this as constitutional, can he find it in his heart to support us to leave this in place?

* * *

HOMELESSNESS

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the wealthy are getting richer, many of Canada's low and middle income families are one paycheque away from homelessness.

We are spending less money on ensuring that people are not sleeping on the streets. The government will claim it cares about homelessness, but actions speak louder than words. Under the Conservative watch, \$70 million has gone unspent. When will homeless organizations see this money? When will this money be spent on the people who really need it?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's facts are not correct. Every year since the national homelessness initiative has been in place, there have been projects that have gone beyond the end of the fiscal year. The funding has followed. That money is being spent.

This government is acting on homelessness. We announced \$270 million for the homelessness partnering strategy in December and \$1.4 billion in a housing trust for the homeless. This government is acting.

By the way, those are measures that the Liberals voted against.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he says the money will be spent. Really?

The previous Liberal government wasted half a million dollars on evaluations and it seems the Conservative government is going to shortchange the program again. Why are homeless Canadians being left without help? Organizations in my riding of London—Fanshawe are still waiting for money promised months ago. These funds were needed before the winter started. Through countless cold snaps, services have operated on a wing and a prayer.

Why is the government sitting on the cheque while people are cold and on the streets?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these organizations that the member refers to do tremendous work, which is why they are central to the new homelessness partnering strategy. We have moved to ensure that there was extended funding through the national homelessness initiative so that these groups had funding to carry them through the end of the year. They will have new funding starting in the new fiscal year.

The question is, when we are moving on all of these issues and doing so much good, why does the NDP engage in this kind of destructive ankle-biting when it could be doing some good and helping us?

Oral Questions

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for over a year Brenda Martin has languished in a Guadalajara prison for allegedly being part of a phony investment scheme. I have a copy of a sworn affidavit from the scheme's mastermind that clears Ms. Martin of any involvement. Indeed, Mexican authorities have said they will release her if they receive the affidavit from Canada.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs prances around the world saying that he is standing up for Canadians in trouble when he actually does nothing. Will the minister now do his job and deposit the affidavit with Mexico and help free this innocent Canadian?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been very involved in the case from the very beginning. In fact, I can assure the member that foreign affairs waived the embassy's standard fee that was normally applied in cases like this for humanitarian reasons. We have been in contact with members of the Martin family. I can assure the member that consular officials are doing everything possible, everything within their power, and everything within the law to assist Ms. Martin.

Rather than the hon. member getting up and casting aspersions, and simply trying to point the finger and blame somebody, he could try for a change to be a little helpful. It might actually assist Ms. Martin as she languishes in the jail he is so concerned about.

* * *

YOUTH

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, youth—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1500)

The Speaker: Order, please. No one is denying the popularity of the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville, but despite the enthusiasm with which his presence is greeted, we have to be able to hear his question now. He has the floor for that purpose, not for the purposes of general applause.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Mr. Speaker, youth participation in cultural activities is extremely important. I believe that youth benefit greatly when they can participate in the diversity of Canadian communities. Obviously, the opposition does not care about youth.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell the House what the government has done to address this very important issue, particularly in the greater Toronto area?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, youth exchanges between young Canadians across Canada is one of the many ways that our government is supporting youth participation in Canadian society. Activities such as the YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada program helps young people to better understand Canada's diversity.

Last weekend Canada's new government announced \$9.1 million over three years for the YMCA of greater Toronto. This will allow up to 6,500 participants to take part in two way exchanges across Canada through to 2009.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

LITERACY

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government's literacy programs are used to promote the various programs that are available to a number of target groups. These groups are often difficult to reach, so cutting the promotion budgets could be detrimental to the literacy effort.

Instead of going through with the announced cuts to the literacy programs, which will affect the people who need them most, why does the government not transfer the necessary funding to Quebec and the provinces so that they can pursue literacy efforts among their respective populations?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that Canada's new government is supporting literacy through a number of different ways, not just through the Department of Human Resources and Social Development but also through the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

In the budget we announced \$307 million for settlement funding. A lot of that money went to helping newcomers who are some of the victims of not being able to read and write to standard. In fact, we are putting more money into literacy today because of initiatives like that than any government has ever provided in the history of this country.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Her Excellency Nino Burjanadze, Chairperson of the Parliament of Georgia.

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 Canadian Forces recipients of the Star of Military Valour, the Medal of Military Valour, the Meritorious Service Cross (military division), and Meritorious Service Medal (military division) presented earlier today by Her Excellency the Governor General.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 552 of the Canada Elections Act, I have the honour to lay upon the table the registered party financial transactions return form and the registered party return form in respect of general election expenses prepared by the Chief Electoral Officer.

[Translation]

These reports are deemed to have been referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

* * *

● (1505)

[English]

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 eighth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

In accordance with the order of reference of Wednesday, October 4, 2006, the committee has considered Bill C-277, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (luring a child) and has agreed on Monday, February 5 to report it with amendment.

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-405, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deduction for medical doctors in underserved areas).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to introduce this bill today that would help underserved communities recruit doctors to their hospitals and establish family physicians.

I would like to thank the students at the University of Ottawa Law School, specifically, Paul Braczek and Jeffrey Kroeker, who assisted in the drafting of this private member's bill.

One out of 30 Canadians do not have a family doctor. In small towns and underserved areas, it becomes as acute as one out of four do not have a family doctor. Barrie, the riding I have the honour of representing, is one of those communities where we have a very acute doctor shortage. This bill would certainly be a step forward in helping alleviate that concern.

Specifically, I want to also pay recognition to Dr. Rob Ballagh and Dr. Brad Dibble, who chaired our physician recruitment task force in our community and helped me come up with this idea as a means to entice doctors to small towns and rural areas that do not have the pleasure of having as many doctors as do larger urban areas that have medical schools.

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

* * *

AN ACT TO AMEND THE NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT, THE CRIMINAL CODE, THE SEX OFFENDER INFORMATION REGISTRATION ACT AND THE CRIMINAL RECORDS ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of National Defence) moved for leave to introduce Bill S-3, An Act to amend the National Defence Act, the Criminal Code, the Sex Offender Information Registration Act and the Criminal Records Act.

Routine Proceedings

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

• (1510)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved that the fifth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade presented on Wednesday, December 13, 2006, be concurred in.

He said: I am pleased to share my time with the member for Winnipeg Centre who also has a very keen interest in the subject that we are discussing here today.

To begin with, I would like to read the fifth report because it is very important that the public watching here today understand what the NDP is bringing forward in the House in order to deal with the staggering job losses that we are seeing in the apparel industry.

We are requesting concurrence to, from all four corners of the House, the fifth report of Standing Committee on International Trade which reads as follows:

The Committee calls on the Government of Canada to stem the current market disruption, in specific categories, in the Canadian apparel industry, by immediately invoking Article 242 of China's accession protocol to the WTO and putting in place restrictions or safeguards on the growth of specific categories of apparel imports from China; and

The Committee further calls on the Government of Canada to begin bilateral negotiations with China, similar to those undertaken by the United States and the European Union, to reach an agreement on imports of clothing and textiles.

This should not be a concurrence motion that receives any controversy whatsoever because it was adopted by the Standing Committee on International Trade, and adopted by members from the NDP, the Bloc and the Liberal Party.

However, I have to mention as well, because it is an extremely important element, that these are the kinds of commitments that the Conservative Party made in the last election. It was held just a little over a year today. The Conservatives, in opposition, were a vocal supporter of safeguards and in fact urged the previous Liberal government who had not enacted those safeguards, much to the dismay of the apparel communities and apparel workers who have lost their jobs as a result. I am quoting the official opposition critic on international trade for the Conservative Party at the time who was a member of the international trade committee. He said:

A Conservative government would stand up for Canadian workers and work proactively through international trade policies to ensure Canada competes on a level playing field.

The Conservatives supported, during the election campaign that was held a year ago, the exact measures that the NDP is now calling on the House to support and urges the government to do. Therefore, this should not really in any way ignite any sort of debate. This was a Conservative promise. One would hope that the Conservatives would keep their promises. However, I am not so sure that they will.

What we have seen over the past year is completely inept negotiations and capitulations in a number of key areas around trade. I am very concerned as are my colleagues here in the New Democratic corner of the House that we may see the very same thing in the apparel industry.

We have seen the softwood lumber sellout which has cost over 4,000 jobs in the matter of just a few weeks since it was put into place. We have been hemorrhaging jobs in the softwood sector. In fact, as I know you are aware, Mr. Speaker, we have lawsuits that are being put up because of the complete ineptitude of the Conservative government in throwing this softwood sellout out there and trying to force it through when indeed it was a capitulation to the Bush administration.

We have also seen this with the Wheat Board. The moment another country says jump, the Conservative government asks how high. With the Wheat Board, with supply management, Canadians are seeing no defence whatsoever of our important interests.

Let us get back to the apparel industry. We have seen the capitulation on softwood, and we have seen the capitulation that the Conservatives are trying to bring in place for the Wheat Board and the supply managed sector. Fortunately farming communities across the country are reacting very strongly, fighting back and pushing back the Conservatives in this regard. However, if indeed they are doing this in these sectors, is there concern that they will continue to allow the hemorrhaging of jobs in the apparel industry?

It is a matter of great concern to us in this corner of the House because we have seen, in what is the 10th largest manufacturing industry in Canada, the clothing industry, 30% of those jobs hemorrhaged right out of the country, lost, in the last three years. Thousands and thousands of families have been impacted as a result of originally Liberal do nothing policies and now the Conservatives who are afraid to actually stand up for Canadian interests.

• (1515)

In January 2004 Canada had 75,500 jobs in that sector. In January 2005 when the WTO system of quotas expired, Canada had 63,000 jobs. We had lost 12,000 jobs already. A year later in January 2006—and remember that was at the end of the election campaign when the Conservatives had promised to put these safeguards in place—we were left with 54,000 jobs. Over 20,000 jobs have been lost. The November 2006 figures, which are the latest figures available to us, show that there are just over 50,000 jobs left.

Over a period of 36 months this country lost 24,000 jobs. Some 24,000 families have lost their breadwinner because of the inaction and ineptitude of the previous Liberal government and the inaction and ineptitude of the current Conservative government. This has to end.

We are proactive in this corner of the House. The NDP is bringing forward measures that are basically tailored, written and ready to go, so that the government can actually take action to stop the hemorrhaging of the jobs. It is not rocket science. Other countries have already put these safeguards into place. It is the Conservative government that is refusing to move.

Routine Proceedings

What has happened since the WTO quotas expired on January 1, 2005, two years ago? For men's and boys' overcoats the quantity of imports from the People's Republic of China has risen close to 100%. The quantity of men's and boys' suits has risen over 150%. The quantity from China of women's and girls' pants has risen over 200%. The quantity from China of men's and boys' jackets has risen over 350%. Those are all lost jobs we are talking about. The quantity of women's and girls' skirts has risen over 200%. The quantity of men's and boys' pants has risen over 180%. The quantity of women's and girls' jackets has risen over 470%.

We are talking about a flood of imports that has led to a hemorrhaging of jobs in communities that depend on the apparel industry and the clothing industry across this country, particularly in areas such as Winnipeg, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. These are urban centres that are seeing this hemorrhaging of jobs.

I reference the softwood industry. I reference supply management and the Wheat Board. Statistics Canada tells us very clearly that most families in Canada have seen their real income actually fall since 1989. We have seen disastrous economic policies over the last 15 years where governments have simply said, "No, we are not standing up for Canadian interests, unless it is corporate CEOs or corporate lawyers who are represented. We are not going to do anything to help the Canadian middle class". Regular Canadians have seen their real income fall. The Conservative government has been in power for over a year. It has done nothing to address that fundamental issue, that real incomes are falling for everyone, except the very wealthy and their incomes are skyrocketing.

Here is a clear case where a government can take action. The NDP has already drafted the plan for the government. The government can give credit to the NDP, but even if it does not, we are used to our ideas being moved forward and other parties claiming credit. The important thing is that the jobs be saved.

We have put forward this template. We have said what needs to happen. The job loss very clearly indicates that this is not something that we can debate and discuss. Action needs to be taken and it needs to be taken now.

What have some of the other countries done? The European Union and the United States have put into place these safeguards. They are already in place. Other countries, such as Turkey and Brazil, have put into place these safeguards to save jobs. It makes sense.

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

I would also like to mention that it has been extremely disappointing to see the incredible number of jobs lost, especially in Quebec.

Since early 2002, 24,000 jobs have disappeared in the apparel industry in Quebec alone, which has been devastating for communities that depend on this industry.

If it were up to the NDP to implement these very important safeguards, we would do it. We must take action. That is why we are tabling this motion today.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my NDP colleague's comments regarding his motion asking for safeguards to protect the textile industry. There have been massive job losses in this sector. I would like to hear from my colleague on certain issues.

At the time, the Bloc Québécois applied pressure and requested on several occasions that the Liberals implement safeguards. Since then, 50,000 jobs have been lost in the textile sector. We are again exerting pressure on the Conservative Party to establish measures that, for the time being, will protect our industries from the new Chinese competition.

We see that nothing is being done. At present, there is a tendency within the Conservative party to completely liberalize trade without providing any social security for workers, for example by means of an older workers assistance program. We have seen how they slashed social programs, such as literacy initiatives, and all manner of other programs. They want to make it a free-for-all market, without providing any protection.

In committee, certain stakeholders told us that we should simply abandon certain manufacturing sectors and not make any investment in them because jobs will be lost in any event.

I disagree completely with this position because it is not representative of the type of society that we wish to build. I would like to hear from my NDP colleague in this regard.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé for his question. I know that he also sits on the committee specifically to encourage this Parliament to make good decisions and make sure that the government stops dragging its feet. Important decisions have to be made to preserve jobs across this country.

What matters is that I agree with the hon. member that the Conservatives' policies are increasingly right wing. And that is not what they had promised. In the last election campaign, they promised to introduce safeguard measures.

They said they were disgusted with the inaction of the Liberals and that they would protect those jobs. The Conservatives got the votes of people who could not predict that, in the blink of an eye, they would break their promise and let down the communities that depend on this industry which is so important to the Canadian economy.

The disappointment comes from this broken promise, this about face. I do not know if they are also disappointed because the Minister of International Trade switched sides, but unfortunately it is irresponsible on the part of the government to continue to drag its feet instead of taking action. That is why we are bringing forth this motion which, I am sure, the Bloc Québécois will support.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I learned a great deal from my colleague's speech.

Routine Proceedings

I would ask him to clarify one point that he raised. He said that the WTO allows member countries to impose limits on the growth of specific categories of Chinese clothing imports. In fact, these imports can be limited to 7.5% growth per year. He cited some startling statistics in his presentation to the House, that certain categories of Chinese imports had increased 200% and 300% per year. A tsunami of Chinese imports is devastating the domestic economy in terms of our textile industry.

Could he verify those figures and comment on them?

• (1525)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg Centre has been a very strong advocate to protect the jobs in the communities that depend on the textile and apparel industry.

It is absolutely appalling when we look at the percentage increase in these imports, anywhere from a 100% increase to a more than 460% increase in certain categories. Imports in the category of women's and girls' jackets particularly have risen more than 470%.

We are talking about a flood of imports that is effectively washing away jobs in communities across the country. In the same way that the softwood sellout is devastating softwood communities, the inaction of the government is leading to a loss of jobs right across the country, in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal.

The government has to act and Parliament can push the government to act in a responsible way.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate on the motion to concur in the committee report.

I will begin by complimenting the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade for its fine report and for undertaking the study on this issue, which is critically important to the riding that I represent. I am proud to support this report. I hope the House of Commons will concur in it and send a clear message that it is not only the standing committee that shares these views, that the House of Commons has affirmed and ratified this same opinion. I hope we can do that today.

I cannot overstate how important the garment industry is to the riding that I represent. There are 43 garment manufacturers in the riding I represent, although that could have changed because they have been dropping like flies since this flood of Chinese imports began when China joined the WTO. There used to be many more garment manufacturers, but there are probably a few less even as we speak.

I would like to recognize the efforts that some of them have made, such as the Nygard manufacturing plants that produce TanJay, and Western Glove Works that produces some of the highest quality denim products in North America. All of these companies have hung on, but just by the skin of their teeth. Many of them employed 800 to 1,200 people but are now down to 300 and 400 employees. The job losses have been devastating.

Let me also say how important these jobs are to new Canadians. We view the garment industry in a sense as gateway jobs for a lot of new arrivals in Canada. A lot of people who come to Manitoba come to the inner city area of my riding. They end up working in the

garment industry. These are good jobs. Let me state right from the start that these are not sweatshops. These are unionized jobs with decent wages and decent benefits.

Western Glove has one of the best daycare centres in the city, called Kid Gloves, where people can bring their children and know that they are cared for in the factory. These are good jobs. They are the kinds of jobs we should be fighting for to try to protect, but successive governments have shown no interest in trying to protect the garment industry. Other industries make representations, and justifiably so, whether it is the aerospace industry or the auto industry, and the government hears them and the government supports them, except for shipbuilding, for some mysterious reason.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: What about shipbuilding?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore is often pointing out that there are deaf ears when it comes to shipbuilding, but there are also deaf ears when it comes to the garment sector. I am frustrated by this and I do not understand it, because in many ways, China's joining the WTO could be the straw that breaks the camel's back for many of the manufacturers in my riding.

When China joined the WTO, China itself admitted and recognized that safeguards in the apparel industry may be necessary in some partner countries. China agreed to limit its flow to 7.5% per year to those countries that asked. A country had to ask; it was not automatic. Other countries were smart enough to ask. The United States, the entire European Union, Turkey, Argentina and Brazil all said, "You are a member of the club now and we are going to have to accept your imports tariff free, but let us phase it in so we do not destroy our domestic industry". Canada did not avail itself of that opportunity. It was there on the table. All we had to do was sign on and we would not have had this devastating impact of the last couple of years.

It is not too late. Today the Government of Canada can stipulate itself to this agreement, but it chooses not to. I do not know what was going through the Liberal government's mind when it passed on this opportunity, other than the Liberals just wanted to be boy scouts. They wanted to be the international good guys; they did not believe in trades and tariffs. I see there is some acknowledgement of that. What they failed to do was stand up for Canada.

Regarding the Conservative government, the Conservative Party at least, I have a quote here from a colleague who was the official opposition critic for international trade. I do not know his correct title today, but here is a quote from him:

A Conservative government would stand up for Canadian workers and work proactively through international trade policies to ensure Canada competes on a level playing field.

• (1530)

That is a noble and laudable concept and I am honoured to associate myself with those remarks, but we do not see any evidence of standing up for Canada in the garment sector. We are not asking for special handouts. We are not asking for anything other than to avail ourselves of what help is available to us.

Routine Proceedings

I am frustrated by the staggering growth of Chinese imports into this country because it is killing what is left of the garment industry in the riding that I represent. This is all about fairness. It is not about special provisions. The surge in Chinese clothing imports is directly related to illegal and unfair subsidies given to the Chinese producers.

I will say, without hesitation and with no fear of insult to the nation of China, that it benefits from unfair labour practices. It will not allow workers to form unions so they cannot negotiate fair wages. It exploits its workers. There are terrible working conditions and that is the unfair competitive advantage that China enjoys.

China also provides free utilities because some of these are state owned and controlled operations. It gives breaks on shipping, no property taxes, no export tax rebates and it engages in currency manipulation. These are all things that China does, which fair employers, like we have in Canada, do not do. It is an unfair competitive advantage that is devastating. We should not tolerate it. This is not a level playing field. If we really wanted to stand up for Canada and Canadian workers, we would acknowledge that China is eating our lunch in a way that we cannot compete with.

I would put our Winnipeg garment manufacturers against any garment manufacturer in the world on a competitive basis on a level playing field and we would succeed. The evidence of that is that we are still surviving, although struggling, in the face of this unfair competitive advantage.

If we were given a level playing field I think we would clean up. However, we cannot compete against these unfair labour practices of denying basic human rights in terms of the right to organize, free collective bargaining, fair wages and working conditions. We cannot compete against that and we should not have to because that drags us all down to the bottom. It has been said that a rising tide raises all boats. It has not raised the boats of those people. My phrase is that a rising tide raises all yachts and leaves the rowboats behind.

I am proud to join in the debate today and appeal to the Conservative government to do what we must do to protect the Canadian garment industry. It should immediately engage in discussions with the WTO and undertake the second paragraph of this very brief report that states:

The Committee further calls on the Government of Canada to begin bilateral negotiations with China, similar to those undertaken by the United States and the European Union, to reach an agreement on imports of clothing and textiles.

My wish and my appeal to the government is that it stand up for Canada, for the Canadian garment industry and for Canadian jobs and that it listen to the will of the House today.

• (1535)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for standing up for the workers and families of the communities that he represents.

He talked eloquently about the concerns of the textile industry but, as he knows very well, many other companies and manufacturers in this country are falling by the wayside as well. My hon. colleague knows very well the big trouble that the car manufacturing industry is in. We hear Chrysler saying that it will have its cars assembled in China.

He comes from the great province of Manitoba where pickerel can be caught in Lake Winnipeg, frozen, sent to China, processed, sent back to the Safeway store in Winnipeg and sold cheaper than if it were sold locally. Something is drastically wrong if white fish or pickerel are sent from Manitoba all the way to China and back. Even the box says that it is a product of Canada made in China. Colour me mistaken, but is there not something wrong with this picture?

We also have shipbuilding, the power tool manufacturers, the auto sector, textiles, one right after another. The present government and the previous one have basically abandoned the workers in this country, who helped built this country, for the so-called market aspect of China.

Does my colleague honestly believe that the present government can actually turn that around, work with other countries and tell China and others to bring up their labour and environmental standards and bring about fair trade, not necessarily capitulated trade?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, when everything in the world is made in China, it makes me wonder where our kids will work. Why do we need to pay the same price for a brassiere or a piece of fish made in China for \$1 an hour that we would need to pay in Canada for \$20 an hour? There is no price advantage. Somehow we have been sucked into it.

It is this zealotry, a willingness on the part of Canada to be free traders, but without ensuring any kind of fair trade. We want to be the boy scouts of the world.

When we were told to eliminate our agricultural subsidies because we would all be doing it around the world, Canada said okay. We eliminated ours but nobody else did. Now we subsidize a tonne of wheat by \$24 and America subsidizes a tonne of wheat by \$124. Why are we so stupid, is the question that comes to mind.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the debate by my colleague from Winnipeg today and it made me think about personal experiences I have had in terms of looking for clothing that is made in Canada. One of my sons is very firm that he does not want to buy clothing that is made in the developing world where people are exploited for their labour. He said that if I am buying him or my granddaughter gifts, I should look for a made in Canada label. Well, I must tell everyone that it is darned hard to find clothing that is made in Canada.

When I was growing up, the clothes my parents bought for me were bought from Canadian manufacturers and made by Canadian workers.

Does my colleague from Winnipeg how much we have lost in terms of the clothing manufacturing and the textile industry in Canada? It seems to me that it was once a flourishing industry. What can we do to ensure that we have that again in Canada?

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Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's concern. The figures are staggering.

Not long ago, this industry, the sixth largest manufacturing industry in Canada, employed 100,000 people across Canada. Winnipeg was the fourth largest centre in North America after Los Angeles, New York and Montreal. By 2004, the number was down to 70,000. By April 2005, that number had dropped to 55,000, which amounts to 45,000 people in the course of about five years. In any other industry that would be deemed to be a crisis and an emergency.

● (1540)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the motion tabled by the member for Burnaby—New Westminster calling on the government to move concurrence in the fifth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade.

The report consists of three paragraphs, and I think it is pertinent to remind folks of this. The report states:

The Committee calls on the Government of Canada to stem the current market disruption, in specific categories, in the Canadian apparel industry, by immediately invoking Article 242 of China's accession protocol to the WTO and putting in place restrictions or safeguards on the growth of specific categories of apparel imports from China; and

The Committee further calls on the Government of Canada to begin bilateral negotiations with China, similar to those undertaken by the United States and the European Union, to reach an agreement on imports of clothing and textiles.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings (Meetings Nos. 39 to 41) is tabled.

I would like to emphasize that the new government is keenly aware that the Canadian apparel and textile industries are significant providers of earned incomes and economic activity in this country. The apparel industry is an important employer of new Canadians and is concentrated in key urban areas, such as Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver. The textile industry is a source of skilled employment and communities throughout Quebec, Ontario and the Maritimes.

The government is equally aware that the Canadian apparel and textile industries have faced, and continue to face, a challenging global trade environment, one where markets are globally integrated. This challenge has encouraged the transformation of the textile and apparel industries from national to globally integrated industries.

Challenged by increasing competition from abroad, the Canadian apparel and textile industries have had to transform themselves over the past decade by focusing on higher value added activity, on innovative and attractive new products and by finding niche markets for their products.

There is no sign that these challenges will end any time soon. Apparel and textile markets continue to be global.

The complete elimination of global textile and apparel import quotas on January 1, 2005, pursuant to Canada's WTO commitments, has resulted in significantly increased competition for Canadian textile and apparel producers, particularly from low wage countries.

Although the need to adapt to increased competition is not unique to the apparel and textile industries, or even to the Canadian

economy, changes in the global marketplace are, nevertheless, having a significant impact on the environment in which the textile and apparel industries have and continue to operate.

It is in the face of such challenges that the new government has demonstrated its continued commitment to the long term viability of both the apparel and textile industries in Canada, by working with them to confront these very challenges. To assist these two industries in their efforts to compete effectively in the changing world markets, we are: continuing to work with our U.S. and Mexican counterparts to facilitate the access of textile and apparel companies to world-class inputs; reviewing proposals for an outward processing program that could provide new market opportunities for the textile and apparel industries; continuing to protect against the illegal transshipment of imported apparel and textile products; working through the employment insurance program to meet the needs of workers adjusting to changes in the industry and to ensure, through ongoing support for human resource sector councils, that employees obtain the skills they need to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing labour market; and identifying and reducing tariffs on imported textile inputs used by the Canadian textile and apparel industries to improve the industry's cost competitiveness.

Those points demonstrate that Canada's new government is working with both industries to address the challenges of globalization and to ensure the continued viability of these domestic firms.

● (1545)

These measures are designed to further enhance industry competitiveness. They will help ensure the industries continue to innovate and make the most out of their key competitive advantages: an in-depth understanding of niche consumer markets and close proximity to North American customers.

I am pleased to remind members that many of the items in our 2006 budget are largely designed to promote a more competitive and productive economy by helping Canadian businesses meet the commerce challenges of the 21st century. The 2006 budget delivered tax cuts for Canadian businesses, big and small. Accelerating the elimination of the federal capital tax, reducing the general corporate income tax and eliminating the corporate surtax will help attract and retain investments in Canada and improve the competitiveness of Canada's businesses.

Further, additional support for education and the skilled trades, including the creation of a new tax credit and cash grant for apprentices, as well as investments in research and development, will encourage productivity growth in these and other sectors.

In addition, on October 20, 2006, the Government of Canada announced the targeted initiative for older workers, a \$70 million federal program designed to help older workers in vulnerable communities, in sectors such as forestry, fishing, mining and textiles, remain active and productive participants in the labour market. Under this initiative, funding will be available on a 70:30 cost shared basis with participating provinces and territories.

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I have spoken in general terms about the many ways in which the new government is working with Canada's textile and apparel industries to help improve their competitiveness. I will now speak in more specific terms about the fifth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade, that being on the import of clothing and textiles from China.

The fifth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade unfortunately does not provide summaries of discussions, analysis or explanations for its recommendations and does not seem to reflect the differing views of stakeholders regarding safeguard actions against China.

In his testimony to the standing committee, Mr. Elliot Lifson, president of the Canadian Apparel Federation, which represents over 600 Canadian companies involved in the apparel industry in Canada, spoke quite strongly against the use of such safeguard measures. Specifically he stated:

Our view is that the scope for Canada to enact safeguards is limited, and safeguards are not likely to offer any tangible benefits to domestic producers...

Mr. Lifson went on to say:

—safeguards will hinder apparel companies that are blending domestic production with imports from China and cause unpredictable bottlenecks in the supply chain that would likely harm a wide range of firms.

In her testimony to the standing committee, Ms. Lina Aristeo, director of UNITE HERE in Quebec asked in relation to safeguards “Why is Canada not doing anything?” She said that we might wonder why Canada had not used the special China bilateral textile and apparel safeguard measure like the U.S. and the EU. The answer is simple. The situation in Canada is different from that in the EU and in the U.S.

Unlike the U.S. and the EU, Canada did not back end load its adjustment to the new global textile and clothing market. Canada had already liberalized its textile and apparel restraints to a considerable degree by the time the last quotas were eliminated. This reflects a distinctly different approach taken by Canada during the 10 year phase-out period. Canada phased out the impact of its existing quotas and eliminated quotas on products of considerable commercial significance during the planned phase-out period. As a result, Canadian adaptation to liberalization in this sector has been going on since 1995 and Canadian manufacturers have largely adapted to a more liberalized trading environment.

Yes, imports from China have risen, but according to Statistics Canada recently released study entitled “Trade liberalization and the Canadian clothing market”, the increase has mainly come at the expense of imports from other suppliers such as Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan. The report also noted that as a result of trade liberalization, clothing prices had fallen steadily. Consumer prices were 5.8% lower in 2005 than they were in 2001, thus providing a benefit to all Canadian consumers.

• (1550)

Under the WTO, Canada retains the right to use safeguards, if necessary. Any request by industry for a safeguard investigation or action will be considered on its merits.

In 2005 UNITE HERE Canada petitioned the Canadian International Trade Tribunal to implement safeguards pursuant to the

product specific safeguard provision. The CITT asked UNITE HERE Canada to establish that it had standing before the CITT by demonstrating that it had the support of the Canadian domestic industry before it could proceed with any inquiry.

The CITT reports that in response to its request for further data indicating domestic support, only two letters from small domestic producers were ever received. The CITT held the file in abeyance, pending the receipt of data showing broad producer support until October 6, 2006, when it ruled that UNITE HERE Canada did not have the required standing to petition for safeguard actions under the WTO China Product-specific safeguard.

To date, the Canadian textiles and the apparel industries have not sought government action under the China safeguard, as provided for under the terms of the WTO protocol of accession for China.

I wish to assure all members that the government is aware of the various challenges faced by the textile and apparel sectors and is committed to putting in place the right policies to assist these industries in meeting their challenges.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague talked about the falling prices of garments from China, which was a benefit to all Canadians. Did he say that to the garment workers who lost their jobs? Most of them shop now at Frenchys, the Salvation Army and thrift shops. Why are Frenchys stores across Nova Scotia, for example, booming in second hand business? Because people cannot afford the clothes in the first place.

When I was first elected in 1997, I bought a made in Canada suit from Moores Clothing for \$195. When I went to get the same suit from Moores a few weeks ago, for roughly the same price, perhaps a few dollars difference, I noticed a sale on suits from China for \$195. It was almost the same price I paid before for my made in Canada suit. Where is my saving?

Workers in Canada make at least minimum wage I hope, plus the health benefits, health care, the environment, all the other things that go along with the benefits. Yet the worker in China barely makes 35¢ or 50¢ an hour or whatever they make. I know fish plant workers in China make a hell of a lot less than that. He has said that it was a benefit to me, but where is my savings?

Try to buy shoes or good running shoes for under \$100. We used to buy made in Canada shoes. Now they are all made in China, Indonesia and Malaysia and they all cost \$100 or more. Try to find running shoes that have been made in Canada. Try to find a fish that has been processed in Canada. One of these days we will be trying to buy a car that is made in Canada, or power tools. When we go to Canadian Tire, Wal-Mart or Home Depot, all the power tools are made in China. What is next?

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It is about time the government woke up and smelled the coffee. The reality is we will lose our manufacturing jobs. We are very quickly losing them now.

The textile workers were the canary in the coal mine per se. My mother-in-law worked in the textile industry in Montreal for well over 23 years. That was her entry job when she came to Canada. She was very proud to hunch over that table. Now she has a very sore back, but she was proud to do that work and then see those clothes for sale at a Bay or a Sears store down the road, Canadian stores.

Now we have American run department stores such as Wal-Mart, selling Chinese goods. Where is the benefit to Canadians in all of that? That is my question for my hon. colleague, for whom I have great respect.

● (1555)

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I also have a great deal of respect for my hon. colleague. I know he feels very passionately about this issue and some of the other issues important to the people he represents in his riding.

I might remind the hon. member of this. What I talked about in my speech was the fact that the industry itself did not bring enough support to bring forth the credibility for the Canadian International Trade Tribunal to further process the challenge.

I refer to an issue that is ongoing and debated in the House many times, and that is the Canadian Wheat Board. The new Conservative government made a promise in the last election that it would provide farmers in western Canada the choice to market their commodities where they wished, where they could get the most profitability. The opposition members have been howling about the government making a decision to give farmers freedom.

If the same government had made a decision to arbitrarily pursue this challenge, I wonder what the opposition members would have been complaining about then. It is not our job to take that sort of issue forward without the industry's support, and we clearly did not have the support of the industry to further that challenge.

I do not think we want to get into a debate about the cost of suits. I think we all realize that the cost of all our clothing and the food we consume has certainly changed.

I invite the hon. member to attend some of our trade committee meetings. At the most recent meetings we have had, we have heard a lot of discussion about integrated trade strategies. We have talked about the textile industry and how it can compete by being able to import parts or pieces of what they are producing.

The integrated trade strategy is a forward looking way at providing another opportunity. I referred to many opportunities in my speech such as the tax reduction that was given to those companies so they could compete. So also can they compete if they look outward at how they can bring in some of the lower cost products to help them be more competitive with their exports.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not necessarily share the hon. member's opinion on the Standing Committee on International Trade. He is well aware of that. The fact remains that I have a great deal of respect for him.

The hon. member talked about integrated strategy, an issue that was discussed by the Conference Board of Canada.

The board said, and stressed, that the countries that are most successful in the context of international trade, globalization and free trade agreements are those which, in addition to opening their markets, are able to protect their workers and to have social programs to support those who lose their jobs.

The Conservative Party is making cuts to all social programs, it has a hard time putting in place a universal older worker support program for all affected workers, and it has no policy to support the industry when it comes to innovation and research. I would appreciate the hon. member's comments on this.

● (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his fine work on the trade committee, which I think has provided both of us with a great opportunity to hear some of the forward looking ideas of folks like those at the Conference Board of Canada and the EDC, which we had come to talk to us about the way that we can provide the opportunity for Canadian companies to not live within a bubble, to be able to look at the opportunities and access those opportunities.

We also have talked about the older workers' program, as I have in my speech, so I take exception to that. I think we have addressed this. It is an issue. He and I probably are going to be getting to that age fairly soon ourselves, so I am glad we have looked at that.

There are many other opportunities, but I might remind the hon. member, looking outward at the opportunities, rather than looking inward and looking backward, that industries in his riding and in my riding and all across this country are going to have to compete on a global field.

We hear so much about what is happening in China and how China is so difficult to compete with because of its low cost of labour, but the last time I talked to someone in China it was outsourcing labour to Vietnam because it was lower there.

We need to also look at opportunities, at how we can provide opportunities and more jobs for our Canadians through looking at the opportunities and not looking at the way to wrap ourselves in protectionism.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam for a short question.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. One of the concerns that we on this side of the House have, of course, is that the exporting of jobs and exporting of industry seem to continue.

A comment made by the parliamentary secretary made me want to ask a question. He said that the clothing industry and the textile industry did not support taking this forward, but I want to ask him what the role of government is. Is the government not there for all Canadians, for Canadian industry and for Canadian workers, and why would his government not take this forward strongly to protect the Canadian industry and protect Canadian working people and their families?

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Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate the comment I made before. If we made an arbitrary decision to challenge this within our WTO bounds, and certainly we could do that, there would be howls from the opposition that the government is moving without the support of the industry. We have a large industry that could come forward and make a recommendation to the CITT. That has not happened.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I consider myself fortunate to be given this opportunity to speak on this very important subject matter.

I had the opportunity of hearing my colleague speak on this motion. I will read it aloud for the record and basically emphasize the areas I agree with and that are an important component of this motion. The motion states:

The Committee calls on the Government of Canada to stem the current market disruption,—

I will explain what that disruption is. The motion continues:

—in specific categories, in the Canadian apparel industry,—

Specifically, I would note the impact it has had on Quebec. The motion continues:

—by immediately invoking Article 242 of China's accession protocol to the WTO and putting in place restrictions or safeguards on the growth of specific categories of apparel imports from China;...

More important, even though I was not a member of the committee when this particular report was prepared, I was told by my colleagues on the committee that the Liberal members worked hard to put forward a second component of this motion, which is as follows:

The Committee further calls on the Government of Canada to begin bilateral negotiations with China, similar to those undertaken by the United States and the European Union, to reach an agreement on imports of clothing and textiles.

That is a very important component part of the discussion as well.

As we listen to members speak, we hear that the real issue is the lack of leadership on the part of the government. There is no doubt in my mind that this particular report reflects the Conservative government's failure to address job losses, job losses in the apparel industry, but more specifically job losses in general. Over the past few months we have heard about job losses in the auto sector and the service sector. We have heard about job losses at Nortel.

Every day as we read the business section of the newspaper, we see that job losses are taking place. There is a reason for this. I think the government does not truly appreciate or understand the importance of some of the sectors in our economy. We are focusing today on the apparel industry, and I will speak to that, but the issue and discussion today have to do with the Conservative government's failure on its China policy. We are drifting.

Let us look at the themes that have developed since the Conservative government has been in power. First, it has no plan. That has become very apparent on the international stage with respect to international trade. It definitely is drifting. Specifically, it has sold us out on the softwood lumber agreement. We are now beginning to see some of the problems with it. This is a separate discussion that we can have at a later time, but there are some major flaws with the softwood lumber agreement.

Then there are the negotiations with South Korea. It is very clear that there is the potential for the government to sell us out with respect to the auto industry. What we want to talk about is fair trade.

I was in committee with parliamentarians and representatives from EFTA, who clearly indicated that a deal is going to be signed in the near future. Again, I have the complete faith that the government will sell us out when it comes to shipbuilders as well, if we look at the government's track record.

With the Conservative government, there is a very consistent theme of selling us out. That is why this report is so important. That is why there seems to be unanimity among the other parties in the House with respect to this.

I recognize that we are a trading nation. One of every four jobs generated in Canada, which means millions of jobs, is attributed to exports. Forty per cent of our gross domestic product is attributed to exports. I understand the billions of dollars that are entailed in trading. We are a trading nation of 30 million people. We need to trade with other countries in order to maintain the quality of life we enjoy, but it does not mean that we cannot level the playing field. It is about fair trade.

I want to share some facts with respect to leveling the playing field for the Canadian apparel manufacturers. The World Trade Organization system of quotas regulating the global apparel and textiles industry, 40 years old, expired on January 1, 2005. For the first time there are no limits on the amount of goods that can be imported into Canada. The expiration of quotas has unleashed a crisis in the worldwide apparel industry, with profound ramifications for Canada as well as the developing countries around the world.

● (1605)

The Canadian clothing industry is in peril. The clothing industry is the tenth largest manufacturing sector. However, more than 30% of jobs in the sector have been lost since January 2004, with 51,719 jobs lost as of November 2006. This is an astounding number compared to the 75,562 jobs of January 2004. That is a major decline in jobs in the apparel industry.

Many other industrialized and developing countries, including the United States and the European Union, consistent with what we had brought forth as our amendment to the report, acted quickly and now have negotiated agreements to safeguard their domestic industry by limiting the growth of Chinese clothing imports.

The Canadian government needs to do the same to ensure a level playing field for Canadian apparel manufacturers and workers. We do not need to lecture them or look down on them or give them a public display where we just rant and rave. We need to show leadership on this specific topic. We need to develop diplomacy and a proper dialogue so that we can actually do some meaningful work, develop a plan and sign a bilateral agreement.

Speaking of Canadian job losses, as I indicated, the Canadian industry has been in a steady decline since January 2002 when the phase-out of import quotas began with the removal of quotas from certain product categories. Since January 2002, more Canadian jobs have disappeared, and 50,000 of them remain today. If we look at specifically what I was alluding to earlier with respect to my remarks about Quebec, since January 2002 almost 24,000 jobs have disappeared. They have vanished. They are completely gone. That represents half of the total clothing manufacturing employment in the province. It is a substantial number and it is a substantial issue.

What concerns me in this House, and concerns other members as well, is that the Conservative government now has developed a theme of flip-flop. We would expect and hope that in this area it would do the same as well. I am going to quote the Conservative Party when it was in opposition. It was a vocal supporter of safeguards. It urged the former Liberal government to negotiate an agreement with China. I will quote the current parliamentary secretary, at that time the official opposition critic for international trade, who said.

A Conservative government would stand up for Canadian workers and work proactively through international trade policies to ensure Canada competes on a level playing field.

That was a comment made by the member who currently is the parliamentary secretary for international trade.

The official opposition, the Conservatives, including Stephen Harper, even supported a motion in Parliament on February 8—

• (1610)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member knows that we do not refer to other members by their given names but by their titles or constituencies. We will try that again.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Thank you very much for that correction, Mr. Speaker. As you can see I am a bit passionate about this issue and therefore made a small error in judgment.

I was alluding to the current Prime Minister while he was in opposition. He supported a motion in Parliament on February 8, 2005, calling on the federal government “to further elaborate with regard to the following elements: the use of safeguards provided for in trade agreements, the implementation of measures to encourage the use of Quebec—and Canadian—made textiles and the creation of a program to assist older workers”. It is about levelling the playing field. It is about fair trade.

The question is: Is this only specific to Canada? I do not think so. We have an opportunity to look at other countries and the leadership role that they have shown to protect their jobs. There are many countries that we can look at and learn from their experiences.

Turkey has used the safeguard procedures and restricted imports from China on 42 product categories. Argentina has amended its legislation in order to allow for the use of safeguard procedures. Peru has used the product specific safeguard at the end of 2003 and putting place provisional safeguards for 200 days. The U.S., as I indicated before, used textile specific safeguards for three groups of products in 2003.

The EU, the European Union, started investigations at the end of April 2005 into the extent of the disruption for the EU market by

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imports of Chinese products in nine categories, followed by formal consultations with the Chinese government.

That is what leadership is about. That is where I believe the Conservative government has consistently, to put it bluntly, dropped the ball.

The leader of the official opposition supports this motion and understands the importance of this motion, and understands the implications it has on jobs in the apparel industry and understands the implications it has in Montreal, in other cities and other urban centres. Our leader understands this problem.

When it comes to leadership, and since we are talking about that, I believe that the Conservative government could take action. What bothers me is that not only has it shown a lack of leadership with respect to the apparel industry, with respect to having no plan, with respect to selling us out with the softwood lumber deal, as I indicated, and the potential to sell us out with the auto industry and the South Korea deal, it has cut millions and millions of dollars from international trade and commerce.

No wonder the Conservatives have difficulties in negotiating or having a dialogue with China. I do not believe they have the resources there. Cutting \$485 million from international commerce and trade is not the way to solve these problems. We are a trading nation. We need to invest in trade. We need to invest in our resources abroad so we can take a leadership role. We can solve problems. We can fight for Canadians jobs.

What is even worse is we have lost our voice at the WTO. That is such an important multilateral instrument that we have, a means for us to be able to negotiate with other countries to address such issues with respect to the apparel industry and other industries that are currently experiencing job losses.

What bothers me even more is that recently it was announced that by the end of this month there will be four consulate offices closed that are very strategic to us: two in Japan, one in Russia and one in Italy. It just boggles the mind.

Today we are discussing the importance of jobs, of having a bilateral agreement with China, and the government is cutting and slashing funding to international trade. It is closing consulate offices. We are losing our voice abroad.

That is something that profoundly bothers me and my constituents. I represent the riding of Mississauga—Brampton South which has small and medium size enterprises located near the Pearson International Airport. That acts as a portal for trade. That is where many small and medium size enterprises trade and they are absolutely vital for the local economic prosperity of my riding.

When those businesses tell me that they hear about these closures of consular offices and they hear about the fact that we are cutting millions of dollars, they are very much concerned. It bothers me as well.

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I think it was important for me to speak from a personal level about my experiences at the constituency level and to discuss the fact that these cuts have a profound impact on our reputation in the international community, a profound impact on how we conduct business domestically, and how we situate ourselves and how do we put ourselves in a competitive situation going forward.

•(1615)

How can I, as the member of Parliament for Mississauga—Brampton South, look at my constituents and tell them that the current government has no plan? It bothers me. It bothers me because we want to ensure we have high quality jobs not only for ourselves but for our children and grandchildren, and trade is the way to go about it.

It is about leveling the playing field. It is about investment, not cutting funding for international trade. It is about improving and increasing our role in the world in this ever-important global economy. It is a global village. Things are getting smaller and smaller. We need to have a strong voice abroad, and the closure of consulate offices is not the way to do it.

Going back to this motion, as I have indicated, our party understands the importance of the work that the committee has done. The committee did an extensive job in terms of speaking to the various stakeholders and making sure that we were able to put forth a plan, a report that would force the government to take action on this very important issue. The apparel industry is a very important industry, not only to the people in Quebec but also to many other Canadians across this country who rely on this industry for jobs.

As I indicated before, the only way we can solve this problem, the only way we can move forward in a meaningful way, is by making sure that the Government of Canada begins to have bilateral negotiations with China. That is something that is not unheard of. We have seen, for instance, the United States take a leadership role in that. The United States has done that for its citizens to protect jobs there. The European Union has done that and I have cited many other countries. I have mentioned them before and again I just want to highlight that Turkey has used the safeguard procedures, Argentina has amended its legislation as well as Peru, and the list goes on and on. This is not unheard of and again, the concern is that this is not new news.

The Conservative government, when it was in opposition, had indicated that it wanted to follow this practice. It indicated very clearly that it would stand up for Canadian workers and work proactively through international trade policies to ensure Canada competes on a level playing field.

What concerns me now is that it has an opportunity to take on a leadership role and tackle this very important issue, but again it has stalled. It is empty rhetoric. It seems reluctant. I do not know why but it has flip-flopped on so many other issues: the environment, Quebec as a nation, and the list goes on. One would think that it would flip on this issue and support us, the opposition parties, on this very important report that has been put forth.

Again, this is something that is very important to all regions, but specifically to Quebec. As I indicated before, 24,000 jobs is a substantial number. It is not a small number of jobs that has

disappeared, and that is half of the total clothing manufacturing employment in that province.

This is something that is very serious, on which the government needs to show leadership. This is a reflection of the policy that the Conservative government has when it comes to international trade. It is a theme that has developed. It has cut millions of dollars. It has no plan. It has sold us out in the past and right now, its inaction on this important subject matter is a reflection of a continued sellout.

I would urge the government to take on a leadership role. I would urge it to have constructive dialogue with China. I would urge it to meet with Chinese officials and start this process, and not use human rights as a cover. Yes, human rights are important and that is a discussion that will always take place, but that does not mean we compromise Canadian jobs. That does not mean that we will not stand up for Canadian jobs.

As I have indicated before, our leader, the leader of the official opposition, supports this motion, supports this report, and understands the importance of it and the implications it has for preserving very important jobs, jobs that help ordinary Canadians through the very tough transition that our country is going through in a very intense, competitive global market.

Therefore, I would urge the Conservative government to support this motion. I applaud the efforts of the other parties for supporting this motion. In committee, they all did good work and going forward, we need to continue to tackle issues of this nature that target jobs, that target specific sectors of the economy that need attention where the government has failed to act, and the apparel industry is one such area. It is a very important sector of our economy.

•(1620)

As the critic for international trade, I understand trade is important, and I have said that before, but that does not mean that we do not want to have a level playing field. We want to ensure we preserve Canada's interests and ensure we are competitive.

It is all about being competitive. It is ensuring that we have a strong productivity agenda and ensuring that we can compete. We cannot compete when the government is not looking out for the interests of Canadians, especially when there are precedents set by other countries. This is not counter-trade. It is just a matter of looking at what is in the best interests of Canadians, of people in the apparel sector.

I would like to thank my constituents who wrote to me and talked to me about this issue. Going forward, on their behalf I will continue to stand up for their concerns.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every time Liberals get up and talk about what they will do in the future, I always think of that Arlo Guthrie song, *Alice's Restaurant*, when the sergeant says to Arlo, "Kid, have you rehabilitated yourself?"

These problems of the trade agreements with China did not happen just the other day. These trade agreements happened a long time ago under the Liberal watch.

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He is absolutely correct, though, that the Conservatives did say one thing in opposition and are now saying something completely different in government. They said the same thing to the widows of veterans in Cape Breton. The Prime Minister said, "Vote for us and we will immediately extend the VIP services for all widows of all veterans".

He also wrote a letter to Danny Williams, the Premier of Newfoundland, saying to vote for the Conservatives, and that if they form government, they would invoke custodial management on the nose and tail of the Grand Banks. It still has not happened.

My question for the hon. member is simple. We know the Liberals made some serious mistakes when they were in government. Now they are in opposition and they see, maybe, the error of their ways. However, does the hon. member have any confidence that the Conservatives themselves will honour anything that they said in previous discussions when they were in opposition?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Speaker, that question is really a reflection of built up frustration that the member feels. I understand that frustration very well.

The member has worked very hard with respect to an important subject matter. When it comes to shipbuilders, they might be exposed to some job losses or major job losses if we sign a NAFTA agreement without having a concrete strategy with respect to shipbuilders before we enter into that agreement.

I understand the frustration. This is not the first time the Conservatives have, as I said in my remarks, said one thing and did another. This will definitely not be the last time as well.

The concern that I have is that the remarks were not made by just any member. They were made by the current Prime Minister, at that time the leader of the official opposition. He said that he would stand up for Canadian jobs. The current parliamentary secretary, when he was international trade critic, said the same thing, so this is at the leadership level. They said one thing and now they have completely changed their minds.

I understand the frustration. The fact is we have a report and a motion that clearly articulates a strong action plan, a road map on how to resolve this issue. We come to the House to debate issues, but we also come to propose ideas and solutions, and this is about solutions.

This report clearly articulates that and the Liberal members in committee said that the way to do this is for the Government of Canada to be in bilateral negotiations with China. That is the only way to solve this issue and preserve jobs, and ensure we stand up for Canadians.

It is so important that the Conservative government take a leadership role. It should stop lecturing the Chinese and actually take some action to solve this very important problem.

●(1625)

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, intentions are very credible and this problem is not something which has evolved yesterday. The member used to be chair of the human rights subcommittee and did good work there. He just said to stop challenging the Chinese on human rights issues, and start

bilaterals and improve the situation. What is the member's position on challenging the Chinese on the human rights issue?

Second, is there a concrete plan? What does he suggest we talk about? Is there a possibility even of resolving the issue? The Chinese are not interested in resolving this particular issue. How does he propose we talk to them and what ideas does he have, concrete ideas, not just fluff?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Speaker, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville has shown a keen interest on this subject. We are talking about a specific report and I am hoping that in the near future other reports will evolve and come to fruition and we will get an opportunity to discuss those matters as well.

Make no mistake about it, human rights is a very important part of our approach when it comes to diplomacy abroad, when it comes to diplomacy with China. I have the good fortune of being the chair of the subcommittee on human rights and this issue and human rights in general are very important issues not only domestically but abroad as well.

What concerns me is how we address those issues. Our former prime minister, Mr. Chrétien, said very clearly when he spoke about China and human rights that every time he had the opportunity to meet with Chinese delegations and officials, he brought up human rights and he had that dialogue and discussion. There is a way to approach this. What concerns me is that this challenge out in public really does not resolve much. We need to sit down with the officials and actually have a dialogue and discussion.

With respect to having a formal action plan, it is clearly articulated in the report and I hope the member will read it. It says:

The Committee further calls on the Government of Canada to begin bilateral negotiations with China, similar to those undertaken by the United States—

There is a framework that we can follow, one which the United States has pursued and has adopted, a framework that the European Union has pursued and has adopted. Not only that, if the member was listening, I clearly articulated other countries that followed a similar suit. I indicated Turkey had used the safeguard procedures. These are procedures that restrict imports from China on 42 product categories. Argentina has amended its legislation.

We have ample evidence, many examples of how we can pursue this. It is not about not having enough support out there and not understanding the problem. It is about actions and moving forward. I hope the member understands the importance of this. I hope that his government takes action on this very important issue.

●(1630)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask the question again. The member opposite was asked what concrete things he believed could benefit the issue of human rights in China. Again he just gave fluff, which seems to be the record of the former prime ministers as well, the ones he claims had such success in this field, and yet there was nothing done.

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The hon. member continues to put money against human rights, money against human lives. Would the hon. member actually answer the question that was asked? What concrete steps is he willing to put into place or that he believes would be an effective way to resolve this issue of human rights? That is part and parcel of the whole issue of trade.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the member is asking a question about a subject that is not the focal point of our debate today. It is a subject that could be attributed to our discussion. We are talking about a committee report and members from the Conservative Party were also present at committee.

The committee is calling on the Government of Canada to stem current market disruption in specific categories in the Canadian apparel industry. We are talking about the apparel industry. We are talking about article 242 of the WTO. We are talking about limiting Chinese imports into Canada. That is the issue here.

We are talking about a way to do that. The way to do that is that the Government of Canada begin bilateral negotiations. That is the premise of our discussion. We are talking about Canadian jobs. We are talking about the fact that we want to use WTO, a multilateral organization that would allow us to make sure that we can protect and preserve Canadian interests. That is the issue here.

What concerns me is that members opposite want to divert this discussion to another subject. I have no problems speaking about human rights in China. We can do that any time. The member can come to committee and he can bring that up on numerous occasions, but today in the House the fifth report that we are discussing is with respect to the job losses in the apparel industry.

The government has not done anything. The Conservatives have been in power for I do not know how many months now and they have not moved a single iota on this specific issue. What concerns me is that they want to divert attention with empty rhetoric. They want to lecture people on human rights and that concerns me a great deal. It is about time they took action. I hope they take action.

I have given concrete examples of countries that have pursued action. The Conservatives can follow those examples and look at them to make sure they understand how to use multilateral organizations. Maybe that is something they are not used to. It is not my concern. They are the ones in government. Our job is to propose ideas and show them the road map and they need to make sure that they follow that road map.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, Fisheries and Oceans; the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, Official Languages; and the hon. member for Windsor West, Infrastructure.

Mr. Myron Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I have one box of several boxes of petitions all dealing with one subject which I would like to present to the House today. Discussions have taken place and I believe you would find unanimous consent to allow me to present them at this time. It would be really convenient if the House would agree to allow me to do it at this time. It would only take a minute.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PETITIONS

ANIMAL CRUELTY

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present four petitions which all deal with the same subject matter.

This petition was spearheaded by Tamara Chaney from Didsbury, Alberta and it contains 111,896 signatures from all across Canada, but predominantly from my riding of Wild Rose.

The petitioners urge Parliament to update our current laws with regard to animal welfare, in other words, toughen up our current animal cruelty laws, and that it be known as the Daisy Duke bill in memory of a pup killed in my riding.

* * *

● (1635)

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, obviously I am very pleased to speak today to the fifth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade. This report calls on the federal government:

—to stem the current market disruption, in specific categories, in the Canadian apparel industry, by immediately invoking Article 242 of China's accession protocol to the WTO and putting in place restrictions or safeguards on the growth of specific categories of apparel imports from China.

The report also calls on the federal government to begin bilateral negotiations with China, similar to those undertaken by the United States and the European Union, to reach an agreement on imports of clothing and textiles.

This motion, which was moved by the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster and which the Bloc Québécois obviously supports, was adopted by the committee on December 12, 2006 and its purpose is to invoke Article 242 of China's accession protocol to the WTO in order to prevent the complete disruption of our industry.

Although imposing quotas on imports from WTO member countries is generally prohibited, there is nonetheless an exception to this rule and that is China. When China joined the WTO in December 2001, the agreement was that WTO members could limit the increase of Chinese imports until December 2008. This safeguard helps curb imports in case of market disruption caused by the export of Chinese textiles. This is quite precisely what is happening in the clothing industry in Quebec and Canada, which has been rather disastrous in the past few years. The following are some statistics that clearly show the issues in and importance of this report.

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In Canada, the number of employees went from 101,000 to 70,000 between 2000 and 2005, which is a 31% decrease. Among the employees working in production, the decrease was 37%, going from 89,000 to 57,000. Quebec has been the hardest hit: 40% of jobs in this industry have been lost and the industry has just 36,000 employees left compared to 60,000 in 2000 and 90,000 in 1998. This is the sharpest decline of all the industry sectors in Quebec.

This decline in employment was more marked in Quebec than anywhere else in Canada. Between 1987 and 2005, Quebec's share of Canada's textile labour force dropped from 56% to 47%. Between 1995 and 2005, that industry dropped from first place to eighth place in terms of all manufacturing jobs in Quebec. Employment in the textile industry in relation to the entire manufacturing industry dropped from 14% to 6%.

As we all can see, this sector has suffered tremendous losses, and this is a very important sector for Quebec. Yet, as I have mentioned, although quotas on imports from WTO member countries are prohibited, there is one important exception to this rule, and that is China.

The United States and the European Union used the special safeguarding measure to ensure that Chinese clothing imports would not destroy their industry. But so far, Canada still refuses to do so. Why? We must ask ourselves some questions.

When in power, the Liberal Party did nothing to support the textile industry. During the last election campaign, the Conservatives promised to act, but the federal government still refuses to take action.

• (1640)

I would like to point out that this motion was adopted by the majority of committee members. The Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Liberals also voted in favour of this motion. Only the Conservatives, who have forgotten the promises they made to Quebecers during the last election campaign, did not support this motion.

Not once in the past has the federal government used the safeguarding measures, although they are set out in trade agreements. Never has the federal government tried to enter into discussion with China to reach an agreement to limit the increases in Chinese imports, which can be done in the context of a bilateral agreement, as indicated in the motion.

The Conservatives, although they used to support this type of measure, finally decided, once in power, to oppose this motion. We should not really be surprised, since, for them, there is no room for government intervention.

The Standing Committee on International Trade is talking about totally free trade, with no social protection for workers affected by industry closures. That is the free market. The Conservatives, who are slightly doctrinaire about this, believe that they can fix everything and that any government intervention will only prevent the free market from producing those benefits. They are talking about protectionist measures. We are not talking about protectionist measures, but about protecting our industries temporarily to make them more competitive internationally. It is not a question of

overprotecting our industries. We just want to protect certain jobs and become more competitive by taking temporary measures.

We must not forget that the Minister of Industry comes from the Montreal Economic Institute, a right-wing, doctrinaire lobby that believes the federal government should take no action to avoid having jobs threatened by Chinese competition move abroad.

Like the government, this report by the Montreal Economic Institute has seriously misjudged the serious impact of Chinese competition on the textile and clothing industries. Nevertheless, the Conservatives should understand that the safeguards are not permanent protectionist measures, as I have already mentioned, that will prevent the industries from having to modernize. They are temporary measures designed to prevent the industries from crumbling before they have time to modernize. Unfortunately, the former Liberal government and the current Conservative government have not understood the purpose and importance of these measures.

I believe that if Quebec had been a sovereign nation, it would have protected its workers. But, as things stand, it is the federal government's responsibility to speed up the modernization of the industry and create the market conditions conducive to modernization. It has the money. It is responsible for these international agreements, but it is not doing anything.

The decline of the textile and clothing industries is not inevitable, but the business environment in which these industries operate has changed so rapidly that they need help to modernize more quickly. Left to their own devices, they will not be able to keep up and will continue declining. The government must help them modernize and convert more quickly with assistance programs, new equipment, research and development, and design services.

• (1645)

At the same time, the safeguards provided in trade agreements to give the industries the few years of respite that they need to change their focus have to be enforced.

That is precisely what this report approved by the Standing Committee on International Trade is all about.

We have to call on the federal government to take action to support our apparel and textile industry, as promised during the last election campaign. It is important to recall this because, so far, the ministers of Industry and International Trade have never taken action or used the safeguards provided in trade agreements, which are available to them.

Moreover, at no time has the government endeavoured to improve the aid packages to speed up the industry's modernization. The support program made up of the CATIP and the CANtex is simply insufficient. We did put many questions to the government during the last Parliament, as we are doing today, to bring about some improvement. The allowable maximum of \$100,000 is not even enough to allow industries to renew their production equipment.

The solutions to these many problems are known to and recognized by everyone who is concerned about the future of these industries. All that is missing is the will of the government.

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In fact, the Bloc Québécois has repeatedly suggested solutions and prompted Parliament to discuss issues that the government would rather have kept under wraps.

I would like to take a moment to discuss a few of these proposed measures.

Introducing incentives to encourage the use of Quebec and Canadian textiles is a simple measure that could enable the textiles sector to keep jobs and could help the apparel sector too.

We have to help workers whose employers close up shop. The older workers assistance program everyone talks about so much must be universal and must help all workers in Quebec and Canada. People who lose their jobs at 54, 55 or 56 are not in a position to retrain. Often, those who do retrain retire soon afterward. Today's question period was enlightening on that subject.

We could also increase transfers to Quebec to fund job training for younger workers who would also benefit from new employment opportunities because of that training. We could use the safeguards in the trade agreements by putting quotas on imports from China under that country's WTO accession protocol.

As I said earlier, when China joined the WTO, there was a provision allowing countries to limit the increase in Chinese imports by implementing temporary quotas to keep their industries from being decimated by the industrial giant.

The United States and the European Union had talks with China and agreed to cap increases in Chinese textile and apparel imports.

In Canada, both Liberal and Conservative governments sat idly by, which explains the results we are seeing today.

Today we are talking about textiles and apparel, but we could just as well be talking about the entire manufacturing sector—the automobile sector, the aerospace sector, the furniture sector—which the federal government has abandoned.

Let us look at what is happening: last week, Saint-Étienne-de-Lauzon's Shermag and Disraeli factories closed for good. Today, Canadel, one of Quebec's largest furniture manufacturers, which operates in my constituency, let 46 workers go.

● (1650)

In the last five years, the number of employees in the furniture sector has fallen from 1,200 to 700.

According to the company's general manager and owner, Mr. Devault, the 15% decrease in sales is due to Asian competition.

I mention this because the government's lack of action in the textile sector should not cross over to the furniture sector. I believe we should take action on behalf of the textile industry as well as many other manufacturing sectors to counter Asian competition.

According to some articles, Mr. Devault of Canadel stated that a standard piece of his company's furniture sells for US\$2,298 while a similar Chinese offering sells for \$497. How can you compete?

We must modernize, improve our technologies and give our industries a chance to gain a competitive edge, even in the Asian market. We could even capture a portion of that market because there

is an emerging middle class in those countries and there are some who would be interested in buying our furniture. We must support our industry. It is the ineffectiveness of the current government that makes it seem like no one cares that 50,000 jobs have been lost in the textile sector. In the past few years, 5,000 jobs have been lost in the furniture sector. The same goes for other sectors, such as the aerospace and automobile industries.

We have the means to support our companies. For this reason we are supporting the motion submitted to the Standing Committee on International Trade to support the textile industry. I am urging the government to support other sectors as well.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for this presentation. The entire issue of clothing and textiles is very important for a number of ridings in the country. I can certainly say that a riding like the one I represent, Madawaska—Restigouche, experienced very significant economic development in the past because of clothing and textiles.

Over the years, situations have arisen. We know that the Chinese market has certainly hurt the industries and the economic development of our ridings.

When we look at the situation, we see how important is it to find a way to help the people, industries and workers in each of our ridings. For my riding it is extremely important to find a solution that will allow us to keep these jobs and not just for now, but for the long term. To be able to do so, this motion, which calls for Article 242 of China's accession protocol to the World Trade Organization to be invoked, is very important.

When this government was in the opposition, it had a very different position. Today, it seems that the government is taking a different direction when it comes to the market. When we look at the economic situation of the clothing and textile industries, we see that the needs are tremendous. In my colleague's province, many jobs have been lost. In my riding, hundreds and hundreds of jobs have been lost. Furthermore, hundreds and hundreds of jobs are currently on the line.

Does my colleague recognize, as I do, that we need to look at what is going on with this government: the Conservatives claim that the market will stabilize things, that this is a global crisis and a situation to which businesses and industry will have to adapt. Those who are in this situation know this is somewhat contradictory; this is the opposite of economic development and the opposite of keeping jobs in our ridings.

Does my colleague from the Bloc recognize, as I do, that the government is saying that it will allow the market to regulate itself, that jobs will be lost and that one day, perhaps, it might be able to turn around and find help for these people?

Routine Proceedings

Why must we wait for such situations to occur before helping our workers? Today, they are working. To those who have already lost their job, it is hard to say that we will take action to fix problems of the past. However, we can look towards the future.

The only decision that this government seems to want to make is to look back at the past and never act. This government, which calls itself progressive—although I highly doubt it—wants to rely on market rules alone to ensure that the industry survives. There is no way. We must be able to help our employers and our workers.

When we look at the situation, it is clear that the example of China is a reality. The product enters Canada at a very low cost, because Chinese workers are paid a lower salary and do not have the same quality of life as Canadian workers. We must be able to support the clothing and textile industry so that our employees, our workers, continue to enjoy excellent benefits and continue to receive the support needed to ensure the industry's survival.

Is it not ironic that the government says that the market will regulate itself, while it is abandoning workers? It is virtually unacceptable to always have the same thing, time and time again, from one situation to the next, when it comes to the lumber or furniture industry—Shermag has two industries in the riding of Madawaska—Restigouche—or the auto industry. These situations have recently become all too common. At the end of the day, the government does absolutely nothing.

Does my hon. colleague recognize, as I do, that the government says that it will leave the market alone and that, if jobs are lost, that will be that—which is unacceptable?

• (1655)

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my Liberal colleague's input and his concern about supporting our industries and preserving our jobs.

The Conservative Party's economic laissez-faire approach must stop. Between 2000 and 2005, 40% of the jobs in the textile sector disappeared.

It used to be that the Liberal Party occupied the seats opposite. We asked the Liberals for the same safeguards to support the textile industry, but to no avail. Plants closed, as hon. members know. My colleague from Huntingdon and I called for improvements to the CANtex program. We asked for POWA assistance for our workers. We asked for safeguards, but the Liberal government did nothing. Today, the Conservative Party is doing nothing.

We hope that the future will be brighter with the Liberal Party if it ever regains power, because it was extremely ineffective.

The Conservative government is no more effective. It has the means to take action, thanks to the budget surplus. The CANtex program could be improved. There are measures that could help the industry turn around temporarily, modernize and increase productivity. The Standing Committee on Industry, Sciences and Technology recently released a report containing 22 recommendations to support the manufacturing industry. What is the government waiting for to act? We are all wondering.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois for his reasoned debate on this very important issue.

As he may have heard, my mother-in-law worked in a textile plant in downtown Montreal. She was very proud of that work. When I talk to her, she is always upset that all those people no longer have the opportunity to work there. The plant has shut down because those jobs have been sent offshore.

Shipbuilding in Lévis, Quebec is another industry that is in trouble. Valleyfield, another beautiful community in Quebec, is in trouble. The forestry industry is in trouble, et cetera, et cetera.

Does the member have any confidence that the government will do the right thing and honour the committee's decision in moving this very important issue forward?

• (1700)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, if this Conservative government is planning to act to support industry and the manufacturing sector, now is the time. It is high time the government did something. That is what Quebec is waiting for.

The government made lots of election promises during the last campaign. It wanted to win seats in Quebec. It made fantastic promises, but it has not done a thing since then.

By refusing to help workers and support social programs and policies, the Conservative government is attacking Quebec values. Quebeckers will not accept that.

As we all know, the government cut social programs for literacy. It can help people through an older workers assistance program. It cut women's programs. Quebec needs its social programs and policies. More than anything, it must take control of its own powers and its economic and social tools so that it can achieve sovereignty. That would be the best solution for us.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to enter the debate on this very important issue.

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I would remind the House of words that were spoken by a gentleman for whom I have great respect, who is now the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development. He used to be the finance critic for the Reform-Alliance-Conservative party. I came to the House in 1997, but he said something in 1998 when he was chastising the then Liberal government about the Canada pension plan, EI and all of the support programs that help pensioners and workers. He said that the best social program is a job; that the best thing we can give Canadians is a full time job. He was absolutely right. When Canadians have jobs that they like and can depend on to look after their families, they have pride and dignity.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, my family came to Canada in 1956 and settled on the west coast in Vancouver. My brother worked in a lumber mill in the same job for almost 45 years. My dad worked in upholstery and was a postman. My mom and dad ran a group home for many years in Richmond and Burnaby, B.C.

I was very proud when I got my first full time job as a fibreglass worker at Lansair at the south airport in Vancouver. I eventually worked at a hotel, then at Canadian Airlines and now I am a member of Parliament. I have had the good fortune of having a job, being able to look after the financial needs of myself and my wife and children as well. I have been very blessed having lived in Vancouver, the Yukon and now in Nova Scotia, that I have not yet lost a job. I have moved to follow my work but I have not yet lost a job.

I can only imagine the tragedy and travesty for people who live in mill towns and smaller communities where the mill shuts down, like in Red Rock, Ontario. Their livelihoods are gone. They say goodbye to their friends and families, sell their homes and off they go. I know all too well what happened to the fishing communities in the great province of Newfoundland and Labrador and the other maritime and Atlantic provinces when the northern cod fishery collapsed. Thousands of people lost their jobs.

Now we are losing jobs because of what we consider unfair trade deals with one of the largest economies on the planet, which is China.

China's economy, by all accounts, is doing remarkably well. There has been a huge transformation in China over the last 20 to 30 years. The federal government still gives CIDA money to China. The Canadian International Development Agency still gives money to the developing nation of China, one of the largest economies on the planet. A member from Calgary often raised the question of why the government continued to give CIDA money to China. That is a debate we can have in the near future.

We all know that China does not have environmental, human rights and workers legislation. It does not have EI, workers compensation, health and safety standards, et cetera. It does not have those things for its workers. Also, the salaries that workers are paid in China are nowhere near the salaries paid in Canada. The former Liberal government and the current Conservative government tell the workers, communities and businesses in Canada that they have to compete with that.

Mr. Broadbent, the former leader of the NDP, said very clearly that it is not free trade. It is not even fair trade. It is unfair trade when we compete with a country that has no respect for human rights,

environmental or labour standards or any other aspects that we in Canada in many cases take for granted.

The rights of workers in Canada did not come about because of the goodness and graciousness of governments. They came about because of the hard work of people on the picket lines, of people who died on the picket lines. Mr. Speaker, you of all people know very well that the Winnipeg general strike was a turning point in this country. I do not mean to say that you were there at the time, but you are fully aware of it.

• (1705)

One of the great leaders of our party, J.S. Woodsworth, wrote about how that strike spurred him and others on to a more socially democratic way of life so that workers could have the benefits to look after their families. It is now 2007 and the threat is competing with countries that are not balanced in any way when it comes to equality of fair trade.

I have absolutely nothing against Chinese workers, their families or the government in any way, but it would be nice to know that China was on the same level footing as we in terms of the environment, human rights, worker safety, worker salary, et cetera, but it is not and the committee, therefore, came up with a motion and we are asking the government to honour it. We will have the opportunity very soon to see whether it wants to accept the will of Parliament.

I want to go back a bit and go over the Conservative track record over the last 13 months. The government rallied and railed against the previous government for appointing its friends to various positions. What is one of the first things it did? Michael Fortier, an unelected Conservative fundraiser, or bagman some people say, was put into the Senate and made a cabinet minister.

• (1710)

The next thing it did, almost at lightening speed, was accept the first of many floor crossers. A gentleman who was from Vancouver Kingsway was a Liberal member at 10 a.m. and became a Conservative cabinet minister at 11 a.m.

Then, during the campaign, the Conservatives wrote a letter on the Prime Minister's behalf to a widow of a veteran in Cape Breton and said that if the Conservatives formed the government, they would extend VIP services to all widows of veterans, regardless of time of death or whether they applied. The word "immediately" was in there.

Routine Proceedings

Then they sent a letter out to Danny Williams, the premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, basically reflecting the motion that the now Minister of Fisheries presented when he was in opposition. In a motion brought forward by the Conservatives, he said that the Conservatives would invoke custodial management on the nose and tail of the Grand Bank and Flemish Cap immediately.

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member but the motion does have to do with China's accession to the WTO and restrictions or safeguards on the growth of specific categories of apparel imports from China.

So far the member has gone from veterans affairs to fisheries and the liturgy I am sure will continue, but I would caution the hon. member to try to be relevant and come back to the motion every once in a while.

• (1720)

Mr. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my friend would like to come a bit closer to some reality. We are talking about textiles. He has brought in a couple of times the issue of his mother and the closeness that he feels about this. I could speak about my aunt who was also in the textile business. We all understand that aspect of it. Would he not agree that perhaps there is a responsibility on the part of not just the 308 members of Parliament here, but on the part of all 31 million Canadians?

Wal-Mart stores are not empty. They are filled with people who are making buying choices. Is the member saying that when an individual has a choice between a \$95 pair of shoes made in China or a \$300 pair of shoes made in Canada that the choice should be gone? Is he suggesting that we should put up barriers and that Gap should be unable to sell its products here? Is there not a responsibility on the part of all Canadian consumers to make these kinds of judgments?

On a vaguely related issue of fair trade, I point out to him, for example, coffee. Canadians can walk into a Safeway or a Loeb or whatever the store and buy some coffee with no questions asked. They can get it for \$1 a pound or whatever the amount is. On the other hand, they will pay \$3 or \$4 a pound for fair trade coffee. Canadians are making these choices because they are educating themselves about the whole situation with respect to coffee.

Yes, there is a place for the government—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The member has had a couple of minutes now. There are a number of people who want to ask questions.

The hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, to correct the member, it was my mother-in-law who worked in that plant.

He is absolutely right, but I ask him a question right back. What is the federal government doing to educate Canadians to buy Canadian first? When was the last time there was any kind of advertising to buy locally first? The province of Nova Scotia is doing that. The member knows as well as I that it is very difficult to compete with a major competitor like Wal-Mart. The member is right. The onus is on Canadians, whether it be the environment, their purchasing power, or whatever.

He talked about \$300 shoes. I would sure like to know who makes running shoes in Canada any more. I have looked for many months and I cannot find them. If I could find them, I would certainly give them a good shot.

• (1725)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I like parts of the member's speech, in particular the breadth of the issues about which he spoke. There is a number of things with which we disagree.

I want to offer my friend a number of suggestions, and I would appreciate his input on them. We both share ridings and constituencies that are on coasts. My riding is on the west coast; his is on the east coast.

My first suggestion deals with shipbuilding. I think the government ought to adopt this solution. Why does the government not take the import tax on ships purchased abroad and use that with a combined fund, to which the private sector can contribute, to help refurbish and upgrade our shipbuilding infrastructure? In other words, the government should take that import tax and rather than dump it into general revenues, put it into a shipbuilding restructuring infrastructure program that would have an equal amount of money from the private sector.

My second question deals with immigrants who are in Canada illegally and who have been here for a long time. Would his party approve of those immigrants being able to access work permits, renewable on a yearly basis? Then those people can get out from the cold, start paying taxes and ultimately, if they are able to do this over a period of years, they can apply to become citizens and be a part of our wonderful country?

My last question is on the issue of China. Is he in favour of erecting trade barriers against China? The Liberal Party is not in favour of that. It would violate many of our international agreements.

Does the hon. member think the government should invest in the elements of productivity, such as education, access to education, infrastructure, a cities agenda, which we adopted, that would allow us to make the strategic investments with other players to improve our productivity?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, first, I would ensure that the government did not give into the request of B.C. shipbuilders and knock the export tariff off those ferries. We should keep the export tariff and use the money in a proactive way as mentioned by the member. I do not have a major problem with that. It is something to look into.

The second question was about trade barriers against China. I never said we should have trade barriers against China. I asked to use the same principles the WTO gave us. My colleague from Winnipeg said it very clearly. It was on the table. We could have had phased in targets over the time. I think he was talking about 7.5%.

The United States and the EU did it. We are asking for the same thing to be done in Canada. It is still not too late to do that. That is within the trade agreements. I did not make that up. The WTO has that.

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Why can we not do what other countries have done? I never once said we should have trade barriers against China. I said we should work with China and other countries to develop an economy worldwide where all workers are lifted up, not just some of them.

Because I have been rambling on, I forget his third question, but I will talk to him privately on that.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Sackville—Eastern Shore for taking what is a complex issue, bringing it down to earth and relating how it affects Canadian workers.

Part of the problem with the unfair competitive advantage that China enjoys and the reason the WTO has agreed there should be phased in safeguards is the unfair competitive advantage on labour standards, the very issue about which my colleague spoke.

China does not allow unions and free collective bargaining. Chinese businesses and manufacturers manipulate currency in an unfair way that we would never tolerate here. Currency manipulation is a sleazy tactic. The world agrees that China should not be doing it. The WTO, in trying to create a level playing field for global trade, has agreed that if we are to let China in we have to phase in the impact to the domestic market.

The Liberals did not avail themselves of that opportunity. I see the former minister of international trade here. How in God's name could they leave that on the table when everyone else immediately saw the need? China agreed there was a need or else it would devastate the local domestic manufacturing sector. Has anyone ever told the former minister what the rationale could possibly have been on the Liberal's part to not avail themselves of this protection and stand up for Canadian workers and our garment industry?

• (1730)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Winnipeg is absolutely correct. A lot of my venom, more or less, was at the current government, but in fairness a lot of these problems existed with the previous government.

The so-called new government has an opportunity to correct that, to fix it, to follow the rules. The Conservatives promised that they would. They rant and rave about how bad this is, but that is one of the promises they made.

When you cut me off, Mr. Speaker, and rightfully so, I wanted to do the comparisons of all the other promises they failed to keep. It is true that the previous government absolutely screwed up big time. It put Canadian workers at the altar of the sacrifice.

However, how do we compete with a country where workers do not even get to vote for their own government? How do we compete with a country where workers cannot have the right to health and safety standards? How do we compete with a country where 5,000 coal miners on average die every year? How do we compete with a country like that? We do not. We have to work with them to ensure that human rights, workers' rights, environmental standards, et cetera are up and then negotiate trade deals that are fair for both countries.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate today on the motion for concurrence in the House of Commons committee report to provide some relief to Canada's apparel and textile industries.

I had the great pleasure, in 2004, of working as a member of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance when we did a very exhaustive study of the textile and apparel industry and came out with our report in October. The report was entitled "Duty Remission and Zero-rating of Tariffs on Textile Inputs: the Canadian Apparel Industry".

As a result of that report and other requests, the minister of finance at the time, the member for Wascana, brought in a very complete package to try to assist the apparel and textile industries in Canada to cope with the competition arising offshore and to try to give them a transition whereby they could become more productive and more accommodating to that competitive environment.

When China acceded to the World Trade Organization, it committed to develop a market economy. In Canada, we view that on a sectoral basis, guided by the Special Import Measures Act, SIMA, and we review by sector whether a market economy exists, in this particular case in China.

I have had some experience working on some issues that came up with respect to bicycles and barbecues. We had a similar problem. Industries in China are hugely competitive in terms of costs. Some of that is driven by low wage costs. I think we have to distill and separate out of this some of the issues and how we go about dealing with them.

If we as Canadians have concerns around low wages in China, there are mechanisms to try to deal with that through our meetings with the Chinese. I believe firmly that we should be engaged with the People's Republic of China and that the best way to get change is to trade and invest with China, with some restrictions.

I am not a very keen supporter of state-owned enterprises buying up our natural resource companies, and I have spoken out about that on a couple of occasions, but generally speaking we should be open to trade and investment with countries such as the People's Republic of China. I think that over the medium term to the long term that is how we are going to be able to influence policies like low wages or the employment of children and the like.

There is a very interesting book that I would recommend to many members of the House. It was written by a gentleman by the name of Jeffrey Sachs. Jeffrey Sachs is the United Nations coordinator with respect to the millennium development goals. Recently I read his book. Unfortunately, I do not remember the title.

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In that book, he talks about the use of child labour and the use of very coercive labour techniques in terms of hours of work and conditions of employment. This gentleman is responsible for monitoring the millennium development goals on behalf of the United Nations, and what he concludes is that while we should argue for improvements, the reality is that there are so many more people employed who otherwise would not have any income whatsoever. For the woman or the young child working in a small village in China, India or Bangladesh, even though the wage to us seems totally unfair and unreasonable sometimes, without it, that person might not be able to look after their children or have any standard of living whatsoever.

So while we realize that the competitive positioning of China right now is very favourable, not only for reasons of low wages but for the way it is using technology and the way it is capitalizing on some of its competitive and comparative advantages, we all know what is happening.

• (1735)

It is the concept of what is called offshoring. This is happening around the world. We are losing many industries to countries such as India and China. Rather than arguing that it should not be happening, we have to adapt and respond to that. This is a reality.

I have heard a lot of critiquing of what our Liberal government did or did not do, but I would like to set the record straight. Our government increased the Cantex funding. Cantex is a program that encourages companies to improve productivity through projects such as lean manufacturing and the implementation of new information technology and logistics systems.

Back in 2004, the Liberal government increased funding to Cantex by more than \$70 million over five years. That additional funding was to assist the textile and apparel industries to become more competitive and to respond to the competitive pressures from countries such as China.

If we look at the textile and apparel industries, we see that they cut somewhat along these lines. There is a very strong textile industry in Quebec. There is some textile industry in Ontario as well, but Ontario has had quite a strong presence in the apparel industry. Quebec does as well.

If we look at the apparel industry, we see that its main objective is to have cheap raw materials, so there is a creative tension between the apparel industry and the textile industry. The textile industry wants to compete against countries such as China, India and Bangladesh. The apparel industry wants to get the cheapest raw materials it can. Within all that, though, they do work together. There are some meetings of the minds and some accommodation is made. They generally have been supportive of a number of programs.

The apparel industry, for example, has the benefit of the duty remission orders. The duty remission orders were introduced in 1997-98 to give textile and apparel companies relief from some duties. The government had previously sunsetted them. They were about to expire in 2004. Our government decided to extend them but to sunset them to provide the industry with a little more time to adapt to this new competitive reality. I was very happy that we did so.

As part of that announcement in 2004, we also eliminated the tariff on fibre and yarn imports, which was worth about \$50 million a year, and on imports of textile imports used by the apparel industry, which was worth up to \$75 million a year. That was effective as of January 2005.

These were efforts to try to assist Canada's textile and apparel industries to adapt to the increasing competition from countries such as China, India and Bangladesh, but there is also the reality that this is a new world and this kind of competition is here to stay. In fact, under the Doha round and under commitments that our federal government has made, there is I think an inclination to reduce tariffs so that those in the developing world can actually sell their products, uplift their economies and help alleviate poverty in their home countries.

There is a careful balance here. Do we allow all these imports from countries in the developing world? In the agricultural sector, it is a very big issue. Do we allow this surge in imports from countries in the developing world so they can lift their economies, provide more employment for their people and address poverty but also create some economic destabilization in this part of the world?

• (1740)

These are difficult questions, but there are remedies available to countries where there is huge disruption. The gist of this motion is to say that the kind of competition coming from China is causing a huge disruption in the sector and the committee would like to bring in safeguards to deal with that.

To go back to the bicycle and barbecue example, there were protectionist tariffs on bicycles and barbecues. With commitments made by our government, and in fact by governments all around the world, once we were convinced that China was a market economy, those tariffs would come down. For example, in the case of bicycles, CCM and other companies located in Ontario and companies in Quebec were very concerned that if those tariffs were eliminated completely there would be a flood of bicycles into the market, and the jobs and the economy activity that goes with them would be threatened.

There was a lot of pressure on the government, but the issue was a basic one. Are we satisfied as a government that in China there is a market economy as it relates to bicycles? I will use the bicycle example first. There were many visits by Canadian officials to the People's Republic of China to ascertain whether there was a market economy functioning in the sector of bicycles.

We need to be careful because subsidies and dumping are different issues. There are other remedies available. In terms of these protectionist tariffs that Canada had on bicycles, the issue was whether China was operating as a market economy with respect to the market for bicycles.

What the officials concluded after many trips back and forth and by working with local missions was that the bicycle market was operating much like a market economy. In other words, the government was not dictating prices. That is largely the test: is the government involved in setting domestic or export prices? They concluded that it was not.

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Having worked in China as a business person and having been to China number of times, I must say that I was initially a skeptic. At the time, I had the great honour to serve as parliamentary secretary to the minister responsible for the Canada Border Services Agency. I remember requesting a number of briefings on this issue, in which I was asking people to convince me that there was a market economy operating in China with respect to bicycles. I must say that they had done a lot of work and had a fairly convincing case that a market economy did exist with respect to bicycles.

In Canada, we approach a market economy definition for China on a sectoral basis, as I indicated earlier. That aligns with the way we go about the Special Import Measures Act. There are some countries, for example the United States, that decide as a global entity when, in their judgment, China is a market economy. They have a slightly different approach. Some of the companies in Canada were somewhat dismayed by the fact that Canada had a different approach, but it was aligned to our own legislative framework and the way that we approach things generally, so that is the way it was.

The reality is that in the case of bicycles the tariffs came down. I have not followed up since then and I do not know if the bicycle or barbecue manufacturers in Canada have used some of the special measures that are available. I forget the exact process, but I think the case goes to the Canadian International Trade Tribunal in the first instance. Ultimately the decision is made by cabinet, which says that notwithstanding the obligations it has, our industry is being negatively affected in a very substantive way and therefore the cabinet is going to provide some tariff protection in the short run.

• (1745)

I am not sure if the bicycle manufacturers or the barbecue manufacturers avail themselves of those provisions. From the point of view of a business strategy, I know the companies were looking at finding the niches where Canada can compete more effectively. This is what I think we need to do more and more with respect to the textiles and apparel industry. I will give an example.

The textile industry in Canada, rather than staying with the typical rugs and carpets and apparel, has moved into textiles as they relate to automotive use and other OEM-type applications. The argument with the bicycles at the time was that yes, we would get a lot of bicycles into Canada, but they would typically be the lower end and lower cost bicycles, and that Canada's companies could position themselves in the middle to upper end of the bicycle market. That is what we need to do, not only with bicycles and barbecues, but with textiles and apparels. The reality is that economies like China, India and Bangladesh are here to stay and Canada has to find the strategies to move up the value chain.

We could look at the amount of outsourcing, or offshoring as it is called, that is going on in Canada with respect to India and the information technology industry. There was a good example that I read about not too long ago. It was in a book called *The World is Flat*.

The example used was of California's animation and cartoon industry. Today some of that work is being farmed out to India. Bangalore and various centres in India have developed a huge cadre of IT professionals who are quite qualified. They can turn a lot of that information into animated cartoons which are then sent back to

California, and the industry in California upgrades them. They are adding value to that raw material. They are finding actually that they are growing their industry in that sense, because the industry in Bangalore is just developing and is not as mature as the industry in California. The IT professionals in India are able to do the basic animation, actually in a quality way, but they are not trained yet to do the value added.

We have a great responsibility in this world as a developed country to allow more access for the products of the developing world. We are seeing a growing gap between the rich and the poor nations, and if we are going to deal with that, we are going to have to be a little more accommodating with respect to allowing developing countries access to our markets. In doing so though, there are ways in the short to medium term that we can provide some protection to our industries, but if we do not deal with this, we are deluding ourselves because this is becoming a serious problem globally.

I am not suggesting that terrorism is a function necessarily of the growing gap between the rich and the poor countries, but I would say it is a factor. Therefore, not only is it the right thing to do, it is the pragmatic thing to do to try to close that gap. One way to do that is to provide more market access for the developing countries.

With respect to this motion, my colleagues have been more intimately involved. I will have to be guided somewhat by them and do more research myself, but I wanted to speak on this topic because it is a very important one and something that we need to be seized with, and that is how to cope with these new emerging economies of countries like China, India and Bangladesh.

• (1750)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no one, at least on this side of the House, said that we wanted to put up a great big wall and exclude China, or India, or Bangladesh, or anybody else. We never said that.

We said that we are going to enter into these trade agreements, which as the member said, opens up our markets to some of their products, but we have to do it in a way that is balanced and fair. We have to do it in a way that those workers in Bangladesh, Vietnam, India and China are not exploited. We have to do it in a way that those workers eventually get the same rights and benefits as the workers in this country do. It is called good standards, fair wages, fair competition, fair regulations, fair rules for all of us.

That member knows there is a tremendous imbalance happening. Anyone who has been to China has seen the mills, mines and sweatshops there. It is not conducive to fair and balanced trade practices. It is not right that the western world takes advantage of the extremely low salaries in those countries.

What can the member offer, not just to help and protect our own workers, but what if he had to stand at a shipyard or a textile plant and tell the workers that we are going to shut their jobs down? What would he do to encourage very quickly the upgrading of workers in the countries that he mentioned so that they have the same benefits that workers in this country have?

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Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, if we wait until there is, as the member called it, a fair wage in China, India or Bangladesh, we will be waiting a long time.

Fair is a subjective matter. Perhaps the member was not listening when I spoke earlier of the author Jeffrey Sachs whose sole commitment is to lift poverty around the world. This very reasoned gentleman argues that even though we find it uncomfortable to see child labour or women in employment with horrible hours and horrible working conditions, he has actually been there and talked to some of them and they say that it is not great, but it is better than the alternative. The alternative would be no work at all and their children would be starving.

If we say we are going to wait for a so-called fair wage, with respect, all we are saying is that we are going to provide protection almost forever. Even if we start raising the wages and working conditions of the people in developing countries, our wages and our working conditions in the west are going to increase, and the gap will never be dealt with. To use Al Gore's expression, the inconvenient truth is that we will never get a fair wage in those countries based on the gap that exists today and where we are headed in the future.

• (1755)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am little perplexed because there were Liberal members on the Standing Committee on International Trade who said very clearly that they supported standing up for Canadian jobs. I am a little perplexed by the member's opinion which seems to be contrary to members of the committee. It was an NDP motion, but with the support of the Bloc and Liberal Party members, that motion was adopted and was brought here for concurrence today.

It was brought here for concurrence because those members around the committee table understood that losing 24,000 jobs in 36 months is something that the government has to deal with. The measures are here. We have the template for action that will help stop that hemorrhaging of jobs. Would the member not support stopping that hemorrhaging of jobs?

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, we find in this House of Commons that there are times and occasions when we do not all agree. In fact, I am on a subcommittee dealing with the anti-terrorism legislation and I seem to be not totally in agreement with my colleagues, so these things happen. This is the real world. It is not a homogenous playing field.

As I said earlier, my colleagues on the international trade committee have looked at this in much more depth. How I will be guided in terms of a vote, I will consult with my colleague from Brampton and others and be more apprised of the situation.

My purpose in speaking here today was to relate some of the experience I have had with respect to China, with respect to bicycles, barbecues, textiles and apparel. When I was a member of the finance committee we had extensive and exhaustive meetings and discussions with our finance minister at the time to provide some relief for the textile and apparel industry.

We heard the example earlier on shipbuilding. The Department of Finance was essentially saying that textiles and apparels are sunset

industries. Our government at the political level said no, we were not going to accept that. We said we would give them a chance to become more productive, to deal with the competition. That is what we did. The members who criticized the Liberal government should go back and read the record on what we actually did.

Hon. Jim Peterson (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Joseph Schumpeter referred to the world of a globalized economy as one of vast creative destruction.

I agree with the hon. members from the NDP that international competition is really rough. I agree with them that we have to do as much as we possibly can to help the workers who are being transitioned out to try to have the best possible jobs here in Canada. This is why we have to figure out how we are going to do it.

Unlike the NDP, I do not believe that we are ever going to succeed in repealing globalization and creating a totally level playing field in every country on earth. We know that is unrealistic. How are we going to help the workers best in the meantime?

Our government gave millions in support to our garment and textile workers to help the workers, to help the towns, to help the communities, to help the companies with transition. My goodness, there have been some that have been highly successful. For example, Peerless is producing men's suits here and exporting them all around North America.

How do we help our workers adapt to the new globalized economy? I will give two examples and we have to be good at it.

In the early 1990s everything we picked up said "made in Hong Kong". In the middle of the 1990s the front cover of *Fortune* magazine said, "Hong Kong is dead". Go there today. It is no longer a manufacturing economy. It is a service economy and it has never been richer and it is booming. It transposed and transformed itself.

Let me give an example of how a Canadian used China to his advantage. Phoenix Performance Products was making sporting goods here in Canada. Two years ago it had 52 employees. It found out that it could import one of the real staple products from China at one-sixth the cost. It had to in order to compete. Phoenix imported that product and kept its doors open because it was globally competitive. Did it lose jobs? No. What it did was transfer the people on that line to a higher value added custom product and a year later it had 93 employees.

That is how companies have to transpose themselves. This is why we as a government brought in CAN-Trade with \$470 million over five years to work with small businesses to form the strategic alliances they need in these other economies around the world, to help them take advantage of globalization rather than be threatened by it.

What did the NDP do, it voted against it—

• (1800)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We have to give the member for Etobicoke North a chance to answer the questions, although I am not sure that any were asked.

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Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I bow to the wisdom and experience of my colleague from Willowdale. He said it all. He reinforced some of the messages that I was making. He gave a good example with Peerless shirts which is exporting globally. It has created a niche all around the world. It was not intimidated by the free trade agreement. It was not intimidated by globalization. Other examples abound. I will leave it at that.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think if anybody was listening, they would be a little confused. To hear the debate today one would think we were talking about globalization, good or bad, or Canada's role in globalization. We are nowhere near anything quite that lofty.

We are talking about a change in the World Trade Organization rules as a result of China joining. We are asking the government right now to avail itself of a clause that would allow it to take steps to protect Canadian jobs from now until the end of 2008. How does saving Canadian jobs become controversial in this place? How does saving Canadian jobs become something other than the unanimous position of the entire House?

I want to bring this debate to its proper level and talk about the people who are being affected. They are the reason we are asking this to be done. Let us keep in mind that the Conservatives took a position prior to the last election. In a news release their international trade critic said:

A Conservative government would stand up for Canadian workers and work proactively through international trade policies to ensure Canada competes on a level playing field.

The Conservative government should do it. Why the debate? The government has the power and the support of the House. Why do we have to get on bended knee and beg for Canadian jobs when there are clauses to lawfully protect them? It is outrageous.

People are scared. They do not understand why we are not using the same clause that the European Union used to save its jobs. The United States saved its jobs. Other jurisdictions around the world availed themselves of this clause and saved their jobs. The Conservative government is prepared to say bye-bye to Canadian jobs. For what? The Conservatives folded up before they even said there was a fight.

I want to read into the record from the meeting of the Standing Committee on International Trade in December of last year. Ms. Wynne Hartviksen from the National Office of UNITE HERE Canada, the union representing these workers, said:

My name is Wynne Hartviksen and I am the communications and political action director for UNITE HERE Canada. Our union represents 50,000 workers across Canada and a wide range of industries. Our members work in hotels and restaurants and social service agencies and in autoparts plants. For the past century, we have represented Canadian garment workers. It's those workers in that industry we want to talk to you about today.

At the beginning of 2002, tariffs began to be lifted on many categories of apparel and textile products from China.

This resulted, of course, from China joining the WTO. She continued:

On January 1, 2005, all WTO-sanctioned quotas on apparel imports from China were also removed. Since that time, there has been a severe market disruption in the Canadian apparel industry, with imports from China rising in some product categories by a shocking 200%. Following the elimination of the decades-old apparel-quota system, many countries, most notably the United States and the

European Union, moved to impose time-limited restrictions on the growth of specific apparel imports into their domestic markets, as allowed for under article 242 of China's WTO accession agreement.

That means when it agreed to join the WTO. She went on to say:

These restrictions, which are known as safeguards, allow countries to cap the growth of imports from China in specific apparel categories to 7.5% each year, from the past year until the end of the calendar year 2008.

This combination of events—the lifting of the quotas in 2005, and the fact that the U.S. and the EU both moved to implement safeguards—has left the Canadian domestic apparel market even more vulnerable to surging imports from China, the global leader in apparel production. As the EU and the U.S. safeguard measures reduced the flow of Chinese exports to the world's two largest markets, ours has been accessed more readily to fill the void.

With all these facts, we've been left to wonder why. Why is the new Canadian government not acting to stand up for Canadian jobs? Why has the government not moved to utilize the same WTO-sanctioned safeguard measures as the U.S., the EU, Brazil, Turkey, and—just in September of this year—South Africa have all used to protect their domestic industry and their local jobs? Why is one of the bedrock manufacturing industries in this country not allowed the same chances as its counterparts in most of the developed world?

Workers in this industry like Radika are the ones paying the price for this competitive disadvantage and simply want their government to utilize the same measures—safeguards—as many of our major trading partners have already used.

Why will the government not do it?

● (1805)

Are we so frightened of the Chinese that we are prepared to allow ourselves to be beaten up to prove to them that we want to be their buddy? This is ridiculous.

Here is someone from my riding of Hamilton who was at that committee meeting and said:

My name is Radika Quansoon, and I live in Hamilton, Ontario. I've worked for Copley Apparel Group for about 22 years. We manufacture men's clothing. There are about 400 people who work for Copley, and we make high-end suits, some of which some of you guys may be wearing here.

About 90% of the Copley staff in Hamilton are women and immigrants. Over 75% of the women there can't even read or speak English.

We have jobs that allow us to support our families. We are skilled workers who take pride in our high-end, quality products. The problem is that our industry is under serious pressure. We wonder if our jobs will be there five years from now.

Levi's closed down in Hamilton, and most of the people there came to our company, but we could only take so many.

We work at good-quality, union-wage manufacturing jobs to support our families. What I'm trying to say is that we just need to save our jobs.

If these people cannot count on their own government to stand up and save their jobs when there is a legal framework to do it, then what hope do they have? This is outrageous.

These are some of the issues that other members have talked about in terms of globalization. They are all valid arguments. Let us have that debate. We need it in this nation in a bad way. Certainly, NAFTA is not serving our needs.

When we are faced with an issue where we are given a legal process by which we can mitigate the job losses until the end of 2008, I defy anyone to stand up in this place and say why we would not do that, particularly when our major trading partners, the European Union and the United States as the best examples, have taken advantage of it for their workers.

Why are we not doing this for Canadian jobs? They are just as important as anyone else. My friends, their children are going to be just as hungry as anybody else's children when there is no money for food.

This is a matter of decency, not legislation. We owe it collectively, and the government specifically, to begin the process that mitigates the damage that will be done until the end of 2008 and that Canadian workers are entitled to.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

[*Translation*]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

● (1810)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: The vote stands deferred until tomorrow at the end of government orders.

The House will now resume with the remaining business under routine proceedings.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

BANKS OF THE ST. LAWRENCE

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, it is my pleasure to table a petition signed by residents of Verchères, landowners on the banks of the St. Lawrence, who are urgently asking the government to protect riverfront properties by installing protective riprap to stop an existing wall from deteriorating.

This petition is similar to a petition that my predecessor, Stéphane Bergeron, tabled in this House on November 24, 1999, in which 621

Government Orders

people called for the implementation of satisfactory measures to halt the phenomenon of shoreline erosion. Now that over seven years have passed, clearly it is time to act.

* * *

[*English*]

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, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some serious concerns have been raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre and the hon. member for Churchill. They have articulated most eruditely a wide amplitude of quite legitimate issues that must be addressed before the proposals of Bill C-44 become law.

● (1815)

If the intent is truly to reform, improve and address the concerns of aboriginal, Métis, Inuit and native peoples, then sincere dialogue that truly hears the messages as presented by such organizations as the Assembly of First Nations is more than requisite. It must be compulsory.

In my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River, a constituency that covers the entire northern border of the state of Minnesota, covers two time zones from Manitoba to Lake Superior and takes seven and a half hours to travel end to end at the speed limit without stopping for coffee, it tells us that the expanse of this one riding affecting 11 first nations is similar to the rest of the nation that has first nation populations.

My riding also has large Métis populations in several communities and growing populations in the cities and towns of the 16 municipalities of the riding. All of these citizens need to feel that justice is being done. Canadians who do not live on reserves and already enjoy all benefits of human rights as enacted want all Canadians to have equity. Who can disagree?

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As I hear the other party representatives make their presentations, it is clear that there are some grounds for commonality. I am quite convinced, after listening intently to the arguments of the members opposite, that by following a reasonable process everyone can be heard, adjustments can be made and we will be able to develop a solution that incorporates the unique aspects of indigenous Canadians.

A demonstration of good faith by Parliament utilizing all the principles of decorum and democracy would go a long way to demonstrating to first nations that we are sincere, truthful and honest. Our goal will be to support this bill and have it move to committee with a series of amendments to be introduced in committee stage. The amendments should be to extend the implementation period, allow for consultations to be held, insert an interpretive clause and to allow for an examination of the constitutional analysis and its impact on aboriginal and treaty rights because this is a matter of human rights.

The Liberal Party is the party of the charter of human rights and supports this measure to extend fundamental human rights protection to all native Canadians. The Liberal opposition believes that aboriginal communities will need time to change their laws and interpret the Human Rights Act.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission's report on section 67 recommended an 18 to 30 month transition period and we believe the bill definitely should be amended to allow for this modest transition period. The Liberal opposition supports the legislation and again needs to push the minority government to address the human rights needs of aboriginal Canadians. These include such issues as education, employment, poverty, water supply and health.

In 1977, when the CHRA was first implemented, section 67 was intended to be temporary. The clause was added because it was recognized that it was possible that certain provisions of the Indian Act would not pass human rights scrutiny and could be struck down.

●(1820)

Since its inception, however, it is interesting to note that section 67 has been the subject of innumerable calls for appeal from national and international organizations, such as the United Nations human rights committee. The CHRC issued a report in October 2005 entitled, "A Matter of Rights," a special report by the Canadian Human Rights Commission on the repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act which recommended an immediate repeal of the section.

Since being proposed, it is clear that the stakeholders throughout Canada have had considerable concern in a most valid way, but let us not assume that because someone has a criticism or concern that it is necessarily negative. The Assembly of First Nations and Native Women's Association were disappointed that the legislation was introduced without consultation and have called on the minister to accept the Canadian Human Rights Commission's recommendation of an 18 to 30 month period of transition. This, I believe, is reasonable if we are going to address fairly those questions of capacity.

I believe that in any legislation the affected parties should have a direct response and it would probably save an enormous amount of time if they were actually addressed beforehand.

First nations themselves are recommending that the federal government not proceed with any repeal until they have been adequately consulted. When we think about what that could mean, it could be that we have recognized national groups, not only representing first nations communities but such groups as the Native Women's Association which represents constituencies that will be directly affected and, therefore, have more than a reasonable interest in wanting to have their say.

We know that there should be no repeal of section 67 until an interpretive provision has been designed, developed, passed the scrutiny and consulted upon and then we will at least know that portion will be dealt with properly.

When we think of constitutional analysis, it is also a recommendation that there be no repeal until the government concludes an impact assessment to determine the potential impact of the repeal of section 67 on aboriginal and treaty rights and, furthermore, that the federal government not proceed with any repeal until any analysis on operational issues is completed.

I believe, as reasonable people in the House, we would feel that these would be things that not only would be requisite but, in terms of fairness and equity, should be part and parcel of any provisions.

As I mentioned briefly before, there have been numerous calls to repeal but they also argue correctly that first nations people are entitled to full protection from discrimination. In re-emphasizing the key point, it is a matter of rights.

The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier, in his aboriginal policy paper, "From Principles to Action: ...Plan to Tap into the Full Potential of Aboriginal Peoples", indicated that it was his position that all first nations people should be protected by the Canadian Human Rights Act.

●(1825)

As an opposition party, we have been on a scale of somewhat to very critical of the minority government for opposing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. We believe that supporting the repeal would be consistent with our position on the UN declaration.

It is interesting how this has become a hot button issue with many first nations people who simply cannot understand why Canada, which seemingly wants to be a world leader and recognized for its position on human rights and fairness, will not support the UN declaration.

Currently, self-governing first nations that are operating outside the Indian Act are subject to the Canadian Human Rights Act. Therefore, there is no rationale for treating first nations communities differently and the repeal of section 67 would go a long way to correcting this inequity.

Adjournment Proceedings

After hearing the other speakers, I hope they will also support the bill, at least those from the opposition parties. We hope the government accepts our proposed amendments and the Canadian Human Rights Commission's report and amends the bill to provide for some period of time for transition. I would think that the minority government would see an implementation period of 18 to 30 months as being fair and that it would address the capacity issues. We also ask that the bill, as recommended by the CHRC, have this interpretive clause to assist the commission and the tribunal in adjudicating claims against first nations governments, agencies and institutions.

A recent article in *The Globe and Mail* indicated that a major Senate report warned of more Caledonian style blockades and violent confrontations between natives and non-natives unless Ottawa started setting aside \$250 million a year to settle land claim disputes. By repealing this and doing it properly with consultation, we can avoid these kinds of things. I agree.

Resolving land disputes would allow native communities to benefit from economic activities and, in every case where these have been settled, it has meant an improvement in the lives of first nations people. Similarly, as federal leaders, we need to treat the legal liabilities in the same way a business sets the money aside so this can be done.

In summary I will just clarify. In 1977, it is remarkable that this was established as a temporary measure. Although it has the effect of shielding the Indian Act and any decisions made or actions taken by band councils pursuant to the Indian Act, it would prohibit the discrimination in areas of federal jurisdiction on 11 grounds: race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted.

In an effort for us to reduce, minimize and eliminate the domestic and international criticism for our failure to repeal this, we had an obligation to do it. Historically, I think the three previous bills to repeal it did not receive royal assent due to the prorogation or dissolution of Parliament.

After 30 years we have had enough reports and discussions. We know that the number of aboriginal people representing so many different national and regional organizations have spoken in favour of repeal. I believe that what we can do prior to introducing a bill is consult and determine that, in principle, no aboriginal organization opposes it.

• (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the other day I raised a question in the House regarding Bill C-45, the new fisheries act tabled by the Minister of Fisheries on December 13 of last year.

It is ironic that this very thick bill, almost two and a half times bigger than the previous act, represents a sweeping change to the oldest act of Parliament, the Fisheries Act, which is 138 years old. It is ironic that it was dropped on our desks on December 13. Shortly afterwards, we went on Christmas break.

After carefully reading the bill, I started asking questions of fishermen, their communities and their organizations, various provincial premiers, various aboriginal groups, and environmental groups. In the premise of the preamble and the news releases, it was said that the bill came from "extensive consultations".

Believing the government to be honest, I started asking who had been consulted with. I am still waiting for the names of the people who were consulted. I asked: "Were you asked to help the government redefine a new Fisheries Act prior to December 13? Were you consulted or were you presented with papers?"

Consultation means to actually seek input from people, not tell them what we are going to do. I know that my hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary from British Columbia, is going to answer this question, so I am going to give him a little preamble.

He probably already knows a very fine and learned gentleman, Mr. Christopher Harvey, Q.C., who is a very well spoken, articulate and very informed lawyer from British Columbia. I will quote a paragraph for the hon. member, because I know the hon. member himself is from B.C.

Mr. Harvey talks about the fact that Bill C-45 is a colossal expropriation of fishing rights, which means that it privatizes a public resource. The hon. member knows that in 1997 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the fisheries are a "common property resource" to be managed by the Government of Canada in the public interest. Mr. Harvey, in his dissertation on the act, says:

This is a transparent attempt to download unlimited and unspecified charges onto fishermen. Long ago, in the B.C. Terms of Union of 1871, the federal government agreed to "defray the charges" for protection and encouragement of fisheries.

That is what it said. The parliamentary secretary can say whatever he wants from his departmental notes. That is exactly what happens. This bill will not protect fish and fish habitat. It will privatize a public resource, will further destroy fishing families and their communities across the country, and will eventually divide and conquer first nations and non-aboriginal fishermen and further create a divide that is already there.

Adjournment Proceedings

We have already said to the minister and his parliamentary secretary that if they truly want to have a new fisheries act, we welcome the debate. We would welcome the opportunity to take this to a special legislative committee before second reading so that we can truly consult with Canadians from coast to coast to coast, and those on our inland waters, in order to develop a new fisheries act that not only protects the habitat but enhances opportunities for commercial and recreational fishermen right across this country.

I have questions for the government.

Why were 31 environmental groups across the country unanimous in their condemnation of this bill the other day?

Why was the UFAW/CAW union in B.C. upset over this act?

Why were Otto Langer and Carl Hunt, two renowned fisheries biologists, one from B.C. and the other from Alberta, so very angry and upset over this bill?

Why was Phil Morlock, head of the CSIA, the association for our \$7 billion sport fishing industry in this country, never once consulted on this bill?

• (1835)

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard this speech before and saying it louder and more often does not make it any more true.

In fact, the proposed act reflects the wishes of fishermen in this country and would ensure that individuals who are licensed to fish will fish the resource for the benefit of their families and all Canadians.

Fishermen have repeatedly told us that they want predictable, stable and transparent decision making and that they want to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. They know that sustainable fisheries for the future means that conservation has to be their first goal. Bill C-45 considers all of these factors.

What Bill C-45 does not do is privatize the resource or corporatize the fishery.

The notion of fisheries as a common property resource is the law of the land as stated by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1997.

In the case of *Comeau's Sea Foods Ltd. v. Canada*, the Supreme Court of Canada stated:

Canada's fisheries are a "common property resource", belonging to all the people of Canada. ...it is the Minister's duty to manage, conserve and develop the fishery on behalf of Canadians in the public interest.

The concept of a common property resource is spelled out in several sections of Bill C-45 so that the public resource would continue to be managed on behalf of the public by a public authority and in the interest of all Canadians.

In the proposed bill, the preamble declares that, "Parliament is committed to maintaining the public character of the management of fisheries and fish habitat".

Further evidence that the act would uphold the notion of the fisheries as a public resource is found under the considerations pertaining to access and allocation.

It states that the minister and others who administer the act must encourage the participation of Canadians in the making of fisheries management decisions, as well as decisions around the conservation and protection of fish and fish habitat.

The importance of maintaining the public access to the fishery is explicitly stated as an important consideration in section 25.

The bottom line is that we need to modernize the way we manage fish and fish habitat, and that is what Bill C-45 would do. Unlike the current act, Bill C-45 would require us to consider impacts on habitat from fishing. It would require us to consult with industry when changing the rules of the game. It would give us and the industry the tools to strengthen industry participation in the day to day management of the fisheries.

It would give a formal role to a broad range of stakeholders in determining how fisheries should be managed. It would take the politics out of access and allocation so that industry could focus on making their businesses viable and economically competitive in a modern and global marketplace.

In short, we are modernizing the fisheries management and the Fisheries Act to meet the needs of a modern industry, one that has evolved significantly over the last 20 years, not to mention over the last 139 years, with an absolutely clear commitment to the sustainable use of the fishery resources for present and future generations.

Like everything in life, use of a common property resource requires rules. Similarly, there are obvious boundaries on the public right to fish. It has been a regulated activity since the dawn of Confederation. In fact, there is currently very little fishing in tidal waters that is not completely regulated by federal legislation. That would continue under Bill C-45. Without regulation and appropriate legislation, there would be chaos on the water and the health of fish stocks would be in peril.

Unlike the current act, which makes no reference at all to common property resource or the public right to fish, a renewed Fisheries Act would set in place rules so that Canadians can continue to engage in fishing activities now and in the future.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, one would almost think he believed what he just read but the fact is that he forgot to tell us that further on in the act the governor in council may override certain things that the minister chooses to do.

The reality is that it was a previous Conservative government that was in power when the world's largest collapse of a natural resource took place off the east coast, the collapse of the northern cod. Four billion of our tax dollars went to readjust that industry and over 50,000 people left the great province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Not one person from DFO or the government was ever held accountable for that.

It will be those people who will be there for the collapse of the independent fishermen and their communities.

If the member is so convinced that it is a public resource, as stated in the Supreme Court decision in *Comeau's Sea Foods Ltd. v. the Government of Canada*, why is that not in the preamble of the text? It is not there. It is incorrect for him to say that it is public property. It is not. This act would clearly turn it over to corporate hands, the big players.

If he is right about a public resource, how does he explain that the Jim Pattison Group controls over 70% of the herring stocks on the west coast? How does the—

● (1840)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but the hon. member had only a minute and it is over.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, despite allegations to the contrary, Bill C-45 does not privatize or corporatize the fishery or destroy fish and fish habitat. The member keeps talking about that. He has not pointed us to a single section that actually demonstrates this. Rather, this bill means predictable access and allocation, greater transparency and stability, and more direct participation of Canadians in the management of Canada's fisheries.

The new habitat section strikes a careful balance between allowing opportunities for economic development and protecting fish and fish habitat for future generations.

Bill C-45 is all about the sustainable development of Canada's coastal and inland fisheries. Conservation and protection of fish and fish habitat is its cornerstone. A modernized Fisheries Act does indeed reflect the wishes of fishers in this country. I encourage my hon. colleagues to support this act.

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 8, 2007, I asked the Minister responsible for Official Languages a question about the Department of National Defence.

As we all know, for many years now, the Commissioner of Official Languages has been criticizing the Department of National Defence for being the department that least respected official language legislation. Personally, as a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I noted that this was often brought up at committee. The department violated the Official Languages Act. The act was not respected approximately 60% of the time.

We now learn, through the CBC, that the Department of National Defence will do only the bare minimum to implement bilingualism. It is giving itself until 2012 to adjust its new bare minimum plan.

How can this be? DND goes into other countries to fight for the right to enjoy liberty and justice. It claims that the laws of those countries must be respected. How can the Department of National Defence justify its failure to respect Canada's laws on official languages?

Adjournment Proceedings

The federal government wants to implement this new measure or new bare minimum plan by 2012. This therefore means that Canada's Official Languages Act no longer exists.

I wonder how many senior military officers at the Department of National Defence are francophones who speak absolutely no English? I do not believe you would find one.

How many deputy ministers speak just English as opposed to just French? There are several in the former category but none in the latter.

How can this Conservative government say that it is ready to defend our country's minorities when it changes its policy for a department that defends human rights and justice? We go to other countries to fight and to defend justice. In our own country, we have a law that was adopted quite some time ago but that has never been respected and that has the worst track record.

What do we say to our soldiers, our francophone men and women? That they cannot rise in the ranks and be promoted unless they speak both official languages? Yet an anglophone will not be required to learn French until 2012. How can we accept that? The parliamentary secretary will rise soon to defend her Conservative government. How can she, as a francophone Quebecker, publicly defend it?

I cannot wait to hear her what she is going to say when she just defends the Conservative government's position. That government took away from Canadian minorities the court challenges program that gave them the opportunity to be able to defend themselves before the courts. This same government is changing Department of National Defence policy. As a francophone, how can she defend her government?

I would like to hear the parliamentary secretary tell us how her government will respect official languages.

● (1845)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to reiterate that the government has an unwavering commitment to the official languages in all federal institutions. We are taking steps to honour that commitment.

I want to reassure this House that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces recognize the importance of the official languages and that the official languages program transformation model is designed to improve performance in this regard.

We all know that the previous government had an abysmal record on this issue, and I would like to point out that, in less than a year, the new Minister of National Defence has introduced a new approach that will produce tangible results.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Commissioner of Official Languages says that the former one-size-fits-all approach did not produce the desired results. That is true, and it was a Liberal failure. Our approach will give real results. In fact, the former Commissioner of Official Languages conducted two major investigations, one into the impact of language on the recruitment, appointment and transfer of unilingual personnel to bilingual positions within the Canadian Forces, and another into language of work at National Defence headquarters.

Her investigations led her to conclude that the Canadian armed forces did not fully respect the Official Languages Act. She therefore made 13 recommendations designed to improve respect for the Act by the Canadian Forces.

The new official languages program transformation model for the Canadian armed forces is a response these recommendations. The former commissioner indicated that she was encouraged by the fact that the new plan addressed most of the recommendations in her report. She also recognized the positive role that this new model may play in improving the use of official languages in the Canadian armed forces.

The transformation model establishes a strategic vision for the Canadian armed forces with respect to official languages. It guarantees that members of the Canadian armed forces will be supervised, trained, managed and supported in the official language of their choice, pursuant to the Official Languages Act. The new plan improves compliance of the Canadian armed forces with the Official Languages Act and takes into account, to a greater extent, the particular needs of the Canadian armed forces.

The model describes three specific objectives guiding the overall vision: ensure that linguistically qualified civilian and military personnel are provided in the right place and at the right time to effectively support Canadian Forces operations and to comply with the Official Languages Act; put in place an enhanced official languages awareness and education program that will ensure that civilian and military employees are fully cognizant of their linguistic rights and obligations; establish a performance measurement system that will accurately monitor the ability of Canadian Forces civilian and military personnel to consistently provide bilingual instruction, services and leadership, when and where required by the act.

The implementation of these objectives will provide a new approach that is more targeted and equitable and that takes into account the particular structure of the Canadian Forces.

The Canadian Forces manage their staff by unit and not by position, and every unit functions as a team. This new approach will allow each unit to provide services and supervise and instruct its members in the official language of their choice, pursuant to the Official Languages Act.

I can assure hon. members that nothing is stopping francophone members of the Canadian Forces from progressing up the ranks. In fact, they are well represented in the Canadian Forces. Let us be clear. In 2005-06, the percentage of francophones in the Canadian Forces exceeded the percentage of francophones in Canada. More than—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, what the parliamentary secretary is not saying is that 89% of francophones speak English and that only 11% of anglophones speak French. It is therefore not proportional.

Now the government is saying that it plans to ignore the law until 2012—another six years. The Conservatives say that their government is committed to protecting the country's two official languages, yet they are taking away the court challenges program. How can this government call itself committed?

The Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages says, “The plan is new and clear with specific objectives and activities whose effectiveness is measurable”. The Conservatives have decided not to comply with the law and not to make people learn French until 2012 but, instead, to put together an easy plan and to do the bare minimum.

How can the government protect our country's two official languages if that is how they think?

• (1850)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I explained that earlier to my friend from Acadie—Bathurst, but I would like to ask him a question.

Why does the NDP not want to work with us to support our country's growing linguistic duality and to unconditionally support our Canadian soldiers and officers? We are talking, but we are also taking action. We are taking action by putting in place a firm structure in order to work with all francophones and all anglophones. We have to target where the needs are and still comply with the Official Languages Act.

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to ask a question in the House of Commons. On December 7 I asked a question of the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. I wanted to find out from the minister the position of the government on public versus private ownership of the Windsor-Detroit border. For those who are not aware, this is the busiest international trade corridor in North America. It is one that has a significant impact on the economy.

Recently Citigroup, a financial institution and one that anyone could hardly suggest is a left leaning think tank, did a study on public versus private ownership of international bridges and tunnels. From that, it measured several different factors. It looked at interest rates, equity, corporate income tax and sales tax. The result of all those analyses was that private ownership would have a 35% to 40% increase in toll rates versus those of under public ownership.

Windsor and the surrounding area have four border crossings right now, with a mixture of ownership. One that is privately held has significantly higher tolls than even its competitors, for example, in Sault Ste. Marie, Sarnia, Fort Erie, Buffalo and also in the region.

Adjournment Proceedings

As we move forward with a brand new border crossing in my region, our concern is that it be publicly owned and operated and that we ensure the lowest fares possible to add increased competition, but not tax the users too much. We all know about the manufacturing issues in Ontario right now. Being able to compete fairly with the international trade agreements coming into force is very concerning to manufacturers. We do not want to add an additional tax burden on the businesses currently there.

I ask for a commitment from the parliamentary secretary's government that the next bridge crossing between Windsor and Detroit will be one publicly owned and operated, similar to others being built across the country.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that we will do what is in the best interest of Canadians and Canadian taxpayers, as well as residents in the Windsor area.

The gateway is essential to Canada, and we know that it is very important. As the member mentioned, it is the busiest border crossing. It is absolutely essential to not only our trade but to our continued economic success and security.

The government is working right now with bilateral and binational partners, such as the United States federal government, the state of Michigan and the province of Ontario where it is situated, to develop a solution that ensures sufficient capacity across the Detroit River to facilitate cross-border trade and traffic, and in fact to enhance it.

As part of this work, we are conducting a comprehensive and harmonized environmental assessment, and I am sure the member would encourage that environmental assessment, to identify the locations of the bridge crossing, the inspection plazas and the access roads.

As well, we are also assessing possible models for delivery of the new crossing because we want to do what is in the best interest of Canadian taxpayers, who are ultimately our boss. Private sector participation, such as the public-private partnership, is one of the models that is being considered.

In November the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities stated at the public-private partnership conference in Toronto that the government was exploring the opportunities for using a private-public partnership for financing, building, operating and maintaining the new crossing between Windsor and Detroit. This is just one of several options, and I want to be clear with the member. We on this side of the House act in the best interest of Canadian taxpayers. No decision has been made as of it. This can deliver new infrastructure more efficiently and more expeditiously.

Although the government can borrow at a lower rate than the private sector, which is one of the considerations the member has brought forward, financing is only one of the many possible considerations that we have to look at before making this decision.

The cost of private sector borrowing would be offset by the risk that the private sector would take and by increased innovation and efficiency. I suggest the member would have to agree with what the private sector can bring to occasional projects from time to time.

We still have appropriate and effective public oversight by the federal government. More specific, Bill C-3, which was one of the initial pieces of legislation the Conservative government put forward, received royal assent on February 1. No matter what model the government picks, it will be the model for governance over our international bridges and tunnels for the best interest of Canadians. The Conservative government will also ensure that the operator puts in place mechanisms to address community concerns.

Let me assure members that the government is absolutely committed to selecting the delivery option that provides the greatest value for taxpayers while maintaining appropriate public oversight of the new crossing. It is quite frankly a balance for the best interest of Canadians.

The government will continue to work with the binational partnership, all of our partners and listen to stakeholders to explore models for delivering the new crossing that is in the best interest of Canadians. If such a model cannot meet the objectives of the Government of Canada or its United States partner, alternative delivery mechanisms will be pursued.

The Windsor-Detroit gateway is a matter of national priority and the government remains committed to ensuring that a new crossing will be in place by 2013, but we will do so in the best interest of Canadian taxpayers, the residents and all stakeholders.

● (1855)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, given the importance of this infrastructure and the future of our country, it is a slam dunk in terms of moving toward public accountability and ownership.

I have done parliamentary research in the past. What has been concluded when examining public versus private ownership is that under public ownership we have direct control over access, safety, quality and pricing. It is very important for national security issues.

Second to that, I point out that I am concerned about the way the government is operating and moving toward an American style privatization of highway systems, which means increased tolls. What ends up happening is we get investment bankers. For example, Australian and Spanish builders in the United States have taken advantage of the public assets and have made huge profits at the expense of ordinary citizens. However, now there is a backlash because they have gone too far down that road.

What I want to hear from the government is whether it will support the call for public ownership.

Now the province of Ontario has joined the cause. In the parliamentary secretary's response to me he mentioned the provincial government. Last Friday in the Windsor *Star*, David Caplan, the province's public infrastructure minister, said:

The Ontario government is urging Ottawa to steer clear of private ownership of the next Windsor-Detroit border crossing...

Adjournment Proceedings

Once again, I stress the importance of public ownership. Get on with the next crossing and avoid lawsuits. It will happen if we have public-private partnerships.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his interest and his research. I would suggest that instead of holding it close to his chest, as so many other members from other parties in the House do, he should provide that information to me. I would be more than happy to look at it, review it and provide it to the minister if it be appropriate. We are a government that is listening to stakeholders and listening to all parties because that is what Canadians want us to do, to work together. I would suggest that the member and all members do that.

I just hope it is not similar to the situation with respect to Bill C-6 which is in the transport committee, and Bill C-11. Bill C-11 was on the projected order for today but I understand the NDP put forward some speakers to try to hold up legislation again. I am hoping that

we can count on the member to provide us with the cooperation that is necessary to move legislation through the House and to move in a way that acts in the best interest of Canadians.

I assure the member that is what this government will do. We will act in the best interest of Canadians overall, but we have a balance to strike and we will strike that balance for the Canadian public.

● (1900)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 7:00 p.m.)

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