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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[*English*]

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

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

HERSHEY COMPANY

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Hershey Company announced that it would be closing its plant in Smiths Falls.

It is hard to overstate the impact of this decision. Five hundred factory jobs will be lost. A market for 1,000 litres of Ontario milk every day will vanish. The Hershey chocolate shop, which attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, will no longer draw tourists.

But these are not the only reasons why I today call on Hershey to reverse its decision.

The decision is a spinoff of what the company calls a global supply chain transformation, a process which, by its nature, tends to miss out on local profit centres. While no one can deny that wages in Mexico may be lower than in Smiths Falls, it is equally clear that some things cannot be globalized.

The decision makers in Pennsylvania may simply be overlooking the high quality of Canadian milk, which will be difficult to duplicate abroad. And shutting down the hugely profitable chocolate shop makes no sense, since it caters to a domestic market.

In years past, Milton Hershey understood the link between community and profit. I call upon his successors to live up to his example.

ZIMBABWE

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today Zimbabwe is a graveyard.

One of the worst humanitarian catastrophes in recent history is happening in Zimbabwe, a catastrophe said to be 10 times worse than Darfur. And the UN said it would not happen again.

President Robert Mugabe has ruined one of the most prosperous, productive nations on the African continent. Its population has been decimated by government-induced famine and disease. The economy has collapsed and an estimated 1.2 million Zimbabweans have fled.

Zimbabwe currently has an estimated 1.3 million orphans; an 80% unemployment rate; millions of people missing; 42,000 women who died in childbirth last year compared to 1,000 a decade ago; an average life expectancy that has dropped by 30 years since 1990, from 67 years to 37 years; and one in five adults is infected with HIV-AIDS.

In the midst of all this suffering, Robert Mugabe held an elaborate party to celebrate his own birthday. It cost over \$300 million Zimbabwean dollars. He threw a party at a funeral, Zimbabwe's funeral.

I ask the Parliament of Canada to support the people of Zimbabwe.

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[*Translation*]

QUEBEC GAMES

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from March 2 to 10, thousands of young Quebecers, along with their coaches and chaperones, will gather in the RCM of L'Assomption for the 42nd Quebec Games Final.

For over a year, hundreds of people have been working hard to give the youth a memorable welcome and to plan a seamless event, with the steadfast support of the municipal authorities of Charlemagne, L'Assomption, L'Épiphanie—city and parish— Repentigny and Saint-Sulpice, as well as a number of partners and sponsors.

I would like to congratulate and thank all those involved in this event, which will no doubt be a great success, and in particular the board of directors of the 42nd games, chaired by Dany Bergeron.

Statements by Members

I invite one and all to attend the sporting events, participate in the activities, and join our mascot Tison for a fantastic time at these 42nd Quebec Games.

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[English]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, each year on March 8 we celebrate International Women's Day. This day began to mark the fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, where 146 working women lost their lives because the door of the factory was locked.

Today, almost 100 years later, we remember how far we have come and realize how much farther we have to go.

Too many women continue to suffer under harsh working conditions. Too many women are living in poverty. Too many women cannot find or afford adequate child care. Too many women face violence in their homes and communities. Too many women are not receiving equal pay for work of equal value.

March 8 is a day that brings women together to celebrate our power and our potential. I would like to wish all the women of this House, women in my community of Surrey and women across Canada a happy International Women's Day.

* * *

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to mark the 130th birthday of one of the finest educational institutions in the country, the University of Manitoba, which is located in my riding of Winnipeg South.

Established in 1877, western Canada's first university has touched thousands of lives. Today the university is the province's most valuable intellectual asset, contributing immeasurably to Manitoba's economic and cultural success, raising our profile around the world, and fostering leadership. I have often called the U of M the jewel of Winnipeg South.

The university has a strong reputation for academics and research. Its 170,000 graduates include Rhodes scholars, champion athletes, community leaders, world class researchers and academic experts. Several members in this chamber graduated from this fine institution, and the University of Manitoba is my alma mater as well.

The University of Manitoba provides a world class education and continues to have a global impact as a centre of research where scientists, scholars and students seek innovative ways to address the most significant challenges facing Canada and the world in the 21st century.

I hope all members will join me in commemorating this very special day.

●(1410)

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Raymond Chan (Richmond, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, by the Prime Minister's own admission, judges will be chosen based on his own objectives and agenda.

I have grave concerns about Conservative attacks on judicial independence and the separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary.

I am deeply concerned about the government's intentions, as it has already eliminated the Law Commission of Canada and the court challenges program.

Judicial independence is a cornerstone of Canadian democracy. Now even the Canadian Judicial Council has spoken out against the government's attacks. The former and current chief justices have stated that the government "is trying to interfere with the sentencing process" and that the Conservative government is putting judicial independence "in peril".

I call upon the government to stop attacking the independence of the judiciary.

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ROYAL MANITOBA WINTER FAIR

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring attention to a milestone event in my riding of Brandon—Souris. The 100th Royal Manitoba Winter Fair will take place in Brandon on March 26 through 31.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II honoured the fair with her attendance in 1970 and officially declared it a royal event. The Royal Manitoba Winter Fair is one of just three fairs in the entire world to have the royal designation and is renowned as one of Canada's largest agricultural events.

Activities at the fair include equestrian events, heavy horse competition, livestock displays and sales, awareness programs, entertainment, and over 300 commercial and agricultural exhibits.

This year's event will highlight our region's rich heritage and history as the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair celebrates a century of agricultural excellence in the western Manitoba region.

Mr. Speaker, I want to invite you and all Canadians to visit the 100th Royal Manitoba Winter Fair in Brandon, Manitoba, from March 26 to 31. Everyone should plan to be there.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

REPUBLIC OF GUINEA

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Guinea is very disturbing. Last week, a number of Quebec and Canadian organizations, including NGOs, unions, women's groups and human rights groups, asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs to use every diplomatic means available to convince the Guinean president to put an end to all forms of repression—over 100 people have died, including several young persons—and to end the state of siege. Canada did not do anything, while the international community has quickly rallied.

On Monday, the situation returned to normal when president Lansana Conté agreed to appoint as prime minister a coalition candidate, diplomat Lansana Kouyaté.

However, it is a fragile peace. The population has shown that it is fed up with the president's authoritarianism and with the corruption of his regime. The crisis has an impact on the economy. The president is clinging to power. The international community must remain vigilant.

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[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party of Canada is standing up for victims of crime and getting the job done to help prevent future victims.

We delivered the legislation to make our streets and communities safer.

We have brought forward bills to end conditional sentences for violent offences; increase mandatory minimum sentences for using a gun in a crime; raise the age of protection for sexual activity from 14 to 16 years; crack down on street racing; get tough with repeat offenders and impaired driving; and reverse the onus at bail hearings. We even have a bill to deal with the proceeds of crime.

There is more. We delivered the legislation providing tougher sentences and more effective management of individuals convicted of sexual or violent offences.

Canadians want stricter conditions on repeat offenders. The opposition parties will answer to voters for stalling and for reversing the positions they held on these criminal justice files during the last election.

Our government is making the criminal justice changes that Canadians voted for and that the Liberals refused to deliver, the changes that make Canadians safer.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the defence committee yesterday, the Conservative member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke made reference to France and the so-called caveats. She also made reference to the Leader of the Opposition and his so-called dual citizenship, with no relevancy to the subject matter.

What was she insinuating? That because his mother is French that makes him less of a Canadian than she or anyone else is? Is she implying that I as a Greek Canadian am less of a Canadian than she or anyone else is? Or that because one has dual heritage one should be labelled a second class citizen?

I would ask this member and all Canadians, aside from our first nations people, to look at their family tree and realize that at some time we all came from another country.

However, I am not surprised, for that party is typically known for its divisive tactics, for pitting one Canadian against another. Who knows? Maybe its next step is to kick out all those who have dual citizenship. Nothing would surprise me.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, some experts interviewed during the television program *Le Point* confirmed that, as regards the environment, the former Liberal government merely used nice rhetoric and empty promises when it claimed to want to reduce CO₂ emissions by 6%, compared to the 1990 level.

Claude Villeneuve, a professor at the department of basic sciences at the Université du Québec in Chicoutimi, said, “Canada's position...was to shoot itself in the foot, by setting such an objective without first examining the constraints that it would bring”.

Moreover, Jean-Thomas Bernard, a professor at Université Laval's department of economy, added, “reducing emissions to such a degree over such a short period of time is totally unrealistic. The Canadian economy, as we know it, could not generate such reductions”.

We also learned that even if we stopped the development of tar sands in Alberta and shut down coal-fired generating stations in Ontario, the Dion gap would still be of 216 tonnes of CO₂ over the 1990 level.

While the Bloc is simply noticing the Liberal government's irresponsibility—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh

* * *

[English]

WINDSOR BORDER CROSSING

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week we learned that the Liberal provincial government was continuing in the shameful tradition of its federal predecessors, a tradition of ignoring the will of Windsorites.

Oral Questions

In an internal newsletter sent to government insiders, the views of residents attending an open house on the new border crossing were grossly misrepresented. The transportation communications staff who drafted the newsletter characterized their position as being opposed to tunnelling on the route leading to a new border crossing.

Nothing could be further from the truth. My colleague from Windsor West and I have heard from literally thousands of concerned constituents on this issue. An overwhelming majority of them favour tunnelling to take the trucks off our city streets and reduce the congestion and smog from idling vehicles.

I call upon the Conservative government to do what the provincial government seems to be unable to do, listen to the community, take action and get on with building a new border crossing for Windsor.

* * *

[Translation]

DORVAL GOLF COURSE

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform you that later today, I will be giving the Minister of Transport a petition signed by more than 20,000 individuals from Quebec and elsewhere who want to protect the Dorval golf course. These people are concerned about the Montreal airport's plans for expansion, which they say will lead to the destruction of the golf course green space.

[English]

As the member of Parliament for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, a riding which includes Montréal-Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport and the city of Dorval, I would urge the Minister of Transport to give due consideration to this issue and to respond to this petition in a timely manner.

* * *

[Translation]

HEART MONTH

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, February is Heart Month, and I would like to use this opportunity to emphasize the importance of exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle. Whether we are young or old, regular physical activity contributes to our general well-being. It keeps our hearts strong, improves our bone density and reduces the incidence of cancer, obesity and diabetes, as well as stress levels and anxiety.

According to the World Heart Federation, over 60% of the world's population is not active enough. The World Health Organization says that a sedentary lifestyle is one of the major causes of death and disability worldwide. Keeping your heart young by being physically active is the key to a long and healthy life. I would like to congratulate people who, like Josette Gravier, director of a seniors' activity group in Boucherville, are speaking out about this important issue.

* * *

PROJECT PORCHLIGHT

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to inform the House today that many communities across

the country are reducing their energy use by drawing inspiration from a project that started in my own riding of Ottawa South.

In recent weeks, Project Porchlight has spread to new municipalities such as Guelph and Thunder Bay, and it is also inspiring communities in Canada's north. Last week, 2,000 energy-efficient light bulbs were distributed in the Yukon. Cold, snow and wind did not deter the volunteers, who distributed the light bulbs by dogsled.

Project Porchlight is enlightening Canadians by showing them that it is easy to make energy-saving choices and reduce their energy use and, consequently, greenhouse gas emissions. I extend my thanks to the residents of Ottawa South for showing what a community can accomplish.

* * *

• (1420)

[English]

ANTI-TERRORISM ACT

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night the opposition parties voted against extending the two special emergency provisions of the Anti-terrorism Act.

As a member of the subcommittee on the Anti-terrorism Act, I am saddened that the Liberal members of that committee, the members for Ajax—Pickering, Vaughan and Richmond, who previously endorsed the view that the provisions were necessary for the safety and security of Canadians, decided to play politics and voted against the motion last night.

They, along with other members who flip-flopped, ignored the sound advice of their colleagues, such as Bob Rae, Anne McLellan and John Manley.

For the past few weeks, numerous groups, including family members of the Air-India victims, wrote letters pleading for support for the renewal of these provisions. What a shame that Liberals chose to ignore their pleas.

We on this side are still dedicated to protecting Canadians from the threat of terror.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister uses fiscal policy to enforce his neo-conservative ideology. He attacks women's equality. He attacks funding for literacy. He attacks the poor and vulnerable and he restricts their access to the courts, all by slashing their budgets.

Will the Prime Minister stop his campaign of intimidation against decent Canadians or will we see more of the same unfair treatment in the next budget?

*Oral Questions***TAXATION**

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the party that brought in new tax benefits for senior citizens. The Liberal Party opposed those measures.

This is the party that brought in new benefits for families with children at all income levels. The party opposite opposed those measures.

This is the party that proposes human rights protections for aboriginal people and matrimonial property rights for aboriginal women. The party opposite opposes those measures.

The Liberal Party is the party that yesterday voted against the families of the victims of the Air-India disaster. That is the party that called the victims of the terror attacks on 9/11 a sideshow. I say shame on the Liberal Party.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, shame on the Conservative Party that increased income taxes for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

It has taken \$3.5 billion away from families looking for child care spaces. It is taking \$3.5 billion away from working people who desperately need to upgrade their skills and their vocational training. It is taking \$2.7 billion away from students who want to get a post-secondary education.

Why is this government so unfeeling, so narrow-minded, so devoid of social justice?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the leader of the Liberal Party is saying is completely false. The leader of the Liberal Party is quoting Liberal promises made during the election campaign, promises that were broken for 13 long years. This government has kept its promises. It is the Liberal Party that has broken the promises it made to the public.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the truth hurts for the Prime Minister. Those are budget cuts made by him, at the expense of Canadians. There is no better evidence of the dishonesty, the fiscal incompetence, of this government than the mess it has made on the question of income trusts. The Prime Minister had made a solemn promise to Canadians. He has reneged on his promise. He has caused a loss of \$25 billion, a disastrous loss for the retirement savings of hundreds of thousands of Canadians.

How can the Prime Minister still look at himself in the mirror after that betrayal, which has ruined the hopes of hundreds of thousands of Canadians?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the leader of the Liberal Party were serious, he would have done his job when he was in government, but he did not.

[*English*]

He did not do these things when he was in government. If he is not going to support the things we are doing, he at least could get out of the way and allow progress to happen.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nothing—

Some hon. members: More, more.

The Speaker: Order, please. Members are crying out for more and they are going to get it but we need to have order to have more. The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore now has the floor and we will hear more now from him this time and from someone else later. However, we will have a bit of order, please.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff: Mr. Speaker, in the run-up to the budget, the Prime Minister simply cannot be trusted to tell the country the truth about income tax. He continues to deny that he raised income taxes but Canadians know very well that he increased taxes for the lowest paid.

Economist, Dale Orr, said today that the first priority for the Conservatives on personal income tax should be “to bring the system back to where it would have been had the Liberals won the election instead of the Conservatives”.

Why is the Prime Minister continuing to deceive Canadians by saying one thing and doing the opposite?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the government that brought in the tax cut to the GST. This is the government that brought in tax cuts to immigrant landing fees. This is the government that brought in tax cuts for small business. This is the government that brought in income tax cuts for transit users, for kids sports, for senior citizens. Every single time that party opposite voted against those tax reductions.

There is only one party that supports lower taxes and it sure is not the Liberal Party of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every taxpayer knows that what the Prime Minister has just said is false.

Dale Orr, an eminent economist who is often consulted by the Conservatives, has said that millions of people with low and moderate incomes are, and I quote, “losers” under the Conservatives’ tax plan.

When will the Prime Minister be honest with Canadians and tell them that he has raised taxes for people with low and moderate incomes?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government's track record is clear. We have cut taxes, we have cut the GST, we have cut taxes for immigrants, we have cut taxes for SMEs, we have cut taxes on personal income for seniors, for children's sports and for students.

The Liberal Party opposed these measures. We are giving the public tax cuts. They gave money to Liberal advertising companies.

*Oral Questions***AEROSPACE INDUSTRY**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we learned this morning that the federal government is about to sign new military contracts with Boeing and Lockheed Martin.

Although the spin-offs from these contracts are estimated at \$7.3 billion, the Prime Minister refuses to impose conditions to ensure that Quebec receives its fair share, which is 60%, since that is the percentage of the aerospace industry that is concentrated in Quebec.

Will the Prime Minister finally assume his responsibilities and add a clause to the contract that guarantees a regional distribution of the spin-offs?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our goal is to rebuild the Canadian Forces after many years.

We are in the process of drawing up contracts for a number of military procurements. There will be economic spin-offs for all national defence industries across Canada. This is only the beginning.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is letting Boeing decide where it would like to invest.

Does he really believe that Boeing will invest money in its competitors, that it will give money to the competition? The Prime Minister has not learned from his past mistakes. Once again, his laissez-faire attitude will be very costly for Quebec.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his refusal to assume his responsibilities will cost Quebec thousands of jobs in the aerospace industry?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what will be very costly for Quebecers is the Bloc Québécois' policy, which is against all procurement for our armed forces.

The leader of the Bloc is contradicting his own policy. He is merely trying to campaign for the Parti Québécois, just as the Leader of the Opposition is campaigning for the Green Party. We, on the other hand, are campaigning for the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to the Prime Minister that the contract is a federal contract given by the federal government at Quebec's expense.

Instead of using its purchasing power to consolidate the aerospace industry, nearly 60% of which is located in Quebec, the Conservative government adopted a laissez-faire attitude and the Conservative ministers from Quebec shirked their responsibilities.

How can the government justify that after awarding billions of dollars in contracts to Boeing, it is now up to the company, and not the government, to decide where to develop Canada's aerospace industry? This attitude is nothing more than surrender.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised by the Bloc Québécois' sudden interest in the economic spin-offs from our military procurement.

I am surprised because in the Bloc Québécois election platform, there is no mention of investing in our armed forces. With the Bloc Québécois there is no army in Canada, no military procurement and therefore no economic spin-off for Quebec. That is where the Bloc Québécois stands.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what surprises Quebecers is that the Minister of Industry is not taking his responsibilities as a minister from Quebec and that he is setting aside the interests of Quebec's economy.

The Minister of Industry keeps saying he does not intend to impose conditions. However, he did impose conditions when he required that at least 50% of the economic spin-offs be directed to the aerospace industry, including 30% in nine key sectors identified by the government.

Will the minister admit that he did indeed impose conditions when it suited him, but refuses to impose any to make things fair for Quebec because he gave in to the Prime Minister?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of our record. I see that the Bloc Québécois is still asking questions and getting excited, but the Bloc Québécois will never be able to take action for the people in Quebec's aerospace industry. I was flabbergasted to see the slogan on the Bloc Québécois website, with the picture of the leader of the Bloc Québécois. The slogan reads, "I invest in Quebec". I will let you in on how much the Bloc Québécois invests in Quebec: nothing. And that means nothing in economic spin-offs for Quebec.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all know that under the Liberals the prosperity gap widened dramatically, but under the Conservatives, that prosperity gap is getting wider and wider.

Earlier this week we learned that the government is afraid to go after profitable corporations that owe taxes to Canada. Then yesterday in the estimates we saw that the government is taking targeted cuts against women and affordable housing.

When is the government going to stop with Liberal-style corporate tax giveaways and holidays and start standing up for the hard-working families and the middle class of this country?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no such thing is true. This government, as the Minister of Finance has made clear, wants to close corporate tax loopholes where they exist and also make sure that everybody pays their fair share of tax. That remains the policy of this government.

• (1435)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it may be a policy, but it is not happening. It is not happening. As so much that we hear from the government, it is cold comfort to the people who are waiting for the things they need.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

The reality is that the government does not have its priorities right. We are talking about sharing revenue. We are talking about an excessive increase in military expenditures for the war in Afghanistan. That is not the way to go.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his budget strategy is leading us straight to a deficit, just like in the days of Brian Mulroney?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Not at all, Mr. Speaker. This government had a budget surplus last year.

I am expecting a balanced budget from the Minister of Finance, a budget that will invest in essential services, lower taxes for Canadians, and reduce the national debt. These are the policies of our government and they will be reflected in the next budget.

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[English]

INCOME TRUSTS

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in executing the Prime Minister's broken promise on income trusts, the finance minister has inflicted a huge hardship on hundreds of thousands of ordinary Canadians, not fat cats on Bay Street, but ordinary Canadians on main street. That is why CARP, representing 400,000 seniors, came out today in support of the Liberal proposal. The minister acted with negligent incompetence. Why did he act decisively wrong?

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that Canadians are very interested to see, I think it was the third income trust policy from the Liberals opposite. I do not know if it is the final position, probably not.

In fact, what the Liberals want is more uncertainty for investors, more uncertainty for the market, more uncertainty for the sector.

Why can the Liberals not support a good solution, one which the member himself said was absolutely the right thing to do?

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the remarks of the Prime Minister were totally wrong, partly because his finance minister is incompetent.

Why should our government have done what the Prime Minister did, which was to disastrously and unnecessarily destroy billions of dollars of savings of hard-working Canadians? That is what he just recommended.

Why for once does the Prime Minister not do the right thing, admit that he did not think it through, and support today the Liberal proposal on income trusts?

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal proposal on income trusts has been all over the map, and that has been one of the problems.

This government has taken decisive action, action which the Liberal Party should have taken, knows it should have taken, and which that member himself said was absolutely the right thing to do.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons reminded Canadians of the terrible letdown of thousands of small investors who, because of this government, lost their savings. The income trusts fiasco continues to reverberate across the country.

How can Canadians trust this incompetent and deceitful government that was responsible for ordinary Canadians losing billions of dollars in savings?

[English]

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons applauded the government's tax fairness plan. It applauded the pension splitting that came in and allowed seniors to split pension income. It applauded protecting more pension income for seniors.

This plan has been applauded by seniors and seniors groups, and members opposite know that very well.

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, CARP does not applaud the fiasco of the income trusts.

This morning the finance minister announced that his ill-conceived income trust legislation will be a part of his upcoming budget. I want to point out that the minister's first official budget announcement was a \$25 billion slam on the pockets of ordinary Canadians. MPs deserve a clear vote on this so they can effectively represent those who lost so much money.

Will the minister at least have the courage to table this in stand-alone legislation?

● (1440)

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the tax fairness plan introduced by our government by ways and means Motion No. 10 was put to a vote in this Parliament and it passed this Parliament.

I would remind the member of what the *Globe and Mail* said about the plan:

When the Liberals were in power, they did not grapple with income trusts.... Now, for cheap political gain, they could scuttle the Conservative's remedy. [The finance minister] tackled a difficult issue that the Liberals could not muster the gumption to resolve.

That is what the *Globe and Mail* said.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, says that the new language system in place at National Defence was implemented because the previous approach failed, and he wonders, in this new context, what the chances are that a francophone soldier can work in his own language.

Oral Questions

How can the Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages go along with an approach that, instead of looking for ways to reach objectives, is lowering requirements?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I had the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages with my colleague, the Minister of National Defence, who made a clear commitment to comply with the Official Languages Act and the spirit of the law. He gave a very good explanation of how he intended to do so. I encourage him to keep up the excellent work.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how could the Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages and the Minister of National Defence have the gall to claim, during their testimony before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, that Commissioner Fraser had been consulted when the new policy was developed, when he says he was not consulted and he believes that 2012 is too long a time frame for implementing the changes?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the member just said is completely untrue. What we said yesterday was that departmental officials and the Canadian Forces worked with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

The former commissioner, Dyane Adam, was given a presentation on the new action plan, the Canadian Forces' transformation model.

We also learned that the member has chosen his country, and that it is Quebec. Personally, as a Quebecker, I have chosen Canada as my country, within which—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Jean.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague from Gatineau for making Quebec his home. It is the most beautiful country in the world.

The Fusiliers Mont-Royal are truly a military institution in Quebec. Their courage and their military exploits are admired by all Quebeckers. They distinguished themselves during the Dieppe landing and the campaign to liberate Normandy and northwestern Europe.

How can the Minister of National Defence attack this francophone institution and threaten its linguistic integrity by combining it with six anglophone units from Montreal? Is that his new bilingualism policy?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is creating some fictional situation that does not exist. There is no effect whatsoever on that regiment.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not creating a fictional situation. This is reality. In October, the Minister of National Defence changed his policy for bilingualism in the armed forces, and that change set off serious repercussions in Quebec.

Does the Minister of National Defence not realize that combining the francophone Fusiliers Mont-Royal regiment with six anglophone units is in fact one more way to anglicize the armed forces?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our transformation plan for languages will be implemented as of April 1 and it will, for the first time, achieve the goals of the Official Languages Act. Unlike that party, which was in government for years and failed year after year after year, we will succeed.

* * *

MUNICIPALITIES

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 2005 Liberal budget implemented federal gas tax revenue sharing with Canada's municipalities to the tune of \$5 billion over five years. In the last year of that commitment period, municipalities will be receiving \$2 billion.

Will the finance minister put forward legislation to make this \$2 billion in annual contributions to our municipalities permanent?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on numerous occasions I have had the opportunity of mentioning to hon. members of this House that over the last couple of months we have been in discussions with the provinces and the territories on this specific issue, as well as the Canadian Federation of Municipalities.

However, I will remind members of this House that it was the Conservative Party of Canada that at the time pushed for a gas tax so that it could flow to the municipalities, not the previous government.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the baloney never stops. It was the Liberals that fought for the cities and it was our government that brought that in, no one else.

In fact, it was our Liberal government that committed to delivering \$2 billion annually to the cities. Will the finance minister be doing the same? I doubt it.

We have a Prime Minister who campaigned against the new deal for cities and a finance minister who downloaded millions of dollars of responsibilities to local governments. In Ontario, municipalities are still struggling from the severe budget gaps he created from his scorched earth policies.

How much longer do we have to wait for our cities to get help?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that before I came to this House, I was a town councillor lobbying the previous government to be able to get money for the cities and municipalities. Finally, it came to reason, but now I see another flip-flop on its part. The Liberals want to once again change their opinion on where they want to go with that file. We will act on that issue.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has belatedly requested from the Canadian Wheat Board the sales records to Algeria for the last 10 years. Is it not a fact that the data reveals that the price paid by the Algerians for board grains was higher than achieved by our competitors, in other words, premium prices for Canadian farmers through the marketing power of the Wheat Board?

Will the minister now apologize to western grain producers, the Canadian Wheat Board and Canadians for perpetuating a falsehood that the board was underselling to the Algerians? Will he correct the record now?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have requested and have the data of the last 10 years of wheat sales from the Canadian Wheat Board to Algeria.

If I get this correctly, the member opposite would like me to release it to the public. If that is his position, I would like him to state it in his follow-up question and then deal with the Wheat Board to follow, just to confirm that.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister fails—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The poor Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has asked for something and the member for Malpeque is on his feet. We cannot hear a word.

The hon. member for Malpeque has the floor. We will have a little order.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the minister fails in his responsibility to declare the facts. Why does the minister allow himself to be bullied by the Prime Minister into undercutting farmers' marketing power?

The minister violated board members' freedom of speech with gag orders. The minister violated the elected board's authority by firing its CEO. The minister violates democratic principles with fraudulent and biased questions and now there is a further violation of democratic principles with a traceable ballot.

What does the minister intend to do with the information from the numbered ballots he is tracking?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to be perfectly clear. If he wants me to release the information on the Algerian wheat sales and if he is comfortable with that, I will do so. If he gets confirmation from the Canadian Wheat Board, I will be happy to move on that immediately.

* * *

• (1450)

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that Canada's future competitiveness depends on developing a highly skilled workforce,

Oral Questions

a flexible labour market, as well as productive and innovative work places.

We also recognize the important role that immigrants play in our labour force. This morning the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development announced an investment of almost \$3 million to support employment integration for skilled immigrants.

Can the minister please share with the House the benefits this funding will provide?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to have been present today to make that announcement. The \$3 million will help provide a pathway to leadership positions in the private sector for newcomers to this country. That comes on top of \$307 million that the government announced to help newcomers after a decade of frozen funding from the Liberals.

We are moving forward in different ways to help newcomers after both the Liberals and the NDP voted against it. I do not understand what is the matter with them.

* * *

NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, an American investor named Vito Gallo is going after the Canadian taxpayer for \$350 million in compensation over the failed Adams Mine dump proposal.

Mr. Gallo is going after chapter 11 of NAFTA regarding a proposal that was under the city of Toronto and under the jurisdiction of Ontario. It is for the benefit of a numbered company in North York. That is quite the stretch for NAFTA.

I would like to ask the government what steps it is taking to protect the interests of Canadian taxpayers? Will it do a complete forensic audit of this company so we know exactly who stands to benefit from this massive hit on Canadian taxpayers?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right that Mr. Gallo is pursuing a chapter 11 case. We are assessing the merits of the case. We will be fighting on behalf of Canada and Canada's interests.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer some guidance. I researched the Adams Mine land titles and I could not find the name Gallo because of course it is a numbered company.

I did, however, find the name Mario Cortellucci, who is a very close friend of the Conservative Party. The Cortellucci clan has given \$170,000 recently, including \$50,000 to our present finance minister when he was running for provincial leadership, \$10,000 to the health minister when he was running, and \$60,000 to that party's coffers since 2004.

Would the minister phone up super Mario and ask him to help the government find out just who is going to stand to benefit from this massive hit on Canadian taxpayers?

Oral Questions

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure why the hon. member is trying to perpetuate another smear in the House but—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The Minister of International Trade has the floor and everyone wants to hear his answer. We will hear the minister now. The Minister of International Trade has the floor.

Hon. David Emerson: Like I was saying, Mr. Speaker, if he wants to perpetuate a smear, he should do it outside the House where people have access to the justice system.

In the meantime, we will be pursuing aggressively this chapter 11 case and we will attempt to demonstrate that it has no merit.

* * *

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first the chair of the Immigration and Refugee Board suddenly resigned. Then members of the advisory panel followed him. Now the IRB is raising the alarm about the government's interference, which is damaging its "hard won reputation".

Why is the government manipulating the IRB to the point that qualified individuals are suddenly jumping ship? The IRB is hemorrhaging.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Let us be clear, Mr. Speaker. The IRB selection process is very flawed and has been for quite some time. Under the current system, one person makes all the appointments and that is the chair. Prior to 2004 one person made it and it was the minister.

We are going to put in a valid system, one where both the minister and the chair work together to choose qualified, merit based candidates so we can clean up the mess the Liberals left.

• (1455)

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister made a mistake in her speech.

It is clear that the consultative committee makes suggestions to the chair. Nevertheless, we are not the only ones asking why the board is hemorrhaging.

The Canadian Council for Refugees, the Refugee Lawyers Association of Ontario and the Ontario Bar Association, among others, are also asking that question.

They want to know when the minister will fill the board's 52 vacant positions.

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact that there are vacancies is just one more example of why we need to fix it. The Liberals could not recruit people.

I am not the only one who believes there is a problem. Let me read a quote. The current chair of the IRB, Mr. Fleury, has said, "the

Board could be an even more effective, efficient and ultimately fair tribunal". That is the current chair speaking and I agree with him.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has broken his election promise to Canadians to establish a merit based appointment process for independent public institutions. This was provided for in the accountability act, but the government is going in the opposite direction: manipulated appointments to the IRB; ideological appointments to the reproductive technologies board; and, worst of all, stacking judicial advisory committees to give the government appointees a veto.

When will the Prime Minister live up to his promises to the Canadian people?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is very proud of the Federal Accountability Act. We are moving very quickly to in fact fulfill all of our promises and all of the commitments placed in the legislation.

I can only hope that the members opposite will be a little more cooperative than before when they tried to sink the last candidate that we put forward for that position.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I and all colleagues here will be glad to see that appointment process set up soon. The government has no right to manipulate these independent public institutions to force through its political agenda.

When will the Prime Minister stop trying to fill these independent public institutions with his ideological soulmates? When?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party today raise the question of the Immigration and Refugee Board. That process is being reformed and it is being reformed according to a number of criteria that were suggested in a report by the executive director of the Public Appointments Commission to have a merit based process. That is exactly what we are doing.

All the squawking you hear from the Liberal Party, Mr. Speaker, is its attempt to keep the culture of entitlement from the grave. It is not going to work.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives were in opposition, they criticized the partisan appointments of immigration commissioners. In 2004, the process changed. Now that they are in power, these same Conservatives want to go back to the old ways of partisan appointments by stacking the selection committees for commissioners.

Oral Questions

How does the government explain this about-face, except to say that they intend to make partisan appointments, ensuring they choose like-minded commissioners? They are taking the same approach with judges.

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I explained a moment ago, we are taking a balanced approach, one where the minister and the chair work together to appoint the members of the advisory panel so that there is true accountability. This is one of nine recommendations in the independent report that was commissioned. We are accepting all of them because we want a better system.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how are we supposed to believe this report is independent?

The minister forgot to mention that one of the departing members of the selection committee, Nick Summers, claims that stacking a committee is a step backwards which opens up the commissioner appointment process to patronage.

How are we to believe that the minister is improving the system, when everyone is resigning, and some organizations, like the Quebec Immigration Lawyers Association and the Canadian Council for Refugees, are concerned about the recommendation that the minister appoint two of the seven members of the selection committee?

• (1500)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quoting a former candidate of a political party.

The recommendations we will follow for appointments to the Immigration and Refugee Board were made by the former executive director of the Public Appointments Commission. He was a long-serving, non-partisan public servant.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the government, the one year land dispute in Caledonia has become Canada's longest running aboriginal occupation. The frequently absent federal negotiator, former Mulroney minister Barbara McDougall, has been unsuccessful in negotiating a resolution. The minister has said that patience is required. Patience in Caledonia has long since run out.

Now that it has been one year and nothing has been accomplished, will the minister show the necessary leadership and agree to personally meet with the parties involved?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the dispute is not one year old; it is in fact 200 years old. However, today, everyone who has been involved has acted responsibly in a positive and balanced way. I include Chief David General in that sense, the provincial negotiator, Jane Stewart, Barbara McDougall the federal negotiator and Allen MacNaughton the national chief.

The only hysterical voices are those of the Liberals. It shows Canadians again why they lack leadership and why they lack the ability to govern the country.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member for Ottawa South made false and misleading statements about the dismissal of the former environment commissioner, Johanne Gélinas. He said to Canadian press in relation to her dismissal, "Political interference cannot be ruled out".

Could the Minister of the Environment set the record straight about this misleading statement by the Liberal environment critic?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at least someone in the House cares about the environment and is asking questions.

I want to wish the commissioner well in her new responsibilities. However, I should point out that in her own statement, on January 30, she said that the discussions between the Auditor General and herself were private and that there was no interference whatsoever from the Government of Canada or its representatives.

It is time the Liberal Party stopped being so negative. Here is what the Liberal member of Parliament for Halton said just a few weeks ago, "We're so far behind meeting our Kyoto commitments now that catch-up is impossible without shutting the country down". It is time the Liberals started to support the clean air act so we can move forward on—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Victoria.

* * *

[Translation]

STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, students are only asking for what is fair. We cannot force them to pay exorbitant tuition fees, causing them run up record debt, and take away their summer employment. The summer career placements program needs more, better-targeted funds—not a 50% cut. Applications from employers are already a month late and these cuts put hundreds of jobs across the country at risk.

When will the government admit its mistake and restore the funding for student employment?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are listening very carefully to people affected by the summer career placement program, but a couple of things are clear. First, in this economy there are many more jobs for young people than there used to be. Second, we know that three out of four of the recipients of those grants in the private sector claim they would have created those jobs in any event.

We are listening and I invite the member to stay tuned. We will have an announcement on this very soon and I think she will be pleased.

Routine Proceedings

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all we ever hear is “stay tuned”. Meanwhile, the government is starving women's groups, adult literacy coalitions and now the non-profits, small businesses and summer camps that provide summer employment for students.

I heard last week that an inner city day care for immigrant and refugee children in Montreal is at risk of closing this summer.

In Victoria, it is programs at our NEED crisis line and women's transition house. Winnipeg, Hamilton and Vancouver are losing summer child care services.

Students in our communities just want some two-way accountability from the government. When will they get it?

● (1505)

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I say to my excitable friend that the government announced \$270 million in December for the homelessness partnering strategy, and \$1.4 billion are in the budget for a housing trust for affordable housing.

We have moved forward on all kinds of initiatives designed to help the most vulnerable in our country, and what do we get? The NDP and the Liberals voted against it. They say one thing, but they act completely different.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is fair to say that while we do not always agree, I have enjoyed a positive, professional relationship with my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance. Therefore, I would not want to see her get in trouble for misleading the House in terms of a statement she made in question period on the subject of CARP, which is an organization of some 400,000 seniors.

She said that CARP supported the government's position. The fact is I have been speaking to CARP representatives in the last few days. They have said that they have never had such a deluge of phone calls, emails or faxes from their membership, which has been extraordinarily damaged by this policy. Indeed, I have in my hand a press release of today from CARP, the title of which is, “The Liberal ‘Ten Percent Solution’: A Step in the Right Direction, according to CARP”, which proves that CARP does not support the government.

Therefore, I offer my hon. colleague the opportunity to withdraw her statement before she is accused of misleading the House.

The Speaker: I am not sure this is a point of order, but the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I told the House, CARP came out in support of the government's tax fairness plan, and I stand by that statement.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of Canadian Parliamentary Delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association regarding its meeting of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development in London, United Kingdom, January 18 and 19, on its participation to the first part of the 2007 ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, held in Strasbourg, France, January 22-26, 2007.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing order 108(2) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, respecting the barley plebiscite.

I also make note that there is a dissenting report from the Conservative members of the Committee.

HUMAN RESOURCES, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, or as we like to refer to it, Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act, as was agreed upon on Tuesday, February 27.

● (1510)

FINANCE

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 14th report of the Standing Committee on Finance entitled “Taxing Income Trusts: Reconcilable or Irreconcilable Differences?”.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 15th report of the Standing Committee on Finance on the topic of identity theft.

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

In accordance with the order of reference of Wednesday, November 1, 2006, your committee has considered Bill C-299, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act and the Competition Act (personal information obtained by fraud) and agreed, on Thursday, February 22, to report it with amendments.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights concerning the importance of ethnocultural communities and the prevention of crime, reintegration of offenders and the growth of safer communities.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade in relation to the order in council appointment of Eric D. Siegel to the position of President of Export Development Canada.

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

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

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[English]

NATIONAL BLOOD DONOR WEEK ACT

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill S-214, An Act respecting a National Blood Donor Week.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the World Health Organization has declared June 14 as World Blood Donor Day. One hundred and ninety-two countries and 181 Red Cross Societies have agreed to support World Blood Donor Day each year. There is no greater gift of life than donating blood.

It is my pleasure to move Bill S-214, An Act respecting a National Blood Donor Week annually during the week of June 14.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

PETITIONS

AGE OF CONSENT

Hon. Jim Peterson (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to table today signed by people from the GTA, including the great riding of Willowdale.

The first petition, signed by 44 petitioners, is to raise the age of consent from 14 to 16 years.

AUTISM

Hon. Jim Peterson (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is to amend the Canada Health Act to include therapies for children with autism and to establish more teaching facilities that deal in those therapies.

[Translation]

SUMMER CAREER PLACEMENTS PROGRAM

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition, signed by hundreds of people in my riding of Richmond—Arthabaska, asking Parliament to intervene and reverse the decision to axe \$55.4 million from the

Routine Proceedings

budget of the summer career placements program over two years, and instead to increase the budget.

The summer career placements program enables many organizations, which would otherwise not have the means to do so, to offer work experiences to youth and to continue their activities during the summer months.

This program provides young people with the opportunity to establish a network in their region of origin, which is a recognized means of fighting the exodus of youth.

● (1515)

[English]

HOMELESSNESS

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by more than 550 constituents who call upon the Government of Canada, the Prime Minister and the housing minister to ensure that the partners for the access and identification project, PAID, which provides critical assistance to homeless persons, and individuals and families at risk of homelessness in obtaining and replacing identification documents, retain its funding and that the government extend the federal homelessness funding for another five years.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in federal criminal law now an unborn child is not recognized as the victim with respect to violent crime.

When Olivia Talbot of Edmonton was shot and killed in November 2005, her 27-week old unborn son, Lane Jr., also died, but because he had no legal protection and there is no legal protection for unborn children in the law today, no charge was laid in regard to that death.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling upon Parliament to enact legislation that would recognize unborn children as separate victims when they are injured or killed during the commission of an offence against their mothers.

[Translation]

BILL C-257

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present in this House, a petition signed by at least 200 people who are asking the members of this chamber, from all parties, to vote in favour of the anti-scab legislation, Bill C-257. The purpose of this bill is to prohibit employers under the Canada Labour Code from hiring replacement workers to perform the duties of employees who are on strike or locked out. These 200 signatures are in addition to thousands of others already presented to Parliament.

[English]

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the names of approximately 500 people on a petition that calls on the government to stop the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation here in Canada and across international borders.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners call upon the government to continue its work to combat the trafficking of persons.

POLAND

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of 42 people from the city of Toronto calling on Parliament to lift the visa requirements for people coming from the Republic of Poland.

Poland joined the European Union in 2004. Canada and Poland are both active members of NATO. Poland is using biometric and secure passport identification. Lifting the visa requirements would increase family visitation, tourism, cultural exchanges and trade missions.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition to present today from the Canadian Polish Congress, Hamilton Branch.

As a result of the Republic of Poland now being a successful member of the European Union since 2004 and given that Poland is an active participant in NATO, the petitioners are asking and I am pleading with the House to please consider lifting the issue of visas for those coming in from Poland.

Given the relationship that Poland has with this country and with the world, it is borderline insulting that we are asking Canadians to have their relatives use visas. This needs to be changed.

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure in tabling a petition expressing concern about the unbalanced counter-insurgency mission in southern Afghanistan.

The petitioners state unequivocal support for the brave men and women serving in the Canadian armed forces but call upon the government to begin the withdrawal of troops from the counter-insurgency mission in southern Afghanistan.

• (1520)

HIGHLANDS LINKS GOLF COURSE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to table another petition stating strong opposition to the government's decision to force the privatization of federal public sector jobs at the Highlands Links Golf Course in my province.

Citizens, not just in Cape Breton but across Nova Scotia, are deeply concerned about job losses and the loss to the local economy which will inevitably result from such action.

The petitioners call upon the government to put the funding and management in place to keep this course in the public domain for future use and for future public sector workers.

ELDER ABUSE

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from 145 signatories who ask the Government of Canada to work to eradicate elder abuse.

The petitioners request that the Government of Canada change legislation at the federal level requiring governments to have an elder abuse protection agency established, to mandate physicians to report elder abuse wherever they see it, to establish regular inspections to

ensure standards are being met in retirement and nursing homes and that those who disclose this information are protected and need not fear the risk of their jobs.

HOMELESSNESS

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a further petition to present to the House today.

This petition is from residents of the city of Toronto who wish to draw attention to the reality that as of March 31, 2007, available funding for the federal homelessness initiative will be drastically reduced and dire consequences for homeless individuals and families across Canada will ensue.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to approve funding and announce it before the end of this month to maintain federal homelessness funding for the next five years at the same level, adjusted for inflation, and for the extension of the program into other municipalities and rural areas so that the homeless will not be put at risk.

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to present petitions on behalf of the hard-working men and women of the CAW who call upon the government to cancel negotiations for a free trade agreement with Korea and to instead develop a new automotive trade policy that would require Korea and other offshore markets to purchase equivalent volumes of finished vehicles and parts as a condition of continued access to our market.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 180.

[Text]

Question No. 180—**Ms. Catherine Bell:**

What funds, grants, loans and loan guarantees has the government issued in the constituency of Vancouver Island North since February 6, 2006, including the 2006-2007 Budget and up to today, and, in each case where applicable: (a) the department or agency responsible; (b) the program under which the payment was made; (c) the names of the recipients, if they were groups or organizations; (d) the monetary value of the payment made; and (e) the percentage of program funding covered by the payment received?

Government Orders

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Privy Council Office has contacted all departments and agencies to ascertain whether they have the electronic capacity to search for and sort financial information such as funds, grants, loans and loan guarantees by federal electoral riding. The results of the survey indicate that the majority of departments and agencies do not have this capacity. A manual search would require an inordinate cost and length of time. For this reason, the government is not able to provide a comprehensive answer to this question.

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA TRANSPORTATION ACT

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities) moved that Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to comment on improvements to Bill C-11 that have been made by the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. Before I do so, I would like to remind members that Bill C-11 is actually the second of three bills on amendments to the Canada Transportation Act that are legislative priorities for this government. Indeed, it is great news for the country and great news for the people who use the transportation systems, which is all Canadians.

With respect to the first bill, the International Bridges and Tunnels Act, clause by clause study was completed by the Senate Standing Committee on Transport and Communications on December 12, 2006.

The third bill will address the rail shipper protection provisions of the act. I can assure the House and all Canadians that the government

has this particular bill foremost on its mind. We are taking action on it and we expect to see it before the House in the coming weeks.

The Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities heard testimony from a wide range of witnesses and received a number of briefs in relation to Bill C-11. In addition to the Minister of Transport and the officials from Transport Canada, witnesses included representatives from the Canadian Transportation Agency, the Air Transport Association of Canada, the Travellers' Protection Initiative, many citizens groups concerned especially about railway noise, commuter railway operators, the Railway Association of Canada, Canadian National Railway, Transport 2000, Teamsters Canada, and the Farmer Rail Car Coalition.

Yes, this government listens to stakeholders and we listened to many of them. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee members for taking the time to hear from those witnesses and for conducting a thorough review of the bill.

The vast majority of witnesses were very positive and supportive of the bill and all were seeking quick passage. This is not surprising, since the sorts of changes being proposed had been debated since the year 2000 by the previous government and quite frankly, nothing was done. A reasonable consensus had been reached on most of those items since that time and it took the current Prime Minister to push the agenda through.

Although there was broad support for passage of the bill, many witnesses requested that some improvements be made and we made many of them. A number of the changes that will benefit the users of the transportation system, urban transit providers, communities and carriers were made. I want to summarize those for the House to clarify any misconceptions that may currently exist.

The act contains a statement on the national transportation policy that is being updated and simplified by Bill C-11. This policy provides general direction in the development of programs, regulations, investments and specific policies. It also provides general direction to the Canadian Transportation Agency and the courts in interpreting the act, which is so important.

These recommendations from the committee will improve the references to safety, security and sustainable environment while streamlining and updating the policy statement. Safety, security and a sustainable environment, which are so important to Canadians, are part of this government's agenda.

Bill C-11 ensures the Canadian Transportation Agency has the proper legal authority to provide mediation services to interested parties such as shippers and railways. The agency has had good results under a pilot project that was actually undertaken on this alternative dispute resolution approach and there is strong support for this provision.

Government Orders

The committee has actually made other changes, including reducing the proposed time frame for mediation from 60 days to 30 days, in order to make it a more effective and quicker tool for those people who need it. The committee's changes would also permit interested parties to use the agency in commercial dispute resolution processes, including both mediation and arbitration. This is something new and we think it will be quite effective.

Some stakeholders have indicated that they would like access to the agency's expertise, even under commercial processes. The improvements will enable stakeholders to address conflicts voluntarily and in a less confrontational manner, which will in many cases get better results.

The current Canada Transportation Act requires the Minister of Transport to table annual reports on the state of transportation in the country. Toward a more effective government, we actually propose that there be additional changes. Instead of a proposal from the department which stated that it would have to be every three years, the changes put forward by committee, which I think are quite positive in this case, are to table annual reports, but they would be less detailed and more focused on an overview of the system's performance, including trends over the past number of years.

● (1525)

In addition, the committee recommended that a more comprehensive report, one that is actually much more detailed, be tabled every five years. Transport Canada will, however, continue to make existing detailed information available on its website. A lot of data that is accumulated on a daily basis and updated on a weekly basis will allow stakeholders who wish to do their own analysis to go on the website and do so.

The Canada Transportation Act permits the minister as well to undertake a public interest review of significant mergers or acquisitions in the airline industry to ensure that the government and future governments and the minister will know what is going on with the large conglomerates that actually employ many Canadians and have such a direct impact on our economy. This review complements the review of competition issues conducted by the Commissioner of Competitions. Bill C-11 would extend this provision to cover all modes.

One of the first steps would be a decision by the minister that the proposed transition raises issues that warrant a public review. The bill provides for the minister to issue guidelines related to this review. Amendments approved by the committee would require the minister to consult with the Competition Bureau in developing guidelines and to include the factors that would be taken into consideration when determining whether a public interest review should be conducted.

The committee approved a number of important changes related to airline service in Canada as well. One change, for instance, would require the Canadian Transportation Agency to report on the complaints it receives in carrying out its air travel complaints functions, including the number and nature of the complaints, the carriers against which the complaints were made, how the complaints were addressed and systematic trends in the industry as far as the complaint process is concerned. This information would actually be included in the agency's annual report.

I should note as well that the agency already publishes information regarding many important airline consumer issues in its annual report and on its website. These changes would be improvements to an already open and transparent reporting process.

Bill C-11 contains a provision that would give the agency the authority to develop regulations on air fare advertising; yes, that is right, air fare advertising. Many consumer groups and consumers in Canada have looked forward to this provision. The amendment made by the committee would oblige the agency to make regulations on air fare advertising following the passage of this bill. Truth in advertising, in essence, is what we heard from many groups.

Bill C-11 contains a provision that would allow the agency to resolve disputes on railway noise as well. This would be the case if the railway and complainant could not resolve their dispute through voluntary measures. This provision has attracted considerable interest. A lot of discussion took place by committee members and indeed by many of the witnesses, including groups from Quebec and British Columbia.

The committee made a number of amendments to the noise provisions which, it is hoped, will improve the co-existence of communities and railways. This country for the most part was established and has been kept together by rail. Rail is a very important part of our community and our country, but at the same time it has to coexist with the communities around the railways. We tried to find that balance in the legislation.

First, the committee added something new, vibrations, which was a common complaint, as a matter that would be subject to the provision. Vibrations will be considered in the act.

Second, the committee changed the standard to which the railways would be held. Bill C-11 would have required, as it was in its original form, "to not cause unreasonable noise", when constructing or operating a railway. We did something different and we are very proud of this provision. We changed it to "cause as little noise or vibration as possible". This is very important because it will maintain less noise for those people who live in those areas. It is very, very important to them. We were listening. This government does listen and it reacts in the best interests of Canadians.

Finally, the committee's amendments would add the potential impact on persons residing on properties adjacent to the railway as a factor that a railway must take into consideration when it attempts to cause as little noise or vibration as possible.

● (1530)

In closing, I would like to thank the committee members for their due diligence, hard work and cooperation in improving this bill. We have a great bill before Parliament now as a result.

I would encourage the House to move quickly to approve the bill. There is a lot of support for this bill in commercial and residential areas across this country and a lot of people are watching this today to see that cooperation move forward.

Government Orders

We owe it to many stakeholders who have waited patiently for the last five years especially. I thank them for their patience. I hope we can move forward with another great initiative from the committee.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his intervention, most especially because he has reminded all of us that we have been very patient.

I am looking for a confession of the road to Damascus variety on his part. Perhaps he could give us an indication as to why it took him and his party this long to recognize that the predecessor bill to this legislation presented by the former government, that would be a good Liberal government, was one that he and his party felt they had to vote against in the 37th Parliament and had to vote against in the 38th Parliament. Now he comes with open palms to say, "Please recognize the value of your ways and support us now in this endeavour when we have finally discovered that good legislation ought to transcend partisan politics".

Would he explain to us what deviant road to Damascus he and his party had to travel in order to recognize that this is a piece of legislation that the Liberal Party put forward because it met the needs of Canadians five years ago?

• (1535)

Mr. Brian Jean: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, there was a blinding light on the road to Damascus. It was more like a blinding light of Conservative government because the people spoke and they got what they wanted. They got a Conservative government that was going to take action.

Let us talk about Bill C-44, the predecessor to this bill, and I think there was another bill before that, but not another one before that one, yet it would not surprise me if there was another one before that. That bill was far too cumbersome, something that just could not work because we could not find consistency.

This is the situation. This Conservative government wanted results, so we split the existing Liberal bill into three bills. So far in eight months we have gotten two of those bills to this point. One bill passed, Bill C-3, another bill is before us today, Bill C-11, and another bill is coming forward in two weeks with some cooperation from members on the other side, as long as they can see and are not be blinded by the Conservative light. It will move forward and we will get results for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a comment before putting my question.

The parliamentary secretary is well aware of the reason why the previous bill, under the Liberal Party, was not passed. In his reply, he said he split former Bill C-44 into three parts. However, he should have split it into four parts, because there is a whole part that the Conservative Party decided not to include, and which provided for the establishment of a new corporation. It would have allowed VIA Rail to become a corporation to ensure its own development. Among other things, it would have allowed VIAFast, a rapid rail service between Quebec City, Montreal and Windsor, to become reality.

Everyone knows that the Conservative Party is squarely opposed to VIA Rail's development. That is the reality.

However, this is not about what should have happened, or what we would have liked to see, but about passing Bill C-11.

We talked about noise and complaints. As soon as the bill is passed, many complaints will likely be lodged, because citizens, communities and citizens' groups have been waiting for a long time to see the Canadian Transportation Agency have these powers.

Can the parliamentary secretary guarantee that the transportation agency will have all the necessary staff to deal with the complaints filed by citizens or citizens' groups against noise and vibrations?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, indeed the member has raised a very important issue, but I can assure him, as he has seen over the past 12 months, this government takes action and gets things done.

Some of my Quebec colleagues approached me before the issue of noise vibration arose. They were wondering whether we could hear specific witnesses, for instance, from Lévis and different places in Quebec. We made way for those witnesses. We accommodated them and we got results in this particular piece of legislation.

It is like everything that this government does. There is positive interaction and cooperation from the other sides to get results for Canadians. We will make sure we have enough people to do what is necessary in this particular case, because we get results. We will continue to get results for people from Quebec and right across the country, from British Columbia to Atlantic Canada.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that the opposition side, now dressed as government, is waiting to hear this speech with bated breath, most of it after much libation has passed through the lips.

Without casting too many aspersions on this, one has to be in control of one's senses when one listens to some of the rhetoric of the government side. I wondered why those members would not take just a moment to say that they have a responsibility as parliamentarians to come forward with legislation that is good for all Canadians. It was there and we are going to try to implement it, they could say, even though for partisan reasons they said no in the past. They said they were not going to support Bill C-44.

But in a stroke of blinding light, of genius, let us divide it up, those members said. They came to this side and asked for our support. We said why not, it is in our collective interest to ensure that legislation that helps Canadians is put forward.

I am not going to reread into the record that which the parliamentary secretary has thought useful for his party's business to talk about what is in the bill. I gave an indication earlier on that there are several things that are important about this bill and that attracted a positive reaction from us.

Government Orders

One of them, of course, is in regard to railway lines that are no longer used, that are declared underused by the railway companies, in that commuter agencies in the various centres through which they pass would have access to them for the purposes of developing appropriate commuter traffic. This would allow us as governments, whether it is this Parliament or the provincial legislatures or the municipalities, to develop a transportation policy for commuters in order to address the environmental, economic, transportation and consumer issues that are evident for everyone.

To do that, we have to put an infrastructure in place that would allow the minister to play a proactive role. That is what Bill C-44 intended to do. The government opposite fought that with every breath it could muster. Today the Conservatives want to put themselves in the clothes of shining bright knights who would accomplish the solutions that would satisfy all Canadians' aspirations and needs.

The truth is the opposite. The government has been asking for and receiving the support of the opposition parties. I see my colleague from the Bloc way down at the end to my left—I can say he is here, I do not have to say he is not here, as that would be for those people—and he has been patient. He has offered the same kind of support that we have offered, because in this instance, at least, he too is thinking about the commonweal.

While we have been doing this, we have watched as the Minister of Transport has ignored the larger implications that were resident in Bill C-44. The underlying principles are as follows: do what is good for the economy of the country, do what is important for the infrastructure and transportation policies of this country, and take into consideration the economic impacts of transportation policies, especially, in this instance, on rail traffic.

What did the government do? We found the minister preferred to do nothing with the cooperation the opposition parties have been offering. So what happened? With Canadian National Railway, he allowed a work stoppage, a strike, to go on for ever so long. I am sure my colleague down at the other end has received the same kinds of submissions that I have from all interested parties and communities across Canada. Whether they were in the lumber industry, the mining industry, the wheat, grain and oilseeds industries, the commercial products industries or even, as we now know, the petrochemical and gasoline industries, we had no movement of goods.

● (1540)

There was no movement of goods while the minister's parliamentary secretary and his government stood and said, "Oh my. Aren't we wonderful? We're just like Jack Horner sitting in a corner. We're just marvellous people".

Meanwhile, there are communities everywhere around the country, especially those one-industry towns, those in northern Ontario, northern Quebec and northern British Columbia, to name just three places, that are completely, totally and undeniably dependent on rail traffic to get their goods to market, to keep the mills open and to keep the mines going. All them were crying for some intervention while two unions, local and international, with CN, played with the economic life of all Canadians and the minister sat there and did nothing.

That government did nothing and then turned around and told us that it was doing all kinds of great things. Look at us, said the Conservatives, we have been here for 13 months and look at all that we have accomplished.

We have asked for the cooperation of the opposition parties, they said, and look at what we in the opposition did: we gave it. We split up a bill, Bill C-44. One aspect of that has been passed. A second one is here before us today. There is a third one down the road. We have been trying to move this along really quickly.

The debate on this should have finished last week, but no, we had the minister for hot air insulting one of my colleagues, the member for Mississauga South, I think, who was here a moment ago. He is moving around the table now. Instead of carrying on with discussions of substance, that minister for hot air wanted to engage in discussions of disruption, and so the bill goes on a little while longer. Instead of capitalizing on the opportunities to build on the cooperative spirit that was here in the House, on this side of the House, with respect to transportation, particularly with this bill and particularly with movement of traffic around the country, while communities everywhere were crying for our help, he did nothing. The Conservatives did nothing. Not only did they dither, but they did nothing.

Let us look at the ports, for example. The ports in the lower mainland in British Columbia were crying for some sort of intervention. No, I am sorry, that would have been too much to ask for. They were looking for some kind of attention and interest on the part of the Minister of Transport to get some things moving. They had to lay off all the personnel, or portions thereof, at the ports. They had boats sitting out in the harbour; others still more. Trains were backed up. Wheat, lumber and minerals were being held up out in the west. Markets out in the Orient and in the States were looking for some kind of product and some kind of interest on the part of the Government of Canada to get that product going. There was nothing.

The Minister of Transport said:

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

My name is Pontius. I wash my hands.

[*English*]

It was a labour issue, he said.

The Minister of Labour came before our colleagues and asked us if would we help him out and support back to work legislation if it became a real labour issue. We said of course we would do that, but we asked why the government did not get the infrastructure in place. We asked why the government did not do the minimum that is required of all of us, which is to show interest. It is not a question of partisanship.

Government Orders

So now what we have in southern Ontario, for example, in parts of Quebec, and in fact almost everywhere in the country but particularly in southern Ontario, is a huge shortage of gasoline, because some of it has not been able to get to the market. Yes, there have been other interests as well, and there have been other incidents, but the product could not get to market, and there has been an increase in the price, diminishing our ability to be productive and competitive and obviously bringing all things to a standstill.

I am sure that the minister for hot air on the other side will immediately say let me see now, has there been a diminution in the emissions of greenhouse gases? Yes, that must be so in part, because there is a voluntary participation by all of those drivers who could not get their gasoline and so walked to work in the middle of winter. Great.

I guess I am reduced to a little bit of sarcasm because I sat there, watched, waited and in fact offered all the cooperation that this side of the House could offer the government to say, "Get this done". But those members were of course interested in heckling, as they are not out of the opposition mentality. They were chuckling, laughing and being as disruptive as they could.

Could we imagine that on this side? No, it would not happen.

I know you will be shocked at this, Mr. Speaker, but there is a member of the transportation committee who comes from the riding of Essex, which is a focal point for all of the manufacturing trade in southern Ontario. The trade goes through that riding into Detroit and on to the other side of the border. Of about \$2 billion worth of trade, about two-thirds of it goes through that area. What happens? Instead of being able to deal with his own party in government to get the trains back on track, he has to be fighting his own party.

Competition in parties is a fact of life that we deal with. One always has to worry about whether the enemy is on that side of the House or on this side of the House, but there we had a ridiculous situation. I am looking at a CanWest news story dated February 22 about how the member had to worry about "murder threats" from his own riding executive. There are all kinds of soap operas going on within that party. No wonder those members cannot address the issues of the country. They are too busy trying to take each other out.

• (1550)

Mr. Dean Allison: What are you talking about?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: What are you talking about, he says to me, and here it is right here. He is pretty short on dates. I cannot read the name because of course that would be inappropriate, but here is the riding of Essex, where the campaign chairman has been charged with—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, you know how reluctant I am to interrupt an hon. member when he is speaking, but it seems to me that the tenor of this debate has absolutely nothing to do with the bill that is currently before the House. I would like to call him on relevance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): As the occupant of the chair, I was hesitant to interrupt the volley of oratory from the hon. member. I know that he is much more experienced than I am.

He has been here in six Parliaments so far, so he knows also not to mention either the presence or the absence of members. I am sure that he will not do it again, especially during the next seven minutes that he has left.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I am flattered that you were actually listening so attentively to what I was saying.

I was trying to address what I think is a perfect set of circumstances. We have an opposition party that had presented legislation and given an indication of how to actually get things done, and an opposition party, now government party, that is looking for that kind of cooperation. We have a perfect opportunity to apply that cooperative spirit. But what happens? Nothing happens.

Our trade is going down. Lumber mills are closing. Remote communities in Canada find themselves even more isolated. Jobs are being lost. We are losing market share. All of these things are happening. Why? It is because, as I pointed out, of what is represented in the press about a situation within their own party that is preventing the Conservatives from being productive here in the House. They are saying it is a drive-by smear. I imagine members would like me to read all of this, but I will just refer them to the articles. They can be found in CanWest News Service and the *Windsor Star* on February 22 and February 3 respectively.

Those members will have an opportunity to be able to see the impediment. The public watching this is probably wondering what is so significant that is preventing the government from doing what it needs to do. Why would the government not take advantage of an opportunity to demonstrate that it is actually a proactive government and become involved in one of the most critical situations facing the nation today?

The government waited until the workers themselves started to go back. They went back for their own internal union reasons, not because the Government of Canada was interested in what was happening to communities everywhere.

The forest product sector pleaded with every member of Parliament on the Hill. It looked for members who were willing to listen to its pleas and get involved in this litigation so that products could move. Nobody could be found to listen except for the Minister of Labour, not the Minister of Transport. The sector could not get a response.

It is up to us to raise these issues. The Minister of Transport is the same individual who, on a *W5* production some one month ago, turned a deaf ear to the issues of safety that are being represented right here in Bill C-11.

We wanted to give the Minister of Transport the authority to be involved in safety and security issues as they relate to all transportation modes, most especially in the railway industry, and especially because the railway industry wanted the government involved. What did we get? We received a shrug of the shoulders from the Minister of Transport.

The former government had launched an inquiry into the safety procedures of railways. The report came down. Everybody waited with bated breath to tell us what was wrong and what measures were being taken to resolve them. We had already put in place Bill C-44 to address some of those issues.

Government Orders

The Conservative government has been in place for 13 months with the benefit of all of the initiatives of the previous government. What did it do? It did nothing. The minister shrugged his shoulders on national television and said he could not even release the report. Everybody must have been asking why not? Does he not have an interest in transportation issues in the country? Is he not interested in the safety of passengers and the value of the commercial product that is being moved from one end of the country to the other? He said he could not because it mentioned a third party. Imagine a minister of the Crown saying he could not.

The minister is asking for enabling legislation right here. We are giving him all the authority he needs. Why can he not tell us what was wrong with those trains? There is a public inquiry. Does the public not have the right to know? He said he could not. I think he did not want to. Why not? That is a good question.

•(1555)

I met with people from CN. I met with people from the railway industry. I met people from the other transportation modes, but I especially met with the people from CN and asked whether they had an objection to that report being published.

Does anyone know what the answer was? It was, “No, we only wanted to be consulted on the first draft of the report and your former colleague in cabinet, Mr. Member of Parliament from Eglinton—Lawrence, the minister of transport, asked us for input. We gave him the input and out came the final report. You are no longer in government, so where is the report? Why is it not public? Why can't we know as Canadians, whether we are commercial users or personal users of our transportation system, and why can't we know what that public report tells us about how we can move our products and persons safely around this country from point A to point B?”

When the government members applaud themselves, I do not know how they do not get cricks in their shoulders. It must be tough to do this and smile at the same time, instead of giving credit where credit is due to the people who worked diligently to put forward legislation and initiatives that were designed for the benefit of Canadians everywhere, especially in the remote communities of this country, to keep it whole, to keep it solid and to keep it united.

The government should have taken at least one moment to recognize that it has an obligation to the Canadian public and that it should discharge that obligation rather than do nothing. That is the shame in all of this. The government is squandering our cooperative attitudes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just listened to the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence. He is going from one situation to another. At one point he was talking about the Canada Transportation Act, which we are going to amend, and then he started talking about the labour dispute at CN over the last few days.

I do not think that the hon. member is drawing the right connections. The recent labour dispute at CN resulted in the Department of Labour and I myself as the minister taking action to

appoint mediators so that the two parties could arrive at a negotiated settlement. As the labour minister, I had certain decisions to make in order to bring the dispute to an end and ensure that Canadians get the service they deserve.

When companies no longer have the raw materials they need to continue production; when remote communities are no longer receiving the food and fuel they need to stay safe and maintain their quality of life; when companies are closing, like the potash mines in Saskatchewan and other similar situations; and when the forest sector is dying, the Minister of Labour has responsibilities he must carry out.

The hon. member must know that we are a minority government and need opposition support in order to pass back-to-work legislation, as we did last Friday morning.

It was not until just a few minutes before our back-to-work bill was to be introduced that one of the opposition members told us the Liberal Party would support it.

The hon. member was saying he played a role. Could he please tell me what exactly he did to end the dispute? I would like to hear what he has to say.

•(1600)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for his decision. Clearly, he took an interest in the situation, and I was surprised. I have known him a long time. He was in government when I was in opposition a few years ago. I know that he wanted to do something positive.

He says that he was waiting for the opposition—in this case, the Liberal Party—to support him so that he could resolve the situation. Because of what he said, he got the response he was looking for.

I did not say anything against him, because he acted appropriately. I was talking about transportation infrastructure. The Minister of Transport did not act as I would have liked, as the public would have liked, as the Minister of Labour acted. He asked for and received support. He took action and the situation was resolved. Someone who is willing to cooperate and asks for cooperation will get it.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am listening to my colleague, and I even listened to what the Minister of Labour had to say. It is true that what is happening at CN is serious. Railway safety is a serious issue. The only problem, and this makes me smile, is that Bill C-11 has nothing to do with that, but does address an equally important problem: noise and vibration.

This is important to the people living near marshalling yards such as the Moreau yard in Hochelaga, Joffre in Lévis, Farnham in Brome-Missisquoi and Pointe-Saint-Charles in east Montreal. Three Parliaments have debated legislation on this issue, yet these people still have not seen a solution to their problems. Bill C-26 was introduced during the 37th Parliament, Bill C-44 during the 38th Parliament, and now we have Bill C-11. In his speech earlier, my colleague never mentioned what we are trying to deal with today: the problem of noise and vibration.

Government Orders

My question is this: are we finally going to be able to solve this problem today, and will the Liberal Party support us in solving the problem of noise and vibration, so that we can move on to other problems? That is my question.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence should know that there are two other MPs who would like to ask questions. We have five minutes and I would like to divvy up the time so that it is fairly distributed.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, this House is a great place. It generates and engenders virtues, among which of course is patience. I thank you for drawing that to the attention of other members because I know that they are anxious to understand how to get to a question. Thank you.

[Translation]

The member of the Bloc looks puzzled. He did not ask me his question because he already knows the answer. I gave it to him a few days ago, in another debate on Bill C-11. I asked him what they understood by the amendment they had included in the bill. We could put an end to noise and vibrations tomorrow by eliminating trains and railway transportation. There would be no more noise. However, the point here was to be reasonable and to allow reasonable activity.

An hon. member: Accommodations.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Accommodations, but what accommodations? If they have a solution, let us hear it. I have a solution. Railway transportation is obviously everywhere, but we as consumers must also act reasonably. The final result is what is important. For this reason, I will support the bill.

• (1605)

[English]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the comments of the member for Eglinton—Lawrence on Bill C-11, which had to do with the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act.

He wandered into a related subject on the recent strike of UTU workers at CN. If I understood him correctly, he was really chastising the government for not imposing back to work legislation more quickly.

I am a bit surprised to hear the member say that. I think he is well aware that we have a responsibility as members of Parliament to respect a legal strike when it occurs and to respect the negotiating process that takes place. I think he is aware that it very often is much easier to impose an agreement and to end the strike than to take some responsibility for what happens after that. Very often if that happens, then there is bitterness, rancour and unresolved issues and the strike simply drags on.

My question is twofold. First, is it his view that the government should have imposed the back to work legislation even more quickly than it did? Second, what does that say about the member and for that matter the view of his colleague on anti-scab legislation?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence should have a short moment to respond to

this, but the more this goes on, the more I believe the point of order raised earlier by the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park is valid.

Let us narrow the next minute and a half that we have left.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, that is sort of a retrospective judgment, but it is yours.

I want to advise the hon. member, who has been here for a while as well, that, first, I do not wander into a position. Second, please do not infer what I am not interested in implying about labour relations. I went deliberately into that issue because I wanted to illustrate what the government had been doing with respect to the goodwill, from this side of the House, it could have utilized in order to put in place legislation that everybody judged was important for the country.

With respect to understanding what the dimensions are regarding respecting collective agreements, of course we always respect that. I also equally and vigorously respect the fact that in eastern Canada there is one rail line, no competition at all, and that all users, whether they are shippers or the general public, did not have use of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-11. I hope that this bill will be passed.

Earlier, I asked my Liberal colleague some questions. Things are not easy in this Parliament, particularly because of the very different approaches to development or to problems the public may be having. Too often, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party have great plans, but neither of them solves people's real problems. Bill C-11 will try to offer a little salve for the wounds of people who are suffering all sorts of upsets because of railway company operations.

The railway industry is expanding rapidly and has undergone major technological changes. Although it provides a useful and increasingly profitable service, it imposes constraints on the neighbouring communities. This has gone on for years, as I said earlier.

The problems associated with the noise, vibration and odours generated by railway operations as a whole have existed for a long time and are becoming more serious with the development of new technologies.

The people listening to us—Quebeckers and Canadians—will understand that for reasons having to do with economies of scale, the way things are done in the railway industry has changed. For one thing, in the mid-1990s, coupling of locomotives and cars was done by human beings. Starting in the mid-1990s or early years of this century, human beings were replaced by remote coupling, which is done electronically or electrically.

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Once this way of doing things was changed, once they wanted to achieve economies of scale by reducing the number of employees in switching yards, the problems associated with noise, vibration and odours became worse. This is done following Transport Canada's standards. As yet, there is no technology that would allow this to be done while making the least noise possible. Since the mid-1990s, many groups of people who live alongside switching yards have got together and formed associations to try to control the noise and odour pollution generated by the railway industry.

Wanting to limit problems for neighbouring communities does not mean being opposed to rail transportation. On the contrary, we want the rail industry to expand. Railway companies, like Canadian Pacific and Canadian National, make profits. While they had some problems during the 1980s and 1990s, I think that since that time they have paid their shareholders a very handsome return. In fact, it rises every quarter.

Phenomenal profits are being made. Profits like these had never before been made in the railway industry.

Pressure is being taken off the roads, and that can help combat greenhouse gases. We are aware of this. Rail transportation can limit greenhouse gases, because it reduces the number of trucks on the roads. It also imposes constraints, however.

Since 2000, that is, since the 37th Parliament, this House has been trying to solve the noise problem. The Liberals introduced Bill C-26. It was virtually an omnibus bill which addressed a number of problems in the railway, airline and other industries, and which made VIA Rail an independent corporation, a corporation with share capital. This could have helped it to expand. From the outset, the Conservatives were against expansion by VIA Rail, which could have engineered its own expansion and could have created VIAFast. Members will recall that debate. The Liberals were divided: there was the Chrétien clan and the clan led by the member for LaSalle—Émard. The result was division on Bills C-26 and C-44. Bill C-26, which was introduced in the 37th Parliament, never saw the light of day because of that division. In the 38th Parliament, Bill C-44 also failed to get passed.

• (1610)

Once again, the people who live near marshalling yards and suffer from the noise pollution and other by-products of the railway industry have not seen any improvement. This problem was buried in omnibus bills. One of the methods used by the Conservative Party in this 39th Parliament was to divide the previous Bill C-44, which was debated in the 38th Parliament, into three.

The Conservatives say now that they broke it up in order to speed things along, but they are concealing the real reason, which is that they wanted to remove everything that had to do with VIA Rail from Bill C-44.

The Conservatives have never wanted the railways to really develop. They did not want the railway companies to compete with airlines for passengers. That was their choice. They wanted to protect WestJet rather than help rail develop sufficiently, the kind of development that the Bloc Québécois has always supported.

It is very important for the transportation sector to become more competitive. Rail is healthy competition for the airlines. There is talk

of a fast train, although not a high speed train, between Quebec and Montreal and Montreal and Windsor. The Bloc Québécois has always supported this vision. The Conservatives, though, divided up Bill C-44 because they did not want VIA Rail to become an independent corporation ensuring its own development or the famous VIAFast project to see the light of day, that is to say, a fast Quebec City-Montreal, Montreal-Windsor train. That is the real reason.

All the same, we would have supported an omnibus bill that included all of Bill C-44. We supported Bills C-44 and C-26 at the time, and now we support Bill C-11, which will deal once and for all with the noise pollution problem.

It is never simple. I use this example because, at the same time, the people listening to us will understand how Parliament works. It is never simple. Insofar as the noise issue is concerned, the Conservatives took it upon themselves to bring a bill forward that touches on this problem. However, there is not just noise pollution but also vibration pollution and fumes. There are all kinds of sources of environmental pollution.

During our discussions with the government about Bill C-44, we touched on these issues but were not successful because of the entire VIA Rail question, even though we were working on fixing the pollution problems. If we are going to fix them, let us really do it. But with government things are never as straightforward as that. We have to understand. The Conservatives have never had any vision of the future; it is always short-term. So they decided today to include noise pollution in Bill C-11. Like us, all my colleagues and all the citizens out there say that if they are going to fix the railway pollution problem, why not take advantage of this opportunity to include fumes in the bill and the issue of locomotives turning night and day and producing fumes and environmental problems.

Sometimes you walk along the rails and you see pollution. Because the rails have been changed, stacks of wood are piled up along the tracks, and so on. The Bloc Québécois wanted to solve all the environmental problems related to railways, but the government decided that the noise was the problem. The Bloc Québécois tried in committee to put forward its own proposals. We wanted to solve the problems of noise, vibrations and fumes. We had clearly understood that, by including only noise, Conservatives did not want to solve all the environmental problems. So we went with vibrations and we asked ourselves whether we could perhaps solve at the same time the problems of vibrations and fumes from locomotives.

This is where we attack the law clerk of the House. The government knows quite well that, when it introduces a bill, we cannot move the amendments that we want, even though we have a lot of goodwill, even though all my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois are experiencing major problems, since, for example, some of their fellow citizens live close to the Moreau railroad yard, in Hochelaga, or the Joffre railroad yard, in Lévis. Even though this committee is now represented by a Conservative, we will ensure that all this will change in the next election. However, the fact remains that the people of Lévis complained to us and we never stopped defending their interests. There is the same problem close to the Farnham railroad yard, in Brome—Missisquoi, and to the Pointe-Saint-Charles railroad yard, in Jeanne-Le Ber, east of Montreal. All these people wanted us to solve all these problems, including fumes. Thus, we introduced an amendment, but the whole part concerning fumes was taken out. The law clerk of the House told us that it was out of order.

• (1615)

So, it is not like we did not try. We wanted to show our goodwill and our good faith in this issue. We tabled everything that we could think of. We even wanted to include public health, because there are now international standards on noise pollution. We really wanted to comply with public health standards. One of our amendments asked that public health not be unreasonably affected, given these essential operational needs. We wanted to include the issue of public health in the bill.

However, because the bill introduced by the Conservative Party was totally silent on public health, the law clerk of the House told us that this amendment, even though quite interesting, was out of order, because it would change the meaning of the legislation.

Those citizens who are listening to us must understand that a government is something that is complex. And when it is a Conservative government, it is twice as complex. That is how things work. That is the reality. The government uses every possible trick to prevent us from succeeding and achieving our objectives. In this case, we were able to reach an agreement on noise.

So, as we are speaking, clause 95.1 of the bill reads as follows:

When constructing or operating a railway, a railway company, must cause as little noise and or vibration as possible,...

This is what we have before us now. The original bill introduced by the Conservative Party talked about not making unreasonable noise.

We managed to get an amendment in that goes further. That was done with the support of the Conservatives, who finally realized that we wanted at least to settle once and for all the issue of noise and vibration, so that we would no longer talk about it, and so that citizens would be able to win their cases.

So, we managed to agree to include the expression “as little noise and or vibration as possible”.

One day, this bill will come into force, but not today. It is at third reading stage, then it has to go to the Senate and come back here. Canadian federalism is complicated. There is another chamber, the upper chamber, called the Senate. It has to study the same bills. The Bloc Québécois has been wanting to get rid of the Senate for a long

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time. The Conservatives have decided that senators will be elected by universal suffrage. We are far from getting rid of it. The federation will become even more complicated. However, one day, we will no longer be here—we hope. One day, Quebeckers will decide to have their own country and they will not have a Senate. That will be best. There will just be a parliament and it will be far less complicated.

However, in the current situation, the bill as amended by the Bloc Québécois, among others, reads as follows at clause 95.1:

When constructing or operating a railway, a railway company, must cause as little noise and or vibration as possible, taking into account

(a) its obligations under sections 113 and 114, if applicable;

This has to do with operations.

(b) its operational requirements;

[...]

(d) the potential impact on persons residing in properties adjacent to the railway.

We managed to get that included. The following clause—and this is the crux of the bill—gives powers to the Transportation Agency, which is new. During its operations, it will have to take into account the potential impact on persons residing in properties adjacent to the railway. From now on, it will have to take into account those who live close by when there are problems with noise and vibration. That is how it will be for their operations.

Clause 95.2 states:

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

This requires the Transportation Agency to establish and publish guidelines that the railway companies will have to follow. Just to get this part into the bill required many hours of discussion. Finally, the agency can be forced to establish and publish guidelines. It is all well and good to say there will be as little noise and vibration as possible, but there still need to be guidelines. This bill will force the agency to establish and publish guidelines.

Once the guidelines have been established and the railways are operational, we proceed to clause 95.3.

On receipt of a complaint made by any person that a railway company is not complying with section 95.1, the Agency may order the railway company to undertake any changes in its railway construction or operation that the Agency considers reasonable to cause as little noise or vibration as possible, taking into account factors referred to in that section.

• (1620)

Before this bill, the Canadian Transportation Agency had no power. Its only role was that of intermediary. Judicial power was tested in that respect in an Ontario court.

One might have thought that after getting involved in a file and participating in negotiations, Transport Canada could have made recommendations and ordered the company to take certain measures if no agreement could be reached in the end. In a decision concerning an Ontario community, the Ontario court ruled that the Canadian Transportation Agency had no power, that it was simply a mediator, not even an arbitrator. It could participate in discussions, but it had no power.

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The real purpose of this bill is to give the Canadian Transportation Agency the power to order measures to be taken. That is, once it receives a complaint, it will analyze it and order the railway company to take measures.

Recently, I met with the Railway Association of Canada, which turned up practically in tears to tell us that it made no sense to force railway companies to produce as little noise and vibration as possible.

I might ask all railway employees, who work very hard, why we have this bill before us today. I might also ask the shareholders and the companies that are making healthy profits and doing good business why we are debating this bill. We are debating it because they have been so remiss in past years that we have no choice.

Personally, I took part in a meeting with citizens who live around the Moreau marshalling yard in Hochelaga; the railway company was also present. I will not say its name because they are all the same, regardless of which one it is, and I do not want to discriminate. So I participated in the discussions. It was easy to see that the employees taking part were there under duress. The member for Hochelaga was present to listen to the citizens. I was there as the transportation critic for the Bloc Québécois. My colleague from Hochelaga and the community, who had been following the Ontario decision, were very well informed and proposed some mitigation solutions to the representatives of the railway company. These people seemed interested but in the end nothing ever came about. That is how it is.

It was the same thing when I met with citizens' groups in the Joffre marshalling yard in Charny. I had a chance to meet the Mayor of Charny, who is now a councillor for the City of Lévis and who really took an interest in this file. It was and still is the same thing. The companies listen, but in the end, when they have to spend some money, it does not go anywhere, not to the next level up anymore than to the board of directors.

Since I am being told I have two minutes left, I am going to use them wisely.

This is how we have ended up where we are today. The Bloc Québécois does not want to be one of those who would prevent the railway from developing. On the contrary, we know that it is developing just fine, that business is good and that it is probably time to put things in order and do something about the pollution that railways can cause. There is noise pollution and other kinds of nuisances.

We will not fix all that today, as I said. And it is not because the colleagues of the Bloc Québécois would not have liked this bill to solve all the nuisances caused by railways. Given that the industry is doing well, maybe it is time for it to make some investments.

At least today the noise and vibration problems should be solved. For any citizens who live along railways or near railway yards this bill should solve any noise and vibration problems they experience. From now on complaints can be filed with the Canadian Transportation Agency, which can intervene and, in accordance with the provision contained in paragraph 93(3), order the railways to take action. The Agency will be able to order railway companies to take remedial action.

Obviously this does not solve the other problems. In committee, communities came to tell us that the trains are increasingly long. In some places, they are even afraid that emergency services cannot get through. That obviously includes ambulances, firefighters, and all sorts of services. Actually the trains are so long that they block entry into entire neighbourhoods. This problem is not dealt with in the bill. I hope that the government one day will listen and table new bills that will deal with all these issues.

• (1630)

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 Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, the Environment; the hon. member for Gatineau, Official Languages; the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Government Programs.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-11, the Transportation Act amendments. I especially want to acknowledge the member for Burnaby—New Westminster for the tireless work he has done on this file.

The New Democrats will be supporting the bill but we continue to have some concerns. I know the member for Burnaby—New Westminster had proposed a number of amendments, not all of which were accepted at the committee level.

I have a couple of things that I want to speak to today, one which I know other members have spoken to, which is the issues around noise. Although the legislation before the House does provide some mechanisms to deal with noise complaints from individuals and communities, we will look to the process that has been put in place to see if it works. However, we continue to have some concerns that there should be stronger language. I might add that the member for Burnaby—New Westminster had proposed some amendments but they were not supported.

Many of us in Canada, from coast to coast to coast, do have railway lines in our communities and the level of disruption that happens in our lives as a result depends on the size of the community.

I stayed in downtown Vancouver in a place that was right on the railway lines where there were a lot of sidings and a lot of noise from the various cars. I just do not know how people manage to maintain a life in that kind of chaos. However, we will look to see if what is in the legislation does actually improve the lives of people who live near railway lines. We are ever hopeful that will actually be the case.

The member for Burnaby—New Westminster also proposed an amendment to another part of the legislation but it also was not supported by the Liberals or the Conservatives. Currently, the Canadian Transportation Agency has a requirement that its members live in Ottawa.

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I come from British Columbia and we often hear people refer to the Rocky Mountains as “the granite wall”. We often feel that the voices from British Columbia are not adequately represented. The member for Burnaby—New Westminster had made some proposals that talked about balanced regional representation. Surely, in this day and age, there are mechanisms to ensure that regional representation is present. We know about teleconferencing. There are all kinds of ways that people can be adequately heard. It is very disappointing that the amendments around the regional representation were not supported. Perhaps at some point more work will be done in that particular area.

When rail lines are no longer being used for rail purposes it is important to have alternatives for the public good. On Vancouver Island, we have been working hard to ensure unused rail lines are kept in the public domain and used for bicycling paths and whatnot. This is an important public interest that needs to be protected.

The legislation did amend the ability to have urban transit authorities being included in the sequence of mandatory offers of railway lines to public authorities, and that is an important step. I would argue that we need to do much more in that respect. In many cases, it would be very difficult for that land to be made available to the public for the public good and if we do not protect that public good, it will be lost forever.

One of the things that was in this legislation was the grain revenue cap adjustment. It is timely to be talking about that given the importance of rail to western farmers. It also talks about how consultation happens in the context of important pieces of legislation that come forward. We are seeing a lack of appropriate consultation right now with the Wheat Board.

• (1635)

When we talk about things like the grain revenue cap adjustment, we would hope as always that the needs of the farmers and community members are adequately recognized.

With respect to the Wheat Board, single desk management has been such an important part of how farmers on the Prairies have functioned for many years. We would hope that their voices are heard so that they can continue to function in that way. A number of farmers were in Ottawa today to make sure that their case was heard and that the facts around what is happening with the plebiscite were understood by everybody. I hope that a more appropriate consultation process is put in place around the Wheat Board and other things that impact on our farmers.

One of the other issues is railway safety. It certainly has been a topic over the last few weeks. There was late-breaking news today about another derailment about two kilometres from Golden in Kicking Horse Canyon. Five cars went off the rails and spilled hydrochloric acid. My understanding is that one of the other cars contained sodium hydroxide. The school in that area has been closed as a precautionary measure.

That is the latest in a long line of problems in railway safety in Canada. Part of the problem is that the railway system has been self-managed. We have seen a cutback in the very important role the public sector plays in watching over that transportation sector to make sure it is as safe as possible.

In a speech given by the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, he said:

In 2005 we saw the highest number of railway accidents in nearly a decade, much higher than the 10 year rolling average that existed before. We have seen an increase in railway accidents. We have seen, tragically, deaths in the Fraser Canyon this summer. We have seen environmental damage such as the Cheakamus Lake in the Squamish Estuary and Lake Wabamun in Alberta. We have seen consistently a greater number of railway accidents over the last few years. This is a matter of great concern.

The New Democratic Party has been pushing for the results of the CN safety audit and to date we have had no luck in getting those released to the public. We often hear lots of talk about accountability, transparency and openness. Surely this would be a good time to make that audit available to the public, especially in light of the number of derailments that have occurred recently.

Canadians value their railway system. They want it to be safe. They want their communities to be safe. Many of the railcars that go through communities contain chemicals that impact on the safety of community members. This was the case in today's incident. There have been spills that have killed the fish in rivers in British Columbia. From coast to coast to coast we value the health of our rivers. I would urge the government to release that audit so the public can know what the issues are facing CN Rail around safety.

One of the other issues is that there is no national transportation policy. One of the great things talked about in Confederation was our national railway. In a country as big as Canada it would seem important to have a national policy that shapes what we expect out of rail and air.

Overall this speaks to the lack of a number of national strategies. In the past I have called for a national forestry strategy. Members from Windsor have called for a national auto strategy. The member for Sackville—Eastern Shore has called for a shipbuilding strategy. It would seem that a national transportation strategy would only make sense. Yet in this day age, here we are in the 21st century and we still do not have those kinds of strategies.

• (1640)

Given that people are clothing themselves in green cloaks these days, it would make sense if we had a national transportation strategy that looked at the benefits of things like rail transportation. I have some stats here that talk about the benefits of rail transportation and how it positively impacts on our greenhouse gas emissions.

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Regarding environmental benefits, the GO Transit website indicates that the average Toronto car carries only 1.16 people. One 10-car GO train carries the same number of people as 1,400 air polluting cars, and one bus can replace more than 50 cars. GO trip projects will provide additional capacity equivalent to 10 expressway lanes and will lead to the reduction of 1.1 million vehicle kilometres of car travel every day. That is significant.

Those of us who have driven in some of the major cities know about the congestion on the roads. When there are rail projects that would benefit us not only in terms of congestion but in terms of our air quality, surely that would be an area in which we could invest.

The Railway Association of Canada website talks about the fact that commuter trains generate about one-quarter as much greenhouse gas emissions as urban autos per passenger kilometre travel. There are others. The document "Rail Transit in America" has a substantial amount of information about the benefits of rail transit and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

It is even broader than just greenhouse gas emissions. A national transportation strategy potentially could have an impact on how we develop our cities. When we build these clusters that are serviced by rail, especially in large cities, we could substantially alter the way development happens and it could be much more environmentally friendly.

A national transportation strategy would provide us with the opportunity not only to look at what our transportation needs are but also to look at the benefits which would help us around development and the environmental impact.

Canadians have a great love affair with their railways and realize the importance around the heritage of railways, railway stations and bridges. The Kinsol trestle, one of the oldest wooden railway bridges in Canada, is located in my riding. Unfortunately, it was damaged by a fire a few years ago. We have discovered that although something has been designated as being a heritage, we have this wonderful railway bridge that is in desperate need of repair and there is no money to do it. Many Canadians are very proud of that rail heritage and yet we just do not have a mechanism to preserve it.

When we talk about a transportation strategy, this legislation deals with the fact that there is a mechanism to make sure that urban and other public authorities have access. We have a very good example of that on Vancouver Island. This is from the Island Corridor Foundation's website. The headline reads, "E&N line donated to Islanders". It states:

The Age of Rail is being preserved on Vancouver Island with a donation valued at \$236 million, say a group of municipal politicians and First Nations leaders.

In what the non-profit Island Corridor Foundation is calling a historic agreement, the Canadian Pacific Railway has agreed to hand over its Island rail assets to the foundation, a partnership of First Nations and local governments along the E&N line.

CPR is donating its portion of the 234-kilometre E&N, which averages 30 metres in width between Victoria and Courtenay, to the foundation. That encompasses 651 hectares of land, six historic railway stations and a number of trestles. The company is also supplying \$2.3 million in "seed money" to help the foundation continue its work.

Later on in the release by the Island Corridor Foundation, it states:

VIA Rail continues to operate a passenger service on the E&N line, but has tried to shut it down several times, saying it's not a profitable venture.

[The] deal will help preserve rail service on Vancouver Island and keep E&N corridor available for such things as power lines, pipelines and hiking trails, foundation officials said. The ownership change will also allow more flexibility to deal with local concerns.

● (1645)

Priorities include:

Signing a deal to continue passenger rail service.

Upgrading the line.

Developing other proposals for the corridor, including a commuter rail service in the south.

The first section of the E&N line, between Esquimalt and Nanaimo, was built between 1884 and 1886. CPR bought it in 1905, and continued to operate on the Island until the late 1990s, when it decided there wasn't enough business to continue. RailAmerica later took over part of the line for a freight service.

Later on it says:

Also being discussed is the scope of rail service along the corridor and the establishment of a leasing arrangement with a company to run the service, said Lake Cowichan Mayor Jack Peake, the foundation's co-chair. A viable commuter rail service is one topic of discussion, he said.

He said the foundation wants to show what can be done with a grassroots rail service, and with the unique partnership that has been created among the five regional governments and 13 First Nations within the corridor area.

"I think one of the things [where] Canada is still lagging behind the rest of the world is recognizing the value that the railway corridors bring to this country that we live in," Peake said.

This was also published in the *Times Colonist* in 2006. This is an example of community partners coming together. I am pleased that this piece of legislation gives some recognition to urban transit authorities and other public authorities. This is an example of how municipalities and first nations came together to preserve that railway corridor.

The east side of Vancouver Island is developing very rapidly. If that land had been lost, the opportunities to do some of the other proactive initiatives that the foundation is proposing would have been lost.

It is also an example of the national transportation strategy which the New Democrats have called for. It would make so much sense to have some incentives to encourage the use of existing rail lines for commuter traffic.

We have a passenger line right now. In the morning people in Victoria go north to Courtenay and in the evening they go south to Victoria. Anybody who lives on Vancouver Island understands that the commuter traffic actually goes south in the morning and north in the afternoon. If there were incentives to take some of those cars off the road and people had access to a commuter train from Chemainus and Duncan, and even from Nanaimo, as there are some people who drive from Nanaimo to Victoria for work, it would make sense. We need that kind of access and some incentives to encourage that kind of commuter transit.

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That partnership is a really good example. Many in the House often talk about partnerships in a variety of areas. The Island Corridor Foundation is a non-profit organization that has built on these partnerships. One of the things the foundation talked about is that in part the partnership was driven by necessity. Its website talks a little about how it was founded:

When Norske announced that they would move their freight business to truck in 2002 there was considerable concern about the future of rail service on Vancouver Island. Without some significant intervention, it is likely that rail service would be abandoned and the property sold off in parcels to private interests, forfeiting the benefits of a continuous corridor forever.

Cowichan Tribes had the foresight to see the potential of what preserving the corridor and rail service could mean to First Nations. At the same time, the Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities (AVICC) saw the potential for Island communities. In an extraordinary collaboration between local government and First Nations, the two groups invited all interested parties to participate in two Roundtables on the Future of Rail on Vancouver Island to discuss the situation.

It indicates that this ended up in the formation of the Vancouver Island rail initiative. It mentions the ongoing collaboration that ended up in the formation of that charitable foundation. It has preserved this right of way for all Vancouver Island residents and I am pleased about that, but I also know that the organization needs funds in order to help it pursue its vision.

We will be supporting this piece of legislation. I would argue that we need to use it as a springboard to move toward developing a national transportation strategy and looking at incentives for things like rail travel because of, among other things, the environmental benefits.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, our colleague from the NDP has brought new elements into our debate at third reading. She proposed, among other things, that unused railway lines should be available to the public domain. I find that idea interesting since last summer I went from Montreal to Vancouver by train. I noticed how dirty and littered with all kind of trash and probably with creosote soaked lumber are the lands along our railway lines. I saw mounds of buckets which probably contained tar, which means that land is probably contaminated.

As far as I know, until now, nobody has said that there was a small environment aspect to the bill. However, I found that the idea of giving the lands bordering railway lines back to the population was a good idea. In fact, that has been done in the Laurentides area, where the grounds have been cleaned up. At the time, the municipalities paid for the decontamination.

Considering the contamination there is along the whole railway line, who should pay for the decontamination if we were to decide to give these grounds back to the people?

I am also thinking about Vancouver, where I saw the biggest storage ground for containers and trash. That was dreadful. I had never seen anything like that in all the other cities I went through.

Is there an environment clause in the legislation that would force the cleanup of the land bordering the river and the sea near Vancouver?

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member has touched upon a very important point.

Regarding abandoned railways, I am going to talk about the Kinsol Trestle in my own riding for just one moment. It is an abandoned railway. When the company left, it did not have any responsibility for cleaning up that site. Part of the trouble that we are having with the Kinsol Trestle right now is that the trestle was made of creosote-soaked ties and they are falling into a stream as they collapse.

I would argue that there are a couple of important points. This act does touch on some environmental aspects, but I would argue not to the extent that it needs to. Many of us believe that those who create a situation where there is pollution should actually be responsible for cleaning it up before it is turned over to the community, otherwise it becomes the community that needs to bear that burden. I would argue that when we are looking at the cleanup of contaminated sites, that responsibility should be borne by the company.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask a question, but first of all I have to apologize. I did not hear the first part of the hon. member's speech, so she may have addressed this, but I will ask the question I was trying to ask earlier.

In my riding, in a community called Sioux Lookout, there are a lot of concerns from CN workers about some of the safety issues. They know a safety audit was performed. They know it was quite some time ago and they know that the government has that audit. The concern or the issue raised is whether CN has to sign off on this before it can be released to the public.

The workers at CN would like to know what is in that report. They would like to know what recommendations or what actions the government is going to take to ensure that if there are any deficiencies, they are cleaned up. The workers have lost confidence in the system and in the rail line they are using, so I would like to know from the hon. member if she has any thoughts on how we get this report out.

How do we protect the workers who are there, and how do we actually come to address any deficiencies if there are any?

• (1655)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I spoke about an accident that just happened this very morning in Golden where there has been another derailment. There has been a toxic spill and the school has been closed as a precautionary measure. It is a very serious issue.

It is very disappointing to stand in the House and ask continuously for access to the safety audit. A number of members have asked in a variety of ways for access to the safety audit on CN. We begin to wonder what is in the audit when we cannot get access to it.

With the number of derailments that have happened and with railway workers dying, we have an obligation to Canadians to ensure that we get access to that study. I urge the government to release it. Workers should have access to it. Community members should have access to it. Parliamentarians should have access to it.

Government Orders

I cannot see any good reason why the government is failing to live up to its very own words of openness and transparency. If we want openness and transparency, we should be able to produce studies when they have been developed and paid for. Where is it?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today at third reading stage of Bill C-11, the purpose of which is to amend the legislation governing transportation in the Canada Transportation Act.

When the bill was debated at second reading in September 2006, I said that the Bloc Québécois supported the principle of the bill, but that we would try to improve it when it was examined in committee. Well, that is what we did. The standing committee heard 37 witnesses and then did a scrupulous examination of the bill, clause by clause.

Of the 11 amendments moved by the Bloc Québécois, plus the amendments from the other parties, the result was that 21 amendments were adopted in the House at the report stage.

First, and in reply to my colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville, I would like to point out that, for the first time, the bill sets out the objective of protecting the environment in its declaration of principle. That is still a principle. I think that we are going to have to watch the present government closely when it comes to the actual application of that principle. In any event, it is in the declaration of principle.

With respect to the environment, I would like to refer to the issue of replacing old locomotives. Only about 30% of locomotives in current use meet environmental standards. I think that if the government is really serious about its bill, it will have to set up a program for replacing locomotives. That is only one example. My colleague was talking about the environment in areas around railway lines where there is contaminated land. Now that we have this declaration of principle, we will be able to force railway companies to decontaminate all of the rail lines that crisscross the country, from sea to sea, as you know.

My primary concern with this bill, as a member who represents a riding, was the whole section supporting the development of commuter trains.

Railed mass transit does offer a number of benefits. It is fast, reliable and comfortable and has little impact on the environment. It can be used to reduce our dependence on highway infrastructures that, in my opinion, disproportionately encourage the use of private vehicles, an ineffective solution for our transportation problems in major urban centres, in addition to having a negative impact on the environment. In that respect, the bill is consistent with its declaration of principle.

Under Bill C-11, big railway companies would be obligated to offer urban transit authorities unused railway lines that could be used for public transit. This is a first in the country—that urban transit authorities will be recognized, and recognized in an order of priority. The federal government will be offered those rail lines first, and the offer will then be made to provincial governments, and then to urban transit authorities, even before municipalities. That will all be done

precisely to encourage the expansion of public transit in our large urban centres.

The bill will correct the existing situation, in which urban transit authorities are not on a level playing field in negotiations with the big railway companies. The plans they wanted to implement were either delayed, because of tough negotiations, or implemented at inflated operating costs because of the power imbalance.

In one of those amendments, we added that this obligation extends to the entire territory served by an urban transit authority, in addition to the metropolitan region that it already serves.

I want to mention the example of the Agence métropolitaine de transport de Montréal; the territory it serves now extends to Saint-Jérôme, which is outside the Montreal urban area but which is part of a large metropolitan area to be served by public transit.

● (1700)

This line was inaugurated just last month and has been a great success, reducing traffic on our beautiful highways, which are constantly blocked during rush hour.

I firmly believe that Bill C-11 will lead to more commuter trains, which many of our constituents badly need. I am thinking specifically of the people in my riding in the eastern part of Laval, who still do not have access to this efficient mode of transportation.

I hope that this bill will make it easier for the municipality to decide to introduce a commuter rail line in the eastern part of Laval, joining the municipalities of Terrebonne and Mascouche directly to the Concorde intermodal station of the Laval metro, which will be inaugurated soon. The Canadian Pacific rail line is available. This is an innovative solution, because the commuter rail line would stop at an intermodal station instead of going right downtown, making the decision to invest even easier. The commuter rail line will be the crowning touch to the city transportation authority's project to expand the Laval metro system.

The disturbances caused by current railway operations are another major concern for the Bloc Québécois and were debated passionately and at length during our discussions in committee and with witnesses.

Our constituents who live near marshalling yards are seeing their quality of life deteriorate unacceptably. Their pleas to the railway companies to solve the problem have fallen on deaf ears.

Several citizen groups came to tell us how distressed they were that there was no mechanism for negotiating with the railway companies.

Clause 95.1 of the bill, which seeks to correct this situation, originally read as follows:

When constructing or operating a railway, a railway company must not cause unreasonable noise—

The witnesses, as well as the opposition members on the committee, including the Bloc Québécois members, felt that “unreasonable noise” was vague and open to interpretation, which could prevent disputes between operators and the public from being resolved. We felt that the Conservative government was giving the railways too much latitude, at the public's expense.

The Bloc Québécois decided instead to talk about “disturbances” resulting from the operation of a railway. Disturbances include noise, vibrations, emissions and anything else that can affect populations and individuals.

Further to our recommendations and with the support of the other parties, the amendment passed now reads:

When constructing or operating a railway, a railway company must cause as little noise and or vibration as possible,—

This wording is more explicit and closes the door on any interpretation to which a company, having better lawyers than the citizens, might resort, since “as little noise and or vibration as possible” is an appeal to all the latest technologies that can be used to reduce such noise. This problem exists mainly in the marshalling yards. There are different engines on the market now that can lessen the noise of the coupling of rail cars with the engines. The agency can now propose all these solutions and impose them on companies to ensure there is as little noise and vibration as possible.

It is all very nice to have requirements in a bill, but they have to be enforced. To ensure this, a section provides that the Transportation Agency can issue and publish guidelines. To ensure the issuance of such guidelines, the Bloc Québécois proposed amending the section as follows:

The Agency shall issue and publish, in any manner that it considers appropriate, guidelines—

This amendment was then passed in committee.

● (1705)

Now, instead of the section saying that the Transportation Agency “can issue”, it says that the agency has an obligation to do so. All this is in response to the various representations made to us by citizens’ groups who asked us to establish specific guidelines or specific criteria respecting noise in particular. As you know, some municipalities have decibel criteria for the proximity of residences. The Transportation Agency now has to issue guidelines that can be imposed on the railway companies.

This bill also amends the Transportation Act in order to make air transportation advertising more transparent. This is another subject dealt with in the bill and it is important as well. The agency can now, on the minister’s recommendation, make regulations respecting advertising in all media, including on the Internet, of prices for air services. These measures will regulate the marketing of airplane tickets by giving the agency jurisdiction to make regulations respecting advertising surrounding such sales.

This is to deal with the exaggerations found in the media: they give a price but fail to say clearly that it is just one way and does not include all the airport and security taxes over and above the transportation costs themselves.

These changes reflect the demand of consumer groups that travellers should be adequately protected. These groups came to see us in committee and told us their concerns.

Bill C-11 replaces the old position of air travel complaints commissioner with increased powers for the Transportation Agency, which will deal now with air travellers’ complaints.

Government Orders

We felt, though, that the complaint-resolution role that the bill conferred on the agency was not very clear. Bill C-11 states that if a person has made a complaint under any provision of this part, the agency, or a person authorized to act on the agency’s behalf, may review and attempt to resolve the complaint and may, if appropriate, mediate or arrange for mediation of the complaint.

In order to reassure us in this regard, the words “may review” were eliminated and replaced by “shall review”, in an amendment introduced at the report stage that has now passed.

In addition, consumers felt reassured by the complaints commissioner’s report because of the complete list it provided of the complaints filed. Although these complaints had not necessarily all been resolved, consumers felt reassured to know that at least the complaints had been publicly disclosed. We therefore added an amendment to the bill to ensure that the agency’s annual report will include the number and nature of the complaints filed, the name of the airline involved, how the complaints were dealt with, and the general trends that emerge. In response to consumer requests, the role previously played by the complaints commissioner was therefore transferred to the Transportation Agency.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the various political parties, both in the opposition and in the government, worked very well together on studying the bill and especially during our work in committee. We thought it obvious that the bill was providing solutions to problems that everyone in Canada has noticed.

The Bloc Québécois is therefore very much in favour of this bill and hopes that it passes as quickly as possible, especially as I can recall two previous versions introduced since February 2003 that never managed to be officially passed. We hope that this time, with everyone’s help including the Senate and the entire government, the bill will finally pass.

● (1710)

Both the constituents we consulted and the various commuter authorities urgently need this bill in order to fix the glaring problems that have gone on for far too long.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

QUARANTINE ACT

Hon. Jim Prentice (for the Minister of Health) moved that Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Quarantine Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Government Orders

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to begin the debate in the House today on Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Quarantine Act.

The new Quarantine Act received royal assent on May 13, 2005 and recently came into force on December 12, 2006. It replaces existing quarantine legislation which contains many outdated authorities.

The modernization of the Quarantine Act addresses urgent issues with respect to the spread of communicable diseases in Canada and abroad. It modernizes existing legislation that dates back to 1872 by providing new tools to manage serious emerging public health threats.

It also represents a complementary step in a series of legislative initiatives to strengthen Canada's public health system which also includes the creation of the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Office of the Public Health Officer.

Due to the priority placed on this legislation, the Quarantine Act received royal assent with the understanding that a period of time following royal assent would be used to develop and put in place the implementation tools that would ensure proper application and enforcement of the act.

While trying to develop a regulation related to section 34, it became apparent that the section would not operate as intended. Section 34 obligates operators of commercial conveyances, such as marine vessels and air carriers, to report any death or illness of public health concern on board prior to arrival in Canada.

This advance notice is critically important to federal officials as it permits an appropriate response to health emergencies on board various vehicles. Further, it permits the minister to better assess whether to order the diversion of a conveyance to an alternate landing site in Canada if required to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

In its current wording, section 34 requires a report to be made directly to a destination authority situated at the nearest entry point in Canada.

As mentioned, the development of a regulation was necessary to support the designation of an appropriate authority.

The current wording of section 34 in the new Quarantine Act is problematic for three reasons.

First, in the event of a health emergency on board a conveyance, an operator may be unable to determine which of the many Canadian entry points is nearest at the time of reporting. In practice, this may lead to delays in reporting and hinder an appropriate and timely response.

Second, the authority designated by the minister may not actually be situated at an entry point. As defined in the new Quarantine Act, an entry point is a place where a customs office is located or a point in Canada designated by the minister.

The most appropriate authority to handle important public health information is a quarantine officer, a federal nurse or a medical practitioner with public health experience who is trained and

designated by the minister. Like other authorities, they are not necessarily situated at every single entry point to Canada, which would include smaller ports or seaports and so on.

Finally, the current wording in section 34 implies direct reporting. It does not take into account intermediaries who may have a role to play in receiving and transmitting important public health information on behalf of a conveyance operator. For example, a pilot will likely call the company dispatch centre first before a report is formally made to the responsible public health authority.

For those very reasons, there is a need for a minor and technical amendment to the current wording used in section 34. The new wording for section 34 requires operators of conveyances in the air and marine community to report an illness of public health concern or death on board as soon as possible to a quarantine officer before the conveyance arrives at its destination in Canada.

● (1715)

At this point in time it does not bind the operator of land conveyances to the same advance reporting obligation. If necessary, the new wording offers the minister the flexibility to preserve other conveyances. This would most likely happen in the event of a large scale outbreak that escalated in a way that was not necessarily predictable.

Limiting reporting obligations to the marine and air community supports a risk management approach.

First, approximately 94% of international flights arrive in Canada through six international airports where there are established quarantine stations and the presence of a quarantine officer. They are Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax, though there are other airports as well.

Second, it is easier for conveyance operators of a bus or train to have a sick traveller disembark in order to attend the nearest medical facility before the conveyance reaches the Canadian border. In addition, issues of a public health concern may be captured at points of entry when sick travellers and conveyances are processed for admittance into Canada.

Under the new act, travellers would have a duty to provide certain public health information and to answer any questions posed by a screening officer, such as a Canada Border Services Agency official or a quarantine officer. It is also important to note that under the previous quarantine legislation there was no requirement for land conveyances to report in advance. Thus, the new legislative framework maintains the status quo for the scope of advance reporting obligations.

While the bill is before Parliament to address a technical issue with the current wording in section 34, this government committed to bringing the new act into force without section 34. This approach provides federal officials, screening officers, quarantine officers and environmental health officers with access to new and strengthened authorities.

Government Orders

Now that the new act is in force, existing quarantine regulations have been repealed with the exceptions of sections 12 and 19. These two sections maintain existing advance reporting obligations to be met by conveyance operators. In essence, this is a stop gap measure until the bill completes the parliamentary review process.

Given the simple nature of this wording issue and the importance of having a complete and comprehensive act in place, it is essential that all parties cooperate to ensure that this minor and technical amendment passes swiftly through both Houses.

Moving forward with this bill in a timely manner reaffirms this government's commitment to public health renewal and the ongoing pandemic planning efforts. Furthermore, it underscores the priority this government has placed on the safety and security of all Canadians.

• (1720)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has laid out the specifics of the bill. However, since we are talking about the Quarantine Act, I was interested to learn that four persons at the Mississauga Trillium Hospital in my riding have died as a consequence of that viral strain that killed some 200 people in Quebec. I understand samples have been sent to Winnipeg for analysis. We are very hopeful that this will not be a serious situation.

It is quite coincidental but very appropriate with the Quarantine Act being established and the problems that occurred during the SARS epidemic and the work done since then. This raises a question. What else have we done and learned from, for instance, the SARS situation, particularly in the Toronto area, that may have necessitated a review of the Quarantine Act?

Has there been any review of the Quarantine Act since those events that would give Canadians some comfort that the appropriate steps for the safety, security and well-being of Canadians is being protected and, as the member indicates, is a priority of the government?

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I assume the member is talking about the virus C difficile.

In any case, the government has taken significant steps to ensure the public health of Canadians is protected. We have approved and expedited the Quarantine Act which was reviewed at the health committee in the previous Parliament.

More than that, we brought forward Bill C-5, the Public Health Agency of Canada Act, which I believe was the first bill the government voted on and approved. It brings into play many protections for Canadians, not the least of which is a chief public health officer who has the powers of a deputy minister and is the head of the Public Health Agency, as well as Canada's chief public health authority. He is able to provide direction, not only to government but to the public with a credible scientific background.

Moreover, the member raised the issue of SARS. We are very fortunate in this country to have a health minister who was actually the health minister in Ontario at the time of the SARS crisis. He also has a very unique background of being not only a provincial health minister but now the federal health minister. He certainly understands the issue of public health, the challenges of SARS and other similar potential public health emergencies.

The minister has been able to create an environment between the provinces, territories and the federal government that is very conducive to bridge building with all the communities and stakeholders necessary to ensure that Canada has the best public health protection possible.

• (1725)

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary gave a good outline of what the Quarantine Act is about and what the proposed amendments will do. However, I noticed that he talked a great deal about quarantining individuals who might be carrying a disease, which is the way most Canadians think of quarantine. They think of people being quarantined in their domiciles because they are infectious.

The parliamentary secretary did not talk very much about the other aspect of the bill, which is cargo coming into this country. Could he explain to us how this bill affects cargo coming by air, by ship or by land transportation such as rail or truck?

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her many years as chair of the health committee, including the time the committee looked at the Quarantine Act. I was the opposition health critic at that time.

The Quarantine Act, along with other legislation that is available to the government, does allow the government to take the necessary action to protect the public interest in a wide range of scenarios, not the least of which is what we are discussing today.

The problem with the legislation as it now stands is, for example, if a plane is flying over Canadian territory, let us say it is flying from London to Toronto, and there is a public health issue and the nearest port of entry is Goose Bay or St. John's, Newfoundland, technically that plane would need to land there rather than complete its trip and go to Toronto where there may be more appropriate facilities and resources to deal with the situation.

This is really a technical amendment to expedite a public health situation or a quarantine situation. In the spirit of ensuring that the public health of Canadians is protected, I hope the member and her party and the other parties in the House will support this technical amendment so the public health of Canadians will be protected.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to look at the news story. The Deputy Chief Coroner in Ontario has already suggested that these Mississauga cases could be linked to the ones in Sault Ste. Marie, confirming at least—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. Unfortunately, I must interrupt. I invite the hon. member for Mississauga South to finish asking his question the next time this bill comes up for debate.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

● (1730)

*[English]***INCOME TAX ACT**

The House resumed from February 23 consideration of Bill C-294, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (sports and recreation programs), as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of Motion No. 1.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at report stage of Bill C-294.

Call in the members.

● (1805)

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

*(Division No. 128)***YEAS**

Members

André	Angus
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bellavance	Bevington
Bigras	Black
Blais	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brunelle
Cardin	Carrier
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Comartin
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
DeBellefeuille	Deschamps
Dewar	Duceppe
Faille	Freeman
Gagnon	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godin
Gravel	Guay
Guimond	Julian
Kotto	Laforest
Laframboise	Lalonde
Lavallée	Layton
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Lussier
Malo	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen	McDonough
Ménard (Hochelega)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mourani	Nadeau
Nash	Ouellet
Perron	Picard
Plamondon	Priddy
Roy	Savoie
Siksay	St-Cyr
St-Hilaire	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques) — 68	

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Alghabra
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anderson
Bains	Baird
Barnes	Batters
Bélangier	Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett	Benoit
Bernier	Bevilacqua
Bezan	Blackburn
Blaney	Bonin

Boshcoff	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brown (Oakville)
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casey
Casson	Chan
Chong	Coderre
Comuzzi	Cotler
Cummins	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dhalla
Dryden	Dykstra
Easter	Emerson
Epp	Eyking
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Folco
Fry	Galipeau
Gallant	Godfrey
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hanger
Harris	Harvey
Hawn	Hearn
Hiebert	Hill
Hinton	Holland
Hubbard	Ignatieff
Jaffer	Jean
Jennings	Kadis
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karetak-Lindell
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Keeper	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Khan	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	LeBlanc
Lee	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Malhi	Maloney
Manning	Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Matthews
Mayes	McCallum
McGuinty	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Minna	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Oda	Owen
Pacetti	Pallister
Paradis	Paty
Pearson	Peterson
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Proulx
Redman	Regan
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rota
Russell	Savage
Scarpaleggia	Schellenberger
Scott	Sgro
Silva	Simard
Simms	Skelton
Smith	Solberg
Sorenson	St. Amand
St. Denis	Stanton
Steckle	Storseth
Strahl	Stronach
Sweet	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Thibault (West Nova)	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Turner	Tweed
Valley	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Volpe	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Williams
Wilson	Wrzesnewskyj — 190

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I declare Motion No. 1 lost.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think, with the permission of the sponsor, the hon. member for Prince Albert, and with the consent of all members present in the chamber this evening, you might find unanimous consent to pass Bill C-294 at report stage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the sponsor of the bill give his consent?

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 6:07 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-257, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (replacement workers), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There are three motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-257.

[Translation]

Motion No. 2 will not be selected by the Chair as it could have been presented in committee.

[English]

All remaining motions have been examined and the Chair is satisfied that they meet the guidelines expressed in the note to Standing Order 76.1(5) regarding the selection of motions in amendment at the report stage.

Motions Nos. 1 and 3 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

●(1810)

[Translation]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1 and 3 to the House.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-257, in Clause 2, be amended by replacing line 4 on page 2 with the following:

“(c) use, in the”

Private Members' Business

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-257, in Clause 2, be amended by replacing lines 3 to 10 on page 3 with the following:

“employer from using the services of an employee referred to in paragraph (2.1) (c) to avoid the destruction of the employer's property or serious damage to that property.

(2.4) The services referred to in subsection (2.3) shall exclusively be conservation services and not services to allow the continuation of the production of goods or services, which is otherwise prohibited by subsection (2.1).”

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to stand in the House today to introduce Bill C-257 which would forbid the use of replacement workers, now at report and third reading stage. As you know, very few private members' bills reach the last stage of the legislative process.

But, before I begin my speech, I want to thank first, the member for Gatineau, who introduced the bill, and also the hon. members for Laval and Vaudreuil-Soulanges, who gave me their place in the order of precedence to allow me to speak for the first hour of debate.

There was a great deal of debate by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. After the bill was passed at second reading on October 25, 2006, it was debated at length in committee for four long months, not including the months spent prior to that. This bill was tabled on May 6, 2006. However, in the past 17 years, a dozen bills have been tabled in this House by the Bloc and have been debated. An almost identical law has been in force in Quebec for 30 years and in British Columbia for 14 years. This bill has been the subject of a great deal of debate, discussion and testimony that was given, seen, heard, debated and discussed.

Today, I am presenting two amendments that are not at all frivolous. They are being made primarily because the Speaker of this House ruled that the Liberal amendments regarding essential services were out of order because, in his opinion, they broadened the scope of the bill.

As hon. members will see, our first amendment eliminates a small phrase to avoid redundancy. I will call this an amendment for the purpose of consistency.

The second amendment modifies clauses 2.3 and 2.4. It is necessary since the amendment of the member for Davenport is now inadmissible and we still had to address clauses 2.3 and 2.4.

These new Bloc amendments correct the translation error in the original bill. In addition, they clarify the French version, which now states the original intention of the Bloc Québécois, which is to define who is able to work during a labour dispute.

As I have said elsewhere, the Bloc's bill is modelled on Quebec law, and keen observers may notice that clauses 2.3 and 2.4 of the bill, as put forward in the amendment, are almost identical to the two paragraphs of section 109.3 of the Quebec Labour Code.

As I said earlier, these Bloc amendments aim to clarify the possibility of employers allowing management to work during a labour dispute in order to maintain production. This is the first case. I said it once, and I will say it again, because some people have misunderstood the Bloc's bill: this bill enables managers to work when there is a labour dispute.

Private Members' Business

The Bloc amendment also allows the employer to use the services of unionized employees to avoid the destruction of the employer's property or serious damage to that property. The bill initially introduced by the Bloc last May 6 allowed this, but there was a translation error that indicated, particularly to anglophones, that it did not allow it. There was a lot of confusion there and this second amendment clears up the confusion. It also clarifies the French version, which now leaves no room at all for interpretation.

Under the amendments proposed today, Bill C-257 permits two categories of persons to work: managers and unionized employees who must see to the conservation of the employer's property. In another situation, unionized employees who are on strike or lockout can go back to work. We refer to the Canada Labour Code itself, to its section 87.4, which already exists. In the language of trade unions and labour, we call this the essential services clause. It is already in the code.

The Conservative government and some other members in this House make a point of ignoring section 87.4. They prefer to use scare tactics about the consequences of our bill.

• (1815)

I would like to quote section 87.4, which is often referred to as the essential services section, as I mentioned earlier. It complements the Bloc Québécois bill very well. Here is subsection 87.4(1):

During a strike or lockout not prohibited by this Part, the employer, the trade union and the employees in the bargaining unit must continue the supply of services, operation of facilities or production of goods to the extent necessary to prevent an immediate and serious danger to the safety or health of the public.

The seven subsections that follow in the existing Labour Code explain how this agreement can function, the role of the Canada Industrial Relations Board in the development of these agreements and the situations in which the Minister of Labour can intervene. In passing, I would add that section 87.7 even specifies the essential services to be provided to grain vessels, and obliges employers and employees to ensure the loading and movement of grain vessels. There are many exceptions, but the health and safety of Canadians is extremely important. The Canada Labour Code already covers that.

Mr. Speaker, you said so yourself, yesterday in this House. You related section 87.4 to essential services, explaining that, although the code does not use that term, the concept is there.

In response to the questions I asked on February 7, 2007, the Canada Industrial Relations Board, whose mandate is to interpret the Canada Labour Code, indicated that section 87.4 is, in fact, often interpreted as a section on essential services. Cathy Braker, senior counsel for the United Steelworkers, said that she could cite several examples. She added, "I can tell you that the language that is reflected in section 87.4 is language that is reflected in almost all of the statutes dealing with essential services across Canada". Furthermore, unions and employers, in both verbal and written communication, often associate section 87.4 with essential services.

Entirely by chance, last week, when there was talk of special legislation and I was doing some research on the CN Rail dispute, I found a letter dated July 26, 2006, signed by the United Transportation Union president, and entitled "Subsection 87.4(1) of the Canada Labour Code, agreement for essential services". The

letter repeats the term "87.4", meaning the agreement for essential services.

The bill in front of us is an excellent bill. Similar or almost identical measures have been in place in Quebec for 30 years now, since 1977. Statistics show that employees and unionized workers regulated by the Canada Labour Code lose more workdays due to labour disputes than those who fall under the Quebec Labour Code. Employees under the Canada Labour Code spend more days away from work due to labour disputes. That has been proven. Workers under the Canada Labour Code represent less than 8% of workers in Quebec but they account for 18.8% of person-days lost in work stoppages. These number are extremely high and speak for themselves. Moreover, the number of labour disputes has been decreasing in Quebec in the last 30 years. There were nearly 300 in 1977 and only 75 in 2005. We can see the number of labour disputes is on the decrease in Quebec. Conflicts affecting workers covered by the Quebec Labour Code are less violent because workers on the picket lines are less susceptible to harassment by replacement workers. Workers feel a lot of injustice. One must admit that in the present situation, the Canada Labour Code creates an unbalance. There are negotiations between workers and employers but all of a sudden, a third group of players—the replacement workers—comes into the game. They play for the employer's team. Changing the rules of the game like that creates a completely unfair situation.

• (1820)

In conclusion, I would say that the scare tactics of the Minister of Labour did not fool anybody.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me an opportunity to take part in this debate.

Allow me to mention right away that the members of the Bloc Québécois are trying to take the example of what happens in Quebec and apply it to the whole country.

Unfortunately this is not the case with Bill C-257, which would no longer allow the use of replacement workers. I am myself a Quebecker and I understand very well what happens in Quebec, but when we talk about services on a national scale, it is not the same thing as in a province. What are the major services managed federally? We are talking about everything connected with travel, that is, when we take a plane, a train or a boat, everything to do with ports and also trucking, particularly the transportation of goods. It is the federal government that manages the major sector of travel.

Another example is our interpersonal communications and also our global communications. This is what is called telecommunications. The federal government manages Canada Post. Once again these are national matters. Another example is the transactions that take place when we pay for what we purchase, that is, banking transactions and banks.

Private Members' Business

These are three major sectors of activity that are managed federally. If a strike occurs in one of these sectors, regardless of where the strike takes place in the country, it has an immediate impact from one end of Canada to the other. For instance, what would happen if someone cut a telephone cable when replacement workers cannot be used? There would be no more 911 service, no more banking services possible, no more Internet. We can see the impact of such an act. Canada's whole economy would be paralyzed, because we could not use replacement workers.

The airlines are another example. Let us say that the baggage handlers decide to go on strike and will no longer load baggage on the planes. Immediately, if it happens in Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver, Canada's transportation economy is completely paralyzed. This is another example of the major role played by the federal government in this area, hence the necessity to maintain a balance and not put our country in a situation where the economy would be faced with total chaos. This is what is at stake here. Allow me also to say that the Bloc Québécois bill, as drafted, did not and unfortunately does not provide for essential services.

Let us imagine, once again, a situation in which essential services are not provided. What situation would we be putting our country in? That is why we are asking for the support of the opposition members, and more specifically of the Liberal Party, which has publicly said, in recent hours, that in point of fact, seeing that this Bloc Québécois bill did not provide for essential services to be maintained, it was not able to support that bill. Given this, we understand how that is case, because this bill makes no sense. We cannot put our economy at risk of being completely paralyzed.

As I said, balance is extremely important in labour relations. That is what we have at present in Part I of the Canada Labour Code, which was amended in 1999 and works very well. I would point out that an employer that used replacement workers in a labour dispute could not do so in order to bust the union. It could not do it for that reason. As well, even if it used replacement workers, a worker who was on strike would be able to go back to his or her job at the end of the strike.

I would point out that if Bill C-257 were in force right now, in the case of the strike we have just had at CN where there was a dispute between two unions—because the strike would still be going on, technically—we would have had to wait until the vote was over, to wait three or four weeks, before the employees could go back to work, even though there is now an agreement in principle between the union and Canadian National. Try to imagine three or four weeks more with no trains in the country. What kind of economy would we have? All areas of economic activity would be paralyzed. Last week, potash mines in Saskatchewan closed down, and there were serious problems at the ports in Vancouver and in the forestry industry. That is how it is from one end of the country to the other. Now imagine three or four weeks more.

●(1825)

People can be full of goodwill, but there are things that apply at the provincial level that cannot be applied Canada-wide because of the importance of the economic sectors that are managed by the federal government, including transportation, telecommunications and banking.

I thank the members who took the time in committee to examine this bill and put it under a microscope. It is clear to them that this bill had in fact been slapped together and failed to provide for essential services. Given this, we will be voting against Bill C-257.

[English]

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we have the opportunity to discuss Bill C-257, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (replacement workers). This bill was specifically intended to prevent the introduction of replacement workers by federally regulated employers during a strike or lockout.

There are those who have suggested the bill somehow goes far beyond this objective and they expressed their concern specifically about the wording of the bill. It was for this reason that I presented amendments to the bill, not to undermine the intent of the bill to ban replacement workers but rather to address the concerns that had been raised.

I must report to the House my disappointment that almost all of these proposed amendments have been ruled beyond the scope of Bill C-257. These amendments were written to address concerns that have been raised about several issues. I believe that these amendments did in fact accomplish this task. I joined with the majority of my colleagues on the human resources committee in supporting these amendments fully expecting they would be found within the scope of the bill.

Let me begin by first offering a few broad observations about the issue of replacement workers. I believe one of the most important points that has sometimes been clouded during the debate on this issue is the nature of most federally regulated workplaces. By their very nature federally regulated workplaces are not the kind of environment that can be described as accommodating to the introduction of replacement workers.

First, in terms of geography we must concede that there is a significant challenge placed before any employer who would attempt to hire replacement workers. To hire replacement employees in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax, for example, in the same short time span normally associated with a strike is not a logistically realistic proposal.

Second, the nature of many federally regulated workplaces is such that hiring replacement workers is in many ways neither practical nor realistic. The character of these jobs is such that considerable training is often necessary and would make little or no sense in the timeframe realities of a strike.

Third, if our objective as legislators is to protect services that are essential for the health and safety of the public, then why would replacement workers be necessary when this issue is already addressed within the Canada Labour Code?

The point I am making is that the whole concept of replacement workers at the federal level is, in most circumstances, a redundant issue.

The intent of Bill C-257 was to address those situations where the use of such workers might be considered as a tool in the collective bargaining process.

Private Members' Business

During the course of the presentations before the committee and even in discourse outside the confines of this Parliament, there have been suggestions that essential services will be undermined if Bill C-257 is adopted.

Had the proposed amendments been allowed, I do not believe this would have been the case. Under the current provisions of the Canada Labour Code, subsection 87.4(1), employers and union representatives are required to agree upon which employees will continue to work during a labour disruption. This is to protect the health and safety of the public. No strike can commence until this issue is resolved to the satisfaction of the Canadian Industrial Relations Board.

If this was the concern of those opposed to the amended Bill C-257, then their fears were unfounded. To ensure that these concerns were addressed beyond any possible misunderstanding, I introduced amendments to Bill C-257 that clarified the need to protect essential services first and foremost.

There is no inconsistency here and these amendments were, in my opinion and in the opinion of the majority of our colleagues on the committee, fully within the scope of the bill.

I must say that I was somewhat surprised to hear the hon. government House leader state on Monday that the amendments "would also dramatically expand and alter the effect of section 87.4 introducing the much broader concept of essential services".

While I disagree with his interpretation about the scope of the bill, if he really believed they had this effect, I would have thought he would have been supportive of a broader interpretation of essential services in view of some of his reasons for opposing this bill.

Many of those who opposed this bill also presented their positions before the committee and I must confess their positions were at times difficult to reconcile.

● (1830)

For example, a representative of a major railway company informed the committee that since 1971 there were four strikes, with only one being resolved through negotiation. The other three ended with back to work legislation.

I find it curious that back to work legislation would have been necessary in 75% of their labour disputes considering there is currently no ban on replacement workers. Clearly, the option of using such workers had no impact on the way these disputes unfolded.

I also note that a representative of the country's private broadcasters speculated at our committee about the possible impact of a strike at a broadcaster during the Quebec ice storms several years ago. He suggested that the public might have been ill served had Bill C-257 been law and a strike was under way. This raised two questions in my mind.

First, would not alternative broadcasters, including public broadcasters, have been available to provide information to the public? Second, how does one hire replacement workers to fill positions in technical jobs like those required at broadcasting companies during a strike or lockout?

The point I am making is that there has been much bluster and misunderstanding surrounding this issue.

As a representative of the Canadian Auto Workers remarked during his presentation, the introduction of replacement workers during a strike or lockout does not assist in facilitating a resolution. Rather, it creates conflict, delays an end to most strikes and develops considerable ill will on all sides.

Clearly it is very difficult in such a short period of time to adequately discuss all the issues that have been raised around Bill C-257. However, suffice it to say that the intent of Bill C-257 is to prevent the use of replacement workers during a strike or lockout at federally regulated employers.

The current law is inadequate in this regard. Basically, for a successful prosecution of an employer to take place it must be shown that the employer hired replacement workers for the express purpose of undermining the union and the bargaining process. How could this be proven in a court of law? It cannot, or at least not without almost insurmountable difficulty. This is why Bill C-257, as amended, was needed.

As for the amendments themselves, they were designed to reaffirm the principles of the Canada Labour Code with respect to essential services and to allow management to continue to work unimpeded during a strike or lockout. That is all they would do.

The decision issued in the House yesterday was indeed quite troubling for me and for many of my colleagues on this side of the House. Bill C-257 as amended by the committee represented a balance that I believe was fair to all parties. It protected essential services, ensured managers could work and set reasonable limits on monetary penalties, while of course prohibiting replacement workers.

My support for Bill C-257 was very much associated with the successful introduction of the amendments upon which the Speaker ruled yesterday. However, I can assure this House that I fully support the principle of a ban on replacement workers. We should not let this setback deter us from moving toward this fair and reasonable objective. I am most certainly committed to continue to do so.

● (1835)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to once again speak to Bill C-257 on the issue of amending the Canada Labour Code to ban replacement workers. I thank my hon. colleague from Gatineau for having introduced the bill.

Over the last number of years, the Canadian government time and time again has enacted legislation that has been chipping away at the rights of working people rather than protecting them. We have seen Canada's record deteriorate so that now we have one of the worst records of any western country when it comes to the promotion and protection of labour rights.

That is why I and my colleagues in the NDP are standing up to speak out in favour of strong legislation that protects the fundamental rights to collective bargaining and the right to strike.

Private Members' Business

We know, as others have said before me, that ending the use of replacement workers during a strike or lockout means fewer and shorter strikes and keeps workers on the job and businesses on the go.

Unfortunately, I have seen violence on picket lines. I want to recall Don Milner, whom I consider a friend and who, during a strike at International Truck in Chatham, was run over on the picket line. A young man with small children, he almost lost his life, and is still recovering from that experience. He was run over through no fault of his own.

We know of many other examples of violence on the picket line. Why? It is always provoked by the use of replacement workers.

Hiring replacement workers undermines the collective bargaining process rather than helping it and can negatively affect the quality of work being done.

Unlike previous speakers, who have said it is unlikely that we would have replacement workers in the federal jurisdiction, that they could not be trained and could not be used, I will say that this is not the case. There have been many strikes in the federal jurisdiction where replacement workers have been used.

We have seen how federal jurisdiction strikes have been prolonged unnecessarily, most recently the Vidéotron strike, I think, but we have also seen that at CBC, Air Canada and other places replacement workers have been used. I want to say for my hon. colleagues who say this sector is too important to ban replacement workers that I wish they felt it was so important that they were in support of a \$10 an hour minimum wage in the federal sector, but that of course is another bill.

This is a sector that has many important services for Canadians, such as passport issuance and food inspection, and certainly we want to avoid any dispute that is long and bitter. The use of replacement workers is not the way to go. We need to avoid the use of replacement workers in this sector.

I am sorry that an amendment I made for this bill was ruled out of order. It was pertaining to the maintenance of essential services, but I want to emphasize that under the Canada Labour Code those section 87.4 essential services are protected and are not overridden by Bill C-257. I want to quote for members subsection 87.4(1):

During a strike or lockout not prohibited by this Part, the employer, the trade union and the employees in the bargaining unit must continue the supply of services, operation of facilities or production of goods to the extent necessary to prevent an immediate and serious danger to the safety or health of the public.

That exists now in law. In fact, long before a strike, employers and employees often agree to terms to allow essential services to be carried out. The Canada Industrial Relations Board and the minister have the authority to protect services during a strike. The CIRB has almost a dozen rulings that refer to the term "essential services" in addressing the continuation of services.

Supply of goods and services is not and should never be reliant on the use of replacement workers.

I have also heard members raise the issue about managers. Bill C-257 clearly allows for managers, directors and supervisors to replace striking workers. That would not change.

● (1840)

Bill C-257 will bring labour stability and encourage investment. I want to cite the experience in two provinces that have long had this kind of legislation.

British Columbia has had anti-replacement worker legislation since 1993. It has had a 50% drop in work time lost through disputes and is experiencing remarkable growth and continued investment.

Quebec as well has had this legislation since 1977. It was the result of a very, very bitter dispute in the 1970s at United Aircraft, where people were very badly injured during the use of replacement workers. Since then there has been labour peace and an average of 15 days lost per year versus an average of 31 days lost under the Canada Labour Code.

This legislation has been good for Quebec and good for British Columbia. I believe it would be good for Canada.

Clearly most employers do not have labour disputes. The overwhelming number of collective agreements in Canada are settled without dispute. No one wants to be on strike. No employer wants to be on strike or have a lockout. The vast majority of employers do not use replacement workers or could not use them because of the level of skill that is required.

This legislation is directed at those few rogue employers in order to create a level playing field for all workers and all employers. It is a fundamental issue of rights, the right to join a union and the right to collective bargaining.

For those rights to be meaningful, working people must have an effective right to withdraw their labour. It is the only power they have in collective bargaining. The use of replacement workers effectively takes away that power. That is widely recognized around the world. As I say, Canada is becoming known as a developed country that has been eroding the rights of working people in the workplace.

I note that the Liberals and the Conservatives have been divided on this bill. I think that is very unfortunate. I urge them to vote in favour. My colleagues and I in the NDP will be 100% in favour of this bill and we urge strongly that the House pass it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we should indeed vote in favour of Bill C-257, which prohibits the hiring of replacement workers.

Private Members' Business

The reasons are simple. The Canada Labour Code does not, unfortunately, fully cover the rights of workers when they negotiate during a labour dispute, whether it is a lockout or a strike. Anti-scab legislation is indispensable, because it allows for civilized negotiations between employers and workers. It removes all the tension that may exist during a strike, when people cross picket lines. This is something that no one wants to experience, and this is what we want to avoid, among other things, by passing anti-scab legislation. The idea is to make negotiations more human, more civilized during a labour dispute.

When we voted at second reading, Bill C-257, the anti-scab legislation, was supported by 20 Conservative members, 70 Liberal members, and by all NDP and Bloc Québécois members. We are confident that other members will join this large group, because it is essential to understand that our purpose here is to improve negotiating conditions during labour disputes.

Without this protection, workers could find themselves at a disadvantage. Indeed, an employer who is not governed by an anti-scab law can hire replacement workers, scabs, thus creating an imbalance. Workers then find themselves negotiating with a boss who continues to make profits, while they have no income. This is indeed what happens during a legal labour dispute.

As I said earlier, Bill C-257 seeks to reduce violence on the picket lines. It promotes a fair balance during negotiations between employers and workers.

Such an act exists in two provinces, that is in the Quebec nation and in British Columbia. In the Quebec nation particularly, such legislation has helped improve negotiations. This is not science fiction. We are not talking about the bogeyman, who comes from the Jonquière-Alma region, and who is telling us that the end of the world is near because, all of a sudden, there is an anti-scab law in Canada. I will get back to this later on.

What is also magical about this legislation—and this will make everyone happy—is that it does not involve any additional costs to the government.

This legislation has existed for 14 years in British Columbia and 30 years in Quebec, in these two jurisdictions, and there has been no movement to scrap it. No one has led movements to get rid of this legislation that allows for civilized negotiations and labour relations during a work stoppage. I will give the example of Quebec because that is a part of the country I know well.

•(1845)

When the legislation passed by the Parti Québécois government in 1977 came into force in 1978, it helped, as I was saying previously, civilize labour relations.

Better still—an interesting observation—when the government of Robert Bourassa was elected in 1985 and returned to power, scrapping the legislation was out of the question. At the time, under the Liberal government, Mr. Bourassa had been approached to scrap the anti-scab legislation. He said—I will paraphrase because I do not have his exact words—that it was out of the question because the direction given to labour negotiations by the anti-scab legislation had brought unprecedented social peace to labour relations in Quebec.

I am talking about a Péquiste, René Lévesque, and a federalist, one Robert Bourassa. All the other governments that followed, those led by Daniel Johnson, Pierre-Marc Johnson, Jacques Parizeau, Bernard Landry and currently Jean Charest, who is also a Conservative Liberal, have never backed down on this.

We hear the words of Canada's current Minister of Labour, who voted in favour of an anti-scab bill on November 5, 1990, when he was an MP in a Conservative government. At the time, he thought it was an excellent bill for all the reasons I just mentioned.

We have to have the mindset that we are working together here to ensure the protection of every party to a work relationship—managers, unions, employers and employees. Parties have to be on equal footing in negotiations—those who are on strike or were locked out and those who locked them out or are facing a situation where the company is shut down because of a strike. That speeds things up.

The Minister of Labour's fear campaigns and apocalyptic announcements are baseless. He should never forget what really goes on in the workplace. People who are directly involved appeared before the committees and proved through simple logic that the situation has improved for negotiations that take place during labour disputes.

That is contrary to everything we have heard from the Minister of Labour who, I repeat, on November 5, 1990, as a Progressive Conservative member of Brian Mulroney's government, voted for a bill like this one.

The current bill does not stop management from maintaining company activities, including the production of goods and the provision of services, nor from using employees to take necessary measures in order to avoid serious damage to a company's assets during a labour dispute. There are provisions in Bill C-257, to allay all fears and to ensure that this bill is effective and responds to everyone involved in talks on both sides of the negotiating table.

We have already mentioned the benefits in terms of fewer work days lost thanks to the framework a replacement workers bill can provide as opposed to a situation where there is no such bill. This is a time saver because it speeds up negotiations. It makes the parties sit down face to face and negotiate faster to reach a solution that works.

•(1850)

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on the anti-scab bill. This is not the first time that the Bloc Québécois has introduced a bill aimed at protecting the rights of workers. I believe the issue should have been resolved several years ago, long before the debate we are having now.

Private Members' Business

Following the speech made by the Minister of Labour and member for Jonquière—Alma during second reading of the bill, I would like to make some comments. I want to provide some clarification to the Minister of Labour, because, first and foremost, he comes from the riding where we find the highest number of unionized workers in Canada. When the Minister of Labour says that if we really give employees the right to strike without replacement workers it will put the Canadian and Quebec economy at risk, that shows he believes that workers are irresponsible people who do not think about the consequences of their action. Workers who go on strike do not do so light-heartedly and they understand quite well the consequences of such action.

I would also like to commend the work done by the union coalition in my area, which represents a vast majority of the unions in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and which emphasized to the Minister of Labour, the hon. member for Jonquière—Alma, the importance of adopting anti-scab legislation. The minister maintained his position, however, a position that we heard again here this evening. By making such a decision, the minister is turning his back on hundreds of workers in Quebec, in his riding of Jonquière—Alma and in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, the region and riding he represents.

How can the Minister of Labour oppose putting an end to the inequity that separates workers under the Quebec Labour Code from workers under the Canada Labour Code? What could possibly explain the labour minister's about-face, when—as my hon. colleague was saying earlier—in 1990, as the Progressive Conservative member for Jonquière—Alma, he supported the anti-scab bill? The minister can very well say that, in his new role, he must adopt a Canadian perspective of the situation. By taking this action, he is ignoring the reality in Quebec and failing to represent the workers in his riding of Jonquière—Alma. I would remind the House that, in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area, which includes his riding of Jonquière—Alma, some 6,000 workers are governed by the Canada Labour Code.

Prohibiting the hiring of replacement workers during a labour dispute is needed now more than ever. Furthermore, as we have already heard but I would like to reiterate, the studies cited by the minister all come from right-leaning organizations. Any study by the Montreal Economic Institute or the Fraser Institute invariably tends to support the interests of management and to back the employers. Anti-scab legislation has existed in Quebec for the past 30 years. As we have said, and I think it bears repeating, it was under the governance of the Parti Québécois, with René Lévesque as premier, that it was adopted in 1977 and came into force in 1978.

• (1855)

Of course, in Quebec, employers are not promoting the anti-scab measure but it must be said that they can very well live with it.

I want to give a few reasons why we should forbid replacement workers.

First, it would reduce violence on the picket lines. We know that relations are sometimes tense if not violent between strikers and replacement workers. Second, it would force employers to bargain in good faith with the workers to prevent them from extending the conflict, and impose a fair balance in the negotiations between employers and employees. The Canada Labour Code can be

interpreted as saying that as long as the employer negotiates that is all that counts. Then, he can hire replacement workers.

There are other reasons. It could prevent households from going into debt when labour disputes last too long. A father must provide for several people. If the family has no income, he must borrow money.

There is also a very wide consensus among unions as to the importance of implementing anti-scab measures.

In today's work world, it is necessary because such measures ensure greater transparency during a conflict.

With this in mind, the current situation under the Canada Labour Code—allowing the use of replacement workers—means that there are very negative consequences during strikes and lockouts. These negative effects are numerous and suffice to illustrate the importance of introducing measures to reduce the length of labour disputes.

The premise is that labour disputes last longer when scabs are used. Even the president of the CSN stated, a few months ago, that everyone agrees that the anti-scab provisions of the Quebec labour code have made labour relations more civilized and contributed to industrial peace.

Such a statement is quite something. We must take note of this opinion. To give just a couple of examples, we believe that the Vidéotron and Cargill disputes would have been resolved much sooner with an anti-scab law under the Canada Labour Code.

Let us return to the Minister of Labour. A while back, not today, he provided some statistics and dramatized the situation that would result with the adoption of the measure in this legislation. I have the figures he gave at second reading of the bill in June: they do not reflect the reality.

In addition, we must consider some other decisive statistics. The average number of work days lost in Quebec is a concrete example. From 1992 to 2002, workers governed by the Quebec Labour Code lost 15.9 days compared to workers governed by the Canada Labour Code, who lost 31.1 days. There is a comparison.

• (1900)

There were twice as many—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but his time is up.

The hon. member for Mississauga-South has the floor.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the report stage debate on Bill C-257, commonly known as the replacement worker bill.

The last time the federal labour code was dealt with, between 1995 and 1999, a comprehensive and exhaustive review took place with all stakeholders. It resulted in some important changes and developments to provide a balance between management and labour and, of course, mutual respect for the collective bargaining process, which is very important to many industries and businesses within Canada.

Adjournment Proceedings

Members of Parliament have also been approached, lobbied, if you will, by many stakeholder groups on all sides. This bill has resurrected many of the arguments that were raised back in 1995. It is becoming very clear that the instrument of a private member's bill, which receives two hours of debate at second reading, and a very short period for review at committee, and only two hours for report stage and third reading, provides a relatively modest amount of time for a bill that is seeking to make very substantive changes to the federal labour code.

I wanted to raise this point because this is a very serious issue. Members are taking it very seriously. There are legitimate disagreements among members within this place, as was seen by the vote at the second reading stage of the bill.

One of the key elements of the debate has to do with the concept of essential services. The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat website in describing what is an essential service refers to the Public Service Labour Relations Act and its definition of an essential service and states as follows:

Subsection 4(1) of the PSLRA defines an "essential service" as "a service, facility or activity of the Government of Canada that is or will be, at any time, necessary for the safety or security of the public or a segment of the public". Services should be identified as essential where there are reasonable grounds for accepting the probability, or even the possibility, that human life or public safety would suffer if a work stoppage interrupted the duties of these employees. It should be noted that positions where occupants are to be available during their off-duty hours to report to work without delay to perform the essential services are also included.

It lists some examples, which include border safety and security, correctional services, food inspection, health care, accident safety, investigations, income and social security, marine safety, national security, law enforcement, and search and rescue.

I think from the standpoint of the Treasury Board and from the Public Service Labour Relations Act the concept of essential services is well defined for the purposes of the Government of Canada.

The federal labour code does not include a definition of what constitutes essential services. In fact, it refers to public health and safety. Amendments that were proposed at committee were trying to incorporate into Bill C-257 the concept of essential services and to have them linked into the federal labour code.

The Speaker, looking at the process and the rules and the procedures that we must follow, was of the view that a couple of the amendments which would establish the concept of essential services within Bill C-257 were beyond the scope of the bill and were out of order. We find ourselves ostensibly with the original bill unamended. A minor amendment was permitted, but the bill is unamended for the most part.

• (1905)

That covers the government side, but there also was the business side, and members also received an intervention from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. Its communication states:

It is the Canadian Chamber's opinion that any change to the Canada Labour Code, especially an amendment that alters the relationship between employers and employees, deserves extensive study in order to fully understand the impacts on Canadian society and the economy. As stated in section 2.4 of Bill C-257, the bill would prevent uninterrupted provision of services that affect seniors, families, small businesses and the Canadian economy—services such as 911; health and emergency services; transportation services (air, rail, marine, and road) and news and weather warnings in the event of a storm or tragedy.

The chamber has launched its campaign to engage members of Parliament on this.

As we can see, the business sector is talking about essential services in the context of the implications to Canadians at large. I know that in our history of postal strikes there has been some argument that the postal service represents an essential service. That is not public health and safety, but—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. The hon. member will have about four minutes left, but 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.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight looking forward to perhaps finally getting some answers to a question I raised in the House on November 7 in regard to a situation in Hamilton.

No doubt members will recall that Stelco in Hamilton was under CCAA protection over a two year period. Over a period of time, the workers and pensioners and of course their families were under great uncertainty. A number of different proposals went before the courts to try to address the debt situation and other problems at Stelco.

Finally, when it did get to the point of a resolution so that Stelco could emerge from CCAA protection, part of the agreement, Hamiltonians were told, was that the federal government was going to put \$30 million into a co-generation plant at Stelco.

Obviously that co-generation plant would go a long way toward cleaning the air in Hamilton. On November 7, I spoke to the fact that the timing, as we see it, has never been better for meaningful projects such as this one.

I look forward to hearing a response from the government, principally because in the spring of this year the Minister of Finance of this government attended the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce and, outside that morning meeting, was questioned by the media and indicated at that time that there was no such agreement on the co-generation plant. Members can imagine how shocked the people of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and greater Hamilton were to hear that news.

Because of that, the uncertainty came back for our pensioners and they are very concerned. I am looking forward to hearing a response to the question I posed on November 7.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1910)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the first time in Canada's history, our new government is taking real action to reduce our pollution and greenhouse gases to protect the health of Canadians and the environment.

Unlike the previous Liberal government, our government will achieve real results through mandatory, enforceable regulations with short term, medium term and long term targets. The short term targets will be announced very soon. Mandatory regulations will replace the voluntary approaches that have failed in the past. We will ensure that regulations are enforced and their objectives achieved.

The previous Liberal government is now under the leadership of the man who the media has nicknamed Dr. Dolittle. He used voluntary measures and ineffective projects funded with taxpayer money, promising to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gases. We all know what happened. He did not get it done. Greenhouse gas emissions actually increased 35% above the promised target. In fact, his deputy leader said that he created an environmental mess.

Unlike the Liberals, Canada's new government believes in the importance of regulations that will require industry to make the necessary investments in their own energy saving technologies.

With regard to the specific case raised by the hon. member, we are willing to examine such initiatives. We also believe that in Canada the polluter should pay. We believe industry should lead in investing in its own technology to save energy, reduce air emissions and decrease production costs.

In the case of air quality and climate change, the government is demonstrating real action and leadership every day. We introduced Canada's clean air act, the most sweeping environmental act to clean up Canada's environment. We announced \$1.5 billion for the ecotrust program, working with the provinces to clean the environment, \$300 million for ecoenergy efficiency initiative and \$230 million for the ecoenergy technology initiative. We announced a renewable fuel initiative, and I could go on and on.

That is why we are introducing enforceable regulations that will require industry to make investments in technology in Canada.

By taking these steps, Canada's new government is focusing on improving the health and environment of Canada. We are ensuring that investments are made to provide clean air and to fight climate change right here at home.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I have to say this is disappointing to us. The people of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and Hamilton have waited since November to hear about this. Instead we seem to be hearing a commercial bashing the former government, like we are seeing on TV these days.

The mayor of Hamilton came to this community about a month ago to talk about Randle Reef and other significant problems in Hamilton. However, there is no need to examine this project. It was agreed to by Stelco, the company involved. It was agreed to by Hamilton. It was agreed to by the courts. We do not understand why the government is delaying on this.

This is an opportunity to do something for the air in our community and to do it now. Therefore, I am really disappointed with this response.

•(1915)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member well knows what we are doing. We are a government of action. We believe that clear regulations will provide industry with an incentive to invest in the technologies needed to deliver early reductions in air pollution and greenhouse gases.

As important as regulations are, if they are not enforced they are not worth the paper on which they are printed.

Our government will ensure that industry lives up to its obligations. Our approach will also encourage technological change right here in Canada for a cleaner and greener future. The government strongly believes that technology can and will play an important role of reducing pollution. I encourage the member to help us move forward.

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the Official Languages Act was passed in 1969, the armed forces have not met their obligation to properly train bilingual officers and to give French its rightful place.

Now the Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages is backtracking on the bilingualism requirements for senior military officers. It is not right that the government, for too long now, has been allowing the armed forces to flout the provisions of the Official Languages Act, and even worse, that the requirements have been lowered for unilingual English officers being appointed to senior positions.

This throws the movement for francophone rights in the Canadian armed forces back 40 years.

In reality, only a francophone officer will be required to be bilingual. The armed forces have never been able to respect the Official Languages Act in their hierarchy. The Conservatives are now choosing to endorse a decline of French in the ranks of the military.

If the armed forces refuse to respect the spirit and the letter of the Official Languages Act, they are being unfair towards the francophones who have no choice but to learn English since senior anglophone officers are apparently incapable of learning even a bare minimum of French.

The Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages and the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities misled this House by implying, on February 8 and 9, that Canada's new policy had been drafted after consultations with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, among others. However, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, clearly stated on February 12 that this was not true. Mr. Fraser also criticized the time frame for implementing this new approach, saying that 2012 was too late.

Adjournment Proceedings

With the new defence rules, the army will be even less bilingual than it is now. Yet even the current situation reflects the Canadian Forces' disrespect for francophones. In 2006, the office of the commissioner showed that the army nearly always violated the Official Languages Act when staffing bilingual positions. Between 39% and 44% of positions designated as bilingual were held by unilingual anglophones. This is unacceptable. It is a deficiency that needs to be pointed out again. The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages has repeatedly made efforts to get the Canadian Forces to meet their obligations, yet they are shirking their responsibilities again.

With the new policy, not only will French be used less in the army, to the continuing detriment of francophones, but francophones will be ghettoized, according to retired lieutenant colonel Rémi Landry. Positions that, for demographic reasons, are located in Quebec and the national capital region will be French-language positions, and the rest of Canada will be for anglophones only.

Once again, Canada is snubbing French and giving priority to unilingual anglophones for promotion, at the expense of bilingual francophones. Yet we know that the Dominion of Canada was founded 140 years ago on the principle that English Canadians and French Canadians were always to enjoy equal language and cultural rights.

• (1920)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to respond today to the hon. member for Gatineau because yesterday, in the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the hon. member had the opportunity to put questions to the Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages and the Minister of National Defence.

I would like to quote what he said at the end of his comments, "I was being long winded. There is no question in everything I just said, but you can respond to my comments—". Once again, the Bloc says a lot, but it will never be able to do anything.

Rest assured that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces recognize the importance of our official languages.

Recently, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages conducted two investigations. In her findings, the commissioner made 13 recommendations to the Canadian Forces for improving respect for the legislation. The new Canadian Forces official languages transformation model is the response to the 10th recommendation. The official languages transformation model marks the arrival of a brand new approach to managing official languages. The previous approach failed. Our new approach will help resolve past problems and will be more realistic. This new plan will strengthen respect for the Official Languages Act by the Canadian Forces and it will better take into account the unique nature of the organization and the needs of the Canadian Forces, and this is how.

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 leadership, instruction and services, when and where required by the Act.

The model will focus on senior military officers. Senior officers will continue to have priority access to second language training.

I want to emphasize this because of the erroneous perception articulated by the member for Gatineau that bilingualism is not a condition of service for senior officers. At least 70% of newly promoted colonels and captains must achieve the highest level of linguistic ability during the year following their promotion.

The model requires all senior officers serving in bilingual regions or positions to achieve a superior level of language ability. The scale is the same as for the public service. It is therefore false to suggest that with this model, we are abandoning our obligations.

The Canadian Forces are committed to offering second language training to military personnel who need it to fulfill their duties well. The Canadian Forces will focus their resources on offering an appropriate level of second language training to individuals who require it to improve overall compliance with the act. The act does not require all federal employees to be bilingual.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, I come back to what I said earlier. We are in the 140th year of the creation of the Dominion, in fact, of Canada as such. However, even after so many years, we recognize, we see and it is demonstrated once again that federal Canada provides the evidence that it still does not respect the rights of francophones in the armed forces.

Moreover, it allows the armed forces to avoid respecting the Official Languages Act. Indeed, instead of getting them to fill all bilingual positions with people who can adequately speak French and English, it finds a new way for the armed forces to avoid respecting this act.

Thus, by creating 277 units of unilingual English forces, 55 French units and 212 bilingual units, the assimilating Canadian state is dividing the armed forces in a ethnolinguistic way to once again diminish—

• (1925)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House that, unlike the political party to which the hon. member for Gatineau belongs, we and the other members on this side of the House voted to support Bill S-3, regarding official languages. As a result, we will not be taking any lessons from the Bloc Québécois. We are going to work to ensure that linguistic duality is just as strong in the Canadian armed forces as it is in other federal institutions.

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address the House on a question I asked recently of the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development about the meanspirited cuts of \$55 million from a program that provided support for student employment and community groups in Canada.

The response given by the minister at the time was:

—it is kind of hilarious that the member would be concerned about a few million dollars in cuts to summer career placement.

That is a troubling response to a serious question about a summer student job program that has created hundreds of thousands of jobs for students to help pay for university and college. Cutting \$55 million, over half the budget, is not an act of a generous country. It is the act of a narrow-minded thinking government and is rooted in its view of the world that sees no role for government to help people.

For the government, if people do not have the means to better themselves it must be their fault seems to be the government's view.

We often hear issues related to crime in the House. We all know that the government would rather build more prison spaces than day care spaces. On the issue of crime it has been an exercise in propaganda.

There is not one MP in the House who does not want to do something about crime. In my own riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour crime is an issue. We need to take measures to deal with repeat and violent offenders, including young offenders.

The recent report on the McEvoy incident was very clear. The Youth Criminal Justice Act works very well but there are some things that we can improve and need to do that. We do not want to throw 10 year old kids in jail like some members opposite. We need a balance because most young people, as we all know, have a huge potential to improve themselves and they may need a little bit of assistance.

The root cause of a lot of crime is the opportunity gap. We want to deal with the root cause which is often poverty.

This brings us to programs like as the summer career placements program. The Liberal government invested in young people, in programs like summer jobs, so that those most in need can get an education. We all know that education and the development of skills opens up opportunities and provides hope for people, especially those who may not have the financial means otherwise.

I think the summer career placements program had two flaws in the eyes of the government. First, it was a Liberal program and, second, it worked.

We have had no answer yet as to what the government will do with these cuts nor do we know what the program will look like. We do know the government cut \$55 million out of the budget but there have been no details. Last June when I asked the question I heard that corporations were benefiting. In my own riding, and this is not dissimilar, I have the list of people who benefited from that program. There are no corporations on that list. It is all not for profits: boys

and girls clubs, youth soccer programs, youth recreation, mental health groups and women's groups. Those are the groups that use the summer program for students and let students do work in the area of interest to them to benefit the community. In fact, in the last two years all the grants in my riding have been for not for profit organizations.

Is this a permanent cut of \$55 million or is this a regifted Conservative hoax, another one like EnerGuide, that it will thrust on the Canadian people?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I am very pleased to tell him that we are acting in the best interests of Canadians, and especially young Canadians.

[English]

We want to ensure our investments help those in need. We want to ensure that our tax dollars are spent as wisely as possible as we try to encourage opportunities and our strategy is working.

Because of the government's fiscal policies, the job market is hot. Unemployment is at record lows and never before have so many Canadians been working. Those are statistical facts. Let me give some examples of how we have achieved this enormous success.

The government, for example, spends over \$300 million annually on programs to help Canadian youth through the youth employment strategy, part of which helps students get summer jobs. So the misinformation we heard about not for profits getting cut off is simply not true. In fact, we are going to continue to fund not for profit job opportunities for young people.

The government has also announced new investments of \$20 million over two years in budget 2006 to fund projects designed to reduce youth crime and gang violence. That accompanies a whole package of tough on crime legislation designed to discourage crime. That is why the Liberal Party, in particular its leader Dr. Dolittle, should stop blocking that anti-crime legislation and help the government pass those bills so that we can make our streets safe.

Adjournment Proceedings

Budget 2006 announced a textbook tax credit that will benefit about 1.9 million students with a tax credit worth about \$80 per student. All they have to do is keep their textbook receipts and they will qualify at the end of the tax year for up to \$80. Even if they do not work or pay taxes, they could keep those receipts and when they get out into the workforce, they can use all the years of textbook purchases and benefit from the tax credit later on.

The other good news that the member will celebrate with me is that we have eliminated taxation on scholarship income, so if students work hard and achieve, and win a scholarship for their efforts, they will no longer see that money taken from them by a government with sticky fingers. Instead, that money will stay in their studies. They will be able to use it to buy books and shelter so that they may continue to do their work.

We have also brought in a \$1,000 apprenticeship incentive grant announced in last year's budget which that member voted against. Over 100,000 apprentices will benefit. Employers also benefit with up to \$2,000 per apprentice for each of the first two years of their contract under the apprenticeship job creation tax credit. So employers who hire apprentices will benefit up to \$2,000 per apprentice in federal grants to encourage them to hire and engage apprentices and give them on the job training.

People in my constituency are proud of what we are doing for the trades. It is not just about university students. Many of us here went to university, but let us not forget that many others have picked up the trades. They work in blue collar jobs. They build this country. They should be proud of what they do and we as a government should help them.

We are proud to say that we are leading, that we are getting things done for Canadians, and that we are producing real results for the Canadian economy.

• (1930)

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, these kind of non-responses are an abdication of responsibility entirely in keeping with the government's approach of cancelling programs it disagrees with ideologically, hacking apart programs that provide the social

infrastructure of our country, and providing no information to community groups or students about what is going on while it decides how to regift a Liberal program that worked from the beginning.

Here is a chance to step up and be a responsible government. Tell Canadians, tell students, tell not for profit organizations, boys and girls clubs, and mental health groups, tell them what is going on.

When the House reconvenes after this week, it will be the week celebrating the coming of spring. After spring comes summer. There is no information. People do not know where to go or where to turn. There is no information about what is going on. When are we going to find out? When is the government going to step up and tell Canadians what is going on with what is left of the summer career placement program after it hacked out half the money?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I think the member should calm down, relax and take some pleasure in the fact that we are keeping a program in place to help not for profit organizations hire our young people for summer placements. The member should celebrate with us that achievement.

In fact, we are making the system more efficient so that more students benefit and more jobs are created. But again, because of our tax cuts and our sound economic management, and our debt repayments, the job market is hot. Jobs are being created. The economy is stronger than ever before and never in this country's history have so many Canadians been working. The country is on the right track. We are getting things done.

[Translation]

We are taking action and will continue to take action in the future.

• (1935)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): 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.

(The House adjourned at 7:35 p.m.)

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