



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 142 • NUMBER 031 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, December 5, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, December 5, 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 Sackville—Eastern Shore.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to pay tribute to International Volunteer Day, which takes place each year on December 5. International Volunteer Day is officially recognized by the United Nations as a day on which volunteers around the world are recognized and celebrated for their dedication.

Canadians make an enormous contribution of time to make life better in our communities. Almost 12 million Canadians volunteer with charities or organizations and contribute close to 2 billion volunteer hours.

However, there is always room for more. In terms of the whole Canadian population, 11% of Canadians contribute 77% of all volunteer hours. This means that 1.3 million volunteers provide 1.5 billion hours, an average of 1,000 hours each.

Volunteer Canada encourages Canadians to join in and be the positive change in their communities.

To all the volunteers and volunteer organizations across the country, and especially those in my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country, I express my thanks for making the effort and taking the time to make life better for all of us.

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INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is indeed International Volunteer Day and, in particular, I want to

draw attention to those Canadians who are serving overseas as volunteers.

At any time, over 3,300 Canadians are volunteering internationally, working to fight poverty, increasing access to water and sanitation, teaching classes, providing health care, working to strengthen democracy and improve governance, and helping accelerate small business development.

Since the creation of Canada's aid program more than 35 years ago, more than 75,000 Canadians have volunteered overseas.

Canada is fortunate to have volunteer organizations with the expertise to make sure our volunteers have a lasting impact. These agencies are attracting international attention for their innovation and ability to work together effectively.

All Canadians can and must be proud of the contributions of Canadian volunteers overseas. I ask all members of the House to join me in saluting the 75,000 Canadians who have served overseas to build a better world.

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[*Translation*]

CLAUDE LE SAUTEUR

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to a great Quebecker, artist Claude Le Sauteur, an impressive landscape painter who passed away on November 29, at the age of 81.

Welcomed and inspired by Charlevoix for more than 30 years, Claude Le Sauteur left a mark on his time with his talent. He has charmed us with his works, of course, but also as a committed, genuine, daring, hard-working, generous and touching man.

Made a member of the Order of Canada in 2000, knight of the National Order of Quebec the same year, and a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1989, Le Sauteur received the Alphonse-Desjardins medal in 1984 and the Quebec Lieutenant Governor medal in 1950.

Claude Le Sauteur's world-famous luminous landscapes and lively, colourful figures enable us to share the imagination of this artist whom we have loved so much and will continue to love forever.

Thank you, Claude Le Sauteur!

Statements by Members

[English]

FIREFIGHTERS

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently I had the honour to attend the Winnipeg Fire Fighters Annual Charity Ball.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Alex Forrest, president of the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg, Local 867, on a successful evening and extend my thanks and the gratitude of my constituents for the work that firefighters and paramedics do every day.

When others are rushing out away from danger, they are rushing in to protect, to rescue and sometimes to die in the line of duty.

Tragically, this was the case for two Winnipeg firefighters this last year, so the event was also an opportunity to honour and thank the families of Captain Harold Lessard and Captain Tom Nichols.

I would also like to commend Mr. Martin Johnson, a constituent of mine, for his leadership over the years in regard to the Fire Fighters Burn Fund. It has been an honour to work with and for such people.

* * *

NORVAL MORRISSEAU

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was with great sadness that we learned of the death of the great Anishinabe painter, Norval Morriseau.

Known as Copper Thunderbird, Mr. Morriseau was the first artist to depict the rich legends and history of the Ojibwa, and he was an inspiration to several generations of aboriginal artists.

Appointed to the Order of Canada in 1978 in recognition of his distinctive body of work, Mr. Morriseau is the only first nations artist to have a major solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada.

The government joins with people around the world in extending deepest sympathy to the friends and family of Norval Morriseau.

* * *

GEORGE KNOX

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the sad duty to report to the House the passing of George Knox.

A squadron flight lieutenant during World War II, George's spirit of selflessness followed him home. He served on many boards and was a tireless volunteer, a steward at Greenborough Community Church, founding president of York Community Services, and the deserving recipient of the Queen's Jubilee Medal for Senior Citizen of the Year.

There is a long list of those who loved him and those who, like myself, had the honour of calling him a dear friend.

The list of those who benefited from his charitable works is endless.

George lived an incredible life. He served his country and then his community and was forever striving to benefit his fellow man. While

some strove for recognition or accolades, George was content to lead a life of quiet heroism.

George was a wonderful, caring, kind, capable and courageous man. Our community will miss him, as will I.

I would like to call on my hon. colleagues in this House to applaud the life and legacy of a D-Day veteran, a community champion and a truly great Canadian, George Arthur Knox.

* * *

● (1410)

KEN GORMAN

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise today to pay tribute to one of the finest teachers I have ever known.

Mr. Ken Gorman taught at Immaculata High School here in Ottawa for the past 26 years, having retired just recently in the spring to pursue his own interests, including songwriting and literature.

Few teachers were able to make the English language come to life like Mr. Gorman could. Hundreds of former Immaculata students are able to rhyme off Shakespeare's verses thanks to his efforts to instill in us a love of the Bard's works.

I will always remember playing name that tune, the candle of inspiration, the wall of fame and all his other techniques to connect with students and to make learning fun.

Sadly, Mr. Gorman was not able to enjoy his well-deserved retirement. Last week, at the all too young age of 56, Mr. Gorman succumbed to cancer.

To his wife Anne and his children Michelle, Marie and Sean, I would like to pass along my deepest condolences. On behalf of the class of 1998, I would like to say to his family that we will keep them in our prayers, and from *Henry IV*, act 5, scene 4, we say, "Adieu, and take thy praise with thee to heaven!"

* * *

[Translation]

BILL C-411

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow will be a critical day for businesses. Indeed, this will be the second hour of debate on Bill C-411, which I introduced in this House, on March 2.

This legislation is very important, because it provides, at last, anti-dumping measures that are in compliance with those recognized internationally, and that will allow businesses to protect themselves against the flood of subsidized imports, particularly from so-called "emerging" economies.

All the parties will have the opportunity to support businesses by voting in favour of a better imports control system. The Bloc Québécois feels that it is urgent to put in place means to help our businesses, which must deal with a strong dollar and face unfair trade practices.

Statements by Members

Tomorrow, we will see which federalist parties defend, like the Bloc Québécois, jobs in Quebec.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Liberals issued yet another empty press release on agriculture. It is not a surprise coming from a Liberal leader who has admitted that he is “not an expert on agriculture”.

Instead of more empty talk, our government is putting farmers first and we are taking real action. In less than two years, we have negotiated agreements with the provincial and territorial governments to create AgriInvest, AgriStability and AgriRecovery, which replace the failed Liberal CAIS program.

We have taken a strong and balanced approach to international negotiations by standing up for supply management and pushing for increased market access for Canadian exports.

We are also taking real action for both our environment and our farm families by providing strong support for the biofuel industry.

Canadian farmers are maximizing tremendous opportunities in agriculture, but our government understands and recognizes that some sectors are struggling. That is why we are working with industry leaders and provincial governments to deliver real help to livestock producers and to build long term solutions.

While the opposition talks, this government will continue to take real action for Canadian farm families across the country.

* * *

NORVAL MORRISSEAU

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the official opposition, I too wish to pay tribute today to an extraordinary Canadian artist, Norval Morrisseau, who died yesterday at the age of 75.

Mr. Morrisseau, a self-taught artist who signed most of his work with his Ojibwa name, Copper Thunderbird, received the Order of Canada in 1978 and is holder of the eagle feather, which is the highest honour awarded by the Assembly of First Nations.

He invented a style used by generations of aboriginal artists and called the pictographic style.

In 1966, Norval, along with fellow native artist Carl Ray, created a large mural for the native people of Canada pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal.

Last year, the National Gallery of Canada organized a retrospective of his work, the first time the gallery dedicated a solo exposition to a native artist.

[Translation]

I would like to congratulate the National Gallery of Canada on that.

[English]

Mr. Morrisseau has been called the “Picasso of the North” by many. It is a well-deserved title. We thank him for his legacy.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are not fooled by the empty Liberal rhetoric. For more than a dozen years, that party failed to address the pressing issues facing women. Its time in office represented lost years for the advancement of women as successive Liberal governments undermined women's safety and opportunity for economic advancement.

Whether it is the fight against violent crime, protection of the environment or elimination of poverty, the Liberals did not get it done.

On that side of the House, things have not improved. Under the current Liberal leader, high profile female MPs are leaving politics. Others are demoted in favour of men. Prominent female candidates have been pushed aside and the Liberals continue to hold annual “no women allowed” parties.

Actions speak louder than words. Liberals make promises but they never deliver. Canadian women are not buying what Liberals are selling.

* * *

● (1415)

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever know and yet Canada remains one of the largest producers of asbestos in the world, dumping 220,000 tonnes per year into developing nations.

Most developed nations have banned asbestos in all of its forms: the entire European Union, Japan, Australia and many other countries.

On October 4, the United States Senate unanimously passed bill 742, the ban asbestos in America bill.

However, Canada continues to allow asbestos to be used in construction materials, textile products and even, unbelievably, children's toys, and it spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

Canada should ban asbestos in all its forms, institute a just transition program for workers who may be displaced, end all government subsidies of asbestos in both Canada and abroad, and stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, like the Rotterdam convention.

*Statements by Members***EXHIBITION TRANSPORTATION SERVICES PROGRAM**

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, galleries and museums across the country are outraged at the cancellation of the exhibition transportation services program by the Minister of Canadian Heritage .

The exhibition transportation services program allows museums and galleries access to art and exhibits that would otherwise be too expensive to ship.

The Thunder Bay Museum, the Thunder Bay Art Gallery and the Fort Frances Museum are concerned with the dramatically increased shipping costs that they will face when this service expires in April.

There is also very real concern that shipping services to remote areas, such as northwestern Ontario, will be unavailable without this government-run program, leaving our museums and galleries without any travelling exhibits to draw patrons.

Arts and heritage programming is too vital to our communities to be put in such jeopardy. The Minister of Heritage must immediately renew the exhibition transportation services program.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is International Volunteer Day, and I am very proud to salute the extraordinary work that volunteers from Quebec do all over the world. On the ground, each one is a ray of hope for hundreds of people. Their caring and know-how enable them to make a solid contribution to improving the daily lives of the most vulnerable. They are the very incarnation of peace, social justice and democracy, values that Quebeckers hold dear.

I want to highlight the work of Claudette and Jean-Guy Bourbonnais, two volunteers in my riding, who share their expertise in organizational development and management with Oxfam-Québec partners in the Congo.

I would like to thank all people who, like them, are helping people in need both at home and abroad. As Christmas draws near, their dedication is an inestimable source of comfort.

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[English]

LIBERAL WOMEN'S CAUCUS

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to honour the release of *Pink Book II*. This new *Pink Book* is the result of countless hours of hard work by members of the national Liberal women's caucus, in consultation with women right across Canada.

The policy document addresses issues of violence against women, housing, aboriginal women, immigrant and refugee women, and rural women; policies that were developed to counter the lack of initiative to promote women's equality by the Conservative government, a government that removed the word "equality" out of the mandate of Status of Women, a government that closed 12 out

of 16 Status of Women regional offices and eliminated the court challenges program and the Law Commission.

In contrast, the national Liberal women's caucus continues to work on behalf of the women of Canada, continues to protect women's interests from the Conservatives in Parliament.

We will bring forward progressive and practical policy suggestions and work with organizations that promote women's equality to ensure that their voices are not silenced.

* * *

● (1420)

[Translation]

BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in its 17 years in Ottawa, did the Bloc put a stop to the Liberal culture of entitlement?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In its 17 years in Ottawa, did the Bloc implement an agreement ensuring Quebec's participation in UNESCO?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In its 17 years in Ottawa, did the Bloc restore fiscal balance in the federation?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In its 17 years in Ottawa, did the Bloc finalize a \$350 million agreement to finance Quebec's green plan?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In its 17 years in Ottawa, did the Bloc put in place a program for the sale of Mirabel land?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In its 17 years in Ottawa, did the Bloc put in place one measure to help farmers?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In its 17 years in Ottawa, did the Bloc reduce taxes for corporations, workers and seniors?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Is it of any use to have 49 Bloc members in Ottawa?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Recognizing the Quebec nation in Ottawa means having Conservative members with the means to put words into action.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government ignores the issues facing women today.

Women still face discrimination and violence every day in Canada and yet the Conservative government went so far as to delete the word “equality” from the mandate of Status of Women Canada.

The only question is, why? Why would the government delete equality as a goal for Canadian women?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth.

I read that the Liberal Party has released a new book on women's issues but I read in the wire story here that the leader of the Liberal Party would not commit to putting these recommendations in his electoral platform.

I guess, having read that the leader of the Liberal Party has adopted the strategy of General Kutuzov, I wonder if this is just another example of him retreating from his own positions.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, wait until the Prime Minister sees the Liberal platform in the next election.

Look at what his government has done to women. It abolished the court challenges program. It closed 12 regional Status of Women offices. It abolished federal-provincial child care agreements, robbing women and thousands of parents of thousands and thousands of child care spaces.

Why is this government so indifferent to the serious difficulties facing women?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party retreated from his own position twice on the first day of his new policy.

This government has replaced funding for bureaucracies with funding that goes directly to women's programs. This government has replaced funding for child care bureaucracies with payments that go directly to women and their families.

The Leader of the Liberal Party has promised to eliminate these benefits and that is just bad policy. This party is going to maintain these benefits for Canadian women.

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is very nervous about the progress his platform will have in the next campaign for women in Canada.

Women in Canada continue to suffer discrimination. They continue to suffer abuse and violence. They continue to struggle for basic equality and, on all of this, the government's track record is abysmal.

Oral Questions

Why should Canadian women trust anything the government says?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has brought in new laws to protect women from violence. Members of that party have said that their government would repeal those laws.

This government has brought in new benefits for women and for children and their families directly to those families. The leader of the Liberal Party says that he would take those things away.

This government has taken programs that used to spend money on offices and bureaucracy and has spent it directly on Canadian women and the Liberal Party is opposed to that. That is why men and women will vote against that party and re-elect this government.

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many women in Canada—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I know it is Wednesday and there is plenty of enthusiasm but we have to be able to hear the member who has the floor.

The hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora now has the floor. We will have some order.

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Mr. Speaker, many women in Canada cannot access legal aid for family law matters, even when they are leaving abusive relationships. The Liberal government was working with the provinces to develop a new agreement to give these women better legal access.

For the sake of these women and for their children, when will the government develop an agreement with the provinces?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting. The Liberals say that they were working on it. In fact, the whole question of civil legal aid was cut by that group of people in 1995. It was their own action that did it.

That being said, we are committed to the family violence initiative. I am pleased the Department of Justice is involved with that. We help individual groups that address domestic violence. It is an important issue and a serious one for Canadians.

I continue to work with federal-provincial counterparts. We have done a lot and we will do more.

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in October the minister threatened that the organizations that criticized the government may lose their funding. She said, “I am surprised that certain organizations that receive our financial support criticize our support for the cause of women”.

These organizations defend women's rights and try to improve the quality of life for Canadian families. Why is the minister threatening these groups?

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to correct what the hon. member just said. Perhaps since her French is not very good, she misinterpreted what she read in the newspaper.

This is what our government is doing for women. Among other things, we have increased by over 42% the budget for Status of Women Canada programs. In the first group of projects that have been announced, 34 projects are for fighting—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

* * *

MANUFACTURING AND FORESTRY INDUSTRIES

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when questioned yesterday by the Bloc Québécois about the lack of an assistance plan for the manufacturing sector, the Minister of Industry had the gall to reply: “I am pleased to see that the Quebec government finally decided to put a plan into action”. I would like to remind the minister that Canada has a budget surplus of \$11.6 billion for 2007-08 and that the federal government still has not introduced a plan to help the manufacturing industry.

Will the Prime Minister do his part for the manufacturing sector and its workers and introduce a plan to help the entire sector now?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the 2007 budget, this government introduced incentives for the manufacturing sector. The sector welcomed this government's budget, and we are already seeing the results. We are seeing new investment in machinery and equipment for this sector. In the throne speech, this government recognized the need to do more, and we will take action.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the crisis in manufacturing and forestry is far from over. Mr. Béchar, the minister from Quebec, has said as much. Jean-Luc Trahan of the Quebec association of manufacturers and exporters has called on the federal government to do something in the short term to help manufacturers.

Why did the Prime Minister choose to make tax cuts that will mainly benefit the oil companies, when he could have used his economic statement to announce measures to help the manufacturing and forestry sectors?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is going to act in the short term and in the long term. That includes tax reductions, as announced in the Minister of Finance's economic statement. The manufacturing sector in Quebec welcomed that statement and those measures, even though the Bloc voted against the tax reductions for that sector. This is another example where the Bloc is not representing Quebec's best interests.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, given the urgency of the situation in the manufacturing sector, the Minister of Finance must act immediately and go beyond the Prime Minister's rhetoric. He must establish short-term measures, such as creating a \$500 million fund

for research and development, and \$1.5 billion in repayable contributions for businesses that invest, thus allowing them to remain competitive and protect jobs.

With a surplus of \$11.6 billion this year, why does the minister not go ahead and implement the measures proposed by the Bloc Québécois and the Standing Committee on Finance and called for by the entire manufacturing industry? He has the means. He must act now.

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister just said, there were very substantial business tax reductions for manufacturers so far this year, \$1.3 billion in the March budget and then across the board long term business tax reductions, which are dramatic to 2012. These were welcomed by the manufacturers in Quebec. This is important long term relief, not millions of dollars but billions of dollars in tax relief for businesses across Canada, including Quebec.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, many manufacturing businesses in Quebec will never benefit from these tax cuts, the way the oil and gas companies stand to benefit, because they are not currently earning any profits.

The minister must be aware that 135,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in Quebec, the equivalent of one in five jobs since 2003, including 65,000 jobs lost since the Conservatives came to power. This sad truth must be quite obvious to the minister.

Is the government's unwillingness to act to help manufacturers not just another demonstration of its indifference towards anything that does not help the tar sands development and the oil and gas industry in the west? Its choices are clear, but these are not Quebec's choices.

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite suggests that manufacturers in Quebec did not welcome the business tax reductions. In fact, what the association in Quebec said:

[Translation]

“We're pleased the Minister of Finance acknowledged the competitive challenges facing manufacturers.”

[English]

Competitiveness is important. Long term tax reductions, that is what the manufacturers and exporters of Quebec said right after the October 30 economic statement.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the figures released by Statistics Canada yesterday are worrisome. The number of people speaking French has gone down across the country, including in Quebec.

This is the result of years of ineffective Liberal policies. The government must renew its policy and strategy on official languages. It must do something to make the French language thrive and grow in Canada.

Appointing Bernard Lord to do work that has already been done is not a solution. What concrete action is the Prime Minister going to take for the French language?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne, the government made a commitment to do more for Canada's new action plan for official languages. Mr. Lord will soon give us his recommendations.

I am very disappointed that the NDP voted against these measures and these commitments in the Speech from the Throne.

• (1435)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not serious. A few years ago, he said that:

[English]

As a religion, bilingualism is the god that failed. It led to no fairness, produced no unity and cost Canadian taxpayers untold millions.

[Translation]

The demographic weight of francophones is in free fall: less than 50% in Montreal and only 4.1% outside Quebec.

Does he realize what will happen if he does nothing? Yes or no? Will he take action?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has no control over the languages spoken by Canadians, but it can ensure that services and benefits are available for all communities and all linguistic minority communities in Canada. That is what we have done.

* * *

IMMIGRANT WOMEN

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, poverty among immigrant women in Canada is very high. It is 43% higher than among women born in Canada. It is very difficult for these women to achieve pay equity.

When will this government act to integrate immigrant women into our workforce?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is very pleased to have worked with the provinces and our local service providers to provide services for new Canadians to help them adjust to Canadian life. We have invested \$1.3 billion to that end, over five years. I should point out that the members opposite voted against that.

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the policies of the Conservative government are not working. Immigrant women need language training. They need to have access to programs to improve their skills. These very qualified women want to have the opportunity to fully participate in the Canadian economy, and we need them.

What does this government intend to do?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apart from investing \$1.3 billion in settlement funding, funding that the Liberals froze for 10 years, last May we launched the Foreign Credentials Referral Office, which will help these new Canadians find out how to get their credentials evaluated so they can upgrade their skills to our standards even before they get here. Once again, the Liberals voted against that.

* * *

HOUSING

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, four million Canadians have housing needs and most of them are women. To deal with this problem, the government cut \$200 million for affordable housing and another \$45 million from the budget of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Cutting funding for affordable housing makes no sense at all.

When will the government restore the money it took out of affordable housing?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a complete fabrication. This government is spending more on affordable housing than any government in history.

When we came to power, one of the first things we did was to provide a \$1.4 billion housing trust so vulnerable Canadians, men and women alike, would have the chance to have a roof over their head. Today we are spending more than any government in history precisely because we are concerned about the plight of these people.

The member should reflect on the Liberal Party's own record, a record that saw it cut and download the housing file to the provinces in—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we should deal in reality. The finance minister even admitted last year, in a speech in New York, that the federal government should get out of the housing business. Hardly surprising, given he is the same minister who once suggested that the homeless should be thrown in jail.

Instead of putting up roadblocks, why will the Conservative government not deal with the affordable housing barriers facing women?

Oral Questions

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1995 the Liberals downloaded all the housing to the provinces. They cut \$25 billion out of the Canada social transfer, the deepest cuts in Canadian history to our social safety net. I think actions speak a lot louder than the member's words.

Obviously those members think that vulnerable Canadians are the ones who should be targeted for the cuts. Meanwhile, they maintained big pots of money that became the sponsorship scandal. Shame on them for their history.

* * *

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

MANUFACTURING SECTOR

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while everyone has been waiting for months for the federal government to do its homework and announce immediate measures to help the manufacturing sector, yesterday, the Minister of Industry had the gall to tell us that he was pleased that Quebec had finally put a plan in place. I do not want to hear the minister tell me about tax cuts. Companies without profits do not pay income tax.

Instead of shamelessly attacking Quebec, which has done its part, when will the minister finally come up with a plan for the manufacturing sector?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have already said that the manufacturing sector is a pillar of the Canada's economy.

I noted the comment about tax cuts, but our government is continuing to create a climate for that industry. We realize that the current situation is not easy, but the industry has to innovate and make investments.

Each level of government has to do its part.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the number of job losses and plant closures in the forestry and manufacturing sectors keeps growing in every region, including in the Mauricie region and in Trois-Rivières, where this month alone, 710 jobs were lost; yet the minister is not acting. The Minister of Industry should implement the plan put forward by the Standing Committee on Finance, which yesterday endorsed the 22 recommendations of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology to help the manufacturing sector.

How many committees will have to endorse these 22 recommendations before the minister finally decides to take action?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are taking action. The Minister of Finance in particular has put forward a fiscal plan that is strong, that will produce in Canada the fiscal policy framework for us to succeed, to be globally competitive. That is what it is all about.

The Canadian economy continues to be strong. There continue to be challenges in certain sectors in response to changing global demand patterns, but we continue to create more new jobs in

Canada. We are on pace to create some 345,000 jobs this year, the same as last year. Our unemployment rate is at a 33 year low. Industry can and will adapt.

* * *

[*Translation*]

OLDER WORKERS

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development claims that we lack faith in the people of Quebec. He, however, lacks compassion. Older workers have been losing their jobs because of numerous closures in the manufacturing and forestry sectors. Those aged 55 and over who, for the most part, have neither training nor experience in other areas cannot find new jobs.

I will therefore repeat my question: What is the government doing for these people? When will it come up with a real income support program to help them?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is last month the most successful job seekers across the country were older workers, so the member is flat out wrong. Older workers do have the ability to get new jobs, to adapt new skills. We see that reflected every month in the job numbers.

I just have to tell the member, I reassert my claim that he really does need to have faith in the people of Quebec. We have tremendous faith in their ability to pick up new skills and transition into new industries. I wish the member would have the same faith in his own constituents.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for people from Alberta like him, everything is great and the oil companies provide lots of jobs. But in Quebec, the manufacturing sector is tumbling down like a house of cards.

What is the government's plan for older workers who cannot find work? Will it tell them to move to Alberta to help the oil companies, as suggested by the member's colleague in the regional development agency? Or will it fund a POWA at a cost of \$60 million out of the \$1.7 billion employment insurance fund surplus?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult when people lose their jobs. We understand that. That is why we have put in place a number of supports.

Service Canada shows up on site to make sure that workers understand their options. We provide not only income support but training. There is the targeted initiative for older workers. We just announced the extension of new seasonal benefits under the EI pilot project.

Again, the member needs to get with the current year. This is not the 1970s anymore. There are huge labour shortages in mining, in retail, in construction, in truck driving. There are opportunities and we are training people to—

Oral Questions

● (1445)

The Speaker: The hon. member for York West.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, section 41 of the Parliament of Canada Act states:

No member of the House of Commons shall receive or agree to receive any compensation, directly or indirectly, for services... to be rendered to any person... for the purpose of... attempting to influence any member of either House.

What steps is the government taking to determine whether Brian Mulroney should be prosecuted for the \$100,000 cash he received while still a member of Parliament in 1993?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that we have appointed an individual in the person of Dr. Johnston to investigate all issues with respect to this issue. We look forward to his report.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would expect that the minister would be well aware of what the rules are anyway.

Yesterday, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs said:

There is nothing preventing members of Parliament, backbench MPs, as he would have been classified at the time, or even today, from engaging in activities outside of their parliamentary responsibilities.

Will the justice minister remind that member and all other government members who do not seem to be clear on what the law is, that it is illegal for MPs to accept money to make interventions on a government file? Even a 10-year-old knows that.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am well aware of the responsibility in all matters.

With respect to the allegations that the hon. member is making, again if she has any allegations, she should bring them forward in the appropriate manner. We are addressing this issue with the appointment of Dr. Johnston, and we should let Dr. Johnston do his work.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 1985 the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney brought in a conflict of interest code of conduct. It says:

Public office holders shall not act, after they leave public office, in such a manner as to take improper advantage of their previous public office.

Given Mr. Mulroney's involvement with the Bear Head project as prime minister, would accepting money to lobby on this same project not put him in breach of his own code of conduct?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a process in place. There are hearings going on before the ethics committee. This government has taken action with the appointment of an independent third party who will look into all issues.

We will look forward to that report in due course.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the code of conduct targets "using public office to unfair advantage in obtaining opportunities for outside employment".

Given Mr. Mulroney's apparent work on Bear Head both during and after he was prime minister, will the public inquiry examine Mr. Mulroney's compliance with his own conflict of interest code?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the government has taken responsible action. When certain allegations were made, we immediately took steps to appoint an independent third party on this.

We have given wide latitude to Dr. Johnston and I think all members of the House will look forward to his recommendations.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my riding the nuclear reactor at Chalk River laboratories went into shutdown two weeks ago for scheduled repairs. This resulted in a cross-country shortage of radioisotopes and medical tests being cancelled.

Now we have learned that during the reactor's maintenance check, regulators found more problems to repair than expected. This means that the reactor will not be operating at full capacity for another 10 days.

Can the Minister of Health tell us what the government is doing on this urgent situation?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is no doubt aware, both AECL and the regulator are arm's length organizations independent of government. Nonetheless, we are certainly very concerned about this issue.

I am indeed working very closely with my colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources, on this issue. I have been informed today that we are in the midst of securing sufficient medical isotopes to address emergency procedures.

The Minister of Natural Resources and I certainly want to reiterate that we have asked AECL officials to do whatever can be done, if possible to be done, to resolve the situation for the benefit of all Canadians.

● (1450)

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Environmental Defence Canada revealed today that the harmful chemical, bisphenol A, is used to line nearly every single infant formula can on the market. First we learned that this chemical was common in baby bottles. Now we learn that the levels found in liquid formula are likely to be far higher than those that leach from bottles.

Will the government put the health of working families and their children first and move immediately to ban bisphenol A in all food and beverage containers in Canada?

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member in this chamber we believe that science should be the judge on these issues.

Indeed, our chemicals management plan that was announced by our Prime Minister is world leading in the fact that it reverses the onus to industry to prove to us, to prove to society and to the Government of Canada, that their products and other chemicals are safe.

Since the launch of that plan, bisphenol A has been one of the first chemicals that we put to review. The information is now with Health Canada and Environment Canada and we are reviewing that information.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the science is in. What the minister is saying today is nothing short of unconscionable negligence.

The government is actually complicit in allowing our children to be exposed to bisphenol A.

The government does it with toys, too. We are talking about poisonous toys made from lead, asbestos and other dangerous substances, and the best the government can do is put up a website.

Will the minister force importers of toxic toys and tainted products to take responsibility for their products? Will he give Health Canada the tools it needs to provoke product recalls when the health of our children is at risk?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member is aware that in fact the current standard in Canada for bisphenol A is one-half of the tolerable intake limits that are found in the European Union and in the United States. That is the current standard that is found in Canada.

I hope the hon. member would agree with me that we have to take these situations with science as the basis for making our decisions, and that is exactly what we are doing in this case.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Sharon McIvor recently won a landmark case at the British Columbia Supreme Court through the court challenges program.

The decision affects the status of thousands of aboriginal women who, by an act of Parliament, were improperly denied Indian status. First, this meanspirited government stayed the decision, and now it is appealing the decision.

The government cut the court challenges program. Now Ms. McIvor has no recourse for the appeal.

Will the government reinstate the court challenges program?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this case has been looked at since it was first announced.

Though there has been no court date set, I am sure it will continue to make its way through the courts.

However, I have to marvel at the member's raising this issue. She along with other committee members from the Liberal Party, the Bloc and the NDP have chosen to delay the extension of human rights to first nations people. They would like to see it put off until after the next election, which of course the Leader of the Opposition is currently planning.

I would ask her to begin working to extend human rights to first nations people.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is somewhat economical with the truth.

What recourse do disadvantaged Canadians, particularly aboriginal women, have to fight for their rights through our justice system?

Yesterday REAL Women of Canada, friends of that government, suggested to Ms. McIvor that she find her own money for the appeal. This is the same attitude the government has toward all vulnerable Canadians, that they are expendable.

How will the rights of these Canadian women be protected?

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the member's reference to the economics of the truth, I must say that she is truly bankrupt in that area.

If a first nations woman on reserve wants to bring forward a human rights case, she currently cannot do that. That first nations woman cannot go to the Canadian Human Rights Commission and file a case because first nations communities are exempted from the Canadian Human Rights Act.

This is something we are trying to do but unfortunately the members of her party are standing in the way and continuing to delay. We would like to pass this right away. They are stopping it.

* * *

• (1455)

JUSTICE

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has decided that it will pick and choose which Canadians will face the death penalty abroad.

What criteria are the justice minister and the foreign affairs minister using to make their decisions about whether a Canadian lives or dies?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has already been indicated by the government and most recently by my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, that we will look at cases on a case by case basis. With respect to the laws in this country, there are no plans to change the laws of Canada in that regard.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the justice minister, who last week did not know what powers he possesses under the Extradition Act, is now making life or death decisions for Canadians facing execution abroad.

For clarity, who will make the final decision to seek commutation of a death sentence? Will it be the foreign affairs minister, the justice minister, the public safety minister, or will the Prime Minister himself decide whether or not Canada will be complicit in executing its citizens?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, Canada has abolished the death penalty, and we will certainly not be reopening that file.

Internationally, whether at the United Nations or in any other forum, we promote the abolition of the death penalty. That is consistent with our actions here at home. Internationally, we promote the same laws that we have here in Canada.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the 83rd annual UPA conference is being held in Quebec City this week. With the challenges faced by hog and beef producers and the forestry sector, the government has nothing to brag about. Government guaranteed, no-interest loans are needed in the hog sector. Beef production needs a \$50 million aid program over two years because of the costs related to specified risk material rules.

Will the government accommodate the producers' requests?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Secretary of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the hon. member that an announcement was made almost two weeks ago, whereby \$600 million would be allocated to help the livestock sector, both hog and beef production. We are putting words into action.

Furthermore, discussions are ongoing with the industry, as my colleague knows. Instead of falsely saying that nothing is being done, she should acknowledge the good news we announce here. I am talking about a \$600 million allocation with the new program.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in five years, U.S. meat imports into Canada have soared and the Conservative government is maintaining stricter standards for our producers, making them less competitive.

Will the government stop harming our producers and will it demand the same standards of the United States and the other countries that it is imposing on producers here?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Secretary of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is fascinating to see how the Bloc Québécois can twist the questions.

Our government keeps its promises.

We recently heard that the U.S. standards were stricter and that the system was not working. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food went to Washington and got concrete results. Now that we have a solution, the Bloc is trying to create problems.

Oral Questions

For once, there was mention of supply management in the Speech from the Throne. What did they do? They voted against it. Let those who voted against supply management tell that to the producers.

* * *

[*English*]

HEALTH

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in spite of ample warning, the government put no contingency plan in place before the nuclear reactor at Chalk River shut down. This reactor provides radioisotopes to hundreds of thousands of patients for clinical cancer treatment and MRI testing. Now hospitals and labs across the country are having to turn away these patients.

What is the Minister of Health doing for these critically ill patients? What is his plan to get emergency supplies of radioisotopes?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed, there were contingency plans in place. Of course, as a result of the arm's length decisions of some arm's length agencies, we are in a bit of a situation that we did not anticipate. As the hon. member knows, we cannot have too much of a contingency plan because the half-life of these isotopes is just three days.

We are working with industry right now. We are getting emergency supplies for emergency procedures and that will continue. My colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources, is working in his portfolio in order to protect the best interests of Canadians as well.

* * *

● (1500)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like many Canadians, I was surprised to hear media reports that the government of Iran has told Canada's ambassador in Tehran to leave that country. Canada continues to be concerned by the Iranian government's actions on various fronts.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs please provide the House with some insight regarding these reports?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we regret Iran's decision to order our ambassador to leave Tehran, which is entirely unjustified. We stand behind our ambassador, who performs his duties with professionalism. Yes, we tried to come to an agreement with Tehran about the exchange of ambassadors for some time, but we did not succeed.

I can assure the House that in the future we will promote human rights, the rule of law, and democracy in Iran and across the globe.

*Oral Questions***LOBBYISTS**

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board has never implemented the new regulations to the Lobbyists Registration Act. Why not? Because the head of the organization representing lobbyists, Mulroney-era Manitoba MP Leo Duguay, says it would be too onerous to disclose who they were lobbying and when.

The government said it would clean up government. Why will it not implement the sections of the Federal Accountability Act that would force these big money corporate lobbyists out of the shadows and into the light of day?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of what our government has done in terms of the Federal Accountability Act. It has prevented the type of lobbying and the type of money movement that was very commonplace under the prior government.

The pre-publication under the lobbyist regulation will take place in January. We are hoping to see implementation next year, perhaps in the middle of the year.

* * *

[Translation]

AIRBUS

M. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that, once again, former Liberal minister Marc Lalonde has paid \$100,000 in bail for Karlheinz Schreiber. Today, in the *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, there is a fascinating article by Stephen Maher explaining that Mr. Lalonde, a former Liberal minister, failed to register as a lobbyist for Bear Head Industries Limited, Karlheinz Schreiber's company.

Our question is very simple. What is the use of having a lobbyist law if it is not implemented and if the Bart Simpson defence can be used, "I didn't do it. Nobody saw me do it. You can't prove anything"?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this happened at another time under another government. In fact, I believe that happened in a case under the Liberal government.

Right now we have changed the laws regarding lobbying, toughening them up considerably, and the obligation is of course upon the lobbyists to respect those laws. There are serious consequences if they do not because we wanted to cleanup Ottawa. We wanted to cleanup lobbying. We have acted and we have done that.

* * *

POVERTY

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, women are far more likely than men to experience extended periods of low income and greater depths of poverty. Poverty means isolation and exclusion. It has devastating impacts for women and their children.

When is the government going to respond to the real needs of Canadian women and come up with real action to reduce poverty in Canada?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I told the member yesterday, thankfully because the economy is hot, we are seeing decreasing levels of poverty in all kinds of groups, including women.

We want to take advantage of that hot job market, which is why we are investing more in training today than any government ever has. We are putting more into affordable housing than any government ever has. We are providing more support for child care than any government in history.

That is a terrific record. What is shameful is the fact that the Liberal leader wants to take away support for Canadian families, the universal child care benefit, and that will hurt—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

* * *

● (1505)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Liberals continue to demonstrate that they are all talk and no action when it comes to women.

The Liberals claim they listen to women, but the actions of the Liberal leader say otherwise, when he has demoted a number of women in his caucus and replaced them with men. Our government is taking meaningful action on issues that matter to women.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women provide some examples of what we are doing?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for providing the opportunity to point out the facts.

It was under our government that the budget for the women's program rose by 42% to a record high of \$15.3 million.

We are the first government in Canadian history to have appointed a Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women.

We are the party that has provided significant support for women and that is making a difference.

The opposition parties should put more effort into directly helping the most vulnerable women rather than putting all their efforts into unfounded statements—

The Speaker: Order.

This concludes oral question period for today.

The chief government whip on a point of order.

[English]

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all parties and with the approval of the sponsor, I think you would find unanimous consent to move immediately to the taking of the deferred recorded division on private members Motion No. 315, standing in the name of the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook, and that the bells summoning members be dispensed with.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

The House resumed from December 4 consideration of the motion.

• (1515)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 20)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Arthur	Batters
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blackburn
Blaney	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casey	Casson
Clement	Comuzzi
Cummins	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Goldring
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hubbard
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Lemieux	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Manning	Mark
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Mayes
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	

Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Pallister
Paradis	Petit
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Rajotte
Reid	Ritz
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shipley	Skelton
Solberg	Sorenson
Storseth	Sweet
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
Trost	Tweed
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Yelich — 118

Private Members' Business

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Barnes
Beaumier	Bélangier
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Bevington	Black
Blaikie	Blais
Bonsant	Boshcoff
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brison	Brown (Oakville)
Brunelle	Byrne
Cannis	Cardin
Carrier	Chan
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coderre
Comartin	Cotler
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davies
Deschamps	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dosanjh	Dryden
Duceppe	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Freeman	Fry
Gagnon	Gaudet
Godfrey	Godin
Guay	Guimond
Holland	Julian
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Karygiannis	Keeper
Kotto	Laforest
Laframboise	Lavallée
Layton	LeBlanc
Lessard	Lussier
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	McCallum
McDonough	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Mourani
Mulcair	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau	Nash
Neville	Ouellet
Pacetti	Paquette
Patry	Pearson
Picard	Plamondon
Priddy	Redman
Regan	Robillard
Rota	Russell
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Siksay
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Cyr
St-Hilaire	St. Amand

Routine Proceedings

St. Denis	Stoffer
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thi Lac
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Tonks	Valley
Vincent	Volpe
Wasylycia-Leis	Wilfert
Wrzesniewskyj	Zed— 138

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

[*English*]

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, since we have all members in attendance and in the interest of efficiency, I think you might find unanimous consent to put the question immediately on the Ways and Means Motion No. 5 listed on today's order paper.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ALLEGED BEHAVIOUR OF MEMBER FOR PORT MOODY—WESTWOOD—
PORT COQUITLAM

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last evening I was in the House to raise a question on behalf of my constituents. At that time, I saw the member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam with an open laptop on his desk and on the screen was an image of a scantily clad woman. This was in my clear view and in the clear view of the public gallery.

I feel very strongly that this is not only disrespectful of women, but it is disrespectful of the House. It reflects an attitude of objectifying women. We know that when women and other human beings are objectified and dehumanized, they become the objects of violence and abuse.

On the eve of December 6, we have to be mindful that we represent all the people of our communities, men and women, and that we are national leaders here. This is a place of power. That power must be used respectfully and it must be used with humility.

I ask that the member apologize to members of the House.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect, I do not have the faintest idea what my colleague is talking about. Members in the House who have known me as a member of the House since 2000 know I treat the House with respect. With respect to what she is alleging, I do not have the faintest idea what she is talking about.

The Speaker: I have to say that whatever is being talked about does not strike me as being a point of order. The House some time ago allowed members to bring computers into the House. What appears on the screens of computers is not under the control of the Chair. I would suggest that if members have concerns about this, they raise it with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House

Affairs. If it wants to pass a rule saying computers are not allowed in the House, it can do so.

I am not getting into anything about content on computers. I am sure the hon. member for London—Fanshawe was not suggesting that the Chair control in any way the computer screens of hon. members. I cannot do that.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I would like to point out that I believe all members of the House are honourable. I know this is a very serious allegation. I would hope the member, who has been accused of this point of order, would look in his heart and perhaps look on his laptop on a day—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, this is a serious allegation and I would hope the member, who has been named, would come back with more of an investigation to be able to—

● (1520)

The Speaker: I have dealt with this matter. I do not believe that this kind of allegation is a point of order in the House. I will allow the hon. parliamentary secretary to say something more, but I am very concerned. This is not a matter of House procedure.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, with respect, I have taken great efforts throughout my political career to treat all my colleagues with the deepest of respect. I do not know where this attack is coming from, where these allegations are coming from. It is utterly baseless, utterly nonsensical.

I thank my colleagues every day and my constituents every day for giving me the honour of serving in the House. I would never do anything like what is being described to me today. I take great offence to what is being alleged here. I would never do what has been talked about. I respect the House too much to even consider doing what has been described to me. I love this place, I love serving my constituents and I am offended that this has even been alleged.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 29 petitions.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

[English]

In accordance with its order of reference on Monday, October 29, your committee has considered Bill C-8, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act (railway transportation), and agreed, on Tuesday, December 4, to report it with an amendment.

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to blue-green algae and their toxins.

FINANCE

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee of Finance in relation to Bill C-28, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2007 and to implement certain provisions of the economic statement tabled in Parliament on October 30, 2007. The committee has had due consideration on this and is presenting it without amendment.

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. This committee recommends that its report on the court challenges program be deemed presented to the House upon its adoption by the committee, if the House has already adjourned, and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House.

* * *

OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-490, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (application for supplement, retroactive payments and other amendments).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure and an honour for me to present this bill here today, a bill that provides for an increase in the amount of supplement to be paid monthly to a pensioner and for the payment of a pension and supplement to a person who ceases to have a spouse or common-law partner by reason of the spouse's or common-law partner's death. In addition, it removes the requirement to make an application for a supplement and allows the retroactive payment of supplements.

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

● (1525)

[English]

NATIONAL BLOOD DONOR WEEK ACT

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.) moved that Bill S-220, An Act respecting a National Blood Donor Week, be read the first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to reintroduce and once again sponsor Bill S-220, An Act respecting a National Blood Donor Week. When I introduced the bill in the previous Parliament, all parties joined me in supporting this worthy initiative.

Canada relies on voluntary donors to provide blood and blood products required to treat patients in a variety of situations. Blood donors save lives every day, yet, sadly, there are not enough to meet the needs of our health care system. The purpose of the bill is to recognize and encourage blood donors who choose to share the gift of life with their fellow Canadians. I trust all parties will continue to support this valuable initiative.

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 86.2, I wish to inform the Speaker that the bill is in the same form as Bill S-214, which was before the House in the first session and I ask that the bill be reinstated.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

[Translation]

The Speaker: The Chair is of the opinion that this bill is in the same form as Bill S-214 was at the time of prorogation of the first session of the 39th Parliament.

[English]

Accordingly, pursuant to Standing Order 86.2, the bill is deemed read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health.

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

* * *

[Translation]

PETITIONS

DANGEROUS SEXUAL OFFENDERS

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure today to table a petition from two of my constituents about dangerous sexual offenders. This petition was initiated because there is a dangerous sexual offender in our community. There has been much discussion of this in the media. Citizens and people interested in this issue realized that there is a flaw in the 1996 legislation on dangerous offenders and those under long-term supervision.

Even though legislation is not retroactive, the people who signed this petition are asking us to amend section 818, which makes conditional release available to dangerous sexual offenders. Furthermore, they are asking us to ensure that offenders like Mr. Bégin will remain in jail as long as they are still considered dangerous.

We collected about 5,000 names on this petition and it is my great pleasure to table it in the House today.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

CANADA POST

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of the people of Brandon—Souris supporting Bill C-458, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (library materials), which will protect and support the library book rate and extend it to include audiovisual materials.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by 400 people from my riding of Red Deer, Alberta.

These citizens are outraged at the violent beating of a 61-year-old apartment caretaker by repeat offender, Leo Teskey.

The petitioners, therefore, demand that Parliament pass tougher laws regarding repeat and violent offenders and adequate compensation for victims of violent crimes.

* * *

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, Question No. 86 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 86—**Mr. Charlie Angus:**

With respect to the Mountain Pine Beetle infestation that is moving from west to east across the country: (a) what is the most up-to-date assessment of the speed at which it will travel across the Prairies and into Northern Ontario; (b) what is the projected economic impact on Northern Ontario, including, but not limited to lost lumber, hectares, employment, and longer term regional development; (c) how many communities and families are expected to be affected by the infestation in Northern Ontario; (d) what financial resources are estimated to be needed to adequately respond to the crisis if the infestation reaches Northern Ontario; (e) has the federal government met with its counterparts in the Ontario government to ensure preparedness for the spread of the infestation into Ontario; (f) what is the current plan to coordinate with Ontario, including, but not limited to, a timeline for future meetings, memorandums of understanding, federal/provincial compensation agreements for affected communities, and a plan to mitigate the impact of the spread of the infestation into Ontario; (g) have any plans been made to halt the progress of the infestation before reaching Northern Ontario; (h) have any funds been spent to put the plan into action; (i) from which departmental budget were these funds distributed; (j) who were the recipients of these funds; and (k) which branches, of which departments, are tasked with developing and implementing a strategy to tackle the spread of the infestation toward and into Northern Ontario?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the response is as follows:

a), b), c), d), e), f), and k) There is no mountain pine beetle, MPB, in Northern Ontario. Canada's government is aggressively acting to stop the spread of the MPB, and mitigate its economic impacts. All resources requested by the British Columbia forest Service have been fully met by the federal government to combat the spread of the Beetle.

Direct control measures are currently being strategically focused along the north-eastern front of the beetle epidemic in B.C., in portions of the major mountain passes between B.C. and Alberta, and in other areas of Alberta where appropriate.

When the MPB population build-up was identified in B.C.'s Tweedsmuir Provincial Park and adjacent pine forest areas in the mid-1990s, the then provincial and federal governments did not take the necessary aggressive action that was needed to combat the threat. Our government is committed to taking all necessary steps to combat the MPB and its spread.

g) and h) The government of B.C. and Alberta and the federal government are engaged in coordinated activities to limit the spread of the MPB at the Alberta-B.C. border. Based on the experience in B.C., an aggressive approach is being taken to reduce the spread of the beetle into Alberta.

Saskatchewan and Alberta have imposed a ban on the transport and storage of pine forest products with bark attached from outside jurisdictions, to reduce the risk of human-assisted transport of the beetle into these provinces.

The federal government, in collaboration with provinces and territories, has developed a national approach to dealing with the MPB and other insects and diseases.

Budget 2006 provided \$400 million over two years to combat the MPB infestation, strengthen the long-term competitiveness of the forestry sector, and support worker adjustment. Of that amount, \$200 million was identified to combat the infestation.

In January 2007 the Minister of Natural Resources announced a \$200 million federal MPB program. Two subsequent announcements on how specific portions of that \$200 million will be spent are worth noting. On March 23, 2007, the minister announced that, under the program, \$24.8 million was being invested in 2006-2007 to help control the spread of the insect along B.C.'s eastern border and to protect communities and forest resources. On June 8, 2007, the minister announced that the federal government is investing \$39.6 million in 2007-2008 under the next phase of the program for ongoing work with the provinces and communities.

The provinces of B.C. and Alberta have also committed and disbursed funds in response to the outbreak that are not included above.

l) and j) There has been no spending in Northern Ontario on the MPB.

* * *

● (1530)

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 77 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

[Text]

Question No. 77—**Mr. Tony Martin:**

With respect to the Canada Summer Jobs program, for each of the first and second rounds of funding offers, broken down by riding: (a) what employers were offered funding and what was their complete address; (b) what was the amount of funding and number of positions offered for each employer; and (c) what was the total amount of funding and number of positions offered in each riding?

(Return tabled)

* * *

[English]

STARRED QUESTION

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Text]

*Question No. 71—**Ms. Dawn Black:**

With regard to meetings and planning by senior members of the civil service relating to Afghanistan for the period of August 15, 2005, until today: (a) how many Deputy Minister-level meetings have taken place; (b) what were the dates and locations of those meetings; (c) who chaired the meetings; and (d) who was present at each meeting?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

* * *

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]

WAYS AND MEANS

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians) moved that a ways and means motion to introduce an act to give effect to the Tsawwassen First Nation Final

Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other acts be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?**Some hon. members:** Agreed.**Some hon. members:** No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.**The Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.**Some hon. members:** No.**The Speaker:** In my opinion the yeas have it.**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. John Cummins: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like the record to show that I am opposed to ways and means Motion No. 5, an act to give effect to the Tsawwassen First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

The Speaker: Apparently now it does.

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to loans), as reported, with amendment, from the committee.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There are three motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-29. Motions Nos. 1 to 3 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[Translation]

I shall now propose Motions Nos. 1 to 3 to the House.

[English]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-29, in Clause 4, be amended by deleting lines 13 to 17 on page 2.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-29, in Clause 5, be amended by replacing lines 29 to 35 on page 4 with the following:

“case of a candidate, the selection date as defined in section 478.01 in the case of a nomination contestant, the end of the leadership contest in the case of a leadership contestant, and the end of the fiscal period during which the loan was made in the case of a registered party and registered association, is deemed to be a contribution of the”

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-29, in Clause 5, be amended by replacing lines 32 to 35 on page 5 with the following:

Government Orders

“Officer shall inform the lender of his or her decision; furthermore, the candidate's registered association or, if there is no registered association, the registered party becomes liable for the unpaid amount as if the association or party had guaranteed the loan.”

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be bringing before the House once again the bill on accountability with respect to loans, former Bill C-54 now Bill C-29, which was reinstated at report stage, in the same form as at prorogation.

The hon. members will certainly recall that this bill amends the Canada Elections Act in order to establish stricter and more transparent rules for loans to political entities. These amendments will ensure a more responsible and transparent use of loans as a tool for political financing. In this regard, accountability and transparency are essential to maintain the confidence of Canadians in the integrity of the political process.

This bill is one of many measures taken by our government to improve democracy and accountability in Canada, in accordance with three major principles of democratic reform: reform of political financing, improving the electoral system and modernizing the Senate.

In the October 2007 throne speech, the government reaffirmed its intention to proceed with these reforms. Our dynamic legislative program of democratic reforms will make real and significant improvements to our democratic institutions.

• (1535)

[*English*]

I remind the House that the amendments proposed for the treatment of loans in Bill C-29 are an important measure to maintain public confidence in this institution and our democracy.

Canadians must have confidence that there is no opportunity for the wealthy to secure undue influence in our political process.

The measures in Bill C-29 follow closely on this government's achievements in the Federal Accountability Act to ensure greater accountability and transparency in political financing. The objective was to eliminate the undue influence of big money in politics.

Members will recall, however, that during the recent Liberal leadership campaign big money found a back door to undue influence through large personal loans well in excess of the legal contribution limit.

[*Translation*]

The amendments would mean that the same standards of transparency that currently apply to contributions would apply to loans.

By closing the loopholes that allow people to use loans to get around both the limits on contributions and the restrictions on their source, Bill C-29 will ensure that the reforms that have already been made to political contributions cannot be undermined by the abuse of loans.

I would like to remind the House of the measures that are included in this bill. First, the bill would put in place a uniform and transparent disclosure system for all loans to political entities,

including the compulsory disclosure of loans' terms and conditions and of lenders' and guarantors' names. This measure would make loans more transparent and standardize the treatment of loans for all categories of political entity, which is not the case at present.

[*English*]

Second, the annual contribution limit for individuals established in the Federal Accountability Act would apply to loans as well. Loans and loan guarantees would be counted as contributions toward the \$1,100 annual limit at the time they were made. This change would ensure that loans could not be used to circumvent the limit on individual contributions.

Third, only financial institutions and other political entities could make loans beyond that \$1,100 limit. This change would mean that unions and corporations would now be unable to make loans consistent with their inability to make financial contributions. They could not disguise contributions as loans, which is a possibility under the current law.

[*Translation*]

Lastly—and I will come back to the importance of this proposal shortly—the bill proposes to tighten the rules for the treatment of unpaid loans to ensure candidates could not walk away from unpaid loans. Riding associations, or the guarantor if there is no riding association, would be held responsible for unpaid loans taken out by candidates.

[*English*]

In the previous session, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs devoted careful study to the provisions of this bill and, after recent deliberations, has reported it back to the House with amendments.

[*Translation*]

Several of these amendments are valuable additions to the rules governing the treatment of loans, because they make the system described in the bill more equitable.

[*English*]

Notably, a change has been put forward by government members and supported by our opposition counterparts to exclude from the annual contribution limit any portion of a loan that is repaid to the lender and any unused loan guarantees. The effect of this change is to allow a lender, whose loan has been repaid or whose guarantees have been unused, still to contribute up to the annual contribution limit.

A change has also been put forward by our former colleague from Vancouver—Quadra, Mr. Owen, to require the Chief Electoral Officer to hear representations from affected interests before making a determination about a deemed contribution. This change, although technical in nature, would ensure certainty and uniformity in procedural fairness in dealings with Elections Canada.

There was also an amendment to extend the period of time as to when an unpaid loan is deemed to be a contribution from 18 months up to 3 years. In the spirit of working in a minority Parliament, the government is also prepared to accept this amendment.

Government Orders

I commend these amendments to the House on the grounds that they improve the overall regime of political financing in the Canada Elections Act.

However, there were some unwelcome amendments from the committee.

At this time, I would like to give some credit to my colleague, the New Democratic Party member from Winnipeg Centre. He has been a strong supporter of this legislation and, in fact, championed it even before it was introduced. We appreciate the cooperation he has shown with us in helping to develop the bill and discussing it at every stage. In particular, I appreciate his cooperation and discussion on the issue of redressing the two unwelcome amendments that were proposed in committee but which the government proposes to reverse.

I thank him for the commitment he gave to this government that his party would support the effort to remove these amendments. These amendments cause the government concern because they undermine the regime that is presented in the bill. Therefore, we have put on notice, motions to amend the bill to restore certain important provisions that have been undermined by opposition amendments.

One of these unwelcome amendments provides that the contribution limits for leadership candidates be calculated annually rather than per contest, as is now the case. This change, if it were allowed, would allow contributors to bypass the legal limit on contributions to leadership campaigns if a candidate carried that debt over different calendar years or if the leadership campaign happened to overlap different calendar years.

That runs counter to the principle enacted in the Federal Accountability Act that contributions to leadership campaigns by individuals be capped at \$1,100 per contest. The government considers this change unacceptable and proposes that the per event contribution limit be restored.

I appreciate again the support that the member for Winnipeg Centre has expressed to us on behalf of his party for that amendment. We are optimistic that, with the support of the New Democratic Party, we should be successful in restoring the provisions originally intended to achieve accountability and political loans on that level.

The second unwelcome amendment removed from the bill is the provision that a riding association would assume liability for the unpaid loans of an endorsed candidate. The change proposed by the opposition would allow political candidates to walk away from debts incurred in campaigns. This is contrary to the spirit of accountability in the bill.

This proposed opposition change would undo one of the most important accountability enhancements presented by the government for the treatment of loans, an enhancement that would create greater certainty about the responsibility for unpaid loans.

The original form of the bill, which we are seeking to restore, not only would ensure principles of financial accountability at the local level, but would also encourage local riding associations to work more closely with their candidates and their campaigns. Again, I appreciate the support and the commitment that the New Democratic

Party member gave on behalf of his party to the government and to myself for our efforts to restore the bill to its original form on this issue of trailing debt from campaigns.

A similar rule applies at the provincial level of my home province of Ontario. Section 44(4) of the Ontario Election Finances Act provides that any eventual provincial candidate's financial deficit is assumed by the local riding association. This has worked very well in Ontario at the provincial level, and opposition concerns, which resulted in the provision being amended in our bill at committee, are clearly ill-founded based on the very successful practice experienced by all of the three major parties in Ontario in dealing with the bill.

The government is, therefore, proposing to restore the provision that a candidate's registered association, or registered party if there is no registered riding association, would become liable for the unpaid amount of a loan that a candidate does not repay.

Finally, I would like to point out that there is a technical amendment required to clause 5 of the bill. That clause was amended at committee and the language employed about when a loan is deemed to be a contribution ought to be made consistent with the defined terms used throughout the Canada Elections Act. We are, therefore, proposing that the language be clarified.

● (1540)

In all, these are amendments that are reasoned and principled and serve the overriding principle that accountability be strengthened for the use of loans as a political financing tool.

We are committed to cleaning up campaign finance. We are going to move to do that as we move forward—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see how the two concepts of conduct and accountability get confused in the House. The government has stood on its hind legs and has spoken at length about accountability through its so-called accountability bill, but that bill had everything to do with conduct.

The government House leader across the way likes to use the term “accountability” with respect to this. We are all in favour of increasing transparency and accountability in the electoral process. In fact, ours was the party that made the largest ever decrease in and restriction of funding and donations to electoral parties and from individuals in the history of this Parliament.

Could the government House leader define for the House what he means by public accountability?

● (1545)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, that is a very broad question, but in the case of the legislation at hand, which deals with political financing, what we are seeking to do in the case of riding associations and local candidates is make those candidates accountable for the debts they incur. This is something that the Liberal Party, believe it or not, objected to at the committee and brought in an amendment to eliminate.

Government Orders

The Liberals propose that a candidate should be able to run up debts, collect loans, have unpaid bills and then simply walk away from them and be able to do that legally. The candidate should be able, they propose, to convert those loans, whatever their quantity, and walk away. It could be a loan for \$50,000 or \$60,000, which would of course convert a loan into a contribution well above the legal limit. They are proposing an amendment to allow exactly that to happen.

We do not believe that should happen. We think accountability means that when we take on an expense, we pay it. It means that when we take on a debt, we pay it and we are responsible for it.

That is true accountability. That is why we want to get rid of the amendment that the Liberal Party supported and introduced to eliminate that accountability for one's trailing debts at the riding level. We wish to maintain that accountability in our bill.

It is a principle of fiscal responsibility. It is a principle of honouring one's word. It is the least we can expect of the people who seek to represent Canadians in this grand place, the House of Commons.

Hon. Keith Martin: That is very interesting, Mr. Speaker. This is a fascinating discussion. I mean that in a very constructive sense for the government House leader. The hon. government House leader did not talk about accountability at all. He was speaking about public conduct. He was talking about conduct, not public accountability.

Public accountability is the obligation of elected officials to tell the public what they are doing, why they are doing it, and who is going to benefit from it, and to have measurable standards upon which the person can be judged by what he or she is going to do. This is done before we actually implement something. That is public accountability, because within public accountability we actually have an internal mechanism for conduct.

If the government were to adopt true public accountability and make it the obligation of public office holders to freely and openly express and describe to the public what they are going to do before they do it and who is going to benefit, then true public accountability and conduct would be the extension of that.

I want to ask the hon. House leader if he would change his definition. Does he not agree with me on—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Minister for Democratic Reform.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, to me it seems quite clear. Being accountable for our debts means that we pay them. I think everybody understands that. That is common sense. There may be some other bureaucratic approach to things, but that is a very simple premise.

In terms of public policy and being accountable, I think Canadians want their politicians, their representatives in the House of Commons, to be accountable primarily and first and foremost to the people who elected them, not to people with huge sums of money, who can, with millions of dollars, make loans in excess of the legal limit for contributions to Liberal leadership candidates, effectively mortgaging them.

That happened a year ago in that Liberal leadership campaign. So their first responsibility is not to Canadians and not to the voters who put them there, but rather to the people to whom they owe hundreds of thousands of dollars individually and millions of dollars collectively. That was the situation in the Liberal Party after the last leadership campaign because this law still had a loophole in it, which we are seeking to address today.

When I talk about accountability to Canadians, I think that first and foremost they want to see us get rid of the undue influence of big money in our political financing system. Progress has been made. We have serious contribution limits. We got rid of corporate contributions and so on.

However, as we discovered in the Liberal leadership campaign, there is big money and the Liberal Party members could find a way to play that game in the past under the current law. They did it through large personal loans. We are going to get rid of that and have true accountability, where votes and Canadians matter, not big money.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party supports efforts to improve the transparency and accountability of the electoral process. Early on, our party was the one that passed the bill to limit the role of corporations and unions in election financing. We also initiated the most significant contribution limit reduction in Canadian history.

That is why Liberal party leadership candidates exceeded Elections Canada's requirements to disclose campaign loans. In contrast, the current Prime Minister is still refusing to disclose the names of those who contributed to his leadership campaign in 2002.

In practice, this legislation would give the last word to financial institutions, not Canadians, when it comes to deciding who can run for office in Canada. This bill would also have a negative impact on Canada's middle class, particularly nomination contestants, at a time when the government should be encouraging Canadians to increase their participation in the democratic process.

If the proposed changes are implemented, it will be very difficult for Canadians, particularly those with limited means who know few wealthy potential backers, to try to get elected in Canada because it is hard to get a loan from a financial institution. Even though we are in favour of a transparent and accountable electoral process, we believe that this bill unduly restricts Canadians' access to the democratic system and that it will prevent them from participating in it.

The Conservatives would have us believe that current legislation enables individuals to walk away from debts. Nothing could be further from the truth. Under the current legislation, individuals cannot use loans to bypass contribution limits, nor can they walk away from debts with impunity. The bill merely reiterates existing provisions. The Conservatives think they can fool Canadians into believing that this bill in some way makes significant changes to the law.

Government Orders

For the record, the official purpose of this bill is to reduce the possibility of undue influence in public life by wealthy interest groups. Obviously, this bill was developed to put the Liberal Party of Canada at a financial disadvantage. The main consequence of this new bill is that it severely restricts the opportunities for people running for office to take out loans, a common practice in the past. The proposed legislation would prohibit individuals from making a loan or guaranteeing a loan to political candidates by restricting contributions to the \$1,100 limit currently in the Federal Accountability Act.

Furthermore, as in the Federal Accountability Act, unions and corporations cannot make a loan to political candidates, parties or associations. Of course, the government claims that the purpose of this measure is to reduce the influence of wealthy financial contributors, who apparently used personal loans to bypass the restrictions on donations in the Elections Act.

The fact of the matter is that during our last leadership campaign, all the candidates publicly disclosed all the loans they had received for their campaign and went above and beyond what was required by Elections Canada. If this bill is passed, only political parties such as the Liberal Party of Canada or local riding associations and financial institutions will be able to make loans to candidates, and it must be at the market interest rate.

There are also new disclosure criteria, requiring that all conditions such as the amount, rate, lender's name and address, and the guarantor's name and address, if applicable, be disclosed.

• (1550)

If the Chief Electoral Officer determines that an unpaid amount of a loan to a candidate of a registered party has been written off, the registered association or, if there is no registered association, the registered party becomes liable for the unpaid amount as if the association, or the party, had guaranteed the loan.

The minister referred to the changes in this regard. I should remind the House that, when it met last spring to consider the bill, numbered C-54 at the time, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs agreed by a majority vote to amend the government's proposal, to ensure that debts incurred by candidates without the consent of their associations or parties not come back to haunt the associations or parties. A majority of the committee did not want this to happen.

Unsatisfied with this majority decision of the committee, the government is now changing the wording of the bill to make this undesirable situation possible again.

The original text of Bill C-29 read, on page 5, lines 32 and 33, "the claimant, the candidate's registered association or, if there is no registered association, the registered party." It said that these parties shall be informed. Today, the government is seeking to amend lines 32 and 33. At line 32, it is keeping the word "claimant", but replacing the comma with a semicolon followed by "the registered association or, if there is no registered association, the registered party", and it adds: "becomes liable for the unpaid amount as if the association or party had guaranteed the loan."

This reversal of the reversal adopted by the majority in committee in the spring is unacceptable in that the association—or, if

applicable, the party—would be held responsible for a loan without previous knowledge of it, without having guaranteed the loan, and without having been informed that the loan was contracted. A national association—or a national party—could quite easily end up in a situation whereby a candidate, without consent from the association or the party, could incur personal debts, under the pretext that it is for an election campaign. Then the party—or the association—without warning, would be responsible for paying back the loan. It is very difficult to accept that part.

There is also the matter of financing leadership races. The minister was honest. He bluntly said that instead of allowing citizens to participate by making contributions on an annual basis, as long as the loan has not been paid back in full, citizens should instead make a single contribution for a maximum of \$1,100. The legislation prevents them from participating any more than that in leadership race financing.

• (1555)

Since I do not have very much time left, I want to say that although we are in favour of having a transparent and accountable electoral process, we believe that this bill unduly limits Canadians' access to the democratic system and that it will impede their participation.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not being a member of the committee, I would ask the member to outline in more detail what items the majority of the committee actually approved democratically and the government is now trying to retract.

• (1600)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, the major change would be in Motion No. 3, the amendment, where the original wording on page 5, lines 33, 34, and 35, says:

—the Chief Electoral Officer shall inform the claimant, the candidate's registered association or, if there is no registered association, the registered party of his or her decision.

Now the Conservatives have changed it and it says:

[Then the Chief Electoral] Officer shall inform the lender of his or her decision; furthermore, the candidate's registered association or, if there is no registered association, the registered party becomes liable for the unpaid amount as if the association or party had guaranteed the loan.

This is exactly the point where, in committee, opposition parties underlined the fact that even though the association or the party would not have guaranteed the loan, they would end up with the liability. They would end up having to repay that loan which, as I have mentioned before, they had never approved of, or for all we know, maybe never even had knowledge of.

The majority of the committee voted on this and it was agreed that this was unfair for the association and the national parties, and therefore, it was amended in committee, so that this particular debt would not turn back to the association or the party.

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The other change done at committee dealt with financial contributions during a leadership campaign. I said at the start of my presentation that this particular piece of legislation is most certainly going to give the Liberal Party of Canada a hard time. We are the party that had a leadership race. We were the party that had to answer to the new law in the sense that we had to disclose all the contributions, whereas the present Prime Minister did not disclose all of the contributions that were received for his leadership campaign.

The Conservative government is trying to force leadership candidates to limit financial contributions to a maximum amount of \$1,100, saying that a leadership race is one event and it would limit the financial participation to \$1,100 per that event. At committee we discussed this and it was agreed that it would become a financial contribution of \$1,100 per year until the debt of the leadership candidate had been fully erased.

Now the Conservatives are reversing the reversal that had been done and they are planning on saying that, no, in a leadership race it does not matter how long it takes to reimburse, there would be one contribution per leadership race to a maximum of \$1,100.

These are the two major differences between what the procedure and House affairs committee had worked on and decided back in the spring of 2007. Now the Conservative government is saying it does not care what the majority of the committee decided democratically, it is ready to impose and change it so that it would be brought back to the original version of the bill. I do not think that this is right.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to take part in this debate on a bill that aims to correct another problem with the Federal Accountability Act. I would remind this House that when Bill C-2 was studied, the government was interested in passing the bill quickly, an attitude that we in the opposition parties, the media and Democracy Watch criticized.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-29 in principle, because it addresses the problem of loans that allowed individuals to bypass political contribution restrictions. In fact, Bill C-29 fills the gaps the government left in studying Bill C-2, which contains little protection for whistleblowers and does nothing to improve the Access to Information Act.

Quebeckers have long understood the importance of having clear, reliable rules on financing political organizations. The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-29 in principle, because it should prevent people from getting around the financing rules, especially as regards contribution limits.

I want to stress that the Bloc Québécois fought long and hard for these limits. Inspired by the system that has been in place in Quebec for 30 years, we called on the government to put an end to financing by companies and limit individual contributions. Bill C-29 incorporates the only change proposed by the Bloc Québécois when Bill C-54 was studied in committee. Then, we decried the fact that the political party was held responsible for its candidates' debts, even if the party was not a party to the contract between the individual and his or her financial institution.

I must say that I am extremely disappointed that the government is refusing to comply with the committee's decision on this. Although

the current government wants to demonstrate good faith and sincerity, the fact remains that its intentions are not really genuine. In fact, the Conservatives are using this bill to point out that during the most recent Liberal leadership race, several candidates took out big loans to bypass financing restrictions. Yet the Conservatives are forgetting that the Prime Minister himself has not disclosed all of the contributions he received during the 2002 leadership race.

If the Conservatives think they can pass themselves off as the champions of transparency and the standard bearers of ethics, I must remind them of a few facts that might force them to reconsider. We all remember, as does the public, all the back and forth between political offices and lobbying firms, the contracts awarded to political friends, the use of public funds for partisan purposes, the many partisan appointments, the appointments of judges and immigration commissioners, that is, to the IRB, on the basis of their political beliefs, and the publication of a guide intended for Conservative members who chair committees that lists every possible, imaginable measure to obstruct the work of committees.

Bill C-29 aims to correct the problem of loans used to circumvent the limits on contributions paid to political parties, but certain problems remain. Whistleblower protection comes to mind. During the election campaign, the Conservatives promised to guarantee whistleblowers greater protection. They wanted to "ensure that whistleblowers would have access to adequate legal counsel". Yet the Conservatives' bill allows for only \$1500 in legal fees.

They also wanted "to give the public sector integrity commissioner the power to enforce the whistleblower legislation". They wanted "to guarantee protection to all Canadians who report wrongdoing within the government, not just to public servants". Furthermore, they wanted "to take away the government's ability to exempt crown corporations and other entities from the application of the whistleblower legislation".

● (1605)

In the recent sponsorship scandal, one of the whistleblowers, Allan Cutler, a Conservative Party candidate in the 2006 election, I should mention, was somewhat critical of Bill C-2. He maintained that Bill C-2 was far from perfect and had some problems that needed fixing, especially with respect to the provisions for protecting whistleblowers.

On April 5, 2005, the Liberal government released a discussion paper on reforming the Access to Information Act. This document met with general criticism. In addition to doubling the minimum administrative fees charged to the public, the proposal by the member for LaSalle—Émard, maintained all the exceptions provided for in the legislation.

If the Liberal Party never managed to bring about any useful reform of access to information in 13 years, the Conservative government, despite its election promise, did not do any better. We are still waiting for this reform.

The public knows that once in power, the Conservatives and the Liberals are not in such a hurry to reform the legislation. The information commissioner recently observed that this is a common trait in all governments:

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The reason that action, not more study, is required is that governments continue to distrust and resist the Access to Information Act and the oversight of the Information Commissioner.

With regard to the lack of transparency in election financing, we can see that the Liberals and the Conservatives are equals. What is the Prime Minister waiting for to disclose all the contributions he received during the 2002 Canadian Alliance leadership race? The public must know that the Prime Minister admitted, in December 2006, that he failed to disclose to the Chief Electoral Officer that he had received hundreds of thousands of dollars. The money consisted of registration fees collected from Conservative delegates attending the Conservative Party's May 2005 convention. The party was forced to treat convention registration fees as donations. The report indicated that three delegates, including the Prime Minister, had exceeded their annual contribution limit of \$5,400 to the party.

At the very least, the Conservative government is a government susceptible to powerful influences. The Prime Minister, when he was leader of the opposition, reprimanded the Liberals for the comings and goings between political offices and lobbying firms. Yet, since taking power he has done no better.

To summarize, the bill establishes a standard and transparent reporting system for all loans made to political entities, requiring the mandatory disclosure of the terms of these loans as well as the identity of the lenders and guarantors.

The bill would prohibit all unions and corporations not only from making contributions, in accordance with the Federal Accountability Act, but also from lending money.

Loans, loan guarantees and contributions from individuals could not exceed the limit set out in the Federal Accountability Act, which is \$1,100 for 2007.

Only financial institutions, at market interest rates, or other political entities would be able to lend money exceeding that amount. The rules for unpaid loans would be tightened so that candidates could not default on their obligations.

Loans not repaid within 18 months would be considered a political contribution.

Riding associations, or where there are none, the parties themselves, would be held responsible for their candidate's unpaid loan.

For all these reasons, we support the principle of this bill but we truly hope that motion no. 3 will be defeated.

• (1610)

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could comment on the amendments that are coming forward at this time from committee, the ones that have been accepted by the government and the ones that have been rejected.

• (1615)

[Translation]

Ms. Pauline Picard: Mr. Speaker, the amendment I am most concerned about is the one in lines 29 and 30. It would make a party or other unregistered association responsible for candidates' loans. A

candidate could decide to borrow money without informing the party, without the party's knowledge. Later, if the candidate failed to repay the loan—no matter what the reason—the party or the unregistered association would be responsible for the debt. I find that unacceptable.

When the committee discussed this liability issue, which could hurt the party or even jeopardize it, we all agreed that parties should not be liable for debts incurred by candidates.

I am therefore extremely disappointed that the government refused to go along with this.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the member said that the Prime Minister refused to say who the donors were in his leadership campaign. Is that true? Was the Prime Minister actually asked to outline these? That would seem to be normal accountability.

[Translation]

Ms. Pauline Picard: Mr. Speaker, on October 2, 2002, the *Globe and Mail* revealed that the current Prime Minister raised \$1.1 million for his leadership race in 2002. According to the article, the Prime Minister quietly published a partial list of contributors on the Alliance's website. The list only includes contributions in excess of \$1,075.

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, does my hon. colleague think there are a couple of misleading aspects that the Conservative government is pushing forward with respect to this bill? I will refer to the two most misleading ones.

The government is suggesting that under the current law regarding political financing, loans are allowed to be made in secret so Canadians are kept in the dark, when the reality is that under the current law the details of all loans must be publicly disclosed.

Does the member not agree that under the current law, not the proposed law but the current law, loans cannot be used to avoid donation limits and they cannot be written off without consequences?

Does she not agree that the status quo with respect to the law is actually very good at ensuring transparency for the public?

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The member for Drummond has one minute to respond.

Ms. Pauline Picard: Mr. Speaker, under Bill C-29, loans, guarantees and contributions from individuals could not exceed the limit set out in the Federal Accountability Act, \$1,100 in 2007. Only financial institutions—at commercial interest rates—and other political entities would be allowed to lend amounts exceeding that amount. The rules governing unpaid loans would be strengthened to prevent candidates from walking away from their debts.

We agree with these provisions. Quebeckers have always wanted this legislation to be as transparent as possible. We think that the way we do things in Quebec—

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•(1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Unfortunately, the hon. member's time has run out.

[*English*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleagues in the NDP caucus, I am very pleased to join the debate on Bill C-29.

Let me say at the outset that I support the content of Bill C-29. I should point out that it finds its origins in a motion put forward by the New Democratic Party on the Federal Accountability Act which, sadly, failed at the time, but the government revisited the issue and saw fit to introduce the same subject matter in a separate bill. That bill is the one before us today.

We should start with the basic premise that nobody should be able to buy an election in this country. In fact, nobody should be able to buy a politician in this country. We should take whatever measures necessary to take big money out of politics for all the reasons that should be self-evident to those of us in the chamber today or anybody watching.

We only need to look south of the border to see how big money can undermine democracy. I do not want to cast any aspersions on the character of politicians there, but I would point out that it takes a couple of million dollars now to run in any credible way for a seat in Congress. Surely, people can see that if people have to start their political careers owing \$2 million, it can, and I am not saying it does but it can, influence the way people make public policy. That is something we want to avoid in this country.

This bill also asks another question, and that is, when is a loan not a loan? I would put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that if a loan is never repaid, it is not really a loan anymore. It is a donation. That is the way Elections Canada views loans that are not repaid. If they are not repaid in 18 months, they become donations.

If a loan is larger than the amount people are allowed to donate and 18 months later it becomes a donation, they have made an illegal donation. There is a contradiction in our election financing laws that cries out to be addressed. This bill does just that.

Looking at the origins and history of this bill, I would like to recognize and pay tribute to the former leader of the New Democratic Party, who most recently sat as the member for Ottawa Centre, Ed Broadbent. A seven part ethics package was put together by Mr. Broadbent which became part of the NDP election campaign platform. It dealt specifically with the idea of election financing loans being problematic in our election financing system. The reason he was seized with the issue at that time is that we all observed the Liberal leadership race.

We became aware that even though the donation limits governing leadership races and other political events were quite rigid, because the very rules the Liberals established placed pretty serious limits on how much could be donated, the loans that were being made were massive. One person alone, the former NDP premier of Ontario, had \$720,000 worth of loans from his brother, the executive vice-president of Power Corp. That loan would have to be repaid in

accordance with the donation limits, which today would be \$1,100 per person per year. We did not see how that was possible.

We were concerned that that loan would be lost in the sands of time without people aggressively policing how loans like that are repaid. People forget about them. Eighteen months later it would fall to the Chief Electoral Officer to follow it up, police it and make sure it was paid back. We are doubtful it happens in that way. This bill would preclude these big loans that are not really loans from undermining democracy and allowing big money to dominate politics once again.

There were other examples, too. Perhaps a more egregious example happened recently with the member of Parliament for Mississauga—Streetsville, who was a Liberal, crossed over to the Conservatives and now has to step out of that caucus as well because it was found that he was circumventing the election financing rules. Even though unions and businesses are not allowed to donate a single penny to finance an election, businesses can lend any number of dollars. In fact in this case, his own car dealership lent \$240,000 to his riding association. Surely that violates at least the spirit of the act, if not the letter of the act.

•(1625)

I understand the election financing problems he has now deal more with overspending. I guess he was sitting on such a pot of money he overspent in his election campaign, but I call attention to the flip side of that coin and that is the source of that very money that he overspent, which was a loan from his own car dealership. That is fundamentally wrong.

It gives an unfair competitive advantage to somebody who can find a big corporation, or a big union for that matter, willing to finance him or her to this great extent, when the rest of us are out there scrambling around trying to raise money within the donation limit of \$1,100 per year. Surely anybody can see the unfairness and the inequity of a system that would allow big money to dominate politics in that way.

As I said in my opening remarks, nobody should be able to buy an election in this country. It undermines democracy and more important, it undermines the public's confidence in their democratic institutions.

We are in the throes of a graphic illustration of how big money can undermine democracy. To those of us who sit on the ethics committee, and my Conservative Party colleague who is the vice-chair of the ethics committee perhaps feels the same way, if big money is influencing public policy decision making in the form of undue loans or loans that violate the spirit and the letter of the election financing laws, or bags of cash are given to leadership hopefuls or former prime ministers in hotel rooms, the public confidence in their institutions is severely shaken and undermined.

We work too hard to set up the best country in the world to see its democratic institutions undermined by what can be only described as greed by those who are willing to take advantage of loopholes in the election financing laws or in the lobbying registration laws, or the lack of them.

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When the NDP was faced with the previous incarnation of this bill, and I believe it was Bill C-54, we spoke in favour of the bill. We note now that the government has introduced three amendments at report stage, two of which we have no difficulty with. We believe they are technical in nature and not of any substance.

The third one we do have a problem with and we will have to serve notice that we will vote against the third recommended amendment at report stage. It is a default mechanism that if the candidate in an election campaign defaults on a loan, it automatically goes to the federal party. We are not in favour of that amendment. We believe it complicates matters. Unless the political party has the right to veto such a loan, it should not be the automatic second or co-signer of that loan. It seems to me that it places an undue financial burden on the federal parties.

There are enough illustrations and graphic examples in the country that the general public could relate to this bill. In the spirit of fairness, in the spirit of levelling the playing field, in the spirit of creating an election financing regime where we all have an equal opportunity and we do not have a system that is dominated by big money in politics, that should be our goal. It should be our guiding principle that one of the best things about our election system, I believe, is how egalitarian it actually is.

There was a time when politics was the purview of the well connected, the rich and the powerful. We have a political system where a carpenter like me can aspire to raise the small amount of money necessary to become a member of Parliament. We have schoolteachers, auto mechanics and electricians; I have met many of my colleagues from all walks of life.

That is the system we want to preserve. We do not want to give an unfair competitive advantage to those who happen to know people who could lend them massive amounts of money far and away larger than the annual limit that we have set through the election financing laws.

• (1630)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre has a great deal of expertise in these issues, much more than I do because he sits on the committee. However, I have followed the bill and have a deep interest in it.

If I understand it correctly, under the bill, one would have to get a loan from a bank, which I agree with completely. I seem to recall reading a while ago that there was a problem in the sense that some banks were a little shy, maybe, to lend money to political candidates because they did not want to be seen taking sides.

Has a change been made or is an amendment contemplated to the bill that, for example, could force banks to make the loan if the candidate is loan worthy, if the candidate's collateral meets certain criteria?

Otherwise, what I can see happening is the law of unintended consequences where a candidate asks the bank for a loan. The bank says that it does not want to get involved in politics and will not lend them money, but the candidate's competitor, who happens to be a business person, who does a lot of business with the bank and knows the bank manager personally, will get the loan because the bank wants to maintain the long term business relationship.

In all sincerity, would the member comment on that possible scenario and is there any move afoot to ensure that does not happen?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises an interesting point, one that the people at the committee have dealt with somewhat. I do not know if an amendment is under way to address that specifically, but I do acknowledge the possibility of a lending institution being reluctant to delve into something where it may be accused of playing favourites or giving advantage to one party over another.

The goal of the bill is to take it out of private hands so individuals or businesses cannot loan in a way that exceeds the donation limits that currently exist in the Financing Act, and also to get away from the idea that somebody's personal connections may be an advantage to her or she.

I accept the valid point that a member of the community, who has a better relationship with the bank, may have an advantage over a perfect stranger who has never had to seek out this kind of loan.

With the bill, we are only saying that it should be financial institutions, credit unions, trust companies, banks, whatever may be able to keep an accurate record of the repayment schedule and to take away the advantage that one may have of getting loans through personal connections, et cetera.

To answer my colleague's questions, I acknowledge it as a legitimate concern. I know of no amendment to that effect being contemplated. I think it is something that would have to be monitored in practice.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, does my colleague from the NDP not admit that for many years now so-called big money was not allowed legally to fund anybody's political party?

For many years, there have been very strong restrictions and constraints upon funding individuals who are running for federal office, which thankfully sets us apart from the United States, where big money does drive the electoral system to a large extent.

Will he not admit to the House that since he has been here and for many years before that, severe, consistent restrictions on funding have been in place and that this is not the issue whatsoever in our electoral system? It is clean and money does not play a big part illegally to try to affect anybody's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There are 30 seconds left for the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal government did in fact put limits on donations, it left one huge, gaping loophole, which was the loans issue. Businesses and unions could no longer donate to any extent, but they could lend a candidate hundreds of thousands of dollars. They could lend them a million dollars. If the candidate never paid it back 18 months later, it would be deemed a donation. What good is that?

This loophole was screaming out to be plugged, and the bill plugs it.

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●(1635)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Before moving on to further debate, 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 Verchères—Les Patriotes, Agriculture and Agri-food; the hon. member for Davenport, Justice; the hon. member for Egmont, Human Resources and Social Development.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-29 deals with the Canada Elections Act and accountability.

I will do a bit of history and talk about public accountability. Unfortunately what has happened for decades is the confusion with respect to what public accountability is or is not and the confusion between public accountability, conduct and responsibility. To the casual observer it seems they would be very much the same thing, but they are not and the implications of that are quite significant.

I owe much of this to Mr. Henry McCandless, from Victoria, who is a retired senior member of the Auditor General's office. He has waged a battle for many years to introduce true public accountability into the public service and into Parliament for the reason of affecting conduct. If we get public accountability right, in effect what we will be able to do is affect conduct and have a transparent means upon which the public can know what we, as elected officials, do and therefore be judged by that. In fact, if we get public accountability correct it is a liberating exercise for those of us who serve and for the public itself.

Let me for a moment give a true definition of public accountability. Public accountability is the obligation of authorities to explain publicly, fully and fairly, before and after the fact, how they carry out their responsibilities that affect the public in important ways. It is an obligation to report publicly to explain the intentions and reasons, including performance standards, what those performance standards are and, after the fact, whether they have been met.

In other words, the outcome of performance and the learning game can also be applied and in doing so, it is the liberating experience. Said another way, we as elected officials and senior members of the public service have an obligation to Canadians to tell them what we will do, why we will do it and what the public performance standards are upon which we will be judged. Then the outcomes can be judged and measured. We not only can go hand on heart and tell the public, in a transparent way, what we will do, but we know what we will be judged on. We know what the goals are, the public knows what the goals are. In doing this, we can measure very clearly how effectively we have executed our duties in the interests of the public good.

That should have been in the public accountability bill, but it has nothing whatsoever to do with public accountability and had everything to do with conduct. It has put on layers upon layers of administrative oversight, which are utterly unnecessary, upon the shoulders of the public service. This has created an expensive mechanism that will add absolutely nothing to public accountability and, in fact, will diminish the effectiveness of the public service to carry out its duties.

I cannot overemphasize the fact that the public accountability bill has been one of the most damaging public initiatives by the current

government, or any government, in allowing the public service to execute its duty and for the public to be served well by an effective public service and an effective Parliament. Because this happened on the back of Gomery inquiry, it was a political initiative on the part of the government to try to make it look like it was cleaner than the previous government. It was all a bunch of nonsense. It was purely a political exercise.

The tragedy of the political exercise, the public accountability bill, is it has diminished the effectiveness of the public service and Parliament. Maybe the government wanted to do that. The Prime Minister is a follower of the U.S. political philosopher, Leo Strauss, who believed that a small number of people were predestined and preordained to lead. The Prime Minister is exhibiting that in Parliament and in the execution of his duties and that of the government.

●(1640)

Through what he has done, we do not now have a Parliament by the people, for the people or for the public through their elected officials. We have a government that is run by the Prime Minister's office, by a small group of unelected, invisible people who govern. These people do not listen to the public service. They exclude civil society and NGOs. They certainly diminish the effectiveness of the House by not listening to their members, their backbenchers and their ministers, their executive for the most part. They certainly do not give a care what anybody else thinks in the House. They also do not care what the public thinks.

If they are so sure in their ideology, that they believed they were preordained to govern and that their ideas are the only ideas that count and they have a tin ear to anybody else's ideas, then they will only move forward what they want and they will not listen to anybody else. However, by that, the public and our country is not served well. If they do not listen to Parliament, if they do not listen to other ideas from across the House, if they do not listen to their members, if they do not work with members from different sides, if they do not listen to NGOs and civil society and experts in our country, even the provinces, which are largely and often being excluded from decisions that affect them, what we have is a government that is less than what it could be, that is open to umpteen mistakes and that makes our country less than what it could be.

Is it not a government's responsibility to tap into the best and brightest ideas in our nation? Is it not a government's responsibility to tap into those great minds and those great ideas from coast to coast? Is it not a government's opportunity to tap into those solutions and implement them in the interest of the public good? I submit they are.

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If the government were to truly introduce a public accountability act, it would put the responsibility on the shoulders of elected officials and unelected public servants, which includes people in the PMO and the PCO, to tell the public what they will do, who will benefit, why they will benefit and identify the public reporting standards upon which its activities are going to be judged. This would liberating for a government. The government could go to the public, tell it what it had done and how effective it had been. In those areas where a government had fallen short, there would be lessons to learned, and the public would fully understand that.

If a government were to do that, it would affect conduct. The conduct of an individual or a party would be measured by that which it told the public it would do. The government ought to be transparent, effective, wise and accountable.

There is a misnomer that public moneys or private moneys can somehow affect decision making. I wonder how many folks out there know that the limits for what people can donate legally to our elections, and to anybody who is running federally for a public office, is very modest. I believe it is between \$1,000 and \$5,000, \$5,000 being the maximum. Banks, organizations and such, could only donate \$5,000.

That is very different from the situation south of the border, where there are no spending limits. Thankfully our country has spending limits and they are governed by law. Therefore, if somebody is going to provide big money to somehow affect the public voting or influence an elected official: (a) the amount of those moneys would have to be large; (b) the person would have to be unscrupulous; and (c) if the person accepted it, he or she would be committing an illegal act. For many years it has been illegal for elected officials to accept large sums of money that would influence our decision making.

The government's notion of public accountability is dead wrong. It needs to review what it is and implement true public accountability. It would be something that no other government has done before and it would be a remarkable legacy if it were to do that.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be here in the House to discuss Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to loans).

[*English*]

We of course as Liberals certainly support the spirit of this bill, but as with most of the government bills this session there are a number of problems. We can see this simply by the fact that there are a number of amendments that have been made to the bill.

The Liberal Party has always supported carefully identified limits and in fact, as many have said in the House already, the Liberal Party of Canada brought in the largest reduction of allowable political contributions in Canadian history and included a huge decrease in what corporations could donate.

As members from different parties have mentioned, I too believe that members of Congress are in an unfortunate situation. They can

only sit for two years before the next election and in that time they have to raise millions and sometimes tens of millions of dollars. Some of the members had other problems with that. I do not enjoy fundraising as it is, but the problem I have is when are we going to do our work if we are trying to raise tens of millions of dollars within a two year period.

A lot of our efforts, as all members of Parliament know, are so overburdened with things to do to help our constituents to improve laws, to attend committees, to meet with organizations that want to influence us on a national level in Ottawa, and then we go back on the weekends and hear all the same things from organizations in our ridings.

If we are going to give a fair hearing to all of these people, look at legislation carefully, prepare for our committee work, prepare for our caucus meetings, and then in a two year period have to raise tens of millions of dollars on top of that, something will be lacking.

Therefore, I certainly think the system we have is very good in that respect which is one of the reasons we limited contributions so much in our system. We support that direction in electoral reform.

Along those lines we want to eliminate any undue abuse of loans that could pervert that system. The problem is that the Conservatives are suggesting that the current legislation allows loans to be written off without consequence. This is absolutely false. Loans cannot be used to avoid donation limits and they cannot be written off without consequence.

There is also another similar point about where the proponents of the bill are misleading Canadians about the current state of the law concerning political financing. The Conservatives are suggesting that the current law allows loans to be made in secret and that Canadians are kept in the dark.

The truth is that under the law that is currently in place the details of all loans including the amount of every loan, in the name of every lender and every guarantor, must already be publicly disclosed.

Therefore, we have to be careful that we are not just writing redundant legislation that is already covering elements that are already in place, elements of course of transparency and accountability that I am sure every member of the House would like to see.

Another element that has been raised during the debate is the philosophical question as to whether it would give financial institutions the final say in who runs as opposed to Canadians. This has been raised by several members in the House and some of my colleagues. I think each member of Parliament will have to think philosophically about that situation where loans only come from those particular institutions.

Of course we all want to ensure transparency and that there is no undue access by any particular groups of people or organizations, and we want to be absolutely sure about that. However, we also do not want to restrict the rights of Canadians to access the democratic process, to take part in it, to show that they are serious, and to contribute toward what they believe in. We certainly need to get a balance in those areas.

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●(1650)

I want to talk about the two amendments. In a bill related to accountability and the democratic process, the committee democratically approved these amendments but now the government is trying to withdraw them.

The first amendment I want to speak about would have the Conservatives changing the contribution for a leadership campaign. It is presently \$1,100, a very tiny amount. We can well imagine the costs for leaders as these campaigns sometimes take several years.

However, the costs for a candidate are very high. We want to be fair to Canadians from all parts of the country and we do not want to discriminate against rural Canadians. We want to allow candidates to get across the country, but the costs and expenses of their travel, their team and the preparation of policy and promotional material, and all that is involved in preparing for debates, all of that is very expensive. So a contribution of \$1,100 is not going to go very far.

The present proposal and existing law allows \$1,100 per year of a campaign. Usually that would be two years or three years until the contribution has been paid off and it is not an excessive amount of money.

The Conservatives are trying to withdraw what the committee has done and only allow a contribution of \$1,100 for the entire lifetime of the campaign and of the process no matter how long it is. Of course, we disagree with that as do some others.

We also have a problem with the second amendment and speakers from other parties have spoken about problems with this amendment as well. The Conservatives are trying to suggest that if a candidate runs up some debt then his or her party or the local association, if there is one, would have to pay that debt.

Really, I cannot imagine many people seeing the sense in allowing other people to run up debt. If I were to run up a debt and then tell the Conservatives they would have to pay for it when they had nothing to do with incurring that debt, that is not the way the system should work.

There could be candidates who go out and incur debt that no one knows about and that puts the onus on people who did not even know the debt was incurred to repay that debt. Or, an organization that is thousands of miles away and would not have any idea that the debt was being incurred would ask the candidates to repay such a debt.

I am not sure that would withstand any type of court challenge related to fairness. We cannot go along making loans that people do not know about and then asking them to pay for it. That is why there has been so much objection to that amendment.

In my last 30 seconds I want to emphasize a point regarding accountability. When the government is putting a whole bunch of conditions on people and government programs, then the clients who really need that money do not have a bureaucracy to make all these overzealous rules and meet these conditions are really being harmed by that mismanagement of government.

●(1655)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on this particular issue. I have to indicate that there are concerns out there with regard to issues of transparency and accountability, and certainly our party is all for that.

We also have to be careful that we are not coming up with a cure which is worse than the supposed problem here, particularly for women candidates and the issue of accessing money. We want to ensure that all candidates have the ability to run, to be able to finance a political campaign, and to do it in a manner which of course demonstrates both transparency and accountability.

Currently, it says all donations over \$100 must be on the website. Now we will have to declare any contribution over \$20 under the new legislation. People will know who has given. I think my colleague from Yukon was very clear with regard to what was happening in the United States with members of Congress. In a two year period they must raise millions of dollars in order to finance a campaign. There are no limits. They go out and raise money. Half of their two year term is simply going on the banquet circuit and dealing with lobbyists.

We do not have those problems. In fact, in this country we have very strict limits in terms of the amount of money that can be spent in any particular riding. I think that is what makes Canada unique.

When we talk with American congressmen and tell them that our limit is \$75,000, they say to us, "That's not too bad for one day". We tell them that is over a 35-day or 40-day period for a campaign and they are absolutely shocked. They ask us what we do with \$75,000.

The problem with this bill is that it is a bit of overkill. What we are trying to say is that we want to make sure that moneys are available if candidates need it. In particular, we have seen cases where this particular amendment in this bill would cause a problem for women candidates borrowing money.

I think the issue is that everyone in the House believes in the accountability aspect. The question is that we also want to make it available for people who wish to run. Not everyone is wealthy and that again is another very good thing. Sometimes people do not have all the money in the bank when they decide to run. I think any kind of a restriction which would reduce that could be a problem.

At the moment, we know that Elections Canada is very clear about the reporting of loans for campaigns. We know that a riding association may loan money to the candidate in that riding. Again, this is all declared. It is all very clear. I think that is important.

The Liberal Party of Canada, during the leadership race, went beyond what was required in terms of the candidates being able to declare information.

If the goal of the bill is to achieve more accountability, then it fails in that regard. It builds new roadblocks in terms of people wanting to access the political arena, those people who want to run in an election. We want to encourage people, regardless of their financial background, to be able to run for election in this country. I think it is important that we do not have a House of Commons that only attracts those with money.

Government Orders

On both sides of the House we know, from time to time, how difficult it is when we are running a campaign and initial up front costs. They may be up front for signs, brochures, a campaign office, et cetera.

Obviously, some candidates do not have all that money at the beginning and they have to borrow. Then they have to wait for money to come in during the campaign. Again, I think that we have to try to have a balance in terms of what we are looking for in terms of this situation. Loans are an important part of this as is the declaration of those loans under Elections Canada and this legislation.

It is also important to keep in mind that there is a challenge now to try and secure money. Securing a loan from banks and financial institutions is important. Under these rules it would make it almost virtually impossible for candidates to go to a financial institution to secure the loan that they may need. If that were the case, then we are saying that they would be better off not running for office because they cannot get access to money.

• (1700)

We already have an open and transparent system in this country compared to that of the United States and others. Even under the old rules, before Bill C-24, we had to declare over \$100 and it had to be accounted for. I think that shows how wonderful our system was. We had to declare it, there were limits on how much could be spent in a riding, the candidate's chief financial officer had to account for every penny, and statements were audited to make sure.

As members of Parliament, we know that if we do not declare donations, or if we are not able to account for every penny, we cannot take our seat in the House. That is important. We simply do not want that situation to occur. Obviously, financial institutions look at a person's ability to borrow money. This again would be a problem.

I think it is a bit misleading to suggest that the current state of the law regarding financial contributions to campaigns is a problem. In fact, I think it is probably tighter now than it has ever been. It is a bit misleading to suggest that loans are somehow made in secret. I do not see how they could be made in secret, because under the legislation, the Elections Act, if someone borrows money, that money has to be declared. The source has to be declared and the dates have to be declared.

I am sure there are members in the House who have borrowed money or had a line of credit from a bank. That has to be declared, as does the interest on it, et cetera, and that must all be paid. Again, I am not sure what the problem is. Every dollar and the lender have to be declared. We have to say whether the lender was an individual or an institution. That is already in the current legislation. All of it has to be declared. I am not sure what the problem is.

It is important that we have rules in place, but the suggestion in this legislation would restrict this even further. This would in turn disenfranchise people in regard to the ability to run. That is not what our system is about. Our system is about making sure that all candidates have equal access, and one of the sources of money they currently use is loans.

If a loan is not declared, there are consequences. There are stiff penalties. However, this legislation would make it even more restrictive, which I do not think Canadians want to see. They want to see transparency and accountability, but they do not want to see this becoming a rich person's game or, in other words, that in order to get into the House of Commons one has to be independently wealthy. I do not support that. I know our party does not support the change in this amendment.

I think it is important that we continue to say that we are different from other countries where raising money is certainly a preoccupation. As members of Parliament, my colleagues and I have more than enough to do in terms of dealing with the real issues of the day. If we have to go on the circuit of raising money and if we say that we are going to restrict loans to such a degree, I do not think it would be very productive. I am hopeful that members will keep this in mind when considering this amendment.

Again, I think we all want to see people from all backgrounds and all walks of life participating in the political process. We cannot tell them that if they do not have the dollars on hand then they cannot participate. That would not be good. It would be a roadblock to their participation. It would be a stumbling block. In fact, I think it would be a regressive move in terms of legislation.

• (1705)

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the hon. member's very interesting speech. One of the things that I find very disturbing is the fact that any smaller party or anyone who does not have the cash cannot run for office, and this will make it a lot more difficult for individuals to run for office.

When people are starting off, as the hon. member mentioned, they borrow money. As the money starts coming in, they start paying off the loans. With a wealthy party or a wealthy area, the candidate will get all kinds of cash. However, what happens is that certain areas will end up not being represented and parties will start to get eliminated.

Could the hon. member comment on how this is going to limit accessibility for lower income Canadians and lower income areas of the country when it comes to the electoral system?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt this will have a severe impact, first in terms of people who would like to run. Not everyone has the ability to simply put the money up front. Depending on people's backgrounds or professions, they would be very much hindered in wanting to run. For many right now, it is a daunting task in terms of running for political office, and then they have to worry about being a full time fundraiser. They worry about where they get the money and about not being able to get a line of credit or borrow money. In some parts of the country, it is more difficult to raise money due to certain socio-economic conditions. Obviously, given that situation, it would be very restrictive.

In regard to education, we talk about how we want to provide a hand up to allow students from disadvantaged areas or who are economically disadvantaged to go to university. Money should not be an impediment to getting a post-secondary education, and I would suggest that money should not be an impediment in terms of being able to run for public office.

Government Orders

If in fact someone wants to run for public office, I note that already the Liberal Party put restrictions on and reduced the influence of associations, unions and businesses. Again, everything was transparent. I think that what we are trying to do here is deal with an issue that really is not an issue.

What we are saying is that we want accessibility for people who run for any political party. My colleague is quite right. If someone from a smaller, less established party wants to run, again, this would be an impediment. The political process should not be just for the rich. It should be for everyone. We should all be able to participate in the political process. It is critical that we do so.

Again, I think that in this situation the government is trying to use overkill for a problem that really is not there. It is not something that I have seen. Certainly, after talking to many colleagues on all sides of the House, I note that they all use loans from financial institutions. They need them. Again, it is unfortunate that we are trying to deal with a problem that I do not think really exists.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question and a comment.

As for the question, it has been an interesting week. We have debated a number of bills and there seem to be hardly any Conservative members speaking on them. I would not have mentioned it except that on an accountability bill it seems the most ironic of all. Are they accountable to their constituents? I wonder if the member would know why that might be. I cannot imagine that they have no ideas. They seem very friendly and I am sure their constituents talk to them and provide input on bills. I am wondering what the member thinks as to why that might be.

My comment, before he answers the question, is related to the important point that the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca brought up, which is the fact that in regard to the last couple of years with all the accountability innovations, many of which the Liberals contributed, sometimes we have to be careful not to go overboard. There are struggling organizations out there helping people and we put in so many rules that they cannot do their jobs.

• (1710)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Richmond Hill has eight seconds to respond.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I have no idea, Mr. Speaker, why the Conservatives are not standing up, but I can say that on this side we are standing up for Canadians and for the political process in this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-29. The Bloc Québécois supports this bill, which seeks to prevent individuals from bypassing campaign financing rules. We support the bill for the simple reason that we think it is necessary to regulate loans in order to prevent people from getting around the financing ceilings. The problem with certain bills is that the wording may be clear, but sometimes the spirit of the letter can be abused. Sometimes a bill can be convoluted and ambiguous. This can result in misinterpretation or misapplication of the legislation. This bill establishes more rules for political financing.

I want to remind hon. members that financing ceilings were established in response to one of the Bloc Québécois' traditional demands. We demanded an end to corporate financing and limits on individual contributions, as has been the case in Quebec for 30 years.

I remember it as though it were yesterday. I can still see Prime Minister Chrétien, who was paying tribute to René Lévesque for introducing clear financing rules, or should I say, pure financing rules, in Quebec. Mr. Chrétien did not use those words, but he said that the new rules, which prohibited corporate financing, were largely inspired by what was happening in Quebec. Imagine. It was not easy for former Prime Minister Chrétien to pay tribute to René Lévesque. Mr. Chrétien probably had to dig deep for that. He probably had a hard time getting it out, but fortunately, for the benefit of everyone, Mr. Chrétien implicitly recognized that the Bloc Québécois had a reason to be persistent and to call for better financing rules at the federal level.

This bill includes the only modification proposed by the Bloc Québécois when the old Bill C-54 was at committee stage. After the throne speech, some bills had to be re-introduced, including the one before us, Bill C-29. The Bloc Québécois was strongly against political parties being held responsible for debts incurred by their candidates, particularly when the political party is not named on the contract between the candidate and the bank.

The members of the Bloc Québécois choose its candidates democratically. We sell membership cards for \$5, and by purchasing a card, any person who subscribes to our values, principles and policies is showing that they support the Bloc Québécois in its defence of the interests of Quebec here on the federal scene. The membership card also gives the individual the opportunity to choose who will represent the Bloc Québécois and the Bloc Québécois platform in a byelection or general election. This is one of the benefits of being a member. There are others, such as the right to attend the annual general meeting, the right to receive party literature, and many other rights associated with being a member of a political party.

• (1715)

The Bloc Québécois is different from some other parties where the leader, on his or her own authority, can literally name certain people as candidates for the party. In our case, the members choose the candidates democratically. This democratic approach also means that anyone who is a member and shares the party's views can stand for nomination. This can cost candidates money. However, the bylaws of the Bloc Québécois place a limit on what a candidate for nomination can spend. I believe it is \$1 per member in good standing, but I could be wrong. At this late hour, my party's bylaws are not uppermost in my mind. Regardless, there is a limit on what candidates can spend. A person therefore could not decide to spend \$350,000 to become a candidate at a Bloc nomination meeting.

Government Orders

During the last session, we found there was a problem with this bill, which was then known as Bill C-54. Candidates could spend up to the maximum stipulated in our party's bylaws, but if they were unable to pay their debts, if they had taken out a loan from a financial institution, the party was held responsible. We considered that totally unacceptable, and we still do. The party should not be held responsible for the debts of a candidate for nomination.

That is why, on behalf of my party, I introduced an amendment to Bill C-54, and I succeeded in convincing my opposition colleagues to bring the government into line. Unfortunately, as hon. members can read in the Order Paper and Notice Paper, the government House leader has introduced three amendments to this bill. One of those amendments would nullify the effects of the amendment my NDP and Liberal colleagues on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs agreed to after I convinced them. The government is proposing a motion to reverse this democratic decision of the committee.

With respect, I want to tell the government House leader that he will likely be disappointed, because I believe that my Liberal and NDP colleagues support the Bloc Québécois' interpretation, and we intend to reject this government amendment, which is designed to reverse what we won in committee. We do not want the government to do indirectly what it was incapable of doing directly.

Because I do not have much time, that concludes my remarks. The Bloc Québécois supports the bill, because it clarifies some rules on political party financing.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to clarify. I did not understand what he said the Liberals and the NDP did not agree with. I think he was talking about the amendment related to parties and associations being responsible for the debt of a candidate over whom they may have no control and had no idea they were incurring debts.

It seems patently un-Canadian, unfair and perhaps unconstitutional. I spoke strongly against that. I think that is what the member spoke against as well, and I want to make sure we are on the same side on opposing that concept in the legislation.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, indeed, we believe that the recognized party—that is, the political party under whose name we sit here in this House—should not be held responsible for debts incurred by a candidate for nomination. That is the principle we would like to defend. I hope my hon. colleagues in the House will vote with me. I received the support of their representatives on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

An individual candidate for a nomination must be responsible for the debts he or she incurs with a bank, credit union or other financial institution. That has nothing to do with the party. In any case, it is, first and foremost, a financial contract entered into between an individual and a financial institution. Thus, it has nothing to do with the party.

Should we also start taking on the unpaid car loans and unpaid mortgages, because the person is a candidate for a party's

nomination? That would be ridiculous. Similarly, political parties are not responsible for the debts incurred by a candidate for nomination.

I would remind the House that a candidate for nomination is not considered an official candidate until the nomination meeting is held. He or she is a candidate for nomination to become the official standard bearer of the party during a byelection or general election.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I note, from the comments of my Bloc colleague, that there seems to be a consensus growing, among the opposition parties at least, that we do not accept this idea that the default position should be to the federal party if in fact candidates default or fail to pay back their loans in the accepted period of time.

We all come from the same premise that a loan that is not paid back is deemed a donation and this was a loophole that should have been plugged.

The point I want to make is that sometimes in a riding where candidates have very little opportunity, they may see in their mind that they have a possibility of winning and spend far too much money in that campaign. In a campaign that may have warranted a \$10,000 token amount, some candidates may borrow the full \$80,000 and run a full campaign even though they have no hope of winning and in fact fail.

I am wondering if a change could be made to the amendment proposed where if the federal parties were to have the right to veto situations like this, would it then be acceptable for the party to be the co-signer or the guarantor of the loan for candidates. Or, does the member's party feel that it is a complete non-starter as an issue?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Winnipeg Centre raises a very interesting question. A distinction must be made between, on the one hand, the legislative rules that would be brought in under Bill C-29 and, on the other hand, the constitutions of each of our parties. The NDP constitution is different from ours; the Liberal constitution is different from that of the Conservatives. It is therefore very difficult, but it is absolutely necessary—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Halton.

[*English*]

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this bill in the few minutes left in debate here today.

Mostly, I would like to talk about the law of unintended consequences. I think it is a law that somewhat bedevils the government. For example, when it brought in legislation to fix what it perceived was a problem with income trusts, we ended up actually making the situation a lot worse with Canadians, investors and the economy. I am kind of concerned that the law of unintended consequences might click in with Bill C-29.

Private Members' Business

The bill seeks to add clarity and transparency to the way that we politicians finance our political activities, mainly election campaigns. It would disallow us the ability to go and borrow money from friends, relatives, places of employment or supporters. It would disallow us the ability, as I understand it, to finance our own campaigns with money borrowed in our own name. In other words, money now has to be borrowed only from a financial institution.

On the surface of it, that does not sound so bad because it makes somewhat of a level playing field among all of us, but when the law of unintended consequences clicks in, all of a sudden we see this. People who are without the means to convince a commercial lending institution to actually give them money for something as dubious and uncertain as running for public office end up out of luck, and, because this is now their sole ability to get borrowed funds to run, we might end up having a lot of people, who would be very worthwhile to have in this place, who would never get here.

I am worried about the consequences, for example, of people with bad credit and people who are not wealthy and who cannot put up a lot of resources to guarantee a loan. Perhaps there are people who are from various groups, female candidates or aboriginal candidates, people who richly deserve to be in this House, who will never make it because of this legislation.

I do not think that is what the government intended. I doubt it is even what the Minister for Democratic Reform intended when this legislation was brought forward. I think it was intended more to catch people, such as the member for Mississauga—Streetsville who crossed from the Liberals to the Conservatives not long ago and now sits as an Independent. I believe it was put into place to catch situations such as that, but the laws of unintended consequences here are very serious.

Effectively, because the only source of borrowed money for a political campaign would now be from a financial institution, which has the power to grant or not to grant that, financial institutions would be given the power of life and death over a political campaign. If they do not finance the campaign, the candidate does not get a campaign. I do not think that is the role of our banks in this country to do that.

I am very concerned that the bill would do nothing to encourage accountability. The system has a lot of accountability now. If people borrow money for a political campaign, they must divulge that. Our guarantor must be public. The terms of the loan must be public. Right now there is every reason to believe that we have adequate accountability in the system.

The Conservatives suggest that the law, as it now stands, somehow leads to secret financing of political campaigns. That is absolutely false. If this legislation does go forward, this place might remain the purview of guys like me: old, white, wealthy, middle class individuals, and, God knows, looking around this chamber right now, I think we have enough of them.

This legislation is actually anti-democratic and I am not about to surrender the ability of good people to run this place to the presidents of banks, and particularly the loan officers of those institutions.

Therefore, I must say that I do not agree with this legislation at all. I think it is draconian and I would call upon the Minister for Democratic Reform to withdraw it.

• (1725)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:30, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

When we next return to the study of Bill C-29, there will be five minutes left for the hon. member for Halton.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

The House resumed from October 31 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have the opportunity this afternoon to speak to the motion presented by the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. I had the pleasure of sitting with her on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I would also like to congratulate her for bringing this important issue, Jordan's principle, to the attention of the House.

As we saw during the previous debate, the government must immediately adopt a child first principle for resolving jurisdictional disputes involving the care of first nations children. This approach, known as Jordan's principle, forces those involved to set aside any disagreements between two governments, two departments or organizations with respect to payment for services provided to first nations children.

In other words, when a problem arises in a community regarding a child, we must ensure that the necessary services are provided and only afterwards should we worry about who will foot the bill. Thus, the first government or department to receive a bill for services is responsible for paying, without disruption or delay. That government or department can then submit the matter for review to an independent organization, once the appropriate care has been given, in order to have the bill paid.

[*English*]

I support this motion, as does the government. I am pleased to report that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and officials in his department are working diligently with their partners in other federal departments, provincial and territorial governments, and first nations organizations on child and family services initiatives that will transform the commitment we make here today into a fact of daily life for first nations parents and their children.

Private Members' Business

[*Translation*]

That is not all. In addition to implementing immediate, concrete measures to apply Jordan's principle in aboriginal communities, I would like to inform the House and my colleague that the government is also implementing other measures to improve the well-being of first nations children.

I would like to discuss some of our government's significant achievements in three areas that affect the lives and future of first nations children: poverty, family violence and education. At the end of my presentation, I will invite my colleague to support our government's initiative to promote the rights and freedoms of aboriginal people.

I would like to assure the House that the government is determined to eliminate poverty, particularly among first nations children. For too long now, governments of all stripes have wrongly believed that the best way—perhaps the only way—to eliminate poverty was to give people public funds. That is a seductive approach, but it is the wrong one because it exacerbates poverty in communities.

Our government has chosen another way. We know that the best and only way to eliminate poverty is to increase opportunities for education and to foster prosperous and stable communities. Studies have shown, conclusively, that education improves the standard of living.

[*English*]

To achieve this goal, the government is working on a number of fronts. We are collaborating with provincial and territorial governments and a variety of first nations organizations to boost economic development in and around first nations communities. We are working with our partners to support first nations business people and entrepreneurs, and we are helping foster conditions that will create good jobs at good wages for those who live in first nations communities.

I am convinced that this approach is the most practical and enduring way to reduce and eventually eliminate poverty among first nations children.

[*Translation*]

We are also concerned about family violence. Several recent reports indicate that there is still a lot of family violence against first nations women and children—more than ever before, in fact.

It is important to support women and give them the tools they need to interrupt this cycle. That is why our government is taking concrete steps to protect women and children against family and sexual violence. We have allocated additional funds to pay for 35 emergency shelters and to ensure that the trained staff providing support services in these shelters have access to the resources they need.

Together with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the CMHC, and other key stakeholders, we are working to create five new shelters under the CMHC's shelter enhancement program. We have also renewed our support for the family violence prevention program for first nations. The goal of this indispensable initiative is to support the operation of shelters that provide women and children

with culturally appropriate services and to ensure the provision of basic programs. The program serves 2,500 women and 2,700 children in 265 communities every year. We are eliminating poverty and we are also working to eliminate family violence so that we can improve the quality of life of first nations women and children.

It is also important to emphasize education, the best means of ensuring a bright future for these people, particularly through high-quality schools that respect cultural values. In this regard, our government, particularly in Quebec, supported the first nations pavilion initiative in Abitibi at the aboriginal forum in Masteuiash.

Our government has made several key investments to ensure that a greater number of first nations children and youth attend safe schools that provide high-quality education with standards comparable to those elsewhere in the country.

On April 5, we announced that we were earmarking more than \$50 million for school infrastructure projects in aboriginal communities throughout Canada to help improve the learning environment for students.

● (1735)

[*English*]

In addition to making these vital investments in the future of first nations youth, the federal government has forged an agreement with the Government of British Columbia and with first nations in the province to provide greater first nations control over on reserve education. What is more, the government sponsored and Parliament approved legislation to give this agreement the force of law.

Our government has made every effort to support first nations education because we recognize its practical intrinsic value: it enables first nations youth to gain the knowledge and develop the skills necessary to take advantage of exciting new employment opportunities.

[*Translation*]

The programs and investments I have briefly described demonstrate the importance of the government's commitment to eliminating poverty, helping youth, reducing violence within aboriginal communities and also emphasizing education.

The motion of my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan is worth supporting and that is what I intend to do.

I would also like to take the opportunity to urge my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan and all opposition members to abandon partisan rhetoric and to support wholeheartedly this government's efforts to repeal section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. That way, we can ensure that the first nations will be protected by Canadian Human Rights Act, like all other Canadians.

Private Members' Business

By supporting motion M-296, I am acting in accordance with my conscience and I urge my opposition colleagues to do the same and to support the repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak about Jordan's principle.

[English]

For members of the public who are watching, the motion we are debating is as follows:

[Translation]

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should immediately adopt a child first principle, based on Jordan's Principle, to resolve jurisdictional disputes involving the care of First Nations children.

• (1740)

[English]

I congratulate the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan and the member for Churchill for all the work they have done on this motion that is very important to aboriginal children.

I also pay tribute to Jordan Anderson, a Canadian child, and his family for what they had to go through. As a legislator I feel a sense of responsibility and almost shame that a situation of governance could cause such a human tragedy and harm. Although this is about Jordan's principle, there are many such cases ongoing in Canada.

I would also like to commend Cindy Blackstock, the executive director of First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, the Norway House Cree Nation and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. They made the important points that simply by cleaning this up first nations children would have access to the same programs and services as other children have.

I would like to make it clear for the people watching what the issue is. Unfortunately in our complicated system of government in Canada, certain programs and services often related to the health and social services fields for aboriginal people are handled differently than they are for other people. Sometimes the federal government is responsible for delivery of the services and sometimes it is the provincial or territorial governments. In fact, even within the federal government certain services fall under INAC, whereas other services fall under Health Canada. Unfortunately this has created for a number of children a very tragic situation of not being able to get the services that other children can get.

An individual bureaucrat may think he is doing the right thing by following the laws and provisions that we have set up, and we may think we have done the right thing in that it would save money or be more efficient, but if a child is forced into a foster home or to stay in a hospital just to have access to services, it is a human tragedy. That by far is the worst element of it, but it is even far more costly.

Jordan Anderson is a member of the Norway House Cree Nation. He was nominated by KidsRights for the International Children's Peace Prize in 2007. I want people at home to know some of the background on this. I will refer to some of the elements from his nomination on how the situation developed:

Jordan was a First Nations child born with complex medical needs. As his family did not have access to the supports needed to care for him at their home on a First

Nations reserve they made a difficult decision to place Jordan in child welfare care shortly after birth.

Imagine any of us having to do that with our child.

Jordan remained in hospital for the first two years of his life to stabilize his medical condition. During this time the Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency...Norway House Cree Nation and Jordan's family worked together to locate a medically trained foster home and to raise money to refit a van for Jordan's safe transportation to medical appointments and family visits. Shortly after Jordan's second birthday, doctors said he could go to a family home. This decision should have been a time of celebration but for federal and provincial governments it was a time to begin arguing over which level of government should pay for Jordan's at home care...he jurisdictional dispute would last over two years during which time Jordan remained unnecessarily in hospital.

Imagine a child not being able to go home from the hospital because of a jurisdictional dispute between the federal and provincial governments, or between departments within one government. We have to remember that there is only one taxpayer and therefore, it does not really matter in the end who ultimately pays, certainly not at the sacrifice of a child.

• (1745)

Jordan's history continues:

Hospital social workers warned the government bureaucrats that Jordan's well being was suffering because he was growing up in an institution instead of a family home but even these warnings did not compel the governments to resolve the dispute and pay for Jordan's at home care....

Norway House Cree Nation and Kinosao Sipi Minisowin Agency initially tried to mediate a solution between the governments but when this failed they turned to legal action. Shortly after Jordan's fourth birthday in hospital, the jurisdictional dispute was settled but not in time for Jordan who slipped into a coma and sadly passed away before he could ever live in a family home.

One might think this is an isolated instance, but it is not.

A recent research report indicates that jurisdictional disputes involving the costs of caring for First Nations children are very prevalent with 393 of these disputes occurring in 12 of the 105 First Nations child and family service agencies sampled in the study during 2004/2005 alone. The vast majority of these disputes were between two federal government departments or between the federal government and the provincial/territorial government....

People can find some information on this at a website, if they want more details, www.fncaringsociety.com.

The story continues:

Jordan's family and community wanted to ensure that the governments put the needs of children first and that no other child is denied or delayed receipt of government services because they are an Aboriginal child. With their support, a child first principle to resolving jurisdictional disputes was created and named Jordan's Principle in honour of the child who inspired it....

Jordan's principle is consistent with the spirit and intent of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which prohibits discrimination. It is also consistent with what we, as moral people of the world, know to be the right thing to do.

Jordan's Principle has received broad based support in Canada and around the world....one of the first supporters of Jordan's Principle was the National Youth in Care Network....many other groups of children, youth and child advocates have voiced their support for Jordan's Principle including the Assembly of First Nations...the Canadian Medical Association Journal, the Canadian Paediatric Society and UNICEF Canada.

Jordan's story has resonated around the world and has been supported by groups in Australia, New Zealand and the United States. His story has been included in over 70 newspapers across Canada and featured in print articles and numerous radio and television programs in Canada, the USA, and New Zealand.

Jordan could not talk and yet people around the world hear his message. Jordan could not breathe on his own and yet he has given the breath of life to other children.

In conclusion, we in Parliament must unanimously support this so that first nations children have access to the same life-saving, life-enhancing and life-building programs and services as other children. Let us not ever again have a situation where a child lives his life and dies in a hospital because of bureaucratic squabbles between governments or departments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of my party, the Bloc Québécois, about motion No. 296 from the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, which reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should immediately adopt a child first principle, based on Jordan's Principle, to resolve jurisdictional disputes involving the care of First Nations children.

The Bloc Québécois supports the motion in principle. However, it is important to remember that Quebec and some provinces have already put in place legislation and assistance procedures. The federal government must therefore do its part by helping to fund services for first nations children. We must understand that the principle of this motion is based on shared jurisdiction between the provinces and the federal government.

Jordan's principle is the name given to the child first principle, which puts the interest of the child before constitutional conflicts when it comes to access to services. The Canadian Constitution does not specify which level of government is responsible for providing services to first nations children.

There are multiple jurisdictional disputes involving child protection. Who has the constitutional, fiscal and moral responsibility for first nations children? The answer to that question has repercussions on the availability of programs and services for aboriginal families and children.

It is important to mention that the average Canadian gets almost two and a half times more services from federal, provincial and municipal governments than first nations citizens, according to the review by the McDonald-Ladd commission in 2000.

According to a number of stakeholders, the best way to manage jurisdictional conflicts is to prevent them. Jordan's principle is more of a provisional measure, while waiting for the federal and provincial governments to reach an agreement on jurisdictions. If Quebec were a country, this problem would have been resolved a long time ago.

As far as jurisdictions are concerned and who is responsible, I will try to provide a brief overview of the jurisdiction problem that Motion M-296 addresses. The motion seeks not to resolve the problem, but to place first nations children and families on an equal footing with Canadian children and families when it comes to receiving social and health services.

As stated in the report of the Joint National Policy Review on First Nations Child and Family Services, the different levels of government are passing the buck with respect to jurisdiction.

The federal government has said that the provinces are responsible for providing child services to first nations, in

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accordance with section 92 of the Constitution Act, 1867. Participation by the federal government in the provision of programs and services, in its view, is quite simply discretionary.

I will read section 92:

92. In each Province the Legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Matters coming within the Classes of Subjects next hereinafter enumerated; that is to say,

13. Property and Civil Rights in the Province.

16. Generally all Matters of a merely local or private Nature in the Province.

As for the provinces, they believe that the federal government is responsible for native people and reserves, pursuant to section 91 (24) of the Constitution Act, 1867:

91. —the exclusive Legislative Authority of the Parliament of Canada extends to all Matters coming within the Classes of Subjects next hereinafter enumerated; that is to say,

24. Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians.

That is the text the Government of Canada used.

The provincial and territorial governments are worried that the federal government is offloading its responsibilities with respect to aboriginal peoples onto them and they argue that “the federal government has the constitutional, historical, and fiduciary responsibility arising from the treaties with aboriginals who live on and off reserves”.

According to a report published in 2005 by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, the first nations have adopted the same position as the provinces. The first nations therefore support what the provinces and territories are saying.

The first nations are the only peoples to suffer from the lack of responsibility and accountability of the federal government and are asking that it maintain “its tutelage and its fiduciary duties towards the first nations, including its children, families and community services”. Moreover:

The federal government funds first nations child and family support agencies pursuant to Directive 20-1—hence a matter of administration—and not, in its view, because of its fiduciary responsibility. The federal government refuses to change its position and has stated that the delivery of programs and services to first nations is discretionary.

● (1750)

That is always the big problem: the federal government does not want to recognize that it has responsibility for the services provided for first nations.

I would like to give some background on Directive 20-1. The current funding formula was developed in 1989 in an effort to standardize funding levels for first nations child and family service agencies in Canada. The directive was issued and requires that agencies operate under provincial legislation when it comes to child protection, but does not include any funding to help agencies adjust. It includes a guiding principle whereby services must be comparable to those provided for children living in similar circumstances off-reserve, but it does not contain any mechanism to ensure that this can happen. Once again, the federal government issued the directive, but did not provide any money to go along with it.

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In Quebec, the Youth Protection Act contains provisions that apply specifically to aboriginal youth. In fact, Quebec has always been in the forefront in this area. The fifth paragraph of section 2.4 stipulates that the socio-cultural characteristics of the community in which the young person lives must be taken into consideration:

5) of opting for measures, in respect of the child and the child's parents, which allow action to be taken diligently to ensure the child's protection, considering that a child's perception of time differs from that of adults, and which take into consideration the following factors:

- a) the proximity of the chosen resource;
- b) the characteristics of cultural communities;
- c) the characteristics of native communities.

Quebec's Youth Protection Act therefore ensures protection for aboriginal communities. Furthermore, agreements between the Government of Quebec and aboriginal communities can be reached in order to promote the protection of young people in those communities, by adapting the legislation to their reality.

Of course, we feel it is important to consult first nations. The Bloc Québécois believes that the future does not lie in pointless opposition, but rather in constructive partnerships that respect the legitimate interests of all parties. On the federal scene, the Bloc Québécois makes aboriginal issues one of its priorities. With regard to future relations between the government and aboriginal peoples, we recommend a more comprehensive approach, one that recognizes the aspirations of aboriginal peoples and favours negotiating agreements nation to nation. The Bloc Québécois believes that Quebec is a nation, and that we must negotiate, nation to nation, with aboriginal peoples.

In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples submitted a comprehensive report that proposed far-reaching changes over a period of 20 years leading to self-government for aboriginal peoples by respecting their customs, cultures, languages and ancestral institutions.

Our party, the Bloc Québécois, believes that in order to develop harmonious relations with Quebec's aboriginal peoples, we must first listen to them and understand them by taking an interest in their reality, their differences and the challenges they face. The Bloc Québécois maintains an ongoing dialogue with the first nations. Our party is suggesting that the government should follow our lead when considering future bills. It has not done so with Kelowna, Bill C-44 and all the others.

In closing, the main issue in this debate is determining who will assume the cost of protecting children. Quebec's Youth Protection Act already contains provisions whereby first nations communities can play an active role in youth protection. Motion No. 296 allows for the protection of children, based on the child first principle, while waiting for the federal and provincial governments to reach an official agreement on various terms and conditions for services, and the payment of services, provided to children in first nations communities.

We support the principle behind the motion. However, we must remember that Quebec and some provinces already have legislation and assistance procedures in place; the federal government must assume its share of the responsibility by providing some of the funding for services provided to first nations children.

● (1755)

[English]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to speak to this motion presented by the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

It is also a time for all of us to hang our heads in shame. A child among us was prevented from having the care he needed because he was caught up in a jurisdictional dispute between governments.

We have heard a lot of talk throughout this debate. I implore members today to think about putting some action behind their words, as my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan has done.

It is one thing to stand up here and talk about the shame of a child who fell through the cracks because two levels of government were fighting over who should pay for his care, but it is another thing to decide to act on that atrocious, appalling chapter in our history.

It has been at least three years, maybe more, since Jordan died. It has been three or four years since we all recognized the fact that Jordan should have received the care he needed instead of becoming a football between different levels of government.

Why has no government chosen to act before this moment? Why did the Liberals, who were in government up until two years ago, refuse to act? And why now are we getting nothing but rhetoric from the Conservatives?

Where is the specific plan? Where is the plan of action to ensure that this situation will never be repeated? Why did my colleague, the NDP critic for aboriginal affairs, have to bring this motion to the House when this matter could have been resolved with a little care, compassion and concern from the government of the day?

I commend my colleague for having the courage to bring this issue forward and for pursuing it every step of the way. As she has told us in the debate, no issue has touched her more than the case of Jordan, who died without having the care he needed and deserved.

Jordan was a young lad who was born with a very serious disability. He was born in Norway House, Manitoba, which is part of the Cree nation. Because his family could not care for him on reserve, he was sent off reserve for care, and there began this horrifying chapter in Canadian history, a chapter of disgrace and shame on all of us, on all political parties and on all levels of government.

I want to single out and commend not only my colleague who has persevered on this matter, but also Jordan's family, who had the courage to speak out, and all those groups, organizations and individuals who have chosen to stand up for what is right and for a principle that has to be respected or we have nothing and we are not a civil society.

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That principle is that a child is a child is a child, whether that child is an aboriginal person on reserve, or a child like my own who was born with a rare brain disorder but has been lucky enough to have had all the care he needs and to be treated as a productive member of our society. Why should someone in my son's situation be treated differently just because he was born on a reserve and had to seek treatment off reserve? Why did Jordan have to spend two years in a hospital setting when he could have been placed in a foster home had he not been tossed about between levels of government in bickering and haggling over who should pay?

• (1800)

How is that possible in this day and age, in the year 2007, in one of the wealthiest countries in the world? How is it possible for us to reduce human life to a dollar figure? Have we learned nothing from his death? Are we not now prepared to do something about it?

There are more Jordans out there. We just have to look at the number of aboriginal people with disabilities and the number of children with disabilities who are not getting the care they need because the government has refused to take seriously the need for care for children on reserve and off reserve. The government has refused to work with our first nations communities to put in place the best possible range of services for children with disabilities.

I want to go over some of the information that government members should be aware of. I will go back to the year 2004 and a document produced by the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy, which is part of the University of Regina. It states:

Aboriginal people with disabilities are caught in a public policy vacuum with little hope for amelioration. Aboriginal persons are individuals who identify themselves as having Indigenous or North American Indian ancestry and may or may not have status under the federal Indian Act.

The article goes on to say that in this whole area, aboriginal people, first nations citizens on or off reserve, who are living with disabilities or who have children with disabilities, are at the bottom of our hierarchy in Canada today. They are at the bottom of our society. They are neglected and forgotten because this government and governments before it have chosen to ignore the problem, to walk away, to turn a blind eye, to not heed the cries of Jordan and Jordan's family.

This is what Cindy Blackstock, the executive director of First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, asked back in the spring of 2007, "Two years after Jordan's death, why isn't the Canadian government implementing Jordan's Principle to make sure" this never happens to another child in Canada?

She said:

With all our hearts and minds we do not understand.

All we can see is that Jordan's principle is about providing First Nations children with the same government services already enjoyed by other children in Canada.

And what we know is that the federal government could save money by providing First Nations children with the equal services they need to live safely at home instead of paying higher costs to put them in foster care or hospitals.

All we can see is that Jordan died waiting for governments to do the right thing.

Do members of the government see it today? Are they prepared to act? Do they understand what this means?

I want to tell them from a personal point of view what it means to have a child with a disability and to want the very best for that child,

and what it means to be able to live in a society like I do in Manitoba, where governments are responsive and where the full range of services is available, whether it was respite care services when my son, Nick, was at home with us, or whether it was finding the best home possible for him where he could live for the rest of his life.

I was lucky. My son was lucky. But it was not just luck. It was government planning and government compassion and a society that cared and cares about everyone among us.

Today we are talking about the most vulnerable people in our society. Our responsibility is to be the lookout for those individuals and to do the very best we can. This means ensuring that we not only support this motion, Jordan's principle, but that we act on it immediately.

• (1805)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by acknowledging my colleagues from all four corners of the House who have spoken in support of this very important motion. I want to thank them for their spoken commitment in the House to Jordan and his family and to all the other children who are in Jordan's situation across the country from coast to coast to coast.

I want to acknowledge Jordan and his family. They have demonstrated incredible courage by allowing us to bring Jordan's story to the House of Commons. The words put forward in the application for the nominee for the International Children's Peace Prize speak about the legacy that Jordan's family hopes to leave. They are as follows:

Jordan could not talk and yet people around the world hear his message. Jordan could not breathe on his own and yet he has given the breath of life to other children. Jordan could not walk but he has taken steps that governments are now just learning to follow. He is an honoured ancestor of First Nations peoples in Canada and an inspiration to all the peoples of the world on how one toddler can change the world...

He is a child who really did change the world by ensuring the rights of children come before the conveniences of governments—all this and he was only five years old.

There will be shame on each and every one of us in this House who stood, supported and spoke in favour of this motion, and eventually will vote on this motion, if we do not actually put some substance behind the words we have spoken here.

One of the things that I know has made a number of us in the New Democratic Party nervous is the fact that in 1989 Ed Broadbent was instrumental in bringing forward a motion before this House on ending child and family poverty in this country, but here we are in 2007 continuing to talk about the number of children and their families who live in poverty. All these years later and still we have not had the meaningful kind of action that is required to end child poverty in this country.

I am urging each and every member of the House, in their support of this very important motion, to move beyond the talk and put into place meaningful plans and substantial actions which would see that never again does a child like Jordan end up not getting the care he or she needs simply because he or she is a first nations child in this country.

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We have enough wealth and enough knowledge to say that there should be no jurisdictional disputes that end up with children dying in hospital simply because governments could not agree on the kind of care that was needed.

One would hope that there is a legacy left from the courage of Jordan and his family in bringing this story forward. One would hope there is a legacy left which says that children truly will come first in this country. In 2007, with all of our wealth, we should be prepared to put children first.

I call on each and every member of this House to not only support this motion but to go back and work within their respective caucuses to ensure that the action that is required to take this motion from principle into reality will happen.

•(1810)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The time provided for debate on Motion No. 296 has expired. Accordingly, the question is on the motion.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion, the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, December 12, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Mr. Myron Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I look at the clock and I see it at 6:30. I wonder if the rest of the House and the Speaker would agree.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on October 26, in this House, I asked the government how it could explain that one year after their land was quarantined because of a

golden nematode contamination, producers in Saint-Amable were still waiting for a long-term assistance plan.

According to the secretary of state responsible for this file, the government had shown leadership. Where is the leadership when they chose to ignore repeated calls from farmers who knew back in the fall of 2006 that the programs in place would not meet their needs? Where is the leadership when they ignore calls for a short- and long-term program tailored to this situation? I have to wonder.

The secretary of state also said that a lot of money had been put on the table and that it continued to flow. Who is telling the truth here? According to the producers, they had over \$1 million in lost revenue in 2006 alone. It seems to me as though the money is not flowing. It has been completely cut off.

The secretary of state also said he was in contact with the producers. However, on October 24, Groupe Ama-Terre sent a letter to the Prime Minister asking him for a meeting. This letter was forwarded to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and, to date, the office of the federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food still has not contacted Groupe Ama-Terre. However, Quebec's agriculture minister has decided to meet with the producers in mid-November. What is his federal counterpart waiting for to follow suit?

How can the government continue to ignore the fact that potato farmers in Saint-Amable have lost 70% of their market and that if they chose to convert to a different crop, they would have to create a market from scratch? It is not easy to re-establish contact with processors and distributors when the very name Saint-Amable is associated with the quarantine and restrictions imposed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and makes potential business partners hesitate.

An assistance plan tailored to the situation has to be implemented without delay. Life for the producers and their families has been turned upside down. The community has banded together and shown its desire to take action. The minister must do the same and give clear instructions to the appropriate officials in order to resolve this crisis.

In his letter to the Prime Minister, Philippe Gemme stated:

Agriculture, this love of the land, of farming, is handed down from father to son, from father to daughter. This is not 21 companies asking for help, it is future generations.

These people love farming and were even prouder of being able to pass on their heritage to their children, who had decided to follow in their footsteps. They want to find a solution to the problem, but their good will is not enough to get them through the crisis.

We must answer their call, as quickly as possible, by establishing a detailed plan outlining the assistance they will receive in the short, medium, and long term. These producers cannot settle for one-time aid when the quarantine imposed may last several decades. This government must take action and it must take it now.

•(1815)

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to talk about my government's measures to help producers in Saint-Amable affected by the golden nematode outbreak.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[English]*

As the member opposite knows, this government is committed to putting farmers first. Since forming government only 22 months ago, our government has invested \$4.5 billion in Canada's agricultural sector.

At the request of the producers, we have overhauled CAIS and replaced it with an exciting new suite of business risk management programs under the growing forward network. This decision was made to put farmers first.

Our important principle of farmers first governed our response to the golden nematode outbreak as well. When golden nematode was discovered, quarantine measures were undertaken to contain and eventually suppress the pest. This quick action from our government helped to restore market access for potatoes into the United States.

[Translation]

We moved quickly to announce that financial assistance would be available to affected producers under the golden nematode disaster program and CAIS as well as under the Plant Protection Act.

To date, over \$1 million of the \$1.5 million available under the golden nematode disaster program has been paid out. The program helped cover the cost of disposing of potatoes from fields that tested negative and extraordinary costs associated with cleaning and disinfecting buildings and equipment.

• (1820)

[English]

We are still at the table with our producers to find long term solutions to this ongoing challenge. Clearly, this government has acted. Farmers like those in St-Amable have received assistance for the destruction of potatoes from negative fields and to help with extraordinary costs related to cleaning and disinfecting buildings and machinery.

Unlike the Bloc, members on this side of the House are able to take real action to help our farmers and we have done so. We have had the Bloc here in this House for 17 years and in that time it has not been able to enact one piece of legislation.

The government and this minister are committed to putting farmers first. Whether by fixing CAIS, supporting biofuels, or providing help for farmers affected by golden nematode, our farmers do come first. We are putting farmers first by working with farmers to find solutions that will make their operations profitable and sustainable.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the floor can insult the Bloc Québécois, but this evening, it is the 21 families that he is insulting. It is Philippe Gemme, his wife Monique Plante and their children, Jean-François, Jérémie and Valérie, whom he is telling that nothing is happening. It is André Gemme and his sons, Stéphane and Jocelyn. It is Christian Chabot and his wife, Suzanne Chartrand. It is Roger Gemme, his wife, Francine Lecours, and their sons Hubert, Dominic, Francis and Nicolas. It is Sylvain Gemme and his father, Viateur, as well as Claude Boucher, Michel Gemme, Martin Gemme, his wife, Louise Beauregard, and their daughters, Claudia

and Vicky. It is also Richard Saint-Aubin and his son, Nicolas. It is Daniel Blain and his daughter, Stéphanie. It is Guy Gemme and his parents, Gustave and Denise. It is Adrien Gemme and his wife, Sylvie Drapeau, and their sons, Toby, Andy and Michaël. It is Gérald Gemme and his wife, Christiane Fafard, as well as their children, Alexandre and Véronique. It is Luc Gemme, his wife, Diane Lussier, and their sons, Jonathan and Nicolas

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, it is always the same with the Bloc. They talk and talk, but they never do anything.

[English]

As I said, this government is putting farmers first. Let me give another example of how.

To create new opportunities for potato producers, we quickly granted close to \$600,000 under the advancing Canadian agriculture and agri-food program for the purposes of developing new nematode resistant varieties of potato, and finding economically viable alternatives to potato production in the area. That research will span a number of years and benefit the whole Canadian industry.

As I said, unlike the Bloc, we are getting it done. Unfortunately, Bloc members can sit there, they can cry, and make a lot of noise, but quite frankly, they have not done a thing in 17 years and they will be there another 17 years doing nothing.

JUSTICE

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we speak of human rights in any respect, there are few who would not acknowledge the wisdom of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who stated:

Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in.

When framed in those terms, who among us would not express concern and reservation about the current position of our own government here in Canada?

The death penalty is an absolute denial of human rights. Canada admirably abolished this cruel punishment in 1976 and subsequently adopted a policy of advocating on behalf of Canadians anywhere in the world who had been sentenced to death.

This most fundamental of human rights has now been undermined by the policy of the current Canadian government when it made it clear that it would not seek commutation for a Canadian citizen sentenced to death in Montana.

Similarly, Canada's noble voice has also fallen silent under this government in respect of the treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan who have been turned over to Afghan authorities. Continual reports indicate that these prisoners are subjected to torture in violation of the most fundamental standards of human rights. In fact, we turn these prisoners over to the Afghan government, which has yet to even ratify the optional protocol to the convention against torture.

Adjournment Proceedings

Additionally, why will the Afghan government not invite the United Nations special rapporteur on torture to visit its country?

Our government also has an obligation to speak out forcefully on the issue of extraordinary rendition, particularly in the wake of the events surrounding Mr. Maher Arar. Make no mistake, extraordinary rendition violates virtually every treaty, protocol or fundamental understanding of basic human rights. It is nothing more than the outsourcing of torture, far from the light of accountability, away from the altar of responsibility, and missing from the foundations of basic human dignity.

Our government is also silent on the issue of detainees in Guantanamo, Cuba, where prisoners are held without clear charges, absent from due process and removed from any assurance of basic human rights.

Let us be clear. No one is advocating that those who do wrong should go unpunished, but basic fairness calls for clear charges, fair trials, and respect for human rights and dignity. We have come too far in our history across the barren desert of human struggle to abandon the advances in human rights and the respect for human dignity that prior generations have fought so hard to win for us.

We need to remember that there are United Nations treaties, the Geneva Convention, domestic human rights guarantees in many nations, and a fundamental understanding of human rights as enunciated in the 1993 Vienna Declaration, which confirms that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and inter-related.

I therefore ask, why does the government speak volumes with its silence on issues so fundamental to our identity as Canadians and so important to our place in the world?

•(1825)

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleagues will know, this is the second time there has been a late show from the member on this issue. It is interesting members opposite have raised this issue with no mention of victims of crime. Our government brings forward legislation to address victims of crime and to protect society, we do not hear the members opposite talk about that.

We hear a lot of talk, and that is all it has been over the last 13 years, when it comes to human rights, but it was our government that provided the redress for the Chinese head tax. It was our government that addressed the hepatitis C issue. It is our government that is endeavouring to bring first nations under the Human Rights Act, which was denied under the previous government. It is our government that is in Afghanistan fighting for the rights that the members opposite purport to uphold. Yet we do not hear messages of support for the good work that our troops and personnel do in Afghanistan from members opposite. All we have heard, now twice, is this one issue.

The Minister of Justice has repeatedly said in the House that the government is not changing the law in our country with respect to the death penalty. In 1976 Canada abolished the death penalty in the Criminal Code.

The government also acknowledges that the legal systems of foreign jurisdictions may have differing views on this issue. Although the government recognizes the sovereign decision of each state to determine its own laws, this government continues to advocate for the full respect for international safeguards where the death penalty is still in use.

On November 15, the UN General Assembly voted for a resolution that called for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Canada supported this resolution. As members can see, Canada is taking a stand internationally against the use of the death penalty.

However, with respect to clemency, as the justice minister has said, our government will be dealing with the issue on a case by case basis. Potentially, if another country will only grant clemency on the basis of an offender being repatriated back home to Canada, we may have difficulty, as the hon. member should acknowledge, inasmuch as an offender who committed murder abroad could be eligible for parole in Canada and, subsequently, be free to live in our communities. That is not what Canadians want.

It is evidence from our ambitious justice agenda that our government's first priority is to protect Canadians. We would be abdicating that responsibility by the potential release of a murderer, particularly one who had committed not one but more murders. I am confident that Canadians do not want murderers free to roam our streets, especially if they have not served a sentence proportionate to the seriousness of their crime.

As the Minister of Justice has said in the House:

—this country and this government, in particular, has had an outstanding record with respect to human rights at home and abroad. I think it is a record for which all Canadians can be very proud.

We will continue to fight every day for Canadians and ensure that our families and our communities are safe.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, the treaties to which the name Canada has been affixed are not just pieces of paper to be enshrined in our national archives. They are living documents. They are commitments to a noble vision that generations of Canadians have viewed as statements of our place in the world.

Human rights and human dignity are not simply concepts cast across pages for students of history to read. They are a manner of living that we believe makes us better people, that makes us a better country and which helps to build a better world for all citizens.

I call the attention of my hon. colleague to the fact that next week the United Nations will celebrate the 59th anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, once again a living document that calls upon all nations to aspire to a vision of human rights and respect for human dignity that appeals to the nobility of human ideals.

Whether it is the death penalty, torture, extraordinary rendition, punishment without fair trial or a lack of respect for human dignity in any form, we have an obligation as a country to honour our heritage and our vision of our country.

Will the government return to a respect for human rights and human dignity—

•(1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, human rights and human dignity are about more than words. We are hearing a lot of words from the other side.

We have been a government of action. One of the actions we have taken is to protect the human rights and safety of Canadians in Canada. We will continue to do that. We will continue to fill the gap that we were left with from 13 years of Liberal inaction, the Liberal soft on crime approach to justice. We will continue to do that. That is protecting human rights as well. If we were to ask Canadians if they want their rights protected and the rights of their children, they would say, "Yes, we do".

On this issue, the UN General Assembly voted on a resolution that called for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Canada supported this resolution. In keeping with our support for the objective of the resolution, we voted with co-sponsors against efforts to undermine it. On this issue, Canada—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Egmont.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 23, I asked a question regarding the theft of a government computer from the home of a HRSDC employee. The computer contained files with the detailed personal information of over 1,200 seniors and their spouses. These seniors are CPP applicants from the Maritimes, and the information on these records included names, addresses, social insurance numbers, dates of birth, and banking information.

I am concerned about a number of issues arising from this incident.

First, the data on the stolen computer was not encrypted. Encryption refers to changing information to make it unreadable to anyone except the person who has the key required to decode it. It is a very common process used to protect sensitive computer files. Why was the data on this employee's computer not encrypted? It would seem to me to be a necessary tool to protect electronic information, especially on computers, that will leave departmental premises.

In addition, we may need a review of the way that client records are handled within government organizations like Service Canada. Recently in Britain, similar data on about 25 million people was lost by a British civil servant. What is the government's security process when dealing with this type of information internally? How does the government ensure security of electronic files when employees work from home? How does it track whether employees are following this process?

How does the government ensure online security? A Canadian applying for a passport online discovered last week that Passport Canada's website was not as secure as it claimed to be. Jamie Laning of Huntsville, Ontario was able to access the records of other passport applicants by simply changing one character on the website address. He notified Passport Canada immediately, but who knows

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who else might have discovered this security flaw and used it to his or her advantage. It is unacceptable for the websites of government departments, which frequently handle the confidential records of millions of Canadians, to have these kinds of security defects.

Finally, I would like to know why the government did not see fit to notify financial institutions that 1,200 people's banking details were being compromised?

When the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development responded to my question, she noted:

There is a process in place and we are doing everything possible to ensure this is taken care of.

I would like to know in detail what this process is and what has been done up to this point to ensure that the information provided by these seniors is secure and to ensure that they do not become victims of identity theft. The people affected were notified by letter, but has anything else been done since? Has the computer been recovered?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the questions raised by the hon. member on the theft of the government computer. I would like to take this opportunity tonight to set the record straight on the actions of this government and the actions we have taken to address this unfortunate incident.

Maintaining the security of personal data is important to all of us in this House and I want to thank the hon. member for Egmont for raising this matter again. It gives me an opportunity to allow all Canadians to know what we are doing to protect them from incidents such as these.

The hon. member should know that the government has very stringent security policies in place to protect the privacy of each Canadian and to ensure their personal data remains secure. Security breaches are rare but when a breach does occur, our government takes swift and decisive action.

Contrary to the hon. member's suggestion, Service Canada has taken a number of steps to reach out to all those who were affected. We have notified, in writing, each and every person who has been affected. We have also notified the banks and the credit agencies in writing and by telephone. As he expressed, he was concerned about that, but they have all been notified. We are also maintaining additional security measures through the monitoring of individual old age security accounts. Again, there are those additional security measures and, as he expressed, that was also a concern.

In addition, Service Canada has set up a special 1-800 line for people to call and it is staffed by specially trained agents ready to answer questions and suggest measures people can take to further protect themselves.

Service Canada is also making trained client service agents available to meet personally with individual clients.

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We have followed up our letter campaign with proactive efforts to contact people who have not been in contact with Service Canada to offer them additional information.

Not only has the government acted quickly to respond to this specific situation, we have also taken steps to prevent such an incident from occurring again.

We are setting up additional information security and privacy awareness sessions for Service Canada staff. We are reviewing our policies and procedures to determine what improvements may be needed and whether staff have the tools they need to ensure the security of information and the privacy of every Canadian.

The security of personal data in this age of cyber crimes and identity theft is something that concerns us all. That is why we are committed to taking decisive action when breaches do occur and that is why we are committed to making sure they do not happen again.

I would like to again thank the member. The answer was not adequate for the seriousness of the crime and tonight allowed me to express exactly what I was told was part of the process.

I believe the member has announced that he will be retiring this year. I congratulate him and wish him well. I know he will be missed in the House.

• (1835)

Hon. Joe McGuire: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the information she has provided, particularly the information regarding the personal follow up by the department in talking to the people who may or may not know that their security has been compromised. I also thank her for her best wishes.

I would like to ask another question. Legislation is going through the House now dealing with enhanced identity theft legislation. I

wonder if this bill could be modified or added to which would take into consideration these types of actions or accidents that do happen when there are security breaches.

I know that when people give out information, they depend on the organizations that are getting it to make them feel secure about them having it, and they should be able to feel safe. I know that 50 of the states in the United States have this type of legislation and I think Canada should do the same.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I am not exactly sure what the member was asking, but we do take seriously the protection of the personal information of Canadians and protecting them from the possibility of identity theft.

We know it is of great importance in this electronic age, which is why we introduced Bill C-27. It would create the new Criminal Code provisions for the unlawful possession and trafficking of personal information and government documents of another person.

I hope that has answered his question, if that is what he intended with the question. We definitely created the new Criminal Code provisions for unlawful possession and trafficking of personal information. I hope the hon. member will encourage his colleagues to vote in support of this initiative as well.

• (1840)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:40 p.m.)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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