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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*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 five petitions.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts entitled “The Testimony of Deputy Commissioner Barbara George before the Public Accounts Committee”.

In this report, the committee found that the testimony presented by Deputy Commissioner Barbara George was either misleading at best or untruthful at worst. As such, the committee is recommending that the House find Deputy Commissioner George in contempt of Parliament. As this is sanction enough, we are also recommending that no further action be taken.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill S-213, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (lottery schemes).

He said: Mr. Speaker, once again, I am pleased to sponsor Bill S-213, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (lottery schemes), concerning video lottery terminals.

Pursuant to Standing Order 86.2, I wish to state that this bill is in the same form as S-211, which was before the House in the first session, and I ask that this bill be reinstated.

As reported in the news this morning, more and more tragic suicides are happening because of gambling problems. In light of what we have learned about this, I think it is high time we addressed this issue. Members of the other place have done excellent work, and now it is our turn to move forward with this well-crafted bill.

(Motion deemed adopted and bill read the first time)

The Speaker: Order, please.

The Chair is of the opinion that this bill is in the same form as Bill S-211 was at the time of prorogation of the first session of the 39th Parliament.

Accordingly, pursuant to Standing Order 86.2, the bill is deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

BILL C-458

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise again today to present more petitions from across Canada. These particular petitions are from Alberta and New Brunswick and are all in support of 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 audio-visual materials.

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling a petition calling for the elimination of detergents containing phosphates. It has been signed by 409 citizens of Verchères—Les Patriotes, and 171 others signed a reply coupon about this that appeared in my householder last fall. In all, 580 people have expressed their support for this measure.

I would invite the members to do the same by supporting Bill C-469, which was introduced by my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé.

Routine Proceedings

I would also like to salute those companies, such as Innu-Science in Sainte-Julie, that are miles ahead on this issue and have been providing biodegradable household and industrial cleaners for 15 years now.

[English]

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from a number of constituents in my riding who urge Parliament to help protect the children of Canada from sexual exploitation by an adult by raising the age of consent from 14 to 16 years of age.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 1 and 134.

[Text]

Question No. 1—**Hon. Sue Barnes:**

With regard to RCMP officers: (a) when will the 2500 new RCMP officers be hired; (b) how many additional RCMP officers will there be by the end of 2007; (c) how many additional RCMP officers will there be in 2008; (d) where will the additional RCMP officers be sent; (e) what is the proposed budget allocation for fiscal year 2007-2008 and 2008-2009; and (f) how many C-division detachments have been reopened since January 2006?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), as recently announced in the 2007 Speech from the Throne, the government is committed to ensuring effective law enforcement, starting with resources to recruit 2,500 more officers to police our streets. To this end, the minister has been undertaking focused discussions with his provincial and territorial counterparts for the purpose of obtaining their views on how best to move this proposal forward. This initiative is intended to enhance provincial, territorial and municipal police capacity across Canada, and is not specifically directed toward increasing resources for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, RCMP.

In response to (b), the RCMP added 639 additional regular members in 2007.

In response to (c), the RCMP is forecasting that there will be 1,034 additional regular members by the end of 2008.

In response to (d), the regional deputy in consultation with the regional management team decides where the new RCMP officers will be placed. National and regional priorities are considered in the decision making process.

In response to (e), the budget allocation for the RCMP as per the main estimates for 2007-08 was \$3.771 billion inclusive of revenues credited to the vote of \$1.403 billion. The approved budget level for 2008-09 is \$3.72 billion inclusive of revenues credited to the vote of \$1.484 billion.

In response to (f), there have been no detachments reopened in "C" Division in the period beginning January 2006 to present. The RCMP will be considering its deployment of federal resources,

including resources deployed in "C" Division as part of a broader examination of organizational issues following receipt of the report of the Task Force on Governance and Cultural Change in the RCMP.

Question No. 134—**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:**

With regard to the tracking mechanism put in place by Canada Post in calendar year 2007 to accurately determine the cost and usage of the Library Book Rate Program, based on the data available to date: (a) what is the total cost of the program for libraries; (b) what is the total cost of the program for Canada Post; (c) what are the financial losses and revenues of the program for Canada Post; (d) how many libraries are participating in the program; and (e) what were the actual and estimated costs of the program for each fiscal year from 2002-2003 to 2006-2007?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the library book rate, LBR, allows libraries to move books between public libraries and to rural and remote residents at significantly reduced postage rates. Canada Post appreciates the importance of the library book rate to Canadian libraries. Canada Post remains committed to working with the major Canadian library associations to ensure that the library community's concerns are understood and that their needs are considered in the future.

In order to collect accurate data with respect to the LBR, Canada Post developed an electronic shipping tool for libraries in collaboration with the Canadian Library Association and l'Association pour la science et les techniques de la documentation. The library book shipping tool enables eligible libraries to prepare and pay for library book shipments. The library shipping tool was introduced in November 2005 and libraries were given until January 2007 to begin using the new shipping tool. Consequently, 2007 is the first year for which Canada Post will have accurate data on the LBR based upon use of the library book shipping tool.

In response to (a), Canada Post does not have information on the total cost of the LBR incurred by libraries. The only data available to Canada Post is the postage paid by libraries to Canada Post under the LBR. The 2007 year-end data from the electronic shipping tool will be available in mid-March. For the first 11 months of 2007, libraries paid postage of approximately \$647,000.

In response to (b), based on the data collected from the library book shipping tool, Canada Post calculates that the LBR cost \$5 million during the first 11 months of 2007. Therefore, Canada Post's contribution shortfall in respect of the LBR for this period was approximately \$4.35 million. Canada Post's legislated mandate is to provide affordable, universal postal services to all Canadians and to do so on a financially self-sustaining basis. Canada Post receives no government appropriation or compensation of any kind for the reduced library book rates. Canada Post is committed to continuing to work with all stakeholders, including government, to ensure that this funding shortfall is appropriately addressed.

In response to (c), please refer to the response to part (b).

In response to (d), Canada Post does not collect information as to which libraries mail under the library book rate. According to the Canadian Library Association, 2,092 libraries have registered to access the LBR.

In response to (e), Canada Post has no reliable data prior to 2007 as all previous estimates were based on sampling only. In order to capture accurate data, Canada Post introduced the library book shipping tool in November 2005. As of January 2007, all libraries accessing the LBR use the new shipping tool.

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SENATE APPOINTMENT CONSULTATIONS ACT

(Bill C-20. On the Order: Government Orders:)

November 13, 2007—Second reading and reference to a legislative committee of Bill C-20, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate—Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform.

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

That Bill C-20, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate, be referred forthwith to a legislative committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to open debate on Bill C-20, the Senate Appointment Consultations Act, which the government is reintroducing from the first session of this Parliament. This bill marks an important step in improving Canada's democratic institutions and is one of two bills advancing the government's efforts at meaningful Senate reform.

•(1010)

[Translation]

Our commitment to provide Canadians with a Senate that is relevant for the 21st century was clearly laid out in the Speech from the Throne and approved by the House:

—our Government will continue its agenda of democratic reform by reintroducing important pieces of legislation from the last session, including direct consultations with voters on the selection of Senators and limitations on their tenure.

Ordinary Canadians agree that the Senate cannot play its role with any credibility when its members can remain there until they are 75 and they are not accountable to the public.

[English]

That is why they are so supportive of measures to allow them to vote in a national consultation process for Senate appointments. Canadians were encouraged when they saw Bert Brown take a seat in the other place. He, of course, had been elected popularly by the voters. They were heartened to see the Prime Minister take account of the democratically expressed will of the people.

Reflecting the will of the people as the norm rather than the exception would enhance the Senate's legitimacy and relevance as a modern, vibrant legislative chamber while respecting its important

Government Orders

and historic roles of providing sober second thought, which Sir John A. Macdonald indicated as a priority, and a voice for Canada's regions and minorities.

[Translation]

Senate reform has drawn a lot of attention since the 19th century but, unfortunately, the upper chamber is still stuck in that era.

We must repair what we can right now if we want to prevent the Senate from continuing its free-fall into what the Prime Minister has described as insignificance and oblivion.

[English]

Canadians expect more of their institutions, and the government will not shrug its shoulders while we wait for the ever elusive national consensus on fundamental reform. Those who insist that we wait for one are really looking for an excuse to leave the Senate just the way it is, although hardly any Canadian will publicly declare that the Senate in its current form is appropriate for a modern democracy.

The desire by Canadians to reform the Senate and make it a democratic and accountable institution was reflected in the government's consultations on democratic reform, which were completed last year. A survey conducted as part of the consultations indicated that 79% of Canadians, that is, four out of five Canadians, supported Senate elections. As a result, the government must and will continue with reforms that fall within the legislative jurisdiction of Parliament.

We have also reintroduced legislation to limit the terms of senators to eight years, a separate legislative measure that can be judged on its own merits. This time, we have laid that bill before the elected chamber first after the other place missed the opportunity to be engaged in its own reform and obstructed our efforts there, delaying it, in effect, for well over a year.

Today, we have before us Bill C-20, which would give Canadians a say in who speaks for them in one of their representative institutions.

The Prime Minister has said that the Senate consultations bill raises complex issues. As with all our democratic reform legislation, we are seeking broad debate at committee about its merits and its details. In this case, we are seeking referral to committee before second reading to ensure the broadest discussion possible. It is important, however, that we be clear now on what the bill contains and, just as important, what it does not contain, especially given what some in the opposition have said about the bill.

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[*Translation*]

Bill C-20 creates a mechanism with which the government could ask electors in the provinces to select the people they would like to represent them in the Senate before the Prime Minister makes his recommendations for appointments to the Governor General.

Like the federal Referendum Act, this bill creates a consultation mechanism that will not be legally binding for the government. The bill gives the government the necessary flexibility to decide whether to use the mechanism, where and when to use it, and in how many places the consultations should be held.

The purpose of the mechanism is not to manipulate the Senate for partisan purposes, but to ensure that the systematic vacancies in the Senate when senators retire could be taken into consideration in the system.

It is essential for the government to have this manoeuvrability because the consultations will be held during federal or provincial elections.

If the consultations are held only on the seats that are currently vacant, then the seats that become vacant shortly after an election could remain so until the next election.

The bill will help ensure that candidates are available to fill seats as they become vacant.

•(1015)

[*English*]

The bill would create a mechanism for people to register as nominees, raise money and campaign, and proposes rigorous accountability for nominees.

It respects what is supposed to be the less partisan nature of the Senate by providing a limited role for parties, both in campaign financing and in not giving parties control over how candidates are listed on the ballot.

It provides for reasonable limits on third-party spending so that organizations cannot exert undue influence on Senate campaigns, while respecting the right to be heard in the political sphere.

It avoids upsetting the carefully balanced campaign financing regime in place for the Commons.

Taken collectively, these are reasonable measures to ensure that Senate consultations are fair, that they invite public confidence, that they respect the less partisan nature of the Senate as an institution, and that the integrity of the Commons campaign financing rules remains intact.

Let me be very clear about what this bill will not do.

It will not make any changes that require resort to formal constitutional amending processes. The bill is not a constitutional amendment. The government's position, supported by eminent constitutional scholars, is that these proposals do not require an amendment and are within the ordinary legislative authority of Parliament to act on its own.

The method of selection remains unchanged. The bill does not detract in any way from the constitutional powers of the Governor General to summon Canadians to the Senate.

It does not change the conventional prerogative of the Prime Minister to recommend appointments identified through this process or any other.

It does not change the qualifications of senators and it does not affect their terms or create vacancies.

It does not change the constitutional role of the Senate itself as the arbiter of questions respecting the qualifications of senators.

The process can take account of whatever length of term Parliament in its wisdom ultimately decides to establish for senators.

I hope that the opposition members will engage constructively in this debate and examine the bill on its considerable merits rather than spend their time on distractions and unrelated matters as they did in the previous debate on the identical bill in the last session.

I am pleased that we have this chance to resume our examination of a bill to give Canadians a say in who represents them in the Senate.

This bill is an important step in the government's unflagging efforts to modernize our democratic institutions and it is a priority for the government.

The bill advances the principle that Canadians should have a say in who speaks for them in the Senate and does so in a way that is respectful of the Senate itself, respects the primacy of the democratic mandate of the House of Commons, and conforms to the constitutional realities of Canada.

The Senate appointments consultation act will build momentum for further reforms. Meanwhile, it stands on its own as a useful step, indeed an essential one, in furthering the goal of a Senate worthy of the 21st century.

Senate reform is perhaps the most studied and most talked about subject among Canadian political science academics. The talk of reforming the Senate goes back almost to its beginnings. When the fathers of Confederation met, more time was spent on constructing the Senate than on any other subject.

I will go back to an observation made by John Diefenbaker, when he said the following to the notion that Senate reform was always talked about:

I recall very well the election of 1925 when the then Prime Minister, Right Hon. W.L. Mackenzie King, stated that reform of the Senate was a first and foremost course of action needed to assure democracy in this country. He said the same thing in 1926. I recall so well the promises of that day.

But to that Liberal prime minister, Senate reform was not the kind of democratic reform we are talking about. I will go on to quote Diefenbaker, who said about Mackenzie King:

He said he was going to substitute live Grits for dead Tories in the Senate. Some of those appointed were only half qualified....

The fact that this joke rings true today tells us why it is that we need to have this kind of Senate reform. I urge this House to seriously consider Bill C-20 and send it to committee so that a broad study can occur.

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Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of short questions for the minister.

He is right when he says that Senate reform has been a topic bandied about academically and politically for many years. That does not excuse the government from addressing the issue in the way it was intended to be addressed, and that is looking to the stakeholders with respect to the Senate. I am very glad that he refers to the Confederation debates. He will know that the Senate was intended to protect regional and primarily provincial interests.

Why is it, I ask, that the government has not consulted with the province? Can the minister inform us that as a result of consultations with each minister of intergovernmental affairs or premier he can report to the House their position on this bill? We have read accounts about provincial positions on this bill.

Why is the minister and the government fomenting western alienation by not dealing with the number of seats that each province has at a constitutional conference? Alberta and British Columbia are underrepresented. They even have vacancies that have not been filled by the government. There are 14 vacancies in the Senate. If the government wants to abolish the Senate, as many colleagues he sits with do, then should it not be truthful with the Canadian public and say, "We want to abolish the Senate?"

I have two final, very short questions. Are the elections envisioned in Bill C-20, it is very unclear and I ask for a genuine answer, or the selections, so to speak, binding on the Prime Minister? If the Prime Minister does not like the election selection, can he legislatively, constitutionally and legally refuse to appoint that nominee?

Finally, what does one do in a case of a deadlock between the two Houses with two fully elected bodies? What would the government do?

• (1020)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, if I were to answer all of those questions, I believe I would be well through the next speaker's time. However, I will try to address the first two.

The first was a question regarding the consultation with stakeholders. It was whether we have consulted the stakeholders. I obviously have a very different view of how democracy works than my hon. friend on the other side.

I happen to think that the most important stakeholders in Parliament and in democracy are the people of Canada. Those are the true stakeholders, not elected officials, not bureaucrats, and not people who happen to be holding seats in the Senate or even those in the House of Commons. It is the people of those provinces.

The very essence of the bill is to go to the people of those provinces and consult them every time there is a decision made on who should be appointed to the Senate, so that they get to choose who represents them, not some of the other stakeholders, not a prime minister, not a cabinet, not a provincial premier but the people of that province. That is what we consider to be consultation, the most genuine consultation. That is the essence and purpose of this bill.

I know there are those who wish to see the Senate remain unchanged. There are many members in the Liberal Party who want to see it remain unchanged because it has served them very well over

the years as an institution dominated by appointed Liberals. However, we believe it should be an institution that serves and represents Canadians in the provinces and that is why our structure is that Canadians in each province would be consulted to select their representatives.

On the question of underrepresentation, he talked about the need to change the distribution of seats in the House of Commons so that the western provinces that are underrepresented could have better representation.

I take it from that point that my friend will be supporting our democratic representation by population bill, Bill C-22, which will be coming up for debate later in the week because that is the objective of that bill: to move toward representation by population, to give them their fair share, to give Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia and underrepresented provinces, more seats than they are entitled to under the existing formula.

I know that because Liberals really do not want that to happen, they will talk about it, say they support it, and then vote against the principle and the bill or obstruct it because that is the way the Liberal Party always works.

It has built institutions that primarily serve the partisan interests of the Liberal Party and does not want to see those institutions change one bit. Liberal members will say one thing and do the other. It has been seen back to the time of Confederation. I do not expect it to change in this Parliament, though I will be delighted if they surprise me by supporting Bill C-20 and Bill C-22 to allow some kind of reform and change to actually happen.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I gave the minister a few lob ball questions, which I thought he would hit out of the park, but he could only get to two of them and he answered those poorly.

I want to speak today about Bill C-20, about the Senate in general, and what this bill in particular seeks to do. It seeks to establish a national process for consulting Canadians on their preferences for Senate appointments.

The bill will see voters choose their preferred Senate candidates to represent their provinces or territories. As such, it seeks to fulfill a Conservative campaign promise to reform Canada's Senate and move toward an elected Upper Chamber.

I am very confused as to whether the Conservative government is putting forward bills toward Senate reform or Senate abolition. When you hear members of the government speak privately, and I have heard the catcalls across the way that in fact there is quite a bit of foment in the Conservative caucus and in the government in fact for abolition.

I think that is a position that can be held. I think that if the Conservative government is really wanting to abolish the Senate totally, then it should probably say so. Maybe there is a bit of a disconnect now.

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Finally, the Conservatives are in government and this party over there has a disconnect between the frontbenchers and the middle and backbenchers. It seems to me that maybe the frontbenchers are not listening to the backbenchers and the middle benchers, people who have been around the block a long time, people who have been advocating for the abolition of the Senate.

I think that is the real debate we are having here, and it seems from the tenor of the remarks by the hon. minister who just spoke here and outside of this House, and by the bills that are being presented, that in fact what the government wishes to do is to abolish the Senate. If that is the debate we are having, why do the Conservatives not just bring forward a bill for the abolition of the Senate, and we can have that debate.

Well, there is a reason. There is division over there on that question. It seems that the Conservative government as elected, and that is the frontbench mucky-mucks, has made promises that it is for Senate reform. Senate reform includes consulting the provinces and looking toward an elected body representing Canada's regions fairly, but also entwining it with issues of representation by population.

Now if the Conservatives truly meant to do that, they would have gone to their first ministers across this country and at least had a conference. We have to ask ourselves, what is the government afraid of?

How bad can it be to have a real meeting with the provincial and territorial leaders, something more than just a main course of bison and a dessert of crème brûlée in a two-hour meeting where they are rushed out to the airport before any real discussion takes place, as we saw from the last conference?

What would be so wrong with sitting down with the territorial and provincial leaders and saying, "This is what we want to do. What do you think?" Then at least we would have on the record, through a conference, certainly not unanimity and certainly not agreement in total, at least a discussion of where the government should go, where the obstacles are, and where the opposition lies.

What we have instead is a patchwork. We have bills rushed through in three days, affecting the future of the Senate. We have television commentary, variously, in Ottawa representing the government's position but also in provincial capitals representing various provincial representations.

With all due respect to the media, they do not play every word that is said. We cannot be sure that what the government mouths, through its spokespersons at night on television, is exactly its position. We cannot be sure that provincial and territorial leaders are being quoted accurately. But it would seem that there is no consensus on this bill and the other Senate reform bills.

A little bit about this bill. It calls for significant Senate reform, this and a companion bill with respect to tenure. Now as my hon. member colleague mentioned, there have been calls for Senate reform since the mid-1970s, when Canada was undergoing major demographic shifts. We had shifts.

I come from Atlantic Canada. There has been a diminution in the population of Atlantic Canada for a generation now, and there has been growth in western Canada for over a generation now, perhaps

two generations. With that, the population and the economic clout of Alberta and British Columbia were very evident.

• (1025)

They were growing much faster, for instance, than Quebec. Quebec still had and still does have 24 Senate seats, while Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. held a combined total of 24 seats. We mean no disrespect to the important primordial position of Quebec within this Confederation, but we must recognize that these regions of Canada require a revisitation of the number of seats in the Senate that they require.

In 1989, as members all know, a Senate seat became vacant in Alberta. The provincial government held an election and Mr. Waters was elected to the Senate, appointed by former Prime Minister Mulroney.

On April 18, 2007, the Prime Minister of this country appointed current senator-in-waiting Bert Brown to fill the Alberta Senate vacancy created by the retirement of a senator there, so there has been some movement with respect to the appointment of selected senators. Bill C-20 attempts to codify the past practice with respect to these two selections.

The process allowing elections or consultations to be conducted to elect senators-in-waiting, however, has four distinct flaws.

First, it was introduced, as I mentioned, without consultations with provincial governments. Again, the Canadian public must understand that provincial governments have a stake in what the Senate is. They should either be for its abolition because it no longer represents provincial interests, which is one position, or they should be for reform as it relates to their own representation within the Senate or the efficacy of the Senate, or they should be for the status quo or some version of modified reform.

We have no record of what the provinces and territories feel about Senate reform and what their position on Senate reform is. Yes, from time to time we will have an interview. Yes, from time to time we will have a letter from a premier or a minister respecting intergovernmental affairs from a province supporting a particular position, but what is the overall position on Senate reform from the provinces and territories?

It is unbelievable that almost one year after its introduction, the Prime Minister has still not engaged his provincial counterparts in meaningful discussions on this legislation.

The second flaw is that it tries to skirt around the Constitution, and haphazardly electing senators in this way will still do nothing to improve the representation of British Columbia and Alberta in Canada's Senate.

Both provinces are, as I mentioned, currently underrepresented in the Senate in comparison to provinces that have not had similar population growth. I do not know if the people of Canada know, or if the ministers in provincial governments know, that there are 14 vacancies in the Senate.

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If the Senate is supposed to work to protect provincial, regional and other interests that are not represented by population in the House of Commons, then whether we are going to change the Senate, whether we are going to abolish the Senate, should we not have the Senate as it is working the way it is designed to work?

Many will argue it is not working. I presume that is why the minister has made such bombastic comments and the government has made the drastic step of saying that the Senate, over in the other place, shall do something by a certain date. I am not going to get into the debate on tackling violent crime. We had that yesterday, but just think of that. The minister and the government know, or should know, that this House cannot legally bind the other place, so it is mere puffery.

Think of the situation should this bill pass and in a generation or two be in effect. It would mean that every province would have a form of an election. Every senator would be duly elected directly by the people and we would have a body that would claim, as much as this place, to be the democratically elected representative of the country.

Would that motion, which the government is attempting to pass telling the Senate what to do, be received in the same light? Would it be offered by the government, had it an elected Senate of its own type? Or is this just pure politics? Would we be addressing these bills if there was a Conservative majority in the Senate?

Third, the process to elect senators in large provinces will unfairly benefit urban areas.

Finally, the bill would allow Senate nominees to be elected, but does not make those elections binding.

• (1030)

In this environment, when we have non-political appointees fired, if we were to have a political appointee elected by a province in a non-binding election who is not the flavour du jour of the prime minister, can anyone imagine the prime minister actually selecting that person?

The bill is ripe with flaws. It does not reflect the good spirit of our Constitution and the good flow of provincial negotiations that had to have taken place before the bill was posited.

• (1035)

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 listened carefully to my hon. colleague's presentation and I have a few comments, observations and a question.

While the hon. member was talking about the need for revised regional representation in the Senate, he failed to recognize the fact that to do that would require constitutional change.

He also went on to mention that the government was not engaged in any meaningful consultations with the provinces and territories as to Senate reform. I would point out to the hon. member and the rest of the members in the House that there have been attempts in years previous, going back probably 80 years, to work with provinces. However, because the provinces cannot agree to any one form of democratic reform or Senate reform, whether it be revamped

regional representation formula, abolishment or true reform, nothing has ever been done.

The member now is suggesting, in some form in his presentation, that we actually try to engage in a constitutional amendment so that we can look at the regional representation aspect. I would suggest to the hon. member that if we go down that road once again nothing will get done.

We are attempting to make meaningful change to the Senate, which I believe most members agree needs reform. Reform has been talked about and agreed upon by all provincial and federal leaders for the last 100 years but nothing has ever been done because we run into the impasse of constitutional problems or non-agreement between provinces. We were attempting to ensure that something gets done that will not require constitutional change.

While the member opposite has said that we have a hidden agenda to abolish the Senate, I would point out that is clearly not true. We said that we needed significant democratic reform but if that cannot be achieved, then abolishment should take place.

The reason that our minister spoke of going to the people to allow them to express their wishes on who they wish to see representing them in the Senate is primarily democratic in its nature.

I would point out to the member opposite a number of examples of how the appointment process that we currently have has worked over the course of Canadian history. This has been on both sides of the House. I admit that both Conservative and Liberal prime ministers in years past have shown patronage when it comes to Senate appointments.

However, could the member answer this simple question? Does he think it is fair that in the course of history, for example, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, a Liberal prime minister, in his 15 years in office, appointed only Liberals and no other Senate members from any other political party? Mackenzie King, another Liberal, in 22 years in office he appointed 103 senators and all but 2 were Liberals. St-Laurent, in 9 years in office, appointed 55 senators and all but 3 were Liberals. Finally, on a yearly basis, Lester Pearson, in only five years in office, appointed 39 senators and all but one were Liberals.

Does the hon. member think that is democratic, fair and truly represents the diversity of opinion in this great country?

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the amplification system may not be working. I think the member was talking about recent government appointees to the Immigration Review Board and the Employment Insurance Umpire Board, who I think were 100% Conservative appointees.

However, if I heard him talk about Senate appointees, I make no apology for prime ministers and parties who were in this place 100 or 150 years ago. In some of those years, women were not allowed to vote. There was hanging in this country. It was not the country that it is today. I do not know where that is coming from.

Government Orders

I am suggesting that the government ought to speak to its provincial counterparts. It ought to come back with a bill that is destined to deadlock between the two Houses. That member may find himself some day in an argument with some senator, elected or selected from Saskatchewan, who claims that because he had a province wide election he has a lot more clout than that member and whatever he says in the Senate is more important. I am not saying that is good or bad. They work it in the United States but they have had a history of a powerful bicameral government. We have not had that history. The Senate was designed to safeguard provincial interests but it was not given the power that this House has.

Does the bill mean that the two Houses would be on a collision course and that you, Mr. Speaker, would be a much less powerful person in this country? I hope not.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, right off the top, I am not very happy to speak in a debate about Motion No. 3, which would send a message to the Senate about its work on Bill C-2. I would rather have spoken about a bill that the government had introduced to increase its assistance to the manufacturing and forestry industries. If they had done that, we could have been dealing with problems that are much more urgent for our fellow citizens than Senate reform.

In any case, though, this reform does not pass muster in our view. As I said yesterday in the debate on Motion No. 3, we think the Senate is a political institution that is not only undemocratic but in the modern era has lost its very reason for being. It is simply a vestige of colonial times and the British monarchy. For these fundamental reasons we will oppose referring it to committee before second reading.

I think we would have opposed it even after second reading because we are opposed to the very principle underlying this bill. Its purpose is to reform an institution that, in our view, is no longer relevant if it ever was. There is no point trying to amend a bill in some way when it is so unacceptable in content and form and when no amendments could possibly make it acceptable. We will therefore vote against referring this bill to committee.

We disagree with the very principle of this bill because it is obvious in our view—and Canadian and Quebec history make it crystal clear—that Canada's institutions cannot be reformed. By trying to reform the Senate through bills rather than a constitutional amendment, the Prime Minister is confirming something that was already evident to many people in Quebec. For Quebec sovereignists, of course, it is impossible in any case to make significant changes to the Canadian constitution, even more so when taking into account the national reality of Quebecers.

It is also deeply shocking to see the Conservative government and the Prime Minister bring in bills with which not only the Bloc Québécois but also the National Assembly of Quebec have said they disagree. This is true of both Bill C-20 and Bill C-22, the latter dealing with a redistribution of seats in the House of Commons.

Each time, it is clear that behind these changes—I am not even talking about reforms, because I think the word “reform” has a

positive connotation—there is never any will to take into consideration the existence of at least two nations within the current Canadian political space: the Quebec nation, which was recognized by this House, the Canadian nation, which we readily recognize, and, of course, the first nations and the Acadian nation.

I think this has been the problem since Canada was created, and is why Canada's political institutions cannot be reformed. I am obviously talking about the lack of will from the majority of this political space, meaning the Canadian nation, to recognize, and not just by a motion in this House, the existence of several nations within the Canadian political space.

I could talk about the history, but not this morning. At certain points in the history of Canada and Quebec, it would have been possible to mutually recognize two nations and to recognize the first nations and the Acadian nation, in order to build a political structure representative of this multinational space. Unfortunately, the past, and also more recent history—for example, the Charlottetown accord and the Meech Lake accord—has shown us that there was not a broad enough will, yet alone a majority, within the Canadian nation to change the political balance and reflect this reality.

Unfortunately, the current Parliament seems to be the perfect example of the crisis in the Canadian system. I am not talking about the Bloc Québécois, because we chose to represent the Quebec nation in the House of Commons. I am talking about the political parties that call themselves national, but should call themselves pan-Canadian, the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party and the NDP.

• (1045)

Those parties all have essentially regional foundations: the Conservatives, more in the west; the Liberals, in Ontario and the Atlantic provinces; and the NDP, a bit everywhere. They are not yet sufficiently entrenched in a region of Canada to claim to be pan-Canadian parties. It is not their fault. Quite simply, no one has wanted to recognize this multinational dimension in the past.

The Quebec-Canada relations crisis is not a crisis for the people of Quebec. It is a crisis in the Canadian system, with ups and downs, since history is never linear. It is very clear that, as long as people fail to grasp this reality—and in the case of the Bloc and Quebec sovereignists, we will take this reality into account as soon as Quebec decides to become a sovereign country—we cannot resume discussions with our Canadian neighbours to reorganize an economic space, at least, and perhaps a political space between our two nations.

That being said, within the existing political space, considering the mindset of Canadians, it is obvious that Canadian institutions cannot be reformed. This situation will certainly not be corrected by trying to reform the Senate, especially since Bill C-20 is aimed primarily at marginalizing the Quebec nation more than anything else.

Government Orders

I was saying that we are against the bill because Canadian institutions cannot be reformed. Indeed, in our view, the very spirit of the bill is unacceptable. Nevertheless, there is also the fact that Parliament cannot reform the Senate unilaterally and without making constitutional amendments. As many constitutionalists have said, the National Assembly has confirmed, and Quebec's Minister for Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs, Mr. Pelletier, has said on many occasions, any attempts to change the composition or the method of appointing senators would require a constitutional negotiation. Obviously, for us as Quebeckers, and especially for sovereignists, a constitutional negotiation will not be held on the Senate question alone, since it is far from our primary concern. We often even forget that that institution exists.

It is therefore very clear to us that the bill as it now stands cannot be acceptable to Quebec or to anyone who wishes to abide by the Canadian constitution.

I often find it amusing—it should make me cry, but I tend to be an optimist—to say that the only people who try to ensure that we abide by the Constitution in this House are the Bloc Québécois. For example, when we talk about respecting the jurisdiction of the provinces or combating the federal spending power, we are unfortunately the only ones who stand up for what was set out in a document that may, in fact, be too old, because it does not reflect the present-day reality of the Canadian political space.

The fact remains, however, that as long as the Constitution has not been amended and as long as we are within the Canadian political space, Quebec, Quebeckers and the Bloc Québécois will stand up for the idea that there can be no amendments relating to the specific method by which senators are appointed without constitutional negotiations. Once again, on the question of constitutional negotiations, when that door—some would say that Pandora's box—is opened again, very clearly there will be other matters to be brought in besides mere questions about the Senate.

There is a fourth point that I think it is important to make. Even if it is reformed, the Senate is a useless institution, as I said earlier. It is a legacy of the monarchy, a legacy of British colonialism; it is the fear that the founders of the Canadian political space had of seeing a sovereign people make decisions through elections and elected representatives.

So they appointed these wise and elite people, who are often conservative. I am not speaking here to Conservatives as such. We are talking about elites who often wanted to oppose the desire for social and economic progress felt by a majority of the population. That is true for Quebec and it is also true for Canada.

I will conclude on that point because I have been told that my speaking time will soon be up. The bill itself is full of problems, even though it might have been thought to have some value.

• (1050)

Under Bill C-20, given that indirect election of senators is not going to make the Senate democratic, we are creating senators whom it will be virtually impossible to unseat. This is a non-binding consultation and it is full of holes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague what will happen if the context

of this bill is respected. However, I will speak in English for greater clarity.

[*English*]

The government seems to have this old, broken down jalopy called the Senate which barely functions. There are 14 vacancies which Canadians seem unconcerned about. My constituents in British Columbia are consistently confused as to the Senate's actual role and what value for money Canadians receive for the work done in the Senate.

Rather than change the entire car or fix its engine, the government bill proposes to change the paint or to put more air in the tires, yet the car still will not function. The car still will not function to get the work of the country done.

What would my colleague suggest is a more fundamental approach? The NDP has a very clear and long-standing position on abolition of the Senate, moving toward something a lot more effective. Is his party in support of such a position or does he feel there is another avenue that would more fundamentally address what is wrong with that place? What better way is there to address the democratic deficiencies that we have pointed out from all four corners of the House?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. I think I was very clear when I spoke: the Bloc Québécois believes that the Senate is an institution that is no longer relevant. In my opinion, it never really was relevant. I closed my remarks by stating that it was a counterweight that the elite had put in place at the time to minimize the role of the House of Commons. In this regard, we are for abolition.

Having said that, we must realize that abolishing the Senate will require starting up constitutional negotiations. Quebec and the sovereignists in particular will not debate just the issue of the Senate. When the Senate was created, there was a balance created between Quebec and Canada by the composition of the Senate. When the Senate no longer exists—and I agree with the member's criticisms—we will have to ensure that the Quebec nation has effective representation within the federal institutions of the House of Commons. That is not necessarily the case with the presence of Quebec senators in the Senate. We will have to ensure that this nation, with the proposals of Bill C-22, will not have its representation drastically reduced.

Therefore, we say yes to abolition, but we have to realize that constitutional negotiations will be required and that these will deal with many more issues than just the Senate. I wish us good luck. As we know, all constitutional negotiations in the past 30 years have ended in failure. As a footnote in history, the Bloc Québécois was born out of one of these constitutional failures, that of Meech Lake.

[*English*]

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our colleague from the Bloc has been characterizing the Senate as a political anachronism which is no longer applicable with respect to its original intent.

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One of the things which I think is of interest to the Bloc is that the Senate continues to protect provincial rights. I would take it that the Bloc would be very much in support of a Senate that could be revamped to continue to protect provincial authorities and rights.

I use as an example the crime bill. There was a very eloquent presentation given by the Bloc pointing out that the crime bill was in conflict with the protection of language rights in the province of Quebec. In fact, that is where the Senate has focused on a very important and serious difference between the intent and spirit of the bill and its actual application in terms of guaranteeing French language rights in the courts in Quebec.

I wonder if our colleague would respond to that observation. What would the Bloc be looking for in terms of how the Senate, and it is argued that it is anachronistic, could be updated? What amendments could be sought to see the Senate perform part of its original intent, which was to protect provincial authorities and rights?

• (1055)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

It is clear that the Bloc Québécois does not want to reform Canadian institutions, but pull out of them. That being said, as long as we are part of the Canadian political federation, we want to make sure Quebec's rights are respected. We also want the provinces to make more demands in this regard. It is true that the Senate was created to counterbalance the fact that the House was more representative of the population of the various provinces.

We simply want to make sure Quebec's political weight within federal institutions does not decrease as long as we are here. We would be much more in favour of a bill that would give Quebec 25% of the seats in the House of Commons than a bill to reform the Senate. That would ensure that, regardless of demographic changes in the two nations, Quebec would have the same political weight. This is another reason why we will oppose Bill C-22.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to this issue on behalf of the New Democratic Party. However, I must say at the beginning that it is somewhat bittersweet, as the time allotted for me is not nearly sufficient to deal with the numerous ethical lapses and failures of the Senate, so I will find myself a little rushed in trying to paint a picture of just what a failure that institution has been.

I do sympathize with my Conservative colleagues who have talked about reforming the Senate for some time now. However, judging from the debate here, I think we will see that the Liberals will stall on making any moves to actually make the Senate accountable to the people of Canada. The Bloc, as we just heard, is simply interested in breaking up Canada. As for my Conservative colleagues, the reality is that if they were serious about having an elected Senate, then Mr. Fortier would have run in the riding of Outremont instead of his very clear declaration that he was too busy to run in an election, but he certainly did not mind taking up a post in the Senate.

The question of reform is tantalizing to people who have not looked at too much of the Senate's history. The fact is the Senate is unreformable. Numerous attempts have been tried over the last 140 years to make that anachronistic institution actually accountable to the Canadian public. At the end of the day we are faced with the fact that we have a Gordian knot of provincial interests that need to be worked through. The other fact is that senators claim to be masters of their own house and they have been openly defiant in their refusal to move that institution not only into the 20th century, but into the 21st century.

Let us look at a few examples of the attempts that have been made at reform. Under pressure, the Senate finally set up a code of ethics for itself, and it was certainly something to behold. Mack trucks with extra tandem loads on the end could be driven through the loopholes.

The Canadian public is probably not aware that our august senators sitting in that other chamber, which by the way would make an excellent public basketball court for a lot less money, allow themselves the right to sit as directors on boards of major corporations in Canada, while at the same time they exercise decision making for the Canadian public.

Under Senate rules it is perfectly okay for a senator to maintain a secret bank account. It is also perfectly okay for a senator not to disclose any of his or her family's financial interests, unless he or she has an actual direct contract with the Government of Canada. The most outrageous rule is that they allow themselves the right to participate, influence and vote in debates on issues where they have financial interests, as long as they declare those financial interests. They can participate in closed door meetings where they could have financial conflicts of interest and could influence public policy, as long as they announce it within that meeting. They can, of course, leave it up to the rest of their cronies as to whether or not the public gets to know about that conflict of interest.

Any small town municipal councillor or school board trustee knows he or she would never get away with breaking conflict of interest guidelines so loosey-goosey and so self-serving. Why is it that members in the upper chamber are allowed to write themselves such a code of ethics? It is scandalous. If that institution were serious about reform, it would take the steps toward reforming itself, but it has not.

The New Democratic Party has been very clear from the beginning on this issue of Senate reform. Our founders in 1933 said there was a need to abolish that anachronistic institution. We remain committed to that to this day. Since 1933 there has been no real attempt by any government to make that group accountable to the Canadian public.

We have been pointed to the possibility of elections. Senator Brown went through an election process in Alberta; however, he was appointed after an election that took place over three years ago. At that time, 86,000 voters refused to participate in that election. Another 84,000 filled out the form wrong and spoiled their ballots, which meant that less than 35% of the eligible people in Alberta who showed up that day actually participated. I do not think that is a ringing endorsement to show that Canadians believe in that institution.

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• (1100)

The other day, the Nova Scotia Conservatives said that they had no interest in partaking in these shadow elections because at the end of the day it falls to the Prime Minister to appoint or not to appoint.

Why has the Senate gone so wrong? Some people think that it started out as a good idea. It has been floated around that maybe it was set up as a good counterweight. However, if we go back to the roots of Confederation, we find that the Senate was started on a wrong principle and it has been downhill ever since.

In 1867, when the forming Government of Canada was looking to set up an institution, it looked to mother England. Mother England, with its long history of class privilege, had a system in place with the House of Lords. It did not want the common people, the average folks like us, to have too much power so it created an upper chamber based on hereditary peer privilege in order to have a so-called check and balance. That was exactly what our founding fathers at that time had in mind. They did not want the common people to have too much say and so the idea of the Senate was set up.

John A. Macdonald was very clear when the Senate was set up. He said that the role of the Senate was to protect the rights of minorities because the rich would always be fewer in number than the poor. That principle was wrong 141 years ago and it has been downhill ever since with that group over there.

The other day I heard a young tour guide outside the Senate chamber say, “The role of the Senate, as proclaimed by our founding father, John A. Macdonald, was to protect the rights of minorities. In this chamber, we look after all minorities. We love them all. We bring them all in and help them”. The poor fellow is being paid to deliver this tripe to the public but the reality is that it could not be any different. The Senate was set up so the government could look after its buddies and pals, the crony system.

Nineteenth century Canada was a swamp of nepotism and cronyism and it remains to this day. To paraphrase T.K. Chesterton comparing the English system and ours, the only thing worse than being squire ridden is crony ridden, and crony ridden we remain.

I do not want to leave the impression that it is just a bunch of hacks, cronies and people who have been flipping pancakes for the Liberal Party for 30 years who have been given the cash for life lottery. There are some august figures and some people who have done very good work in the Senate, but choosing to show up and do good work is not a legitimate reason for a system of government. The fact is that senators can show up or not show up to work. They can show up to be active or they can basically stay wherever they are, in the Bahamas or wherever, with their attendance rates being as abysmally low as they are. It is entirely up to them to decide how much they want to participate.

The question of whether they do good work on an individual bill here or an individual senator there who has the great background is not the issue. The issue is whether this works as a form of government. I would suggest that in the 21st century we remain pretty much the only country in the western world that accepts the fact that party bagmen, cronies, friends of the party and failed candidates can be given this position and stay there without any scrutiny until they are 75 at the public's expense.

I would suggest that the question before us is simple. Is it possible to reform this anachronistic institution or should we move forward to abolish it? I would say at this point that we have tried reform and it will not work. The reality is that we need to put this question to the Canadian people.

A number of basic things have changed since the swamp of nepotism was first set up in the upper chamber back in 1867. In terms of checks and balances, we did not have strong provincial governments at that time. Now we have very strong provincial voices. We did not have the legal system or the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that are in place today to represent minorities. Much has changed. Do we need four levels of government, one whose members hardly ever show up except to ding the taxpayer when it comes time to collecting their pay?

The issue before us is that the triple E Senate will go the way of all other Senate reforms and we need to get back to the four basic U's. The fact is that the Senate is unelected, unaccountable, unreformable and, ultimately, unnecessary in the 21st century.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like the position of the member who just spoke, who is my riding neighbour—he represents an Ontario riding and I represent a Quebec riding—the Bloc's position is clear: we suggest nothing less than abolishing the Senate, which is useless and has absolutely no purpose. I am thoroughly convinced that there are fine men and women in the other place who could be doing something other than what they are doing at present.

I have a very simple question for my colleague. Have you ever seen the senator who is supposed to represent your region come to your defence in the upper chamber? Do you know who he is? Do we know him in our regions? If you do know who he is, then good for you, but I do not know who he is or what he does. If you do know who he is, I wish you would tell me. If you know a senator who represents you, I would like to know.

The Speaker: The question was no doubt directed to the Speaker, but the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay may now respond.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question in terms of whether or not the Senate actually lives up to its claim of representing regional interests. Where were the senators during the Atlantic accord? They were out on an extended lunch. Where were the senators when it came time for the equalization payments for Saskatchewan? I do not know. I certainly did not hear any.

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We have a senator in my riding, the famous No. 27, Frank Mahovlich. He is a great guy and a great hockey player. He is from Schumacher and from a great Croatian family. Frank usually gets called upon to work for Liberal candidates to help defeat me in the elections but it has not worked yet. However, I do know that one of Frank's roles is to come up and raise the flag for the Liberal Party. I have nothing against Mr. Mahovlich but if we are going to choose people to represent us, there should be a vote.

The question is whether or not this system of voting would actually work or is necessary because we see the entrenched interests to ensure that voting does not happen.

That is one senator I know of and, at the end of the day, I think the Canadian people need to know that their representatives are actually doing the job within this chamber, which is the elected chamber of the House of Commons.

• (1110)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Timmins—James Bay for his eloquent outlining of the challenges we have with the existing format for the Senate.

With regard to my Bloc colleague's comment about regional representation, I represent Nanaimo—Cowichan in British Columbia and what is commonly termed as “western alienation” is evident in terms of our so-called regional representation in the Senate.

I would like my colleague to talk about what I see as a bit of a near irreconcilable difference. On the one hand, the Conservatives appointed Michael Fortier to the Senate and then named him the unelected, unaccountable to this House Minister of Public Works. We now have this bill before the House that truly just tinkers at the margins.

I wonder if the member could comment on that position where, on the one hand, the Conservatives are very willing to use the Senate when it benefits them and yet, on the other hand, they put forward a bill that really does nothing to resolve some of the challenges we see before this House.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, clearly, the government tripped and fell in terms of its credibility on reform when it appointed Minister Fortier who is now sitting on one of the biggest real estate sell-offs in federal history without any accountability.

It goes back to what happened under Mulroney when we had failed candidates, bagmen, pals and the head of the PC Canada fund. Under Chrétien we had more defeated candidates and more backroom advisers. If people failed with the Canadian people, they did not need to worry because there was always a lifetime job. Our last prime minister, the member for Canada Steamship Lines, had Art Eggleton bounced out of cabinet for ethical breaches. Guess what? Those ethical breaches meant nothing to the Senate. The Senate welcomed him in with open arms. It was the same with Francis Fox.

The fact is that the days of cronyism and nepotism must end. We need to take our place in the 21st century and say that we have strong provincial governments, strong courts and a strong federal government and we need to improve the work within this chamber, probably include more members and more regional diversification.

As I said, the Senate chambers are beautiful. I would personally think they would make a great public basketball court, but I am certainly open for suggestions for better use for the taxpayers' money than paying that crowd who hardly ever show up anyway.

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, I compliment my colleague, the member for Timmins—James Bay on his speech. I do not think he used notes, which shows his capacity to think and speak on his feet, and he actually presented the NDP position on the Senate quite well. The NDP's first position is to abolish the Senate and its second position is to elect, if possible. Its final position is status quo.

My first and foremost option is to have Senate elections at the top of that list. My friend from the Bloc Québécois is heckling me here on the issue of Michael Fortier.

In the last election campaign, we did not happen to win seats in Canada's second largest city. We thought it would be appropriate to have somebody representing Canada's second largest city at the cabinet table so we appointed—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to heckle them when they speak and I would appreciate the same courtesy.

We decided to appoint an eminent Montrealer, who is well known in the city of Montreal, to our cabinet table and, at the same time, appoint him to the Senate on the condition that he present himself as a candidate in the next election campaign for this House. The Senate actually does have a question period. Three out of four seats in the Senate are occupied by Liberal members and opposition members and there is an opportunity there for accountability so we tried to combine the two best possible scenarios.

It was one of those dynamics where we were damned if we did and damned if we did not. If we appointed Minister Fortier to the position that he has right now, people would make the noises that we just heard from the opposition parties. If we did not appoint him, people would say that the Conservatives do not care about Montreal because they did not appoint somebody to cabinet from Montreal. It was a lose-lose proposition but we think we made the right decision and we have somebody who is doing a fantastic job on behalf of Montrealers at the cabinet table in the form of Michael Fortier.

I want to talk about this bill and why I do think this is a good step forward. My principal reason is that it allows for consultation. I disagree with my colleague from Timmins—James Bay in his description of the Senate and how it was founded on rotten first principles. He may make that argument about the House of Lords but it is not a transferrable argument to the current Canadian Senate.

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The Senate, in its Canadian form, our upper house is designed in order to have the grievances of provinces represented in Ottawa. Yes, of course it can do a better job of that. My colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan just mentioned the issue of western alienation. If we take the number of seats in the House and the number of seats in the Senate, combine them together and divide them by the population of that province, by a wide margin my province of British Columbia is overwhelmingly the most dramatically underrepresented province in Ottawa on Parliament Hill. We need to do a better job of ensuring that Canadians have a fair voice in the House of Commons, which is why we put forward a bill to add more seats into the House of Commons, more seats for those provinces that are currently underrepresented, Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. James Moore: I would comment, as well, that my colleague from the Bloc is continuing to heckle me.

The reason the Bloc Québécois is in favour of abolishing the Senate is because in order to abolish the Senate we must amend the Constitution. There is nothing the Bloc would rather have this country do than to get into a divisive constitutional debate.

What is more, the Bloc members want to abolish the Senate because it wants to have that Senate debate. They also recognize that about a quarter of the 105 senators are from the province of Quebec, which means that about 75% of the Senate are federalists. The Bloc does not like the idea of having that many more people in Ottawa in one of the two Houses of Parliament fighting for and defending Canada's interests. It wants to have fewer federalists in Ottawa, which is why it believes in abolishing the Senate.

The members of the Bloc Québécois, as usual, are up to their own mischief on this issue. They do not have a sincere position. Their position is about mischief making and about driving their agenda of tearing Quebec from the heart of Canada and we, frankly, will not have any of that.

This bill is about consultation. It is about reaching out to provinces and recognizing their role in having provinces at the forefront of the decision making of who will represent the provinces in Canada's upper house, which is an important step forward.

It is important to note that the province of Alberta has Senate election legislation and it has been exercised twice. In our government, we appointed Bert Brown to the Senate, who was elected by the people of Alberta. When a subsequent vacancy arises, the Premier of Alberta will have the capacity to elect senators in waiting who will then be appointed to the Senate on a democratic basis by the people of Alberta.

Under the NDP, the New Democratic government in the province of Manitoba passed bill 20 to elect senators in the province of Manitoba. The citizens of that province can have their say on who will be fighting on their behalf on Parliament Hill.

In the province of Saskatchewan, Premier Brad Wall has already indicated that he is drafting legislation and working hard to put forward Senate election legislation in the province of Saskatchewan so that the people of Saskatchewan can decide who their senators will be.

●(1115)

In British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell has indicated that he is interested in following this path as well.

We have a conceivable situation where the four western provinces of Canada, based on their democratic choice, will enter into a process to elect senators at the grassroots level so Canadians can have a direct say in which politicians are in Ottawa, spending their money, in scripting their freedom and advocating for public policy changes. It is important that Canadians have that democratic right. That is something our party has always advocated and it is something in which I have always believed.

The is all about that. It is about consultation with provinces and it is about incremental reforms.

My colleague from Timmins-James Bay also mentioned the former Liberal government, under the member for LaSalle—Émard when he was prime minister. He used to constantly say, when he was campaigning in western Canada, that he believed in Senate reform. He was not prepared to engage in sweeping constitutional reform and Senate reform. He was not prepared to have any kind of incremental reform. Outside of that, he was all in favour of Senate reform.

We recognize we have a minority Parliament. We think Canadians are prepared for this debate and are prepared to engage in it. I do not think we want to go down the road of engaging in constitutional discussions if it is not necessary. We think there can be incremental Senate reform in the country, and this is one of the mechanisms by which it can be done.

A couple of bills on Senate reform are being considered by the House. The other bill is to have Senate term limits, to limit the number of years somebody can serve in the Senate, from a maximum of 45 years down to 8 years. That is a reasonable reform and proposition. Also we have the bill before us, which provides for consultation.

I reiterate the point that abolishing the Senate requires a constitutional amendment. The New Democrat position is a very idealistic one, but it is a very unrealistic one. Without constitutional amendment, the Senate cannot be abolished.

There is a backdoor way of abolishing the Senate, which is do not appoint any senators, leave the vacancies sitting there. Over time, these vacancies will accumulate. There are a couple of problems associated with that. One is the Senate vacancies will not come up proportionately across the country. We may be a situation where one province is dramatically disadvantaged in the Senate by virtue of the number of vacancies relative to another province.

We are almost getting to that point in British Columbia. Three out of the six seats in the Senate are currently vacant. Half of our Senate delegation is not there. We hope those seats will be filled through a democratic process, ultimately by consultation.

Government Orders

The other problem with the backdoor way of abolishing the Senate, without constitutional reform, is we get into this dynamic where the smaller the Senate, the more power it has. We have seen this. We have seen the Senate exercise its power in a way that is not helpful to the democratic mandate provided to the House by the Canadian people. We have seen that in the past and we see it today.

We know the clichéd saying that the Senate is supposed to be the chamber of sober second thought. We have the example of Bill C-2, a comprehensive crime bill. It was one of the cornerstone issues on which Conservatives campaigned in the last election campaign. When I campaigned in my district in the suburbs of Vancouver, it was the dominant issue I pushed on the doorsteps. That was what I heard back from my constituents. As good politicians, we talk about the issues that are of concern to our constituents.

Criminal justice reform was probably the central issue of concern for my constituents. We campaigned hard on criminal justice reform matters. We were elected to Parliament on the basis of our criminal justice platform, and we put forward these bills twice, once in the individual forms, and we did not succeed. The House prorogued. We came back, we packaged them together in Bill C-2, a comprehensive tackling violent crime act, and we have pushed that legislation forward.

We had full debate in the House of Commons on the legislation in the original form. When it came in the form of Bill C-2, we had a full debate in the House. We had a full debate at committee. We considered amendments and accepted them. Then the bill finally passed, with the support of opposition parties. Now it is in the hands of the Senate.

The government was elected on the basis of a very specific platform of criminal justice reforms. We passed them in the House, with the support of the opposition parties, and they went to the Senate. Now the Liberal Senate members have proposed 59 witnesses on Bill C-2 to logjam bill at the Senate side. After more than two years of government, where we have compromised on the bill, we have worked together, we have worked across party lines, we have passed the bill, we want to see it become a reality. This kind of activity on the Senate side needs to be stopped.

Therefore, if there is abolition of the Senate through constitutional means, the Bloc will play its games. If there is abolition of the Senate through backdoor means, by restricting senators, a smaller number of people will be empowered to play more games like we have seen on Bill C-2.

• (1120)

The way to go ahead is to have incremental reform with reasonable measures. It is not unreasonable to say that senators should sit for a maximum of eight years rather than 45 years and have that responsibility of being a senator circumscribed to that amount of time. That is an entirely reasonable reform.

The second one we have proposed is to have the federal government sit down with the provinces and consult with them in the best way to allow the people to decide who should legislate on their behalf in Ottawa.

This is quite straightforward. I think if that proposition were put forward to Canadians, we would win this debate 95:5. This is why I

hope the bill will see that kind of support in the House, with the support of opposition parties.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate if the hon. member could explain this contradiction. It has been cited that some provincial governments are onside with the legislation and the concept of Senate elections. However, the provincial Governments of Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and recently the other side's cousins in Nova Scotia, the Conservative caucus, have voted unanimously to reject the notion.

The contradiction is as follows. During the Atlantic accord and the great equalization debate, it was stated in the House that while the government wanted to proceed with its election promise to fully exempt non-renewable natural resources from the equalization formula with no caps, the equalization formula being 100% a federal government program, because there was no provincial government consensus on the issue, it could not proceed in fulfilling that election promise.

The Governments of Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador do not agree with the government's proposed legislation on Senate reform. Yet the government is intent on proceeding regardless of that fact.

Could the hon. member please explain to the House that contradiction? While he is on his feet, could he also provide information as to whether there would be the possibility that provincial governments or the federal government could allow the establishment of districts of ridings within provinces to elect senators or Senate nominees, as opposed to only having a province-wide vote?

• (1125)

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I sense an interest in my colleague running for a district in Newfoundland and Labrador for the Senate in the future.

First, on the issue of equalization, I went into that debate, but he misrepresented what was said in the past by us in the campaign and what we delivered to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Beyond that, on the issue of Senate reform, there will be disagreements within provinces on how we go forward. However, I would like to turn the question on itself and suggest this to him. Why should a member of Parliament from Deer Lake prevent the people from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and in the future British Columbia, their right to choose their senators?

Why should any province say to another province that it cannot do what it democratically has chosen to do? Again I will use the example of Manitoba. A provincial NDP government passed bill 20 to elect senators in the province of Manitoba. That is its choice. It has its own Senate delegation that comes to Ottawa and fights on behalf of Manitobans. Why should anyone from any other region of the country tell it who it can or cannot send to Ottawa? That is not right. It is undemocratic.

If the province of Quebec wants to sustain the status quo, this legislation provides for that. If Quebec wants to sustain the status quo, it does not have to engage in consultation. It is consultation about how we go forward.

Government Orders

If those provinces are ready for democracy and reform, so their citizens are empowered to elect their senators, why should the federal government get in the way? We want to encourage those provinces to do so.

If his province and other provinces do not want to go forward under this prescription, I suspect the provinces he described are not unanimous in their position and alternatives. Some of them want to abolish the Senate to increase the power of individual premiers. I suspect that is the case with Newfoundland and Labrador, where he is from. That would be keeping in step with the style, but that is not always the case. Each of these provinces has its own internal dynamic in terms of what it would prescribe as the right solution for Senate reform, and there is a fair debate to be had.

For those provinces that have had their debate and chosen the way forward, let us get out of their way.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue for a very quick question.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question will be very short. I do not understand how my colleague, whose remarks were very interesting, by the way, arrives at the same answer. Everything is blocked in the Senate. Any reforms the current government wants are blocked in the Senate. Bill C-11, about the Inuit in the far north, which we worked on in committee, is being considered in the Senate.

Why does he not recommend the immediate abolition of the Senate instead of trying to change it? Because it will stay the same in the coming years if it is not abolished.

The Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor for a very brief response.

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I do not agree.

We are against abolishing the Senate for the reasons I gave in my speech.

First, we can improve our Senate through non-constitutional changes, with this bill, just like the other one, which would reduce a senator's mandate from 45 years to eight years.

Second, we know what the Bloc wants. It wants the Senate to disappear so there are 80 fewer politicians in Ottawa to defend Canada in its current state. The Bloc simply wants there to be members from Quebec like them, in order to destroy Canada. We do not agree.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss Bill C-20, a bill that, by any definition, is purely political, even by Ottawa standards. Like everything we see from the government, the facts play little relevance in what it crafts as legislation or policy. This is all about politics.

Even the name, an act to provide for consultations, shows us what qualifies as consultations in the eyes of the government. It has not had discussions with the provinces and it did not take very long for provinces to speak out against this in its earlier incarnation and again now. As my colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador

mentioned, Conservatives in my province of Nova Scotia very recently spoke out about it.

The bill has little to do with reforming the Senate, but much to do about fulfilling an election promise made by the other side in order to appease their narrow base. Does the leader of the government in the House really believe a discussion, at this moment, on this topic is in tune with the needs and the realities of most Canadians?

In my riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour people are worried about the coming economic downturn. Is the government, which squandered away a lot of money it inherited, ready for that economic downturn? Is it ready to provide the support and the stimulus that Canadians will need to get through this difficult time?

Are students interested in this? None who I have talked to have raised this as an issue in the schools I go to on a regular basis. I always ask kids what is on their minds. They talk about the environment, Afghanistan, the high cost of tuition, literacy, social services and infrastructure that provides the social supports for which Canadian is known. They do not talk about the Senate.

It indicates that the government is either trying to waste the time of the House as we go toward an election, or it is using this as a political wedge, or both. The bill and others like it are props to be used to distort or to create the impression that the Conservatives champion change when in fact they do not.

The bill does nothing to address the issue, for example, of Senate representation. I will have that discussion. We should have a discussion about the House of Commons and about the Senate.

When we go back to the original Senate, when we had Confederation, the design of it was not bad. It was a good design. It was such that regionally there was representation in Canada. Lower Canada, Quebec, had 24 members. Upper Canada, Ontario, had 24 members. The Maritimes had 24 members. Then as the west joined Confederation, it had 24 members. Then the north and Newfoundland and Labrador joined and they were accorded seats in the Senate to represent the important regional issues that mattered to the people in those areas.

Yes, the House of Commons has a largely proportional say in voting on all the important measures of the day. The elected members of Parliament made those decisions.

The Senate is designed, not only as a chamber of sober second thought, but to provide that regional balance, and we saw that. My colleague from Timmins—James Bay, for example, suggested that Atlantic senators did nothing on the Atlantic accord. That is entirely untrue. After it passed in the House, the Senate had further hearings on the Atlantic accord. All senators from Atlantic Canada on the Liberal side voted against the budget. They did continue that fight. Probably at the end of the day, they played their role, which was to bring more attention to it. For example, the Premier of Nova Scotia came up for hearings. However, at the end of the day, the will of the elected House prevailed, but that did not make redundant the role of the Senate.

Government Orders

My colleague from B.C. talked about representation. I agree that my province of Nova Scotia, with 10 seats, and B.C. and Alberta with six seats, need to have that discussion. The bill does not talk about that. We need to have those discussions in a serious and positive way throughout the country.

We need to look at Senate terms as well. Let us talk about the Senate terms. Should they be lifetime to 75? I do not know. I suspect probably there is a better way of doing that, but it is not by coming forward and suggesting that we are going to have consultations, ignoring a lot of the important issues that matter across the country.

I would be very open to some kind of Senate reform package that would allow Canadians to feel they were more connected to the Senate, just as I would support some reforms in the House of Commons that would allow them to feel more connected to this chamber as well.

• (1130)

I want to read the May 2007 resolution from the National Assembly of Quebec, when this bill came back in its original incarnation, Bill C-56. It states:

THAT the National Assembly ask the Parliament of Canada to withdraw Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, introduced in the House of Commons last 11 May;

THAT the National Assembly also ask the Parliament of Canada to withdraw Bill C-43, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate, whose primary purpose is to change the method of selection of senators without the consent of Québec.

Most recently, in the province of Nova Scotia at the Conservative annual general meeting of the struggling Conservative government of Rodney MacDonald, this proposal for elected senators was put forward to Progressive Conservatives in Nova Scotia. The report in the now defunct *Daily News* of Halifax the next day headlined "Tories reject Harper's plan for elected Senate". It lead off:

[The] Prime Minister's dream of an elected Senate suffered a set back yesterday when Nova Scotia Tories defeated a resolution that asked the province's Progressive Conservative government to organize a vote this October. Delegates at the party's annual convention in Halifax voted overwhelmingly against the idea.

And a number of reasons were given.

It is not particularly creative or imaginative to run around the country and bash the Senate. It has been done for years. The language we hear of the unelected and unaccountable Senate, filled with party hacks and all that sort of stuff does not add a lot to the debate.

In fact, if we look at what the Senate has done for Canada and the work that it has done for Canada, it has actually served this country very well, not only as a chamber of sober second thought but also through its committees.

At around the same time that Mr. Romanow prepared his national commission on health care, Senator Michael Kirby produced his. They were both excellent reports and a good synopsis of the current situation.

I would suggest that the Kirby report from the Senate was every bit as good or perhaps even better in some areas than the Romanow commission report. He went on to do work on mental health which has now become sort of the hope of mental health advocates and

people who suffer from mental health illness in this country. That came out of the Senate as well as Joyce Fairburn on literacy, Colin Kenny's work on military issues and a whole host of studies, some of which I individually would agree with and some of which I would not, but which no one could deny was important work.

I may be a little bit biased coming from Nova Scotia. We happen to have some pretty good senators. There is the senator from my own riding, Senator Jane Cordy, who is an outstanding senator. On the work I do on post-secondary education, Senator Willie Moore is the champion of post-secondary education.

If we talk to the AUCC, the CFS, the CASA, and the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences and talk to the granting councils, they can tell us that they can always get a good understanding of what is happening when they talk to many of these senators who are particularly focused on this issue. Senator Terry Mercer from Halifax has done some championing work for post-secondary education.

Again, I want to go to the regional aspect of what they have done. When we talk about post-secondary education, we can talk about tuitions and the unique nature of Nova Scotia where we have the highest tuitions in the country.

We can talk about research and development. If it was not for the work, I would suggest, on the part of senators as well as Atlantic Liberal caucus members, some of the important investments through ACOA in research and development would not have happened. We need to build up the research capacity of our universities in Atlantic Canada which are very good, but they need a certain amount of attention.

I think that is a regional issue that is very important. I mentioned the accord. Even the Progressive Conservatives have nominated good senators. Senator Lowell Murray is actually a senator from Ontario but he is a Nova Scotian and he has been a champion of a lot of issues including the duplicity of this government on the Atlantic accord.

I think it is easy to bash the Senate. In fact, the Senate has done some very important work across this country. We can make changes. There is no question about that. We all want to see changes in how Parliament works. We want to see changes in this House and in the Senate, but here we are talking about this issue, when Canadians are worried about the economy, poverty, the environment, jobs, education, literacy, and the list goes on.

I cannot support this bill. I am open to discussions about Senate reform. This is not the answer. It has not been brought in with consultation. It does not meet the needs of Canadians and I will not be supporting this bill.

• (1135)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my Liberal colleague, and I certainly think the issue here is what the Liberals have done for years. They will point to this senator or that senator and say, "See, because we as a party have chosen who will make decisions, there are certainly some who will actually show up and do their jobs".

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However, that is not the question here. The question is whether that is right, whether that works in a 21st century democracy.

I had spoken earlier about the egregious loopholes that exist within the conflict of interest guidelines of the Senate, which these senators chose for themselves. For every good and hard-working senator that he can name, we can name many senators who have very low attendance records or have conflicts of interest.

We have, for example, Michael Kirby, who sits on the board of the largest private health care company in Canada, yet he was able to chair and write a report for a Senate committee study on the future of health care in Canada.

We have numerous senators who sit on the boards of telecommunications operations, even those these are federally regulated. We have Michael Meighen who is a director and trustee in 25 companies, including many income trusts, so certainly this could come before the Senate and he would be in a position to speak on—

• (1140)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am going to have to interrupt the hon. member there because I see other members that may want to ask questions.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry you interrupted him. I think there was probably a good point coming that we missed.

I agree that there are good senators and there are bad senators, just like there are good members of Parliament on this side and bad members on that side. I do not deny that fact. That is clearly the way it is.

However, let us look at those issues he mentioned. Let us look at conflict of interest. I am open to that. Let us have a discussion about conflict of interest.

Let us look at the terms. Let us look at the allocation by province of what the Senate does. Let us even look at what the work plan is. Let us even look at whether it needs to have its own separate buses. I will look at all that stuff. I have no problem with that, but this bill addresses none of it.

I assume the NDP will vote against it because these things are not mentioned in this bill. This bill is simply a piece of political red meat thrown at the base of the old reformers who just say “Senate bad, everything else good”.

This is not a comprehensive bill in the sense of bringing forward meaningful change for Canadians. It does not address the things that we need to change in the Senate. It does not take into account the fact that our senators do some very good and valuable work in Canada, and it is unfair that they often get targeted. Let us change the Senate, but let us do it right.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I was over on that side of the House, and Mr. Chrétien and his crew were on this side, over and over I asked them, which the record will show, to demonstrate to us that when they were appointing senators from a list, why their list of their partisan people

was a better list than the one chosen by the people. That really is the question here today.

The member here talked a little bit about how the senators do good work. That is not problem. Let them do good work. Many of them do good work. Many of them are good, hard-working senators, but in a modern day democracy, is there still room for political patronage appointments to the Senate?

We say no. This consultation will permit a prime minister to appoint senators from a list chosen by the people, so at least we bring some element of democracy into it.

I would like the member's comment on that. How would he have answered if he would have been the prime minister when I asked that question over the last 14 years?

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, there may be a better way of appointing senators, but we do not see it here. Maybe he thinks that Gwynne Dyer should appoint all the senators.

He talks about us making political appointments. The Prime Minister has no problem putting his political hacks in all kinds of appointments in this very day and age. We see them going into ACOA. Regional development agencies are now being filled at the top level with the former chief of staff to the Premier of New Brunswick and a former senior adviser in the province of P.E.I.

That is unbelievable. That is taking politics to a whole new level. That is putting them in the civil service, so they have no problem with using politics and being partisan about the appointments process.

If the government wants to reform the Senate, let us talk about that, but it should go talk to the premiers. It should talk to Rodney MacDonald and Jean Charest, and the other premiers and come up with something better.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have heard all sorts of things today in the House and all kinds of different views. Ours is very clear and has been since the beginning. Ever since 1993 when the Bloc Québécois first arrived in this House, when I first took my seat here, we have thought that the Senate should be abolished for several reasons.

Even the Conservatives say the Senate is blocking some bills now. The Senate is not elected. Even if this bill should pass, how will senators be elected? The Prime Minister would still have the right to decide that someone does not suit him and therefore could appoint someone else. They would still be doing through the back door what they cannot through the front, that is to say, appointing people for partisan reasons. That is unacceptable.

Some people say that the provinces that are not happy with this and do not want a Senate can just withdraw. That is anti-democratic. I remember the time of the Meech Lake accord. We had to open up the Constitution. All the provinces had to agree with the Meech Lake accord, and if they did not, it was just too bad and the accord fell through. I fail to see why we cannot do the same with the Senate. When we are dealing with something as important as the Senate, the least we can do is open up the Constitution because several provinces—virtually a majority of them—are opposed to the Senate.

Government Orders

I went around my riding and did a little test with my electors to see whether they knew who their senator is—their representative in the Senate, the man or woman who is supposed to be representing them in the other chamber. Nobody knew their senator. Why was that? Because senators have no obligations at all. They sit on boards of directors at head offices and are involved in various corporations, which puts them, of course, in a conflict of interest.

They are never seen out in the field. We are the ones who are out there and we are sitting in the ejection seats. We are not appointed for 25 years. We are here and in every election we must prove that we have done a good job and deserve to be re-elected. That is not true of senators who are there for 20 or 25 years, pulling down salaries in excess of \$100,000. This bill will not solve the problem because the upper house will always throw another monkey wrench in the works.

Some people talk about the senators' good work. Well, I'm sorry, but we can do good work right here in the House. Things would go a lot faster if we did not have to send each bill to the other place, where things get bogged down because the Liberal or the Conservative senators have decided that bill x should not be passed. The other place gets the word, then they debate the bill, engage in systematic obstruction, and call the shots. That is unacceptable.

I will read an important motion. This is not a sovereigntist motion; it is a federalist one. Members of the National Assembly unanimously adopted the following motion:

That the National Assembly of Québec reaffirm to the Federal Government and to the Parliament of Canada that no modification to the Canadian Senate may be carried out without the consent of the Government of Québec and the National Assembly.

That is an inescapable fact. We would save a lot of money. Right now, our seniors, people without adequate housing, and the homeless are suffering terribly. We would save millions if we eliminated the Senate. Imagine: 105 senators being paid over \$100,000 per year.

What exactly do they do? They show up here when they feel like it, but make no appearances in the ridings. We never see them. In 15 years of political life, I have never seen a senator attend an activity or an event in my riding. What do they do? They have a pretty sweet gig: they do whatever they want. That is unacceptable. This bill would not even require senators to do anything.

• (1145)

They are not even required to do anything. They are simply elected for eight years. Eight easy years at \$100,000 a year. To do what? Some of them work, it is true, but they are few and far between. I do not know the senators. How is it that I do not know them after 15 years? The reason is that we do not see them, because they do their own thing and come here to Parliament when they feel like it. There was even one senator who got the boot because he was in Florida and had not been in the upper chamber for nearly eight months.

I am sorry, but if I went to Florida for eight months, I would hear about it from my constituents. If I did not do my riding work, if I did not go and see my constituents, if I did not listen to them, if I did not write to them, if I did not communicate with them, I would lose my seat before long. I think this is extremely important. We are much

closer to our constituents, and there are enough elected bodies already.

There are the municipalities, the school boards, the Government of Quebec and the federal government. I think we have enough already. These bodies cost voters a great deal of money. We have everything we need. Moreover, some provinces have abolished their upper chamber because it served absolutely no purpose.

I do not see why we should do things any differently here. We are totally opposed to this bill. I do not have to draw you a picture, because we have been saying so for 14 years. I do not see why we should do things any differently here. I do not see why the provinces should be excluded from making this decision. In any case, from what I have heard in this House, most members will vote against this bill. I hope so.

If we want real reform, then we should open the Constitution and hold a debate. I guarantee that Quebec will put its foot down, as it did in the National Assembly, and say that it does not want the Senate. We know how things work. If one province refuses, then there will be no Senate and there will be no changes.

Instead of introducing bills like these, I would prefer to see this House achieve constructive things, that we take care of social housing, the poor and the homeless, that we truly address real issues like the forestry sector, which is collapsing, and the manufacturing sector. That is what is needed. There is plenty of money floating around here. The Senate costs us a fortune. Let us take that money and spend it where it is truly needed, and not on the Senate, which, I repeat, has no obligation to voters, no representation obligations and no obligation even to this House.

Senators do whatever they like in that other place. They block bills on which we have worked here in the House for months, sometimes years. I remember one such bill that was blocked. It was a bill on the environment act, the framework legislation. We had worked on it for two years, redoing it, revising it, rewriting it, making sure it was much more up to date, since it had not been revised in 15 years. The Senate blocked us. They blocked it for nothing. That situation lasted for months, and we do not need that.

I think we are responsible here in this House. We are capable of making our own decisions. We are all elected members, all in responsible political parties. I think the Senate is an ineffective apparatus that we do not need. Thus, it must be understood, we will be voting against this bill.

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a whole bunch of things went through my mind when the member was speaking.

I hesitate to do this because it is not really in my nature to praise Liberals, but I do need to counter one of her statements. She said that she never saw a senator, that he was never in the riding, that he does not work, et cetera. I have an example to counter that.

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Even though every member of Parliament from Alberta is a Conservative, every one of them, unfortunately we are represented in the Senate by people from the Liberal Party and the NDP because they are whom the prime minister appointed.

I want to say something about one of the hard-working members from Alberta. His name is Tommy Banks. I see him frequently at functions in the city of Edmonton where my riding is. He appears there. He participates actively in the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies. He conducts music and does many good things there. One day some constituents were here. We went for a walk. I showed them the Senate. This was at about 10 o'clock at night. We went up into the Senate gallery and who was giving a speech? Senator Tommy Banks. I am not campaigning for him, but some of these people do good work and I would say that he is one of them.

The question is, do they have legitimacy having been appointed? I believe that if we gave them the legitimacy of an election, they could do good work and add to the democracy in our country.

Furthermore, I need to say it is just a hard fact that Ontario and Quebec have 60% of Canada's population. They have 60% of the seats in this place and unless we have a counterbalance in the Senate for the outlying regions, everywhere except Ontario and Quebec, we lose the democratic balance in this country in which the views from right across the country are expressed and represented in our houses. We do have to have a Senate. I am quite convinced of that, but I would like to see it as an elected Senate so that it has full legitimacy.

I would like the member's comments on that. I have always enjoyed listening to the member and I look forward to hearing what she says now.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Speaker, I have known my colleague for many years and we have sat on the same committees. I understand his point of view very well. He is lucky to have a senator come to his riding. That is one senator out of 105. I am delighted to hear it. For the past 15 years, I have laid a wreath on Remembrance Day in two areas of my riding and I have never seen a single senator attend the ceremonies.

We find the Senate to be truly useless. In this place, we are able to legislate, to make decisions and to vote on laws. In my opinion, citizens would appreciate us more because we could do the work more quickly. At present, there are so many instances where a bill can take two to three years before coming into force. That makes no sense. We could easily assume our responsibilities, right here, and ensure that our bills move along quickly. We adopt a bill, it goes to committee and witnesses are heard. They do the same thing in the other chamber, with the same people. It is an enormous waste of time.

We should be able to do it ourselves, without the Senate. We should be able to ensure that, as elected members, we do our work properly and that when there are elections, we can prove that we did a good job. The voters would then decide whether or not we deserved to be re-elected. That is not the case of the senators. I am opposed to the Senate.

I know that my colleague works very hard. I worked with him on a committee for many years. I think that we could act much more quickly if we had all these powers here and not in the other chamber, which I believe is useless.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enter this debate with great pleasure but also with great remorse because of the intellectual dishonesty that is being perpetrated by the government in bringing forward this bill at this time.

There is a reason that I make such harsh judgment of the government. I know it is not easy and there are certain government members who endeavour to provide honourable discourse and dialogue in this place. Yet when looking through the many pages of Bill C-20, Canadians might be left with the impression that the government is actually serious about Senate reform, somehow serious about democratic reform. This goes back to the days of the Reform Party and then the Canadian Alliance and various incarnations in between in speaking to what I believe was a sincere desire among Canadians to see some sort of accountability in all levels of office.

If the rules that were given to the Senate were applied to any other official body in this country, Canadians would be absolutely disgusted. They would be unable to understand why we would allow such an important function of government to run amok and have so few rules guiding its own merit and conduct. The ethics rules are not adhered to. On simply showing up for work, the attendance is abysmal. Before I entered politics I ran a small business. After looking at the attendance records for some senators, they would not have been hired, or if they had been hired, they certainly would have been let go as soon as possible. They simply do not show up and when they do, their effectiveness is found wanting.

Clearly there is much speculation in the media and by the pundits that we are on the eve of another election. There is potentially a series of confidence votes. The Prime Minister for some delusional reason seems interested in going back to the Canadian people for a mandate.

The government is showing its true colours in desiring an election because it is clearing the decks of all those bills. The Conservatives want to show some small significance of effort back to their base, that oh yes, they are engaged in the issue and here is their evidence and proof.

Lo and behold, like a gopher, Bill C-20 has popped up its head and pretends at some sincere effort. The government lost any momentum for discussion of the bill because it chose to prorogue Parliament. It chose to suspend Parliament which essentially killed all of the bills on the order paper that were in progress, such as its own crime bill and other bills, including this bill as well. All of that time was lost and it is more than two years since the last election.

Government Orders

The government introduced this bill, but allowed it to fall into the black hole of prorogation, a process which few Canadians understand. However, the government understood it well, and the desperate need for another throne speech was its excuse. It set the bill back 12 months or more and lost any kind of serious discussion.

The New Democrats are deeply interested at our core of finding a way to fix the fundamentally flawed institution that is known as the Senate in order to allow Canadians some sense that democracy is functioning and that they are getting value for money. There are 14 vacancies in the Senate and we get no sense of urgency whatsoever from the government to fill those vacancies, because ultimately those positions are filled through patronage appointments. That is the way it is done.

The government seeks credibility on this issue. It seeks to tell Canadians it is sincere about Senate reform and having true representation in the Senate. One of its first acts as a new government, having just run a campaign on accountability, was to appoint Michael Fortier from Montreal to the Senate. That was one of the first things the Prime Minister did after having spent not just weeks but months telling Canadians how sensible and accountable his government would be, how it would clean up the corruption of the Liberals. How many times did we hear it in this place from the Prime Minister and other people in his cabinet that they would not follow the record of the Liberals and not give crony patronage appointments, that they would do it differently?

One of the things the Conservatives were thinking of doing was reforming the Senate. Lo and behold, when given the reins of power, the first thing the Prime Minister decided to do was to force upon the people of Montreal a representative they did not choose. He chose to put someone into the Senate in one of the most important cabinet positions, one which controls billions of taxpayer dollars, someone who cannot be held to account in this place.

● (1200)

When that ministry, under his guidance, runs amok and spends money unaccountably or perhaps wrongly, he cannot be called to account. He simply cannot be given that direction and focus from this place. Canadians cannot see him, at least on the evening news, presenting his opinions in a place that was constructed to do just that. These walls were built and these desks were put in this place for that. Canadians imbued Parliament with the power to be accountable over many things. One is the law and another is the use of taxpayer dollars.

Yet the government has chosen to put an unaccountable, unelected person into the cabinet and stick that person in the Senate in order to get around this little annoyance called democracy, this little discomfort, which is that people in just about every urban centre in this country decided not to elect Conservative members. Rather than actually appeal to those voters in any kind of sensible way and present a platform on urban transit strategy or the serious issues affecting Canadians living in cities, the Conservatives decided that the appointment process was just so much easier. It is just so much easier to appoint someone to the Senate and allow that person to occupy one of the most critical positions in cabinet.

In this bill, despite the many pages and the many clauses and amendments, the government is clearly playing at the margins. It is

clearly tinkering at the edges, because at the end of the day, through all the sections on voting, discrepancy and penalties, it still remains the purview and the power of only one person in this country, and that is the Prime Minister, to choose whom he or she will allow to go into the Senate.

When we craft laws in this place, we do not craft them for any particular current representation or any current manifestation of government. We seek to create laws that will last throughout governments, that will stand the test of time and be a good representation of sound thinking.

It is wrong for the government to present a bill with the pretense that perhaps this Prime Minister may choose to honour the wishes of some of the voters who are constructing some electoral options in regard to it being a truly accountable forum and in regard to this bill somehow fixing a fundamental problem. Earlier in the discussion in regard to the functioning of the Senate, I called it an old beat-up jalopy that simply will not start. It simply will not function. The government's solution is a new coat of paint and some air in the tires, perhaps with windshield wipers if they are needed.

Sometimes there were debates and moments in history where, for some miraculous, rare spot in time, the Senate actually performed a function. It actually did something admirable in one of the current policy debates, but those moments are so rare that they remind me of a strange phenomenon I was looking up earlier. I was trying to find the actual taxonomic name of a flower in the Amazon. It buds only once every 25 years. It is quite rare. No one really knows when that is going to happen and it is a news item every time. Everyone rushes to the Amazon, the cameras show up, the flower buds and shows itself, and then quickly disappears again for some unknown period of time.

When I deal with my colleagues in the Senate, as admirable as some of them may be, I find that as an institution there is absolutely no lever to pull on. There is no accountability measure. I can recall before the previous government fell that the House of Commons, in the midst of an energy concern regarding seniors on fixed incomes, sought to pass a piece of legislation that would assist low income seniors with their home heating bills. I am sure all my colleagues who were here at that time remember that debate. We all remember how the parties got together in one of those rare moments in Parliament and decided to pass a bill at all stages and allow the bill to pass on to the Senate.

I met with a senator that day on entirely another issue. He told me to go back to my leadership and tell them that the bill, which we could find all party agreement to, had no guarantee whatsoever of getting through his chamber because the Senate had to be accountable. That senator was a Liberal, and of course he had no determinants of influence or bias whatsoever in terms of what was happening here in this place electorally with his elected colleagues, and he guaranteed me that if we rushed to an election too quickly, he assured me that this bill would not go through, and how dare the NDP bring down his Liberal government.

Government Orders

In fact, it was a bluff, of course. The bill passed and the money was received by needy seniors across the country, but the fact, and the point of this illustration, remains, which is that the accountability of that gentleman to represent this narrow, biased and partisan view, rather than the interests of this country and the people who vote for members in this place, shows what is so fundamentally dysfunctional about what it is the Senate has come to represent, which is a minority representation, protecting minority views, those of the powerful and the elite in this country.

• (1205)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley has given the House an eloquent representation of why this bill simply does not address some of the very serious problems with the Senate.

There are two arguments that have been made in the House. One is that this is incremental reform and it is trying to move the Senate in a direction that makes it more accountable to the Canadian public. The second is that it will increase regional representation.

Those of us from British Columbia know how desperately more adequate regional representation is needed. Recently a community trust bill was put forward in regard to the \$1 billion going to forestry and manufacturing and we saw how the voices in British Columbia simply were not adequately represented when that bill was developed. British Columbia's forestry industry is a significant part of its GDP, yet because that bill is allocated on a per capita basis, it is not going to deal with some of the serious forestry impacts in British Columbia.

Given the fact that this argument around regional representation simply does not wash in this bill, given the fact that what an elected Senate would do is contribute to more costs to the taxpayer in terms of running elections, given the fact that this was an opportunity for meaningful democratic reform—and perhaps we should have been looking at proportional representation—I want to ask the member what he thinks about the regional representation aspect of this legislation.

• (1210)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan is asking essentially two questions. One is around representation and the other is around value for money.

Since 1993, the Senate has received a 70% pay increase. The cost of the Senate on a yearly basis has been double the cost of inflation for this country. These are expensive folks to keep at the trough. This is not an inexpensive adventure. The government is suggesting that we hold more elections. There is some cost attached to that, although I always am cautious about the cost of democracy in that one moment when Canadians become the most powerful people in the country and cast a vote. There are costs incurred with that.

However, there is a tinkering at the edges in the representation. Most people in Skeena—Bulkley Valley in northwest British Columbia could not name a single senator. Maybe they could name two if they were really lucky. Being so far removed from Ottawa, they often wonder how they have been represented. There was actually representation. A senator did in fact visit our riding, to check on a business proposal in which he was an investor. He also sat on

the Senate committee that was going to approve legislation that helped the business proposal get forward.

That was the reason for his visit to my region. It was to check up on his business interests, to understand if there were certain tinkering with the bill that was before his committee, on which he was meant to be representing the views of all the country, one would imagine, that could aid and assist in his financial endeavours in my region. That was an incredible moment.

What was most interesting to me was that when the senator spoke with me, he was absolutely unabashed by this scenario. On the clear and present conflict of interest that was happening in front of us, he saw no problem with it at all. He did not think he had to recuse himself. He felt it was incumbent upon him to make sure the bill helped his business interests and those associated with him. How ridiculous does this get? This is what the people in my region see and then they wonder why this place is defended so assiduously, particularly by the Liberals, and even in this bill by the Conservatives.

Fundamentally, this bill does not get at the heart of the problem. It does not clear up the ethical gap that exists between what Canadians want and what senators on a daily basis feel is their right and privilege, and that is to defend their own interests rather than the interests of this country.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague's comments on our other chamber. I have to say that I understand the member's concerns about some of the issues of accountability and the fact that the NDP still believes the Senate should be abolished, which is not the case with the Liberal Party or, I think, with the Conservative Party. But to criticize the Senate in an unfair way, which is what is happening in this debate, I think is really not becoming of all of us as legislators.

There is valuable work being done in the Senate. The Senate has existed for a very long time. It is in the founding of our Constitution and our federation. If members have an issue with the Senate, they should put it out there, but to attack members of the Senate who actually have been appointed because of the fact that it is part of our Constitution I think also challenges the Constitution and the very foundations of this country.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, it is a riveting debate and there is an enormous number of Liberals here. As for the question or the fundamental that my esteemed colleague talked about, I think that what is fundamentally unbecoming is relying upon an ancient tradition and institution that has seen zero reform in its time and has enormous ethical implications on the work that we do here in this place.

I am seeing this with my own bill. It passed unanimously through the House, but the Senate has seen no urgency whatsoever to deal with it. There is no care or concern whatsoever for a bill that would help protect children from harmful chemicals. There is no concern that the bill will die if they do not take it on with urgency. They have put my bill off for some months. That is not becoming. That is unethical.

Government Orders

•(1215)

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-20.

Let me begin with this statement, which members might find familiar: our “federation is only as strong as the democratic institutions that underpin it”. It might be familiar to members because this statement was affirmed by the House when it adopted the government’s Speech from the Throne for this sitting of Parliament.

We might not agree on everything in this place. In fact, across the country we disagree on a variety of things related to our political process, but whatever else may divide us, I think we agree that we share a commitment and a loyalty to federalism and to democracy. We have shared loyalties to those things.

As members of the House of Commons, as representatives of Canadians, we are all committed to continuing to strengthen our federation by strengthening our democratic institutions. We can look back at the history of Parliament and see that electoral and institutional reforms aided us as we moved down the pathway of making those federal and democratic reforms.

Because of the efforts of our predecessors in these respects, Canada is a free and democratic society. In fact, we are a model for aspiring democracies the world over. Our federal structure is looked to as a guide for constitution makers and nation builders everywhere.

We have merited this reputation because we have been willing to change. We have aspired to reflect democracy’s and federalism’s proudest ambitions. As members of the House, we share the responsibility to carry on that proud tradition.

I am proud to represent the beautiful province of British Columbia. From time to time, I speak to people about democratic reform. They might talk to me about proportional representation. They might talk to me about the voting age. They might talk to me about a variety of things, but inevitably what I hear most about is Senate reform. This system that we have today bothers them. We need to respond to that.

The Senate must be reimagined. It must be recreated in the image of a democratic and federal Canada. I believe that our shared commitments to democracy and federalism should lead us all to the conclusion that we need to do something about the Senate.

Maintaining, protecting and promoting the reputation of Canada is a responsibility of Canadian lawmakers. The subject matter of our present debate, the Senate appointment consultations act, gives us an opportunity to fulfill this responsibility.

The extent of reform that is possible is no small undertaking. We could aim for comprehensive reform that will satisfy the full scale of federal and democratic change in the Senate. To do that, though, constitutional change is necessary.

However, short of comprehensive reform, some change can be effected by this present Parliament. I believe it is our responsibility to do what we can now and to hold on to the hope that we can do more in the not too distant future.

I believe the bill before us is a promising legislative initiative. It speaks to both the federal and the democratic ambitions of Canada and seeks to reform the Senate to promote those ambitions.

With this legislative initiative, the opinions of Canadians will be sought on whom the Prime Minister should recommend for appointment to the Senate. That is basically what the bill is all about. With this single act, we can effectuate immediate reform that will answer part of the Senate’s democratic and federal deficiencies. To neglect to pursue this opportunity is to fail in our responsibilities as members of the House.

In a democracy, citizens should understand that they are participating in the law-making process and they should have that opportunity. By having the opportunity to choose their representatives, as they do in the House, they engage in that very participation.

In fact, I never lose sight of the fact that I serve here at the pleasure of the people of Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission. Citizens have participated in the selection of every member of the House. However, citizens currently have no participatory role in choosing who sits in the Senate.

Given that the powers of the Senate in the law-making process are similar in many respects to the powers of the House, citizens similarly should be participating in the selection of senators. The Senate appointment consultations act would give them that opportunity. To deny Canadians that opportunity is to deny them their proper place in both Houses of Parliament.

•(1220)

In pursuit of Canada’s proud democracy, we should support giving Canadians the opportunity to participate in deciding who shall sit in both Houses of Parliament.

Now in days past the decision to divide Parliament into two Houses was made in the light of the federal aspirations of Canada. The House of Commons was designed to reflect proportional representation, or at least mostly so, of all Canadians, whereas the Senate was designed to reflect Canada’s regions.

The Senate appointment consultations act proposes not only to give citizens of Canada an opportunity to speak to their preferences on senatorial appointments, it also allows the regions to speak, not just individual citizens. By allowing for consultations per province, the attachment of a senatorial nominee to his or her region will be strengthened.

The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley who spoke previously is right, I think, that most Canadians cannot name very many of the senators who represent their region. He is right about that, even in B. C. where we have a relatively small number of senators, something that also has to be fixed along the way.

I think part of that is due to the fact that we do not have any way of participating in the process. In fact, if we follow this bill and put in place a consultation process, an election by all accounts would give the opportunity for those nominees to better connect with the people in their region. So the relationship between Canada’s regions and Canada’s senators will be promoted by allowing citizens to have a say in who should represent them.

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This may be the most important point of all, senators will owe their allegiance to the region that nominated them and elected them, and not to the Prime Minister or party that appointed them. That is a very important point. I believe this will allow the Senate to regain its constitutional status.

Some will maintain that Senate reform may well be necessary, while the democratic and federalism deficiencies are obvious, and while change is within our grasp, there are other more pressing matters than Senate reform. No doubt the members of this House face many important matters that warrant our attention. We consider them day after day. However, when properly understood, Senate reform should be recognized by all members of Parliament to be a priority.

First, this House committed itself to Senate reform by approving the government Speech from the Throne. This House committed itself during the lifetime of this Parliament to the priorities set out therein. This House has acted on many of those priorities, and now it is time to devote itself to this one.

Second, Senate reform is not a challenge that will be forgotten should we neglect to act now. The Senate is an essential component of Parliament. Unlike the position of the NDP, I believe it has an important role to play. Few actions of this House and no bill passed by this House may proceed without Senate approval.

It reflects poorly on this House that we have had for so long the possibility of correcting the democratic deficits of the Upper House and have failed to do so. Yet, we now have more than the mere possibility of acting, we now have the opportunity to act. A bill is before us and it would be to ignore our responsibility not to stand behind this legislative initiative.

Third, the call for Senate reform has been expressed both democratically and in each one of Canada's regions. Canadians, when polled, have responded enthusiastically to the proposals for Senate reform put forward by the government, including this bill, the Senate appointment consultations act. In a federal democratic state like Canada, when the democratic expressions of citizens throughout the regions affirm a legislative initiative, that should be the guide by which Parliament should act.

These are all reasons that encourage the members of this House to stand in favour of the Senate appointment consultations act. As for me, I will be proud to tell my constituents that I have fulfilled my responsibility to them as their representative in Parliament. I will be proud to tell them that when given the opportunity to support a measure that would further Canada's democratic and federal ambitions, a measure that enjoys decisive, regional and popular support, I voted in favour. I encourage all members to do the same.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the chance to speak to this bill entitled An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate.

From the outset I would like to say that we are against referring this bill to committee before second reading. In fact, we are against

the very principle of the bill, and we believe that no amendment in committee could make it acceptable.

I would add that a lot of hypocrisy surrounds the tabling of this bill. To support that claim, consider that the Senate currently consists of 61 Liberals, 24 Conservatives and 4 independents. I say it is hypocritical because the current government is very uncomfortable with the Senate and the people in it. It is also uncomfortable with the work done by the Senate.

We are against this bill because we think that Canadian institutions cannot be reformed. Just look at the Meech and Charlottetown accords. Twice Canada has rejected the aspirations of Quebec.

Furthermore, the Bloc Québécois was born in 1990, as hon. members will remember, precisely because Canada could not be reformed. Even the Harper government admits that Canada cannot be reformed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. We do not use the surname of an hon. member in the House. Please refer to him by title or riding.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, excuse me.

So I will say that even the Conservative government admits that Canada cannot be reformed. It is trying to reform the Senate piecemeal. It is trying to take things away from the Senate piecemeal, rather than by a constitutional amendment. To the Bloc, it is obvious: it is impossible to amend the Constitution in any meaningful way.

Attempts have been made to reform the Senate on numerous occasions, but nothing has ever resulted. History is repeating itself. You are quite young, Mr. Speaker. We who are a little older have read widely. If we look back a few years, we see that attempts have been made to reform the Senate on numerous occasions. Senator Serge Joyal, who is still living, has written a book about Senate reform. In that book, he listed 26 proposals for Senate reform, in only the last 30 years. So the problem of Senate reform is not a recent one. We assume that we may again find that we have to say it is not possible to do it.

In the opinion of the Bloc Québécois, the Senate is a useless institution. Originally, in addition to being the Chamber for sober second thought about bills, the Senate was also supposed to protect regional interests. Clearly equal representation of the regions in the Senate should, in theory, provide a counterbalance to representation in the Commons.

What we see at present is that party affiliation has got the better of regional representation, thereby nullifying the very objectives of that Chamber, which instead tends to replicate what goes on in the House of Commons. It is as if the Senate has become a second House of Commons.

The indirect election of senators would not improve this situation, in the Bloc's opinion. On the contrary, the electoral process tends to strengthen the role of political parties, to the point that indirectly elected senators would likely be more concerned about the interests of their party than about those of their region.

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How can this government justify preserving a Senate that would have responsibilities similar to those of the House of Commons, of the parliamentarians who sit in this Chamber? This would create duplication and would cost an estimated \$81 million. If we elect senators and they have the same powers as the members of this House, we are going to be creating duplication that will cost a great deal in public funds.

Term limits for senators and indirect elections of senators do not make the Senate more democratic. Under the bill that has been presented to us, in our opinion, it would be virtually impossible to unseat senators. The public consultation is not binding on the Prime Minister.

As well, electors are not all equal before the Senate. And eligibility for the position of senator is not open to everyone, again under the bill. An indirectly elected Senate would undermine the existing parliamentary system in the event of a deadlock between the two chambers. And lastly, the senators have the power to oppose measures enacted by the House of Commons, which is elected.

Do you see all of the hypocrisy in this? I would add to this that by strengthening the legitimacy of the federal Senate, Stephen Harper is trying to infringe the authority of the provincial premiers. And we know that the provincial premiers have—

• (1230)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Once again, the hon. member must name the member's riding or title, and not the member's name.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, I must be very drawn to the current Prime Minister, since I keep referring to him by name.

By further legitimizing the federal Senate, this government wants to undermine the authority of provincial premiers. This Prime Minister is marginalizing the Quebec nation by creating an elected Senate. Under the pretext of an orthodox reform of federalism, this Conservative government is proposing shattering the balance of the federation.

In Australia and the United States, having an elected senate has enhanced the legitimacy of the federal government and has nationalized public life rather than serve the representation of the federated states within federal institutions. To be heard in Congress, the American states have been reduced to being lobbyists. Senators elected to represent an entire province would overshadow the authority of the provincial premiers and run the risk of supplanting them as regional representatives.

Quebec has always asked that the Senate be abolished for the simple reason that it wants, above all, to have powers of its own. This is what Robert Bourassa and Gil Rémillard asked for through constitutional laws at the time of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords. It was never accepted. A constitutional amendment was never possible for Quebec. This time, since this Prime Minister is incapable of making a constitutional amendment for the senators, he is asking that we gradually strip away their mandate and eligibility.

We are definitely against the Senate. Clearly, we are against the very principle of the bill. No amendment could make it more constitutional, equal or legitimate for us.

• (1235)

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's remarks and I see great logic in her arguments. That it exactly the position of the Bloc Québécois.

However, I heard a Conservative member say this morning that the Bloc wanted to see the Senate abolished because there would be fewer federalists representing Quebec in Ottawa. He added that that was the reason why the Conservatives wanted to make changes and, through Bill C-20 reform the Senate.

I would like my colleague to tell me if there is a consensus in Quebec with regard to the potential abolition of the Senate—which some of us hope for.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

There is no consensus as such on the idea of totally abolishing the Senate. It is not a top priority. However, the Bloc Québécois has noticed that the minimum condition set by successive governments in Quebec on Senate reform has always been clear: there will be no Senate reform without first settling the question of Quebec's status.

I mentioned earlier that in 1989 Robert Bourassa said that he did not wish to discuss Senate reform before the Meech Lake accord was ratified. In 1992, Gil Rémillard said that Quebec's signing of an agreement on Senate reform would depend on the outcome of negotiations on the concept of a distinct society, the division of powers and the federal spending power.

Finally, with Bill C-20, the government is proceeding with piecemeal reform of the Senate without satisfying the minimum conditions stipulated by Quebec.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my Bloc Québécois colleague for her eloquent speech. I learned a lot from listening to it.

My question is theoretical because I share my party's reservations about this bill. Theoretically, an elected Senate would mean more elected representatives from Quebec in Ottawa. Perhaps some Bloc senators might even be elected. It could happen; it happened in the House of Commons.

Is the member against the idea of increasing the number of elected representatives from Quebec in Ottawa, and perhaps even increasing the number of Bloc members elected in Quebec?

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question, which I find very funny.

First, I hope that there will never be any Bloc Québécois senators in Ottawa. There should not be, because the Bloc Québécois is not here to occupy seats in the Senate. It is here to stand up for Quebecers' interests.

Second, nowhere in the law or the bill that has been introduced does it say that there would be more elected senators from Quebec and Ontario.

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Third, this bill was introduced because the current makeup of the Senate is making things difficult for the current government. The government is doing everything it can to discredit the Senate. I happen to think that those people work very hard. Nevertheless, we in Quebec do not want to get involved in Senate reform because we do not believe in a second, upper house. Not only is this a historical fact—as I said earlier when I talked about Gil Rémillard and Robert Bourassa—but Quebec has always wanted to be recognized and has always wanted provincial governments to have certain privileges. Governments of the other provinces will want exactly the same thing.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak about Bill C-20.

Electoral reform is something that I hear about often from my constituents in Leeds—Grenville. Always at the top of their list is what we are going to do about the Senate. I would like to take this opportunity to give a bit of the history of discussions about changing the Senate in our country.

First, dissatisfaction with the Senate as produced for us by the Fathers of Confederation—the Senate being something which they spent more time talking about than any other subject at the conferences leading up to Confederation in 1867—began almost immediately.

In 1874 there was an extensive debate in the Parliament of Canada about reforming the Senate and in particular, the appointment process, but nothing happened.

In 1887 at the first interprovincial meeting of premiers, there was a call for an elected Senate, but nothing happened.

In 1906 through to 1909, there were extensive debates in both federal houses about Senate reform, but again, nothing happened.

In 1921, Liberal leader Mackenzie King included Senate reform in his party's election platform. This was followed by extensive debates in both houses in 1924 and 1925 on the need for reform of the Senate, and again, nothing happened.

At the 1927 Dominion-Provincial Conference, Senate reform was a main topic of discussion. All the politicians said there was a need for reform, but again, nothing happened.

There were extensive debates in the Senate in 1951 and in the House in 1955 on the need for Senate reform. Again, nothing happened.

In 1965, the Pearson government, following up on a bill introduced by the previous Diefenbaker government, was able to have passed through Parliament an amendment reducing the terms of senators from life to age 75. That was not very revolutionary, to say the least. And that was it. There has really been no change in the formal structure of the Senate since that time.

In 1972, a special joint House and Senate committee, the Molgat-McGuigan committee, held extensive hearings across the country and recommended the need to reform the appointment process for the Senate, if nothing else. Again, nothing happened.

In 1978, the Trudeau Liberal government proposed a bill which would abolish the Senate and replace it with a new body to be known as the house of the provinces, with at least half of the members chosen by the provinces. Again, in the end, nothing happened.

After that, there was a series of commissions and studies: the Pepin-Robarts committee in 1979; the Quebec Liberal Party beige paper in 1980; the House-Senate joint committee, the Molgat-Cosgrove committee in 1984; the Macdonald commission in 1985; the House-Senate joint committee, the Beaudoin-Dobbie committee, in 1992. All recommended basic reform in the appointment process, with election most often as the preferred option, but again, nothing happened.

One of the reasons there was this continued pattern of engaging in public discussion of basic Senate reform followed by no action was that often the argument was made that such reform could only be tied in with other more comprehensive constitutional changes. Thus, attempts at that method, such as what happened in the Charlottetown efforts, failed. The other reason is that the government could then use all of that as an excuse for why nothing gets done.

I am hearing the same refrain and the same arguments coming now from those who still do not want to reform the Senate, in particular, those in the Liberal Party. That is because continued inaction on this file is in their clear partisan self-interest.

However, this government, unlike all previous governments, has chosen not to hide behind these excuses and long history of non-achievement. We have decided to boldly move forward with that incremental reform that we know for sure the federal Parliament and government can initiate and accomplish on its own without going down the complicated path of formal constitutional amendments involving the provinces or some kind of wholesale reopening of the Constitution, something that we know would be very difficult.

In the first session of this Parliament, we introduced two quite modest bills to get the ball rolling in a very serious way to achieve Senate reform. There was Bill S-4, to reduce the term of all future Senate appointees from the current potential of 45 years, something which my constituents find quite offensive, in that someone who is appointed at age 30 is able to sit until the mandatory retirement age of 75. We wanted to change the term to eight years.

• (1245)

The bill would provide for the ability of the Prime Minister to consult Canadians on their preferences as to who should serve them in the Senate before making such appointments.

What is the actual atrocious record of Senate appointments that both major political parties, while in government, not including the current government, have been of guilty since Confederation?

Sir John A. Macdonald, our first prime minister, in 19 years of office appointed only 1 Liberal and 1 Independent. The rest were all Conservative. I would personally not see that as a bad thing.

However, as I go on, Sir Wilfrid Laurier in his 15 years in office appointed only Liberals.

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Sir Robert Borden, in his nine years of office appointed only Conservatives, except when he led a union coalition government during the war.

Mackenzie King in his 22 years in office appointed 103 senators and all but 2 were Liberals.

Louis St. Laurent in his nine years in office appointed fifty-five senators and all but three were Liberals.

John Diefenbaker in his six years in office appointed thirty-seven senators and all but one were Conservative.

Lester Pearson in his five years in office appointed thirty-nine senators and all but one were Liberal.

Pierre Trudeau in his 15 years of office appointed 81 senators and all but 11 were Liberals.

Joe Clark in his nine months in office appointed eleven senators, all of them Conservative.

Brian Mulroney in his nine years of office appointed fifty-one senators, some of whom are still sitting in the Senate today, and all but two of them were Conservatives. One of the two was Stan Waters, appointed as a Reform senator by Mr. Mulroney due to his election by the voters of Alberta in the spirit of Meech Lake, which we all know failed in the end.

Jean Chrétien in his 10 years in office appointed 75 senators and all but 3 were Liberals.

Paul Martin in his 23 months in office appointed 17 senators, only 5 of whom were not Liberal.

Neither Kim Campbell nor John Turner appointed any senators, although Turner did Trudeau's bidding in that regard, as we know. It was something that was very prominent in the election of 1984.

I have had an equal opportunity to be a critic of both major parties that have held office. However, when it comes to the current Prime Minister, we finally have a breaking of this historical pattern.

Since taking office only 21 months ago, the Prime Minister has only made 2 appointments to the Senate, and there are currently 13 vacancies. One of those appointments, Senator Fortier, was to ensure that the island of Montreal was represented in the cabinet, with the commitment from that appointee that he would resign his seat in the Senate as soon as the general election was called, and seek election to the House.

The other was the recent appointment of Senator Bert Brown on the basis that he, on two separate occasions, was democratically chosen by the people of Alberta as their preference to be selected to serve in the Senate.

Therefore, the government has done as much as it can to break this pattern of no action on Senate reform. It is now up to the opposition parties in the House and the Liberal majority in the Senate to wake up and smell the political coffee. There will either be reform or Canadians might well choose abolition.

I have laid out quite clearly the history of what has happened in terms of efforts to reform the Senate, but the bill goes a long way

toward moving the ball forward, which Canadians support. I I urge the other parties to support the bill.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague was doing quite well for a while, as he went through the history, showing the overwhelming preponderance of promoting partisan interests above the interests of the country. Whether the prime minister had been Conservative or Liberal or some variation in between, they seemed to consistently have a high percentage of appointing their friends and buddies to the Senate.

The problem the NDP has with the bill and its many pages, and there are many, is this. We have a body that has very few ethical guidelines, which the bill does not seek to correct in terms of senators being able to sit both in conflict of interest for business negotiations while also sitting in the Senate. It also has increased its own pay packet by 70% since 1993, and the cost of expenses go up double what that is because of inflation. The fundamentals of this are wrong.

The hon. member did okay until he got to the point where the appointment of Senator Michael Fortier came in, and there was some attempt to justify why this abhorrence of democracy and justice was okay. This has been the history of that place. This has been the history of failed attempts at reform.

For a government to roll out a bill, prior to a series of more confidence motions and delays in real action, shows a certain ineffectiveness and insincerity to get the job done.

• (1250)

Mr. Gord Brown: Mr. Speaker, in the case of Senator Fortier, he has agreed that as soon as a general election is called, he will immediately resign his seat in the Senate and seek a seat in this House.

However, Canadians are looking for Senate reform. They have been asking for this for a long time. We have seen a history, which I outlined, of attempts to change the upper chamber. This bill is an attempt to do that, and it is something we can do.

It is easy to stand in the House and talk about theoretical ideas and attempts to change things that are impossible to change without real constitutional change. This can be done. This Parliament can make a difference. I urge the hon. member to get behind the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague and I really liked his comment about the appointments by both sides.

However, I have looked in vain to find what role there is for the Senate in 2008, 2009, or 2010. I am not talking about 1874. What use will it serve in the future with unelected members? What useful role does the Senate play that we should want to preserve it?

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Brown: Mr. Speaker, Canadians have become increasingly frustrated with what goes on in the Senate and their view that it should be an elected chamber.

The bill goes a long way toward satisfying something for which Canadians have asked. Once again, I urge the hon. member to get behind the bill.

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Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the theme of my colleague from Leeds—Grenville's speech could have been that nothing happened.

One of the great things that disappointed me and, as a westerner, annoyed me to no end throughout my years here was the prime ministers of the previous Liberal administrations, first the majority governments of Jean Chrétien and then more recently the short minority government of member for LaSalle—Émard, kept saying that they would refuse to do any piecemeal Senate reform. That was the term they used, which was very annoying not only to myself but to many Canadians who I believe looked for some progress.

As my colleague has said, there have been repeated failed attempts ever since Confederation to bring about any change. Could he briefly address this business that piecemeal is perhaps the only way we will ever get any meaningful Senate reform, incrementally, taking it step by step, and that this is an important first step?

• (1255)

Mr. Gord Brown: Mr. Speaker, those who do not want to make any change consistently hide behind the argument that they will not make any piecemeal changes because not all the changes needed will be made.

This is an attempt to do something to make it an elected Senate. The government has put this forward. I urge all members to get behind it. We can make a difference in the Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is opposed to the bill concerning the appointment of senators. Parliament cannot reform the Senate unilaterally or without a constitutional amendment. At any rate, even a reformed Senate is a useless institution.

Canadian institutions cannot be reformed. The numerous attempts to reform the Senate illustrate perfectly the “Canadian dead end.” Proposals to reform the Senate date back as far as 1874. Barely seven years after the creation of the Dominion of Canada, the Senate was the subject of criticism and calls for reform.

A motion in April 1874, by member of Parliament David Mills, recommended that “our Constitution ought to be so amended as to confer upon each Province the power of selecting its own Senators, and of defining the mode of their election”. Now, 133 years later, we are still debating this issue. Senator Serge Joyal, who wrote a book on Senate reform, identified at least 26 proposals for Senate reform in the past 30 years alone.

The Bloc Québécois believes that the Senate reform proposed by the current government is a slap in the face for Quebec federalists. The minimum position of successive Quebec governments has always been clear: no Senate reform without first settling the question of Quebec's status.

In 1989, Robert Bourassa said he did not want to discuss Senate reform until the Meech Lake accord was ratified. In 1992, Gil Rémillard said that signature by Canada of an accord involving Senate reform would depend on the outcome of negotiations on the concept of a distinct society, division of powers and the federal spending power.

By means of Bills C-19 and C-20, the current Conservative Prime Minister is trying to reform the Senate piecemeal, without having satisfied the minimum conditions stipulated by Quebec.

Clearly the Senate cannot be changed unilaterally and without a constitutional amendment. The Canadian Constitution is a federal constitution. Consequently, there are reasons why changes to the essential characteristics of the Senate cannot be made by Parliament alone and should be part of the constitutional process involving Quebec and the provinces.

In the late 1970s, the Supreme Court of Canada examined Parliament's ability to amend on its own the constitutional provisions concerning the Senate. According to its decision, known as “Authority of Parliament in relation to the Upper House”, in 1980, decisions pertaining to major changes to the essential characteristics of the Senate cannot be made unilaterally.

All reforms of Senate powers, the means of selecting senators, the number of senators to which each province is entitled and residency requirements for senators, can only be made in consultation with Quebec and the provinces.

Benoît Pelletier, the Quebec Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, and MNA for Chapleau, reiterated Quebec's traditional position on November 7, 2007, which was not so long ago:

The Government of Quebec does not believe that this falls exclusively under federal jurisdiction. Given that the Senate is a crucial part of the Canadian federal compromise, it is clear to us that under the Constitution Act, 1982, and the regional veto act, the Senate can be neither reformed nor abolished without Quebec's consent.

That same day, in November 2007, Quebec's National Assembly unanimously passed the following motion—I hope the government is listening:

• (1300)

That the National Assembly of Québec reaffirm to the Federal Government and to the Parliament of Canada that no modification to the Canadian Senate may be carried out without the consent of the Government of Québec and the National Assembly.

Quebec is not alone in opposing the idea of an elected Senate. The outgoing Premier of Saskatchewan, Lorne Calvert, and the Premier of Manitoba, Gary Doer, have called for abolishing the Senate instead of trying to reform it. The Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty, has also expressed concerns about whether electing senators to the Senate might not make the inequalities even worse.

In summary, indirect election of senators would change the rapport between the House of Commons and the Senate. These changes cannot be made unilaterally without the consent of the provinces and without the consent of Quebec, recognized as a nation by the House of Commons. Whether the Senate is reformed or not, it is a useless institution.

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Initially, the Senate was supposed to be a chamber of sober second thought that also protected regional interests. Regional equality in the Senate was supposed to counterbalance representation in the House. However, it seems that partisanship has gained the upper hand over regional representation, thus rendering null and void the purpose of the other place, which has a tendency to follow the lead of the House of Commons.

How can this government justify having a Senate whose responsibilities would be much like those of the House of Commons at a cost of \$81 million per year? All the provinces have done away with their upper chambers. No province has had an upper chamber since Quebec abolished its legislative council in 1968, and as far as I know, the provinces are able to govern appropriately.

Bill C-20 would not make the Senate democratic. Public consultation is not binding. Bill C-20 provides for public “consultation” to choose senators. The Prime Minister maintains the authority to appoint or not appoint the senators chosen by the public. The Prime Minister could therefore decide not to appoint a candidate selected by the public. The background paper provided by the government concerning this bill states: “The Prime Minister can take into account the results of the consultation when making recommendations to the Governor General regarding future representatives of a province or territory in the Senate”.

Besides, how can we trust this Prime Minister, who did not hesitate to appoint Michael Fortier to the Senate, even though he himself criticized the Liberals’ partisan appointments to the Senate? The current Prime Minister’s real motivation is to marginalize the nation of Quebec. Under the pretext of an orthodox reform of federalism, the Conservative government is proposing shattering the balance of the federation.

In Australia and the United States, having an elected senate has enhanced the legitimacy of the federal government and has “nationalized” public life rather than serve the representation of the federated states within federal institutions. To be heard in Congress, the American states have been reduced to being lobbyists. Senators elected to represent an entire province would overshadow the authority of the provincial premiers and run the risk of supplanting them as regional representatives. That is what the proponents of a “triple E” Senate want: a federal Parliament that would be more legitimate because its elected members were more sensitive to regional interests. Quebecers would never stand idly by as their own province blithely accepted Senate reform.

• (1305)

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to voice my support for the bill. It is important that we start modifying and modernizing the Senate.

I do not agree with the Bloc member in wanting to abolish the Senate. The Senate does a lot of good work. If we look at some of the committee work it has done, even in its special interest and the heavy patronage that happens there, it still accomplishes a lot of good work. It is important to have that sober second thought go through the bills and motions that come from this House.

We need to look at the big picture. If we look at other parliaments and congresses across the Americas, almost all of them run in bicameral parliaments, just like we do, and all of them have elected senates. Whether it is Chile, Colombia, Brazil, the United States or Mexico, they all have elected senates.

We need to move down that path and Bill C-20 would help us to do that and to finally get rid of the palace of patronage. It is time for us to look at the hard facts. We are moving forward with proper bills to limit the terms of senators to eight years. We are moving ahead to have an election as a consultation with voters across the country to select the senators they want sitting in the palace of patronage and essentially change that into a functional democracy, the way it should be.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, the best thing we can do with the Senate is quite simply get rid of it. The monarchy existed in ancient times, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, and had absolute power over the people. It is outdated. The principle of the genetic lottery of monarchs is outdated. It is fine for the history books—it is very interesting reading—or for the king and queen of the carnival.

The Senate is an institution that serves no purpose other than to hand out goodies to the political parties in power. The government party demonstrated this earlier. This has to stop. The provinces and Quebec, within the current federal system, do not have a Senate and work very well.

If we want studies to be carried out, since that is what the Senate does, we can turn to academics, professionals, intellectuals and citizens to meet the needs of the House of Commons and of the citizens of Quebec and Canada. We do not need a senate.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague’s speech. It is interesting to note the reference to the American model, where elected senators represent the regions. It is not surprising that the Conservatives look to the American model, where senators are more influential than the governors of the various states.

The fact that an elected official comes from a province does not guarantee that he will defend the interests of that province. We see that with Quebec’s Conservative members, who are preparing to vote for this bill contrary to the unanimous motion of the National Assembly—the only parliament to represent Quebecers—stating that this bill must be withdrawn and that this issue must not be pursued. Ten elected Quebec Conservatives will vote in favour of this measure.

Since the elected Quebec Conservatives do not represent Quebecers, why do we believe that elected senators would be any better?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Gatineau has 30 seconds to respond.

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Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is completely right. For there to be democracy, people must be elected as part of a decision-making body. We do not need two decision-making bodies within a single state. The House of Commons and the National Assembly are where elected members debate topics and bills in order to vote for or against a given bill, amended or not. There must be a vision that responds to the needs of the people. A senate is nothing more than a political favour.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak this afternoon in the House of Commons and to represent the good folks of Crowfoot, Alberta, central and east central Alberta.

This is one of those subjects that is dear to the heart of, I think, most Canadians. When we consult Canadians about the importance for the democratization of Parliament and the democratization of our institutions in Parliament, most Canadians point to the Senate and say that we should reform it or abolish it but that we must make certain that the status quo does not remain.

Consequently, that is what prompted the government to bring forward Bill C-20, to bring forward positive change to an institution that needs it.

I remember many years ago in the late 1980s, probably even the mid-1980s, when there was change sweeping across the country. A new political party started in the west and a new political party started in Quebec. They were new parties with new ideas. Canadians at that point in time were very disappointed when they looked at the Senate. They saw an institution that was not functioning right. We saw cases where there were senators who spent most of their time in Mexico and it frustrated Canadians knowing that they were paying with their tax dollars to allow this type of so-called representation to take place.

At that point in time, Albertans, especially in the area where I live, started to talk about the need for this type of Senate reform. Ideas came forward. At that point in time, a Senate election was held and a gentleman by the name of Stan Waters became the senator in waiting in Alberta.

The prime minister of the day, Prime Minister Mulroney, and that government eventually saw Senator Waters appointed to the upper chamber, the Senate, and we saw representation.

Mr. Waters travelled throughout Alberta, throughout the west and throughout Canada talking about the need for Senate reform. I recall those meetings and I recall having him even to my small community in Alberta. I recall him talking about how the Senate started, how the Fathers of Confederation realized the importance of representation by population. When they formulated the idea of this House, they knew that representation by population was a fundamental in democracy and they wanted to achieve that.

As we have already heard in other speeches today, the body of Parliament was formed into constituencies and that is the way that the House still is.

However, the Fathers of Confederation spent much of their time as well debating, planning and strategizing as to what the Senate would look like. They realized at the time that in a country as large as Canada, a country with the huge differences in geography, the differences from the east to the west, that we needed something to balance out representation by population so that our regions would be protected. They realized at the time that a populace area would have the ability to take advantage of less populated areas, take advantage of those resources and take advantage of many of the issues that less populated areas wanted. Consequently, they came up with this idea of a Senate that would not be as political and as partisan as this House.

We talk about partisanship within the House of Commons. To be quite honest, I think it always will be partisan because we are elected in political parties with very different political agendas.

The balance in all of this was to have a Senate that could sit back, represent regions and ensure their area and their district were not taken advantage of.

• (1315)

I had the opportunity of sitting with a Liberal senator on the plane one day and I appreciated what he said. He talked about how in the very early days, I am not certain if it was in Confederation or perhaps when he started sitting in the Senate, maybe that was even in early Confederation, Senators were not even allowed into caucus meetings because there was a differentiation between the Senate and the House, and it was not to be as political.

We can see that what has happened is that we have moved away from that type of time and we see now where the Senate is very political. We see now where the Senate is halting legislation that the government is bringing forward. We have heard the speeches this afternoon about the number of prime ministers who have only appointed senators from their own political parties. Why? It is because they realized that it was a political appointment. Many of them were nothing more than fundraisers for political parties and now they sit in the Senate.

The current legislation comes along because Canadians are saying that they want their Senate to become more accountable and democratic.

Last Saturday evening in my riding of Crowfoot, I had the opportunity to attend a meeting that was a fundraiser in preparation for a potential election, a fundraiser where we had 300 people on a night that was remarkably cold, probably with a wind chill colder than minus 30, in Trochu, Alberta. Individuals came together to talk about what was happening here in Parliament and what was happening throughout the country.

Senator Brown came to the meeting and gave a speech. He was there with his wife and she received a remarkable ovation, as well. If anyone knows Alice, they would understand why that would be, but Senator Brown gave a clear indication as to why he felt that this hope of Senate reform was still alive.

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He talked about speaking to provinces, about going out and talking to premiers, and explaining the reasons why this was not just good for one part of the country but why this was good for all parts of the country, and how premiers now were starting to understand that this kind of legislation, Bill C-20, is doable.

Why do I say it is doable? Bill C-20 is not facilitated by the opening of a constitutional debate. It is legislation that very simply would allow individuals to elect, allow individuals a voice, and allow individuals a say in who would represent their areas in the Senate.

That is why we re-introduced the bill. This is not something that is going to divide our country. Very clearly, one of the priorities of the government is to keep a strong unified country. We will not bring forward any type of legislation that would bring disunity to our country.

Our economy is strong, our government is clean and the country is together. We are unified. We are seeing that today and the legislation is not to pit one area against another but it is to allow all Canadians to have a voice in who would sit and represent them in the Senate.

We promised in the last election, and also brought it forward in the Speech from the Throne, that we would take a step-by-step approach to reforming the Senate. In some ways I wish that we were sitting here today and had a bill that was very similar to what we used to call the triple E Senate. That is not what this bill is about.

Many of my constituents would say the bill is not enough. I would tell them this is an incremental step in the reform of an institution that so desperately needs it. All Canadians recognize that the Senate must change. I think most of us here in the House recognize and realize there has to be some change. The status quo is not good enough.

The government is committed to leading that change. For that reason we bring forward this bill and we are excited to debate it in the House.

• (1320)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I truly get a sense of sincerity in terms of what my colleague's constituents have been calling for over a number of years. Folks in Skeena are sometimes disgusted by what they see in the other chamber.

I was trying to find two important features in the bill in terms of accountability. One is around the present conduct of senators in terms of ethics and the potential conflict of interest with their work and their public life. As it stands right now senators can engage in business interests as representatives of the government without any apparent conflict of interest, something that we as elected members are not allowed to do. No individual elected to any position in the country is allowed to do that. Is there any proposal in the bill that would close that ethical gap?

As we all know, senators are appointed at the whim of the Prime Minister, and it still appears to be at the whim of the Prime Minister. Maybe this Prime Minister is interested in appointing individuals to the Senate who are elected through this process, but as written in the

bill, the power still remains with one single person. Is this rectified in the bill?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, the bill does not take away the fact that the Prime Minister would appoint whoever was elected by their province to the Senate. My NDP colleague asked if the bill would still allow the Prime Minister to appoint individuals to the Senate and the answer is yes. The bill also encourages provinces and individuals to have a say in whom the government would appoint.

Bert Brown received overwhelming support when he ran in Alberta. Over 300,000 people came out to vote, a remarkable turnout just for an election.

Let us play this thing out. The member is from the Skeena area in British Columbia. Let us say that citizens in British Columbia want to have an election to choose their senator-in-waiting. Let us say in that election that one individual was overwhelmingly chosen by the people. That would really put pressure on the prime minister of the day to either appoint the individual the people asked for or appoint whomever he or she wants in the Senate.

We believe that this is the first step in making certain that democracy will prevail, that the people will have the right to choose their representative in the Senate.

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the important point made by the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

I remember that subsequent to the people of Alberta choosing Bert Brown, the Prime Minister at the time, Jean Chrétien, actually appointed someone else. Senator Tommy Banks was appointed during that era if I remember correctly.

As we debate the bill it is important that we bring out issues like that. I appreciate the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley raising this particular issue.

It is important that Canadians clearly understand the process we are debating here today. In an election campaign one of two leaders could form a government and become prime minister. It could either be the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada or the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada.

During the election campaign people should ask if an individual chosen democratically by the people to sit in the Senate would be appointed, or would that decision be completely set aside and a patronage appointment would be made, as was made by Jean Chrétien. That is an important point.

• (1325)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, my colleague makes a very important point.

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We asked 300 people in Trochu on Saturday night if they knew the names of their Alberta senators. They knew Bert Brown was a senator because there had been an election. They knew Betty Unger had come second in that election. They knew a number of other people who also ran. Very few knew the names of their appointed senators. Very few knew Senator Tommy Banks, a good guy, and one I really appreciate. He was a piano player in Edmonton. Very few knew that Claudette Tardif was a senator from Alberta. Very few people knew that Grant Mitchell from Alberta was an Alberta representative. He was a former Liberal leader. He could not win an election in Alberta, but he could get an appointment to the Senate.

The member's point is correct. Once the election takes place, there is pressure to appoint the victor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise to discuss Bill C-20, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate. Like my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I do not agree with the principle of this bill, and therefore, with it being sent to committee.

I would like to remind members that last November, members of the Quebec National Assembly unanimously adopted the following motion:

That the National Assembly of Québec reaffirm to the Federal Government and to the Parliament of Canada that no modification to the Canadian Senate may be carried out without the consent of the Government of Québec and the National Assembly.

Whether or not they share the views of the Bloc Québécois regarding Quebec's future, the three parties represented at the National Assembly all agree on this important point. The Canadian Parliament cannot unilaterally change the Senate.

Despite how quick the Conservative government is to boast about recognizing the Quebec nation, it is infringing the interests of that nation by introducing Bills C-20 and C-22.

First, it is proposing to reform the Senate without consulting Quebec, thus going against the governing consensus in the National Assembly that has been expressed on more than one occasion. Reforming the Senate "piecemeal" by way of legislation allows it to avoid reopening the constitutional debate. Second, the federal government is proposing to reduce Quebec's weight in the House of Commons, as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works in fact made a point of emphasizing in a mailing to his constituents.

Quebec and the provinces must necessarily be involved in any change to the essential characteristics of the Senate, that is, everything relating to the powers of senators, the number of senators a province is entitled to and the residence requirements for senators. Legislation is therefore not the appropriate route for Senate reform, and this is also the opinion of the Government of Quebec.

Obviously, sovereigntists in Quebec have long understood that Canadian institutions could not be reformed and that it was impossible to amend the Canadian constitution in a meaningful way: the political party to which I belong is founded on that understanding.

As well, there are many countries that have adopted a unicameral parliament: Sweden and Denmark are but two examples of countries

whose democratic credentials cannot be doubted, and that are even the envy of many nations in several respects. There is also the oldest parliament in the world, the Icelandic Althing, whose origins go back to the 10th century and which abolished its upper chamber in 1991.

It may be worth pointing out that Quebec and the Canadian provinces that had a similar institution in the past abolished their upper chambers several decades ago. In 1968, for example, almost 40 years ago, Quebec chose to abolish its Legislative Council. During the debate on the bill that was introduced for that purpose, a number of speakers rose to speak on the question of whether or not this kind of institution should be retained. Some of the things said in 1968 may still apply today.

At the time, René Lévesque was the member for Laurier. He had been the leader of the unified sovereigntist forces under the banner of the Parti Québécois for a little over a month. I would now like to read a passage from the debates of the National Assembly, which was still known as the Legislative Assembly at the time. I will take a few liberties with the speech delivered by René Lévesque, whose easily recognizable intonation and manner of expression come shining through right down to the punctuation in the text. Obviously, I will not attempt to reproduce his very distinctive delivery. Here is what René Lévesque said on November 26, 1968, about the upper chamber:

I think it would be a good idea to remember that the institution we call the Legislative Council, which remains fundamentally unchanged, is rooted, here and elsewhere, in a society that witnessed the birth of democracy. It goes back to a time before our societies' acceptance of democratic institutions. In most cases, regardless of what we call these kinds of institutions—Senate, upper chamber, House of Lords, and so on—they were created at the behest of privileged members of society when it became clear that divine right monarchies everywhere were losing their old absolute power over citizens. These kinds of councils and institutions were created with the intention of reining in the will of the people being freely expressed through universal suffrage.

● (1330)

After hearing that, people may point out that the Conservative government's proposed reform seems to have been inspired by democratic principles because it provides, at least indirectly, for the election of senators. I, however, feel that an elected Senate would only confuse matters and mess up the entire legislative process.

In the beginning, the supposed role of the upper chamber was to protect regional interests. However, it seems that partisanly appointed senators tend to represent the interests of the party that appointed them. To hide that obvious disparity, the member for LaSalle—Émard, when he was Prime Minister, decided to appoint senators affiliated with other parties, so as not to stack the deck too much. Indirectly electing senators would not solve the problem because political affiliations would be even more evident.

In reality, by proposing this Senate reform, the Conservative government is trying to marginalize Quebec. In June 2006, Marc Chevrier, a professor in the Department of Political Studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal, wrote the following:

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—equality of the provinces in the Senate clashes with the idea of Quebec being a distinct nation. To enshrine such equality is to finish what was started in 1982: bringing Quebec into line by forestalling its demands as a nation. Basically, the Harper and Trudeau governments, whose ideologies differ so fundamentally—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please.

The hon. member must refrain from using the names of members. Please use their titles or ridings.

Mr. Luc Malo: You are right, Mr. Speaker.

Marc Chevrier, professor at the department of political science at l'Université du Québec added:

The [current Prime Minister] and Trudeau governments, whose ideologies differ fundamentally, share common ground when it comes to nation building: Trudeau by unifying Canadian society with a culture of constitutionalized rights; and [the current Prime Minister] through a federal chamber where provincial debates, through the influence of elected senators, are transformed into national issues.

I cannot put enough emphasis on the fact that it is out of the question for Quebeckers to accept having their nation and their National Assembly lose some of their powers to a reformed Senate. When there is consensus in the National Assembly over certain important issues, the Conservative government turns a deaf ear: what will happen if an elected Senate, claiming to speak on behalf of the regions, interferes between the federal government and the elected members of Quebec's assembly, who are already struggling to be heard?

Another argument that is often used to justify the Senate's existence is that its purpose is to give a second opinion on issues studied by the House of Commons.

If it is outside opinions we are after, then that opportunity already exists: it is one of the raisons d'être of the 24 standing committees of the House of Commons.

I will read an excerpt from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on the importance of the role of the committees:

Committee work provides detailed information to parliamentarians on issues of concern to the electorate and often provokes important public debate. In addition, because committees interact directly with the public, they provide an immediate and visible conduit between elected representatives and Canadians.

The committees, the standing committees in particular, are important democratic tools. And yet, the Conservative government has often chosen not to respect their opinion. For example, last February, it chose to ignore 21 of the 22 recommendations of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology on the serious crisis in the manufacturing industry.

I will close my speech with a question: instead of trying to unilaterally reform the Senate, in violation of the right to consultation enjoyed by Quebec and the provinces, would it not be more useful and more consistent with the rules of democracy for the government to show more respect for the work accomplished by hon. members and apply the recommendations coming from the committees, especially when their conclusions are unanimous?

● (1335)

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I too listened intently to the speech by my colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes. It was well documented and well researched, which proves that one does not have to be a senator to do extensive research.

The Conservatives, who want to keep the Senate, claim that the role of senators is to represent the provinces and the regions. As far as I know, we are all here to represent a riding. Our role is to represent the people from our riding and to defend any consensus within our riding and our province, be it Quebec or another province.

But certain members in this House—and I am thinking of the 10 Conservative members from Quebec—do not defend the issues on which there is consensus in Quebec, including with regard to the bill before us. In a unanimous motion, the National Assembly, the only parliament that can really claim to be representing Quebeckers, has asked that this bill not be supported and be withdrawn immediately. These 10 Conservative members were elected to this place but they do not represent Quebec. They refuse to respect that motion. Why would elected senators represent Quebec any more than these 10 members who put the party line ahead of Quebec's best interest?

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, the comments made by my hon. colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber are entirely relevant. That is precisely the other issue raised by the introduction of this bill.

This House recognizes that the Québécois form a nation. Should the members of this House not be doing everything they can to act on the unanimous consensus reached by the members of the National Assembly?

My hon. colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber strongly emphasized that, when it comes to the Quebec nation's higher interests and the overwhelming, unanimous and clear consensus reached by the National Assembly, the Conservative members in this House from Quebec prefer to keep quiet, sit down and vote in accordance with the same hard line that other members of the Conservative Party want to take with Quebec. This is unacceptable.

It bears repeating over and over: Quebeckers must remember this when the time comes to deal with these same members during the next election.

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the hon. member a simple question. There are elected senates in countries such as Australia, Mexico and Brazil. I believe that even in France there is an elected senate. What does the member have against elected senates?

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, reforming the Senate would require amending the Constitution. For constitutional amendment to occur, there must be consultation, the sharing of information and decision making with other governments in Canada, namely, Quebec and the provinces.

Before we can even talk about Senate reform, these partners, Quebec and the provinces, must be consulted to see what they think. In that regard, all Conservative members, beginning with the members from Quebec, must be aware that the National Assembly of Quebec has said that there cannot be any constitutional amendments or changes to the Senate without first duly consulting the members of the National Assembly.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, It is my honour to weigh in on this debate. It is a critical debate and it is an issue which, quite frankly, Canadians have been waiting for Parliament to get on top of and deal with for some time. In fact, I have heard members speak of how Senate reform has been contemplated for some three decades with various efforts being thwarted, for lack of a better word.

This bill makes great strides in the right direction. We have to go back to why this bill has been reintroduced and what the government is ultimately trying to do. This is another example of a government doing what it said it would do.

Let us go back to the throne speech, which was democratically passed by the members of this House, and look at what the throne speech said. I would like to remind hon. members that they did vote in favour of it. The throne speech said:

Canadians understand that the federation is only as strong as the democratic institutions that underpin it. Our Government believes that Canada is not well served by the Senate in its current form. To ensure that our institutions reflect our shared commitment to democracy, our Government will continue its agenda of democratic reform by reintroducing important pieces of legislation from the last session, including direct consultations with voters on the selection of Senators and limitations on their tenure.

What the government said in October is exactly what the government is saying today in this bill. We are saying that Canadians should be consulted on who represents them. I heard the hon. member for Crowfoot a few minutes ago talk about how the constituents in his riding could not name the senators who represent them. I find that remarkable. In fact I find it sad that in a modern democracy such as Canada people do not know who their representatives are.

I would hazard a guess that virtually none of my constituents could name who represents Ontario in the Senate. However, I also would hazard a guess that close to 90% of the constituents in my riding know who their member of Parliament is, because I work for them each and every day, and they know that.

These constituents deserve to be represented in the Senate. They deserve to be democratically represented in the Senate. That is what this bill proposes. It does not propose constitutional reform that would enter the country into a debate that we certainly do not need to go into right now. What this bill provides is a mechanism for the governor in council to seek the views of electors in a province about appointments to the Senate for that province.

The bill also proposes strict rules of accountability for the Senate nominees. It creates a framework for governing the actions of political parties and spending by third parties. It establishes rules for the single transferrable vote and defines the roles and responsibilities of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, who will be responsible for administering the consultation.

I cannot understand why anyone in this House would be opposed.

I understand that the Liberal Party is opposed on the basis that it would prefer that the Senate continue to be a house of cronyism and partisanship. It is how it looks after its political friends and allies, the bagmen that deliver the money, but our party does not believe that is the way the Senate should work. We believe the Senate can play a

crucial role in Canada's democracy, but not in its current form, not as long as Canadians are not represented democratically in the Senate.

I am sympathetic to what the NDP has to say about the Senate. The New Democrats say that the Senate has existed for years, that this is the way it has operated, that they do not agree with it and they feel that the Senate should simply be abolished.

Our party has taken a different position. We have said that the Senate must change. It must become democratic. It must become more modern in the way it functions, or it must be abolished. We are not prepared to accept the status quo any longer.

Maybe the Liberal Party would like to go to Canadians and put forward its position that the status quo on the Senate is acceptable, but I do not believe anybody in my riding believes the status quo on the Senate is acceptable any longer.

● (1345)

We can see example after example of bills that have been sent to the Senate, bills on which the people of Canada have weighed in and have provided their opinions. They have put their weight behind bills that the government has brought forward. What has the Senate ultimately done with them? It has delayed and obstructed. Why? Because it does not take its direction from the people.

Senators take their direction from the political party or the leaders that appointed them. That is not right. That is not acceptable. The Senate is supposed to represent the various regions of the country. The House of Commons is supposed to represent approximately by population the various populations of the country. There is supposed to be representation by population in the House, and while I would argue that we need to make a bit of progress on that, I think that largely that is true of the House of Commons.

The Senate is supposed to represent regional interests. It is there to represent the various regions of Canada. It is not supposed to be the place for political bagmen, for the people who are owed favours and for pure partisanship, but that is the way it exists today.

I hear a number of my Liberal colleagues piping up with comments. I know they like the status quo on the Senate. Perhaps they have friends they would like to appoint. Maybe they owe some favours to some people who helped them get elected in the various regions. I am not sure, but I will say that the Senate must change.

Again, I can cite all kinds of examples. If we look at the tackling violent crime act and the various measures in it, we will see a bill that has been obstructed for years. Our government has been in place for more than two years. These were measures that we ran on in the election. We introduced these bills. We fought to get the measures in these bills through committee. That has not been easy, because while all the parties ran on an agenda of cracking down on crime, once the Liberals got here they fell back into their old ways of being soft on crime and not really being concerned about tackling crime the way it should be tackled or about restoring balance in the justice system.

However, we did fight to get them through and we did get deals from the various parties to make these bills work. We have sent them to the Senate. All of the witnesses have been heard. We believe the balance of justice is in these bills.

Government Orders

We know what Canadians, in significant numbers, believe. Last night on the news, there was a story about a poll. I watch the news quite often. Last night on the news, there was a story about a poll on dangerous offenders, specifically on the reverse onus portion of the tackling violent crime act and whether Canadians felt that the reverse onus for dangerous offenders was an important measure and something they supported. Seventy-six per cent of respondents said they believe this is necessary and that it needs to be done.

There is also the age of protection bill. A pastor in my riding said to me that he really appreciated the fact that our party has moved on the age of protection legislation, as it is something that they have been supporting for a long time. He said that we need to protect our children from sexual predators. I told him that I appreciated the support, but that we had not been successful in getting it through the Senate yet. He wanted to know what he could do. I told him that the first thing he can do is support us in the democratic reform of the Senate. That is why it is ultimately very important for us to do this.

Senators very often do not speak the same language as our constituents. Senator Carstairs, for example, last week said that she does not support the age of protection bill specifically because 14 year old and 15 year old prostitutes might be afraid to be tested for HIV and STDs and we would force them underground.

Why does she not understand that the point is that we want to protect them? We do not want 14 year olds and 15 year olds being exploited for sex any longer, but that is how the Senate works. Senators do not have to deliver democracy. They do not have to listen to Canadians. If she had a conversation with the church pastor who spoke to me, or with his congregation, would she speak the same way if she had to be democratically elected? I doubt it.

I would also say in regard to the Senate that many senators never leave Ottawa. If they never leave Ottawa, they cannot possibly represent the people of my riding or the people of the various regions in this country, because this area has a beat all its own, one that is not necessarily representative of all Canadians.

• (1350)

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's presentation today. I was not sure where he was going when he talked about Senate reform and dangerous offenders. Then I remembered that the current Prime Minister had appointed Michael Fortier to the Senate and put him in charge of all the contracting of the Government of Canada, and there have been some very dangerous offences in that line, so I think the link is made.

I believe, like every member here and like the vast majority of Canadians, that we need some restructuring of our democratic institutions, but a system whereby we have a right to vote on who we think the Prime Minister might appoint is not an elected Senate. I think there is a process in place. We have to respect that we do work within the Constitution and have true reform of our Senate.

I am a big supporter of a triple E Senate, whereby we would have a realignment of the Senate by region, elected and effective, but not voted for at the same time as the parliamentary elections so that it just reflects Parliament. There would be a staggering. Also, if we are going to go with restricting term limits, sure, but not in the sense that the prime minister of the day could appoint the whole Senate.

I am listening to what the Conservatives are saying about an elected Senate and what the New Democrats are saying about proportional representation. If we followed through on those things, we would have some sort of elected Senate and an appointed House of Commons, so I do not think that would advance the situation of democracy very much in this country.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, those are certainly very interesting comments, but I would invite and encourage the member to go back to the Liberal senators and ask them to follow Minister Fortier's lead. They can all stand for election in the next general election. Then perhaps Senator Carstairs could go back to the good people of Manitoba and talk about how 14 year old and 15 year old prostitutes should not be protected and see how that works for her. I am not sure that it will be a real vote-getter, but maybe she knows Manitoba better than I do.

Quite frankly, I am encouraged by what I hear from the Liberals: if the bill were to pass, Liberal prime ministers would not listen to the consultations of Canadians, or at least that is what I just heard, and prime ministers ultimately would not have to follow the outcomes of Canadians by whom they have been elected. I will be very excited to stand in front of the people of Peterborough and say that I can guarantee that when Ontarians make their voice known, when they say who should represent them in the Senate, my prime minister will select that person. I guess a Liberal prime minister would not. That is something I want to talk about in the next election.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the comments by the member for Peterborough. There is finally some common sense coming from that side of the House. It is just fantastic. His is a refreshing voice over there.

I can tell members, being from the province of Manitoba, that we definitely want to make sure that we raise the age of sexual consent, despite what Senator Sharon Carstairs has said, and protect our youth.

Based upon the comments I have just heard, I need a clarification. The member is talking about that palace of patronage in the Senate and how senators are there at the power of their party. I want to have him clarify this: is the Leader of the Opposition actually the puppet master of the Liberal senators?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: To be honest, Mr. Speaker, I do not know. There are rumours about his role and certainly the amount of power that the Leader of the Opposition swings in the Senate. Some people say there may be as many as three different Liberal factions there. Ultimately, though, I think the Liberal senators stand for the same thing as the rest of the Liberal Party. They stand for power. They stand for access to the trough. Ultimately I think they can unite on that. I do not really know that they stand for anything in particular other than power, but I do believe they stand for power.

One thing that I believe Liberal senators understand is that there will not be any more of them, at least not put into the Senate in that fashion, unless they can get another Liberal government elected. On that they can unite. They can unite on the need for patronage to get Liberals into position so that ultimately they have access to the trough.

I heard an NDP member talking about a Senate appointment as a cash for life victory for a Liberal. I tend to agree. I think it is time that it was put to an end. I do not want 45 year terms for senators any more. I do not want any more senators put in place by someone who owes a debt to someone else.

I think senators should represent Canadians. They should represent the views and needs of Canadians. That is the only thing that they should represent: the needs of constituents and their best interests, not a party's best interests.

• (1355)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel has four minutes before question period.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois on Bill C-20, which provides for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate.

Hon. members will know by now that the Bloc Québécois will oppose any reform of the Senate, because the Bloc simply wants to abolish the Senate.

I am happy to speak, because we hear all sorts of incredible things here, and it makes me smile to hear the Conservative members say that they have kept the promises they made in the last election, when every day their actions tell quite a different story.

I remember that they wanted to introduce a bill on transparency, ethics and integrity. More than 60 Conservative members still have not been reimbursed for their election expenses. Three of those members are ministers from Quebec, including the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages. The Conservatives promised transparency and integrity, but the only members of this House who have not been reimbursed for their election expenses are Conservatives.

So that is the sort of bill the Conservative Party introduces. This bill on Senate reform is another good example.

True, the Conservatives promised that there would be an elected Senate, but what they are proposing is an elected Senate that violates the Canadian Constitution. Everyone, including the Supreme Court, agrees that the only way to have a Senate that is truly elected and complies with the law is to amend the Constitution. The Conservative Party has introduced a bill that provides for electing senators, but allows the Prime Minister to decide whether or not to honour the will of the electors.

Once again, the Conservatives are trying to tell us that they are keeping their election promises, but they have manipulated all the laws, just as they manipulated the law on political party funding and the Canada Elections Act. This is the same thing. The Conservatives are manipulating the laws to serve their own purposes, when the position of the Government of Quebec has always been clear. It is not shared by the Bloc Québécois, but this is the position taken by the National Assembly of Quebec on November 7, 2007. A motion

Statements by Members

was unanimously adopted in the National Assembly and reads as follows:

That the National Assembly of Québec reaffirm to the federal government and to the Parliament of Canada that no modification to the Canadian Senate may be carried out without the consent of the Government of Québec and the National Assembly.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member will have just over seven minutes left after question period. We will move now to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SAFER INTERNET DAY

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, more than 43 countries around the world are recognizing Safer Internet Day.

Safer Internet Day is a chance to educate parents about the dangers that lurk online and encourage them to protect their children from harm. As the Internet continues to reach into more homes and be accessed by younger children with each passing year, this need is becoming even more critical.

Our government has taken strides on this important issue. Bill C-2, currently in the Senate, would raise the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16 years old and protect Canadian teens from so-called sex tourists who would take advantage of our existing laws to abuse our precious children. We need that bill passed by the Senate and we need it into law now.

All organizations, like Kids Internet Safety Alliance, deserve credit for their tireless efforts to eliminate online sexual exploitation of children and youth, but the battle is far from over.

On this Safer Internet Day, I ask everyone to please encourage everyone who cares for a child to educate themselves and their children on how to stay safe online and to put pressure on the Senate to get the job done and get Bill C-2 passed now.

* * *

• (1400)

YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a group of about 30 cadets from Montreal will soon arrive in Repulse Bay in Nunavut's Kivalliq region to spend two weeks in the community.

Repulse Bay, a community situated on the Arctic Circle, is considered one of the more traditional Inuit communities and is the entryway to Ukkusiksalik National Park where the wonderful Wager Bay teems with wildlife, such as polar bears and whales.

A group of Repulse Bay cadets will then travel to a southern Canadian community in the coming year. I wish the two parties the best in their adventures.

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I am a great supporter of these exchange programs for youth as these programs open their eyes to the incredible differences that exist within our great land of Canada while giving our youth a chance to showcase this part of our country. Friendships formed from these exchanges help to foster a better understanding for tolerance and diplomacy in Canada.

I congratulate all the volunteers and teachers in all the Nunavut communities who are working hard helping in fundraising and filling out applications.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL CHILD SOLDIERS DAY

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, February 12 is International Child Soldiers Day. Throughout the world, hundreds of thousands of children are forcibly enrolled in militias or join out of need. These children serve on the front line, and are used as scouts or, worse, as slaves. They are deprived of a decent childhood. They suffer injury, abuse or deep trauma, and die in combat.

That is why the Geneva Convention and the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child seek to prohibit the involvement of children in armed conflict. Since the late 1990s, a multitude of international treaties, resolutions and protocols have been added to guide the protection of child soldiers.

I therefore reaffirm the Bloc Québécois' unflinching support for the cause of stopping the use of children as soldiers, so that these children can have a real childhood.

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[English]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the pine beetle crisis is not going away and the Conservatives are not doing nearly enough for the hard-working people of British Columbia.

More than 25,000 families have been affected by this devastation. Eighty per cent of the pine trees in B.C. will be gone by 2013. Seven million hectares of land have been affected and there has been more than \$10 billion in lost value.

First nations and isolated British Columbian communities surrounded by standing deadwood are living in fear waiting for that fire that is certain to come.

When communities ask for accountability for the money promised them more than two years ago, they are met with blank stares and delays from the government.

The government needs to step up and improve on its record of negligence. An example of this was the \$1 billion that the NDP and communities across the country forced out of the government for communities in need right now.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. The implications are serious and far-reaching. This crisis of national scope requires leadership and courage, and the NDP and its leader will provide this leadership.

TAIWAN STRAIT

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a wise man once said that the true meaning of freedom is not what we are free to do but what we are free from doing. This adage comes to mind as I watch events unfold for my friends with respect to Taiwan Strait issues.

I make these observations with deference, as an interested observer, recognizing that I cannot truly appreciate the values or the personal history as one who lives there.

I took note of the results of the democratic expression of Taiwan's citizens in January, believing it represented the desire to move toward a less confrontational approach to Strait issues.

The world eagerly looks for and respectfully encourages initiatives that will build closer economic and cultural relations across the Taiwan Strait to result in the reduction of tensions.

To that end, may I humbly suggest that my friends on both sides of this vexatious issue consider another adage. If it is desirable not to do something, then it is advisable not to do it.

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CERTIFIED GENERAL ACCOUNTANTS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 2008 marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Certified General Accountants Association of Canada.

CGA Canada represents 68,000 professionals and students and is one of the three accounting designations recognized equally by provincial and territorial statute in Canada.

It is, therefore, perplexing why the Conservative government recently posted a notice of vacancy for the important position of Comptroller General of Canada stating a preference for the single designation of chartered accountant. This implies a bias against not only CGA's members, but certified management accountants as well.

As an equal opportunity employer, I would like to know why the Conservatives are denying thousands of professional accountants fair access to opportunities in the federal public service.

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● (1405)

CANADIAN RABBINIC CAUCUS

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, visiting Parliament Hill today is the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus. This is the second annual visit by the caucus, which is comprised of rabbis from across Canada, men and women, from all streams of Judaism.

They are visiting Ottawa today to meet with parliamentarians and government officials, representing their various communities and bringing a rabbinical and spiritual point of view.

Noting that terrorism is rampant in the world, the rabbis will repeat their call to the leaders of all faith groups to denounce the killing of innocents in the name of God or of religion.

The Rabbinic Caucus carries the message once more to all Canadians that overseas conflicts and the resultant passionately held views should not be allowed to degenerate into uncivil discourse and antagonisms here at home.

This caucus has embraced a hope shared by many Canadians that Canada, as an open, pluralistic, democratic and diverse society, might aspire to be the country that offers guidance and inspiration to the world in these troubled times.

I hope all members will join me in welcoming the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus to Parliament Hill.

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[Translation]

30TH ANNIVERSARY OF DRUMMONDVILLE SPORTS ORGANIZATION

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this year is the 30th anniversary of the Grands du sport of Drummondville, an organization dedicated to promoting people who have made their mark as volunteer builders in sports.

In honour of the anniversary, the organization's executives decided to create a sports hall of fame in Drummondville, a project that has been in the works for nearly 28 years.

In addition to the traditional evening celebrating excellence in sports, this year's program includes a hockey game at the Centre Marcel Dionne, showcasing hockey legends Guy Lafleur, Yvon Lambert, Stéphane Richer, Marc Bureau, Enrico Ciccone, Sergio Momesso, Gilbert Delorme, Normand Dupont and Serge Boisvert, who thrilled Quebecers when they played in the NHL.

I would like to wish a happy 30th anniversary to the athletes, teams, trainers, referees, administrators of the various sports federations, and the executives of the Grands du sport.

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THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, the people of Quebec City gave a warm welcome to the Prime Minister of Canada at the Calgary Stampede's western breakfast during Quebec City's Carnaval.

Unlike the leader of the Bloc, who always arrives empty-handed, our Conservative government keeps its promises and gets results.

The Conservative government has kept its promises to provide funding for Quebec City's 400th anniversary, for the congress centre in Lévis, for the Musée national des beaux-arts, for the project office for a science and technology exploration centre, for the Patro de Lévis, for the Chauveau soccer facility, and more.

Here is a piece of advice for the Bloc leader and his followers: forget about the studies; there is no "Quebec City mystery". The people of Quebec City want members of Parliament who will act in their best interests.

The Bloc team has been on the ice without a puck for 17 years. The people will judge the Bloc's empty words and its powerlessness. In the meantime, the Conservative members from Quebec are taking

Statements by Members

action and are standing up for Quebec's interests within a united Canada.

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[English]

CANADIAN RABBINIC CAUCUS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too want to acknowledge the presence in Ottawa today of the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus.

Rabbis from across Canada and from all streams of the Jewish faith are meeting today with parliamentarians, government officials and diplomats to discuss three important subjects: support for Canada's withdrawal from Durban II; the importance of the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state as a precondition for Middle East peace; and the threat that Iran poses to Israel, to Middle East stability and to world security.

Iran continues to accelerate its uranium enrichment in defiance of the UN resolutions. The Liberal Party believes that the international community has an obligation to exhaust all appropriate means of solving the Iranian nuclear crisis.

I call upon the government to take the lead internationally by imposing sanctions on Iran through the Special Economic Measures Act, SEMA.

SEMA is a flexible, expedient and efficient way for Canada to respond to threats to international peace and security. It is more than time to put it to use.

* * *

● (1410)

JUSTICE

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he could be in your neighbourhood or he could be in mine.

Violent criminal, Sheldon Kuiack, is on the loose. After shooting his girlfriend in the face in 2004, the sex offender was serving his sentence in a halfway house. CTV Ottawa has learned that two weeks ago today he simply opened the door and slipped off into the night.

Why on earth did the Liberal justice system allow this violent sex offender to serve his time in a halfway house and not in jail?

The Conservative tackling violent crime bill would throw gun criminals, like Kuiack, in the slammer for at least five years on the first offence. Under the bill, he would still be locked up today. However, the Liberal leader is blocking the bill in the Senate.

Residents familiar with Kuiack's whereabouts should immediately call the police as he is extremely dangerous and, for the sake of his victims, the Liberal leader must pass the bill immediately.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

CÔTE-DES-NEIGES DISTRICT

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Association des gens d'affaires de Côte-des-Neiges for a project that promotes tourism in their community, which I am very pleased to represent in the House of Commons.

The result of broad community consensus, this project will set up a seasonal information booth in the neighbourhood to promote, on behalf of the residents and local businesses, the important local and international tourist attractions.

The intent is to make Côte-des-Neiges a tourism centre by highlighting its architectural, cultural and religious heritage which include such jewels as St. Joseph's Oratory, the Saidye Bronfman Centre for the Arts, Université de Montréal and the north entrance to Mount Royal.

In addition, the project encourages cultural exchanges and informs visitors about the multi-ethnic nature of the Côte-des-Neiges district, a Canadian model for welcoming people from all over the world.

Congratulations to the Association des gens d'affaires and to the citizens of our wonderful neighbourhood, who wish to promote Côte-des-Neiges.

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CERTIFIED GENERAL ACCOUNTANTS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to the Certified General Accountants Association of Canada, of which I have been a proud member since 1990, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

CGA-Canada has come a long way in 100 years. Today, it is the fastest growing professional accounting association in Canada. CGA-Canada has 68,000 members and students as well as affiliated associations in Bermuda, the Caribbean and Asia. CGAs work in more than 80 countries and look after the interests of businesses, governments and non-profits.

CGA-Canada has also advised the Parliament of Canada by providing input to important committees such as the Standing Committee on Finance, of which I am a member. These contributions have greatly helped to shape Canadian public policy.

Congratulations to CGA-Canada.

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THE BUDGET

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government will table its budget on February 26. The Bloc Québécois would like to remind the government that there is a \$10.6 billion surplus for 2007-08, and a \$9.9 billion surplus for 2008-09. So, the Conservatives are in a position to consider our proposals.

The government must provide assistance for the economic and social sectors, which are in dire straits. It must improve the current aid plan for the manufacturing and forestry industries, restore the

dignity of seniors by awarding them full retroactivity of the guaranteed income supplement, increase transfers for post-secondary education, reinvest in women and social housing, and invest more in culture and the environment.

The government will still be able to pay down the debt, without paying it down entirely. The Conservatives must embark on a major change of direction with significant gains for Quebec if they want the support of the Bloc Québécois.

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[English]

KELOWNA ACCORD

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been almost a year since Parliament passed Bill C-292, An Act to implement the Kelowna Accord. Since then, the bill has been stalled in the Senate because the Conservative senators have used tactics of delay and diversion. They have done so in spite of the will of Parliament and in spite of their own election promise to honour the terms and objectives of the Kelowna accord.

In so doing, they have turned their backs on aboriginal Canadians. The Conservatives have denied aboriginal Canadians better health care for their children and families. They are denying aboriginal Canadians a better education and housing. The Conservatives are denying the aboriginal people of Canada the hope of a better life.

The Conservatives like to talk an accountability and transparency game but practise exactly the opposite. They said that they would honour the commitments of Kelowna but they have refused to fund the agreement and are using parliamentary tactics to back out of their commitments.

How can they continue to justify turning a blind eye to the needs of the aboriginal people of Canada? Why does the Prime Minister not show some leadership and order his Conservative senators to pass Bill C-292?

* * *

●(1415)

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Valentine's is near. For Liberals it is big corporate bucks, not love in the air. Liberals have a sweetheart deal, an Ottawa cocktail party and no holds barred live auction stacked to the roof with lobbyists and corporate bigwigs, looking to buy Liberal love in all the wrong places.

Ad scam netted the Liberals \$40 million. This Liberal love note promises corporate sugar daddies "the sky is your limit during this auction", never mind the Conservatives limited political donations to individuals to a cap of \$1,100.

CEOs can bid thousands for golf with a former PM, doubles tennis with the Rae brothers or hockey with the Liberal for York Centre, thousands of corporate bucks through the finance law's five hole.

This is not a third rate romance, low rent rendezvous. Liberals are asking corporations *How Deep is Your Love* and to prove it with their chequebooks, giving until their *Love Hurts*.

We might as well face it: Liberals are addicted to corporate love, even if it means breaking all the rules.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC PRIVATE LUMBER PRODUCERS

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, if I were to mention \$400 million in sales, \$700 million in payroll, \$4 billion in processed products, \$500 million in tax revenue, 29,000 jobs and 35,000 producers, you would probably think I was referring to a rapidly expanding key area of economic activity in Canada. But the numbers I just mentioned represent the economic contribution made to the forestry sector by private lumber producers in Quebec.

However, this is becoming a thing of the past, since the Conservative government is ignoring these owners and the impact of the forestry crisis on them. Today, they are on the brink of bankruptcy, facing the inevitable and in despair. In the past two years, they have suffered a total loss of revenue of \$70 million and, unfortunately, it is not over.

The government's trust fund should help them continue to develop one of our most precious natural resources, our forests, with their customary respect, professionalism and consideration for sustainable development. But such is not the case. These private lumber producers might as well not even exist as far as the Conservative government is concerned.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today during a press conference in response to mine, the Prime Minister used the word rotation for the first time. That is a happy surprise and an encouraging sign. We thought the Prime Minister did not believe in the rotation principle.

Will he say today that, under the rotation principle, the additional troops that NATO should provide will enable our troops to be replaced in their combat mission, their offensive mission, and allowed to focus on a new security, training and reconstruction mission?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I said that the leadership positions of the mission in Afghanistan rotate. That has been NATO practice since the beginning.

I was very interested to see the new proposals of the leader of the Liberal Party. There is more agreement now between our positions. We will study these positions with a view to achieving a greater consensus. That is what Canadians want.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in this spirit of consensus seeking, could the Prime Minister clarify the government's position in regard to 2011 after the Leader

Oral Questions

of the Government in the House of Commons was so confused about it yesterday?

Is 2011 a firm date or deadline that will be communicated clearly to our allies and the Afghan government so that they can plan accordingly? Or is 2011 simply an opportunity to prolong a never-ending mission? Is it a recipe for getting bogged down?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government obviously does not want a never-ending mission. We said in the throne speech that we wanted to transfer security responsibilities to the Afghan forces by 2011. We said the same thing in a motion before the House.

I noted as well that the Manley report, by a group of experts appointed by the government, also says that we do not want a never-ending mission.

Once again, we intend to study the proposals made by the Liberal Party.

● (1420)

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for a year, the government made the mistake of not taking seriously February 2009 as the firm end of the combat mission in Kandahar. We see the result today. It is important not to repeat the same mistakes twice. We need to have clear end dates for a mission that allow the government to set clear benchmarks, our allies to have clear expectations and have clarity for our troops.

Considering all these benefits, why is the Prime Minister refusing to make 2011 a firm end date for the mission?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have never suggested that February 2009 is the absolute end date of the mission. It has been our position, looking at the facts, that it would not be likely. On the other hand, I point out the Speech from the Throne in which we indicated the desire of the government to transfer responsibilities for security firmly to Afghan authorities by 2011.

We believe the Canadian contribution is important. We believe our allies, as well as ourselves, should work with the Afghan government in a way that makes a smooth transition toward Afghan responsibility for its own security.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has acknowledged today that Canada must secure a rotation of troops from its NATO partners if the mission in Afghanistan is to continue after 2009. Our party has been saying that for more than a year.

The Prime Minister has finally begun phoning around to secure the additional troops, but I am sure he understands that this process cannot go on indefinitely. Canadians need to know whether help is on the way.

Has the Prime Minister fixed a clear deadline for a conclusion to his negotiations with our allies?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. At the moment we have not fixed the deadline to that. I can report, however, that our government, at all levels, continues to talk to our NATO partners. I think our NATO partners not only take our requests very seriously, but take very seriously the consequences for the mission if NATO does not become more fully engaged and more effective in the mission.

We have had good response to our discussions with allies so far, and at the moment it is our intention to continue that dialogue.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has finally started to look for troops abroad, as he said, but so far he has not received any commitments from our allies. This cannot go on. Canadians need to know who will help us in Afghanistan and when they will do so.

Will the Prime Minister set a deadline for these negotiations with our NATO partners?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just setting deadlines is not always the best strategy for getting something. We have had good discussions so far with our NATO partners and allies and these discussions are ongoing. We are optimistic about getting the troops and equipment we have requested.

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THE BUDGET

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we now know when the next budget will be brought down. In this prebudget period and this time of economic uncertainty, it is especially important to know how the Prime Minister plans to use the surplus. With a \$10.6 billion surplus for 2007-08, the Prime Minister has ample resources to respond to our demands. The \$10.6 billion figure comes from the Minister of Finance.

Can the Prime Minister tell us how he plans to use this surplus? Will he use the whole amount to pay down the debt?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is in a good debt position in this period of uncertainty. Because of sound economic management by the Minister of Finance, we are able to maintain a balanced position with tax cuts, investments in aid and reductions of the public debt. We plan to continue that balanced approach and manage the economy effectively in this period of uncertainty.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, would a balanced position not be to use a third of the surplus—\$3 billion of the remaining \$10.6 billion—to pay down the debt and use \$3.5 billion to address the crisis in the manufacturing and forestry industries and help businesses, the regions and workers, particularly in this time of economic uncertainty, because no one can predict whether next year's surplus will be as large as this year's?

Would the government not be taking a balanced approach if it paid down the debt, but did not use the whole surplus to pay down the debt?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the surplus created by the Minister of Finance, we have announced \$1 billion for the national community development trust. Moreover, with increased equalization payments, Quebec would receive nearly \$1 billion in additional funding.

This year, we have cut taxes, which means \$8 billion in tax breaks for the manufacturing industry. Reducing the debt will give this government future flexibility so that it can continue to manage the economy effectively.

* * *

GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, given this year's surplus of \$10.6 billion, the government could give seniors back their dignity and still allocate \$3 billion to the debt. Since the Conservatives are also indebted towards seniors, they must make the guaranteed income supplement fully retroactive to the tune of \$3.1 billion, as they had promised.

What is the government waiting for to pay the debt owed to seniors?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned seniors. Seniors and workers of all kinds paid a very high price to dig our country out of deficit in the past and the government will not put us back into deficit.

We have been very responsible in ensuring that on the one hand we are providing for seniors by raising the guaranteed income supplement two years in a row. We are providing lower taxes for seniors of all kinds, lifting 185,000 low income Canadians off the tax rolls. These are all measures that the Bloc voted against.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with this year's \$10.6 billion surplus, the government must do a 180-degree turn on the environment. For example, the government could create a \$1 billion fund to help individuals cut energy use, while still putting \$3 billion towards the debt.

What is the government waiting for to invest in technologies for the environment instead of always favouring its friends, the oil companies?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has taken action and gave the Quebec government more money than it asked for. This is something that has never happened with the Bloc, here in Ottawa. We also gave real tax cuts. And what has the Bloc done, here in Ottawa?

Some hon. members: Nothing.

Oral Questions

Mr. John Baird: It voted no. That is terrible.

* * *

[*English*]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the issue of Afghanistan, it is now absolutely clear that there are two fundamental approaches.

There is an approach to extend the war for another three years, and that is an approach which is inherently going to take us toward more combat, or there is an approach that would launch us on a path toward peace by ending the mission.

Does the Prime Minister agree with his Chief of Defence Staff, who has said that the military presence in Kandahar must inherently include combat? Does he agree with the general, when he says that to say otherwise is illogical?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I obviously agree that Kandahar, in fact Afghanistan as a whole, is a combat zone, but let me remind the leader of the NDP why two successive governments and two parties have decided to be in Afghanistan.

We are there because we are under a mandate approved by the Security Council of the United Nations, supported by virtually the entire international community.

We are there at the invitation of a democratically elected government in Afghanistan, and our troops are protecting ordinary Afghan people who need our help.

We are there because we have young men and women who have put their hearts and souls into this. They believe and know we are doing the right thing, and we will succeed.

• (1430)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, former prime minister Lester Pearson said, “Of all of our dreams today, there is none more important — or so hard to realize — than that of peace—”.

It is clear that the Liberal Party has now abandoned that pathway and it is a sad day. It has chosen to follow the government in extending this war for another three years.

Will the Prime Minister at least agree that there will be a vote on this matter prior to the budget vote taking place, so we can know where the House stands on the prolongation of war versus the—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working on getting a consensus on a motion that can indeed pass the House of Commons, obviously uphold Canada's obligations and international reputation, and support our men and women.

It is not normally my habit to defend the Liberal Party, but the Liberal Party, for example, not only entered us into Afghanistan, but the Liberal Party directed this country through World War II. Parties that run this country understand that in a dangerous world, we sometimes have to use force to maintain peace.

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current approach to our mission is in need of a change. It is now clear that combat alone will not bring lasting peace to the area. Our mission must be one of diplomacy and development, assisting the Afghan people to build their own resources and capacity.

It is what Canada is known for in the world and something of which Canadians are very proud. That must be the focus after our combat mission ends in February 2009.

In light of the recent developments, is the government ready to endorse such a responsible and comprehensive approach?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the ultimate aim of our policy is to leave the Afghans with a country that is more secure, better governed and more peaceful. This is the aim of our policy.

I am pleased to hear that the member of the Liberal Party opposite wants us to do the same thing. I hope we will have common ground. I hope we will be able to have a consensus on the aim of the mission and why we are there for the Afghan people.

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the response from the minister. Up until now, ten times as much has been spent on combat operations as on development. The Liberal opposition has been proposing a more enhanced development model for Afghanistan for the past year.

Will the government now provide clarification of its recent statements by confirming that our combat mission will end in February 2009, and that it will change to one of development, diplomacy, and training?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): That is our mission, Mr. Speaker.

We are there for defence and for a more secure Afghanistan. We are helping the Afghan people so they can have a secure and peaceful country. Our diplomats and our development workers are there as well. We want to have a better coordinated approach. We will have a better coordinated approach. I also hope that the international community will have a better coordinated approach.

When I gave my speech at the UN in New York, I said that we needed a UN special envoy for Afghanistan and I hope we will have one.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): The problem with this government, Mr. Speaker, is that it avoids the truth like the plague. For two years now, the government has denied the facts, twisted the truth and misled the people of Canada concerning our mission in Afghanistan. There has been no transparency or accountability. That is unacceptable.

Does the Prime Minister understand why the people of Canada are now refusing to give him carte blanche for a never-ending mission?

Oral Questions

● (1435)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to tell my hon. colleague that this government has doubled its development assistance funding for Afghanistan. We believe that, for the sake of security in the country, sustainable development should be ensured for the Afghan people, and that is what we are doing. We need the support of Parliament, and I hope that a common ground can be found in a motion, so that we can support our troops and honour our international commitment.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Minister of Foreign Affairs should listen to the question before answering.

[English]

For two years the government has denied and distorted the facts, and deceived the Canadian people about the mission in Afghanistan. No honesty. No transparency. Liberals are demanding it. Canadians deserve it.

Will the Prime Minister finally deliver it, and how?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the previous Liberal government that involved Canada in Afghanistan without even holding a vote here, in Parliament.

We sought a clear vote from parliamentarians on the extension of the mission, and we will want another one to extend it further.

It was the previous Liberal government that decided to participate in a mission in Afghanistan, more specifically in Kandahar, the most difficult region in Afghanistan.

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HUMAN RESOURCES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised to correct the fiscal imbalance, which he still has not done. Not only has the federal government failed to eliminate its spending power or turn over tax fields, but the transfers to Quebec and the provinces have still not been restored to the level of the 1994 and 1995 indexed amounts.

Does the Prime Minister intend to keep his promise and will he, in the next budget, finally increase transfers for post-secondary education to a total of \$3.5 billion, restoring them to where they were before the cuts?

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member asked his question because it was this government that moved in the last budget to increase spending in post-secondary education by 40% in a single year.

Not only that, in the last budget we announced that we would undertake a student loan review. That is a very important matter for thousands of students who engage in that program. We will be announcing the results of that in the upcoming budget, a historic budget, on February 26. I look forward to seeing the results of that.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government did not restore the amounts. We have been seeing cuts since 1994 and 1995. Several OECD studies have shown that investments in education are the most significant determinants of economic growth and technological innovation.

Will the Minister of Finance ever understand that paying down the debt quickly serves no purpose if it is to the detriment of funding for post-secondary education? Does he understand that in the upcoming budget he must increase transfers for education if he does not wish to mortgage our economic and social future? This is the way to address the current economic slowdown.

[English]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it does not take a study to show that this government has stepped in and demonstrated that we believe that education is part of the solution, not part of the problem. There has been a 40% increase in a single year and a number of different tax measures designed to relieve the tax burden for people who attend post-secondary education.

This government is all about ensuring that we have the best educated, most flexible and skilled workforce in the world. Under the leadership of the finance minister in the last budget, we made very serious progress to achieving that and we are going to see some more action coming in the next budget.

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[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is showing once again that he is abandoning the regions of Quebec, that he is leaving them to fend for themselves, by cutting funds for the corporations that help regional businesses.

Does the minister realize that, by withdrawing his financial assistance, by reducing by 50% his support to the corporation providing technological support to small and medium businesses in eastern Quebec, he is depriving tens of businesses from any funding? He is abandoning that region, and also all the other regions of Quebec.

● (1440)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to an organization in the lower St. Lawrence region that has been depending on the Economic Development Agency of Canada for close to 11 years. We put in place a policy which provides that, when there is a project with a specific timeline, that is with a beginning, a middle and an end in terms of results, we will continue to support it.

With a budget of \$200 million, the Economic Development Agency of Canada cannot continue to deal with a huge number of organizations which, decade after decade, continue to rely on us. There comes a time when they have to fly on their own.

Oral Questions

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Economic Development Agency of Canada is about to withdraw its support to community organizations that make a significant contribution to the emergence of job-creating businesses across Quebec.

Does the minister realize that, because of his obsession with streamlining his department's programs, he continues to threaten jobs in leading-edge sectors in Quebec? Does he realize that he is spelling the death of organizations dedicated to the creation of high-tech jobs, as is the case with Technopole, in the Saint-Maurice Valley?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is there to help small and medium businesses, the manufacturing and forestry sectors, and the organizations that have projects with a specific timeframe, that is with a beginning, a middle and an end. That is the department's role, and that is how we can best contribute to the economic development of the various regions of Quebec.

* * *

[English]

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the crisis in the auto parts industry is getting worse and still the government does nothing. Kitchener Frame announced that it is throwing 1,200 people out of work and this is a huge blow to the Waterloo region.

Will the government finally admit that there is a strong role for the federal government? How many good Canadian jobs have to disappear before the government does something about this emergency?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly every single member in the House is saddened any time a Canadian worker loses a job. Kitchener Frame is a company that produced a frame for SUV vehicles. The market in the United States has fallen very significantly, causing a significant problem for that company.

I would point out that other corporations and companies in the auto sector continue to do well. There are plants that will be opening, a Toyota plant this fall, and there are also companies in the parts industry in places like Woodstock, Stratford, Simcoe and St. Thomas that are able to succeed in the current market.

The Minister of Finance, myself, the Minister of the Environment and others have met with the auto executives and with labour. We continue to work on this issue with them.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we also learned that General Motors in the United States has suffered the largest annual loss ever and is getting rid of 74,000 workers. Will the government do anything to protect Canadian jobs?

With the ongoing pressures on the North American auto companies and the additional impact of the market downturn, does the government even know what the effect will be on Canada or does it simply not care about Canadian workers?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government cares about Canadian workers and, more to the point, we care about our capacity to assemble automobiles in Canada. One out of every six automobiles that is produced in North America is produced in Canada. There are 158,000 workers in this industry, approximately a quarter of Ontario's manufacturing GDP.

Two and a half million cars are assembled in Canada. It is something that we are extraordinarily good at. We are going to work together with labour and industry to make sure that we keep that competitive advantage.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, by announcing the tabling of the budget, the Minister of Finance wants to divert attention away from the contracts he handed out to his friends from the Mike Harris era. Mr. MacPhie earned almost \$22 per word for last year's budget speech, a contract awarded in contravention of Treasury Board guidelines.

Will he also write this year's speech, or will the President of Treasury Board do his job and crack down on the abuses of his colleague, the Minister of Finance?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I made clear, the documentation in support of the time spent, the hours worked over several months in the contract to which the hon. member referred is publicly disclosed in accordance with the rules. I invite the hon. member to review the documentation. Once the hon. member has done that, if she thinks that there was not value for money, she can raise it here, but the hon. member could at least do her homework before she asks the question.

● (1445)

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am raising it.

In 2006 the Prime Minister said, "\$132,000 is a lot of money.... It represents the total taxes paid by 27 single working Canadians earning \$40,000".

His finance minister did not get the message or he would not have given his friend a \$122,000 contract to write a budget speech. What does the finance minister have to say to those 1,200 Canadians who lost their jobs today about that big fat untendered contract?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes the assumption in her question that the work was not done for the money paid. That suggestion is wrong. The evidence is publicly available. I invite the hon. member to look at and review the evidence of the work done for the money paid.

*Oral Questions***ELECTION FINANCING**

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in spite of our government's implementation of the toughest anti-corruption law in history which bans corporate donations, the Liberals insist on finding ways around the rules to raise funds from corporations and wealthy insiders.

Tomorrow they have an event auctioning off time with key Liberals where the sky is the limit and individuals, partnerships, corporations and associations are free to bid as high as they want. As my colleague from Essex said, this is Liberal love in all the wrong places.

Can the Minister for Democratic Reform remind the Liberal leader and his colleagues about the new rules of campaign financing?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to illegal fundraising, the Liberal Party refuses to change. Although individual contributions are limited to \$1,100 and corporate contributions are now banned, the Liberal Party is trying a way around that, an auction for lobbyists.

Tomorrow night here in Ottawa with the Liberal leader it is possible to buy special access, lunch with the deputy leader, the industry critic and more. How much? It says that the sky is the limit, that a successful bid will not affect one's annual political contribution limit, and that corporations are free to bid as high as they want.

The party of the sponsorship scandal is alive and kicking. The Liberal Party just will not change.

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[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Vanier Institute of the Family has just published disturbing statistics. Canadian families have record debt levels with an average of \$80,000 per family, or 131% of their disposable income. More and more they are paying their bills with credit cards that have usurious interest rates charged with impunity by our banks.

We know that the Minister of Finance failed miserably on the issue of ATM fees. Will he at least take action on credit cards?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the best social program is a job. This government in two years has created more than 750,000 excellent social programs in Canada.

With respect to low income Canadians, we have removed 650,000 low income Canadians completely from the income tax rolls in Canada. We also have the working income tax benefit which the members opposite talked about but never did, which we introduced and which is now law in Canada. We also have a working families tax plan and a registered disability savings plan to help Canadians.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the finance minister were listening to Canadians, he would know that families are getting ripped off at the bank, ripped off at the gas pump, ripped off by cellphone companies and ripped off on their cable bills. But the rip-off does not end there.

The finance minister is personally ripping off taxpayers. He paid a friend \$200,000 for a 20 page speech. Does he even know that \$200,000 is the average family's income for three years? This is unjustifiable. He has no moral authority to talk about budgetary matters or anything else. Why does he not just resign?

• (1450)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would know, if he bothered to review the material, that the work done was extensive. It was done by two people over an extensive period of several months. It related to policy and communications and not as the member just suggested. It is plain that the member has not bothered to review the documentation which is publicly disclosed.

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BULK WATER

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange has said that water is about to become commoditized and traded as a futures contract, along with pork bellies, oranges and lumber.

Former Alberta premier Peter Loughheed has said he expects lobbying efforts from the United States aimed at prying bulk water out of Canada to intensify over the next decade.

Last week at the Munk Centre a panel of water policy experts called on the government to create safety net legislation to effectively ban Canadian bulk water exports, now, today, before there is a crisis.

When is the government going to act and close the door once and for all on bulk water exports—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International trade.

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under NAFTA there is no obligation on the part of Canada or any of the NAFTA partners to export bulk water in any form. In fact, there is legislation in place that protects against the commoditization of water, as long as water remains in its natural state, and on boundary waters, it cannot be removed without the permission of the federal government under law, for export or for any other reason.

There is good legislation in place. If the Munk Centre study has something new to tell us, we will certainly study that.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, “water was not exempted from NAFTA”. Who said that? The MP for Calgary East, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The problem started when prime minister Brian Mulroney removed from the last draft of the free trade agreement the exemption for water that had been included in earlier drafts, to the surprise of his international trade minister.

Why does the government always have to be dragged kicking and screaming to face the truth that everyone else knows? Why will the government not do something to protect our environment, our natural heritage—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International Trade.

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the partners to the North American Free Trade Agreement actually came together and signed in 1993 an agreement that water in its natural state was not covered in any way by the North American Free Trade Agreement. It is against the law to export bulk water, to remove bulk water from its natural state, from its water basins. That party was in power for a long time and it said the same thing.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in December the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration shamefully boasted that the government was “very proud” and “was delivering” on its record of immigration. The grim reality is that under the Conservative government, people are waiting longer than ever before to enter Canada, 20% longer. We need immigrants desperately to help this country grow, but the government has no long term plan to get them here.

Why has the Conservative minister neglected to get the necessary resources from her government to look after Canada's failing immigration system?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are hardly going to take lessons on immigration from the Liberal Party. Let us look at the Liberals' shameful legacy: They put a \$975 tax on immigrants; they ballooned the backlog from 50,000 to 800,000; they voted against \$1.3 billion in settlement funding for new immigrants; they voted against our foreign credentials referrals office. When it comes to their claims, they claim to stand up for immigrants, but they actually vote against them.

• (1455)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government can try to duck and hide and the minister can play ostrich and stick her head in the sand, but the fact is the government has repeatedly failed new immigrants, another broken promise.

How fast a person immigrates to Canada depends on where the person lives. This is discriminatory. Beijing waiting times have increased by 41%, while process cases have decreased by 48%.

Will the government immediately rectify the problem and allocate necessary resources everywhere so that everyone is given equal opportunity to come to Canada? When will the government do it?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, given the fact that the Liberals voted against all our other efforts to help immigrants, I find that surprising.

I also find surprising that that particular member would be saying that everyone deserves the same kind of treatment. They may deserve it, but I do have in my possession a letter from an MP in this

Oral Questions

House asking for special treatment for certain people very close to him. That member is the member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by closing its employee payroll service at the Shawinigan Tax Centre, Canada Revenue Agency has eliminated 28 permanent positions that represent high quality jobs in a region already harshly affected by a number of plant closures. Despite all that, the minister responsible is saying that the agency has improved the efficiency of its service by concentrating these jobs.

Does the minister realize that this centralization is detrimental to the Mauricie region and that cutting positions in Quebec and sending them to Ontario and Manitoba is unfair to the workers in Shawinigan?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier in the House, CRA studied this issue extensively and arrived at the conclusion that it was more efficient to concentrate these functions in two locations.

I also pointed out that CRA continues to grow in all areas of the country.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister's response is an insult to the hundreds of workers who are waiting for their paycheques.

How can the minister responsible for the agency claim to be offering a better service when casual employees are forced to wait 10 to 12 weeks for their pay as a direct result of this decision?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said Friday, unfortunately some new workers in CRA did not receive their cheques on time. CRA has taken action to correct this.

If the member is aware of anybody who has not been paid, please advise me and we will take the necessary action.

* * *

FORESTRY

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, B.C. native leaders have been asking for help for two years from the Conservative government.

Last week they came to Ottawa to plead with the government for help with the pine beetle infestation. More than 100 aboriginal communities, already reeling from forestry job losses, are living in fear as the forest fire season approaches.

When will the minister finally help these communities, or will the government fumble this crisis the same way it has others, laissez-faire, too little too late?

Oral Questions

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week I had a very productive meeting with the B.C. First Nations Leadership Council.

Our government has committed funding, something which the previous government did not do, to fund exactly this issue, to protect communities from forest fires.

Under our program, 53 first nations communities in British Columbia are receiving funding under our mountain pine beetle initiative to protect communities. We are getting the job done.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government knows how to set goals and priorities.

Many African countries are working to meet the basic human necessities that we take for granted.

As a rich nation, Canadians are well equipped to help the world's poor. I know the people in my riding of Sarnia—Lambton are extremely compassionate when it comes to international development.

The Prime Minister committed to doubling aid to Africa by 2008-09. Can the Minister of International Cooperation tell the House if Canada is on target to meet this commitment?

• (1500)

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is on target. Last week I announced \$302 million to the African Development Bank, \$72 million to the World Food Program and \$17 million to strengthen governance in Africa.

Last July the government announced \$125 million to feed children in Africa. In November the Prime Minister announced \$105 million toward improving the health of Africans.

In this year alone our government has announced over \$620 million. We will meet our commitment to double aid to Africa.

* * *

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the TimberWest Elk Falls sawmill in Campbell River closes May 8, with 257 workers fired. This is the 112th casualty of the forestry industry crisis, with 30,000 jobs lost since 2003.

It will not stop with the sawmill. The pulp and paper mill next door is struggling to survive the high dollar. Without a secure source of fibre from the sawmill, Campbell River could lose another 400 jobs.

The government must immediately advance the \$1 billion trust fund to the provinces. Could the minister tell us how long we will have to wait in Campbell River?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has been very proactive for the forestry sector. We have been investing millions of dollars to promote innovation, looking to expand our market opportunities.

We recognize the struggle of this sector in every corner of Canada. That is why our Prime Minister announce \$1 billion for the community development trust fund. I am very pleased that the province of British Columbia has been extremely supportive. In fact, I have had discussions about this fund with the premier, and I have every confidence that it will deliver for these communities in the months ahead.

* * *

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the crisis in the manufacturing sector is getting worse: 1,200 jobs lost at Kitchener Frame; 150 at Dana Manufacturing in Barrie; 55 at Abitibi-Bowater; 270 at Lanxess Inc. in Sarnia; and 600 at Ford/Nemak.

We are losing good paying jobs every day and it is hurting working families. An aid package is only a start. We need a comprehensive manufacturing strategy.

How many more jobs will be lost before the government wakes up, takes concrete action to prevent layoffs and helps industry weather this economic storm? Why does it not wake up?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member would want to take notice of the stimulus that has been provided to the Canadian economy for 2008 by the government. The cumulative effect of the stimulus is 1.4% of GDP in Canada. She can compare that with the proposal in the United States, which is about 1% of GDP.

This is an enormous stimulus being delivered now to the manufacturing and other business sectors in Canada.

* * *

AUTISM

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year the House, with the support of all Conservative members, passed a motion calling for the creation of a national autism strategy. The government has totally ignored this motion.

This week, Stephan Marinoiu, a father of an autistic child, walked from Toronto to Ottawa to raise awareness of the government's failure to live up to this commitment. Over the last couple of days, it would have been a tough cold walk.

My question is for the Minister of Health. How many more Canadian families will be left out in the cold by the Conservative government as costs rise for family members dealing with autism?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is something parents around the country, who have autistic children, deal with on a day to day basis, including members of our caucus.

This is why the government acted. We did something last year that no other federal government has done. We invested \$1 million in a brand new chair of autism research. We hosted a national research symposium, working with our provincial and territorial partners to share best practices, improve knowledge and research.

We are doing concrete things in our sphere of jurisdiction to help the lives of autistic children and their parents.

* * *

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Hon. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-8 makes amendments to the Canada Transportation Act that will help protect rail shippers from potential abuse of market power by railways. This is great news for rural Canada and for Canadian farmers and manufacturers.

The Grain Growers of Canada and the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities both voice their support for the bill and encourage the Senate to pass it in a timely manner.

Could the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities inform the House when he expects the bill to pass the Senate?

• (1505)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise all members of the House that Bill C-8 is supported by both parties in the Senate. Senators are aware of the fact that the support for the bill was unanimous and that clause by clause on Bill C-8 was completed in a record 15 minutes in committee.

Given that no one in either house opposes Bill C-8 and that there are no unresolved issues remaining, it is my understanding that Bill C-8 should get through this week for our shippers and people needing this.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Kathleen Casey, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island and the Hon. Roger Fitzgerald, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Patrick Rouble, Minister of Education for Yukon.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

TACKLING VIOLENT CRIME LEGISLATION

The House resumed from February 11 consideration of the motion.

Government Orders

The Speaker: It being 3:06 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Government Business No. 3.

Call in the members.

• (1515)

[Translation]

(The House divided on Motion No. 3, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 40)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anderson	André
Arthur	Asselin
Bachand	Baird
Barbot	Batters
Bellavance	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Bigras	Blackburn
Blais	Blaney
Bonsant	Bouchard
Boucher	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Brunelle	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Cardin	Carrie
Carrier	Casson
Chong	Clement
Comuzzi	Crête
Cummins	Davidson
Day	DeBellefeuille
Del Mastro	Demers
Deschamps	Devolin
Doyle	Duceppe
Dykstra	Emerson
Epp	Faille
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Freeman
Gagnon	Galipeau
Gallant	Gaudet
Goldring	Goodyear
Gravel	Grewal
Guay	Guergis
Guimond	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffier	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kotto
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laforest
Laframboise	Lake
Lauzon	Lavallée
Lebel	Lemay
Lemieux	Lessard
Lévesque	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
Lussier	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malo
Manning	Mark
Mayes	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Mourani
Nadeau	Nicholson

Points of Order

Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Ouellet	Paquette
Paradis	Perron
Petit	Picard
Plamondon	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Rajotte	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Roy	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shipley
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Thi Lac	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Vincent
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Williams	Yelich— 172

NAYS

Members

Angus	Atamanenko
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bevington
Black	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Davies
Dewar	Godin
Julian	Layton
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse	Mathysen
McDonough	Mulcair
Nash	Savoie
Siksay	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Wasylcyia-Leis— 27	

PAIRED

Members

Lalonde	Pallister— 2
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The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 3 carried.

I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded division, government orders will be extended by nine minutes.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION REGARDING COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. On February 8 during oral questions the member for Beaches—East York asked a question that was the subject of the committee's proceedings, not just its agenda or schedule, as would normally be allowed.

In the question, the member asserted that the Minister of Canadian Heritage and for the Status of Women and Official Languages misled the committee during her appearance. This assertion was the subject of debate within the committee and was not the proper subject of a question to a committee chair.

I reference Marleau and Montpetit, at pages 429 and 430, under the category of questions concerning matters before committees, where it is stated:

Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to chairs of committees. Questions to the Ministry or a committee chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee may not be raised.

Further, it is stated that questions:

—on a subject matter that is before a committee, when appropriately cast, are normally permitted as long as questioning does not interfere with the committee's work or anticipate its report. When a question has been asked about a committee's proceedings, Speakers have encouraged Members to rephrase their questions.

After the improper question was put, the member for Don Valley East, the chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, responded and continued to assert a position which was in fact a matter of debate and opinion that was not shared by all the committee members.

I cite again from Marleau and Montpetit at page 827:

During the Oral Question Period in the House, a committee Chair may respond to questions, provided they deal with the proceedings or schedule of the committee and not the substance of its work.

I contend and would ask you to consider that this question and the answer from February 8 should be ruled out of order, as both contradict the normal protocols for oral questions in the House.

The Speaker: The Chair certainly appreciates the diligence of the hon. member for Simcoe North in this matter. Having anticipated that this might be his point of order, I have the text of the question before me.

The hon. member for Beaches—East York in her question asked this:

Does the chairperson plan an early meeting of the committee to consider how the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages misled the committee this week during her appearance regarding equality?

In other words, the question did, in my view, deal with the schedule and agenda of the committee, which is a question that is permitted. The question did ask, is there going to be an early meeting of the committee? It did go on to ask about the business of the committee, but the agenda is properly part of the question. The question was, is there going to be an early meeting of the committee to consider this item on the agenda? In my view, that kind of question is in order.

The answer did not have much to do with the question, but Speakers are stuck on answers, as the hon. member knows. I am sure he is very sympathetic to the position of the Chair, because frequently we have questions that are asked and a response is given that does not answer the question and in fact has nothing to do with the question. But it is not for the Speaker to decide whether those answers are in order or not in the circumstances.

The provisions in Marleau and Montpetit deal with questions. The hon. member will notice that they do not tend to deal with answers. Some have suggested that question period in the House is called question period, not answer period, because the response does not necessarily answer the question that is asked.

In this case I agree that the response from the chairperson of the committee was not an answer, using the usual expression of answer, to the question that was asked. It was a response, but it had relatively little to do with the question.

I believe the question met the exigencies of our procedure in that it did deal with the schedule. It asked when the committee might meet and about the agenda for that meeting. In my view, therefore, it was in order. It may have had other undertones in it that Speakers would prefer not to have in there, but the fact is, in my view, that it did deal with those two items and therefore I allowed the question.

I can only sympathize with the hon. member when we deal with answers. As I have said, Speakers have very little to say over what constitutes the response to a question. If the response is not an answer to the question, I cannot rule the response out of order unless unparliamentary language is used in the response, which would of course be out of order and which he has not suggested occurred in this case. I sympathize, but there we will leave that one.

I appreciate the member's diligence in checking this out and raising the matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

SENATE APPOINTMENT CONSULTATIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to resume the remarks I had begun concerning Bill C-20 prior to question period. First, I want to repeat for the benefit of those listening that the Bloc Québécois will be opposing this bill.

Everyone knows very well that the Bloc Québécois has always said that it would be a waste of time to reform the Senate and that the only proper reform for this Senate would be to simply abolish it. That would represent real savings for the taxpayers. In any case, there is no longer an upper chamber in any of the provinces. It has already disappeared in Quebec, among others.

I began my remarks by saying that the Conservatives make election promises and then appear to keep them. It is one way of doing things. It is true that during the election campaign the Conservative party decided to promise Senate reform by making it an elected Senate. However, it must be understood that while it is nice to have dreams and make election promises, we are far from the reality.

I gave a first example: yes, the Conservatives promised legislation on transparency, on ethics and all of that. Strangely, the only members of this House who have not had their election expenses reimbursed by the Chief Electoral Officer are more than 60 Conservatives, including three ministers from Quebec, including the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Canadian Heritage. All of them failed to comply with requirements and have made expenditures that are not allowable and contrary to the Canada Elections Act. That is why those Conservative members have not

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been reimbursed for their election expenses. They promised legislation on transparency, ethics and integrity, and they are the only members whose election expenses have been refused by the Chief Electoral Officer because, obviously, they asked for reimbursement of expenditures they were not entitled to make.

Once again, when we look at the bill before us dealing with Senate reform, we recognize that the Conservatives made a promise. However, there is one problem: the only real way to reform the Senate is to re-open the Constitution, and that is not what they said.

First, in 1970, the Supreme Court of Canada, in a judgment entitled "The Supreme Court of Canada in Re: Authority of Parliament in relation to the Upper House, [1980] 1 S.C.R. 54", stated that decisions related to the Senate are "essential" and that any reforms affecting the powers of the Senate must be carried out in accordance with the re-opening of the Canadian Constitution. Therefore, the consent of the provinces is necessary.

On this subject, it is all very well to introduce Bill C-20, but, in the end, to get around the Constitution, here is what the Conservative party is doing in trying to keep its election promise: it will hold elections, although the Prime Minister will not be obliged to accept the results of the election. So, they will hold elections for senators and afterwards, the Prime Minister will have the option of choosing senators from among the persons who were elected, since, under the Constitution, he is the one who chooses senators and appoints them.

First, quite simply stated, these amount to phony elections, because there is no guarantee that the Prime Minister will abide by the choice of the electors. Next, it is quite obvious they are simply trying to give a false representation of the principles of democracy. That is how the Conservative government is trying to operate: by distorting democracy.

In one particular case, the Chief Electoral Officer did not fall for that kind of manoeuvre. That is why 67 Conservative members did not have their election expenses reimbursed. They tried to manipulate the Canada Elections Act to go beyond the set limit for the reimbursement of expenses and now they are trying to manipulate the Constitution.

The province of Quebec responded very clearly through its Minister for Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs, Benoît Pelletier, who is not a sovereigntist but a Liberal MNA. On November 7, he issued this warning to the federal government. I will read his statement:

The Government of Quebec does not believe that this falls exclusively under federal jurisdiction.

Minister Pelletier was talking about the Senate.

Given that the Senate is a crucial part of the Canadian federal compromise, it is clear to us that under the Constitution Act, 1982, and the regional veto act, the Senate can be neither reformed nor abolished without Quebec's consent.

On the same day that the Quebec Minister for Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs issued this statement, the following motion was passed unanimously by the National Assembly, that is by all parties, both sovereigntist and federalist:

That the National Assembly of Quebec reaffirm to the Federal Government and to the Parliament of Canada that no modification to the Canadian Senate may be carried out without the consent of the Government of Quebec and the National Assembly.

Government Orders

•(1525)

And yet it is quite clear. In the opinion of the Bloc Québécois, at least, the Senate is a fine example of why Canadian federalism does not work. No constitutional amendments ever attempted have ever been accepted. The Conservatives are providing an even better example by trying to erode and circumvent the Constitution, by introducing a bill about electing senators. This will not be a real election, because ultimately it is the Prime Minister who will make the choice. He wants to have some kind of consensus through elections and he reserves the right, if he does not agree with the person who is elected, to appoint someone else.

The Conservatives will have invented just about anything. Every day, they pull a rabbit out of their hat. It is quite entertaining to see Conservative members from Quebec, or even ministers, going against the decision of the National Assembly of Quebec and trying, in addition, to distort and circumvent the Canadian Constitution in order to achieve their ends because they had the misfortune to make a campaign promise they could not keep. That is the reality. Quebeckers, who gave the Bloc Québécois a large majority, understood it well.

An hon. member: And they will again.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: And they will again. My colleague is quite right and he has understood well what the Conservatives are. Obviously, they signal left and turn right. That has always been the case. They make promises, and in trying to keep them they have no compunctions about twisting the Constitution or the Canada Elections Act as they have done.

I reiterate that over 60 members, including three ministers from Quebec, among them the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages, have not been reimbursed for their election expenses because, once again, they have tried to twist the Canada Elections Act by attempting to put in for expenses they were not entitled to. That is the image that this Conservative government will be leaving in the public's mind. Quebeckers will not be duped in the next election campaign.

Once again, they will have understood that the only way the Senate will truly be reformed is to abolish it. There are no other solutions. That is obviously what the Bloc Québécois proposes.

[English]

The Speaker: Questions and comments. The hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park. I always want to say Elk Island, but Sherwood Park.

•(1530)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I sure did make my mark in life as the member for Elk Island and I was honoured to have been only the second member of Parliament for that riding. It was a new riding in the previous election and then, of course, the boundaries were changed and it became the riding of Edmonton—Sherwood Park, which is where I now have the honour to serve.

After listening to the member's speech, one thing really puzzles me. How can the member continue to say that we will not appoint

the person that is chosen by the people anyway? He quite distinctly said in his speech that if the people do not select someone that the Prime Minister likes that he will appoint someone else.

This whole exercise is about bringing some democracy, in other words the voice and the will of the people, to the selection of senators. There is no justification in our modern age where most western countries have a level of democracy and where the people are heard, whereas in Canada we have one of our houses of Parliament appointed without regard to the will of the people.

Alberta is a perfect example of that. Every member of Parliament from Alberta is a Conservative right now, and we hope that will continue, but only one senator is not a Liberal appointment. The choices made by Liberal prime ministers have been totally political appointments. Until Senator Bert Brown was appointed by the Prime Minister as a direct result of Bert Brown having won an election in Alberta, we had no members of the Senate from Alberta who actually represented the will of the people.

If we are going to have a Senate, how can the member possibly justify speaking against having the people make the choice, rather than some politician in Ottawa?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I am surprised at the hon. member. I have been here since 2000 and I know that he has been here for several years and that he very much enjoys following the debates in the House. I am surprised that he has not read the bill.

Under this bill, it is still up to the Prime Minister to appoint a senator even if this senator is elected. Why is it so? Because, anything else would require an amendment to Constitution.

It is quite simple. The Quebec National Assembly has responded very well. Let me again, for the benefit of the member, the reference to the Supreme Court of Canada entitled, "Re: Authority of Parliament in relation to the Upper House", which states in part:

Decisions that affect a "fundamental feature or essential characteristic" of the Senate cannot be made unilaterally.

It is clear, for instance, that the appointment of senators, the process of appointing them, is an "essential characteristic". Making the Senate a truly elected Senate would therefore require an amendment to the Canadian Constitution.

Like every government before it, the Conservative government did not dare to reopen the Constitution. Changes to the Senate have been proposed since 1894, but nothing ever came of it. Why? Because it would require reopening the Constitution.

Now, the Conservative government is again trying to avoid reopening the Constitution and transgressing the law. It should heed the warning from the unanimous vote taken by all parties represented at the Quebec National Assembly: do not do it, it is not legal.

I cannot understand how my hon. colleague, who is following the issue closely and trying to get interested, can support this bill. Why does he support it? It is unconstitutional. That is the reality.

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The only way this can be done is through an election. The Prime Minister may select the candidate or not. That is what the bill his party introduced says. If he disagrees with that, he should have a word with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons who introduced the bill.

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

• (1535)

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, seeing as you have taken occupancy of the chair, I must say that on the last occasion when you were in the chair and I rose you gave an extremely informed lecture on the history of the predecessor ridings to the one I now represent talking about the old riding of Lanark—Renfrew. It was an example of knowledge which I do not think you share with many people. That is a very specialized form of knowledge.

I want to talk a bit today about the Senate consultations bill that is before the House and, in particular, about the line of argument that has been presented, vis-à-vis the bill, that is not a very intellectually founded argument nor a practical one.

It is the Liberal line that no piecemeal reform can take place in the Senate. I use the word piecemeal advisedly because the right hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, when he was prime minister, would use the word piecemeal as his way of indicating that it was unsatisfactory. He wanted to have, so he said, the entire Senate change as a package and all problems dealt with at the same time. That was his mantra. It was his way of ensuring that in practice the Senate remained an appointed body because he understood, and I think the Liberals understand, that in practice, if we were to amend all the different aspects of the Senate that could be improved, we would find ourselves at an impasse.

We need to remember the different aspects of the Senate that have come up for discussion over the past couple of decades. We have the powers of the Senate. Should the Senate be a co-equal body to the lower House as it is now but not a confidence chamber or should it have its powers rejigged in some way? Members may recall, for example, that the Charlottetown accord led to changes to the powers of the Senate. In fact, to some degree, I think there was an increase in its powers.

We also have had discussions on whether there should be elections for senators or the kinds of advisory consultations that the government is proposing in the legislation currently under contemplation.

We have heard the idea of term limits for senators. The government, of course, has proposed eight year term limits for senators as opposed to the effectively limitless terms that start when one is appointed and continues on until the age of 75, allowing, at least in theory, members to be appointed to 45-year terms if they are appointed early enough in their lives.

Then there is the question of how the Senate is apportioned among the various provinces. Is it weighted correctly? Should there be some adjustment to the way the Senate is weighted? I come from a background in the Reform Party. I remember the party of which I

was formerly a member, the old Reform Party, was in favour of a triple E Senate and one of those E's was for equal. The Reform Party believed that the Senate should be weighted equally by provinces. Other suggestions to change the weighting of the Senate have also come up.

If we do everything all at once, which, essentially, is what the Liberals argue we should be doing, then we would be confronted with the situation in which we would need to make these changes under various different sections of the Canadian amending formula, the amending formula that we use for amending our Constitution. To make this point, I would draw attention to the fact that changes to the terms of senators is currently being contemplated under the authority of section 44 of the Constitution Act, 1982. Section 44, which is part of our amending formula, states:

Subject to sections 41 and 42, Parliament may exclusively make laws amending the Constitution of Canada in relation to the executive government of Canada or the Senate and House of Commons.

We have had some of Canada's most prominent constitutional experts, including Patrick Monaghan and Peter Hogg, indicate that they regard the proposal to amend the terms of senators under this formula to be constitutionally permissible.

If one wants to make other changes, however, one has to use a different section of the Constitution. It would be section 38, the 7/50 formula, where we must have seven provinces with 50% of the population of Canada if we want to change the powers of the Senate and the method of electing senators. I am referring to section 42 of the Constitution Act that specifies that the 7/50 formula must be used or if we want to change:

the number of members by which a province is entitled to be represented in the Senate and the residence qualifications of Senators;

That is a direct quote from the Constitution Act. Therefore, we see different sections of the Constitution being required.

• (1540)

If we try to do everything in a single package, by necessity we must introduce legislation, or a constitutional amendment, under the most restrictive of the available constitutional methods. In other words, under the 7/50 formula, what in effect we would be doing is taking all of the different aspects of the Constitution and making them subject to the approval of one of those giant, everything-included packages that tend to come out of meetings of the premiers. I think we have seen that this is not always a recipe for success.

Let me make this point by citing some examples from the past. In reverse chronological order, we have the Charlottetown accord, which attempted to make a variety of changes to the Constitution of Canada under one package. That, of course, failed.

Then we have the Meech Lake accord, going back to 1990. That, also, was not a great success.

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Prior to that, we have the 1982 package of constitutional amendments. It got through the House and through most legislatures. We know it was not approved by the legislature of Quebec. I think a good case could be made that there was the near breakup of the country following the crisis over the failure of the Meech Lake accord. It goes back to a crisis started by the attempt to pass a giant package through on which a national consensus was not possible; not necessarily a good model.

Finally, going back to the early 1970s, we have the Victoria charter, which attempted to do the same thing, and which failed.

That is the history. This would appear to be a very bad way of doing things.

By contrast, I think considerable maturity is shown by the government's approach of dividing the Constitution package into sections and dealing with them one by one.

Dealing with the issue of taking the indefinite terms of senators and turning them into defined eight-year terms, the government has used the approach of saying that this is constitutionally a fairly easy thing to do. Although it is a constitutional matter, it is dealt with by resolution. It, nevertheless, is treated like an ordinary piece of legislation and, therefore, it can be introduced as an ordinary piece of legislation. And of course the government has done that.

Separate from that is the matter before the House right now: the Senate consultation legislation.

What we have done here is to recognize that we cannot actually create Senate elections without seeking the support of seven provinces with 50% of the population. So, as an alternative, without violating the various prerogatives involved and the constitutional requirements involved in our Senate, which require that our Senate be appointed, we seek advisory consultations.

One can say those are de facto elections, but nevertheless the constitutional obligation is met and it can be dealt with as ordinary legislation. The other questions can be set aside and considered separately. The fact is that we have a workable method, something that actually can take place. It seems to me this is best way of proceeding.

I want to point out, in the minute that remains to me, one other consideration.

The Liberals make a great deal of the need for this holus-bolus, one-size-fits-all, single package of Senate reform when it suits them. However, their history shows that they were in fact perfectly willing to consider doing it one piece at a time.

I referred earlier to the Charlottetown accord and the Meech Lake accord. Both of those accords contemplated changes to one part of the Senate without dealing with all of the Senate.

Let me make this point by actually quoting from the proposed constitutional amendment from 21 years ago that dealt with changes under the Meech Lake accord to the Senate. It stated:

1. The Constitution Act, 1867 is amended by adding thereto, immediately after section 1 thereof, the following section:

25.(1) Where a vacancy occurs in the Senate, the government of the province to which the vacancy relates may, in relation to that vacancy, submit to the Queen's Privy Council for Canada the names of persons who may be summoned to the senate.

Subsection (2), and this is the important part:

Until an amendment to the Constitution of Canada is made in relation to the Senate pursuant to section 41 of the Constitution Act, 1982, the person summoned to fill a vacancy in the Senate shall be chosen from among persons whose names have been submitted under subsection (1)—

• (1545)

The point is that we are specifically saying that seeing as we cannot get unanimity on the broader question, we will settle for a partial reform. The partial reform approach makes sense. When it does not suit the partisan interests of the Liberals, they pretend it does not. Even Liberals agree with that.

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is this. Why does the member feel that opposition parties continue to oppose any attempts to reform the Senate?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, with regard to my hon. colleague's question, the Bloc Québécois has sort of a stock answer about wanting to go back to the appointed model I just quoted from, an appointment by the provincial legislatures.

In practice, though, the Bloc's *raison d'être* is to make sure that Canada breaks up and Quebec leaves the federation. If Canada works better, that pushes it further from its goal. Really, it is anxious to make sure that Canada does not work.

The NDP honestly believes that the upper House should be abolished. I do not support that position, but I understand it and I think it is intellectually honest in advocating it quite openly. That is not so easy to achieve as a practical matter. There are some hurdles that have to be achieved in terms of a very high level of consensus. That is a somewhat utopian goal that the New Democrats have, but they are sincere in their belief and I applaud them for that.

As for the Liberals, I can only conclude that they really want to have a continuation of the appointed Senate model. I mentioned that when the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard was Prime Minister he talked a fine talk about really wanting to have a reformed Senate. He proposed nothing, ever, to achieve this goal, except once in the later part of 2003, when he had just become Prime Minister to say, "We will consult with the House of Commons and have it make recommendations". Then he backed off, and went ahead and made appointments.

All of his ideas were really always about appointments, a prime minister carrying on in the same old fashion that existed before. I believe that is essentially where the Liberal Party continues to stand to this very day.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join the debate today on the Senate reform this Conservative government wishes to achieve. First, I would like to mention that from time to time, at receptions or on Parliamentary trips, I do exchange greetings with my colleagues in the Senate. As far as I am concerned, they are human beings just like us and friendliness is always in order whenever we have an opportunity to discuss matters. I make no secret of the fact that many of them have the best interests of the public at heart. Yes, what is more, some senators have even accomplished great things in our society. I thank them for their contribution. However, that is not the question.

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Despite ideological differences I may have with the senators, it is not the senators who disturb me but rather the institution of the Senate itself. I find it absurd that a democratic society, such as Canada claims to be, can still accept the notion that unelected people should play a role in approving legislation and in governing the affairs of the country.

I am not a historian, but I can easily remember that Canada's upper chamber, the Senate, descends directly from the British House of Lords. At one time, those lords argued it was essential not to give power to the people and that it was necessary to offset the elected House with a chamber comprised of aristocrats. The Senate is the last sign of an old, obsolete monarchy in which the seats of power are allocated according to blood ties.

That way of thinking has not changed much. Today, some senators are appointed because of their family relations. I think, for example, of one senator from Quebec who was appointed because his father was a minister in the Trudeau government. In the case of other senators, the reasons for their appointments may be slightly different but they owe their places to connections, friends or political allegiance.

Will electing senators change this selection process? Not at all. In fact, the Conservative government must think electors are gullible if it would have them believe that this reform will make a big difference. In the formula proposed in the bill, the Conservatives are trying to reform the Senate with a simple bill, without getting into any constitutional details. I can understand their fear of starting a constitutional debate, as they did with the Charlottetown accord in 1992, because the Conservatives know full well that a reform of the Senate or the Constitution, like the one they are proposing, is unacceptable to Quebec.

Last November, the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously—including the government's ADQ friends—passed the following:

That no modification to the Canadian Senate may be carried out without the consent of the Government of Québec and the National Assembly.

Quebec is not alone in opposing the idea of Senate reform, as proposed by the Conservatives. Premiers Calvert, Doer and McGuinty have mentioned that it would be better to abolish the Senate than to try to renew it. Curiously, our party, the Bloc Québécois, a sovereignist party, has support from the governments of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario to abolish the Canadian Senate rather than have a piecemeal reform. For the Bloc, whether the Senate is reformed or not, it is still a useless institution.

For those who support Senate reform, the upper chamber draws its legitimacy and its need to exist from the fact that it provides a sober second look at the work of the House of Commons. Allow me to be skeptical. Senators are meant to take an objective and perhaps even a regional look at bills that are sent to them and review the work of the House of the Commons, but they are not elected and are not accountable for anything or to anyone. Over the years, partisanship has gained the upper hand over this supposed objectivity.

Electing senators will not change this partisanship in the least. According to the Conservatives' bill, the members of the upper chamber would be elected under a political banner and then appointed by the Prime Minister, if he so wishes. Since these new

senators would be elected with a political affiliation, we can expect that they will toe their party's line.

The Bloc Québécois and I are not alone in saying this, and not only today in this House.

● (1550)

On October 1 of last year, *Le Droit* printed a quotation by Elaine McCoy, an Alberta senator. She said:

—the institutional structure causes senators to close ranks around party discipline and to hold the party line.

According to this senator, we would have to do much more than elect members to the upper house to put an end to this kind of discipline. In other words, electing senators would do nothing more than duplicate the House of Commons.

As everyone here knows, none of the provinces have had upper chambers since Quebec abolished its Legislative Council in 1968. In Quebec and the Canadian provinces, parliamentary democracy is working just fine without a second partisan review of decisions made by elected representatives. Furthermore, I am certain that Quebecers would be delighted to find out that just by abolishing the Senate, we would avoid duplication and save between \$80 million and \$100 million per year.

Before wrapping up, I would like to make three points to illustrate the connection between the issue of Senate reform and other current issues.

First, as I said before, neither the existing nor a reformed Senate can be of any use, as evidenced by the fact that the institution slows down and hinders the democratic process. Bill C-2, the omnibus bill we talked about earlier, has been blocked in the Senate for partisan reasons even though this House, which was democratically elected, passed it unanimously.

Second, the Prime Minister rails against the Senate, but he, too, uses it for partisan purposes, as shown by his appointment of the Minister of Public Works. Many people no longer believe the Prime Minister when he talks about democracy, transparency and a new way of doing politics. What a wonderful show of federalism and openness. The Minister of Public Works has had four opportunities to run under his party's banner in Quebec byelections, but he chooses to be a ghost-like presence by putting in precious few appearances in the upper house. He gets paid pretty well for the tiny amount of time he spends there.

The third and final point that connects the bill with current events is being played out in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and the courts. Certain Conservative members and ministers broke Elections Canada's rules during the last election. I have no doubt that the Conservatives would consider themselves above the law and use the same tactics when the time came to elect senators.

The simplest solution for everyone—and I would recommend it to my Conservative colleagues who have not yet gotten the point—is simply to abolish the Senate. We should not waste our time on piecemeal reform. The Senate costs a fortune, has no legitimacy and more often than not holds up decisions of the House.

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•(1555)

[English]

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I could not help but think of one particular statement the member made at the start of her speech where she said that having elected senators would have no effect.

We are elected in this House, and if any of us had made some of the statements, as reported in the news, that Senator Sharon Carstairs made recently, does the member think we would get away with that? The senator can because she does not have to face the people to be picked. Senators can say whatever they want in the Senate and they do not have to worry about being re-elected.

I can almost assure the member it is not a correct statement that elected senators would have no effect. Elections would make those people think twice before they used their words with no fear of ever having to be nominated or campaign again.

The member who just spoke is going to have to campaign again. I would have to campaign again, but the senator would not. If nothing else, to be accountable for what we say and do in this place would be a start in the right direction.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Speaker, I listened to the question from the member for Wild Rose. In my opinion, the solution is simply to abolish the Senate. Then we would not be discussing whether or not it should be elected. Even if it were elected, as my friend said, the senators would represent a party. And if they represented a party, they would tow the party line.

I like it when the Conservatives cry wolf, even though the first thing the Prime Minister did was to appoint an unelected minister, Michael Fortier, who is in charge of one of the largest departments, Public Works and Government Services Canada. He does as he pleases. He is paid as a senator. He has a card and he punches in and out, which takes only 30 seconds. He is paid by the Senate to punch in and out. He is campaigning on a bus paid for by the Senate and taxpayers.

I believe that the Senate should just be abolished. Senator Fortier would run for election at the same time as everyone else.

[English]

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the bill.

I have listened to many of my colleagues give their rationale as to why all members of the House should support the bill. There has been a lot of technical information and a lot of legislative and legal support for arguments put forward. I would like to take a somewhat different approach in terms of my remarks today.

As a member of Parliament, I often speak to school students. In Ontario, grade 5 students have a section on Canada, so sometimes I speak to grade 5 classes and other days I speak to grade 10 classes, because grade 10 students in Ontario have a civic section in the standardized curriculum. Those are the two grades I visit.

Often the students ask me about my job and about Parliament. I have a very difficult time explaining to students why our Senate

exists the way it does. If we take a step back, it is actually shocking that in a mature and developed democracy like Canada, we still have an institution like the Senate.

Years ago I went to graduate school in the United States and I actually taught a course on government there. Students and colleagues would ask me about Canada. They were not familiar with our system.

When I would explain to American political science students how the Senate worked in Canada, they were shocked. They actually did not believe what I was saying. They would say, "Come on. That is not the way it really works". They did not believe that we could have a system where prime ministers can unilaterally put whomever they want into the Senate for 20, 30 or 40 years and that person functions as a parliamentarian with an office, staff and voting rights, and participates in the great debates in our country with absolutely no credibility or democratic legitimacy.

That is what this all boils down to. For years I thought I was the only one who thought that our Senate was shocking simply because it existed the way it does. I remember in the early 1990s the first time I heard Preston Manning speak. It was before the Reform Party was even in Ontario. He talked about democratic reform. I thought to myself that finally someone was talking about this. I remember thinking that I was not the only one who thinks that the Canadian Senate is grossly inappropriate and should be fundamentally changed.

I am very proud that I was one of the first people in Ontario to join the Reform Party and was involved with the party at that time. I came to the Reform Party because of my interest in democratic reform, not so much on judicial or economic reform, although I agreed with those planks, but democratic reform.

We have about 400 parliamentarians in Canada and 100 of them are in the Senate. They are there simply because one individual, the prime minister of the day, put them in the Senate and they stay there, at one time it was for life, but now it is until they are 75 years old. I am a pretty calm person, but if I want to get myself agitated, I just think about the Senate. The Senate is something that can actually make my blood boil because it is so outrageous the way it exists.

I heard one of my colleagues say that while he does not agree with the NDP position on abolition, he can respect it. I feel the same way. I believe that in a large diverse federation like Canada a bicameral legislature will work better than a unicameral legislature. I appreciate there are lots of people in my party who think the Senate should be changed.

The really interesting question is, who on earth actually thinks the current Senate is defensible? How would people justify the structure of the Canadian Senate today? I have come to the conclusion that there are only two groups of people who would support the current structure of our Senate.

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• (1600)

The first group would be the people who are already there, because it has worked for them. They would argue that the system works fine because it put someone such as themselves into the Senate. The second group would be the people who thought one day they might be appointed to the Senate. They think if they play their cards right, if they are nice to the party leadership, if they raise funds, if they do this and that, maybe somewhere down the line, as a reward, they will become senators, and they do not want to close off that option. I put that group of people in the same category as the 20% of the public who say that part of their retirement plan is winning the lottery. I guess a certain number of Canadians think getting appointed to the Senate is part of their career path and they do not want to lose that option.

This is the first point I make with students when I talk to them. I tell them that it is outrageous in the 21st century in a country such as Canada that we still have one of the two chambers of our national legislature where members are appointed for life by a prime minister.

I remember 10 or 15 years ago when the Iron Curtain came down in Europe. Many of the countries in Eastern Europe took the tentative first steps to establish democracies. Countries in the Middle East and other parts of the world had already crossed that gap and had gone from a military government or a totalitarian or a communist state to become a democracy. I imagine at the time, those countries looked at how they should structure their new democratic government. They probably looked at other countries such as Great Britain, or France, or the United States or other places to get ideas whether they would use a parliamentary system or a presidential system and how they would set it up.

I have often thought what would have happened had those countries brought in consultants and asked them how they should set up their new democratic government and the consultants told them they should have bicameral legislatures, but one chamber would be elected by the people. However, there would be strict party discipline and the prime ministers would pretty much control that in a majority government. In terms of the judiciary, they would let the prime ministers unilaterally appoint all the judges. Maybe the prime ministers would also unilaterally appoint the heads of all crown corporations and all ambassadors. For the second chambers in the national legislatures, the prime ministers would also unilaterally appoint all members to them.

If a consultant had said that in one of the countries in Eastern Europe 10 or 15 years ago, the individual would have been laughed out of the room. Somebody would have said that it was an absurd notion that any country could function in that way. I guess the consultant would have said that was not true, that Canada functioned this way.

In considering this bill today, we are talking about taking one step in the right direction. Some of us, particularly on this side of the House, would like to take more steps and we would like to take them faster.

We are satisfied with taking steps to deal with at least indirectly electing senators, having some mechanism where people would have some say in who would become their senators. If that is combined

with the other bill that would limit Senate terms to eight years, those two things would create a somewhat legitimate democratic institution infinitely better than we have today.

I hope we will take those two steps. I think they would work, they would make the Senate a more legitimate place and it would create an appetite for more steps in that direction.

Members in the Liberal Party say that they want everything or nothing, either a comprehensive fix the whole Senate package of reforms or they do not want to change anything. There is one of two explanations for that. First, they want comprehensive reform to the Senate. However, given they have been in power most of the last 50 years, they have had ample opportunity to do that but they have not. Second, they do not want any change to the Senate, but it is a convenient way for them to not publicly say that they are against Senate reform.

If the Liberals can have all the pieces fit together at the same time, if it is done through proper channels, including the constitutional amendment, then they will support that. However, they will not support other measures even though they are easily defensible, are logical and unarguably make the Senate more democratic than it is now.

On that basis, I encourage all members of this place to support the legislation. Help us take one baby step in the right direction. Before I leave this place, I hope we have a Senate that functions with the robust energy of a legitimate, democratic institution and that it can play the role that it is meant to play in our national political debate.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague from the Conservative Party talk about the changes he would like to make to the Senate. I found it all very interesting, but I would have liked to hear him address other issues and I would like him to answer the following questions.

While he is in favour of having an elected Senate, he did not mention anything in his speech about how useful that Senate would be. How could it really assist with the work done in this place, given that the bills brought before us are referred to committee, where witnesses are heard? Bills go through a long process before they are passed. They are considered in depth by the various political parties, which each has their own vision.

Elected or not, how could the Senate really make a greater contribution to the Canadian people and the analysis of proposed legislation?

• (1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Barry Devolin: Mr. Speaker, a democratically legitimate and therefore more meaningful Senate can fulfill several roles in Canada's Parliament.

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First, work sharing takes place at the committee level as well as within the legislature. The Canadian Senate plays that role today to a certain extent. When many pieces of legislation are brought forward, a certain amount of due diligence needs to take place. The volume of work that Canada's Parliament could deal with would be enhanced if there were two different chambers, two different groups of people to deal with that.

Second, we can read some of the justification in the United States. When its house and senate were set up, the senate would run on a different electoral cycle. As we know, some issues rise today to be of great importance and six months from now they are less important. We are all elected at the same time in this place. Having the other place on a different electoral cycle, people would go in at different times from different parts of the country. This would ensure that the issue of the day would have an impact, but it would not be the only issue that would carry forward. Spreading out the times when parliamentarians are accountable to the voters is a good thing.

Third, the upper chamber typically has a role more focused on regional representation. It is a certain irony that a member of the Bloc has asked why we need more regional representation in this place. That is a role for the Senate to play. Years ago we had the proposal for a triple E Senate, which would be equal. Different parts of the country would have a strong voice, even the less populated provinces, in one of the two chambers, and that would ensure their voices were heard.

Those are all legitimate roles that could be played by a democratic Senate. From my point of view, those are all reasons why a reformed Senate is preferable to abolishing the Senate. We need to move in that direction.

If I had been asked five years ago, I would have said my first choice would have been a reformed Senate. My second choice would have been the status quo. My last choice would have been to abolish the Senate. In the past year the first place is still a reformed Senate. However, I have come to the point where I flip two and three in my own mind. Abolishing the Senate is preferable to the status quo, but it is inferior to the option of fixing the place. If this bill and our Senate term limits bill passes, those are two important steps in the right direction to ensure the Senate of Canada plays a meaningful role.

To go back to the notion of people being elected at different times, Ontario just had a provincial election and the dominant issue arose for six weeks and then disappeared. No one has talked about it since, yet we have a government for the next four years based on one odd issue. Having two chambers would help us to avoid in Canada's national Parliament.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-20, which talks about what I would call an advisory election. It is a piecemeal effort on Senate reform.

First, I am not opposed to Senate reform. The Senate has been with us many years now and it is something on which perhaps Canadians and parliamentarians, both federal and provincial, should have an open and honest debate. We attempted it during the Charlottetown accord and Meech Lake discussions. Unfortunately, we did not make it all the way, but I thought we had some good

discussions and very constructive proposals were put on the table, which perhaps would have solved this issue once and for all.

These discussions would have to be broad reaching. They would involve the powers of the Senate. If we look at the constating documents of our country, the powers of the Senate are not really set out as to how senators are appointed or elected, the term of the Senate appointment, whether appointed or elected, and the numbers, which is a big issue for many provinces across Canada. If we look at the United States or Australian models, we would be heading toward an equal effective model. In Canada we do not have that, which is a big issue. All of these issues are worthy of discussion, debate and, hopefully, resolution.

However, to deal with it on a piecemeal basis, is the wrong way to go. At this juncture, when we have never had a discussion about Senate reform or at least a recent discussion, it would be my recommendation for the present government and Prime Minister to call the provinces together and discuss this entire issue. There has been absolutely no consultation, no discussion, no meetings, nothing, zilch, regarding any form of Senate reform and no consultation on this bill.

If we do not have consultation or meet with the provinces, the first thing that happens is the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, Yukon and New Brunswick are up in arms and against the legislation. It is difficult for people to support it. I do not think the piecemeal approach is the way to go. I would urge the government, if it is seriously interested, to try to reform the Senate and move on that basis.

We have to look at the history of the institution when our country was established in 1867. The Senate was created to represent the regions. However, the western regions did not exist at the time. In fact, there was a higher population in the Atlantic region on a percentage basis than there is now. That is the way the Senate was adopted then. It reflected the dual cultural and linguistic nature of the country. Since then, it has not evolved to meet the changing nature or fabric of Canada.

The people who debate this issue should look at what happened in Australia and the United States. United States senators were originally appointed, I believe, by the state legislatures. Eventually there was an evolution to an elected Senate. In that case there is an equal Senate with the powers defined. In this case, we would not have that. There would be nothing to deal with the powers involved, which would be a quagmire. I suggest there be some effort made with the provinces to discuss Senate reform.

• (1615)

I realize there were efforts made in the Charlottetown accord and the Meech Lake accord and these efforts did not bear fruit. I know that. I believe Charlottetown was the last accord. Ever since those accords were voted down, there really has not been an effort. Probably people were sick and tired of it and just did not want to go into the discussion about Senate reform again. It was put on the back burner. It was not a priority for the provincial governments. It was not a priority for Canadians.

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However, perhaps it is time to dust off the briefing books. It is time to dust off some of the position papers to look at this whole issue and it is time to call the provinces together. That is the most important point I will make in my debate this afternoon. To try to do this as the federal legislature without any consultation, without any meetings, without any discussions with the provinces, I submit is foolhardy.

I find it a little hypocritical for the government of the day to be doing this. I was really quite offended at the actions of the government, because in his very first item of business upon being sworn in after the election, the Prime Minister appointed to the Senate his campaign chair, who continued to be the campaign co-chair in the federal election of 2006. There was no talk of an election. There was no talk of a consultative process. The Prime Minister appointed him to the Senate.

Perhaps I would not have been offended at that, as it has certainly happened before, but the next thing the Prime Minister did was appoint him as an unelected Minister of Public Works and Government Services. For the last 25 months, he has been around Ottawa as the unelected Minister of Public Works and Government Services. He spends approximately \$43 million each and every day. He answers no questions in this House. He answers no questions in the Senate.

I have absolutely no idea what this gentleman looks like. I have no idea what he does and I never will. No one else in this House is any wiser than I am insofar as that particular person. He is, I submit, accountable to absolutely no one.

I do not want anyone here to get me wrong. I do not have any problem with a discussion on Senate reform. I think it would be healthy for the nation, but I certainly think it is not going anywhere unless we involve the provinces. I submit and suggest that the government should call a first ministers meeting with one item on the agenda: Senate reform. They should talk about the powers, the numbers, the appointment process and the term.

The government should put everything on the table and just see if there is any common ground. It should just make an effort. It may be unsuccessful, and it would not surprise me if it were unsuccessful, but the government should see if there is any common ground that can be worked at between the federal government and the provincial governments representing all provinces. So if there is any resolution to this issue, certainly it would be advisable.

Again, on dispute resolution, as I said, when we look at the Constitution we see that there are the powers of the House—and we can only have one confidence chamber—and the powers of the Senate. They really are not delineated, so if we had followed this process to its nth result, we would I guess have a Senate that is elected by advisory elections. How is any dispute to be resolved in future years? These are unanswered and disturbing questions.

Again, let us look at other jurisdictions, especially Australia. I would urge members to look at this and bring Australian experts here to see if there is any common ground so that we can move forward.

As my time is up, let me close by saying that the tenor of my comments and my position are clear. I believe that the time has come

and that maybe we should have a broader discussion rather than trying to accomplish this on a piecemeal basis.

• (1620)

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to ask a question regarding the member's words about consultations. We constantly hear about this. We hear about consulting with the provinces and consulting with this group and that group. We never hear the words “consulting with the Canadian people”.

In the Charlottetown accord, great consultations went on. The provinces were working together. All the political parties were working together. They were pounding out this Charlottetown accord that was to be brought to the people. They were going to say to the people that there it was, the answer, what we had been looking for, but nobody consulted with the people.

For the first time since I had been in this country, and I have been here since 1968, there was a referendum and this was put to the test. Lo and behold, 65% of the people or thereabouts rejected the Charlottetown accord. Why? Because nobody consulted with them.

That is what we are short of in this country on a regular basis. I wonder if the member has consulted with his constituents. Have they described to him what kind of Senate they would like to see? I have consulted with mine. I am going to give a speech in a minute and I am going to reflect what my constituents would like to see in the Senate.

We are always consulting the elite. Then the members of the elite come forward and go out on a big campaign trail.

As we can remember, all the leaders of every political party and all the leaders of the provincial parties were saying that we had to support the Charlottetown accord, that folks had to do it, that the elite had made a decision on our behalf. Yet 65% of the people said no. Does that not give a message to the member about consultations?

• (1625)

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to disagree with the member across. I think it is important to consult with the people. It is important for each member in the House to consult on what the people that he or she represents want as far as a reformed Senate is concerned, if a reformed Senate is wanted.

However, I want to point out to the member that in this country we have a Constitution which specifically states that no amendment to the powers of the Senate can be made without the consent of at least 50% of the provinces representing at least 66% of the people.

With that constraint facing us, why would we just ignore it? It is there. It is in the Constitution. We cannot change the Constitution unilaterally, so we have no choice but to consult with the people. The member is quite right. However, we have no choice but to consult with the provinces too, because if we do not consult with the provinces this is not going anywhere.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I remember hearing a speaker a long time ago who was talking about the plight of hungry children in third world countries. He said that he could not save them all, that he could not do everything, but that he could do something. “I will help one or two if I can,” he said.

Government Orders

I use that as an analogy for this. The Liberals keep saying that “we cannot do everything and therefore we will do nothing”. I challenge them to ask why we do not do what we can. This particular initiative being undertaken by the government involves no constitutional changes. It is simply an act which will provide for consultation with the people, with a commitment that when the people express themselves in a vote on whom they want to have in the Senate as their representatives, then the current government will appoint them.

It takes nothing. There is no need for a constitutional amendment. Let us do what we can and move toward democracy.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, very briefly, here is my answer to the member across. Why do we not try to take the bold approach? Why do we not try to do what is right?

We know the constitutional constraints face us, but that should not stop us from having a discussion with the people, as the member for Wild Rose has said, and with the provinces, as our Constitution says. If we do not do that, this whole exercise and this whole discussion are doomed to failure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Windsor West, Passport Canada; the hon. member for Victoria, Education; and the hon. member for St. Paul's, HIV-AIDS.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know how much time I have.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska has 10 minutes left, but he will likely only be able to use two this evening.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank you. That is what I thought.

Since I have about two minutes left, I will immediately get to the conclusion of my speech on Bill C-20.

I am going to sum things up rather quickly by saying that the government is trying to do indirectly what it cannot achieve directly. The bill provides for the consultation of electors in a province with respect to their preferences for the appointment of senators to represent the province.

The Bloc Québécois feels, as does the vast majority of Quebecers, that even if it is reformed, the Senate will remain a useless institution. We cannot insult the other place here, but one thing is sure. This is not meant as an insult, but in Quebec it is widely believed that we really do not need the other place.

Initially, the Senate was supposed to be a chamber of sober second thought that also protected regional interests. That is why it was created in the 19th century. Regional equality in the Senate was supposed to counterbalance representation in the House. However, it seems that partisanship has gained the upper hand over regional representation, thus rendering null and void the purpose of the other place, which has a tendency to follow the lead of the House of Commons. This is what we call—and some of my colleagues have

pointed it out—duplication. Heaven knows that the Bloc Québécois is opposed to any form of duplication, and particularly so in the case of the Senate.

How can this government justify having a Senate whose responsibilities would be much like those of the House of Commons, at a cost of \$81 million per year?

This was my introduction to set the stage for the rest of my speech. In short, we are totally opposed to this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith all questions necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): 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): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

[*English*]

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I would request that this division be deferred until the end of government orders tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Accordingly, this vote is deferred until the end of government orders tomorrow.

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from February 11 consideration of Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to loans), as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a surprise opportunity to speak on this particular bill. I thought I would take an approach on this bill which is speaking from, if you will, the perspective of a member in this House who has been here for 10 years.

Government Orders

I have gone through four elections. I represent a riding in the east end of Toronto called Scarborough—Guildwood. When I was first elected, it was referenced as Scarborough East. Commenting on raising funds over those four elections, possibly about to be a fifth election, it is getting more and more difficult.

My riding is a riding of extremes. One can buy a \$2 million house in the riding. There are some people in the riding who are quite wealthy. It is clearly a very small group of people. There is also quite a substantial segment of the riding where people are comfortably affluent, live in pretty nice houses and have pretty decent jobs.

By far and away, the vast majority of people are hard-working people trying to make ends meet, a population that is really from all over the globe. There is a considerable Tamil population, a considerable Muslim, Indian population, a considerable Pakistani population and a considerable Caribbean population.

Among those folks, plus some of those who are homegrown, these folks are just trying to make rent. That is all they are concerned about. They do not have time to dream about other things, other than just making rent. To propose raising funds among these folks is just nonsense.

Over the course of these past four elections, I have found, increasingly, that whatever fundraising I do, I have to do it outside the riding. Just simply, folks are not prepared to give. That is rather unfortunate. Maybe other members' experience parallels that, and maybe it does not. Some ridings are clearly more affluent than other ridings, and in some ridings it is clearly easier to raise funds. In my particular case, it is not easy to raise funds.

We are in this kind of half-pregnant situation, where we have severely curtailed the ability of members to raise money. Essentially, we have eliminated the ability to raise money from unions, we have eliminated the ability to raise money from corporations, we have limited the amount that we can raise from individuals, and that is, frankly, starting to take its toll.

Now members end up having to look at lending themselves money in order to finance a campaign, whether it is a local riding campaign or whether it is in fact a leadership campaign. That has created some more distortions. Again, it is kind of a half-pregnant solution on another half-pregnant solution.

To wit, we have this bill, a politically motivated bill, no doubt, but nevertheless not really a bill that takes into account the realities of being a member of Parliament and running for office. That is a considerable sacrifice for anyone in this Chamber, whether they are a government member or not. It is a considerable sacrifice to families, it is a considerable sacrifice to individuals, frequently their health, and it is almost inevitably a sacrifice to their personal financial well-being.

Nevertheless, we are here. We volunteer to do this. We are all adults. We all know what we are doing. I do not think the Canadian public should be shedding tears for any one of the 308 of us who choose this life.

Nevertheless, I do reiterate the point that fundraising for members and fundraising for leadership campaigns has become more and more difficult over time and in large part, we have been doing it to

ourselves by the limitations that we have imposed upon members. There are arguments where people say, well, this is actually a good thing. This is openness, this is transparency in democracy, and all the rest of the stuff.

• (1635)

I frankly hate fundraising whether it is a big event where we have to get people to give us a cheque or an individual baking sale where we have to sell cookies or silly nonsense like that. I was elected to be a legislator, not a fundraiser.

In the United States this distortion has gone way out of whack. In the past week or so, Hillary Clinton had to lend her own campaign \$5 million. In months past, John McCain had to actually take his fundraising list, monetize it and give it to the bank as collateral for a \$3 million loan just to keep his campaign alive.

We see enormous amounts of money poured into U.S. campaigns for the presidency, for the senate, for congress. I was talking to one congressman a while back and he has to raise \$10,000 a week just to simply be prepared for his two year election cycle.

I would submit, and I hope that all members would agree, that in U.S. politics, money has become so dominant it distorts policy. That needs to be steered away from literally at all costs. In part, America has lost its moral leadership in the world because of the influence of money.

I do not want anybody to be confused that we are in any kind of similar situation in Canada. We have gone in the opposite direction. We are making it more difficult for members and leadership candidates to raise money. Because we are doing that, we are getting into all kinds of distortions, one of which the bill tries to address.

I would dearly love it if frankly Elections Canada would simply pay the campaign costs, to just do it. We end up getting some portion from Elections Canada. That portion gets split with the party in some instances and in some instances it does not. Then we raise certain amounts of money and tax receipts are given.

In some respects that money is also taxpayer subsidized. Any money we are short for the particular campaign, we end up lending ourselves money, generally through a financial institution, then we have to fundraise in order to pay off the loan. The receipts we receive are tax receipted and a portion ends up ultimately getting paid by the taxpayer.

When we add it up and subtract it out, the taxpayers and effectively the government are probably paying about 75% of the cost of a campaign in any event. Why do we not just go the whole route and have campaigns funded by Elections Canada. That way we would get out of the whole conundrum of eternal fundraising and the eternal frustration that this bill frankly represents. It represents frustration for everyone here.

I would almost like to take a poll of the members sitting here who actually say they like fundraising. If they do, they can do mine. They are welcome to it. I had this strange idea that I was elected to be a legislator and not a fundraiser.

Government Orders

People might say that this could get us into all kinds of situations, how much individual candidates receive, et cetera. Certainly, at a riding level, that amount is pre-established by Elections Canada and I frankly do not see why that is a complicated exercise.

Leadership campaigns, I am prepared to say are a more complicated exercise, but I do not really see why we could not do something similar to that.

We will go through this exercise of looking at the bill. I know our party will be supporting the bill if certain amendments are proposed and passed.

• (1640)

Frankly, I see it as a waste of legislative time. We should bite the bullet and have elections funded by the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I regret to interrupt the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood. I had given him notice. Questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I am a little out of breath, because I had to run back to my place.

I will finally have a chance to speak on the bill before us, contrary to what I had been told. I welcome this opportunity. Needless to say that the Bloc Québécois supports this bill.

With respect to Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to loans), we believe in the continued importance of measures to ensure that the rule whereby a cap is applied to contributions by individuals is not circumvented through the use of loans.

We do not agree, however, with all the motions to amend the bill which was approved at committee.

The first of these motions aims to return the text to its original form. Contributions to a leadership campaign would be limited to a total of \$1,000 for each leadership candidate, although in committee, it was amended to make it \$1,000 per year. We do not agree with that amendment. Everywhere else in the legislation, the principle of contributions is based on calendar years. We believe that if a different criterion is established, that could cause confusion, and there is no particular reason why an individual should not be allowed to contribute to the same campaign in the course of two separate calendar years.

The second motion adjusts the dates from which one would calculate the three year timeframe allowed to pay back a debt, failing which it will be considered a contribution. That is changing. For instance, in a nomination race, a candidate for party leadership would have three years from the end of the race, rather than from voting day, and the party would have three years from the end of the fiscal year in which the loan was made, rather than from the day that the amount is due. These are minor amendments proposed by the motion, which was passed in committee. We think they are acceptable.

Motion No. 3 is the one we most strongly oppose. The government wants to reject an amendment put forward by the Bloc Québécois that aimed to make the political parties responsible for the debts incurred by their candidates. Of course, we find it completely ridiculous that third parties can be saddled with a loan of which they have no knowledge and which they never guaranteed.

I will explain the implications of this government motion. For example, a candidate runs for a party and incurs a debt of \$60,000 with his bank to finance his election campaign. The candidate loses the election. He might have won, but let us assume—it is more plausible—that he was defeated. After three years, if he has not yet repaid his debt to the bank, the party will have to repay it. I do not understand where this completely new principle comes from that would allow a debt to be transferred to a third party that has nothing to do with the transaction.

It is like going to my banker to take out a loan and telling him that my neighbour is my guarantor. My neighbour is not aware of this and has no way of knowing, but he is my guarantor. I tell my banker that if I do not repay him, he can go and ask my neighbour to repay him. That is absolutely absurd.

We hope this motion will be rejected because it will do nothing to clean up politics. On the contrary, it will take away that responsibility from candidates who stand for election.

• (1645)

However, we are in favour of the overall bill. We believe that we must prevent the law from being circumvented because candidates in a leadership race or an election could obtain financing through loans that might never be repaid.

Several candidates in the Liberal Party leadership race obtained large loans from individuals and financial institutions. For example, Bob Rae borrowed \$700,000, \$580,000 at 5% interest from the former Vice-president of Power Corporation, John Rae, and \$125,000 from himself.

According to the *Ottawa Citizen* of May 9, 2007, the current Leader of the Opposition borrowed \$650,000: \$150,000 from Mamdouh Stephanos, \$100,000 from Marc de la Bruyère, \$50,000 from Stephen Bronfman, \$50,000 from Roderick Bryden, and \$25,000 from Christopher Hoffmann.

If there is no provision to ensure the repayment of these loans and if they are never repaid, they end up being disguised contributions. We must prevent this situation.

The Conservative government is not really in a position to be talking about ethics. Its ethics and transparency track record has not been very impressive, and this has been clear since the Prime Minister's leadership campaign. We still do not have a complete list of donors to his fundraising campaign. But beyond the funding of recent campaigns, we see that during the last election campaign, some 60, maybe even 70, Conservative members broke the Elections Canada rules, and there is now a case before the courts.

Government Orders

Of these 60 or so members, several were from Quebec, including some ministers. It is a bit surprising to see a party that claims to set an example in ethics and transparency engaged in a legal dispute with Elections Canada.

This government is obviously being influenced. A former lobbyist was appointed defence minister in the first cabinet. The minister has since been transferred to the Canada Revenue Agency. Communications director and lobbyist Sandra Buckler was also caught in a very questionable situation. Contracts have been awarded to political friends. And recently, this week and last week, there was talk in the House about a contract awarded by the Minister of Finance, at a high price, just for writing a speech that was somewhat questionable in form and in substance. Funds have been used for partisan purposes and appointments.

•(1650)

Since I do not have much time left, I will give a list of Conservative cronies who were appointed by the government: on April 12, 2006, Jim Gouk, a former Conservative member, was appointed to the board of directors of NAV Canada; on April 21, 2006, Gwyn Morgan, a Conservative fundraiser, was appointed chair of the new Public Appointments Commission; on July 27, 2006, Kevin Gaudet, a Conservative organizer who worked for the Prime Minister's leadership campaign, in 2004, was appointed to the Canada Pension Plan Review Tribunal; Brian Richard Bell, a Conservative organizer in New Brunswick, was appointed to the Court of Queen's Bench of New Brunswick; on September 18, 2006, Jacques Léger, a former interim president of the Progressive Conservative Party, was given a judgeship in the Superior Court of Quebec for the district of Montreal; on October 31, 2006, Raminder Gill, a former Conservative candidate who was defeated in Mississauga—Streetsville to make room for floor crosser Wajid Khan, was appointed as a citizenship judge; on November 1, 2006, Howard Bruce, a Conservative candidate for Portneuf in 2004 and 2006, was appointed to the Transportation Appeal Tribunal of Canada; on January 25, 2007, Loyola Sullivan, co-president of the Prime Minister's leadership bid, was named Canada's ambassador for fisheries conservation.

Unfortunately, I do not have enough time to finish the list. I would have needed a good half an hour.

•(1655)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member. It is now time for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since he still has a bit of time left, I would like to ask my hon. colleague to continue to list the names of some of the people who were appointed after the Conservative government was elected just over two years ago. I wonder if he can continue to give us the names of people who were appointed by this government.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

We could continue with the matter of the partisan appointments of judges, and immigration and refugee board commissioners.

The Prime Minister changed the appointment process in order to be able to appoint the candidates of his choice. In the case of the appointment of judges, the Conservative government changed the composition of the selection committee in order to ensure a preponderance of votes. The four members of the selection committee who were appointed by the government hold the majority of votes, while there are only three seats for independent members who represent the Canadian Bar Association, the provincial bar and the provincial justice department. Thus, we have a committee made up of three independent members and four members appointed by this government that essentially control all the appointments.

Regarding the appointments of commissioners sitting on the Immigration and Refugee Board, the Conservative government again politicized the selection committee by reserving the right to appoint two of the seven committee members.

In both cases, the government abandoned the principle of appointments based on merit in order to have the flexibility to appoint either party cronies or people who share the same right-wing ideology.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on a couple of the statements the member made.

When one is looking for capable, qualified people, it is a tough chore to automatically exclude everybody who has ever been involved in any form of support of a political party. The fact is that we urge our citizens to be involved.

The member mentioned Mr. Gouk, a colleague of mine who used to sit as a member of Parliament. He was appointed. Jim Gouk happened to have been an air traffic controller. He was more qualified than any of the other applicants. I do not know why anyone would disqualify him just because he happened at one time to have been a Conservative. I know where the member is coming from. It is a tough chore.

What I object to is when the Liberals used to appoint people whose only qualification was that they were members or supporters of the Liberal Party.

However, in this particular case, and it is one on which I have personal knowledge, there is probably nobody in the country as knowledgeable about air traffic control, having worked in that business and kept up to speed with it, than Jim Gouk.

I understand where the member is coming from as I used to sit on that side. One has some sympathy for the perception but in this case the perception is wrong.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, the member has indeed summed up the situation well. He spoke of one case. If there were only one case, it would not be a problem, but it is always the case. The government of Stephen Harper awarded a communications contract—

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber should think about not referring to other members by name, but rather by title or by the name of their riding. No need to read up on it, he already knows the rules.

The hon. member may finish answering the question put to him.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I realized my mistake the moment I saw you rise, Mr. Speaker.

The Conservative government awarded a communications contract to Marie-Josée Lapointe, who was on this government's transition team. This contract goes against the spirit of the government's own Federal Accountability Act, since political staff are not allowed to receive contracts from the government in place for 12 months after they leave. The contract was eventually cancelled halfway through, following a hard fight in the House.

When Bill C-2 was passed, the point was raised also that the issue of whistleblower protection had not been covered. In addition, the reform of the Access to Information Act has yet to be covered. So, in terms of ethics, it is falling short.

• (1700)

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber, who gave a fairly exhaustive list. I am certain that if we were to continue, we could go on for quite some time. But there are other things in this bill that we need to discuss.

For us in the Bloc, each riding, each candidate, is independent. Candidates are responsible for their own funding. Fundraising is the responsibility of the riding, not the national party. We are therefore responsible for raising money, but we cannot exceed certain limits, such as \$1,000 per person.

In my riding, I do not receive \$1,000 contributions. Very seldom does someone give \$1,000. In fact, I have never received such a contribution in 15 years as a parliamentarian and five terms of office. People contribute \$5, \$20, \$100 at spaghetti-thons and events attended by party members and people who take an interest in our work and come out to help us with the upcoming election campaign.

Election campaigns are coming fast and furious. We had elections in 2004 and 2006, and we could go to the polls again in 2008. It is not easy to raise money quickly, but you have to try. Sitting members and their executives have to do whatever they can. The law must be obeyed. We have passed a law on ethics. It is pointless if we do not obey it. People no longer believe in ethics, because of all the scandals that have occurred and will continue to occur. We have not seen the end of scandals.

There are currently 67 cases involving Conservative members only. Only Conservatives are involved. The Liberal, the Bloc and the NDP members have all had their expenses reimbursed. Of those 67 cases, three Conservative ministers are currently involved in legal action. You have to wonder. Certainly, we will vote for this bill, even though we are more or less in favour of some things, because we need it and more. Otherwise, the Conservatives might continue to do anything.

The other important aspect is that the party has no control over candidates' expenses. If I decide to borrow \$50,000 or \$60,000, I do

not have to ask my party for permission. I can do so in my own name, spend the money and never pay it back. It becomes the party's responsibility. The party has to come after me to recover the \$50,000 or \$60,000.

If 67 cases are being filed against these 67 Conservative members in this situation, that is one expensive legal bill. Money is being wasted for nothing and they are displaying a total lack of ethics, which is unacceptable. Election campaigns must be run within our means. For example, if I collect \$30,000 or \$35,000, I will organize my campaign to stay within the budget I have. End of discussion. We will not use as many signs. We will work with the money we have and campaign with the money available to us that we honestly collected. That is extremely important.

It is true that it is difficult to campaign, but we always manage to do so by means of fundraising events and by helping fellow MPs with riding expenses. That is how we manage to get enough money to see a campaign through.

Of course, we do not collect \$20,000-dollar or \$30,000-dollar donations, since that is against the law, but we know that is done on the sly, which is unacceptable. This must stop. The law must be obeyed. This must never happen again: 67 Conservative members being sued. We did not make that decision. The Chief Electoral Officer, whom the Conservatives appointed themselves, decided there was a case that should be prosecuted.

• (1705)

Obviously, any bill that can improve the situation or make all the members of this House a little more ethical must be supported.

As my colleague said, it is unfortunate that the committee already adopted three motions unanimously, and then all of a sudden they are no longer in the bill. They are there, but they have been changed. This is dangerous, because it leaves us open to a repeat of things that have happened in the past, which would not be good.

Can we not run clean campaigns? Hanging more signs will not get more people elected. It is not because a person has fewer signs up that people will not vote for him; that is not true. If we do our job the way we are supposed to, if we properly represent our constituents, if we provide good services for our constituents and do a good job here, in the House of Commons, I do not think a voter would hesitate to vote for a candidate because he is missing three or four signs. If the voter knows that I have been honest and that I obtained financing honestly, he will encourage me and encourage my ideologies.

It is too bad that the three motions that were adopted in committee are no longer there in the same form. That is often how things are done here. Everything is changed, everything is altered, and then they try to downplay it in order to act unethically. That is not acceptable to anyone in the House. It is also undesirable because it destroys what confidence our electors have. They are already very sensitive and concerned about whether we are doing clear, clean, accurate work.

We could shed light on all our finances. In my riding, people can find out who gave me donations over \$100. We have lists and they are available. Everyone should do it like that. That should be how it is done everywhere. In this way, we cannot be accused of being unethical. I think it is high time that things changed around here.

For 15 years I have been watching my colleagues in action and have seen some of the so-called in and out schemes. There are so many it can scarcely be imagined. For us, though, it is forbidden. The Bloc Québécois has been applying Quebec law for a long time because we want to abide by this ethical code, which is very important. We want to show that we are responsible because we do not want to put our party in an embarrassing position. Our party is therefore very clean and clear in Quebec. We have actually already campaigned on this issue. People can check at any time, therefore, whether our election campaigns have been conducted properly or not.

We must be responsible. We cannot simply borrow money left and right. Think of the people who cannot get paid back. Think of the people who borrowed money like Bob Rae, who borrowed \$705,000. Just think what will happen if he fails to pay this money back. It is unethical and that cannot be accepted. I wish we could open the books of the Conservatives across the aisle and see how they conducted their campaign in 2006. There could well be some big surprises and maybe one of the biggest scandals ever witnessed in the House.

* * *

• (1710)

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among the parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of this House, during consideration of Bill S-220, An Act respecting a National Blood Donor Week, a member, other than the member for Mississauga—Brampton South, may move the motions for concurrence at report stage and third reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed 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, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord for explaining to the House how it is possible to collect funds honestly. We all practice this way of doing things. However, I wish to thank her for explaining it to the House because I believe that this is not the practice of all parties in this House.

An amendment such as the third amendment to this bill makes it possible to be truly Machiavellian. For very honest parties, it would mean that candidates could put their party into debt. The parties that want debt to be incurred at the beginning could very well tell the candidates to take on debt that the party would pay back later. That could be disastrous for both sides.

I would like my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord to tell us about the horrible consequences of adopting the amendment and how the members' monies could be manipulated.

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Brome—Missisquoi.

That is probably what happened. We will know more after the inquiry. At this point, the entire Conservative Party is the subject of an inquiry. I believe that the party told its members to borrow money that it would pay back. That is downright illegal. Furthermore, it distances candidates from the people. Being close to the people means organizing all kinds of events, such as cocktails for business people and less costly events to attract people, to invite them to meet us so they can get to know us and understand our political party and what we have to offer.

In my opinion, that is a better way of doing things, much better than taking out a \$60,000 loan that the party will pay back later and campaigning with that money. That is totally illegal and unacceptable, and it is not at all close to the people. That is not what people are looking for. When they find out about things like this, it reflects badly on all politicians. That is the problem. We all pay for that. It makes us all look like thieves, even though we are not. The Bloc has never done that kind of thing. As I said earlier, we raise funds in accordance with Quebec law that has been in place for 30 years.

The sad thing is that this affects how people see politicians. Voters now think we are the lowest of the low; they like us less than car salespeople. Imagine that. We have a lot of catching up to do. We have a lot of work ahead of us. We need ethics, and we need it now. This bill has sidestepped ethics yet again. Yes, we will vote for the bill because it has some good things in it. However, the Conservatives are still trying to get around some issues so they can do what they did in 2006 once again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine for a brief question or comment.

Government Orders

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): I will be very brief, Mr. Speaker. My Bloc colleague's speech was quite interesting.

I would like to ask her if she has other examples, besides the 67 MPs, of unsuccessful Conservative candidates suspected of having violated the Canada Elections Act in 2006, based on a ruling by the Chief Electoral Officer and not the opinion of the opposition parties.

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The member for Rivière-du-Nord has 30 seconds left.

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. I will be very brief as I do not have much time remaining.

I cannot provide all the names. However, just imagine that three ministers, people who manage huge budgets every year, committed fraud or are under suspicion of fraud. This is very serious. We are talking about people who manage taxpayers' money. It is incredible: 67 members of Parliament. We will see how this plays out.

This may be why the Conservatives are in a hurry to hold an election: to hide what exactly happened in 2006 and to prevent it from coming to light. I can say one thing for certain: we will be watching them in the next election campaign.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to participate in the debate on Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to loans).

Several members have already talked about this bill and have explained its principal objectives, one of which is to create a uniform and transparent disclosure system for all loans to political entities, including mandatory disclosure of terms and the identity of all lenders and loan guarantors. I would point out that such provisions already exist in the Canada Elections Act.

The previous government formed by the Liberal Party of Canada passed a bill on election financing that sought to limit the role of corporations and unions in election financing, initiating the most significant contribution limit reduction in Canadian history.

This bill targets funding for candidates in leadership races, byelections and general elections, but the law passed under the previous Liberal government already contained Elections Canada's requirements for loan disclosure.

During the last Liberal leadership race, which took place in 2006, all candidates for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada exceeded Elections Canada's requirements for the disclosure of loans under the Canada Elections Act.

That is not at all the case for the current Prime Minister. He has refused to disclose the identities of those who funded his campaign for the leadership of the Conservative Party in 2002. The Conservatives, as we have seen so many times on other issues, are trying to deceive Canadians.

In the previous session of Parliament, Bill C-29 was Bill C-54. When the Conservative government introduced this bill, it gave misleading information about the current legislation on political party financing, and the Conservative members continue to mislead

Canadians every time they talk about Bill C-29. The Conservatives imply that the current legislation—I am not talking about their bill, but about the legislation in effect today, which was adopted by Parliament when the Liberal Party of Canada was in power—allows secret loans and that candidates are not required to disclose a loan, the amount of that loan, the name of the creditor or the name of the guarantor.

Under the legislation that is in effect today and has been since 2004, candidates must provide Elections Canada with information on all loans they receive, whether they are running for the leadership of a party or in a byelection or general election.

Canadians get annoyed when they cannot trust what their own government is telling them.

• (1720)

During the last election campaign, this Conservative government boasted and said it was whiter than white, whiter than snow, and that it would be accountable, transparent and open. Canadians just have to read and listen to what the government is saying about the current legislation on financing for political parties and candidates. It is claiming that someone running for the leadership of a party today or last year or the year before could borrow money without having to disclose who the creditor was, how much the loan was for or who the guarantor was. It is sad.

This government is going even further. With its bill, the government wants an association or party to be held responsible for a candidate's unpaid debts, even if the local riding association or the party was not aware of the loan and had not guaranteed it. It would be like having a brother in another city who takes out a loan. I do not know my brother borrowed money, but because we have the same last name and share the same blood and DNA, I would automatically be liable for the loan. I would have to repay his loan if he went bankrupt and did not repay it.

The opposition parties have amended this bill. The governing party has even amended its own bill, which is interesting. I would like to provide some information about that.

Government Orders

The Conservative government proposed an amendment to its own bill, thereby admitting that its Bill C-29—which had been Bill C-54 in the previous session of Parliament—was not perfect. The Conservatives proposed amendments to ensure that loans and suretyship contracts paid back during the same calendar year are not included in the total calculation of donations for that year. Consider the following example. If an individual loans \$1,000 to a candidate in February and the candidate pays that amount back in April, the individual who loaned the money would be permitted to guarantee another \$1,000 before the end of the fiscal year. This was not included in the original bill. The Conservative members put forward an amendment because it made sense and was reasonable. All the parties—the NDP, the Bloc Québécois, and the Liberal Party—all supported the government's amendment. The Liberal Party, supported by the Bloc, proposed an amendment to make it possible to make donations every year to candidates for party leadership and not just a single donation to one particular candidate, as set out by existing legislation. This was because a leadership race can extend over more than one calendar year. Finally, the Bloc, supported by the Liberals and the NDP, put forward an amendment that removed one clause of the bill that required political parties to pay back any loans incurred by its candidates that were not paid back to the creditors. As if a candidate could take out a loan without notifying officials from the party or riding association.

• (1725)

It was suggested that he or she could then declare bankruptcy and the party would be forced to pay back any debts incurred, even if the party had not approved the debt from the beginning. The Conservatives opposed that amendment and introduced the motions at the report stage for—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I regret to interrupt the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine. The hon. member for Joliette.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member referred to an amendment introduced by the Bloc Québécois, saying that it was supported by the NDP and the Liberals at committee. Is it always like that with the Liberals? Does she know if the NDP changed its position?

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I honestly believe that the NDP still supports the bill as amended in committee and reported back to the House. We would have to check how loyal that support is, however. Loyal is not necessarily a word I use often in reference to the NDP. I find that NDP members are not always very loyal to their own party's constitution. In Quebec, we can see sovereigntists run for the NDP, which is the most centralizing party I have ever known. I was so shocked. I realize that this does not address directly the question, but it does address it in part.

The NDP claims to be a federalist party, yet it recruits sovereigntists to run for and represent the NDP in Quebec. I would like the leader of the NDP and the new member for Outremont to explain that contradiction to the Quebec people, be they sovereigntists, nationalist or federalists. How can they explain such a contradiction?

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this debate on Bill C-29, which is in fact the amended version of Bill C-54 that was debated in the previous session. All

parties agreed to pick up the debate where we left off before resuming this new session. As was the case in the previous session, we will support the bill even though, and I will come back to this, we think it is important that a number of the amendments we made to it—I am talking about the opposition parties, but the Bloc Québécois in particular—be maintained despite the government's desire to drop them for reasons that are completely unclear to me.

We were in favour of this bill and we still are. The purpose of the bill is to prevent individuals from bypassing campaign financing rules. The bill now includes a ceiling of \$1,100 for individuals. Companies and corporations are no longer able to make donations to political associations. We agree with this principle that has existed in Quebec for 30 years now. This was one of the first accomplishments of the Parti Québécois under the leadership of René Lévesque.

As such, we agree with the idea that once a number of rules are in place governing political party fundraising and the amounts that individual voters can contribute, people should not have opportunities to get around the law by taking out loans, thereby sidestepping the will of Parliament, particularly the House of Commons, to ensure that the rules of the game are more or less the same for all political parties.

I have been watching what is going on with the primaries in the United States and the mind-boggling amounts of money the candidates are spending. This is not even the race for the presidency of the United States. These are just the Democratic and Republican nomination races. It is clear that that much money results in inequality that prevents some people from participating in the races from the very beginning.

Of course, in both Canada and Quebec, fundraising efforts do have to be significant. Everyone in this House knows that and participates in it. Still, the amount of money each of us can use for our election campaigns is within reach, even for individuals who do not have a personal fortune at their disposal or a network of acquaintances to secure the loans or donations they need to launch a campaign. For example, the value of some contributions made to both the Conservative and Liberal leadership races, which took place before Bill C-2 was passed, is still unknown.

It is clear to us that candidates should not be allowed to use loans to sidestep the caps that put an end to corporate backing and limit individual contributions.

Private Members' Business

The bill also solves another problem with the Federal Accountability Act, Bill C-2, about which I spoke earlier. When Bill C-2 was being studied—and this was denounced by all opposition parties—the Conservative government was much more interested in quickly passing the bill in order to inform citizens that it had fulfilled its first promise. Unfortunately, this haste resulted in a certain number of deficiencies. I am referring to loans to political entities. The bill fell somewhat short in terms of the ethics promised. We really did have to revisit the shortcomings of Bill C-2. I remind the House that, at the time, the opposition parties, the media, the political observers and organizations such as Democracy Watch pointed out the problem but the government refused to take action.

• (1730)

Once again, as is often the case in this Parliament, each party had to study the advantages and the disadvantages of the deficiencies resulting from the Conservatives' haste. We supported the bill because we were generally in favour of the underlying principle.

Bill C-29 also solves the problem of loans—it is at the heart of the bill—whereby the limits for personal political contributions could be circumvented. Several ethical difficulties were not addressed by Bill C-2. I am thinking, for instance, of poor protection for whistle-blowers and the failure to reform the Access to Information Act.

Bill C-29 incorporates the only change proposed by the Bloc Québécois when Bill C-54 was studied in committee. This amendment ensured that the political party would not be responsible for the debts of candidates. The government wants to change that. We do not really understand the government's intentions. It wants to force a political party to guarantee, without prior knowledge, the debts of a candidate who, without making any effort to raise funds, decides to borrow from a bank the maximum amount allowed under the Canada Elections Act.

We therefore proposed an amendment, with which the government seemed to agree, or at least the opposition parties, the Liberals and the NDP, did. Now the government is questioning our amendment. Therefore, we will vote against this government motion.

It is rather irrational and illogical that a political party would be responsible for debts incurred by its candidates without the party knowing. We think the Bloc's amendment should be upheld so that the bill makes sense. I hope the two other opposition parties will still be in favour of it, as they were when Bill C-54 was being examined in committee.

The Bloc Québécois is almost entirely financed by individuals. A candidate could borrow \$50,000 from the bank to run his election campaign. If he did not repay the loan, the bank could go after the political party. I think allowing this would be almost immoral. It means that every citizen who donates \$5 to our party would also have to support this candidate who might have gotten into debt irresponsibly.

I think that even though we agree with the spirit of the bill and will vote in favour of it, the government should rethink its decision to remove the amendment proposed by the Bloc and adopted by the committee. It should go back to something that makes much more sense and that would be more respectful towards the thousands of

small donors who are the financing backbone of the Bloc Québécois, and I imagine this is the case with the other parties.

I will not go on any longer. That was my basic message. We will have to hope that the government comes to its senses and accepts the bill with the amendment proposed by the Bloc and adopted in committee.

• (1735)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 5:39 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1740)

[English]

NATIONAL BLOOD DONOR WEEK ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-220, An Act respecting a National Blood Donor Week, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage, and pursuant to order made earlier today.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (for the member for Mississauga—Brampton South) moved that the bill be concurred in at report stage.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): When shall the bill be read a third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (for the member for Mississauga—Brampton South) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to speak to Bill S-220. The bill supports the ongoing efforts of Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec to recruit blood donors and volunteers to give the precious gift of life: blood.

I would first like to thank my colleague, the senator for Northend Halifax for his leadership in this matter. I would also like to acknowledge the leadership role played by the member of Parliament for Mississauga—Brampton South for all the good work he has done on the bill.

A majority of Canadians will need blood or blood products during their lifetime. Giving blood saves lives. In fact, every donation can directly save up to three lives. Blood is a bond that unites us all irrespective of our socio-economic status or our religious denomination.

Our blood supply is open to one and all. Any Canadian can use our blood in hospitals. There is no requirement. It is a representation of our Canadian values: equality for all.

We all share the blood. That blood is available because of the generous contribution made by hundreds of thousands of volunteers across Canada. These volunteers are not paid. Their giving is an act of genuine altruism. They are everyday heroes.

I can give an example from my local community. In Newton—North Delta, the Sikh nation has organized a donation drive in memory of the 1984 pogrom of Sikhs in New Delhi. They adopted the first week of November and they do these drives to raise blood. They have raised record amounts of blood in Surrey. From there, the movement is active across Canada and in other countries. Having a national blood donor week will encourage many Canadians to participate during that week and give blood.

When we look at the Sikh nation's example, countless more private companies, non-profit and government groups organize drives to give blood in our places of work and play. These initiatives show the importance of giving blood in an immediate and personal way.

People often do not appreciate how important the blood supply is. Less than 4% of eligible Canadians give blood. This hit home with me when my father went to the Surrey Memorial Hospital last month. Because of his condition, he needed blood, and because of countless donors, he was able to get it right away. Thanks to all those volunteers who have done a tremendous favour to Canadians who need blood. In mentioning Surrey Memorial Hospital, I would also like to thank all the nurses and the doctors who paid attention to my father and took the best care of him.

Many of my constituents, such as Duncan Robinson whom I ran into over the weekend, are passionate about this issue. Through his leadership and his innovative ideas, we will be able to further improve our blood supply.

It is very important for all Canadians to have the same access to blood as my father had to the blood he needed, access that is swift and that does not depend on who we are or who we know. To ensure this access and to ensure an adequate blood supply, we must encourage Canadians to give blood.

• (1745)

Passing the bill and establishing a national blood donor week is an important way to support this process and thus we will build awareness of the importance of giving blood, reinforce the fact that giving is completely safe, help build blood supplies during peak periods and celebrate the contribution of boundless volunteers and donors.

Each and every Canadian has the power to make a difference and the power to save a life. I believe that everyone has the will to do this act of good but this act must be encouraged. Bill S-220 would go a

Private Members' Business

long way toward encouraging that behaviour. People need to be recognized and their contributions need to be celebrated. There is no better way to do this than through a national blood donor week.

I personally congratulate all the volunteers who have given blood in the past and encourage everyone to carry out that tradition.

I hope all my colleagues will support this measure to make history in this way so that whenever any Canadian needs blood it is available.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for his excellent bill.

I see my card shows that I have given blood 28 times now, so I am a big supporter of the blood donation system in Canada.

I would like to ask the member if there is a precedent for his idea of having an emphasis on a week, either in a province in Canada, in a state in the United States or somewhere else in the world and if that has been effective in increasing blood donations.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Yukon. In fact, he was in the Speaker's chair when I was referring to him as Mr. Speaker and that was my purpose in talking about the member giving blood. In fact, he is setting an example here in the House.

The member asked me about an example in another state. I mentioned local efforts made in my own riding of Newton—North Delta where the Sikh nation came together in the memory of the 1984 massacre that happened in Delhi. It started in 1999. If we look at the record now, they established the first week of November to remember those massacred and for two years in a row in B.C the Sikh nation has been the top donor of blood. That is an example from here at home and I am sure from this initiative there will be many more organizations and provinces that will come onboard to have an initiative like this that the Senator from the other place proposed in the bill.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak in the House to Bill S-220, An Act respecting a National Blood Donor Week. It also is an honour to announce my support for designating the second week of June as national blood donor week.

It is easy to say that Canadians are lucky to have access to some of the safest blood in the world. Instead, I would like to acknowledge that it is not luck but the kindness and generosity of a network of dedicated blood donors and volunteers who help to make this possible.

A blood system is nothing without these generous individuals. It is the people whom we rely on when the times get really tough. As such, it is important to celebrate and honour all blood donors and other volunteers who make the system work by creating national blood donor week.

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The second week in June is significant, not just because it marks the launch of summertime in Canada when blood donations traditionally decline, but because it also marks the World Health Organization's World Blood Donor Day on June 14. Canada can join other nations and millions of people and organizations around the world to celebrate blood donors, raise awareness of the need for a safe supply of blood and increase voluntary blood donations around the world by declaring the second week of June national blood donor week.

One significant reason Canada's blood supply is safe, and all the more reason to celebrate by creating national blood donor week is that it is 100% donor supplied. According to the World Health Organization, less than 50% of blood collected in developing countries comes from voluntary donations. Instead, the majority comes from paid donors or obligatory blood replacement from the family members of transfusion patients.

The Pan American Health Organization recognizes that voluntarily donated blood is significantly safer than blood donated for payment or replacement. According to this organization, blood for payment or replacement is 40 times more likely to be infected with hepatitis C and 175 times more likely to be infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

The celebration of Canada's blood donors, coordinated with World Blood Donor Day, sets a positive example worldwide. Many countries in the Americas where just 30% of their blood is voluntarily donated, look in awe to Canada wondering how we can do it. The simple answer is the kindness and generosity of our volunteers. That is all the more reason why I support the designation of the second week in June as national blood donor week.

Acknowledging and thanking Canada's blood donors via a national blood donor week will serve as an example of best practices to nations around the world who want and need their own safe blood systems. However, it will also keep our system going. The Government of Canada serves its citizens, including those close to each of us whom we love and cherish dearly, by encouraging the existing donors to keep rolling up their sleeves and prospective donors to start.

Declaring a national blood donor week says to the people of Canada that this is important. The one small act of donating blood, the snippet of time, makes a huge difference in each of our lives.

As good as our system is, a national blood donor week would help it get even better. Although one unit of blood can potentially save three patients, the average patient needs 4.6 units for treatment. Existing rates of blood donations at less than 4% falls short of what Canadian patients need. At least 5% of Canadians need to donate in order to satisfy the existing demand.

Furthermore, in all likelihood our aging population and national commitment to improved access to surgeries will mean an increased need for blood. An increased need for blood means an increased need for blood donors. The creation of a national blood donor week will help to achieve that goal by telling Canadians that donating blood is a safe thing to do and the right thing to do.

I ask all my colleagues to show their appreciation for Canada's blood donors by voting in favour of Bill S-220.

● (1750)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too want to thank the member for the work and effort that has gone in to bringing forward Bill S-220, an act that proposes the designation of the week in which June 14 occurs be national blood donor week.

It is interesting that 192 other countries around the world, members of the World Health Organization, have already declared the week of June 14 as National Blood Donor Week. It makes sense that Canada, as a country that prides itself on our health care system and that wants people to be treated quickly, efficiently and to the best of our ability, would follow the lead of those 192 WHO countries.

There is a need for greater awareness in the public in regard to the importance of blood donation and, of course, organ donation as well. The statistics in regard to blood donation in Canada are very telling. Fifty-two per cent of Canadians have required blood or blood products for themselves or a family member and yet the donation rate is still hovering at around only 4% of eligible donors.

More than 20,000 blood donor clinics are held every year, with a total of 1.1 million units of blood collected annually, but those clinics still see only 4% of eligible donors. Clearly, there is a need to raise awareness among Canadians because a plentiful supply of blood is an important factor in answering the health needs of Canadians.

Availability also plays a significant role in keeping wait times down, since blood is required for many treatments, including transplants. A liver transplant needs up to 100 units; other organs about 10 units; auto accidents up to 50 units; coronary bypass surgery, one to five units; and cancer, up to eight units every week. The number of these treatments has been increasing steadily and, therefore, the demand for blood is also increasing.

We need to have an effective response to that need. We are obliged to provide a reminder to people about the importance of donating blood and organs so it becomes part of the mindset of all those eligible donors. We often hear the news reports and ads on the radio about the need for blood. On long weekends during the nice weather, more blood is needed because more people are on the road and there are more accidents.

There is a small surge of people who donate blood because the ads on the radio have reminded them that they may be required to help. They go in and donate blood but they do not make it part of their annual routine, and that is what really needs to happen.

Another part of this bill deals with bone marrow donation. Bone marrow is considered part of blood donation. It is not that people actually give bone marrow but they do sign up. The truth is that we have major challenges around bone marrow transplants because the registry needs to be quite significant in order to support a very mixed Canadian population. Because of our diversity, people often have not been able to find a bone marrow match and these people die, which is a tragedy.

This legislation would allow a much bigger registry. It does not mean that all those people would donate bone marrow, because that is a very serious decision, but at least there would be more people to ask.

In addition to the encouragement for blood, bone marrow and organ donation is the need to ensure that transfusions and donations are safe. We must always think of the safety of the recipient of a blood or organ transplant, and must never risk either health or safety. Strict screening practices must be in place that secure the safety of the blood and tissue supply.

This, of course, brings me to what Canadians have a right to expect from their institutions when it comes to secure, responsive blood and tissue supplies and a secure, responsive health care system, a system for everyone. There must be more doctors and nurses and more training spaces for health care providers to expand the pool of skilled professionals able to provide those services.

In addition to a reliable blood supply, we need to control drug costs by phasing in a national prescription drug strategy to help families afford the medications they need and phase out the evergreening of patent drugs so that cheaper generics are available sooner, saving money for patients, hospitals and provinces. We need to stop privatization and forge a new deal with provinces that links reliable federal health transfers to commitments that such funding will not subsidize for profit health care.

• (1755)

A secure blood supply, like our efforts to promote real dignity for seniors, is part of a strong medicare system. Free dental care and drug coverage for everyone over 65, expansion of long term care options for the thousands of seniors and families waiting for such care, as well as shorter wait times, are part of what we want to put in place in Canada.

The policies I have referred to today are among the kinds of changes New Democrats wish to see, changes that get results for ordinary people, those needing donated blood and bone marrow, seniors, young families.

Declaring the week of June 14 as national blood donor week is incredibly important, but only if action around awareness comes with it. We have to get more of that information out to Canadians, at least to younger people. We need blood donation to become part of their routine activities to ensure long term supply.

I wish to extend my gratitude to the member who brought forward Bill S-220. I am pleased to stand and support all my colleagues in having the week of June 14 declared national blood donor week.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1800)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Newton—North Delta would normally have the right to reply. Since he is not here to do that, I will put the question.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, is there unanimous consent to see the clock as 6:39 p.m.?

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to see the clock as 6:39 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

PASSPORT CANADA

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to talk again about a very important issue. It is a follow up to a question that I asked on December 4, 2007, in the House of Commons related to privacy and passports.

I had asked about the security breach at Passport Canada's offices. In fact, it almost wished it had a security breach. It allowed passport information to be provided to the public without being hacked into. A simple keystroke by an Ontario man led to the access of information of Canadians, information related to their social insurance numbers, their driver's licences, their addresses, people they knew and their information and their passport information, information important for the security and vetting of that passport. We know the United States, for example, will be requiring more Canadians to have passports and looking at the security of it.

What happened? I guess the government procured a computer program with a major flaw and that flaw has subsequently led to passport information being made available and not only in Canada. This was on the worldwide web. People had the opportunity to view the personal and private information of Canadians.

Adjournment Proceedings

My question for the government was very straightforward. Had it ensured that the breach was stopped? Would it deal with the company that created the program? Would it apologize to Canadians for handling their personal information in such a manner? We can only assume that the information of all Canadians in the passport system at that time was vulnerable. Those are important steps.

We have seen personal information and privacy issues emerge in other countries. They have apologized and have been accountable.

Apparently the government, which is supposed to be tough on crime and security and all those different things, does not feel it has any onus or responsibility when it has the trust of people's sensitive information. The information on the web could have been used to take out a mortgage in somebody else's name. The government could have at least apologized. More important, it could have made sure that everybody affected by the problem was notified.

Instead, I received a response from the minister at that time, which was interesting. He talked about communicating with the department that morning, but the incident had taken place the week before. There was no apparent need, or it was a lack of interest or he was not informed. We do not know which it was, but the situation had festered over a period of time and the minister apparently indicated that in his response to me.

It is important to talk about some of the things that are happening with regard to privacy and passports. Mr. Jamie Laning of Huntsville tried a couple different keystrokes on his computer. He stated:

I'm just curious about these things so I tried it, and boom, there was somebody else's name and somebody else's data.

Another Canadian's information popped up on the screen, which included home and business numbers, federal ID card numbers and firearms licence numbers, which should interest the government.

It is important to note that the government, on November 21, 2007, introduced legislation to make it illegal to obtain this information, but it has not brought the bill forward. At the same time, it was making noise about having more protection for Canadians against identity theft. This is becoming a rampant problem in our country.

I would like to provide the government this opportunity to apologize to Canadians.

• (1805)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful for the opportunity to set the record straight on this issue. I thank the member for Windsor West for bringing forward this issue.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, like Passport Canada's CEO Gerald Cossette, was very concerned to learn of the breach of the passport online system. This incident was investigated and Mr. Cossette assured the minister that Passport Canada took immediate steps to correct this very serious issue.

In fact, this incident had been reported to Passport Canada before the press covered it. Passport Canada immediately suspended access to the system, investigated this claim and took appropriate action.

Passport Canada recognizes that the protection of personal information is of critical importance. To this end, it dictates significant resources to ensure that the privacy of our fellow citizens is properly safeguarded. Passport Canada will continue to work to ensure that the passport online system operates securely, including constant monitoring and testing.

Rest assured that this incident received prompt and meticulous attention and that all issues were fixed before being made public. Passport online now is a highly secure application.

In short, the member for Windsor West would be pleased to know that this problem has been fixed.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the parliamentary secretary's comments. However, in other countries, when there has been a security breach of an individual's personal information, they are required to let that person know. Canada does not have a law like that.

Other countries, including the United States, have due diligence in their laws. An individual should not have to learn that their personal information was stolen when a news story breaks. The custodian of that information, the government in this case, should tell the individual, offer an apology, and correct the situation.

The government has apologized for not letting those Canadians know that their information was at risk. They should not have learned about it through the mass media. It should have been done in a personal way.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, as I stated to the hon. member, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has said that he reported the matter to Passport Canada. Passport Canada has assured us that the problem has been fixed.

Only a few files were accessed. All POL users must register using the Government of Canada's secure channel. Passport Canada has the ability to track who accesses what files and when. Furthermore, only a small portion of the online application can be accessed. Of the six pages that make up the online form, only the fifth one was vulnerable.

Passport Canada's main database was never jeopardized. Passport online is temporary and it stores information for those who apply for a passport through the web. Passport Canada takes seriously the obligation to safeguard personal information by ensuring that the most effective and secure processes are in place.

EDUCATION

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight for what may be my last chance before the 2008 budget to ask the government to fix student aid in Canada.

I ask on behalf of Veronika in Calgary, who owes over \$50,000 on four different government loans. Instead of paying one lump sum, she must make four separate payments of \$200 each month, which add up to more than half of her \$20 an hour salary.

Adjournment Proceedings

I ask on behalf of Deidre in Victoria, who has been in and out of mental health services since she was a full time student 10 years ago. Until I wrote to the VP of her bank, she was routinely hounded by collection agents, ineligible for any relief, even though her disability prevents her from long term employment.

I ask on behalf of a constituent who was turned down because her recurring bouts of cancer were not considered a permanent disability, a so-called gap for episodic illness.

I ask on behalf of Brian in Vancouver, a PhD student, whose loans were suddenly recalled in the middle of his degree, despite the federal government's promise that loans were not repayable for the duration of full time study.

I ask on behalf of medical residents who were here yesterday on the Hill and whose average debt of \$160,000 means they pay two-thirds of their small residency salary toward student loans every month.

I ask on behalf of the new mother I recently met, who has started to worry about affording university for her children, while she herself has several years of payments left on her own student loan.

Ever since budget 2007 promised a review of Canada's student financial aid system, I and my NDP colleagues have asked that this rare opportunity be used to relieve the financial and emotional burden of student debt on young people starting out their careers, and to fix the many flaws and gaps that students have experienced.

We have proposed that budget 2008 create a federal grant system to offset student loans in every year of study, reduce the student loan interest rate, establish a student loan ombudsperson, improve and expand eligibility for debt relief programs, create standards for the conduct of student loan collection agents, postpone loan repayments and interest accrual during full time doctoral studies and medical residency, simplify repayment into one account with clear and regular statements, among other solutions.

The parliamentary secretary will surely tell us that her government is helping students. She may mention the textbook tax credit, which only pays out \$80, or the increase in graduate scholarships.

The fact remains that the students whose stories I have briefly shared, and countless others in similar situations, have been left out of federal budgets for a long time. I do not need to hear that we must be patient for the budget. I want to hear a commitment to these students that the budget will not leave them behind again.

Could the parliamentary secretary assure me of that?

• (1810)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise tonight and have this opportunity to speak on the issues raised by the hon. member for Victoria.

First of all, we have to correct some of the hon. member's assertions. One of them was that the Government of Canada was making a profit from the Canada student loans program. I want the member to understand and believe that this is just not true. The Canada student loans program does not and has not ever made a profit. The program has existed for one reason and one reason only:

to help Canadian students access the post-secondary education that they want and deserve.

This government committed in our Advantage Canada plan to creating the best educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world. We also recognized that a vibrant student loans program is an important tool that will help us to reach this great goal.

I would like to take a minute now to discuss some of the misconceptions the hon. member has around how this program is run, primarily in regard to the charging of interest.

Contrary to the hon. member's suggestion, we do not collect compound interest daily. The Government of Canada collects simple interest, compounded monthly. Second, it is true that the interest collected does go into the consolidated revenue fund, but the costs of the program come out of the same fund. Year after year, the result is a shortfall, not a profit.

I know that members of the NDP have a problem understanding the concept of profit and what it means, so I would like to reiterate for my colleague that in this case the program costs are greater than the interest collected. Quite simply, no profit is made on the backs of students.

There is no confusion about how students go about repaying their loans. In fact, when students first apply for a loan they are told up front that they can choose their interest rate, either fixed or variable, when they start repaying their loan. This is reiterated when they begin the repayment process after they complete their studies. Students are able to get detailed information about their loans at any time simply by calling the National Student Loans Service Centre or visiting the centre's website.

I would also add that, unlike interest on commercial loans, the interest that borrowers pay on Canada student loans is tax deductible. Moreover, borrowers who experience financial hardship while repaying their loans can apply for interest relief. In 2004-05, for example, over 100,000 borrowers received interest relief from the government. This was worth \$64.8 million.

As I mentioned a few moments ago, this government realizes that the Canada student loans program is a vital tool that will help us achieve our long term goals as a country. That is why we have announced a comprehensive review of the program. The result of this review is going to be announced in budget 2008 on February 26. I look forward to those results.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1815)

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, all those fancy numbers do not hide the fact that students and their families are paying double their share of post-secondary education compared to a decade ago. For example, federal education transfers relative to the economy are less than one-half of what they were 15 years ago and the \$800 million that the minister often refers to replaces only one-quarter of that.

I may have used the word “profit”, so let us use the word “revenue”, perhaps, which goes to consolidated revenue and then to corporate tax cuts to large financial institutions instead of the government offering that help to students and their families, who are desperately trying to make ends meet. We have thrust the burden of paying for university onto parents, many of whom are still paying, as I said earlier, for their own student loans—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that this government has spent more supporting students than any government in history. We have made bursaries and scholarships tax deductible. We have given all students a tax break on their textbooks. We have made it easier for parents to save for their children's education by changing the RESP.

In 2006 in the budget, we increased transfers to provinces by 40%. That was an increase of \$800 million in a single year and we promised at least a 3% increase every year until 2013. In 2007-08 we invested \$2.4 billion in post-secondary education through the Canada social transfer. This will rise to \$3.2 billion this year.

This government is not making a profit on students. There has been no other investment—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We will now hear from the hon. member for St. Paul's.

HIV-AIDS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am here tonight to once again ask the government for some answers on the cuts it is making to HIV-AIDS community programs. The Minister of Health has admitted that he has removed \$15 million previously promised for community programs for prevention and for the support of persons with AIDS to live with dignity.

He has shifted these funds to the HIV vaccine initiative he announced in partnership with the Gates foundation. This is occurring despite the Gates foundation policy that will match only new money, not funds that have already been allocated to HIV-AIDS programs.

Furthermore, as reported in the *Globe and Mail*, none of the money announced for the vaccine initiative has actually made it into the hands of researchers. It has been taken away from crucial programs and is just sitting there. While the search for a vaccine is critical work, it cannot come at the expense of education, prevention and support programs for Canadians living with HIV and AIDS.

These decisions are especially offensive because they come at a time when HIV rates are rising.

I would like to read into the record the letter I sent to Mr. Gates. Then I will ask the government to answer some very direct questions. I wrote:

Dear Mr. Gates

I am writing to you to share my concern that Canadian community HIV/AIDS funding is being redirected to the HIV Vaccine Initiative supported by your foundation. On February 20, 2007, you joined Prime Minister Stephen Harper to announce that the Canadian government would—

•(1820)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I have to remind the hon. member that we cannot quote proper names.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I will continue:

—joined [the Prime Minister] to announce that the Canadian government would provide \$111 million dollars and your foundation would contribute \$28 million dollars to support the Canadian HIV Vaccine Initiative. Last week at the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister at the Public Health Agency of Canada stated that “In terms of the funding for the HIV vaccine, the federal government is providing \$111 million, \$26 million came from existing sources, including about \$15 million from the federal initiative....

[*Translation*]

While I am wholly supportive of research into an HIV vaccine and I applaud the generosity of the Gates foundation, this new venture can not come at the expense of education, prevention and support programs for Canadians living with HIV and AIDS.

[*English*]

Community HIV/AIDS organizations in the province of Ontario are already very concerned about the loss of expected funding and additional cuts are anticipated across the country. In many communities this means the loss of staff dedicated to prevention or the end to services for HIV positive Canadians.

[*Translation*]

I urge you to intervene by asking the Government of Canada to restore the funding to community programs in order to abide by the spirit of its agreement with your foundation.

[*English*]

I have the following direct questions. I am hoping the member opposite can provide equally direct answers, not some text that the department has prepared.

Ontario community support programs have been hit with a 60% cut that both the health minister and the Public Health Agency of Canada admit is disproportionate. This 60% cut is in spite of the fact that since 1985 Ontario has had the highest number of positive HIV test reports in the country and this number is rising. Can the government explain its misguided and prejudicial policy towards the province of Ontario?

Outside of Ontario, funding for community support programs will run out in March. Community agencies have already been told to expect cuts—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I have to stop the hon. member there.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue and the government takes the fight against HIV-AIDS very seriously, both at home and abroad.

Adjournment Proceedings

The member will know very well, when this question originally came up, that it was in fact her government that cut the \$15 million that has been referred to. That was the answer in question period in November and I doubt very much that the member included that fact in her letter to the Gates foundation.

The fact remains that this Conservative government has invested \$84 million toward HIV-AIDS in the years 2008-09, more than has ever been spent in our nation's history. I hope that was included in the letter to the Gates foundation, but due to partisan reasons, I am sure the member conveniently forgot to include this government's great and progressive record on fighting this terrible disease.

Our government has been committed to a comprehensive, long term approach to HIV-AIDS in Canada and throughout the world. To this end, the government funding for HIV-AIDS is directed toward a mix of different initiatives.

Financial support is being provided to support community, capacity building, prevention programs and research to improve diagnosis and treatment. We strongly believe in the fundamental importance of vaccine research that will one day lead to preventing HIV infection for future generations.

That is why this government has invested a record \$84 million in the 2008-09 fiscal year. Investments such as this government is making will support both federal initiatives to address HIV-AIDS in Canada and the Canadian HIV vaccine initiative, investments that will continue to grow over time.

The member opposite has a responsibility to set the record straight with respect to ongoing investments of the federal government on both the federal initiative and moneys that have been allocated to the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. Inaccuracies that she presents do a disservice to the front line organizations who tirelessly put effort into fighting this terrible disease.

Let me speak about the federal initiative to address HIV-AIDS. The initiative represents a comprehensive integrated Government of Canada response to HIV-AIDS here in Canada. The goals of the initiative are to prevent the acquisition and transmission of new HIV infections and to slow the progression of HIV-AIDS to improve the quality of life, reduce the social and economic impact of HIV-AIDS, and contribute to the global effort to reduce the spread of this terrible infection.

That is why the government has committed, through the federal initiative, to address HIV-AIDS and develop discrete approaches to

addressing HIV-AIDS for particular target populations, including aboriginal people. Through these investments, we are focusing on providing access to care, prevention information, and treatment and support activities where they are needed most.

At the centre of our approach—

• (1825)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for St. Paul's.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, the previous Liberal government actually doubled the funding for HIV-AIDS programs in Canada and put into place the \$84.4 million strategy from which the Conservative government has taken \$15 million, in spite of the fact that 4,500 Canadians still become infected every year.

Let me also be clear that no community organization under any previous Liberal government ever received any cuts. After these untimely, irresponsible cuts, this government will still not tell the Canadian organizations what to expect. It is February 12. These organizations were told in the news to expect the drastic nature of their cuts by the beginning of the year. When will the government tell these community organizations what they can expect and how many people they have to lay off?

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, while this government is interested in helping people with HIV-AIDS, the assertion presented by the member is completely false. People who are non-partisan and of credibility know this, like Bill and Melinda Gates. For every one dollar they invest, three dollars are invested by this government.

That was done with this government in power. The previous Liberal government did not do it and I would strongly suggest it would have been incapable of coming up with such a progressive and thorough plan.

Let us just examine for a second the actions. The member stood up in a very righteous kind of position, but when the member was a member of cabinet—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 6:30 p.m.)

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