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(HANSARD)

Monday, June 9, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, June 9, 2008

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-265, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (qualification for and entitlement to benefits), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

• (1105)

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I will first make a ruling by the Speaker on Bill C-265, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (qualification for and entitlement to benefits). There are three motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-265.

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

[*Translation*]

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

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-265 be amended by deleting Clause 1.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ) moved:

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-265 be amended by restoring Clause 3 as follows:

“3. Subsections 7(1) to (5) of the Act are replaced by the following:

7. (1) An insured person qualifies if the person

(a) has had an interruption of earnings from employment; and

(b) has had during their qualifying period at least 360 hours of insurable employment.”

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-265 be amended by restoring Clause 4 as follows:

“4. Subsections 7.1(1) and (2) of the Act are replaced by the following:

7.1 (1) The number of hours that an insured person requires under section 7 to qualify for benefits is increased to

(a) 525 hours if the insured person accumulates one or more minor violations,

(b) 700 hours if the insured person accumulates one or more serious violations,

(c) 875 hours if the insured person accumulates one or more very serious violations, and

(d) 1050 hours if the insured person accumulates one or more subsequent violations

in the 260 weeks before making their initial claim for benefit.”

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity today to address Bill C-265, and the proposed amendments to it, which have now been grouped. I am glad the Speaker of the House found all three motions in amendment to be in order.

A number of years ago, in 1996, a change was made to employment insurance. This was the most significant change to EI and affected workers across the country. Some would have had us believe that the intention behind changes to unemployment insurance was to get people off employment insurance, to reduce their dependency on it. According to them, most people would rather receive EI than go to work. I can say that, everywhere we have gone, we have seen that this is not the case, and colleagues from across the country could say the same thing.

I would argue that the government is the one dependent on employment insurance. The surplus has been accumulating ever since the EI fund was created and now it totals \$54 billion. Last week, theft from the employment insurance fund was made legal by a vote in the House of Commons. Ironically, when we finally vote on Bill C-50 tonight, that will seal the deal, and that will be that.

Bill C-265 seeks to re-establish the situation—I am not sure that that is the right word—in other words, it seeks to make employment insurance a little more humane.

People who receive employment insurance benefits get just 55% of their salary. Imagine what that means for people earning minimum wage. That is not at all uncommon in seasonal industries and tourism, for example. People working in the tourism industry earn little more than minimum wage, and most of those jobs are seasonal.

I have done the math, and it turns out that in most cases, 55% of minimum wage is much less than social assistance benefits. I should add that these employment insurance payments offer no benefits, such as a drug card—no benefits whatsoever. As such, that is a very low wage.

Private Member's Business

What does Bill C-265 seek to do? Employment insurance can be pretty complicated with all the formulas and so on. For example, some pilot projects use the 14 best weeks, but others do not even take that into account. That means the factor is 14. Consequently, for an individual who worked 12 weeks, the benefit calculation is still based on 14 weeks at 55%. That reduces the employment insurance benefit even more. This bill would see benefits calculated based on the 12 best weeks.

Some parts of the bill were not quite right, so that is why the amendments were made. When the committee members were studying Bill C-265 on employment insurance, they discussed the 12 best weeks and the 360-hour minimum for eligibility. The Conservatives proposed an amendment, and to everyone's surprise, the Liberals agreed to it. The Liberals refused to agree to Bill C-265 as written, including the 360-hour minimum for eligibility. They voted against this measure.

As it turns out, the Liberals have not changed their position on employment insurance since 1996. Let us not forget that that was when they were wiped out in the Atlantic region. They lost ground there because they brought in hours worked minimums for employment insurance eligibility, minimums that made people ineligible.

For example, a claimant needs to have worked 420 hours to qualify for employment insurance in areas where the unemployment rate is higher than 13%; 490 hours if the unemployment rate is 12% to 13%; and approximately 535 hours if the unemployment rate is under 12%. Those figures are approximate.

We thought things had changed since then. It has been nearly 12 years since the Liberals had their lesson and saw that changes needed to be made to EI, but they did not support us. I cannot wait to hear what the Liberal member has to say about that.

● (1110)

For years, I have seen Conservatives here in the House of Commons. Before they were Conservative Party members, they were members of the Canadian Alliance or the Reform Party. The only thing they said during debates was that we needed to decrease EI premiums, which would create jobs and ensure that more people were working.

How would lowering EI premiums solve the problem with fish processing plants in the Acadian peninsula, the Gaspé, Nova Scotia or Newfoundland and Labrador? At this very moment, crab fishing season is open, and workers in the fish processing plants are working only 20 hours a week. How can we solve the problem by lowering EI premiums when people have not accumulated the required number of hours to qualify?

Then, the Conservatives and the Liberals told us that we needed to change the employment insurance rules, because people depended on it. They took \$54 billion from the employment insurance fund and put it in the general fund to pay down the debt and achieve a zero deficit. This was done at the expense of workers who lost their jobs.

An hon. member: The Liberals.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The Liberals did that in 1985, I agree. A Conservative colleague has just told me that the Liberals did that, and I agree with him, but nevertheless, they were supported by the Conservatives.

I am introducing Bill C-265, which would allow people who have worked 360 hours to qualify for employment insurance. But, in committee, the Conservatives and Liberals voted to delete this criterion of 360 hours. I hope that people are watching this debate today. I listen to the Liberals during debates or when they are on television. They say that they would like to be re-elected because they want to save employment insurance.

Yet, people often cannot receive benefits. We know that 68% of women in Canada do not qualify for employment insurance—even though they have contributed to the fund—and 62% of men who have paid into employment insurance cannot qualify because of the number of hours required. Quite often, women work part-time, 20 hours a week, and therefore cannot qualify.

That is what is currently happening in my region, and it is the same all across Canada, be it in Toronto or Vancouver. People would have us believe that it is only happening in the Atlantic provinces, but after the tour I did, I can say that it is happening everywhere.

As for the Bloc Québécois amendment, the consequences are too severe. The unemployed do not qualify with 420 hours, yet the Bloc Québécois wants to force them to have 700 and 875 hours.

With this bill, we can at least say that the two parties that are against employment insurance will have to take a position and indicate where they stand. I am anxious to hear the position of my hon. Liberal colleague who supported the Conservatives to remove the 360 hour requirement from my bill. I am anxious to hear my colleague from Nova Scotia, as though there were no problems in that province. I am anxious to hear from the Conservatives, who claim to be there for the workers, as though lowering premiums creates jobs.

We need only look at fish-processing plants in Atlantic Canada. Many are not operating at the moment; there is no work. We see this in the forestry sector, given all the closures. Now, we will also see it in the automotive sector. People have lost their jobs in Oshawa and they are leaving the factory. I hope they do not have to leave and that they win their fight. I wish them good luck and my thoughts are with them. Losing one's job is not easy. Furthermore, if they are given severance pay, they will not be eligible for EI benefits. It happened to workers at AbitibiBowater in Dalhousie and to workers at the Smurfit-Stone plant in Bathurst.

The employment insurance program is paid for by the workers, but under these types of formulas, they will not even be eligible, and this will leave them burdened with the biggest debts possible. Hopefully our amendment will be accepted and, in the end, the Conservatives and the Liberals will see a small light at the end of the tunnel, in favour of the workers, and give them a chance to survive.

● (1115)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to congratulate my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst for introducing this bill.

Private Member's Business

We will surely recall that, over the course of the past four years, the Bloc Québécois has introduced five or six different and very comprehensive bills on this very subject in the hope of addressing this injustice perpetrated against workers.

Our colleague from Acadie—Bathurst and his party have decided to introduce more focused measures for the most part, which is also very good. According to what I heard him say, they hope that this will at least correct part of the injustice, in the event that the two major national parties do not have the courage or the political will to do so. This is very sound reasoning and allows us to assess the good faith of the two major parties with regard to how the unemployed are treated.

The unemployed did not ask to be in this situation. No one wants to lose his or her job. Similarly, they did not ask to be in this situation created by the unemployment insurance accessibility requirements. By the way, it has to be said that this should be called unemployment insurance. The name was deliberately changed in order to create or support the right-wing ideology that holds that this insurance is intended for people who want to work, as a Liberal minister said two or three years ago. This clearly shows all the prejudices against the unemployed. Policies are based on pre-conceived ideas.

As my friend from Acadie—Bathurst said earlier, the employment insurance fund has had a surplus for the past 12 years, but not because the unemployed had too much money; in fact, they did not have enough. The real reason is that accessibility criteria were tightened in order to exclude as many unemployed workers as possible from receiving benefits. As a result, at present, only 40% of all people who make employment insurance contributions can expect to receive benefits.

In fact, the fund surplus has been used for other purposes, even though the fund is made up only of employer and employee contributions. Meanwhile, we have pressed to have the purpose of the fund—to provide benefits and support for people who lose their jobs—remain unchanged. We have therefore introduced five or six bills, which have been debated. The most recent bill pertained to the independent fund and called for the return of the \$54 billion that has been diverted from the employment insurance fund. The Liberals and Conservatives voted against that.

Where is that \$54 billion? It should be considered a debt, just like the money the federal government borrows from financial markets. This money does not actually belong to the government.

It is as if we had disability insurance in case, one day, we should unfortunately fall ill. We pay for this insurance, but when we need it, the insurer says that it has spent the money on other things, but that there is no need to be concerned, because it made good use of the money. However, we will not receive any income while we are disabled.

The government is saying the same thing to the unemployed: it cannot give them their money. They are unemployed and need the money now, but the government has spent it on other things, such as maintaining buildings or making improvements to Rideau Hall.

● (1120)

The government used the money for other purposes and told the unemployed not to worry because it made good use of that money. That the government made good use of it is not the issue. The issue is that it took money that did not belong to it by virtue of the purpose of the EI fund.

The bill introduced by the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst corrects this problem in part. First, it creates better eligibility conditions for employment insurance and it also proposes a better way of determining income—in other words, the best 12 weeks.

In committee, amendments were made to the original bill. Here in the House, we are going to correct those amendments in order to implement eligibility measures that are more appropriate and more respectful of the situation of the unemployed, hence the incremental penalty scheme, if, by chance, an unemployed person's situation were more complicated with respect to his or her obligations to the employment insurance fund.

Another amendment we made includes inserting 360 hours of insurable employment as a condition of eligibility for benefits. In other words, one has to work 360 hours to be eligible. That is fair. Why? Because depending on the work situation, a worker can be treated unfairly compared to others. For example, 43% of men can hope to receive employment insurance benefits while in the case of women this drops by 10% to 33%. Why? Because women often do not hold their jobs as long because of their situation: they are mostly offered unstable jobs. As far as young people are concerned, it is even worse: 17% of young people under 30 can hope to receive benefits.

This situation is not right: the Canadian government treats men, women and young people in different ways. That is gender discrimination. That should not exist. The eligibility rules are very complicated for everyone; over the years they have become ineligibility rules. Not only do we have ineligibility rules, but we also have rules that discriminate from one group to the next.

I see that I still have two minutes, so I will also briefly talk about the situation with seniors, people over the age of 55. From 1988 to 1997, there was a program called POWA, the program for older worker adjustment. The Liberal Party, which was in power at the time, abolished that program, even though it cost only \$18 million per year. Out of a budget of \$16 billion, that is a small amount. It is clear how little concern there is for older workers.

The Conservatives often said that they had more compassion for people 55 and up, and that they would improve the situation. But it is the same old thing: the situation has not changed. Workers 55 and up have a hard time finding jobs, and employers have a hard time investing in an older worker.

Private Member's Business

However, the money is there, we know that money is the solution, and we know that people are experiencing difficulties. The government simply has a lack of political will to get involved, to stand up for those who need it most. It is even more difficult for the Conservatives, because it is a question of ideology. They want to decrease premiums so that there is as little money as possible to help workers who have lost their jobs.

● (1125)

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share with you our conclusions regarding Bill C-265, following its review by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

The first version of Bill C-265 proposes substantial amendments to the Employment Insurance Act, resulting in less stringent eligibility criteria and increases benefit rates. These proposals would have quite an impact on the fund. Before further discussing the repercussions identified by the standing committee, I believe it is important to analyze the situation in the more general context of today's labour market.

We acknowledge that there has been an economic slowdown in some sectors and certain regions in the country recently. However, in general, Canada's labour market indicators remain robust.

According to Statistics Canada, the unemployment rate in Canada continues to be one of the lowest in decades and the proportion of the population that is working has reached almost record levels. The participation rate of working age Canadians is 77.9%, one of the highest in the world. In addition, a review of long-term unemployment indicates that the rate declined from 13.5% in 1996 to only 4.4% in 2006 and 2007, under our government.

In short, more Canadians are working and the labour demand is high. Employment opportunities are abundant because a number of sectors are facing labour shortages and the aging of the active population in the next few years will only increase labour demand. In this context, one of the important objectives, now and in future, is to encourage the full participation of Canadians in the labour market.

Of course we realize that even in periods of high employment, some individuals need the support of employment insurance. The facts indicate that the plan is meeting their needs. Statistics Canada's 2006 Employment Insurance Coverage Survey reports that almost 83% of individuals who pay into the plan and who lose their job or quit for allowable reasons are entitled to benefits. In regions where the unemployment rate is high, the proportion of eligible individuals has increased significantly.

Of course, the higher the unemployment rate in a given region, the harder it is to find a job there. That is why, in the employment insurance system, when the unemployment rate goes up, the number of hours required to be eligible for benefits goes down. Setting a fixed number of hours—360 hours in the first version of Bill C-265—works against the goal of achieving equal access to benefits across the country. In fact, the regions that would benefit the most are those that already have low unemployment rates. In such regions, eligibility requirements would be reduced by 50%, but regions with high unemployment would see only slight reductions.

When the standing committee reviewed Bill C-265, its members made it clear that a fixed rate, 360 hours, could have negative repercussions on the labour market and would be very expensive. By opposing that suggestion, the standing committee upheld the variable eligibility requirements and the provisions for people who are new entrants or re-entrants to the labour force, because it recognized that those requirements stimulate labour market activity.

With respect to benefit rates, following the standing committee's study, the bill still proposes increasing benefit rates by introducing a formula based on the 12 best weeks.

We believe that we need to find a happy medium between raising benefit rates and the possible factors associated with the notion of "best week" that could discourage people from working. It is important for members to keep in mind that we are currently conducting a pilot project in regions with high unemployment that calculates employment insurance benefits based on the 14 best weeks of income over the 52-week period preceding the claim.

● (1130)

This pilot project is designed to address the same issues as the best 12 weeks approach. It examines whether this way of calculating the benefit rates will encourage workers to accept jobs which, otherwise, would have lowered their weekly benefits.

Our government's approach is based on the certainty that Canada has to rely on the forces of the labour market and the economy. That is how we look at employment insurance. Based on the annual EI monitoring and assessment report, there is every reason to believe that Canadians are well served by the EI program.

At the same time, we have always sought to improve the program and bring in specific changes to address specific problems. For example, we have: relaxed the eligibility criteria for compassionate care benefits; launched a pilot project to examine the effects of providing additional weeks of benefits to those in high unemployment regions; extended transitional measures for two regions, in New Brunswick and Quebec, until the conclusion of the national review of EI boundaries; introduced just recently, in budget 2008, improvements to the management and governance of the EI account, against which the Bloc and the NDP voted.

As I said, our government believes it is important that the EI program strike a balance between providing temporary income support for Canadians while they find new employment and keeping individuals active in the workforce.

Given that it cannot be established that the fundamental changes put forward in Bill C-265 are absolutely necessary, two important factors have to be considered: the cost to Canadian workers and employers, and the potential negative impact on the labour market.

Bill C-265 is not the right approach in light of the current labour market conditions. The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that all Canadians can participate and prosper in the Canadian economy. We believe that we can make the most progress and deliver the most results by investing in a variety of mechanisms, including the EI program.

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on Bill C-265 introduced by my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst.

Employment insurance is a very important part of the social infrastructure of Canada. That is a core belief. It has changed over the years. Today fewer Canadian workers have access to EI in general. Canadian employers and employees have seen a surplus of premiums over benefits paid in the last decade. I think it is time to make some changes to EI. We know that other people believe this. A number of private members' bills have been introduced in the House and have gone through committee, for example Bill C-269, this bill, Bill C-265 and Bill C-278 by the member for Sydney—Victoria, which is a very important bill that would have seen the EI sickness benefit period raised from 15 to 50 weeks. It is an active file. Also, the government recently introduced a proposal to set up an EI crown corporation.

Let us start with a few facts to set the context.

Between 1994 and today there has been a surplus each year in the EI account. From 1990 to 1994 there was a deficit each year, the last time the economy had a serious slowdown. We have seen over the past decade or so premium rates drop significantly. In 1993 employees paid \$3 per \$100 of insurable earnings and employers paid \$4.20. Those have dropped on the employee side from \$3 to \$1.73 and on the employer side from \$4.20 to \$2.42.

We saw some changes as well in 2000 and 2004. In 2000 we saw the extension of parental benefits from six months to a year. In 2004 the compassionate care benefit was added. Several pilot projects were introduced in 2005 for things such as going to the best 14 weeks. There were some other changes that were very positive as well, including an additional five weeks for areas of high unemployment. These pilot projects were set up to provide more benefit coverage in areas that specifically needed that assistance. In 2005 a new process was introduced in the rate setting mechanism, whereby rate stability was to be achieved by restricting the rate change to .15, in other words 15¢ per \$100 of insurable earnings.

In 2004 the House subcommittee on EI made recommendations, one of which was for a more independent EI board, a commission, with a fund that would operate outside the consolidated revenue fund. It did not recommend total independence but it recommended that step. Many workers and employees felt that would be a good idea.

Private Member's Business

The EI surplus is a very contentious issue. It is a surplus or a no show surplus, depending on to whom one talks. One thing we know is that it is not theft, as some people would characterize it. The money was kept track of and allocated every year. In fact, interest has been allocated. On the \$54 billion, the EI alleged surplus, some \$11 billion of that is in fact allocated interest.

It is a contentious issue and I understand that. The money went primarily to pay down debt and perhaps to other services as well but most of that money went to pay down debt. One can agree or disagree with that decision, but that was a policy decision that was made by the Government of Canada.

There are many aspects of EI that need to be addressed: those who are excluded, self-employed people, creators, part time workers who are often women. I believe there is a need to re-evaluate benefits paid to those who already qualify. What we need is a serious debate. We do not need allegations of theft.

We do not need the leader of the New Democratic Party going to a CLC meeting and saying that nobody in the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party cares because they only had five minutes at the finance committee hearing and totally neglected the fact that a Liberal-led motion in the human resources committee evaluated this new EI corporation. If it was not for that, there would be no discussion of this. The government's response was to set up a crown corporation, but how do we know if it is a solution when there is no information available? We have been provided nothing.

We introduced a motion at the human resources committee. We heard from employees, employers, actuaries, labour organizations and business groups, many of whom said that it might be a good idea, but they just do not know and they need more information. That report will be tabled in the House this week. I hope that the government looks at the recommendations of workers as well as employers.

These meetings were public. They asked questions about things such as the size of the reserve, the accountability and how this would affect benefits.

• (1140)

I, like almost all Liberals, feel that EI reform is necessary. We particularly need to look at it at a time when many Canadians are worried about the economy.

Liberals are part of a group which included the NDP member for Acadie—Bathurst, the Bloc and labour groups that looked at a previous bill, Bill C-269, and came to some common ground on it. The common ground was negotiated in good faith and every Liberal in this House supported Bill C-269 when it came for a vote. Bill C-265 shifts that ground considerably.

Private Member's Business

As an example of what it takes to reform EI, this is a serious business. One proposed amendment to increase the rate of benefit from 55% to 60% would cost \$1.2 billion every year. That was an estimate done in 2004. Reform is costly but it must be done. It cannot be done on an ad hoc basis. It is simply too important for that. It must be done by a government that accepts the fact that EI is a fundamental part of the social fabric of Canada that strengthens our communities and our people.

Reform cannot be done by running around and making allegations. We all play the constituencies. That is why it is called politics: to tell disingenuous stories about what is happening in this place when we visit with labour organizations or business groups, or to make allegations of theft and other issues about what happened before.

Changes to EI are needed, but what are those changes and what is the cost? What about the two week waiting period? We think something should be done about that. There is the five week black hole. Should it be the 14 best weeks or the 12 best weeks? What is the solution? Do we go from 55% to 60%? How are part time workers and self-employed workers covered? How is sickness covered? People have said to me that we should extend maternity leave to two years. There is no shortage of ideas. Those ideas will only be turned into action by a government that is serious about EI reform.

The Conservative government is not serious about EI reform. Reform will only be done by a government that accepts EI as a key part of the social infrastructure of Canada that strengthens not only the people and our communities, but all of Canada. It is time for a proactive and positive change to EI for employers and particularly for hard-working Canadian employees.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hardly know where to begin after listening to my colleague from the Liberal Party. I did have some prepared comments, but he has actually knocked me right off my game with the outlandish remarks he made regarding EI reform and his efforts to convince Canadians that the Liberal Party sincerely would like to see the EI system reformed.

I would like the record to show that it was the Liberals who gutted the unemployment insurance program in 1996. It was the Liberals who paved the way in 1996 and showed the Conservative Party how to use the EI fund as a cash cow for everything except income maintenance for unemployed workers.

It was the Liberals who were punished resoundingly in the province of Nova Scotia by six seats because they had the audacity to undermine income maintenance for unemployed workers. They got slaughtered in the election in 1997 as a direct result of using the EI system to pay off their debt on the backs of the most vulnerable people in the country, unemployed workers.

Before I begin my remarks on the bill put forward by my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, I must tell the House that the Liberals gave away \$100 billion in tax cuts, which they are very proud of and crow about from the rooftops. Let me tell the House where they got that \$100 billion to give away to their buddies.

The Liberals took \$30 billion right out of the unemployment insurance program, whether we call it stealing or lifting or pilfering,

and not one penny of that was their money. It was paid in by contributions from employees and employers, nobody else.

They took another \$30 billion from the surplus of the public sector pension plan. Again, they had no proprietary right to the surplus in the pension plan without negotiating it with the beneficiaries. The Liberals took that \$30 billion right out of there and used it to do whatever they wanted, from paying down debt to giving tax breaks to their buddies.

The last \$40 billion they took was from direct social program cuts.

That is where the Liberals got the \$100 billion that they gave away to their buddies.

I must not get completely knocked off my game. I will return to the issue at hand here, which is Bill C-265, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (qualification for and entitlement to benefits), introduced and sponsored by my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst.

Let me preface my remarks by saying that working people in Canada have no greater champion on this issue than my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst. He was elected on the basis of his advocacy on this subject and he has been a tireless champion.

Throughout 11 years this June 2, this man has stood up many times to try to drum some reason into the ruling party of the day. There have been nine years of Liberal leadership and two years of Conservative leadership. He has been trying to get it through their thick heads that income maintenance for unemployed workers is a good thing to bridge the gap of employment.

He has been trying to tell them that our system is dysfunctional and broken. No wonder it was showing a surplus of \$750 million a month at its peak: nobody was qualifying any more. It is not hard to design a system that shows a surplus if benefits are denied to virtually everybody who applies. That happened for two reasons.

First, the Liberals introduced a system that went to an hours-based system of 920 hours, which made it very difficult for people to qualify for the first time. The bill put forward by my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst proposes to reduce the eligibility qualifying time and return it to 360 hours. The benefit would be based on an individual's best 12 weeks.

We know who undermined that at committee. The heart and soul of this legislation, in summary, is that it would reduce the eligibility time so more people would qualify, and it would increase the benefit per week that individuals would receive so they would get a reasonable benefit based on former income. That was undermined at committee by the Conservatives, backed up by the Liberals.

This is a minority Parliament. The opposition parties could in fact effect this change in this finite window of opportunity, but it was gutted, stripped and undermined by the Liberals at committee. Therefore, we are right back where we started. Again we have the same fight of nobody qualifying for eligibility for EI any more and successive ruling parties in government using this fund as a cash cow to pay for everything but income maintenance for unemployed workers.

•(1145)

In 1997 we did a calculation of the impact of the Liberal cuts. In my riding alone, just the riding of Winnipeg Centre, when the Liberals gutted the EI system, \$20.9 million a year in federal money that was coming into the riding of Winnipeg Centre was ripped out. It was like losing the payrolls of two huge pulp mills or auto plants. Federal payroll money of \$20.9 million a year that was coming into the riding no longer did. It was stopped.

That was true in every riding across the country. There were some ridings in Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec where the impact was in terms of \$50 million a year of federal money that used to come into those ridings. In the riding of Acadie—Bathurst, it was \$81 million a year.

Do we wonder why the constituents were up in arms and sent the bums running by voting them out of office en masse in those Atlantic Canada ridings? That was the real impact of the changes to EI. Yes, the Liberals might have balanced the books, but they balanced the books on the backs of the people least able to afford it.

I am a journeyman carpenter. I have been on probably 10 different EI claims in my life, which is just a fact of life as an employee in the blue collar industries, but let me tell members about one thing that always bugged me, which neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives ever fixed.

When I was going through my four year apprenticeship, there was a two week waiting period even when I was going to trade school, as if I had been laid off. But apprentices are not laid off: the beauty of apprenticeship is that people earn while they learn. The employers give them six weeks off to go to the trade school and study for those six weeks.

It used to be that we could go right onto EI. That was part of the deal. Then the Liberals introduced a two week waiting period for apprentices, who had to starve and somehow borrow money to bridge that gap. That cost \$11 million a year. A lousy \$11 million a year would have made people whole for the two week waiting period, at least among the carpenters. I guess we have to extrapolate that to other trades.

That is how nickel and dime they were as they were trying to squeeze every ounce of juice out of the EI system. I will never forgive them for the inconvenience that it caused me and people I know.

Now that the Liberals think they are poised to form a government again someday, they are unwilling to fix the EI system, which they broke. In spite of all their rhetoric and being sympathetic to the issues, they are unwilling to fix it. I listened to that guy from Dartmouth and I could not believe it as he fudged around all of the issues that he knows very well are true.

When we add up the numbers of opposition members in this House of Commons, we see that we can do anything. United, we could bring this government down. United, we could fix the EI system. United, we could have a national pharmaceutical health care plan. United, we could have a national child care program.

We could do anything, but those members have squandered this finite window of opportunity.

Private Member's Business

I am running out of time, but I want to do justice to the bill that my colleague has introduced and has fought so valiantly for. It must make his blood boil to sit here in the House of Commons today and watch the other parties, the ruling party and its dancing partner, the Liberal Party, once again strip, undermine and destroy his efforts to fix the EI system.

I know that people in his riding had some optimism that perhaps this was the window of opportunity we needed, that surely Parliament would listen to them now that working people are represented in the House of Commons, and now that the three centre-left parties, so to speak, are united in opposition, but no, one of those parties went south on us. The official opposition went south on us, and we lost this again because the Liberals still see the unemployment insurance fund as a cash cow they can milk.

That \$54 billion that we will vote on later today in Bill C-50 will be the end of that surplus money. Just let me state for the record one more time in case there is anybody who does not understand it: this is not the government's money. The entire EI fund since 1986 has been made up of contributions from employers and employees. Not one penny has come from the federal government.

When the fund dipped into deficit for a few years in the early 1990s, the total accumulated deficit was \$11 billion. That was paid back, so as for the government taking \$54 billion now and leaving only \$2 billion in the kitty, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour says we should not call it theft, but I am at a loss for words for what else we would call it. It is simply not the government's money to use as it sees fit.

It is not too late, I urge members, to support my colleague's amendments to reinstate these conditions to make the unemployment system work. I call on all members to vote in favour of the amendments he has put forward today.

•(1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst for this bill, which is another demonstration of those who have fought hardest against the deficit and have had no return on their investment.

I would remind the House that the government managed to build up a surplus of \$54 billion in the employment insurance fund by tightening up the system, by requiring more hours to qualify and, in the end, paying fewer weeks of benefits. That is how they turned off the taps. As a result, those who are the worst off have made the greatest contribution to fighting the deficit.

When we hear that Canada is now in a better financial situation, the people who are primarily responsible for this are the unemployed workers, employers and workers who have contributed to the EI system, which has really been used as a cash cow.

Private Member's Business

Now, when we try to correct the situation, for instance with Bill C-265, by lowering the threshold for becoming a major attachment claimant to 360 hours, which would make special benefits available to those with that level of insurable employment, we are merely trying to restore its human side. That is how we must look at this bill.

We are also talking about weekly benefits representing 55% of the average weekly insurable earnings during the highest-paid 12 weeks in the 12-month period preceding the interruption of earnings. In other words, with an amendment like this to the legislation, someone who manages to qualify for employment insurance and loses his or her job will be given an income that is far from extravagant, but which represents a more reasonable minimum than under existing legislation, which, as everyone knows, is the result of these systematic restrictions under previous governments.

We now have the most appalling proof, that is, the \$54 billion that the government would sooner forget. As though following this misappropriation of funds, in other words, after stealing this money, it was decided to record it, to put it down under lost accounts and stop worrying about it. However, the people who fought the fight and those living in this situation today still need some help, like the kind of help outlined in the bill before us.

The same is true for older workers. In my riding there have been some major closures. Unfortunately there was another one just last week. In a company with 50 or so employees, 5 to 10 are workers over 50 who cannot be retrained easily. I know there are some in the Quebec City area as well. I also know that some people have gone to their MPs and, facing this real-life situation, the latter have said, "We are going to change things". But, today, the Conservative government is stepping back and not confirming the commitment it made to older workers.

Bill C-265 has to be seen as a heartfelt appeal for a modicum of fairness for people who have to live with the employment insurance system.

In the same vein, I would like to talk about one aspect in particular, that is not necessarily directly in the legislation, but is not unlike this situation. I am talking about all the pilot projects that are coming to an end in fall 2008. For example, there was the project that extended the unemployment rate, requiring fewer hours in order to be eligible and increasing the number of weeks of benefits. This project will end in October 2008 if the government does not extend it.

There is a pilot project for newcomers. Eligibility is based on 840 hours, instead of 910 hours under the regulations. This too will end on December 6, 2008. This helps keep young people in their regions and prevents us from losing them because, as everyone knows, there is an exodus of young people.

There is a project that allows all claimants to earn a minimum of \$75 without any impact to their benefits or to earn 40% instead of 25% of their rate of benefit without being cut off. This encourages people to earn a little extra. This is another pilot project that will end in fall 2008.

There are two other projects: one that allows claimants to take the 14 best weeks and the other that grants five additional weeks of benefits in order to deal with the gap.

It is a series of measures. Under pressure from everyone who wanted the situation to be corrected, at least the government made adjustments by setting up pilot projects. These pilot projects have been in place for a number of years now and we now know they are necessary for ensuring minimum income for those who are affected by these pilot projects. We hope that the government will make these projects permanent and enact them in law, in the same spirit as Bill C-265.

The first few times the member for Acadie—Bathurst and I talked to each other, even before he became a member of Parliament, we agreed that the former government's cuts to employment insurance had to stop.

● (1155)

In our ridings, we saw how this negatively affected not only people's individual financial situations, but also the regional economy. The government's main message was that seasonal workers do not deserve reasonable support from the government; they should just move. We are still hearing this today: workers should move or go out west. I have nothing against the west. The government considers the law of the marketplace so important that it looks on people like cattle. It is time for a change.

We need to bring in measures that will restore some measure of dignity to the employment insurance system, measures like the proposals in Bill C-265 and the amendments the Bloc Québécois reintroduced in this House to ensure the debate took place. I appeal especially to the members from regions outside major centres, resource-based regions, regions with a major seasonal industry.

This is a private member's motion. Members must take this opportunity to exercise their rights as members and vote for this bill. This is a pivotal moment. This will not necessarily be the bill of the century that attracts the attention of the national media, but every member here in this House should look at the bill and ask himself or herself whether it would not benefit the people in his or her riding who are most in need and are experiencing financial difficulty. Would voting for Bill C-265 not be a great way to combat poverty?

All the efforts made by the members of this House to restore some measure of dignity to the employment insurance system deserve to be recognized. The effort that has been made to bring this bill before us deserves recognition. We need to put the \$54 billion surplus and the money we want to provide for people into perspective. This bill will not make the system too broad, far from it.

For example, basing the benefit amount on the 12 best weeks will give people \$320 instead of \$300, or something like that. In a family, even if both parents are working, it can be very difficult to make ends meet during some winter months, especially on that much money.

Government Orders

In a society with such collective wealth, parliamentarians have the responsibility of ensuring that an adequate minimum amount of this wealth is distributed. We are more than happy to take advantage of the fruits of the labour of seasonal workers, who do not work full-time each year. Often more people are required to carry out this work. However, we need to ensure that they have decent minimum conditions. It is our responsibility to provide an employment insurance program that adequately responds to these conditions.

The fight for employment insurance has long been a defensive one. I hope that we are at the point of taking concrete action and that we will adopt legislation that will restore a minimum level of quality to the program and that will re-establish the balance between workers and employers. The 1994 changes have proven unduly harsh for those who lose or quit their job. The pendulum has swung too far, and the situation must be fixed.

In conclusion, I would ask the members in this House to consider, when they are voting, whether or not it is truly reasonable to accept what the bill is proposing, which is calculating EI benefits by allowing someone to qualify with 360 hours based on the best 12 weeks of earnings; by reducing the qualifying period before benefits are awarded; and by removing the distinctions made in the qualifying period on the basis of the regional unemployment rate. Are these proposals not simply a way of bringing the pendulum back to centre, of restoring a better balance?

We must always remember that by voting for this measures, we are not returning the \$54 billion surplus that was siphoned off. Today we are very happy that the Canadian economy is in better shape. If we had a way to give back to those who made the biggest contribution in Quebec and in Canada and who brought about this state of affairs, why would we not do so by voting in favour of the bill before us?

• (1200)

[English]

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

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from June 6 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.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The question is on Motion No 1. 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): The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

• (1205)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The next question is on Motion No. 2. 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): The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

The next question is on Motion No. 3. 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): The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

Government Orders

The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions at the report stage of the bill.

Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred until 3 o'clock tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The vote on the motions will be deferred until 3 o'clock tomorrow.

* * *

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

The House resumed from May 1 consideration of the motion that Bill C-51, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to speak to Bill C-51, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. I have had a lot of input from constituents. I want to discuss some of the aspects of the bill and to put on the record some of the input from constituents, mostly to identify concerns that need to be looked at during the detailed analysis of the bill at committee and the testimony of expert witnesses.

The bill would amend the Food and Drugs Act to modernize the regulatory system for foods and therapeutic products, such as contact lenses, breast implants or pharmaceuticals, for example, to improve the surveillance of benefits and risks of therapeutic products through their life cycle, to improve the compliance and enforcement measures by corporations to encourage them to report adverse reactions or potential health threats associated with market products and to give substantial regulatory powers to the minister.

The bill would also create new offences relating to food therapeutic products. It is a new term in the bill, which includes drugs and cosmetics. It would require licences for importing food, in interprovincial trade in food, make amendments to the therapeutic product listing, expand the powers of inspectors, add new administration enforcement measures, including mandatory recalls of therapeutic products and cosmetics, substantially increase the penalties related to offences and provide for the disclosure of confidential business information in certain circumstances.

I have had a lot of input on the bill. I will state some of the concerns at the outset before I go through them in some detail. I do not think anyone in Canada would be against making products safer. Many products have gone as far as to cause the deaths of Canadians. I do not imagine anyone would argue against aspects of the bill that would make products safer for Canadians. A number of elements in the bill are beneficial.

I have reviewed the *Debates* and have not seen one MP who spoke against the items in the bill, which would make products safer. However, people have many concerns about the bill. These concerns have to be looked at in great detail in committee stage to ensure they are addressed.

One of the biggest concerns is that natural health products would be targeted. At least one company has suggested there would be a huge reduction in health food products or naturopathic cures available to Canadians. Independent analysts at the Library of Parliament and other references have suggested that is not in the wording of the bill, that there is no targeting of natural products. All products would have the same types of controls.

I was quite relieved about that, but nevertheless, I want to find out why there is a problem with the license timing success rates for natural products. Apparently right now there is a backlog of 33,000 to 40,000 products, including food products, natural health products, consumer products and drugs. Many MPs agree that we need to put the resources in to get these approvals done. No matter what products, whether drugs or natural products, if they have proven to be safe for Canadians, why would we have this huge backlog of 30,000 products when they could help to improve the lives of Canadians?

You are doing a great job, Mr. Speaker. You have been in the House for a long time. I know you are retiring soon, so I congratulate you on your excellence work as interim Speaker.

For a particular constituent, I want to ensure the Empowerplus remains available to Canadians. If not, I want to know why. This is very important. She is a professional and suggests in her email, which if I get a chance I will read later, that it keeps her out of the health care system. It keeps her healthy and able to work as a valuable contributor to society.

● (1210)

If some result of this bill would prevent Empowerplus from being available to Canadians, I would certainly want to know why. I would want to investigate that in committee.

There is the relieving of a regulation that could allow big drug companies to advertise directly to consumers. I am a little worried about this. There are all sorts of funds available to do this type of product advertising. I am not sure this is a good step forward. People should be getting recommendations from their doctors or health practitioners, not basing their decisions on whichever company has the most money to advertise.

There are a number of changes in regulations. I mentioned this at the beginning. A number of things in regulating foods, drugs, health food products, natural products, everything covered in this bill are done by regulation. I want to ensure that the committee looks at that in great detail, that the items deferred to regulation are ones that should be done at an administrative level and not come back to Parliament. That is our system.

Government Orders

One of the natural food companies suggested that this bill would allow the bypassing of Parliament in making laws. Obviously that is not true. We can never bypass Parliament, but regulations do not come before Parliament. I would want to ensure there is a reasonable level of administrative items that are allowed to go through under regulations and that they are not at a level of law making but of Parliament. I hope the committee will review that in great detail because a number of people have raised that concern.

As I said earlier, some people suggest there is going to be a massive reduction in products available to them, natural products, health food products, other types of products, because the bill does not target specific types of products but targets everything equally. I want to ensure when the expert witnesses appear before the committee that committee members ask questions and get confirmation that would not be the case, especially in light of the evidence I mentioned earlier about the backlog in analyses of products for licensing. Hopefully, resources will be put forward by the government to make sure that backlog disappears.

One of the benefits of the bill are larger fines. There used to be tiny fines, which for big drug companies were no more than mosquito bites. Drug companies are very professional and do an excellent job, but every once in a while there is a rogue company. We have heard examples of cases where people died. We want to make sure that if this had been done knowingly, a judge would have access to imposing fines and penalties at a level that would be reasonable in those situations.

The government would have the ability to recall unsafe products when discovered. Right now it is up to the companies. Companies by and large have cooperated. It is in their best interests to cooperate, but it should not be left up to them. What if a company becomes insolvent? The government needs the power to recall products. I do not imagine anyone would disagree with that.

It is an offence to give the minister false information about products. I cannot imagine any Canadian objecting to that. Similarly, tampering with products or their labels to make them injurious to people's health would be an offence. I believe everyone would agree that is an improvement.

• (1215)

We do not want people telling consumers something that is not true and tampering with the label to suggest people are getting something they are not. There are provisions regarding false or reckless alarms and prohibiting the importation of food that is injurious to human health. Obviously, Canadians would not want products that were injurious to their health to be imported. Canadians want the controls on imported foods, drugs and other types of products that are dangerous to be as strong as the controls on locally produced foods, drugs or other types of products that are dangerous.

I am curious about why the regulations relating to crossing provincial borders are in the bill, considering the efforts to which the federal government has gone to leave interprovincial matters to the provinces and not create interprovincial border problems. I wonder why that is in the bill.

Bill C-51 would require hospitals and health care institutions to report adverse reactions. I cannot imagine anyone objecting to that.

Canadians certainly want to know if some drug or other product is causing adverse reactions. If that provision was not in the bill, an institution might report the adverse reactions and no one would take notice of it. When there is mandatory reporting and officials see the same problem occurring in several places in Canada, they would know it is something that has to be looked into.

The legislation also allows for life cycle testing and monitoring of a product. Sometimes new products come out, are tested and approved and then their use is changed. People use them in different ways or as a remedy for something else. There is no testing down the road. Bill C-51 would allow testing and life cycle monitoring of a product to ensure that it and its uses continued to be safe for Canadians down the road.

During the debate previously on this bill, some members mentioned products that had been a problem in the past and why Canada needs such a bill. I am quoting from *Hansard* the names of drugs that were mentioned by other MPs. Heparin was mentioned. There was mention of a contaminated drug from China, Vioxx, which led to many deaths. Evra is a birth control drug which leads to clotting. Singulair is an asthma drug which causes suicidal ideation. Champix is an anti-smoking drug which causes suicidal ideation and depression. There are also some anti-psychotic drugs for children that apparently cause obesity. People are worried about the vast majority of drugs and products coming on the market.

The Minister of Health said when he introduced the bill that he issued warnings practically every week about this or that dangerous product, some of which are natural products which have an impact on cardiac arrest, strokes or liver damage. If drugs or whatever products happen to cause those problems and the minister is giving a lot of warnings, obviously Canadians want that type of danger to their health dealt with.

The minister also said that he wants to ensure that natural health products are available to Canadians. Indeed, the government wants more natural health products in the marketplace in order to provide more choice. It is good if that is true, but the minister has not necessarily convinced Canadians yet. From the many concerns that I have heard about, a number of people have not been convinced.

I want to go through some of the emails that I have received regarding concerns that have to be dealt with at second reading before the bill can proceed. The first email is very cogent to my riding:

My limited understanding to this Act may impose restrictions on the collection, preservation and use of, in our case, traditional medicines etc. I don't think anyone is sure at this point the impact on First Nations, Self-Governing or otherwise. What I do know is that there has to be meaningful consultation if legislation is developed that could potentially diminish or impact on our rights under our Self-Government and Final Agreements.

As you know, First Nations gather, preserve and use all kinds of traditional medicines and this activity is protected under our agreements.

Government Orders

Others including our Health & Social Director are also raising this as an issue, and it is certainly has potential to impact on our culture and lifestyle.

As a citizen of the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, this concerns me greatly—

● (1220)

As she says, it is mandatory by law to have consultation. Certainly, I hope that such first nation witnesses are called and that there is an analysis and consultation to the effects on their products that they have used since time immemorial.

Someone named Carole states:

I am opposed to the Police State Powers in Bill C-51. I want my access to natural health products protected and there is something wrong with the State making Personal and health decisions...health decisions are fundamental to our personal Autonomy...

There has been more than one comment on the types of powers in the bill. The committee definitely has to review those to ensure they are not out of line with the standard types of enforcement. In particular, search and seizure powers have been raised by a number of people, and that certainly has to be cleared up by the committee.

A person by the name of Shawn states:

—I do not support bill C-51...I prefer to have access to natural products “free and clear”.

The next one is from Elizabeth. I will pass that one for now because this is the one I was talking about where the person has bipolar disorder and definitely needs this particular drug I was talking about, Empowerplus, a vitamin supplement, to keep her healthy and she does not want to be denied this important medicine.

The next one is from a person who distributes these types of natural products. It states:

Many Canadians rely upon natural health products for their health. These products are endangered and consumers need to act now to save them.

Since 2004, when the Natural Health Product Regulations were introduced, natural health products have been increasingly threatened. The new Regulations were Health Canada's response to consumer demands for the government to protect their access to natural health products. The Regulations have had the opposite effect. To “legally” sell a health product, the new Regulations impose a licensing requirement. The problem is that 60% of licence applications have failed. These have been the “easy” applications. Expectations are that 70-75% of applications will fail. For the [natural health product] Community this means 75% of [natural health products] we rely upon for our health will become illegal.

I certainly think this person has experience in the field. I certainly think those answers have to be given by the committee as to what is purported that this bill would do and the results on the ground, not only of this bill but the regulations of 2004 and the effects they are having.

I also have all sorts of concerns from a chap named Werner. I will not go into them now because they are so long. Also, as he is not one of my constituents, I am sure his MP will bring them up. However, he has a lot of concerns about, first, the minister's past history related to the drug companies. He has a whole bunch of detailed information that I am sure he sent to many MPs and they can bring out those concerns related to the bill.

Another one from my riding, though, is from Bryan. He states:

I'm afraid [this] will eliminate our choices. I find [the] assurances to the contrary empty promises. They say the bill doesn't target natural products, practitioners and consumers, but there is nothing in the wording of the bill that says that. Big Pharma can afford to do the testing, pay fines and market their products. This bill will help

them consolidate control of the market by eliminating what little competition they have now - alternative medicines and suppliers.

He, too, talks about individuals who need to deal with diabetes, arthritis and bipolar depression with diet and supplements. We want to make sure that we do not lose those.

I have another practitioner of herbal medicine, named Andrew, who thinks that a huge number of the products, 75%, will be eliminated. Unfortunately, I do not have time to go over all of these because I can see my time is up, yet I wanted to present many more.

● (1225)

I commend people to read a *Globe and Mail* article of May 23, 2008, that goes into this in more detail. I urge the committee to deal with a number of the questions raised by my constituents, the final one being the fact that the inspectors who have the ability to do these inspections and recalls will hopefully not be forced to do a lot of them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Thornhill.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many of my Thornhill constituents have also raised concerns with me about the impact that Bill C-51 will potentially have on natural health products. Among other concerns, Thornhill residents have suggested that Bill C-51 will place unfair regulations on vitamins, limit their access to natural health products, restrict their ability to grow herbs, and will potentially hurt small business owners.

I would like to ask my colleague to elaborate a bit more on the impact that Bill C-51 will have on natural health products and what response he would like to give to these concerns raised by residents of Thornhill.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I have had a number of similar concerns raised. There is a campaign by a particular company that has had products with wide distribution. I had those concerns too, and that is why I wanted more analysis done on the bill as well as feedback from people who know more than I about these particular regulations and drugs.

As I said, any independent analysis that I found of the bill suggests, first of all, that there is no targeting of any type of product. All products are covered equally in the bill. Whether it is a drug, natural health product or a cosmetic, it has to be safe, so there is definitely nothing being targeted.

However, one of my concerns, as I mentioned in my speech, is if these things are going to be licensed and there is no problem as long as they are safe, why are there 30,000 products of all types in the backlog? I think people will be worried if their products are in a backlog and not approved because then obviously they will not be available.

Government Orders

I want to read from the *Globe and Mail* article of May 23 that I mentioned. It has looked into this as well. It states:

But in reality, medical experts say the changes probably won't have a major impact on the way natural health products are marketed and sold in Canada. In fact, they may finally bring accountability to a largely unregulated industry that has typically been able to market products with little proof of their effectiveness and limited safety guarantees, according to Lloyd Oppel, a physician responsible for health promotion at the British Columbia Medical Association.

Many companies selling herbs and vitamins fear the changes could force them to provide the same level of safety and quality evidence as pharmaceutical companies - requirements that are excessive considering the high level of safety of natural health products, said Penelope Marrett, president and CEO of the Canadian Health Food Association—

● (1230)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Question and comments, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member read many articles and letters, but will the Liberal Party and this member stand up and say no to this bill as it is drafted now?

Really, it is a power grab for the health minister to have an inordinate amount of discretion on the whole natural health products industry. Lumping natural health products with drugs causes all sorts of problems. Yes, there is a huge backlog of licensing but that is partially because of the way past regulations have been implemented by both the previous Liberal government and now the Conservative government.

Many of the amendments that may be necessary and that the member read into the record, if this bill were to pass the way it is at second reading, and if it gets to committee, I am afraid they will be ruled out of order by the health committee chair.

By that time it might be too late, even though I understand that there will be concerns from all across the country. Therefore, will the member vote against this bill now or at least not say yes now and not send it to committee, or if it is sent to committee send it without a recommendation?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, if the member had noticed, members from all parties are very supportive of a number of items in the bill that makes products safer for Canadians.

Not a single member of the House of Commons had a problem with many of the things I listed. They want to improve the safety of products for Canadians. They do not want, for instance, big drug companies being able to put things on the market that are dangerous without there being sufficient controls.

I also said in my speech that I wanted to ensure that a number of concerns I raised that people have put forward, whether they are real or perceived, are dealt with at second reading.

The member suggested a power grab. That is why I said in my speech that the regulations have to be reasonable at an administrative level. Things that Canadians should be able to change by law are at the legislative level. The committee has to look at that.

The committee has to look at the type of enforcement to make sure it is similar, that it is not an abrogation of our rights that we normally expect to have as Canadians, as well as other types of enforcement regimes.

The purpose of the committee review, and members of all parties have talked about the things to be looked at in committee, is to bring these types of concerns forward. Fortunately, the experts on these items will come before the committee as witnesses. The natural health food people have to be there.

I raised the point that I do not think anyone raised in the previous debate about first nations. People with products should be witnesses at that committee to make sure that the legally required consultation is done, so that Canadians can be made safer with the good parts of the bill, but that the concerns are also dealt with before the bill proceeds any further.

● (1235)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment the hon. member on his speech because it does reflect much of the correspondence I have been receiving on it and on which people have been approaching me.

There seems to be a concern about natural health products and the hon. member has outlined that concern quite well.

Indeed, my family has been a beneficiary of natural health products where pharmaceutical products have failed. I have a great deal of personal sympathy with the concerns that are raised in correspondence.

However, there does seem to be a discrepancy sometimes between the claims of natural health products and what the empirical evidence might be.

It seems to me that the approach that has been taken by our party is, in fact, the proper approach, which is to at least let the evidence come out in committee and hear what the experts have to say, particularly on the issue of potential discrepancies between the claim of a natural health product and any evidential, as opposed to anecdotal, evidence.

I would be interested in the hon. member's comments as to whether he feels that the committee can perform a useful service to the people of Canada in allowing that evidence to come forward, so that Canadians have some assurance that what they see on the label is in fact the product that they will not only receive but that the product will do what it says it will do.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I definitely agree with the member. I want to make sure my position is clear. I agree with him that it helps natural products.

I am a big supporter of alternative medicines. I hope there will be more of them and that they will be approved. However, I agree with the hon. member. There has to be a system where they are approved safe for Canadians.

Government Orders

There are examples, and I do not have them in my notes, of certain natural products, and I remember one related to iodine, that had properties that were not listed on the label or in amounts that were unsafe to Canadians. These have already been analysed and discovered. I am sure these are few and far between, as are problems with drugs. However, if it could be injurious to the health of Canadians, we have to ensure that what is on the label is in the package, and it has the proven effects and that the company is not making false claims.

I hope the committee will be able to do that type of work. Fortunately, we have a majority of opposition members at committee that could certainly lead to the right witnesses being called.

I am not on that particular committee, but in other committees of which I am a member, my experience has been that when good knowledge and input came forward, the government was not very forthwith in allowing amendments to improve bills at committee. I hope this will not be—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Cambridge.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today and speak at second reading of Bill C-51, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. This is an important bill with an important goal.

Many members in the House know, and most people in my riding of Cambridge know, that I was a chiropractor for 20 years. I prescribed natural health products to improve the health of my patients, to limit the time of their disablement or their disease, if I may call it that, or at least to ease some of their symptoms. I have not only prescribed these products or recommended many of them to my patients over many years, and still do to this day, but I have also recommended them to my children, my wife, my in-laws, and my mother. I take them myself.

I congratulate the Minister of Health and the government, whose goal, in the introduction of this bill to the House, is simply to better protect Canadians, to keep them safe, and to modernize the safety system within the existing act.

As a result of my background and my passion for these products, I would like to limit my comments today to the natural health products aspect of this bill.

In 2005, a Health Canada survey showed that 71% of Canadians regularly took vitamins and minerals, herbal remedies, homeopathic treatments, and naturopathic treatments. In fact, we have known for decades that a vast percentage of the Canadian population use non-traditional forms of medicine, whether they are chiropractors, naturopaths, homeopaths, or reflexologists, all of these being outside the traditional allopathic course of action. In fact, if we were to lump it all together, there would be a compelling argument that more people actually see non-medical doctors than medical doctors.

These products can decrease the cost to the public purse significantly. In saying that, it is the government's intention to keep access to these products open. There will be no changes in accessing these products by Canadians than there was a few years ago. Nothing technically is going to change. I am appreciative of the opportunity

to explain more clearly exactly what is going to happen with respect to natural health products as a result of this legislation.

As a member whose past history is that of a chiropractor, I want to support the demand that Canadians have for a broader choice but for safe and effective natural health products. It is important that natural health products be regulated to protect Canadians, and no one argues that. There are clear examples where tainted products have been found not just among natural health products but even among prescription medication.

Sometimes it happens that products have something in them that makes them unsafe. Everyone will remember the Tylenol incident of a decade ago where some of those products had to be removed from the market very quickly because they had been tampered with.

The other issue is that Canadians deserve to know what is in the bottle. They deserve to be protected from poor quality production or from malicious tampering with a product. Canadians need to know that if they are buying vitamin C that they are actually getting vitamin C. This makes simple sense and there are many examples.

● (1240)

One example that the House is fully aware of is a product called black cohosh, which was found to contain a species of the plant different from what was stated on the label. Some people, of course, think that natural health products are very safe and of low impact, and generally speaking they are, but the fact is that in this particular product the presence of this other plant actually caused liver toxicity. It was a major health problem for the people who were taking it.

These people were innocent. They read the label. They took their advice from their chiropractor, their medical practitioner or their naturopath. They went to the natural health store and purchased the product, but it was not the product that they were led to believe.

As well, we have had instances where folks come along and make unfounded claims. They actually might stand up and say that if we take this product, this pond algae from some obscure place around the world, making it sound attractive and exotic, it will cure cancer. There have been examples of such claims being made in regard to a cure for SARS.

Not only is this misleading to the public, but let me explain the danger in doing something like that. We do know that there are proven aids for these types of conditions. There are treatments available to Canadians that will help certain conditions, such as terminal cancer, for example, treatments to extend the life of the patient or make the patient feel more comfortable.

Of course, a patient with one form of cancer also can have other conditions, not just the single terminal cancer. A lot of patients with these types of diseases have other problems. Those other problems need to be treated as well, but when someone comes along and says that all a patient needs to do to cure his or her cancer is take a particular product, that patient sometimes delays appropriate care. Through delaying appropriate care, the condition worsens.

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In some cases, not cancer cases in particular, but SARS, as was the case in Toronto, there were claims by some manufacturers or suppliers of certain products that if people took their product it would cure SARS. That kind of claim is extremely dangerous, because it prevents Canadians from getting appropriate care and, in some cases, can lead to the death of the patient. It often leads to a delay in proper care, making the disease itself more chronic, more difficult to treat and significantly more dangerous for the patient.

Despite our good intentions as a government to come along and revamp a very old, outdated regulatory system, despite our good intentions as a government to have the simple intention of making these products safer for Canadians but still keep alive access for Canadians to health practitioners, complementary treatment professionals and manufacturers, despite those good intentions, as my friend opposite mentioned, there has been a campaign on the Internet and elsewhere that has led to a lot of misinformation and a lot of concerns for Canadians. Unfounded as all of this may be, it is out there and I believe we need to address it.

I, too, have received these types of emails. Not only am I the member of Parliament for Cambridge-North Dumfries, but I was a chiropractor for 20 years, so a lot of my old patients have been writing to me. They have expressed some of these concerns.

For example, they are concerned that the way natural health products will be regulated will change and they will lose access to these products. That is absolutely not true.

There is a concern that natural health products will need a prescription. Again, that is not true.

We use the word prescription probably a bit too loosely when we speak of things. I myself say that I prescribe these products for patients, but not in the way that one needs a prescription, where one goes to a medical doctor, costing the provincial health care system some \$35 to \$50 and gets a prescription written out, which means then going to a pharmacist and paying another \$9, \$10 or \$12 dispensing fee.

• (1245)

None of that is true. It is another myth that for some reason is being propagated on the Internet. I want to assure Canadians that it is not true.

As well, there is a false belief that inspectors would be able to enter private homes without permission or a warrant. No one in this House would ever allow such a thing to happen. That is absolutely not true. In fact, as with any law in Canada, no one can enter a private home without a warrant, which would require a judge to review the case. The case would have to be extremely compelling.

I will mention a little later on in my speech that there are times when private property has to be walked upon to get to a manufacturing facility, but these are rare cases and I am here to say that this belief is absolutely not true.

I want to make this clear to members of the House, particularly my friends in the NDP, who seem to prefer to send out misinformation. I heard one of the hon. members this morning again using phrases like lumping NHPs, natural health products, together with foods and drugs. As for the phrase “lumping together”, that member either has

not done her research at all or is actually trying scare Canadians on purpose into somehow supporting her misguided approach to this bill.

I am sure the member knows that this is a very complex piece of proposed legislation. It has been around for years. It has been modified somewhat. Perhaps the member has not read the new legislation that we have introduced and is relying, much like the misinformation campaign on the Internet, on outdated information.

It is very important that we not use these tactics to create fear in Canadians. What is important in this place of honour is that we try our hardest to find the absolute truth with respect to every piece of legislation. The bottom line is that we need to alleviate Canadians' concerns, not make them fearful by misinformation on those kinds of things.

I want to step back for a second on the issue of Health Canada officials. In fact, the minister has met with Health Canada officials, who have had multiple stakeholder meetings over the last month or more to explain Bill C-51 and hear suggestions for change.

I should mention that I myself have received hundreds of emails, as many members have, but I have also sent out hundreds of letters and have made phone calls to many of the natural health product stores in my riding. I have sent letters to every single chiropractor, naturopath, dietician, herbalist, medical doctor, and physiotherapist, I believe, all of whom would have access to patients who may wish to have advice on products.

I congratulate all of the folks in my riding who have written back. It is indeed an honour to have a constructive, bilateral conversation with constituents and hear their concerns, but that is only the first half of it. There is then the ability to bring those concerns to Ottawa, to this place, and sit down with the Minister of Health and his team. I have to tell members that I have done so on no less than six occasions.

It has been an absolute honour to be able to bring forth the concerns from my riding of Cambridge and North Dumfries and have the minister listen to those concerns, knowing full well that the minister and his team have listened to the concerns of all members in the House who, in totality, have heard the concerns of the manufacturers, the people who use these products, Canadians, and professionals abroad.

On behalf of the Minister of Health and in response to this government's concern for the opinions of Canadians and manufacturers, I believe we should in fact refer Bill C-51 to committee. It is the government's intention as a result of all of these consultations to introduce amendments for the committee's consideration.

• (1250)

If I may, I would like to share some of the results of those conversations, some of the end points, so to speak, of a minister who has listened to stakeholders and has discussed with a number of members of the House some of the proposed amendments that we would make to Bill C-51.

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First, we fully accept and agree with what we have heard from natural health products stakeholders. This very important amendment is to create legislatively a third category for natural health products. I want to say that existing now is a sort of regulatory third category, but the government wants to make it a legislative third category. This is a very important step in protecting natural health products from ever being lumped into foods or drugs, neither of which they are.

I think that takes into consideration all of the fears that Canadians have expressed, because it will protect natural health products. It will be impossible to silently change the way health products will be treated when they are in a third and separate category.

We understand that natural health products should be recognized in legislation as different from drugs. We recognize that they are unique within an overall umbrella of therapeutic products.

To do this, we propose to bring into Bill C-51 a definition of natural health products which is actually consistent with the current definition under the regulatory regime that now exists and has existed since 2004. The reason we want to do that is reasonably simple: we feel it would be appropriate given that this definition has already been subjected to extensive consultation.

Bill C-51 will thus support the existing NHP regulations, which reflect the unique nature of NHPs and recognize that these are generally lower risk products. In regard to this separate and legislated third category, this amendment would also make clear that regulations relating to drugs would not apply to natural health products.

We have also heard great concern that in defining NHPs care should be taken to avoid lumping them, as I am sure NDP members will continue to say, into the regulatory standards for foods. Foods are outlined in *Codex Alimentarius*.

We agree with that. Therefore, it is the government's view that our proposed approach to defining NHPs separate from drugs, but within an overall umbrella of therapeutic products, will prevent the application of Codex to NHPs.

Second, we have listened to many people and professionals who say the same level of scientific evidence that Health Canada requires for drugs should not apply to NHPs. This is a very good amendment by the government. It is our intention to propose an amendment which would make it clear that the type and amount of information required for NHPs shall include traditional knowledge, knowledge of first nations, knowledge of the 5,000 year history of the Chinese on their types of medicine, and history of use, with history of use being safe use, or as has been used for decades by chiropractors, naturopaths and so on.

In addition, given the wide range of therapeutic products, we proposed an amendment which would make it clear that the type and amount of information required to obtain a licence depends on the nature of the product and its intended use. In other words, a new product may require more information. Or if a product claims to cure cancer, versus the common cold, then certain things would be different. We will underline this in the preamble of the bill: that the use of history and traditional knowledge are valuable and important sources of information.

Third, we want to talk about compliance and enforcement provisions. The government's intention is that the powers of Health Canada should be exercised in a very reasonable way and only for good purpose. Amendments to the bill and as suggested at committee will be that an inspector must carry out his or her duties in a reasonable fashion, having regard to risk of injury. As well, if any product is seized, it has to be dealt with in a timely manner so as not to impact small businesses.

• (1255)

I see my time is up. Perhaps I will have the opportunity during questions and answer to get a couple of these other points out.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the government on the proposed amendments, particularly adding traditional knowledge, which is a very important amendment, and I appreciate that.

I have a question on one particular amendment. Perhaps the member could outline this further for people who might not understand the complexities of the categorization of these natural products. Although he did a very good job in his speech, could he go over the regulatory regime where in 2004 they were categorized?

If I understand it, the government has agreed to an amendment that would solve the concern and the legislative environment. Right now every product, whether it is a drug or a food, would be subject to a lot of the conditions in the bill. Now there will be an additional amendment to will deal with a lot of the concerns we have had expressed to us. This will identify natural products in the legislative framework as something different.

• (1300)

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the member's question in two different ways.

First, the government will propose to committee that we send another amendment, which I did not get to, and that is to set up a separate advisory committee. That committee would be an external advisory committee made up of stakeholders, manufacturers, health care professionals, the public, consumers who would have input on any changes that need to be made with respect to upcoming natural health products.

As the member will probably know, and this is the second part of how we intend to do that, under a regulatory regime, the minister and future governments would have an easier time of making changes to how natural health products would be impacted.

As we have seen over the last six or eight years, this issue has come and gone many times. The misinformation we read on the Internet is largely in part some of the past experiences we have had. By creating a separate legislated category, that will become significantly harder to do.

What we have seen in the past is folks have argued that natural health products should be food. We understand there is a regulatory regime with respect to Codex, which is very complicated. As a government, we are getting a little fed up with some of the safety factors with respect to food.

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We really do not want to put natural health products there. We certainly do not want to suggest that natural health products are drugs and have them fall under the regulatory regime of the pharmaceutical industry, which would require a huge amount of investigative research before getting to the market. These are generally safe products, so we did not want that.

There seems to have been a workable regulatory category for natural health products. The government would like to propose an amendment that it is a legislated category. I do not think we will change the name, and I would not propose we do that. However, instead of the food drugs act, it would be food, drugs, natural health products act. It simply recognizes them as a separate product, which makes them safe and makes the issues permanent for Canadians. Canadians will have the same access to these products as they have had over the years past and now on into the future.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to what the member had to say. I counted at least seven amendments, if not more, that would change the bill, whether it is the legislative or third category, definition of health product, traditional use, the recognition of, separate advisory committee, compliance, et cetera. The health critic for the NDP had a lot of concerns right from day one. It as if the way the bill is drafted now is not acceptable.

I hear many concerns. Rather than passing the bill as it is at second reading, why would the House not send it to the committee without recommendation and then have those amendments put in at the health committee after some hearings? If we say yes to Bill C-51 the way it is structured now, how can anyone blame the natural health product industry, or the herbal medicine practitioners and all those folks who are extremely fearful because of the way it is structured and written? There is a lot of fear out there and I do not blame them because of the history.

The hon. member also said that he understood because of the past history of this industry being attacked. There is a lot of misunderstanding out there. Would it not be a much better approach for the House to not say yes to the bill as it is drafted? The government is already proposing all these amendments? If we approve the bill as it is at second reading, then during the summer how will anyone understand and know for sure these amendments will be accepted at the health committee?

• (1305)

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, the way the process in the House of Commons works is a bill is presented at first reading and at second reading the House gets to debate it. We get to stand in the House and express our concerns about the bill, or the concerns we have heard from our constituents through emails or phone calls. The minister, as I mentioned, has met with a number of stakeholders and has done an incredible amount of work listening to folks.

What happens now, for the member's information, is the bill gets voted on at second reading and heads to committee where all these changes happen. Committee then brings the bill back amended for third reading. I think the member has probably confused second reading with third reading. This is exactly what we do at second reading. We have the debate at second reading in the House. All members then get to put their proposed changes or their ideas forward. Then it goes to a smaller committee, not a committee like

this with 308 members, of 12 members who have the time and budget to bring in stakeholders, witnesses, manufacturers and consumers. They add information.

The committee then sits down after that and members debate all the information they have gathered. They write a report and make recommendations. They vote on the actual wording of the amendments, so they dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s. Then the bill comes back fully changed and the House gets a third shot at third reading to vote it down.

To vote it down now would put Canadians at risk. The way it is now is not good. That is why we are changing it. I encourage my friends from the NDP to stop the misinformation because this is important for Canadians. This is becoming an extremely good legislation. If these amendments are picked up at committee and if other amendments proposed at committee are looked with the due diligence that committees tend to do, then that is exactly how Parliament should work for Canadians.

I ask all members of the House, including the NDP, to vote the bill through at this stage and the committee will do its job.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to my colleague that, in general, the bill is interesting. It also addresses important demands made by the Bloc Québécois. However, we would like to ensure that, during committee work and study of the amendments, careful and close attention is paid to the entire issue of natural products.

This bill proposes changes to how things are done. Those involved in these sectors, which have grown significantly in recent years, are afraid that a framework will be imposed that is similar to the one governing medications, for example. In that regard, we must ensure that there is appropriate oversight but that it is not so heavy-handed as to paralyze this field.

Can the hon. member provide assurances that this is the government's intent?

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, if the member had been here for my speech, he would have heard that this was exactly the government's intention with these proposed amendments. We intend to show the value of natural health products in the preamble of the legislation. We intend to define natural health products under a legislated definition and a legislated third category.

We will restrain the power of inspectors. We want to constrain their ability to do search and seizures. There will have to be warrants. None of this misinformation is true. We will use the history of the product, be it traditional history based on, for example, first nations or Chinese medicine and traditional knowledge of doctors. We will be doing all of that as well as protecting personal information and creating an advisory committee for the—

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-51 today. This is an issue that deals with something of top concern to people across the country and certainly people in Vancouver Quadra, and that is the issue of health care. More importantly, health prevention and maintaining health is a critical part of what we do as people, families and mothers.

This bill speaks about not just protecting health from adverse issues through products that might be dangerous but also touches on how we can maintain our health and prevent health challenges by using natural products and complementary medicines, and using the medical system in a proactive and preventive way.

It is a very important bill which I am pleased to speak to. It touches on the protection of consumers from products that are tampered with or contaminated. It talks about protecting consumers. The products that they think they are buying and consuming need to be such products. There needs to be the ability to recall products that are problems and an important update to this legislation that is very out of date. From those perspectives, this is an important bill.

I will touch briefly on my background using complementary medicine. I, in fact, applied to become a naturopathic physician. Way back in my early career choices, I applied to the John Bastyr College of Naturopathic Medicine in Seattle having completed all of the prerequisite requirements to enter a college of naturopathic physicians. Since then, I have become a mother of three children and raised those children using almost exclusively complementary medicine.

Of course, the medicine provided by our MDs and hospitals has a very important role to play. When my daughter broke her leg, I was very grateful that there was an emergency department. I was able to take her in and she was given great care. She has healed properly and is able to climb mountains and plant trees without a problem.

The allopathic medical system also has an important place in our lives. However, so does complementary medicine. Using naturopathic physicians as primary physicians has been my family's choice. Using homeopathic remedies, traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture, and a variety of alternatives has been an important part of maintaining the health of my family members.

From that perspective, I have been very concerned about possibly infringing on the choice that people might make to use naturopathic, complementary and other alternative modalities, and the products that they use, many of which have been used in traditional medicines for hundreds, if not thousands of years, and are important to maintaining health, preventing problems, and managing chronic diseases.

An additional aspect about the complementary medical system is that it tends to be supportive of people taking self-responsibility for their health, changing some of the lifestyle aspects that may not be conducive to their health, stepping forward to take responsibility in preventing problems by eating well, and using nutritional and herbal supports before there are clinical problems.

That self-responsibility is increasingly important in our society. As demographics change, the allopathic medical system is overburdened with the demand on it and the costs are escalating, and taking larger and larger percentages of provincial budgets.

● (1310)

I have been listening to the concerns of people in my community of Vancouver Quadra from the perspective of the fines and enforcement measures in the proposed bill. I appreciate the member for Cambridge mentioning some of the amendments that the government was considering. I have also been listening to people from the Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors, both in British Columbia and nationally.

While I recognize that there are real concerns with this bill, notwithstanding Health Canada's attempts to reassure people that it would essentially change very little with respect to natural products, I want to flag some other concerns.

One of the concerns, of course, has to do with the intent to lump natural products in with therapeutic drugs. An article in *The Vancouver Sun* points out how completely unacceptable that would be. The article reports on a study which took place at the Vancouver General Hospital. It essentially concluded that 12% of patients who were rushed to the emergency room were there because of adverse affects from medications. The study findings were published that day in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. The 11 international authors of the study said patients with medication related complaints were more likely to be admitted to hospital beds after they had been seen in the emergency room and occupied those beds far longer than others, a result the authors described as striking. The study estimated that 70% of such visits were preventable through better prescribing, dispensing, and monitoring of patients.

I would like to quote from lead investigator Dr. Peter Zed, who was working at Vancouver General Hospital during the study but is now at the Queen Elizabeth Health Sciences Centre in Halifax:

We've proven in this study that we've got a problem in the health care system with patients who experience bad effects from medications and we have to figure out how to reduce those problems.

Problems stem from a variety of issues, including patients being prescribed the wrong drugs, given wrong dosages, having allergic interactions with drugs, and patients not following instructions for how and when to take their medications.

The key that one can take away is the fact that essentially one in nine emergency room visits at Vancouver General Hospital relate to pharmaceutical medications. This is a very different category of product than natural products such as herbs and traditional Chinese medicines.

Some adverse affects have been put forward by Health Canada. Members across the aisle have suggested that natural products and herbal medicines also can have adverse affects. I am not going to argue that there may be cases where a product is not 100% what it is claimed to be in the container or that there may be a contraindication with other medications people might be taking.

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However, one in nine emergency room visits are due to pharmaceutical drugs versus the record of natural products, herbal medications, homeopathics, organotherapy, and other kinds of products that would be lumped in with pharmaceutical drugs in the bill as it reads now.

I am pleased to hear that amendments to create a third category are being considered, given that until very recently Health Canada was denying that there would be negative impacts from the way the bill was structured. I am going to be very vigilant in following the debate as this goes forward.

I have a letter from a constituent. Brian says:

I am writing to you as one of your constituents to express my concerns about Bill C-51 and the impact it will have on the ability of my naturopathic doctor to treat my health concerns safely and effectively as well as my access to natural health products that I currently purchase. As an informed patient, I have chosen to be treated by a naturopathic physician utilizing natural therapies and substances to ensure optimal health. I would like some assurances that my choice to see a naturopathic doctor or purchase natural health products in the store will not be negatively affected by Bill C-51.

● (1315)

I am focused on the response of the naturopathic physician community because that is where my knowledge is strongest and those concerns remain.

I have a public posting from a naturopathic physician in Nelson, B.C., who is the current president of the College of Naturopathic Physicians of British Columbia, Dr. Lorne Swetlikoff. He acknowledges that:

—Bill C-51 appears well intended and seems to strengthen the manner in which all health products will be regulated. [However] as you delve into the details of the bill you discover the potential for disaster [that] it poses for the practice of naturopathic medicine in Canada.

A couple of the examples of the concern that is being raised by the naturopathic community is that:

The bill introduces a new term called “prescription therapeutic products” to refer to any product, including a natural product that is not included under the current natural health product regulations and states that they will be accessible only by a “practitioner”.

However, of great concern to Dr. Swetlikoff and other naturopathic physicians is that:

—under this bill, prescription therapeutic products require a prescription from a “practitioner”. Currently naturopathic doctors do not have prescribing authority and are not designated as a practitioner in Canada [under our federal laws].

So, essentially, that would mean that there would be many products that naturopathic physicians utilize to maintain the health, to protect and prevent problems, of their clients, and to manage chronic diseases, that would no longer be accessible to them. Of course, they could be prescribed by an MD, but medical doctors are actually not trained to utilize those kinds of herbal and non-pharmaceutical drug products. So, they could become inaccessible.

I think it is critical to understand that this does affect many patients because many people use the services of naturopathic physicians. They are physicians who have been trained seven-plus years in post-secondary institutions and to now say that a naturopathic physician can no longer prescribe a patient to use a herb like St. John's wort is completely outrageous. That area needs to be addressed as the bill moves forward.

I had the privilege of having worked with the provincial government when I was in cabinet between 2001 and 2005 to raise the profile of complementary medical modalities and the effectiveness of those modalities on prevention and chronic disease management, and the need of additional professionals to take care of patients who in my province of British Columbia have a shortage of family doctors available. So, it is very important to integrate complementary and alternative medicine into our health care system and not to isolate it and marginalize it.

So, in British Columbia I worked with the government and the naturopathic association to ensure that we in British Columbia have a broader scope of practice for naturopathic physicians that better reflects the kinds of services that they are trained to provide. I am pleased that recently a law was passed that supports a scope of practice that will allow those physicians to prescribe, to have hospital privileges, to refer to specialists, and to request laboratory procedures for their patients.

That is a step toward integrating naturopathic and other alternative medical practitioners into our health care system, which is exactly what we need so that people can have choice, so they are not isolated, so that there is not a duplication where a patient needs to see a naturopathic physician and then has a whole different track to see an MD because of the historic separation between those practices.

● (1320)

Integrating them is very important. I have been pleased and privileged to be able to work toward that in British Columbia, but it is not the case in all provinces. In provinces where a naturopathic physician cannot prescribe, Bill C-51 would unfortunately and very negatively curtail the ability of naturopathic physicians and other complementary physicians to provide proper care, service and support to their patients.

I was also pleased to hear about the proposed amendments. The member for Cambridge described some of them.

We need to ensure as the bill moves forward that there is proper consultation, and not just consultation but incorporation of the views and the requirements of the different stakeholders that have an interest in this. I would contend that this has not happened adequately or we would not have had this great amount of concern and fear on the part of the public, a fear that to some degree I have shared.

I have been working with naturopathic physicians, as I have said, but also with people who represent the manufacturers, the importers, the distributors, the wholesalers and retailers of these health products, to make sure we understand which of these concerns are valid. Substantially, these concerns are valid. We should move forward in a way that fully addresses them, that does not just window dress this by hearing them and then moving forward with a bill that overregulates a sector whose products have demonstrated very little harm.

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I will repeat what I said in my introductory remarks, which is that consumer safety is an important role of government. That is part of what we do. We regulate and legislate to protect consumers from demonstrated harms, but as a society we have to always balance between that kind of protection and an overregulation which would cast a net so broadly that it would bring in products and issues that really have not been demonstrated to be harmful to the people who choose to use them.

I would say that is what Bill C-51 does. By casting such a wide net, it actually risks doing more harm than it prevents, by frustrating people who are taking responsibility for their health, and by applying huge fines, which might be appropriate in the case of a billion dollar pharmaceutical firm but not in an industry in which the largest players are much smaller. That kind of draconian compliance and enforcement tool is simply not appropriate in the natural products category whereas it might be in the pharmaceutical drug category.

I am pleased to be able to participate in this debate. I will be taking an active interest and involvement at the caucus committee, where my colleagues will discuss this, and also at the parliamentary committee. I intend to be a visiting member and ensure that the naturopathic physicians' concerns, as well as the concerns of other stakeholders, are clearly articulated.

I will do what I can to ensure that they are incorporated so that as we move forward Bill C-51 does what it is intended to do, which is to be a positive and important tool in protecting the safety and well-being of the consumers of the products it covers without over-regulating and creating barriers to the use of those natural products that are so important to so many of us.

• (1325)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the way the bill is drafted, we know that probably 60% of natural health products will fail. As well, the inspectors will have huge powers to look for compliance. In fact, we have heard that Health Canada is trying right now to recruit more health inspectors from universities. There is great concern in the community that the way the bill is drafted would cause great harm to the natural health products industry.

I heard the Conservative government say that it wants to change the preamble, have a different enforcement mechanism, restrain the inspectors, have the third category legislative area, have a different definition of health products, redefine what traditional use means, including native, first nation and the 5,000 years of Chinese herbal medicine history, and a separate advisory committee.

It begs the question: why would the government not just withdraw the bill, redraft it properly and bring it back when the fall session starts? Right now we are being asked to vote for or against the bill the way it is drafted now. Even though there is some promise that amendments will be put forward in the committee, we do not know, first, whether the committee will accept these amendments and, second, whether these amendments will even be in order given how fundamental these changes are and how extensive they would be.

Why would we not say no to the bill before us, pick the good parts, redraft the bad parts and start all over again? Certainly the bill as it is now is not acceptable. Even the Conservative government

says so. Why would the Liberals not join with the NDP and say no to the bill the way it is crafted now?

• (1330)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I share the member's deep concern about the bill. I am in complete agreement that extensive changes are needed.

However, this coming vote is a vote in principle. The principle is that patients have safe, effective and high quality products and that regulating pharmaceutical drugs and natural products for the purpose of reducing risks to health, enhancing safety and accuracy of products makes sense. I am in support of that principle.

As I said in my remarks, the way the legislation is written currently does not provide the balance we are looking for and I have major concerns about it, but those are concerns that need to be taken seriously as the bill moves forward. I would strongly exhort the government members and the other members of the committee to take the time that is needed for their work.

The committee work can be an opportunity for hearing from the stakeholders that have critical information to provide. This should not be rushed through. These are very complex issues. It is critical to find that balance of providing consumer safety without over-regulating and without unintended negative consequences.

I also share the concern that we can have the right licensing compliance and enforcement rules but if we do not have the capacity to have enough inspectors or licensing officers to carry out the licensing in a timely way, then effectively it becomes a barrier, unintended or otherwise, to the use of those products. This is a major concern that also has to be addressed as the bill moves forward.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made a very good and knowledgeable speech. I congratulate her. I was particularly interested in the fact that one in nine admissions to emergency at Vancouver General Hospital is pharmacologically related.

One of the concerns that the bill sort of addresses, and I am not quite sure whether the government has proposed amendments in this area, is the apparent discrepancy between what natural health products claim and what the evidence is to support the claim.

I wonder if the hon. member has given some thought to whether there should be some bringing together of the claims of the product with the evidence to support the claims for the product, be it empirical or anecdotal.

• (1335)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I would contend that many of these natural products do not contain claims. Perhaps some do. I think the natural products industry is pretty careful not to make claims. I purchase many products that I know work. I know that based on my 35 years of experience in using them, not because the label on the bottle says to take this and it will strengthen that.

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The idea of evidence also brings to the fore the difference between natural products, herbal products, homeopathic remedies, et cetera, and pharmaceutical drugs. By and large, pharmaceutical drugs are developed and sold by major corporations that can spend hundreds of millions of dollars in testing and collecting evidence to support their claims. They then have a patent on a product and can charge huge amounts.

There are some medications that run into hundreds of thousands of dollars a year with regard to being provided to the market. That is certainly not the average, but the pharmaceutical firms invest a lot in research and evidence gathering and they can then recover that.

Who is going to spend the money for double-blind trials on a herbal product for which there is no patent and no way of recovering the costs of putting that research in place? It is simply not practical, so we cannot require the same standard of testing and evidence for a natural product, because otherwise that becomes an unintended barrier to its use.

I believe approximately that one-half of the population of British Columbia uses complementary and alternative medicine at some point during the year for their health, health care and prevention. We do not want barriers to those people taking responsibility for their health.

I had a forum in greater Vancouver a couple of years ago in which I brought together the leading thinkers in naturopathics, in traditional Chinese medicine, in the natural cancer centre associated with VGH, in massage therapy and in some of the other modalities. I brought that group of leading thinkers together in a forum at the Boucher Institute of Naturopathic Medicine, which is in New Westminster, with the then minister of public health, Carolyn Bennett, to talk about how we could better integrate complementary and alternative medicine into our health care system, for all those good reasons that I have already expressed.

The key that came out of that meeting and the key request that the leaders in those other modalities had of the then minister of public health was that the federal government should be investing in research. The federal government should be providing research funding to generate the evidence, because these practitioners and physicians have experienced the evidence of the effectiveness of their products. That is why half of British Columbians seek their help: because their products do work and they do no harm. These natural products, the homeopathics, the tinctures, the organotherapies, do not send people to the emergency rooms.

We need that evidence, but we need the federal government to fund the research for it. Otherwise it will not happen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-51.

First off, I want to say that the Bloc Québécois has been demanding for a number of years already that we look at that issue further. It seems to me that Canadians and Quebeckers are somewhat tired of occasionally being the victims of products that adversely affect their health and that of their children. There have been scandals recently. Just think of the toy scandal, for instance, involving children who suffered lead poisoning.

Quebeckers and Canadians are aware of some degree of deceit in the department stores where they buy everyday consumer items, among other things. Everyone knows that when we pick up a jar of pickles from China, the label sometimes shows that the product was made in Canada. There is false representation every step of the way. The Bloc Québécois raised that issue many years ago, calling on the government to clean up this whole area of drugs, agricultural products and cosmetics. We are pleased in that sense that the issue is being brought before the House today.

The Bloc Québécois will make sure that what I just talked about is reflected in the legislation. We have seen before obligations, everyday things, come into force under a bill, which did not reflect reality at all. That is what we want to pay attention to. It is not because the bill's title refers to tidying up the area of drugs, cosmetics and agricultural products, because the intention is stated in the title, that we should be lax.

In fact, let me say outright that the position of the Bloc Québécois is to vote yes at second reading stage, but there will surely an opportunity to take a very serious look at the bill at the Standing Committee on Health to ensure that reality is defined properly and reflected in the bill.

I have seen governments—and this one is no exception—come up with bills that they claimed would fix some social problem or other, bills that included various guidelines, amendments and new restrictions or that made laws more permissive. We need to sort out exactly what we want this bill to achieve. Naturally, the parties, including the opposition parties, will each have their way of seeing things. All I want to say is that the Standing Committee on Health will study the bill thoroughly.

For now, I will try to communicate the Bloc Québécois' opinion of what is before us now as faithfully as possible.

We also have to talk about how the government reacts and what it is doing to make sure that all products available to consumers are safe.

A number of interesting things have happened over the past few years. I certainly remember how people practically called the Bloc Québécois heretical because it wanted labelling on products. Back then, we were told, “No, no, no.” That was probably 10 years ago now.

We thought we had made some progress, but just last week, one of our colleagues introduced a bill on labelling, and the government worked with the Liberal Party to defeat it. Such things make us wonder about this government's true intentions.

I hope that we will be able to put together a good bill here, and I hope that when it becomes law, the government will actually enforce it. It is easy enough to say, “Here's the law”. It is something else entirely to enforce it, a process that is sometimes not taken seriously.

Government Orders

For example, take what we were told not that long ago, maybe seven or eight years ago when the labelling issue was up for discussion. People were talking about genetically modified organisms. There should have been thorough studies, and, like the United States' Food and Drug Administration, Health Canada should have studied the repercussions and the ins and outs of this issue. But the minister at the time, who is now rector of the University of Ottawa, said, "Oh no, we don't need that".

• (1340)

Monsanto, a global company specializing in genetically modified products, has conducted all the studies and concluded that it was perfectly safe. In my opinion, that is a serious mistake. It is like asking a Ford dealer if Ford products are any good. What do you think his answer will be? He will say that Ford makes the best products. GM, Chrysler and Toyota representatives would say the same thing about their products.

Government organizations have to ensure that these companies comply with standards. Because of globalization and international competition, standards often vary from one country to the next. That is how we end up with Chinese pickles sold in jars made in Canada. When we are aware of that, we start noticing that the standards are different as well. Therein lies the danger.

Agriculture is affected the most by that. There are many producers in my riding. It saddens me to think that, in the U.S. and Europe among others, the agricultural industry is financed and subsidized, because in Canada we are more catholic than the Pope, so to speak, not subsidizing our agricultural industry in order to comply with the WTO. Yet, there is irrefutable evidence that the United States and the European countries are not complying.

As I said earlier, environmental standards and quality assurance standards for agricultural products in countries like China are different from ours. It is therefore easy for the Conservative government to suggest that we may not be competitive enough. Competitiveness is one factor, but when countries are permitted to subsidize their agriculture and products are allowed into Canada to which standards different from ours, much lower standards, are applied, that does not help our economy and it also puts the health and safety of Canadians et Quebeckers at risk. Attention will have to be paid to this in connection with the bill before us today.

Another interesting aspect of the bill is the tracing system. This is extremely important. When an agricultural product is recalled, we need to know where and in what conditions it was made. Until now, there has been nothing—or almost nothing—like this in place. We are happy to see that Bill C-51 contains provisions on traceability. The bill may also include the register of adverse drug reactions, at least we hope so.

Regarding the recall management system—I just mentioned recalls—if a product is found to be faulty or hazardous, there has to be a way of determining how it will be recalled. Often, hazardous products are recalled in a rush, and there is no way of knowing whether all the products have been taken off the shelf in all shopping centres. This also applies to drugs and cosmetics. We will therefore pay attention to the recall management system.

There is one thing in the bill that we will pay close attention to: regulations. This is a flaw in the House of Commons and Parliament, not just Canada's Parliament, but parliaments in general: often, bills will give responsibility for regulations to the governor in council, in other words, the cabinet, and the minister will make recommendations to the governor in council.

I experienced that myself with a bill concerning veterans that would have seen money paid annually to widows of veterans so that they could remain in their home. In the regulations, three or four months later, we noticed that the governor in council had chosen a date on which the law would be enforced, and before which anyone else involved would be left out. We made our strong opposition known.

It is the same thing with these bills. As soon as the minister and the governor in council, meaning cabinet, get too much leeway, there are surprises. If I have time, I will speak about our concerns with this bill if the minister and the governor in council are given too much leeway in regard to the regulations.

I want to issue a caution right now. The Bloc Québécois absolutely does not want natural food products to be considered drugs or cosmetics, meaning that they would be bound by this bill.

• (1345)

My colleague from Quebec City explained that officials had told the committee not to worry, but we are worrying nonetheless. Just because something is raised in committee does not mean that one day—maybe because of the regulations—there will not be a problem.

Many people obtain these products without a prescription, and I think that they are still in a position to do so. These people should not fall directly under this legislation; it must not apply directly to natural food products.

As I was saying earlier, the Bloc Québécois will pay close attention to this in committee, to ensure that natural food products are not affected by this bill. Earlier I heard statistics that nearly 50% of the population uses complementary or alternative medicine, and these people should not end up being victims of this bill.

We are also concerned about encroachment because it is well known that the Bloc Québécois is very protective of Quebec's areas of jurisdiction. A certain number of inspector positions will be established pursuant to the bill. However, we notice that there will be duplication in certain areas. Therefore, we have to be careful because, at present, several duties have been delegated to Quebec inspectors. In my opinion, if more federal inspection positions are created, it is important that there not be a duplication of services in general. That runs the risk of being very expensive for taxpayers and of causing friction also. We believe that it is important to try to avoid encroachment.

With respect to this bill, we also examined the famous ban on drug advertising. I find it interesting. I love American sports and often listen to football, hockey, baseball, or basketball games on American stations. But I also have time to work. Sometimes, I listen while ironing my shirts because I have to come to Ottawa on Monday and I have no one to wash my shirts. Believe it or not I listen to the football game while ironing my shirts or sometimes while reading documents. I can chew gum and walk at the same time.

However, on the topic of an advertising ban, there is a new American dream—drugs. It is incredible. Everyone knows the ads for Cialis and Viagra. We see a very healthy looking man with his girlfriend, wife or life partner and he is always bursting with energy. That is the new American dream: a fulfilling sex life. Yes. It should not surprise us; we see it on television. That is what the ads aim for. And a few minutes later, in another ad, they are selling Celebrex. If you have a bit of joint pain, you should hurry to your doctor to get a prescription for Celebrex. It is important because it not only solves the problem, but it also reduces your chances of arthritis in the future. We can see where this ad leads. There are many more. There is Lipitor—their ad says that if your cholesterol is the least bit elevated that it is dangerous and you should go to see your doctor.

In a few years, American advertising for drugs has gone from \$50 million to \$1.8 billion. Pharmaceutical companies are not doing this out of the goodness of their hearts and because of their generous spirit. Investing \$1.8 billion in advertising ensures that people will stock up on drugs. This causes many things, including over-consumption.

The companies do not tell us this, but the person who wants to live the American dream today, the one who watches football and wants to become Adonis, will have to take Cialis or Viagra, Celebrex to avoid any aches and Lipitor to ensure low cholesterol. That is the new American dream.

• (1350)

We cannot allow this to happen in Canada or in Quebec. It is extremely important to ban the advertising of drugs. Advertising leads to excessive consumption. And what does excessive consumption lead to? It not only causes side effects in people, but it also causes the price of drugs to rise.

Today, almost 40 million Americans are unable to afford the drugs they need. I have even seen busloads of people, sponsored by U.S. senators, come to my riding to buy drugs because they were affordable. The ban on advertising of drugs should continue.

Another aspect of the bill before us is progressive licensing. This is something new. Previously, Health Canada conducted studies and if all the studies were conclusive and all the clinical trials were conclusive, the drug would be released. Now there will be a new approach that could be more progressive. The drug could be released before the experiments are completed.

There are some people who may need that. When people are truly desperate, they sometimes need to resort to extreme or innovative treatment. Even though some drugs have not yet been approved by Health Canada, it is possible under certain conditions that progressive licensing of those drugs will be allowed. Nonetheless,

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this cannot be used as an excuse to license a drug with great haste. That is the risk we run.

I have a minute or two left. I just want to come back to some of the regulations that could be risky. Clause 30, which addresses the regulations, very clearly states that the minister may make regulations for carrying the purposes and provisions of this act into effect. Potentially, the minister can act in various areas, including product labelling, purity standards, the way in which clinical trials are conducted and the exemption of products from the legislation.

If we open the door to concepts as basic as those and put them in the hands of the minister, we run the risk that the government will take advantage and that the provisions of a bill will go too far or not far enough at the discretion of the minister and the Governor in Council.

These questions are extremely important. I would like to reiterate the Bloc Québécois' position. The Bloc Québécois has been waiting for this bill. We have waited long enough for this bill, so we will take the time needed to study it carefully at the Standing Committee on Health. In that regard, I trust my colleagues on that committee. They will do an excellent job.

The position I just mentioned is the Bloc Québécois' position. We reserve the right to vote against it at third reading. At second reading, we will vote in favour of the bill. In committee, we will do our job and, depending on the gains we make, we will dispose of this bill at third reading.

• (1355)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member mentioned advertising, because I do not want to see more advertising either.

A constituent, Brian, wrote in an email:

Bill C-51 was brought to my attention by a person who has successfully controlled the symptoms of his diabetes, arthritis and bipolar depression with diet and supplements. He is afraid he will lose his right and ability to do this under Bill C-51. He will then have a choice to go back on Big Pharma's anti-psychotics and other drugs, which did not work well and caused intolerable side effects, or to sink into psychosis and eventual death. That's an example how loss of choice will affect an individual.

I want to make sure that does not happen. I hope the member would agree.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, clearly, natural health products are an important issue. Unfortunately, pharmaceutical companies do not see things the same way. If there is a chance we might try to control pharmaceutical companies and to control natural food products, that could negatively affect the latter products.

I would like to tell my hon. colleague from Yukon that we have thought of that. For many people, I think the use of natural health products often prevents them from falling into the trap of pharmaceutical products and side effects. So, yes, we will look into that question at the Standing Committee on Health.

Statements by Members

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member will have eight minutes remaining for questions and comments following oral question period.

We will now move on to statements by members. The hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SASKATCHEWAN FOREST FIRE

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was in the riding over the weekend and learned there was a large forest fire near Uranium City, a town in the most northern area of Saskatchewan. I was then informed that the residents of the city have been evacuated because the fire is dangerously close.

My thoughts and prayers are with the residents who have been evacuated and their families and the lives they have had to temporarily leave behind.

I would like to personally thank each and every one of the people who have stayed behind to fight the fire for their personal dedication and sacrifice. I would ask the entire House to wish for their continued safety.

I thank the authorities who are managing the forest fighting in Saskatchewan for all their continued help and efforts. Everyone appreciates the work and dedication they bring to their positions.

I will be visiting Uranium City later this month. I look forward to seeing everyone and their families safe back in their homes, enjoying everything that northern Saskatchewan offers each and every one of us. My thanks to all.

* * *

• (1400)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the agriculture committee has been studying the product of Canada labelling issue since early April and is currently finalizing a report that will be presented to Parliament on Wednesday, June 11. With no regard for the study that is under way, on May 21 the Prime Minister announced the onset of new consultations with many of the same stakeholders who were witnesses to the committee study.

The Prime Minister's announcement is an affront to the work of all members of the agriculture committee and to the contributions of the stakeholders who appeared as witnesses to the study. As a result, in an unusual measure, the agriculture committee passed the following motion at its last meeting:

That the Prime Minister recognize and respect the work of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and ensure that the work of the Committee will not be sub voted and that the recommendations based on input from Canadian Stakeholders will be implemented and that the Prime Minister confirm his willingness to accept the work of the Committee.

The members of all committees deserve—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain.

* * *

[Translation]

WESTERN FESTIVAL IN SAINT-TITE

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on May 9, at the national gala of the Quebec tourism awards, the Festival Western de Saint-Tite won the prestigious gold medal in the category for festivals and tourism events with an operating budget of \$1 million or more. It is a great honour to be recognized by the entire Quebec tourism industry, and certainly a huge reward for the citizens, volunteers and businesspeople of Saint-Tite.

In 2007, this international event celebrated its 40th anniversary in great style, and shattered an attendance record with more than 725,000 festival-goers. It also generated some \$50 million in economic spinoffs. Such great success over the years would never have been possible without the invaluable contribution of its 550 volunteers.

I am very pleased to invite all Quebecers to the 41st edition of the festival, which will be held from September 5 to 14, 2008, and which promises to be just as fantastic as the last.

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[English]

GANG CRIME

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a serious threat is growing on our streets as gangs get bigger and more sophisticated each day. Innocent people are being killed.

In my riding of Surrey North, Chris Mohan, a young man with a bright future, was gunned down as he was leaving home to play basketball. Another man, Ed Schellenberg, who was doing maintenance work across the hall, was killed. Two families have been left empty and grieving.

Last weekend our community came together to remember what should have been Chris Mohan's 23rd birthday. His mother, Eileen, echoed a call the NDP made in the last election. She wants a federal program for young gang members who want a safe way out of the gang lifestyle. The witness protection program does not meet these needs.

Last November I held a press conference demanding urgent action from the Conservatives, a national strategy to fight gangs. So far, my call has fallen on deaf ears. How many deaths will it take for the government to listen?

*Statements by Members***CARBON TAX PROPOSAL**

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader's carbon tax has no friends, certainly not among Canadian premiers. Even Ontario Liberal Premier McGuinty has spoken out against this punitive tax. Last week Saskatchewan Premier Wall said this tax would “knee cap” Saskatchewan's economy. Premier Stelmach perhaps said it best, “The western provinces are really supporting Canada's economy right now, so why would we want to move further and diminish our competitiveness and hurt the Canadian economy?”

Why indeed? Why does the Liberal leader want to raise the price of gasoline? Why does he want to raise the price of home heating fuels? Why does he want to raise the price of electricity? Why does the Liberal leader want to endanger manufacturing jobs in Ontario and cripple more than 500,000 jobs in Canada? Why does the Liberal leader want to raise input prices on our grains and oil seeds farmers just when they are starting to turn the corner and make a profit? How can taxing Canadians out of their jobs and their livelihoods be revenue neutral?

* * *

• (1405)

[Translation]

PAUL AND THÉRÈSE ABUD

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to salute Paul and Thérèse Abud, who were honoured yesterday evening by the Cercle culturel historique Hilarion Cyr in Saint-Léonard.

Mr. Abud immigrated to Canada from Lebanon in 1957 and became a full citizen not long after that. Mrs. Abud was born in Canada to Lebanese immigrants. With their family, they moved from their first home in Dalhousie to the Saint-Léonard region, bringing with them a degree of diversity and a desire to help the community's economy.

In addition to being a businessman, Paul Abud also became actively involved in his community. Among other things, he was a member of the municipal council and president of the chamber of commerce. He was also involved in Louis Robichaud's equal opportunity program.

Mrs. Abud was also active in business and was, among other things, chair of the board of directors of Foyer Notre-Dame and a member of the library board.

I would like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Abud for everything they have done for their community. They can be proud of their accomplishments, and we are proud of them.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not even Halloween, but the Liberal leader is offering Canadians a major trick, a big, fat, permanent carbon tax. Never mind he vehemently opposed a carbon tax when running for leader. Never mind he

recently called it bad public policy. Never mind he said “there will be no carbon tax”. He has now given it a green disguise.

The Liberal leader has made tens of billions of dollars in non-budgeted spending promises and he has stuck Canadians with the devastating tax bill.

The Liberal tax trick will only treat Canadians to higher gas prices, higher electricity bills and higher food costs, punishing seniors on fixed incomes, punishing rural Canadians and punishing young families. The Liberal tax trick means permanent job losses for auto workers and skyrocketing input costs for farmers.

The Liberal leader will make himself sound green by taking plenty of green from the wallets of Canadians. Canadians, do not fall for this punitive Liberal tax trick. They should treat themselves to a Conservative government.

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[Translation]

MARIE-PIER BOUDREAU GAGNON

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Marie-Pier Boudreau Gagnon on qualifying for the Olympic Games in Beijing. She will compete in solo, duet and 8-person team synchronized swimming.

Courageous and determined, this young, 25-year-old athlete left the family home at the age of 13 to train, first in Quebec City, then in Montreal. Marie-Pier trains for 42 hours a week to reach her Olympic dream. She is the pride of the Rivière-du-Loup area, and will soon be the pride of all of Quebec and Canada.

After her Olympic career, she hopes to study business administration at university. She would like to go into international law. She is a wonderful example of perseverance.

The Bloc Québécois and I want to warmly congratulate you, Marie-Pier, for qualifying, and we wish her good luck in her present and future endeavours.

* * *

THE CONOMY

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in this time of economic uncertainty, the Liberal leader is considering a tax on production. I remember that, on October 10, 2007, in a speech to the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, he declared, “—there will be no carbon tax—”. That is further proof that the Liberal leader has changed his mind and his policy.

That is the height of hypocrisy. On the one hand, the Liberals say that gasoline is too expensive and then, on the other, they want to add a tax that would increase the price by 60%. What do the Liberals want? These days, it is hard to follow them or understand their reasoning.

I can assure Canadians that the Conservative government will continue to build a vigorous economy for Canadians who work hard, pay their taxes and respect the law.

Statements by Members

[English]

NEW MINAS

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the village of New Minas in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

New Minas is the soccer capital of Atlantic Canada and the shopping capital of the valley, with over 300 commercial outlets.

Its motto, “A Good Place to Live”, explains why it continues to grow and expand.

The chairman of the village commission, Dave Chaulk, and commissioners Maynard Stevens, Dean Hatt, Les Barrett, Dale Pineo and recreation director Vince Forrestall and all the village staff and the events sponsors are to be congratulated for planning and supporting a tremendous year round celebration.

A 40th anniversary New Year's levee kicked off the festivities. Last Saturday we had a “Marathon of Memories” family fun day celebrating Terry Fox and his “Marathon of Hope”. I was proud to join Fred Fox and New Minas citizens in celebrating New Minas on Saturday.

I wish New Minas continued success and prosperity.

* * *

● (1410)

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been seven days since the Liberal leader has failed to repay his hundreds of thousands of dollars in leadership loans, yet he continues to ignore calls to come clean with Canadians and table his agreement with Elections Canada and his debt repayment plan.

However, last Friday the member for Cape Breton—Canso said something very interesting in the House. He said:

Last Monday was a significant date. Those leadership candidates had to have their repayment schedules tendered with Elections Canada as we go forward. They all complied with that rule. They all complied with those conditions. Those repayment plans have been put forward and approved by Elections Canada.

If that is true, then when does the Liberal leader plan on revealing the truth to Canadians? Who are the wealthy elites who lent him hundreds of thousands of dollars? Who is really pulling his strings?

Will the Liberal leader table his agreement with Elections Canada and his debt repayment plan right now and prove the member for Cape Breton—Canso was telling the truth?

* * *

MEMBERS-PAGES SOCCER GAME

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House of some good news. This Wednesday select members of Parliament will be playing a select group of ambassadors at 7 o'clock at Ashbury College in a great game of soccer. Hopefully the MPs can be victorious.

However, I regret to inform the House that the MPs' House of Commons soccer club let its fellow members down. On May 8, we

played the invincible pages of the House of Commons. For the first time in six years, the mighty MPs went down to defeat. It was a terrific game. I personally have to admit that it was the fault of the goaltender for the MPs.

I also want to mention that two players, one member from the Liberals and one of the pages, received most valuable player awards.

It was an awful lot of fun.

On behalf of the entire House of Commons, I thank the pages for their service to us this year. We wish them the very best of luck in their future.

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**OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE
ACCOUNTABILITY ACT**

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 29, Bill C-293, the better aid bill, received royal assent. It was passed unanimously by the House.

Many people and organizations have been fulsome in their praise for this significant achievement. There are many people to be thanked, especially those who have written, emailed, petitioned, demonstrated, phoned and shown up at MPs offices to voice their support for the bill. It could not have happened without them.

Now the task is to have Canada's official development assistance consistent with the bill. Business as usual is not an option. It is reasonable to expect that ministers and departments will spell out in detail how they expect to adhere to the principles and accountability mechanisms in Bill C-293. The principle and concessional aid should be easily achieved, however, large multinational organizations will require special vigilance. The last thing we want is policy incoherence.

Parliament will be watching.

* * *

[Translation]

100TH BIRTHDAY OF SALVADOR ALLENDE

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Salvador Allende was born in Valparaiso in 1908. He earned a medical degree at the University of Chile. He began his political career by co-founding the Socialist Party of Chile. He then became a member of parliament, minister of health and a senator. His political involvement continued all the way to the presidency of Chile in 1970. He died during the coup d'état on September 11, 1973.

Despite the difficulties that followed his election, he implemented an extensive government program by distributing wealth and creating a socialist economic context.

Here, as elsewhere, the Chilean community—some 12,000 people in Quebec—will come together to celebrate the 100th birthday of this exceptional defender of human, economic, social and cultural rights.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS**

By acknowledging the presence on the Hill of Michelle Bachelet, the President of Chile, my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois and I add our voices to those of the Chilean community in saluting this 100th birthday.

* * *

[English]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are so many Conservative scandals out there, that it is hard to choose where to start.

First is the so-called Mulroney-Schreiber public inquiry that the Prime Minister promised seven months ago and still nothing.

Not to be outdone by NAFTA-gate, the government investigated itself in this matter and surprise, surprise, it was found innocent.

Then there was the security breach of the former foreign affairs minister. The Prime Minister and ex-minister refused to appear before the committee to testify on this issue. What are they trying to hide?

Just when we think the Conservatives could not get into any more trouble, they bring back the Cadman affair, where Dona Cadman confirms, in an affidavit, that financial considerations were made to Chuck.

That is the only party in the history of our country that brings up old scandals to detract from its new scandals.

My list of Conservative scandals could go on with the in and out scheme, the Ottawa light rail project, income trusts and untendered finance contracts, but unfortunately I only have 60 seconds.

* * *

• (1415)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I picked up this quote up over the weekend and I just had to read it in the House today. It states:

A carbon tax is less effective than a carbon market at reducing emissions. Some of my opponents for the Liberal leadership have suggested that a carbon tax would be the most effective measure to curb climate pollution. This is simply bad policy...

A carbon tax “is simply bad policy”. Who said that? It was not someone in our party. It was the flip-flopping Liberal leader. He said that he was completely opposed to a carbon tax. Now he wants to impose the mother of all taxes on Canadians.

However, we know one thing. We know there is one party that has always said no to higher taxes for Canadians. There is one party that will not make seniors and Canadians on fixed income pay more for gas, heat and electricity. That is this party, this government. Leadership is all about that.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently I called for an honest and much needed national debate on carbon pricing to fight climate change. Instead of taking this seriously, what do the Conservatives offer Canadians? They offer a cartoon, a talking grease spot.

When are the Conservatives going to stop insulting Canadians and offer a real plan to tackle climate change instead of cartoons and a campaign of lies?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we are calling for, honesty and truth in advertising from the leader of the Liberal Party, who has a plan to impose a multi-billion dollar tax on just about everything for Canadians. Even while gas prices are going up, he wants to force them up higher with higher taxes in order to pay for the billions of dollars of unbudgeted Liberal electoral promises.

We know that it is a tax trick on Canadians and we are not going to let the Liberals get away with it. When they use weasel words like “revenue neutrality”, we are going to say, “Hold on to your wallets because he wants to raise your taxes”.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are going to expose the lie.

In the Conservatives' so-called climate change plan, we read, and I quote, that this plan will create “higher energy prices, particularly with respect to electricity and natural gas”.

Will they admit that their so-called climate change plan will lead to higher energy costs for Canadians?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about lies.

Last year, in a speech in Edmonton, the leader of the Liberal Party said that under a Liberal government, there would be no carbon tax. He said that. Now, we know that the Liberal Party has a secret plan to tax Canadians on everything. Using a carbon tax, he wants to raise the price of gasoline, the price of everything, but Canadian taxpayers will not be mistreated by the Liberal Party. They do not want such a tax.

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will see how much the attack ads are misleading and are a lie.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

● (1420)

The Speaker: Order. I know the word was not used in relation to hon. members, but I think it is unnecessary to use this kind of language in debate in the House on either side. I would urge hon. members to show restraint.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal plan, our plan, will affect energy costs with tax cuts. Their plan will not. The Conservatives admit that their so-called plan will increase energy costs. I want an answer to my question, which is, what tax cuts are they offering to offset their higher energy costs to Canadians?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader opposite talks about lies. I would like to talk about the truth.

He said last year, "There will be no carbon tax". He said also:

A carbon tax is less effective...at reducing emissions. Some...have suggested that a carbon tax would be the most effective measure to curb climate pollution. This is simply bad policy—

Even now the Liberal website states, "We do not favour a carbon tax where money is transferred from companies to the federal government and is lost in general revenue". We agree with the leader of the Liberal Party last year.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, deep in the pages of the government's regulatory framework for greenhouse gas emissions, there is the admission that its plan will result in higher energy costs and these costs will be passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices. Nowhere does the Conservative plan propose to help seniors and low income Canadians bear those costs. Our plan will.

How can Canadians have a real debate about climate change policy if the government will not level with Canadians about what its plan will do with energy prices? When will the little grease spot start telling the truth?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I do not know what the grease spots have to do with this. The hon. secretary of state though has the floor. Order, order.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we can hear just a little bit of anxiety on the other side. We have begun to tell the truth about their secret plan to impose a massive new tax on just about everything on Canadians to pay for the Liberal Party's unbudgeted promises. But at least the deputy leader has been more honest about this than his boss has been, because the deputy leader of the Liberal Party said two years ago:

We've also got to have popular, practical, believable policies that may involve some form of carbon tax.

That means one thing and one thing only: higher prices for Canadians, higher prices on gas, higher prices on home heating fuel, higher prices for low income Canadians. They are—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he forgot to mention the tax cuts.

[*Translation*]

The government is forced to admit that its environmental plan will lead to higher costs for consumers.

How can Canadians have a real debate on this issue if the government is not honest about these costs? When will their little grease spot tell the truth?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Yes, it is true, Mr. Speaker, that I did not refer to the tax cuts this government has made in spite of opposition from the Liberal Party. Let us be clear: the Liberal Party promised to eliminate the GST but did not do so. A Liberal government in Ontario promised not to raise taxes, yet imposed the biggest tax increase in Ontario's history.

Now, we are hearing about another plan to raise taxes: the carbon tax. This is a Liberal Party scheme that Canadians will not go for.

* * *

● (1425)

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's economic development minister, Raymond Bachand, has given a number of interviews in which he condemns his federal counterpart's decision to stop funding non-profit economic development organizations. In an interview on the program *Les coulisses du pouvoir*, Mr. Bachand stated: "This is a decision the minister made all on his own. It was not something recommended by his officials or his colleagues. It is an ideological decision."

Does the Prime Minister realize that his Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec is doing nothing less than destroying an important component of economic development in Quebec for purely ideological reasons?

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 who is asking this question in this House is the same person who asked all his members to vote against the creation of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. He is the same member who said, in this House, that the regional economic development carried out by Ottawa was a waste of energy.

If we listened to the Bloc Québécois, Quebec would not get 5¢ for regional economic development. We think differently. We are investing \$200 million a year to support regional economic development in Quebec.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what we called for and what we are still calling for is that Quebec get all the money for economic development, as all premiers of Quebec have requested. To this minister, who is always telling us that there is "a beginning, a middle and an end", I say that he is in the middle, he has had his beginning, and his end is coming.

Opinion in Quebec is unanimous that these organizations do an outstanding job. Because of the cuts announced by the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, many of these organizations will disappear.

How much longer will the Prime Minister endorse his minister's intransigence?

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 leader of the Bloc Québécois thinks that all these organizations are going to disappear. We do not believe that. We have been talking about this for two years. The organizations knew what was coming. The proof that it is going to work is that they have already begun submitting transition plans. They know that by March 31, 2010, they are going to have to be self-sustaining.

The organizations believe in their future. We think they can sell their professional services. I repeat, the money we save will stay in the same region.

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 seems to be more interested in finding jobs for his friends, like Norman Forest at the Immigration and Refugee Board, than in defending Quebec's model for economic development. This is just another example of favoritism by the minister, who wants everything to go through his hands.

Instead of stubbornly trying to destroy the Quebec model, will the minister reverse his decision and reinstate the necessary funding for organizations devoted to economic development?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe Quebec's economic strength lies in something much broader than a few economic development organizations that currently depend on the government to cover their operating costs year after year.

Quebec's economy is fuelled by 228,000 small and medium sized businesses. Quebec's economy is fuelled by Bombardier, Rio Tinto Alcan, Alouette and other such companies. They are the ones that create jobs; they contribute to our economic development. We are implementing a strategic plan to support small and medium sized businesses in manufacturing and other industries.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister is showing an absolutely incredible lack of respect.

Raymond Bachand, the Quebec minister of economic development, innovation and export, has accused his federal counterpart of contempt in cutting funding to non-profit economic development organizations.

Instead of ignoring what Quebec is asking for, will the minister agree to transfer all the money to Quebec so that it can have all the tools it needs for its own economic development?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions

Oral Questions

of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the short answer is no. Regional economic development is a shared jurisdiction.

The Government of Canada has an annual envelope of roughly \$200 million, while the Government of Quebec's Department of Economic Development, Innovation and Export has an envelope of \$800 million, which is four times as much as we have.

If Minister Bachand wants to cover the recurring operating costs of the organizations forever, he has everything he needs to do so. It is up to him.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, GM workers in Oshawa are simply trying to save their jobs. I was with them this week to show my support, but where was the government? Not with the workers, in any case. Indeed, this government, like the previous government, is ignoring the issues facing workers. It has no strategy to transform the industry, no plan to preserve jobs and no desire to build environmentally-friendly and hybrid cars here.

Why is this government abandoning the GM employees and workers in Oshawa? Why?

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is very determined to see success in the auto sector, including at GM. We have instituted a number of policies, including tax cuts, a cut in the GST that make it easier for people to purchase cars, tax cuts for their income that has helped them in that regard and the accelerated capital cost allowance to help auto manufacturers.

I would say that the policy within Canada is working. Auto sales were 103,000 in January. In February sales went up to 111,000, March 150,000, April 175,000, and May 184,000. The problem is in exports to the United States and in this regard, we are going to work with GM to try to find ways to solve that.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tell those numbers to the 10,800 people who have lost their jobs in Oshawa just in the last two years.

Behind every one of those job losses is a family, like Bobby's family. I drove in her truck around the facility the other day. She has worked in that plant for 27 years. We are getting hooting and cat calling from the government members here. They do not give a damn about people like Bobby and the working families who have been building this country for years. Let the Conservatives keep up their heckling.

I am asking the government when it is going to take some action for these workers and start to put a plan in place—

The Speaker: Order, please. I would urge restraint, again, in the language of all hon. members. It is unnecessary, I think, to use words like that. The hon. government House leader.

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, the government has had a plan in place and in large part thanks to the hard work of the member for Oshawa, who has been pressing from the start the importance of a click in the auto industry to be able to compete with changing times.

He is one of the reasons why we have a \$250 million auto innovation fund to help make our auto industry more competitive as it faces changing times, as the markets in the United States go a little bit soft.

We have done what we can to keep the Canadian markets strong. We are doing what we can, through our auto innovation fund, through the national research council, and through others to help them compete, and we will continue work with GM to make—

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the apology to be delivered on Wednesday to the victims of Indian residential schools, we have made the point repeatedly that it is not sufficient for aboriginal leaders, elders and survivors to sit in the galleries or stand outside on this historic occasion. They must be invited to join members of Parliament on the floor of the House to receive the apology in person.

Last week, the government's response to this suggestion was essentially no, but that appears to have changed. Will the government confirm that aboriginal people will indeed be seated on the floor of the chamber, and specifically, who has been invited?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we are committed, as I have said many times, to have a very meaningful and respectful apology.

It will be on Wednesday and I would ask the hon. member to show some respect for the occasion, which will be a historic moment.

It will be an occasion where representatives of survivor groups will be here on the floor of the House of Commons along with the leaders of the five national aboriginal organizations.

We look forward to that event and to the subsequent ceremonies that will take place in the Railway and Reading rooms. This will be a very nice occasion.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this event should indeed be one of historic proportions, an integral part of reconciliation between the Government of Canada and aboriginal peoples. Both sides need to have a voice.

Will Canada's aboriginal leaders have the opportunity to respond to the apology, also right here on the floor, where their responses will be officially preserved in the *Hansard* of the House of Commons?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are looking forward to this occasion, the apology here on the floor of the House of Commons.

There will be occasion, of course, for the Prime Minister to present that apology, as promised in the throne speech. The opposition leaders will have a chance to respond to that.

There will be other parts of the ceremony, including other speeches, other ceremonies, gift exchanges, and other things that are also important that will take place here in the House of Commons, in the adjoining room following the actual apology here in the House of Commons.

• (1435)

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, details of the plan for Wednesday, the day of the residential school apology, are gradually now trickling out.

Aboriginal leaders and survivors should have been fully consulted every step of the way. By now they should be aware of the text of the apology, and we know that is not the case.

In order to properly prepare a response, will national aboriginal leaders have an opportunity to view the text no later than tomorrow, a day prior to the statement of apology in the House of Commons?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear there is concern about the text of the apology.

We have done extensive consultations. The Prime Minister has met with various members of survivor groups and former students. I have done the same thing. We have had submissions from national and regional organizations, and survivor groups from across the country.

All this has helped us put together what I think will be a very good apology, very complete, and it will be one of those moments when all Canadians and all parliamentarians will be very proud to be here for that moment.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): However, Mr. Speaker, will they see the text ahead of time?

The statement of apology should be a historic event. It must be done right. In order to truly have national impact, the apology must include present and former national leaders in addition to the aboriginal representatives.

As a true gesture of respect and reconciliation to the survivors and their families, has the government extended an official invitation to the apology to the Governor General, to all former Canadian prime ministers, to members of the Senate, and to members of the Supreme Court?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the apology will be here in the House of Commons. It will be very meaningful and respectful. There will be representatives here in the House of Commons to represent the 100,000 former students who are waiting to hear this apology.

We will have representatives here, both the oldest living survivor and the youngest one. We will have representatives from different organizations, both Métis, Inuit and first nations. It is going to be a great occasion.

Oral Questions

First nations and the aboriginal people know what is going on here. They know they are going to get what the government promised in the throne speech, a respectful apology.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BILL 101

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, hundreds of people including many artists demonstrated in Montreal yesterday for the strengthening of Bill 101. The Bloc Québécois has introduced Bill C-482, which attempts to do just that, for example, by amending the Official Languages Act in order to have the federal government recognize that French is Quebec's only official language. Unfortunately, the Conservatives voted against this bill.

With Quebec's national holiday just a few days away, will the Conservatives finally put their words into action and promise to support this initiative?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member just explained, Bill C-482 did not receive the government's support. That being said, our government will work within its jurisdiction and protect both official languages in Canada.

Furthermore, as a Quebecker, I refuse to accept the Bloc member's flag-waving tactics, presenting himself as the only one defending the rights of francophones in Quebec.

* * *

LANGUAGE OF WORK IN QUEBEC

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the same time this demonstration was being held, four major Quebec unions, including the FTQ and the CSN, participated in a press conference to support the Bloc's initiatives to give tangible expression to the recognition of the Quebec nation, in particular, to ensure that French—and only French—be the language of work for all workers in Quebec.

Is this support not just another sign for this Conservative government that the Quebec nation wants to live and work in French, and that this government should amend the Canada Labour Code so that all companies under federal jurisdiction are subject to the Charter of the French Language within the boundaries of the Quebec nation?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as usual, the Bloc Québécois is trying to pick fights in an attempt to maintain its presence here in Ottawa.

The Canada Labour Code does not address language of work. I will repeat it again: neither the Canada Labour Code, nor the Quebec Labour Code, addresses language of work. The Canada Labour Code deals with labour relations, workplace health and safety and labour standards, not language.

● (1440)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know that the home of Julie Couillard was under RCMP surveillance in 1998. Yet the Conservatives persist in saying that they were not aware of her shady past. The Prime Minister and those of his ministers who were involved in this matter ought to appear before the Standing Committee on Public Safety to show good faith and shed light on this sordid matter.

Will the Prime Minister and the ministers concerned reconsider their decision and agree to appear before the committee, yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as everyone in the House is aware, the Department of Foreign Affairs is undertaking a serious review of the serious public policy matters.

As for the other questions that I know are intriguing and an interest to the Bloc Québécois and others who watch *eTalk Daily*, programs like that, they can watch the parliamentary committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is clearly a public security matter, as a minister even had to resign. Yet, the Conservatives are not answering our questions in the House. That is why they have to appear before the committee. The secrecy surrounding this matter has to stop. This kind of governing under the seal of secrecy has to stop. The Conservative code of silence has to go, and so does their need to control everything.

Do the Conservatives realize that, if they refuse to testify, everyone will conclude that they have things to hide?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been quite open about what took place. The former foreign affairs minister, the member for Beauce, left documents in an unsecure location. That was unacceptable. It was contrary to the rules that apply to cabinet ministers. As a consequence, he offered his resignation and his resignation was accepted because it is important that those rules be respected.

With regard to any other issues surrounding it, the Department of Foreign Affairs is conducting a review and will surely get to a point where it can make recommendations for any changes that are necessary to ensure the processes are adequate.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an internal review by the Foreign Affairs Department is not adequate at all. With all of the revelations about Ms. Couillard's life, and connections with the mob and the bikers, that her father's house had been under surveillance, and that she may have been under surveillance, this should have been obvious to the RCMP and CSIS that this matter presented a grave issue of national security.

My question is for the public safety minister. Did the RCMP or CSIS raise these security concerns with anyone in government at any time?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have made it quite clear in this House that the Prime Minister is not in the business of enquiring into the personal lives of particular citizens in Canada, and this is no exception.

However, I am not surprised that we have yet another former NDP premier wanting to ask questions about this instead of asking questions about public policy issues. Today, for the first time after us talking about it for weeks, the Liberals were finally prepared to talk about their carbon tax, and I am not surprised because they come from a party that really liked really high taxes.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister opposite continues to raise with nauseating sanctimony the issue of privacy of individuals. Let me advise him national security always trumps privacy, particularly in the bedroom of the top diplomat of the country, when national security is concerned. We know that the Prime Minister and the former minister are refusing to testify before the committee.

Will the Prime Minister tell us now if the RCMP or CSIS informed him of any potential or real security concerns, and if they did so—

The Speaker: The hon. the government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the arrival of these former NDP premiers, this Liberal Party has come a long way from the days when its leaders said the state had no place in the bedrooms of nation. Now, the Liberals not only believe they have a place in the bedrooms of the nation, they consider the whole question of privacy to be, in his words, “nauseating”.

We actually think that one's right to privacy is an important right that should be respected and all Canadians should have that protection.

* * *

AIRBUS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been seven months since the Prime Minister promised a public inquiry into Mr. Mulroney's dubious financial dealings. It seems ridiculous that it has been seven months and the government still cannot find someone to lead that inquiry.

Is it the Prime Minister's contempt for the judges? Is it the Conservatives' desire to protect Mr. Mulroney? Or are they just waiting for the President of the Treasury Board to be appointed to the bench so he can head up the inquiry?

• (1445)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we indicated early on the importance of having a proper public inquiry into this matter. Unfortunately, that was delayed for some time when the opposition parties engaged in one of their trademark legislative inquiries that really did a lot to help.

Fortunately, we had Professor David Johnston looking into the matter and providing terms of reference for a committee and a commissioner that will be established before we rise for the summer.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems ridiculous that, seven months later, the government is still promising to act soon. We are several months past soon.

Will the Prime Minister appoint someone to lead the inquiry into the Mulroney affair, or will he tell the people of this country that he has made yet another error in judgment and changed his mind about an inquiry concerning Mr. Mulroney and his cash-stuffed envelopes?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am afraid that the hon. member was so interested in the question she was going to ask, she did not listen to my last answer. There will be a commissioner in place by June 20.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader has admitted he cannot set priorities and has made tens of billions of dollars in non-budgeted spending priorities.

To fund his spending promises, he is trying to trick Canadians into paying a permanent new carbon tax he once vehemently opposed.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wajid Khan: They can scream all they want, but they will not be allowed to conceal the carbon tax. Liberals are now busy concealing the real nature of this tax from the public. Shame on them.

Could the government tell this House if there are any plans to impose this punitive carbon tax on Canadians?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that the government has no intention of imposing new taxes on Canadians of any sort.

However, I wish I could say the same of the Liberal opposition. It was only last year that the leader of the opposition said there will be no carbon tax. Now we know differently. Now he is wrapping it up in language about a green tax, a tax shift, and revenue neutrality. When Canadians hear those words from politicians, they know they are weasel words to cover just another big tax grab.

We will not stand for it and neither will Canadians.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is the federal government's responsibility to protect consumers from unfair trade practices. Oil companies, hugely subsidized by the Conservatives, are making obscene profits and are setting their predatory prices on the backs of Canadians. In my area this morning, a litre of gas cost \$1.50. The Liberals are proposing a new tax that would do nothing to limit greenhouse gases.

When will the government assume its responsibilities and protect consumers as opposed to oil companies?

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the members of the NDP can be hypocritical on this. They have never seen a tax they did not like. They certainly would support anything the Liberals would do to raise taxes for Canadians.

We have moved. We moved ahead of this. We have already lowered the GST by 2%. We have lowered income taxes. We have lowered taxes across the board for Canadians. The GST cut at the pumps alone is saving Canadians \$500 million a year. We are proud of those changes we have made.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, "Yoo-hoo. Over here". I have "a warning". The Conservatives have just said they cannot do anything to help the middle class families who are getting gouged at the pump. The Liberals said the same thing for 13 years. We had "better not fall for this trick".

The federal government can and has to act to protect consumers. Why is the Conservative government hell bent on making the middle class pay more than it needs to at the pump? Why are the Conservatives not doing anything to help middle class families?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as usual the NDP members are far behind the curve. They always are.

We have already moved in significant ways. We have lowered the GST by 2%, which is important to Canadians. We have lowered income taxes. We have raised personal exemptions. People are keeping their own money.

That is unlike the Liberals, who are going to raise taxes by imposing a carbon tax on Canadians. It is going to cost the Liberals billions of dollars per year to pay for the promises that they have not budgeted.

* * *

● (1450)

OMAR KHADR

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question concerns Omar Khadr. I would like to ask someone over there if the government can somehow explain how it is that those people who were interviewing Mr. Khadr were told to destroy their notes, which is something that would be quite improper in the Canadian context.

I would like to again ask the parliamentary secretary if he can please explain why it is that Canada is putting up with this kind of activity with respect to the trial of a Canadian citizen.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former NDP leader of Ontario has just joined the Liberal Party. Hence, he does not know what the Liberal Party did before, but I would like to remind him that Mr. Khadr has been in jail since 2002 when that party was in power, and the policy we are following was brought forward by that party.

As for the question he has asked, he should be asking the leader of the official opposition, who was in the cabinet, why those members did not raise those questions at that time.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is during the watch of the Conservative government that the judge in the trial has been removed because he was not satisfactory to his military superiors. It is during the Conservative watch that Mr. Khadr's interrogators were told to destroy their notes.

Whatever may have happened in the past, that was then, this is now. The government can change an injustice and right a wrong. No Canadian citizen should be treated in this fashion. I would hope the government would at least agree with that.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand what he means by that was then and this is now. The fact of the matter is that for 13 dark years that party was in power.

All that is happening now is because that party was in power. Mr. Khadr was held in 2002 when that party was in power. Certainly those members cannot rise up and say now to let us forget the 13 years of darkness and let us move forward. That is not going to happen.

This government will act in the best interests of Canada.

* * *

TRADE

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ignoring months of study and extensive testimony, the Conservatives have decided to subvert the work of the trade committee and rush through a trade deal with Colombia, a country acknowledged as having the worst human rights track record in the western hemisphere.

What steps has the government taken to ensure that human rights have been addressed in a meaningful and enforceable manner? And why the rush?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, human rights are protected in the trade agreement. The free trade agreement with Colombia has been a long time coming. There have been a lot of ongoing negotiations between Canada and Colombia. It will benefit Colombia. It will benefit Canada. We expect human rights to improve in Colombia because of it.

Oral Questions

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives just do not get it. The Prime Minister and President Bush have been quoting each other for months to try to rush through these agreements with Colombia, ignoring serious concerns over human rights and the environment. The government's cozy ties and admiration for the Republican Party are well documented.

Could the minister explain why the Republicans continue to dictate our trade policy?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have recently signed an accord with Peru and Colombia. It is the strongest accord that Canada has ever signed in terms of help for workers' rights in these countries.

These people are committed to respecting the fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organization; to engaging in social dialogue with employers, unions and the government, and to enforcing labour standards. This accord is very serious. If people do not respect it, they will have to pay a penalty for not protecting workers' rights.

* * *

•(1455)

COLLÈGE MILITAIRE ROYAL DE SAINT-JEAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean closed, the region has lost at least \$300 million based on budgeted operating expenses, not to mention indirect spin-offs. It is not enough for the minister to provide a \$10 million budget suitable for a college level institution when the budget for this same facility was in excess of \$25 million in 1995.

When does the minister intend to meet our demands by granting university status to the institution and restoring the budget to former levels?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be involved in reopening this special institution so necessary to our military sector.

I wish to thank the former defence minister for his efforts in this matter. Our nation is very proud of this institution. I hope that we will be able to develop this military facility in future.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I urge the minister to not be too proud because the former minister was also very proud and he is no longer the minister.

On another topic, the new chief of the defence staff, General Natynczyk, has drawn a worrisome parallel between the situation in Afghanistan and the one in Iraq. He declared that the guerrilla tactics and techniques were exactly the same as those used in Afghanistan and that the risks were also the same.

Are we to understand that with this appointment, the government is orchestrating the radicalization of operations in Afghanistan along the lines of those in Iraq?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer to this question is a resounding no.

As for the first question, when the former Liberal government decided to close this institution, what did the member do? He did nothing. Our government reopened this institution as it promised in the election campaign. National Defence and our government are very proud of this accomplishment.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we mourn the very recent loss of two more Canadian soldiers.

We know that all members support our troops and that the loss of life and health of our military men and women is felt by all Canadians. Yet the government continues to fail our troops as they return from Afghanistan and other operations. Let us consider the fact that post-traumatic stress disorder, a crippling mental injury, still ranks among the most common of afflictions.

While clinics are fine and they are needed, when will the government provide real support for all the health care needs of Canada's newest generation of veterans? When will it take real action?

Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the difference between the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, of course, is that when the Liberals were in office they neglected our men and women in uniform, including veterans, and spent most of those 13 years taking benefits away from veterans, including the VIP services.

Since in office, as the House well knows, we have doubled the number of stress injury clinics across the country. The member is quite aware of that. We will continue to do that and provide the very best services to our men and women in uniform and veterans.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board released its annual survey results last week and now the Liberals are retreating with their tails between their legs. The board now has provided us with the detail that three-quarters of western farmers want marketing freedom for their own barley.

I know that farmers in my own riding have consistently demanded the ability to market their own barley. Can the Minister of Agriculture tell the House what else we were able to find out in those survey results and how it affects the Canadian Wheat Board?

Oral Questions

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, even David Herle, and everyone will recognize that name, the former campaign chair for the Liberal Party who conducted the survey, unequivocally states that “dual marketing is the preference among farmers for barley marketing” and “if they cannot have a dual market, most would prefer an open market to a single desk”.

That is very revealing. The results cannot be any clearer than that. The Liberal caucus must know that it is on the wrong side of this debate. What those members would like to know is when the member for Wascana will allow his colleagues to support western farmers' freedom.

* * *

● (1500)

LOBBYISTS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we learned Friday that the Liberal-turned-Conservative ethically challenged minister for the 2010 Olympic Games has yet again compromised the Canadian public. When Washington State went looking for a piece of the Olympic pie, it hired none other than Gordon Campbell insiders Patrick Kinsella and Mark Jiles to lobby the federal minister.

There is only one problem. They are not registered to lobby, which means it is illegal for them to lobby. Why is the floor-crossing Olympic minister meeting with unregistered illegal lobbyists on the 2010 Olympic Games?

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, as my colleague knows, there are of course laws in British Columbia with regard to lobbyists. Anybody who is doing any kind of lobbying in British Columbia has to obey those laws.

With regard to the minister for the 2010 Olympics, he is doing everything he can and our government is doing everything it can to ensure that the 2010 Olympics will be a huge success for Vancouver-Whistler, British Columbia and all Canadians.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it stinks. It is yet another Conservative scandal as the Conservatives act just like the previous government. This latest breach in the rules governing conduct by ministers raises serious questions.

When did the minister meet with Kinsella and Jiles? What was the topic of discussion? His constituents have not been able to meet with him for two years, but does the minister check lobbyist status prior to booking all his lobby sessions?

Will the government investigate why the minister for the Olympics met with unregistered, illegal lobbyists?

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, my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster has to realize that the louder he says it the truer it does not get.

The minister for the 2010 Olympics has not broken any rules. He has fulfilled all his obligations to ensure that the rules of course have been followed by our government and that the 2010 Olympics will be a success for all Canadians.

* * *

ZIMBABWE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 9 I had occasion to visit a hospital in Zimbabwe and spoke with patients whose arms had been broken while trying to deflect blows to their heads. They were attacked because they support Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the opposition MDC and presidential candidate for the June 27 runoff.

Dozens of MDC supporters have been killed, hundreds beaten and thousands displaced. and now they apparently have to surrender their voting cards to get food. This is not a free and fair election.

What action is the government contemplating? Have we even offered to send a significant number of observers?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for asking this question because we share these same concerns. We are seriously concerned about whether this is going to be a fair and transparent election under the regime of Mr. Mugabe. Canada has repeatedly called for international election observers to be sent to oversee the election.

Clearly we are disturbed by the reports that are coming out of Zimbabwe. We will keep on pushing for international observers to go there and make sure this is a fair and transparent election, which is what all Canadians would like to happen.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of the Environment visited Atlantic Canada and demonstrated further proof that this government was committed to protecting and preserving our environment in Atlantic Canada by announcing the creation of a national wildlife area and improving weather forecasting on Sable Island.

[*Translation*]

The minister also met with his provincial counterparts to discuss action on the environment.

[*English*]

Could the minister update the House on the details of those meetings?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did visit Atlantic Canada last week. We were able to sign a memorandum of understanding for environmental cooperation. We are working well with all four Atlantic Canada governments on water issues, climate change and fighting smog and pollution.

I was also very proud to announce \$5 million over five years to help preserve and protect Sable Island, something the Minister of National Defence has fought for long and hard.

* * *

[Translation]

MARINE AND RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Government of Quebec announced a new program to help companies move toward marine and rail transportation with investments in infrastructure and in those companies that will reduce their greenhouse gas emissions through such a move. The federal government ought to follow Quebec's lead by taking similar positive action instead of funding oil companies.

Will the Conservative government follow Quebec's inspiring model, thus focussing on both the environment and the economy at the same time?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

This gives me an opportunity to remind the House that the Government of Canada, this government, contributed \$350 million to Quebec's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat the adverse effects of pollution. When worthwhile projects are put forward, we look at them and, if there are coordinated efforts, we implement the projects in such a way as to ensure that everyone stands to gain.

* * *

● (1505)

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Luis Téllez Kuenzler, Secretary of Communications and Transportation of Mexico and Ms. Mary E. Peters, Secretary of Transportation of the United States of America.

Some hon. members: Hear! Hear!

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The minister only told half the story. The other half of the quote is:

“Involved” farmers are evenly split between a single desk and an open market for barley.

The minister—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. It sounds like a matter of debate. We have debates in the chamber and statements are made that perhaps because of time limitations even do not contain all the facts that members would like to hear or only certain ones. People are sometimes selective in their statements. In the circumstances, I know there may be a debate on this and I am sure that we will look forward to more questions and perhaps statements from hon. members on the subject, but I do not think it is a point of order.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts: the 16th report, “Chapter 3, Innuvialuit Final Agreement of the October 2007 Report of the Auditor General of Canada; and the 17th report, “Chapter 5, Managing the Delivery of Legal Services to Government - Department of Justice Canada, of the May 2007 Report of the Auditor General of Canada”.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, western Canadian farmers continue to demand barley marketing freedom and the government remains committed to getting it done.

As was discussed earlier, the latest survey numbers produced by Liberal insider, David Herle, for the Wheat Board showed a growing number of western Canadian farmers want barley marketing freedom. Therefore, on behalf of those farmers, I seek unanimous consent for the following motion: “That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, in relation to Bill C-46, An Act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act and chapter 17 of the Statutes of Canada, 1998, when the bill is next called for debate, a member from each recognized party may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes, after which time the bill shall be deemed referred forthwith to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food; and in relation to Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act (election of directors), when the bill is next called for debate, a member from each recognized party may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes, after which time the bill shall be deemed referred forthwith to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food”.

Routine Proceedings

• (1510)

The Speaker: Does the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent. The hon. chief government whip.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I will try once again. There have been consultations among all the parties and I think you may find unanimous consent for the following three travel motions: "That 12 members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs be authorized to travel to the national military cemetery of the Canadian Forces in Ottawa, Ontario in June 2008 and that the necessary staff do accompany that committee"; "That, in relation to its study on the seal harvest, seven members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans be authorized to travel to Brussels, Belgium in September-October 2008 and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee"; and "That, for the remainder of this session during its consideration of matters pursuant to Standing Order 83(1), the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to adjourn from place to place within Canada and to permit the broadcasting of its proceedings thereon, and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee".

The Speaker: Does the hon. chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose these three motions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent. The hon. government House leader.

* * *

EXTENSION OF SITTING HOURS

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like at this time to move the standard motion that can be made only today. I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 27(1), commencing on Monday, June 9, 2008, and concluding on Thursday, June 19, 2008, the House shall continue to sit until 11:00 p. m.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated last week in answer to the Thursday statement, this is we have work to do week. To kick off the week, we are introducing the customary motion to extend the daily sitting hours of the House for the final two weeks of the spring session. This is a motion which is so significant there is actually a specific Standing Order contemplating it, because it is the normal practice of this House, come this point in the parliamentary cycle, that we work additional hours and sit late to conduct business.

In fact, since 1982, when the House adopted a fixed calendar, such a motion has never been defeated. I underline that since a fixed calendar was adopted, such a motion has never been defeated. As a consequence, we know that today when we deal with this motion, we will discover whether the opposition parties are interested in doing

the work that they have been sent here to do, or whether they are simply here to collect paycheques, take it easy and head off on a three month vacation.

On 11 of those occasions, sitting hours were extended using this motion. On six other occasions, the House used a different motion to extend the sitting hours in June. This includes the last three years of minority government.

This is not surprising. Canadians expect their members of Parliament to work hard to advance their priorities. They would not look kindly on any party that was too lazy to work a few extra hours to get as much done as possible before the three month summer break. There is a lot to get done.

In the October 2007 Speech from the Throne, we laid out our legislative agenda. It set out an agenda of clear goals focusing on five priorities to: rigorously defend Canada's sovereignty and place in the world; strengthen the federation and modernize our democratic institutions; provide effective, competitive economic leadership to maintain a competitive economy; tackle crime and strengthen the security of Canadians; and improve the environment and the health of Canadians. In the subsequent months, we made substantial progress on these priorities.

We passed the Speech from the Throne which laid out our legislative agenda including our environmental policy. Parliament passed Bill C-2, the Tackling Violent Crime Act, to make our streets and communities safer by tackling violent crime. Parliament passed Bill C-28, which implemented the 2007 economic statement. That bill reduced taxes for all Canadians, including reductions in personal income and business taxes, and the reduction of the GST to 5%.

I would like to point out that since coming into office, this government has reduced the overall tax burden for Canadians and businesses by about \$190 billion, bringing taxes to their lowest level in 50 years.

We have moved forward on our food and consumer safety action plan by introducing a new Canada consumer product safety act and amendments to the Food and Drugs Act.

We have taken important steps to improve the living conditions of first nations. For example, first nations will hopefully soon have long overdue protection under the Canadian Human Rights Act, and Bill C-30 has been passed by the House to accelerate the resolution of specific land claims.

Parliament also passed the 2008 budget. This was a balanced, focused and prudent budget to strengthen Canada amid global economic uncertainty. Budget 2008 continues to reduce debt, focuses government spending and provides additional support for sectors of the economy that are struggling in this period of uncertainty.

As well, the House adopted a motion to endorse the extension of Canada's mission in Afghanistan, with a renewed focus on reconstruction and development to help the people of Afghanistan rebuild their country.

Routine Proceedings

These are significant achievements and they illustrate a record of real results. All parliamentarians should be proud of the work we have accomplished so far in this session. However, there is a lot of work that still needs to be done.

As I have stated in previous weekly statements, our top priority is to secure passage of Bill C-50, the 2008 budget implementation bill.
[*Translation*]

This bill proposes a balanced budget, controlled spending, investments in priority areas and lower taxes, all without forcing Canadian families to pay a tax on carbon, gas and heating. Furthermore, the budget implementation bill proposes much-needed changes to the immigration system.

These measures will help keep our economy competitive.

● (1515)

[*English*]

Through the budget implementation bill, we are investing in the priorities of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

These priorities include: \$500 million to help improve public transit, \$400 million to help recruit front line police officers, nearly \$250 million for carbon capture and storage projects in Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia, and \$100 million for the Mental Health Commission of Canada to help Canadians facing mental health and homelessness challenges.

[*English*]

These investments, however, could be threatened if the bill does not pass before the summer. That is why I am hopeful that the bill will be passed by the House later today.

The budget bill is not our only priority. Today the House completed debate at report stage on Bill C-29, which would create a modern, transparent, accountable process for the reporting of political loans. We will vote on this bill tomorrow and debate at third reading will begin shortly thereafter.

We also wish to pass Bill C-55, which implements our free trade agreement with the European Free Trade Association.

[*Translation*]

This free trade agreement, the first in six years, reflects our desire to find new markets for Canadian products and services.

[*English*]

Given that the international trade committee endorsed the agreement earlier this year, I am optimistic that the House will be able to pass this bill before we adjourn.

On Friday we introduced Bill C-60, which responds to recent decisions relating to courts martial. That is an important bill that must be passed on a time line. Quick passage is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of our military justice system.

Last week the aboriginal affairs committee reported Bill C-34, which implements the Tsawwassen First Nation final agreement. This bill has all-party support in the House. Passage of the bill this

week would complement our other achievements for first nations, including the apology on Wednesday to the survivors of residential schools.

These are important bills that we think should be given an opportunity to pass. That is why we need to continue to work hard, as our rules contemplate.

The government would also like to take advantage of extended hours to advance important crime and security measures. Important justice measures are still before the House, such as: Bill S-3, the anti-terrorism act; Bill C-53, the auto theft bill; Bill C-45 to modernize the military justice system; and Bill C-60, which responds to recent court martial decisions.

There are a number of other bills that we would like to see advanced in order to improve the management of the economy. There are other economic bills we would like to advance.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

These include Bill C-7, to modernize our aeronautics sector, Bill C-5, dealing with nuclear liability, Bill C-43, to modernize our customs rules, Bill C-39, to modernize the Canada Grain Act for farmers, Bill C-46, to give farmers more choice in marketing grain, Bill C-57, to modernize the election process for the Canadian Wheat Board, Bill C-14, to allow enterprises choice for communicating with customers, and Bill C-32, to modernize our fisheries sector.

[*English*]

If time permits, there are numerous other bills that we would like to advance.

[*Translation*]

These include Bill C-51, to ensure that food and products available in Canada are safe for consumers, Bill C-54, to ensure safety and security with respect to pathogens and toxins, Bill C-56, to ensure public protection with respect to the transportation of dangerous goods, Bill C-19, to limit the terms of senators to 8 years from a current maximum of 45, and Bill C-22, to provide fairness in representation in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

It is clear a lot of work remains before the House. Unfortunately, a number of bills have been delayed by the opposition through hoist amendments. Given these delays, it is only fair that the House extend its sitting hours to complete the bills on the order paper. As I have indicated, we still have to deal with a lot of bills.

Routine Proceedings

We have seen a pattern in this Parliament where the opposition parties have decided to tie up committees to prevent the work of the people being done. They have done delay and obstruction as they did most dramatically on our crime agenda. They do not bother to come and vote one-third of time in the House of Commons. Their voting records has shown that. All of this is part of a pattern of people who are reluctant to work hard.

The government is prepared to work hard and the rules contemplate that it work hard. In fact, on every occasion, when permission has been sought at this point in the parliamentary calendar to sit extended hours, the House has granted permission, including in minority Parliaments.

If that does not happen, it will be clear to Canadians that the opposition parties do not want to work hard and are not interested in debating the important policy issues facing our country. Is it any wonder that we have had a question period dominated not by public policy questions, but dominated entirely by trivia and issues that do not matter to ordinary Canadians.

The government has been working hard to advance its agenda, to advance the agenda that we talked about with Canadians in the last election, to work on the priorities that matter to ordinary Canadians, and we are seeking the consent of the House to do this.

Before concluding, I point out, once again, that extending the daily sitting hours for the last two weeks of June is a common practice. Marleau and Montpetit, at page 346, state this is:

—a long-standing practice whereby, prior to the prorogation of the Parliament or the start of the summer recess, the House would arrange for longer hours of sitting in order to complete or advance its business.

As I stated earlier, it was first formalized in the Standing Orders in 1982 when the House adopted a fixed calendar. Before then, the House often met on the weekend or continued its sittings into July to complete its work. Since 1982, the House has agreed on 11 occasions to extend the hours of sitting in the last two weeks of June.

Therefore, the motion is a routine motion designed to facilitate the business of the House and I expect it will be supported by all members. We are sent here to engage in very important business for the people of Canada. Frankly, the members in the House are paid very generously to do that work. Canadians expect them to do that work and expect them to put in the time that the rules contemplate.

All member of the House, if they seek that privilege from Canadian voters, should be prepared to do the work the rules contemplate. They should be prepared to come here to vote, to come here to debate the issues, to come here for the hours that the rules contemplate. If they are not prepared to do that work, they should step aside and turnover their obligations to people who are willing to do that work.

There is important work to be done on the commitments we made in the Speech from the Throne. I am therefore seeking the support of all members to extend our sitting hours, so we can complete work on our priorities before we adjourn for the summer. This will allow members to demonstrate results to Canadians when we return to our constituencies in two weeks.

Not very many Canadians have the privilege of the time that we have at home in our ridings, away from our work. People do not

be grudge us those privileges. They think it is important for us to connect with them. However, what they expect in return is for us to work hard. They expect us to put in the hours. They expect us to carry on business in a professional fashion. The motion is all about that. It is about doing what the rules have contemplated, what has always been authorized by the House any time it has been asked, since the rule was instituted in 1982. That is why I would ask the House to support the motion to extend the hours.

• (1525)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on a specific matter of House business that will be dealt with in the next two weeks, specifically on Wednesday, June 11, Canada's aboriginal leaders and selected residential school survivors will be invited to join us here on the floor of the House to receive the apology, and that obviously is very good news. However, apparently those aboriginal representatives will be expected simply to sit through perhaps the most important and emotional moment of their lives, and that is the official apology, without saying anything in response to it.

Again, it is very good that aboriginal representatives will be on the floor. That idea was proposed in the House, first, by the official opposition and others. The government has agreed to it, and that is a very good thing. However, surely, on this very important occasion on Wednesday, those aboriginal representatives should not be voiceless. The aboriginal people, who will be here, will be hearing from four politicians in the House. Surely, the House owes them the courtesy of hearing from them in return, right here, so it can be on the official record.

As the government House leader contemplates the business of the House over the next two weeks, and specifically on Wednesday, while there is still time to do so, could we not come to some common understanding that the aboriginal peoples who will be on the floor will not only be asked to sit and listen, but in fact have the chance to respond?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the aboriginal leaders who are here will have an opportunity to respond. As we have indicated, the events of the day include not just the solemn and official apology, which will take place in this chamber, but they will continue through the day with the appropriate ceremonies, the smudging ceremony that is contemplated and other very important aboriginal ceremonies that are important to give the day the solemnity that it represents.

The survivors of the residential schools have been waiting all too long for the opportunity to hear this apology. It is important that the day be done in a respectful and proper fashion. It is very important that the apology in the House be a solemn official apology of the House of Commons, done in the normal fashion that the House of Commons does its business. That is the approach the government is adopting. We believe this will give it its greatest meaning and demonstrate the deepest sincerity of the gesture, which is long overdue.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find the government House leader's sense of irony a bit strange and perverse in his request for an extension of sittings.

I went through the pain and suffering of six weeks of his government filibustering the environment committee, six weeks of talking out the clock day in and day out. The Conservatives lack of planning and integrity create a crisis for the rest of Parliament. In mistaking the idea that we come here to work for some sort of political gamesmanship day in and day out at justice, procedure and House affairs and the environment committee, they spent six weeks filibustering, delaying, holding the bill hostage on one clause. Ironically, it was a clause on transparency and accountability.

It seems odd now that the government would come back to the Parliament and say that the clock is running out on the spring session, that it needs more time to debate these important issues. When the Conservatives had the time to move legislation forward, they chose not to. They previously prorogued Parliament and killed their legislation that was in mid-process, some of which had already passed out of the House, on justice and matters of affairs, which the so-called House leader has described as important to Canadians. By doing that, they denied their bills to come to the full force of law. They then sat in committee week after week for political games playing. They delayed the work of the environment committee and the democratic right of this place to vote on a bill. Now they suggest, within days of that happening, that this crisis has been created by others, not their own doing, and they need extra time to get through their legislative calendar.

Did he make any of those considerations previously when the government instructed its committee chairs to take hostage and hijack the democratic process, which is this Parliament.

• (1530)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, hearing denunciations from the NDP of filibuster, as in full debate, is somewhat having the teacher speak to the student.

The NDP has for many years been the masters of exploiting the processes of the House. A number of bills are before the House right now, which we still have not passed because of exactly the fact that the NDP has utilized every possible device to delay the government doing its business, whether it is putting every member of its caucus to speak to a bill, introducing concurrence motions to eat up House time to prevent that from happening, voting several times as it has to keep the House from returning to business, from returning to government orders in order to allow those delay obstruction tactics to continue.

Frankly, when it comes to tying up the House and delaying the doing of our business, the NDP is certainly the master of that. We do not regret that it does it. We regret it does that and that bills do not pass, but it is certainly its right.

What we are dealing with is a very different question. We are dealing with not with whether we should debate matters fully. We are dealing with whether we should even utilize the time that we are expected to sit.

The rules contemplate that on this day, and it is only one day a year, the government House leader can rise and make the motion for

extended hours. It is so common that the calendar, which is printed up for the House of Commons, and anyone can go and look on the website, identifies these two weeks as possible extended sitting hours pursuant to that Standing Order 27(1). We are expected to do that. Since 1982, it has happened every time it has been sought. It is called working. It is called showing up for work.

That is what the government is prepared to do and that is what we are calling on the other parties to do as well. The people of Canada expect their members of Parliament to show up in the House at the hours we are supposed to show up, to have the debates we are supposed to have and to conduct the business they want us to conduct on their behalf. That is what we are asking to happen here.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the House leader cannot get out of his embarrassment that easy. It has just been explained how time and time again, week after week, the government stonewalled committees. It delayed the process. For weeks and weeks and months of wasted time, it wants to add two weeks of a few hours extra.

In the justice committee, meeting after meeting, even when there were witnesses waiting and when the committee legally wanted to have a couple of extra meetings and not delay time, the Conservatives instructed their committee chair to walk out of the meeting and delay the whole process. A number of the bills on this list would have been passed now if it had not been for the Conservatives walking out of meetings.

What is most embarrassing is the House leader just said to a member of the House that it was stalling when a party had every member of its caucus speak to a bill. Is that democratic? He is saying that members cannot speak to a bill, or even speak once on it? That is an embarrassment and a confrontation to democracy to tell members they cannot speak to a bill, which the government House leader just said was a stalling tactic. It is an embarrassment that he would say a member, who is elected by his or her constituents, cannot speak to a bill.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the hon. member raised the question about the justice committee. At the justice committee, the meetings have not been adjourned by the Conservative chair. It is the Liberal vice-chair who has refused to call votes and who has adjourned the meetings. It is not the Conservative chair, so the fault lies there.

The Liberals do not want to conduct the business there either. The only motion they are willing to consider is one that has nothing to do with legislation whatsoever. They wish to have another one of their side show legislative committee inquiry Star Chambers.

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However, in the process what bills do those members not want to deal with? What bills are they obstructing? They obstructing Bill C-25, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, which is long overdue, something which Canadians want to have dealt with, something that was referred to the committee. They want to study something else instead. There is Bill C-26, drug penalties, which has been there for some time and something with which Canadians want dealt. They would rather study something else instead of that. There is Bill C-27, identity theft, again is other legislation. Three items of legislation are before that committee. We would like to see them out of that committee and into the House so we can pass sit.

Guess what? The opposition parties, in their ongoing campaign to delay and obstruct our justice agenda, our getting tough on crime agenda, continue to find excuses to delay that, including having their Liberal vice-chair adjourn every meeting and not allow it to proceed on to the important business of that legislation. That is the problem. It is that kind of delay and obstruction that resulted in over 1,400 total delays to our justice bills in the first session of Parliament.

It is those kinds of delay and obstruction tactics that make it necessary for us to seek the kind of permission, which the rules contemplate, for additional hours because we have a tremendous amount of work to do, a very full legislative agenda. It just seems that some do not want to show up to do that work.

• (1535)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to take part in this debate on the government's request to extend the sitting hours in the House of Commons for the last 10 sitting days before the summer adjournment.

The government is exercising an option that exists under the Standing Orders, particularly Standing Order 27, and it is, in effect, asking the House to sit every sitting day until 11 p.m. from now until June 19. That is the substance of the motion.

What the government House leader has tried to do in the last few minutes is to offer some justification for those extended hours. The government says, in effect, that it is necessary to have these additional hours for the next two weeks to somehow speed up its legislation, that list that is found on the order paper, but I suggest that the real reason and the main goal for this motion, on the part of the government, is to hide its own patent mismanagement of the House calendar over the last many months.

Let us look at the facts. In 2006, out of 365 days, the House sat for only 97 days. That, of course, was the year that was interrupted at the beginning of the year by the election, but in 2006, the House sat for 97 days. In 2007, the House sat for only 74 days before the government prorogued the first session of this Parliament and then instead of coming back promptly, it delayed the beginning of the second session until well into October, October 16, 2007, to be exact.

This conscious delay, this delay by the government, was its prerogative. It exercised it, so it is the Conservatives' responsibility. They effectively eliminated 16 sitting days in last fall's House calendar, not to mention all of the time that was wasted on a vacuous throne speech debate since many of the bills that remain on the order paper today were simply reinstated from the previous session. In other words, prorogation and a Speech from the Throne produced

precious little that was actually new. They were just recycling the same drivel from before.

The Conservative minority government is now asking for the cooperation of opposition parties to adopt this motion to extend hours in order to help it advance an agenda that largely consists of old business, despite the fact that the government itself has squandered a great deal of time and goodwill over the course of the last two years.

I would like to take a moment to remind members of this House of the words spoken by the now Prime Minister when he was leader of the opposition on the topic of how to make a minority Parliament work. That is one very important factor to bear in mind in the context of this motion, that we are operating in a minority situation. I am quoting the Prime Minister's own words that are found in *Hansard* for October 6, 2004:

I believe that even when a government holds a majority it is not relieved of its obligation to consult with the opposition, with the House and with the people on important matters. That obligation is surely even more imperative when a minority government situation exists. It is the government's obligation to craft a working majority to advance its agenda by taking into account the policies and priorities expressed by the three opposition parties in the House.

In other words, a great call for cooperation in the House of Commons. I agree with what the Prime Minister said when he was the leader of the opposition. Unfortunately, the minority government has demonstrated no commitment to those principles that were described by the Prime Minister when he was leader of the opposition. The minority government has no idea what it means to consult the opposition parties, not to mention no idea what it means to take into account their priorities.

The modus operandi of the government is one of bitter partisanship all the time, running roughshod over everything and everybody in its path, no matter what. Let us take a look at its track record.

• (1540)

The Conservative leadership across the way prepared and distributed, just about a year ago now, a 200-page handbook on dirty tricks, instructing its members on how to obstruct the work of Parliament should things not be going happily in its direction.

Several Conservative committee chairs have actually followed that manual on dirty tricks very carefully. One example is the justice committee, which has just been referred to, where the chair repeatedly, just as soon as the meeting gets going, gets an urgent call of nature and rushes from the room. He does this at every single meeting. Is that accidental? No. It is a conspiracy to destroy the effectiveness of that committee.

We can see the same pattern being followed at the procedure and House affairs committee, the operations committee, and the ethics committee. All of this is an effort on the part of Conservative members to hide from the truth about a seemingly never-ending series of Conservative ethical difficulties, and parliamentary committees have been sacrificed to Conservative political expediency.

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The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has refused to appear before standing committees to defend her supplementary estimates. The minister responsible for official languages refuses to appear before the standing committee to defend her government's action, or lack of action, on official languages. It is obvious that in the Conservative government, transparency and accountability are not principles that ministers are prepared to respect.

That creates an atmosphere in the House where it is, indeed, difficult to get the kind of cooperation that the government House leader has asked for today. What is the genesis of that problem? What is the root cause? The government House leader need only look in the mirror.

I will give the House another example. The government agreed to a compromise resolution earlier in this session about Afghanistan, and particularly Canada's role in that very difficult mission. The motion was comprehensive. It involved a good deal of give and take, back and forth, across the floor. But specifically, it included the creation of a special committee to oversee that mission, to provide a greater degree of transparency and accountability back to Canadians.

After the adoption of the resolution, which occurred on March 13 of this year, a full month went by and the government had not bothered to consult with anybody with respect to the creation of that very important special committee. In fact, the Liberal official opposition had to use an opposition day to force a debate that resulted in the motion in the creation of that special committee. The government would not have taken action if the opposition had not moved to force it to do so.

With respect to consultations, I should point out that the Conservative government has a great deal of difficulty sharing information with opposition parties, especially when it concerns the proposed calendar of House business. Members will be very familiar with the vacuous speeches that always appear here in the House of Commons on the Thursday of every week in response to questions about the future agenda for the House.

The government, one would think, would take advantage of official and unofficial meetings of House leaders to share plans and priorities about how the business of the House is going to flow. The fact of the matter is that information is rarely forthcoming.

When the Conservatives were the official opposition, they demanded and they received from the government of the day a calendar outlining the government's intentions for House business for three weeks in advance. Today, we are lucky if the government can provide five days of advance notice of proposed House business from time to time.

None of that contributes to the kind of atmosphere where there is a sense of cooperation or where the government can make a convincing argument that there is a sense of urgency that justifies the motion that it has presented.

On other matters, there have been simple requests from opposition parties for things like take note debates, for example, which are no burden on the government whatsoever but they do deal with important topics like Darfur and foreign aid, and other matters of public interest where members strive, for the better part, to set aside

the intense partisanship of this place and take note of a matter of important public interest.

On several occasions, House leaders have asked for the government House leader to make an occasion available for various take note debates and the government House leader's response has been simply "no". We asked why, his answer was "No reason. My answer is just no". He said, "I can be arbitrary so I am being arbitrary". That again does not contribute to a good working relationship in the House.

● (1545)

On another item that we have seen very recently, something like advanced notice and consultation for solemn occasions, like the recent visit by the President of Ukraine and the apology on residential schools, somehow the government, rather than treating these with the dignity and the solemnity they deserve, they somehow get twisted into partisan arguments that repel other members of the House from even trying to accede to government requests.

The government has also been quite strange in managing, or mismanaging, what it says are its priorities in the House. On the election campaign, the Conservatives have repeatedly said that their priorities include things like gun control and killing the Canadian Wheat Board, and both of those things have been on the order paper. However, they have only been called for debate in the most symbolic and trivial of ways.

The legislation on firearms, for example, has been on the order paper, in my recollection, since June 2006, and it has been called for debate in the House on one occasion for one hour. Similarly, the bill on the Canadian Wheat Board has been sitting on the order paper since March of this year, and the first time the government even mentioned it was today in response to a question during question period and then on a motion after question period.

If these things were such priorities, the debates would have been called on these items months and months ago, and not just brought up at the last minute and the government saying that now they are a priority.

When we asked the government, as we have done both in the House leaders meetings and on the floor of the House, to specify the priorities it has for things that simply must be passed before the summer adjournment in a couple of weeks, all it did was simply recite in total the entire order paper.

When the government claims that everything is a priority, then clearly nothing is a priority, and the government cannot, on that basis, make a compelling argument for extended hours.

The government has tried its very best to portray the opposition as the villains who are in some way delaying the work of this Parliament as it appears on the order paper, but the fact of the matter is, when we look at the government's own delays in bringing legislation forward, when we look at its disrespect for Parliament and for the committee process, when we look at the ways that it has failed in the mandate expressed in the Prime Minister's own words; that is, to consult and show respect for others in this place, then it is little wonder that when it makes a motion of this kind, the opposition is skeptical.

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I would inform you, Mr. Speaker, that the official opposition will oppose this motion.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the member is completely off base on his comments about committees.

Frankly, the committee work is frustrated. The members at committee are simply frustrated by the logical and lawful application of the rules. Following the rules is something members in the opposite party are just not used to doing. They get frustrated, not just because the rules are being applied to them but also because, and I am sure the member has a lot to do with it, of poorly crafted motions.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you can understand because you have to rule out of order sometimes motions that are outside the scope of this great House, but of course, that is something else.

My real question for the member is, what is the reasoning behind not allowing the House to sit further? In my lifetime, except for my wife sometimes, I have never been told I cannot work harder. What is the point to not allowing this House to move and work a little harder for Canadians? What is wrong with that?

In fact, there are a number of members opposite who have not even been here in weeks, so what would it matter when most of the caucus opposite does not even show up, does not vote—

• (1550)

Mr. Derek Lee: Order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gary Goodyear: I am speaking to the motion and I will pull it back, Mr. Speaker.

I am simply asking for the logic behind allowing members of the House, who choose to work harder for Canadians, to do so? Why would it matter? Members opposite should just say, yes, and let us do the work for Canadians. That is the only right answer.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, that member and the government have had fully the entire session of Parliament since their so-called throne speech last fall to do that work on the part of Canadians, and the fact is that they have not done it.

They have been obstructionist in committee. They have been uncooperative with other opposition House leaders.

Simply, to get to the final point, when they were asked just a couple of days ago what their priorities would be for the period between now and the end of the session and what things they would want to see accomplished for Canadians in that period, they could not and would not answer the question.

Until they can indicate what the priorities of the House might be, there is no point in simply providing them a blank cheque on timing. This is not an institution that is governed and run by the government. This is an institution that is run by all parliamentarians. We are duly elected to this place.

It is not just the Conservatives who have legitimacy in the House of Commons. Every parliamentarian who is duly elected to this place has the same rights and responsibilities. The government has to show some respect for the institution before it can expect to see some respect shown in return.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to confirm what the House leader of the Liberals just said when the member for Cambridge asked what was wrong with staying here and working at night and what was wrong with putting in more hours.

Does he agree with me about those times at the House leaders' meetings, I believe every week, when we asked to stay at night and have take note debates and were refused? No, we were told by the Conservatives, we are not staying. No reasons were given. What was wrong with having take note debates?

Never have we seen in the history of our Parliament that the procedure and House affairs committee was not sitting for months and months because the Conservatives refused to replace a chair who was taking the side of the government on the in and out scandal when he was supposed to be independent.

I recall when the debate at committee on the sponsorship scandal was brought about by the Conservatives. I am sure the leader of the Liberal Party will remember that, because at that time the Conservatives thought it was a matter for Parliament. Now, though, the Conservatives say the in and out scandal is not a matter for Parliament.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I think the whip for the NDP is trying to make the point that the government is exercising a double standard.

When it was in opposition it had a certain view about the application of the rules and, for example, things like committees being able to look into allegations of impropriety. When the Conservatives were in opposition, they were all in favour of that. Now that they are in government, they have taken extraordinary steps to try to stifle the committee process.

Whether it is procedure and House affairs, the operations committee, the ethics committee or the justice committee, the Conservatives have tried their very best to shut down those committees when those committees wanted to focus upon certain public allegations of impropriety or wrongdoing on the part of members of the government. As a consequence of that, there are portions of our committee system that simply have not been sitting, certainly not sitting effectively, for the last number of months.

Earlier, a member of the NDP made the point about the environment committee. It was effectively stifled and stymied by the government for the simple reason that the government did not like the direction in which the committee was going.

What the government fails to recognize is that this is in fact a minority situation. If we want a minority to function successfully, there has to be some give and take. There has to be some common respect and consultation back and forth across the floor—

• (1555)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I will have to cut off the hon. member there. More members would like to ask questions. I will go first to the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

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Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a backbencher I am confused as to why there would not have been some kind of discussion and agreement between the parties at the House leaders' meetings, which happen once a week, eyeball to eyeball, across an oak table upstairs. I have been there in a previous incarnation. I have witnessed the walkout of the Conservative chair of the justice committee. I have been there.

I do not really understand why these things are not working. The government now is seriously at risk of not getting this motion in the absence of any kind of negotiation.

I will put it to the Liberal House leader that 20 years ago, and the member for Egmont will remember this, this type of motion used to pass in the House. We used to sit one, two or three nights just before the June break to try to get work done, but it was all through negotiation. When the Progressive Conservative Party had a majority, it still negotiated.

Does the Liberal House leader not think there is a misunderstanding or lack of comprehension somewhere in the system when we, as four parties sitting around a table, cannot even come to some agreement on what bills should get to what point and pass before the summer break? What is broken here?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I am sure it is a very frustrating situation, particularly for members who have been here for some considerable period of time and have seen the House function in different ways.

There has been a unique style established by the current government in its management of House business. There is not, unfortunately, that spirit of collaboration, give and take, consultation and respect around the table that used to be a hallmark of how the institution would function.

Instead, time and time again, opposition parties are simply told that their views do not matter, that they do not matter, that "it is our way or the highway" and that they can just shove it. That is the attitude. Quite frankly, with that kind of attitude, it is very difficult to work out those collaborative arrangements. We try very hard, as we did at last week's meeting. When the question was asked of the government House leader what the priorities were and what must get done, he would not give an answer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We have time for a brief question or comment. The hon. member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry there is only a brief moment for a question, because there is much I would like to say.

Quite frankly, what I find more amazing than anything else is that when the motion was first introduced about 35 minutes ago and we had a voice vote, all opposition parties voiced "no", when of course this could have been passed by unanimous consent, as everyone in this place knows.

In fact, as the government House leader stated, each and every year since 1982 there have been extended sitting hours before

previous Parliaments rose for the summer. The reason for doing that is quite simple. It is to spend as much time as required to try to finish any unfinished business.

I would simply ask the opposition House leader, when does he expect now to deal with government business before us? It appears from his remarks that the opposition is going to be denying consent to extended sitting hours. When, then, does the opposition House leader feel we will actually get to attend to government business, as is the responsibility of that member and every member in this place?

•(1600)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. gentleman that there are two full sitting weeks remaining between now and June 20. As far as I know, the only day that will be treated in an unusual way, and quite rightly so, will be Wednesday, to deal with the aboriginal apology. Otherwise, it will be the normal flow of business for the remaining nine days.

The government has all of that time to advance its agenda. Maybe it should not have wasted the 16 days at the beginning of this session, or advanced all the other ways in which it has squandered the hours, so that this Parliament could have achieved something more.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will start off by saying that the Bloc Québécois, like the official opposition, and like—I believe—the NDP, will oppose the motion by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons to extend the sitting hours, for a number of reasons.

First, it is important to remember—and this was mentioned by the House leader of the official opposition—that the government and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons have been completely unwilling to negotiate and cooperate. Usually, when Parliament is running smoothly, the leaders meet and agree on some priorities, some items and some ways of getting them done. But since the start of this session, or at least since September, House leaders' meetings on Tuesday afternoons have simply been meetings where we hear about a legislative agenda, which, within hours after we leave the meeting, is completely changed.

That is not how we move forward. Now the government can see that its way of doing things does not produce results. In fact, I think that this is what the government wanted in recent weeks, to prevent Parliament, the House of Commons and the various committees from working efficiently and effectively.

As I was saying, usually such motions are born out of cooperation, and are negotiated in good faith between the government and the opposition parties. But we were simply told that today a motion would be moved to extend the sitting hours, but with no information forthcoming about what the government's priorities would be through the end of this session, until June 20.

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This was a very cavalier way to treat the opposition parties. And today, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the Conservative government are reaping the consequences of their haughty attitude. As the saying goes, he who sows the wind, reaps the whirlwind. That is exactly what has happened to the Conservatives after many weeks of acting in bad faith and failing to cooperate with the opposition parties.

In this case, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons—and earlier I mentioned his arrogance, which, to me, has reached its peak today with the way the motion was moved—gave us no indication as to his government's priorities from now until the end of the session, despite the fact that he was pointedly questioned about that matter. What we did receive was a grocery list with no order, no priorities. As the leader of the official opposition said earlier, when everything is a priority, it means that nothing is.

That is the current situation: they gave us a list of bills which, in fact, included almost all of the bills on the order paper. Not only were things not prioritized, but in addition, as I mentioned before, it showed a disregard for the opposition parties. There is a price to pay for that today—we do not see why the government needs to extend the sitting hours.

Not only was the grocery list not realistic, but also it showed that the government has absolutely no priorities set. The list includes almost all of the bills, but week after week, despite what was said during the leaders' meetings, the order of business changed. If the order of business changes at the drop of a hat, with no rhyme or reason, it means that the government does not really have priorities.

I am thinking about Bill C-50, a bill to implement the budget, which we waited on for a long time. The government is surprised that we are coming up to the end of the session and that it will be adopted in the coming hours. However, we have to remember that between the budget speech and the introduction of Bill C-50, many weeks passed that could have been spent working on the bill.

●(1605)

As I mentioned, the list presented to us is unrealistic. It shows the arrogance of this government, and furthermore, the order of the bills on the list is constantly changing. We feel this is a clear demonstration of this government's lack of priority.

In light of that, we can reach only one conclusion: if the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform cannot present us with his government's legislative priorities as we near the end of this session, in effect, it means that his government has no legislative priorities. It has no long-term vision. Its management is short sighted, very short sighted indeed. I would even say it is managing from one day to the next. From my perspective, this can mean only one thing: it has no legislative agenda. When we have before us bills dealing with only minor issues, this is what that means.

Proof of this lack of legislative agenda is easy to see, considering the current state of this government's agenda. An abnormally small number of bills for this time of year are currently before the House at the report stage and at third reading. Usually, if the government had planned, if it had been working in good faith and had cooperated with the opposition parties, in these last two weeks remaining before

the summer recess, we should have been completing the work on any number of bills.

Overall, as we speak there are just five government bills that are ready to be debated at these stages, in other words, report stage or third reading stage. Among those, we note that Bill C-7, which is now at third reading stage, reached report stage during the first session of the 39th Parliament, in other words in June 2007. It has been brought back to us a year later. And that is a priority? What happened between June 2007 and June 2008 to prevent Bill C-7 from getting through third reading stage? In my opinion, we should indeed finish the work on Bill C-7, but this truly illustrates the government's lack of planning and organization.

As far as Bill C-5 is concerned, it was reported on by the Standing Committee on Natural Resources on December 12, 2007, and voted on at report stage on May 6, 2008. Again, a great deal of time, nearly six months, went by between the tabling of the report and the vote at this stage, which was held on May 6, 2008, while the report was tabled on December 12, 2007.

Finally, Bills C-29 and C-16 were both reported on by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs roughly six months ago.

All these delays of six months to a year force us to conclude that these bills are not legislative priorities to this government.

It would be great to finish the work on these four or five bills, but let us admit that we could have finished it much sooner.

This lack of legislative priority was even more apparent before question period when the House was debating second reading of Bill C-51 on food and drugs. Next on the agenda is second reading of Bill C-53 on auto theft.

If these five bills were a priority, we would finish the work. But no, what we are being presented with are bills that are only at second reading stage. This only delays further the report stage or third reading of the bills I have already mentioned. If we were serious about this, we would finish the work on bills at third reading and then move on to bills that are at second reading.

Furthermore, if its legislative agenda has moved forward at a snail's pace, the government is responsible for that and has only itself to blame, since it paralyzed the work of important committees, including the justice committee and the procedure and House affairs committee, to which several bills had been referred. And then they dare make some sort of bogus Conservative moral claim, saying that we are refusing to extend sitting hours because we do not want to work. For months and months now, opposition members, especially the Bloc Québécois, have been trying to work in committee, but the government, for partisan reasons, in order to avoid talking about the Conservative Party's problems, has been obstructing committee work.

Earlier, the NDP whip spoke about take note debates.

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•(1610)

Once again, it is not the opposition that is refusing to work on issues that are important to Canadians and Quebecers. Rather, it is the government that refuses to allow take note debates, because of partisan obstinacy. In that regard, we clearly see that the argument presented by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform is mere tautology or a false argument. In fact, it was the Conservative Party, the Conservative government, that slowed down the work of the House and obstructed the work of several committees.

Not only is the government incapable of planning, vision, cooperation and good faith, but furthermore, its legislative agenda is very meagre and does not in any way warrant extending the sitting hours. In addition, the Bloc Québécois sees many of the bills that are now at the bottom of the list as problematic, but if we extend the sitting hours, we will end up having to examine them.

Take Bill C-14, for example, which would permit the privatization of certain Canada Post activities. Do they really think that sitting hours will be extended to hasten debate on a bill that threatens jobs and the quality of a public service as essential as that provided by the Canada Post Corporation? That demonstrates just how detrimental the Conservatives' right-wing ideology is, not just to public services but to the economy. Everyone knows very well—there are a large number of very convincing examples globally—that privatizing postal services leads to significant price increases for consumers and a deterioration in service, particularly in rural areas.

I will give another example, that of Bill C-24, which would abolish the long gun registry even though police forces want to keep it. Once again, we have an utter contradiction. Although the government boasts of an agenda that will increase security, they are dismantling a preventive tool welcomed by all stakeholders. They are indirectly contributing to an increase in the crime rate.

These are two examples of matters that are not in step with the government's message. It is quite clear that we are not interested in extending sitting hours to move more quickly to a debate on Bill C-24.

I must also mention bills concerning democratic reform—or pseudo-reform. In my opinion, they are the best example of the hypocrisy of this government, which introduces bills and then, in the end, makes proposals that run counter to the interests of Quebec in particular.

Take Bill C-20, for example, on the consultation of voters with respect to the pool of candidates from which the Prime Minister should choose senators. Almost all the constitutional experts who appeared before the committee currently studying Bill C-20 said that the bill would do indirectly what cannot be done directly. We know that the basic characteristics of the Senate cannot be changed without the agreement of the provinces or, at the very least, without following the rule of the majority for constitutional amendments, which requires approval by seven provinces representing 50% of the population.

Since the government knows very well that it cannot move forward with its Senate reforms, it introduced a bill that would

change the essential characteristics of the Senate, something prohibited by the Constitution, on the basis of some technicalities.

It is interesting to note that even a constitutional expert who told the committee that he did not think the way the government had manipulated the bill was unconstitutional admitted that the bill would indirectly allow the government to do what it could not do directly.

They are playing with the most important democratic institutions.

•(1615)

A country's Constitution—and we want Quebec to have its own Constitution soon—is the fundamental text. We currently have a government, a Prime Minister and a Leader of the Government in the House of Commons who are manipulating this fundamental text—the Canadian Constitution—in favour of reforms that would satisfy their supporters in western Canada.

We do not want to rush this bill through the House by extending the sitting hours. It is the same thing for Bill C-19, which, I remind members, limits a Senator's tenure to eight years.

These two bills, Bill C-19 and Bill C-20, in their previous form, meaning before the session was prorogued in the summer of 2007, were unanimously denounced by the Quebec National Assembly, which asked that they be withdrawn. It is rather ironic that the federal government recognized the Quebec nation and then decided to introduce two bills that were denounced by the Quebec National Assembly.

I must say that the two opposition parties are opposed to Bill C-20, albeit for different reasons. Thus, I do not think it would be in the best interests of the House to rush these bills through, since we are far from reaching a consensus on them.

I have one last example, that is, Bill C-22, which aims to change the make-up of the House of Commons. If passed, it would increase the number of members in Ontario and in western Canada, which would reduce the political weight of the 75 members from Quebec, since their representation in this House would drop from 24.4% to 22.7%. It is not that we are against changing the distribution of seats based on the changing demographics of the various regions of Canada. We would like to ensure, however, that the Quebec nation, which was recognized by the House of Commons, has a voice that is strong enough to be heard.

The way things are going today, it is clear that in 10, 15 or 20 years, Quebec will no longer be able to make its voice heard in this House. We therefore believe we must guarantee the Quebec nation a percentage of the members in this House. We propose that it be 25%. If people want more members in Ontario and in the west, that is not a problem. We will simply have to increase the number of members from Quebec to maintain a proportion of 25%. There are a number of possible solutions to this.

Routine Proceedings

Once again, I would like to point out that we introduced a whole series of bills to formalize the recognition of the Quebec nation, including Bill C-482, sponsored by my colleague from Drummond. That bill sought to apply the Charter of the French Language to federally regulated organizations working in Quebec. That was for organizations working in Quebec, of course. At no time did we seek to control what happens elsewhere in Canada. The bill would have given employees of federally regulated organizations the same rights as all employees in Quebec, that is, the right to work in French.

Unfortunately, the bill was defeated, but we will try again. Once again, the fact that Bill C-482 was defeated does not mean we are about to throw in the towel and let Bills C-22, C-19, and C-20 pass just like that. As I said earlier, we will certainly not make things easy for the government by rushing debate on these bills here.

And now to my fourth point. I started out talking about the government's lack of cooperation, vision and planning, not to mention its bad faith. Next, I talked about its poor excuse for a legislative agenda. Then I talked about the fact that we find certain bills extremely problematic. We will certainly not be giving the government carte blanche to bring those bills back here in a big hurry before the end of the session on June 20. Our fourth reason is the government's hypocrisy, in a general sense.

This has been apparent in many ways, such as the government's attitude to certain bills. I would like to mention some of them, such as Bill C-20. I cannot help but mention Bills C-50 and C-10 as well.

Bill C-50, the budget implementation bill, makes changes to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's powers, but that is not what the debate is about. Bill C-10, which introduces elements that allow the Conservative government—

• (1620)

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

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I once again appreciate the good work of our interpreters so that I could understand every word that the hon. member opposite was saying. He addressed a number of things on this issue, but I would like to respond to just a few of them.

The first is he claimed that the bill which proposes that senators be elected is doing indirectly what cannot be done directly. I would like to point out to all members and anybody who happens to be watching that this is not true. The fact of the matter is that the prime minister of the day recommends and appoints senators. He chooses from a list.

I remember when I was on that side of the House I asked many times the prime minister of the day, Monsieur Chrétien, why it was that the list he got from Liberal Party hacks was a more legitimate list than the one given to him by the provinces of people they elected. In both cases, he would choose a senator from a list. That is the response to that point.

The member accused us of pandering to our western roots. I would like to increase the level of respect on that. All of us are

elected to represent our constituents. I do not think I am pandering to my people when I properly represent them here. He said that he represents Quebec. Members of the Bloc use that phrase more often than anybody in this place, that the Bloc members are here to represent Quebec.

The difference between Bloc members and me is that I also think globally in terms of Canada and its role in the world. Certainly I think of Canada as a whole when I debate and vote on issues here, whereas he is focused on Quebec only and as such, I think he is doing only part of a job as a federal member of Parliament. I say that respectfully.

I can assure the House that if the shoe were on the other foot, the member would be saying a lot more a lot louder about representation. He indicated that 75% of the seats must come from Quebec regardless of population. That is what the Constitution says and I do not have any particular issue with that, but what about the people in the parts of the country where, because of the demographics, their vote in the House of Commons represents maybe 120,000 people whereas in other areas, it represents less than 100,000?

We should work toward equality for people around the country. That would be a really good nation building thing to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Senate, I am not the one who is saying that. Of the constitutional experts who testified, 80% said that Bill C-20 was unconstitutional, and the other 20% agreed that the government and the Prime Minister were doing indirectly what they could not do directly. Opinion was unanimous, and that was condemned by many of the experts who appeared.

Still with regard to the Senate, not only is the Conservative government paralyzing the work of the House, but it is also paralyzing the Senate. In fact, since the Conservatives came to power, they have not replaced any senators who have retired or died. The Senate currently has 15 vacancies. Last week, Christian Dufour, a political scientist at ENAP, said that at this rate, the Senate would also be paralyzed.

So we are not the ones who are bringing things to a standstill. It is the Conservative government. Moreover, its reform is not at all consistent with what is written in constitution. We have reached the point where it is the Bloc Québécois that is trying to uphold the Canadian Constitution of 1982. That is pretty amazing.

Routine Proceedings

I will conclude by answering the member's last question. We agree that the regions of Canada are entitled to fair representation in this House. But we need to recognize that if Canada is shared by at least two nations, the nation of Canada and the nation of Quebec, then the nation of Quebec must have a political weight in this House that remains unchanged at 25%. We have had 75 members, guaranteed by the Constitution, but 75 out of 308 is not the same as 75 out of 350. It does not give the same political weight. What we are asking is that Quebec, which has been recognized as a nation, maintain its political weight within federal institutions as long as Quebec remains part of them.

• (1625)

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member may have forgotten about the first nations. We will probably hear more about that on Wednesday. It is an honest mistake, I know.

I want to recommend to the member that he consider my suggestion that one of the problems here is the issue of respect, that would be the respect between the political parties here and respect for the institution.

He will recall that almost every Thursday right after question period the official opposition House leader asks what we call the Thursday question. The purpose of that is to allow formally on the floor of the House the government to outline to all members of Parliament what the business of the House is likely to be for the next five days.

What has happened in this Parliament is the government House leader makes a speech. It is a show and tell exercise. He outlines everything that has happened for the last month. Then he says what the theme for the week will be and then he outlines about 20 different things.

If the House thinks I am just making this up, I want members to look at the projected order of business. The project order of business allows us to know what business is likely to be dealt with in the House today. Do you know how many government bills there are on that list, Mr. Speaker? There are 18 government bills listed on the projected order of business for the House today. That is not respect for members. That is just putting everything into the suitcase and saying, "Here, do that". As the government suggests to us that we should be sitting an extra 35 hours or so over the next eight or so sitting days, I think it should at least have enough respect to outline exactly what it wants, not the entire inventory. The government should just tell us what it wants and negotiate something that would allow us to make progress in getting that done.

What does the hon. member think about that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to clarify something. It may have escaped my colleague's attention, but I did say that there are at least two nations within the Canadian political landscape. I recognize that the first nations are part of the Canadian political landscape, but we must also recognize that they are nations of a different type because, really, what is important for aboriginals is bloodline. They are nations based on ethnicity. The

difference is that in Quebec, as in the Canadian nation, we are trying to build a civic nation, one based on land occupancy. Just a brief aside.

I completely agree with the member's remark: presenting 18 bills as priorities is not only disrespectful of the opposition, but it is also shows a blatant lack of respect for democratic institutions. In my mind, the government lacks respect for democratic institutions when it stalls committee work or when the Prime Minister, the Minister of Public Safety and the member for Beauce refuse to appear in front of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security to explain their actions in the Couillard affair.

This government lacks all respect for democratic institutions; it wants to use them for partisan reasons. And it is completely legitimate that the opposition is not giving the government a blank cheque by voting for the sitting hours to be extended.

If the government is serious, let it tell us which four, five or six bills they wish to wrap up by the end of the session, and I am sure that the three opposition parties will cooperate. However, this is not the path that the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons laid out for us today.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we look at today's orders of the day, we notice a slew of bills that seem to have appeared out of the blue.

I too attend the weekly House leaders and whips meetings. How many times have we met and asked the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons what legislation would be brought in? There might have been two or three bills on the list, and nothing concerning the following week to allow members to prepare, nothing at all.

How can one take the joke so far as to say, with this many bills now up for consideration at the last minute, that they could all be passed when some of them are merely at the second reading stage?

Even if we agreed to extend the hours of sitting of the House, can one realistically think that we would be able to pass these bills with debate? Or could this be done only the Conservative way, "my way or the highway", where they introduce a bill, put it to a vote and then tell us to live with what they have decided? The problem is that the Conservatives act as if they were a majority government.

• (1630)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There are 30 seconds remaining to the hon. member for Joliette.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that, on the opposition side, we are unanimous in denouncing the disrespectful and somewhat contemptuous attitude of the government and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. Let us hope that the lesson will stick and that, in the future, the government and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons will show some willingness to work in good faith, in cooperation with the opposition parties. I am convinced that the three opposition parties are prepared to sit down and have serious discussions, but the other side must first stop laughing in our faces.

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[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): 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 Davenport, Omar Khadr; the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Tibet; the hon. member for Richmond Hill, Afghanistan.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak about the Conservative motion, which states: “That, pursuant to Standing Order 27(1), commencing on Monday, June 9, 2008,—that is today—and concluding on Thursday, June 19, 2008, the House shall continue to sit until 11:00 p.m.”

Mr. Steven Blaney: Agreed.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I heard the member for Lévis—Bellechasse say “agreed”. It would be fine to sit, but what has happened over the months that have gone by? What has happened in Parliament under the Conservative minority government? What will happen in the coming months?

If the bills are so important, as the Conservatives are saying, the government can guarantee that, if the motion is not passed, the House of Commons will not be prorogued. That means that in September we will come back to the House and continue to work. The Conservatives would not prorogue until October or November, as they have done before: a young government that came to power prorogued the House of Commons when we could have been debating bills.

This session, after the May break, our calendar shows four more weeks of work. Of these four weeks, two are reserved for the possibility of extended sitting hours here in the House of Commons. I cannot accept that the Conservatives are saying that we are a bunch of lazy people, and that we do not want to work, when this government has done everything possible since last August to ensure that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs could not operate.

It has been at least two or three months now since the committee last sat because the Conservatives have refused to appoint someone to chair it. The Conservatives decided that the matter submitted to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs was partisan, and that is why they are not replacing the chair.

I remember that we appointed a new chair, we voted for a new chair, but the chair never did call a meeting of the committee. The chair is being paid to carry that title, but he met with the members once, and then, it was only to adjourn. Is that not partisanship? When a party refuses to hold a public debate on things going on in Parliament or with political parties, that is partisanship.

As I recall, during the sponsorship scandal, it was fine for the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, which was chaired at the time by an opposition Conservative member, to hold hearings and discuss the sponsorship scandal.

But now that the Conservatives are the ones who spent \$18 million during the last election and shuffled money around to spend another \$1.5 million on top of that, well, they do not want to talk about it. They will not talk about it. When the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights was about to discuss another case, it was shut down again.

To this day, there are bills that have not been debated in committee. The Conservatives think that democracy should happen nowhere but in the House, and certainly not in committee. Parliamentary committees are an important part of our political system, our parliamentary system, our democracy. We were elected by the people in our ridings to come here and pass bills.

• (1635)

We cannot invite a member of the public to testify in the House of Commons, for example. We do not hear witnesses in the House of Commons. We have parliamentary committees where we can invite constituents or people from any part of the country to explain how a bill will affect them and to suggest ways to improve the bill.

For the Conservatives, the most important committee is the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. All they want to do is create justice bills. They would rather build prisons and put everyone in jail than adopt sound social programs to help people work and give them a fair chance in life. For the Conservatives, you either follow the straight and narrow path or you go to jail. These are the sorts of bills they are most interested in.

These are the sorts of bills they are most interested in, yet they brought the work of this committee to a standstill. The chair left the committee and said there would be no more meetings. Experts and members of the public are being prevented from talking to us about important justice bills. This evening, the Conservatives are asking to extend the sitting hours of the House of Commons until June 20 in order to discuss and pass these bills, because they are important. If we do not vote for these bills, then we are not good Canadians. That is in essence what they are saying. They do not want any debate.

They would have us believe that if we extend the sitting hours of the House of Commons every evening until June 20, there will be a terrific debate. We will debate these bills. We will have the opportunity to see democracy in action. At the same time, they have brought the work of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to a standstill. I have never seen such a thing in the 11 years I have been in the House of Commons. I have never seen such a thing.

I would go so far as to say that it has become a dictatorship. Everything originates from the Prime Minister's Office. So much so that, last week, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons complained that he was tired of rising in the House of Commons. He is the only one to stand up; the ministers do not even have the right to rise to answer questions. It is always the government House leader who answers questions. He was so tired one day last week that he knocked over his glass and spilled water on the Prime Minister. They should have thrown water on him to wake him up because he was tired. He himself told the House that he was tired.

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That shows the extent to which the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons as well as the Prime Minister's Office, and not the elected Conservative MPs, control the government's agenda. The MPs have nothing to say. There are also the little tricks of the Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip who told members how to behave in parliamentary committee meetings, which witnesses to invite and how to control them. If they are unable to control them they interrupt the meeting. I have never seen anything like it in the 11 years that I have been an MP.

I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages since 1998. We invited the minister to appear in order to help us with our work and she refused. She refused. She was asked in the House why she refused and she replied that she did not refuse. The committee was studying the Conservatives' action plan. If they wish to make an important contribution to communities throughout the country, there is an action plan to help Canada's official language minority communities—anglophones in Quebec and francophones in the rest of the country.

The action plan was being studied. We asked the minister to speak to us about the action plan so we could work with her. She refused and said she would appear after the plan was tabled. We will invite her again. I have never seen a minister refuse to help a committee.

• (1640)

We invited her again to the Standing Committee on Official Languages concerning the 2010 Olympic Games. The francophone community will not be able to watch the Olympic Games in French anywhere in the country because the contract, which was bid on by CTV, TQS and RDS, was awarded to CTV. We asked the minister to come to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Instead she said that it was not important for this country's francophones, and she declined. The communities have questions. This all happened in the fall.

This spring, at budget time, the Conservatives declared that money for the action plan or for official languages would come later. We are used to that. We receive an article in English and are told that the French will come later. That is what the budget reminded us of. The money will come later.

But people are waiting. They are wondering what will happen to their communities. People from Newfoundland and Labrador even came to speak to the committee. They told us that currently, minority language communities are having to use lines of credit or even credit cards to help the community. It would be interesting to hear the minister explain why the Conservatives are not giving that money to communities, as they should. They promised to help minority language communities.

I would like to come back to the environment. When we were supposed to be working on environmental issues, the Conservatives systematically obstructed this work for days. They said they had the right to do so. Indeed, they did have the right; that is no problem. We have done the same thing, we will admit. That is part of debate.

Someone came and asked me how we could stop this obstruction. I told that person that it was their right to obstruct and that, if they wanted to talk until the next day, they could. However, when that happens, the chair must not take sides.

Yet that is what happened at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We had to ask for the chair of the committee to step down. In fact, when we arrived at the committee meeting at 11 a.m., the Conservatives took the floor in order to filibuster and if one of them had to go to the bathroom, the chair adjourned the meeting for 10 minutes. That is no longer obstruction. When we asked the chair if it was going to continue after 1 p.m., he told us to wait until 1 p.m. to find out. Then, at 1 p.m., he decided to adjourn the meeting.

We have been trying since August to discuss the problem of the Conservatives, who had exceeded the \$1.5 million spending limit allowed during the last election campaign. The problem with the Conservatives is that they want to hide everything from Canadians. They spoke of transparency, but they wanted to hide from Canadians all their misdeeds. When they were on the opposition benches, they counted on this, especially during the Liberal sponsorship scandal. I remember that and the questions they asked in the House of Commons and in parliamentary committee. They did not hold back.

But they do not want that to happen to them. And if it does, they try to hide it. That is why they did not allow a parliamentary committee to discuss the problems they had created, such as the story with Cadman, our former colleague. His wife said today that her husband told her that he was promised \$1 million if he voted with the Conservatives. She never said that was not true; she said that was what in fact was said. Her own daughter said the same thing, that promises had been made. The Conservatives are saying that no one has the right to speak about that. Only they had that right when they were in the opposition, but not us. They are acting like gods and we have to listen to everything they say.

Today, they are moving a motion asking us to listen to them. And yet, when the House leaders and the whips met in committee there was nothing on the agenda. I have never seen the like. The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons was even asked if there was anything else on the agenda. He just smirked. He was mocking us and today he wants us to cooperate with him. The Conservatives are saying that they are here to work, but they have blocked all the work of the House of Commons for the past six months.

• (1645)

And they are lecturing us?

[English]

When the House leader of the Conservative Party tries to give us a lesson and says that we do not want to work, but they are here to work, I cannot believe it.

We have a committee that does not even sit right now. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has not sat for the last two or three months. The Conservatives do not want to hear what they perhaps have done wrong. If they have nothing to hide, they should have let it go ahead.

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The Conservatives said that if they were to be investigated by Elections Canada, they wanted all parties to be investigated. Elections Canada did not say that all the parties were wrong. It said that the Conservative Party had broken the rules of Elections Canada by spending over the limit of \$18 million. It was the Conservative Party that did that. Right away the Conservatives filed a lawsuit against Elections Canada. Now they say we should not talk about that in the House of Commons.

Every time we went to the House leader meeting and the whip meeting, they had nothing on the agenda. The Conservatives say that they are very democratic. They want a big debate in the House of Commons on bills. Bill C-54, Bill C-56, Bill C-19, Bill C-43, Bill C-14, Bill C-32, Bill C-45, Bill C-46, Bill C-39, Bill C-57 and Bill C-22 are all at second reading.

I will not go into detail about what each and every bill is, but even if we say yes to the government, we will be unable to get through those bills. If we want to get through those bills, it will be the PMO and the Prime Minister's way. The Conservatives bring bills to the House and say that members opposite should vote with them. If we do not vote, they say that we are against them. That is the way they do it, no debate.

The debate, as I said in French, should not only take place in the House of Commons; it should to take place in parliamentary committees. That is the only place where Canadians have the right to come before the committees to express themselves. That is the only place people who are experts can come before us to talk about bills, so we can make the bills better.

When a bill is put in place, it may not be such a good bill, but maybe it is a bill that could go in the right direction if all parties work on it. If we put our hands to it, perhaps it can become a good bill. We could talk to experts, who could change our minds, and maybe we could put some new stuff in the bill.

However, no, the Conservatives got rid of the most important committee that would deal with the bills in which they were interested, and that was the justice committee.

I may as well use the words I have heard from the Conservatives. They say that we are lazy. How many times did we say at committee that we would look after the agenda, that there were certain things we wanted to talk about, for example, Election Canada and the in and out scheme? At the same time, we said we were ready to meet on Wednesdays and we could meet on other days as well to discuss bills.

We proposed all kinds of agenda, and I dare any colleague from the Conservative Party to say we did not do that. We have proposed an agenda where we could meet on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and the Conservatives refused.

Mr. Joe Preston: You threw the chairman out.

Mr. Yvon Godin: My colleague said that we threw the chair out. Yes, because he was partisan. The reason for that is because he allowed the same member to talk only until 1 o'clock and he should have been allowed to talk until 2 o'clock the next day. That is what filibustering is.

However, the Conservatives have a different definition of filibustering. Their way of filibustering is when a person needs to go to the washroom, they let him go. If he is hungry, they let them have his sandwich. When it comes time to go to question period, they let him go and then they let him go home to have a break. That is not filibustering. That is why he was thrown out. It was not the way the PMO wanted it. It was not the way the Conservative whip wanted it.

The way the PMO runs this place is unacceptable to us. We will not vote with the Conservatives to extend the hours when they sat on their bums for the last six months and did nothing.

• (1650)

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I only wish I could have the amount of passion the member for Acadie—Bathurst has shown. He is well known for his passion. The people back home will want to know that it is warm here in Ottawa today, but that is the member's natural colour. I will see if I can get worked up to the same level.

I must correct a couple of things the member mentioned during his speech. In his passion he may have overstepped where the truth ends and something else begins.

From a filibuster point of view, we were ready, willing and able. The member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre filibustered for many hours at the procedure and House affairs committee. The member for Acadie—Bathurst seems to think that what is good for one is only good for the other if it matches the same thing. When the NDP filibusters, that is fine, but when we want to state our point, then we are somehow going beyond the rules.

The member for Cambridge, who was the chair of the procedure and House affairs committee, in my opinion, bent over backward to keep things on an even keel and to keep things going in the proper manner. The member spoke about that committee no longer functioning. I will tell him why. The member for Acadie—Bathurst and other members of the opposition threw the chair out.

They talk about democracy. At that same meeting the member for Acadie—Bathurst stood up and challenged for democracy. He and other members voted to put another member in as chair, and I know that member well. It was me. They did this over my own objections. I told them that I did not want to be chair because we had a perfectly good chair. Apparently in this place even when one does not want a job, for example, if a member does not want to be chair of a committee, opposition members can gang up and appoint the member anyway. Then those members wonder why committees come to a halt with that kind of performance.

Is that democracy?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question, if he had a question.

If we want to look at democracy, we were a committee, and according to the rules, committees are their own masters. After we put our confidence in the member, he did not have confidence in himself. That was not our fault. One thing he did though is he took the job and he took the pay as chair of a committee.

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Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I believe that is the second time the member has said that. I did not take money for being chair of that committee. I think that is a huge injustice to me—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. There is quite a lot of noise going back and forth. The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London wants to make a point of order.

• (1655)

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, that is the second time the member has said that I took money for being the chair of the committee. As we all know, when one is appointed, or in this case handcuffed and made to be chair of a committee, payments start to happen automatically. I immediately refused them and paid them back. I took no money for being chair of that committee because I was shanghaied into the job. That is twice—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): That is not quite a point of order, but I appreciate the hon. member clearing up that point.

If the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst wants to conclude his remarks on this question, we will take another question.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I will apologize, Mr. Speaker, but when I asked him, he said he was enjoying it. That is why I said it. Instead of saying he was resigning his position as chair, he said that he was adjourning the meeting. He left us out of the loop. We had to request a meeting with four people signing, and then he resigned. In all this time the government has refused to replace the chair. Now the government wants us to sit night after night to discuss bills it did not want to discuss, and the Conservatives say that we are not ready to work. We are ready to work.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the points made by the member and others about committee difficulties are quite valid.

One aspect I have noticed, and I think it is really problematic, is the government's approach to its legislation. It calls bills for debate at second reading. A boilerplate speech is given that gives very little information and then no other government members speak to the bill. It does not give hon. members an opportunity to question members of the government to get details.

Second reading is an important stage of the legislative process. It is a debate during which we decide whether we are going to give approval in principle to legislation. The government totally ignores its own legislation, tells us we can talk all we want, but it wants a vote. The government makes everything a confidence issue if we happen to blink.

The thing that really bothered me was the government House leader saying that members just come here to collect a paycheque and then go on vacation. That is an insult to members of Parliament. The vast majority of members of this place work very hard and when the House is not sitting, members continue to work very hard. I think the member would agree.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I totally agree. I did not take this job to sit you know where and not work. I say without question that all members do work.

To say what the government House leader said shows the lack of respect the Conservatives have for this House and all members of

Parliament. How many times when the Prime Minister was in opposition said that the government of the day was not respecting the wishes of the House?

The changes to the immigration act should not be in a money bill. Those changes should not be in Bill C-50, but the government has put those changes in a money bill in order to say it is a vote of confidence, it is the Conservatives' way or the highway. That is what is wrong. The Conservatives do not get it. They are in a minority government situation. The Conservatives should respect that but they do not. They should understand that. The Conservatives should work with the opposition parties.

In many countries in the world there are minority governments and they work better than the minority government under the Conservatives does here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that I thought the speech by the member for Acadie—Bathurst was amusing, but also very real and realistic. I do not think we have ever seen such a controlling government, or a government whose ministers answered so few questions. It is rare to receive a response to a question. There is a lot of amateurism. Yes, with this government, democracy has gone out the window.

The member said that the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages did not want to meet with the committee members. The weakness of the minister is clear, and it is evident that she is not familiar with her files. Once again today, she sent a letter to all of our colleagues in the House to say that the founding of Quebec City was the founding of Canada. She does not know her history at all. She does not know Canadian history. She does not know her files. A number of government ministers do not know their files.

I think we need to put an end to this farce. This circus cannot go on. The public has told us that they think this is a circus. We should not extend our debates.

• (1700)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Terrebonne—Blainville for her statement. However, I do not agree with her that my speech was amusing. I do not think this is in any way amusing.

In a democracy, when we sit here in the House and we represent one or more groups of people, things have to be done democratically. Here in the House, we should be able to study bills properly and to do so in good faith.

Routine Proceedings

I believe that the government is not acting in good faith. The Conservatives show up here with a bunch of bills, but they shut down parliamentary committees. I sat down with them to figure out what could be done, but they want things done their way or not at all. We cannot even discuss these things with them.

Today, they are asking us to work late and they are telling us that we do not want to work late. Personally, tonight, I am going to be calling people in my riding because something is rotten in Canada, people are losing their jobs and they want to collect employment insurance. This evening, we will be voting on a bill about the \$54 billion stolen from working men and women. Here is what I am going to do this evening. I am going to work for my people. This is not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my question will be straightforward, since my colleague, as usual, explained things very clearly and very eloquently.

Everyone realizes that the Conservatives are suddenly looking for a consensus. Indeed, they are looking for cooperation, although, from the beginning—even as far back as the previous session—they have been remarkably and unpleasantly arrogant.

In addition to my colleague's remarks concerning committees, I am regularly struck by two other things, that is, this government's refusal of requests for take note debates. The parties, their party as well as the other parties, have had to ask for emergency debates, instead of coming to an agreement. If I am not using the correct term, someone will correct me, but they had to ask to hold debates in the evening to discuss important issues—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, but there is not enough time for the second question.

The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst has only 30 seconds to give his response.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, in 30 seconds I can say that I agree with the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. How many times did we ask to work in the evening to hold take note debates to talk about the farmers who are facing poverty, the fishermen who are facing poverty and the closures of paper mills, causing thousands of jobs to be lost? The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons always refused our requests, with a simple “no” and without any explanation. It was simply “no, no”—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader has the floor.

[*English*]

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 know my time is limited so I will try to refrain from going into the hyperbole that we have

heard from the hon. member from the NDP. I want to stick to the facts in the limited time that I do have.

The facts are simply these. Since 1982, every single year we have had extended sitting hours at the end of the session before we rise for the summer. I would also point out that in the 26 years since the Standing Orders have been changed to reflect the fact that the government House leader can introduce a motion to extend sitting hours, it has passed. During those 26 years we have had a series of governments, sometimes minority but also a number of majority governments.

The reason that is germane to this conversation, in my estimation, is that in a majority government, that government can basically pass whatever legislation it wants. It has the votes in the House. There is going to be no opportunity for the opposition to really stonewall a bill if the government of the day wants to get it passed. Yet even in a majority situation, during those years of majority governments, the House had extended sitting hours. What does that say? Quite simply it says this. Under no circumstances have I ever seen in the last 26 years any government, whether it be minority or majority, come to the end of the spring session with an opportunity to pass all the legislation that is introduced in that session. That is why we need additional sitting hours.

The opposition is trying to make the case—and let me make it perfectly clear that it is not a reason, it is an excuse—that our government has somehow delayed passage of bills purposely, that we have somehow obfuscated in committees on legislation. That is simply not true. Again, I point out that if a majority government needs extended sitting hours, that means this is something that should be taken seriously. Unfortunately we have a situation here after moving the same motion that has passed for 26 straight years, that every opposition party in this place is now saying, “No, we do not want to sit the additional hours. We do not want to deal with the legislation that is on the government's agenda”.

Why is that? It can only be one of two reasons: one, they want to get out of here early and they do not want to do the work; or two, all they are trying to do is obfuscate and delay with petty politics the government's attempt to bring legislation forward and get it passed in the House. There can be no other reason.

I wish I had more time, but just for a moment, I want to point out a number of inaccuracies that all members of the opposition have brought forward today in this debate in talking about delays in committees. I had been a member of the procedure and House affairs committee. It is true that that committee has not met for a number of months now, but it is simply not true that it was because of delaying tactics by the government. The facts are this. The opposition parties put forward a motion at the procedure and House affairs committee to examine the in and out advertising, what they call, scheme of the Conservative Party in the last election.

Originally the Law Clerk of the House of Commons rendered an opinion and said that the motion is outside the scope and the mandate of the committee, that it should not be presented and should not be received. The chair of the procedure and House affairs committee ruled accordingly. He said, “That motion is out of order”. At that point in time the opposition parties combined to overturn the ruling of the chair.

Routine Proceedings

I would suggest that if the Law Clerk of the House of Commons examines a motion and deems it to be out of order, that ruling should be respected. Our chairperson respected that ruling. He made his ruling according to the opinion of the Law Clerk and yet from there things went straight downhill. The opposition parties disagreed. They overturned the chair's ruling and ultimately kicked the chairperson out of that committee. The only reason was for petty politics.

• (1705)

I have heard a number of times this afternoon the opposition members say that when the Conservative Party was in opposition, it did the same thing with the sponsorship scandal investigation. I beg to differ.

The Auditor General of Canada in her report first identified the problem which ultimately lent itself to the biggest political scandal we have seen in the history of this country. Because the Auditor General, an officer of Parliament, made a report, that gave the public accounts committee the perfect to right to say it wanted to investigate the charges that the Auditor General has levied.

What do we have in this case with procedure and House affairs? There is a dispute between Elections Canada and the Conservative Party. Did the Auditor General reference that? No. Did the Law Clerk say it would be appropriate and in order to investigate that, to discuss that at committee? No. So, we have absolutely apples and oranges here in comparison to what the opposition is trying to say.

An investigation into the sponsorship scandal at the public accounts committee was completely in order. Even the Law Clerk of this House agreed it was because the issue was first raised by the Auditor General in her annual report. The issues that the opposition members are trying to investigate have never been raised in such a fashion. As we all know, the opposition Liberal Party, particularly, has been trying to create scandals where none exist. The only reason the Liberals are trying to delay Parliament's work is because they want to concentrate on imaginary scandals rather than do the nation's business.

I want to say that for the first time in 26 years we have combined opposition parties refusing to sit late to deal with the nation's business. Not only is that disgraceful and unconscionable, eventually the members in opposition will have to answer to the electorate why they do not want to do the work that the nation sent them here to do.

• (1710)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:12 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 27(2) it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

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:

• (1735)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 141)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Albrecht
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Baird
Benoit	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Boucher	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Comuzzi
Cummins	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Goldring	Goodyear
Grewal	Guergis
Hanger	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hiebert	Hill
Hinton	Jaffer
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Khan	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Lemieux	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mark
Mayes	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Paradis	Petit
Poillievre	Prentice
Preston	Rajotte
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shipley
Skelton	Solberg
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Van Kesteren

Routine Proceedings

Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson

Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Yelich— 114

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Angus
Atamanenko
Bagnell
Barbot
Bélanger
Bellavance
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Blais
Bonsant
Bouchard
Brisson
Brunelle
Cardin
Casey
Chow
Comartin
Crowder
Cuzner
Davies
Deschamps
Dhaliwal
Dion
Dryden
Easter
Folco
Gagnon
Godfrey
Goodale
Guimond
Hubbard
Jennings
Kadis
Karygiannis
Laforest
Lavallée
Lee
Lessard
Lussier
Malhi
Marleau
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Mathysen
McDonough
McGuire
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Minna
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau
Neville
Paquette
Plamondon
Proulx
Redman
Rodriguez
Roy
Savage
Scott
Siksay
Simard
St. Amand
Steckle
Stronach
Temelkovski
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Tonks
Turner
Vincent
Wasylcyia-Leis
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André
Asselin
Bachand
Bains
Barnes
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bennett
Bevington
Black
Bonin
Boshcoff
Bourgeois
Brown (Oakville)
Byrne
Carrier
Charlton
Christopherson
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
D'Amours
Demers
Dewar
Dhalla
Dosanjh
Duceppe
Eyking
Fry
Gaudet
Godin
Guarnieri
Holland
Ignatieff
Julian
Karetak-Lindell
Keeper
Laframboise
Layton
Lemay
Lévesque
MacAulay
Maloney
Marston
Masse
McCallum
McGuinty
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mulcair
Murray
Nash
Pacetti
Picard
Priddy
Ratansi
Regan
Rota
Russell
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Silva
St-Cyr
St. Denis
Stoffer
Szabo
Thi Lac
Valley
Wappel
Wilfert

PAIRED

Members

Ablonczy
Bernier
Gourde
Lalonde
Ouellet

Batters
Faille
Guay
Manning
St-Hilaire— 10

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to yet again present an income trust broken promise petition on behalf of a number of constituents from my riding of Mississauga South.

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts, but he recklessly broke that promise when he imposed a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of the hard earned savings of over 2 million Canadians, mostly seniors.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon the Conservative minority government: first, to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions as shown at the finance committee; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

DARFUR

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to enter a petition into the record which states that Canada must act to stop the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. Since 2003 over 400,000 people have lost their lives and 2.5 million have been displaced. We have a prosperous country and it is time for us to stand up for these people. The petitioners call upon the government to encourage the international community, in whatever way necessary, to end these atrocities.

● (1740)

UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition that expresses profound concern regarding Bill C-484, the proposed unborn victims of crime act, and states that it conflicts with the Criminal Code because it grants a type of legal personhood to fetuses, which would necessarily compromise women's established rights.

Violence against women is part of a larger societal problem and it is everywhere. Fetal homicide laws elsewhere have done nothing to reduce this violence because they do not address the root causes of inequality that perpetuate the violence against women. The best way to protect fetuses is to provide pregnant women with the support and resources they need for a good pregnancy outcome, including protection from domestic violence. The petitioners ask that the Government of Canada reject Bill C-484.

S. O. 52

DARFUR

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, sadly, and to emphasize the petition we just heard on Darfur, I am presenting another petition on Darfur, with signatures collected by Canadians for Action in Darfur from the people of Ottawa, who are asking us to stop the humanitarian crisis. As was just said, 400,000 people have been killed since 2003 and 2.5 million have been ripped from their homes.

Canada has a responsibility to work with the international community to end this atrocity. The signatories want the government to know that each signature on the petition represents 100 innocent dead citizens of Darfur.

NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this petition in regard to Bill C-51 is from about 100 residents of the West Kootenays. Their petition says that 70% of Canadians currently use natural health products, that they do not wish to have natural health products in the same category as pharmaceuticals, and that they want to use their right to free choice as to whether they use natural health products or drugs to maintain wellness.

Therefore, they call upon Parliament to vote against Bill C-51 as it is written and to protect their rights as consumers of natural health products.

IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition regarding family reunification that I would like to lay before the House.

DARFUR

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today with two petitions regarding the issue of the continued humanitarian abuses that are taking place in Darfur. Since 2003 over 400,000 people have been killed and 2.5 million displaced. Horror stories like this should not exist. It is our responsibility to lead the abolishment of the despair, rape and death that currently plague this particular region of the world.

I am proud to present these petitions to the Department of Foreign Affairs with the hope that the government will encourage and participate in all necessary measures to end this crisis once and for all.

ANIMAL CRUELTY LEGISLATION

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been asked to submit a petition to the House to strengthen animal transportation regulations. The petitioners say that transportation times in Canada are among the longest in the industrialized world and are not consistent with scientific findings on animal welfare during transport, and that animals become injured and diseased during transport. They are calling upon the House of Commons to amend the animal transport regulations to be consistent with EU scientific findings on animal health and welfare.

UNBORN VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we continue to receive petitions, name after name, day

after day, supporting Bill C-484. These petitioners recognize that pregnant women who have decided to bring their pregnancy to term and have a child actually deserve protection in law for that choice. The most poignant part of their petition is that they ask that injuring or killing an unborn baby during a violent act be a criminal offence.

I am very pleased to present these petitions, which today come mostly from the town of Estevan in Saskatchewan.

* * *

● (1745)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

WEST COAST SALMON FISHERY

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member Vancouver Island North. I would be pleased to hear her argument on this subject at this moment.

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as you know, I have sent you a letter advising that I would be seeking an emergency debate on the west coast Pacific salmon. The reason I am doing so is that I have tried to get a take note debate on the subject but that was not possible.

On the west coast, salmon are in trouble. If we do not act quickly, we are at risk of losing many species, especially the Chinook, Coho and Sockeye.

I am asking for this debate after speaking with many of the stakeholders who fish this once great and abundant resource. They are all saying the same thing: "Help". They are asking for help from the government to protect fish habitat, enforce regulations, and learn about and protect the health of the ocean.

Salmon are the canary in the coal mine of our oceans. Many other species depend on them for survival, including bears and whales. For thousands of years, first nations have relied on salmon. Now they are being asked to ration their catch.

The economy of our west coast communities will also feel the pain. Given the current downturn in the forest sector, it might well be the tipping point for many of our coastal communities, which are struggling not to become ghost towns.

Just yesterday we celebrated Oceans Day, but with 70% of the world's fisheries in decline, including our salmon, it is truly an emergency and not much to celebrate.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your careful consideration of this request and look forward to an opportunity to raise awareness of the declining Pacific salmon.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for her intervention. I acknowledge that this has been an ongoing crisis, if I can use that word, for some time in terms of fish stocks, but I note that in her letter she stated that “Canadian and American negotiators... worked out changes to the Pacific Salmon Treaty that will reduce the commercial Chinook salmon fishery off the west coast of Vancouver Island for conservation efforts”. Efforts are being made.

I have heard her submissions. I am aware somewhat of the situation and certainly aware of its seriousness, but I am not sure that it meets the exigencies of the Standing Order in constituting an emergency at this time. Accordingly, I decline the request at this time.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-51, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is fair to say that Bill C-51 has attracted a fair bit of attention. We have been debating it again today.

Bill C-51 is an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts. Needless to say, the Food and Drugs Act definitely needs updating. It is an old act. It goes back to about 1934. It has had a few tweaks along the way, but certainly it is time for some updates to the Food and Drugs Act.

There are some good provisions in the bill, that is for sure, including life cycle monitoring of pharmaceutical drugs and mandatory reporting of adverse events. These are very positive things that need to be done because there are serious concerns about these products.

The public response overwhelmingly on the negative side has been over concerns about what will happen to the natural health products industry under the regulations.

In illustrating some of those concerns, I wish to make reference to a letter that I received recently from a number of very distinguished and concerned scientists, which illustrates the concerns that are out there. I received this letter on May 4. It is a copy of a letter to the minister and states:

We, the undersigned, are physicians, scientists and practitioners of international origin with considerable experience in the use of natural health products. We are gathered in Vancouver at the Fairmont Hotel to attend the 37th Annual International Conference on Orthomolecular Medicine...

We are most concerned that the Bill will lead to loss of access to valuable food supplements and other nutritional products for our patients and for many others, who have often found such products to be essential in maintaining their health.

Government Orders

Another point they make is this:

Nutritional products are qualitatively different from pharmaceutical products and carry an undetectably small risk of harm....

They provide a reference from the journals about that. They continue:

There are therefore no grounds to impose on them the same risk-benefit analysis structure that is proposed for all therapeutic products under this bill.

The majority of organizations and commercial bodies operating in the natural product field are run by individuals or are small businesses. The regulatory hurdles proposed will be too high for many of them to achieve, and the penalties proposed for infringements of this bill are grossly disproportionate and unnecessarily severe.

They go on to state:

We are also concerned at the potential impact on the regulatory climate in our own countries, given the international trend to harmonization.

We encourage your department to open dialogue with our Canadian colleagues in the hope we can find a workable solution.

This letter is signed by scientists from around the world. They are from the Netherlands, Japan, the United States, Finland and Norway. There is a PhD neurochemist from the U.S.A. Others are from Switzerland, Spain, Mexico, and other countries. There is Professor Harold Foster, PhD, from Victoria.

I use this only by way of illustration. This discussion we are having in Canada about Bill C-51 to amend the Food and Drugs Act is being noticed by health care practitioners from other countries. They are concerned about the impact it will have on regulations in their own countries.

One of the points they raised at the end is that they encourage the department to “open dialogue with our Canadian colleagues in the hope we can find a workable solution”.

I know that since the bill has been introduced most of my colleagues here in the House have had a fair bit of representation from concerned citizens. I am sure that most members have heard from constituents. At the latest count in my office, I have had 380 responses raising concerns about the bill. I am sure that others have had dozens if not hundreds of representations and I know there has been a fair bit of concern and discussion.

In response to that, the Minister of Health has launched some consultations with industry across the country. The minister and his team were out in Vancouver for consultations and in Toronto and other major centres as they consulted with industry leaders about how to remedy the concerns that are out there. I know that he is working on some amendments and I look forward to seeing them presented in the House shortly.

At this second reading stage of the bill, it is certainly not possible for the minister to introduce amendments, but I understand that there will be a forthcoming indication of some amendments that our government members will bring forward at the health committee if and when the legislation passes second reading.

Government Orders

•(1750)

Therefore, I welcome those amendments. I look forward to what I understand will include an attempt to create a legislative third category. That is something that people have been interested in. That is one of the major concerns that have been expressed and there will be other substantial amendments to alleviate the way the bill would be applied as well as to clarify concerns that have been raised. We look forward to those amendments coming forward and being able to go over in detail what those changes mean.

The minister stated that it is not his nor the government's intention to restrict natural health product availability in Canada. I am sure and I have every reason to believe that he is very sincere in making those statements. I have no reason not to believe him or the government in their intentions.

The problem is that, given the history of actions by Health Canada over the past several years, the increased powers and the changes proposed by Bill C-51 give informed Canadians a very great cause for concern. In that regard, I would like to review some of the history and illustrate a couple of the concerns related to the bill as it stands.

Going back over at least four previous health ministers, there was an effort to regulate natural health products as drugs under the Food and Drugs Act. By the way, I think everyone recognized that there was a need to bring in regulations for natural health products. Everyone wants to make sure that we have good manufacturing practices, we need office inspections and some quality control measures there, and we certainly want to make sure that what is on the label is actually in the bottle.

So, certainly regulation is necessary. Everyone is in support of regulation. It is the type of regulation that is being considered here and the concerns about whether those regulations are appropriate for the low risk and the natural character of these products. By nature they are low risk, they are low cost, they are non-patentable items, they are more akin to food, concentrated food items, vitamins, minerals, amino acids, which are components of protein, and that is the stuff we are made out of, and therefore by nature it is low risk and well tolerated in biological systems.

Going back through a bit of the history, there was a huge public response out of the attempt by former minister David Dingwall to regulate natural health products as drugs. It was followed up by Allan Rock. Allan Rock, as minister, put the brakes on the process and commissioned the health committee to investigate and produce a report. There were widespread consultations and a report was tabled in 1998, making some 53 recommendations.

That was followed by the creation of a transition team of experts. Some 17 experts came together to try to organize how would this new office of natural health products come together and what form it would take. They made recommendations that were published in a report in the year 2000.

I note that the transition team, in their report, had a vision that they articulated there. They hoped that the minister would be a champion for a new era for NHPs, natural health products; that vitamins and minerals would take their place in improving the health of Canadians and the health care system in Canada, that the minister would be a champion for helping natural health products find their way to taking

their rightful place in strengthening Canadians, improving prevention of disease, promoting wellness, and helping keep people off the waiting lists that are so troubling to anyone trying to access health services for serious health failures.

In the 37th Parliament I introduced Bill C-420 which was to move the natural health products department office, which changed names from the office of the ONHP to the natural health product directorate, under the food side of regulations. So we had food and drugs, and we would take it from the drug side and move it under the food side because it was more akin to foods than it was to drugs.

That bill died when the election of June 2004 was called and it reappeared in the 38th Parliament with the help of my colleague, the member for Oshawa, who tabled the bill and we got agreement to keep the name.

The outcome of that was that NHPs were placed not where we wanted them under food, but they remained as a subclass under the drug side of the regulations. So, this is where we are since that day.

•(1755)

Currently, natural health products are regulated as a subclass of drugs for regulatory purposes, although they have their own regulations. That has been the status since 2006. When we started this process there were some 50,000 to 60,000 products on the market. What has been happening in the interim is that there are about 6,000 products that have been approved.

I notice the member for Yukon, who is still with us in the debate, in his speech earlier mentioned there were some 33,000 to 40,000 products backlogged and that is probably accurate. There are about 6,000 that have gone through the approval process of that huge number that were out there a few years ago.

About half of the products applying do not make it through the regulatory process. A lot of good products are dropping off the shelves in Canada under the current regulatory regime. Those that are approved are the simple ones. They are single monograph products, not the combined products. Many of the more effective well-known and popular remedies that are out there are multi-ingredient products. Most of those have not even started into the process yet. So a lot of products are not making it through.

Complicating it further is the fact that many good products that come from outside the country from the United States, for example, are not being shipped into Canada because the producers find the regulatory regime is too onerous and the market is too small. They have just stopped shipping their product to Canada, so we are losing products that way. That is the current situation.

Government Orders

People in the industry are frustrated at the lengthy delays in receiving an NPN and lengthy requests for more information. It seems products like Red Bull or an energy drink gets an NPN fairly readily. They will never have a hope of impacting anybody's health, but they might give people a kick or a little better high, or keep them awake if they are mixed, as some young people do, with alcohol which we would not recommend. We would end up with a drunk who is a little more alert.

Those products seem to make it through the regulatory process in a flash, but natural health products that could have a real impact on serious illnesses seem to be having a hard time getting through.

I want to return to the letter from the scientist. Speaking at a conference just a month ago, so we are not talking ancient history, Dr. Bonnie Kaplan from the University of Calgary spoke about her experience with the product Empowerplus. I know others in the House have mentioned this product already and probably most members have some knowledge of this vitamin and mineral product produced in Alberta. It had a profound impact on people with bipolar disease.

This product attracted some attention in Alberta. The government of Alberta said whoa, there is a huge problem, a lot of people seem to be taking this. It had the Alberta Science and Research Authority examine the product and it commissioned a study at the University of Calgary with some \$544,000 in funding. The initial results were very promising. In fact, there were some four peer review articles published.

About this time, Health Canada moved in to shut down the study under the regulations of the day. It called on the RCMP to raid the company and contact 3,000 Canadians, and order them back on their psychiatric drugs even though many of them were taking the product with the knowledge of their physician and many of them had been well for years by simply taking vitamins and minerals.

I want to use that as an illustration of why people are alarmed at the regulations in Bill C-51. It is not simply what is in the bill, it is the behaviour of the department in the last number of years that has people alarmed. Given the tools that are in Bill C-51, it is concerns that with the wrong attitude this could ensure that a lot of very good products will never see the light of day in our country given this response. I mentioned: thousands of Canadians were taking the product, the Alberta response, the early results, and that Health Canada shut down the study, and sent in the RCMP.

Just to go on with Empowerplus for a minute, there was a researcher from Harvard, Dr. Charles Popper, a world renowned psychopharmacologist. He testified at a court case just after the last election. I unfortunately missed it, but I did read his testimony. He testified that he learned how to help people get off drugs from the lay people in this company who have accumulated a lot of experience trying to help people with their condition by taking these vitamins, minerals and amino-acids, and improving their mental health.

I wish members could have been there to hear testimony from a woman named Sabina from Renfrew. She had been on psychiatric drugs for 18 years and in spite of that, in and out of hospital.

● (1800)

Sadly, with the condition she was afflicted with, when she was not trying to take her own life, she was trying to take her husband's life. She had been on vitamins a year and a half, when I met her, and had not had a single failure. That is something that, I think, would attract some attention. Some people may say this is helping, although it is anecdotal evidence, but she was one of about 3,000 Canadians who had improved.

By the time I met her, a year and a half after taking these products, she was no longer trying to kill herself. She was working and paying taxes. I have to admit as a Conservative, I like that. She is also volunteering. She is not on the high needs list but back out in society and producing. When I saw her at the court case, where she testified for this company against Health Canada, she had lost 60 pounds, was off all her medication, and taking nothing but vitamins.

The company she worked for was so impressed with her that it sent her to get a university degree and she is volunteering to train horses on the side. She is a tremendously productive lady, a lady with a tremendous sense of humour. I wish everyone could meet her.

I wish everyone could have met no less than the former deputy prime minister of Norway when he was in Ottawa. He came to meet with Health Canada officials about this product because he had a child that was out of control and nobody in Norway had been able to help him. He heard about this product and ordered it for his child. His child improved so much that he wanted to import this product to help other people in Norway, but he could not because there was a warning on the Health Canada website, which is still there to this day, that says this is an untested and dangerous product. Therefore, even with his connections, he was not able to import the product.

When I had lunch with him, he was later scheduled to meet with Health Canada officials. When they found out why he was here, they cancelled his appointment. It seems, sadly, that no one at Health Canada was willing to meet with Sabina or with this gentleman or with thousands of Canadians. The minister of the day was not willing to meet with them.

Everyone taking the product was concerned when Health Canada was trying to shut down this product at the border because the minister of the day had the attitude or the approach that this was an untested. The minister said, "It could be thalidomide".

That is disappointing, but that kind of attitude seems to be what is prevailing at Health Canada, even to this day, and that is why people are concerned about the implications in the bill. This is the same Health Canada that could be handed extraordinary and, some might say, draconian provisions by the bill.

There are some concerns. People would like to know that the vision of the transition team would come to pass and that the regulatory regime would be a friendly one that helps natural health products, which by nature are low risk, become more available.

Government Orders

One of the concerns is subsection 15.1(4), which says simply that the minister has the power to put any product or class of products under prescription only status. The challenge is simply that vitamins and minerals, nutritional products, amino-acids are what we are made of. They have always been in the public domain, but under the powers in the bill the minister could simply move something from the natural health product class over to a drug class in certain potencies. The minister has those powers. That is one concern.

Another concern is in regard to clinical trials. The bill says that clinical trials must be approved for designated therapeutic products. We depend on most of the research on natural health products to understand how they work. We found out a little while ago that vitamin D has a big impact on people with multiple sclerosis and now the recommendation is that we should be taking vitamin D to reduce a whole host of other conditions, including many cancers.

We are concerned about the availability of these products. University research could be put at risk. Some would argue that universities could be asked if they applied for a clinical trial for basic research.

Finally, the definition of government has people concerned. I will finish with this simple remark. The government, under this definition, could be another international government or agency that could bring in regulations from the World Health Organization or Codex, for example, and impose them on the Canadian public without due consideration or consultation here at home. Those are some of the concerns.

• (1805)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, constituents in my riding of Newton—North Delta have many concerns. They are very worried.

I had the opportunity to meet a couple in their seventies, Adella and Richard Matthews. When they came to my office, they expressed concern that when they go to doctors now, they have to wait two hours. They are worried that if this legislation goes through, they will not be able to obtain the products they have been using successfully for the last 30 years, which are helping their health. Their health will deteriorate and they will lose the chance of using those products.

How would the member address the concern of those constituents who think that these natural health products will go under prescription and will not be available to them at a reasonable cost?

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the concern raised by the member for Newton—North Delta.

Many Canadians are concerned. Recent statistics tell us about 71% of Canadians are taking some form of vitamins and minerals regularly. I suppose that is because they believe it makes a difference, and it is good advice. In my opinion, we should be taking something.

The problem seems to come from Health Canada's long-standing approach that people should not be allowed to what it calls self-diagnose or self-treat for what it wants to define as serious disease.

That attitude itself may be the root of the problem. It seems the attitude may be a bias that is as old as the Food and Drugs Act itself.

It may be an entrenched bias. I use the word "bias" to simply mean it is our world view. I suppose we all have a bias. I suppose the only people who do not have a bias are the ones who have not thought about something long enough to form an opinion.

My point is there seems to be a problem with the way the thinking has been in the past in Health Canada. I hope we can see this change, that a different vision could be accomplished. It may be that our minister will become the champion the transition team has looked for, someone who would like to see natural products take their rightful place.

However, it is an attitude. Some people think we should be unable to get help without medical supervision, such as somebody takes Empowerplus for mental health, which is a serious illness, and the fact that vitamins and minerals, which by and large are in the public domain, would help them with that problem.

The challenge is this approach has left us with a problem that is still getting worse. Here we see something that is offering great promise from the public domain, vitamins and minerals helping to sort out a biochemical problem. Maybe we need to freshen our outlook and ensure we have people in charge of the regulations and a perspective that protects the interests of the public to ensure we investigate, analyze and study the things that are most hopeful.

A tremendous number of articles have come out about vitamin D. Just yesterday there was another article in the newspapers about vitamin D and calcium reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes.

For chocolate lovers in the room today, there was an article in the same paper yesterday, which said that chocolate had Tryptophan in it. This is an amino acid that Health Canada took off the market for a while. Tryptophan is an amino acid found in turkey and chicken soup, but it is important in producing Serotonin, which is important in regulating mood and reducing anxiety. All the anti-depressant drugs, or many of them, are selected Serotonin reuptake inhibitors, SSUI, so we do not break down the Serotonin and it makes us feel better.

A simple thing like chocolate, or Tryptophan, an amino acid, if we have enough of it in our system, helps to calm people down. Maybe we should try to ensure those are more available rather than less available.

• (1810)

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I congratulate the hon. member and express to the House how much we all appreciate the wisdom he brings. He has obviously been on this issue for many years.

I would like to ask a question on some of the questions he posed in his speech.

Government Orders

In the government's response, the Health Minister has chosen to send a letter to the chair of the health committee expressing these proposed amendments about which the member has heard. There are really three key amendments. The third is the legislated category, and that will be my main question. Without a legislated category for natural health products, I think the concern would be greater, that pharmaceutical companies would ultimately be able to take over the natural health products.

My hon. friend opposite asked about the costs being driven up, and this is how that would happen. In the third legislated category pharmaceutical companies could not take it over. As a result, the prices would stay the same.

I simply mention for my hon. friend that the research under the third proposed amendment, the research required by natural health products, would take into consideration historical empirical evidence. We have traditional histories, which I think are very respectful of our aboriginal communities and our Chinese communities, for example, that have used products without harm for 5,000 years. The proposed amendments the minister has put on the table will actually help all those areas.

The final issue is Health Canada, which is a huge concern of all members here. The legislation and the proposed amendments will point out that there will be a need or a conviction on the part of Health Canada to act in good faith and act reasonably. That will be worded in the new documents and the proposed changes.

Could the member comment on how the third category would stop some of the pharmaceutical influence?

• (1815)

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, that was a very good point raised by my colleague from Cambridge. I know he has a big interest in this file as well and a lot of experience in using natural health products and making them available to his patients in his former career.

I look forward to hearing that information come forward from the minister. I am sure he has done his best to try to remedy this, to make it palatable and make it work better. That is the minister's interest at this time.

I have not seen the fine print or the details of how they propose to do that. I hope it will accomplish the minister's intention. From previous attempts, we were told we had a third category under the Food and Drugs Act, when they simply took the regs and plunked them as a subclass of drugs.

With respect to type II diabetes, we had a big push for aboriginal communities to enhance the diagnosis for type II diabetes on reserve, since that is a federal responsibility. The same day there was an article in the local paper here about a herbal product from native aboriginal history, which turned out to be just as successful as the best drugs in managing type II diabetes. I wonder why we did not choose to promote that approach first in their community, which was a long-standing part of their culture.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a document on the Health Canada website talks about Bill C-51 and natural health products. There are 42 questions and each one of them basically pooh-poohs all the concerns raised by Canadians.

Now the member has laid out that significant amendments have been proposed. It means this document is not worth the paper on which it is written. It means Health Canada does not have the confidence of that member or any other member across the way. It also means the bill should be withdrawn now, amendments made and re-submitted to the House so Canadians can have a bill with which they can work. To send it to committee without these amendments will complicate the process.

Why will the bill not be withdrawn now?

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, the fact amendments are coming is a good thing. We must remember this is a big bill and it is complicated. It does not deal only with natural health products. It deals with drugs, cells, blood, cell cultures. There is a whole lot more in the bill than natural health products. It seems the biggest concerns have been in this realm.

We hope the amendments, which will be forthcoming in time for committee to take them right at the beginning of its deliberations, will help to ameliorate the situation.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-51. My constituents have deluged my office with emails, letters and campaign materials. The community has huge concerns about the bill. It is a key bill for the future of the health of Canadians. Therefore, it needs careful deliberation and study.

While the bill has been introduced by the government with the goal of improving the health and well-being of Canadians, there are serious concerns that it will have the opposite effect. We want the products and the medications we use to do no harm. That has not been the case in the past, where everything from children's toys to food to pharmaceutical products have done great harm to Canadians because of the lack of government vigilance and regulation.

We want our products to be safe and effective, but many people use natural health products. They are very concerned about the legislation. They are concerned that somehow by using the term therapeutic in Bill C-51, natural products and the practice of natural medicine will be lumped in with the pharmaceutical products to which people want to exercise choice to choose an alternative.

We have heard in the House before that in previous hearings in the 1990s, the Standing Committee on Health recommended a separate special definition and separate regulations for dealing with natural products. To me, that makes very good sense, but that is not what is contemplated with this legislation.

I believe the people who have raised this alarm across the country have absolute validity in raising their concerns. They do not want to use natural products that are not good for them, but they understand natural health products are not the same as pharmaceutical products. Chemical compounds are required to have very rigorous testing before they are allowed on the market, and even then not with always universal success.

Government Orders

I want to read a couple of the letters I have received. They have been sent by very many eloquent, well-informed people who are very concerned about the legislation. I will only read a couple of letters.

The first one is from a woman in my riding. She is a community leader and works in health care. She says:

"I'm writing to express my concerns about Bill C-51 and the impact it will have on the ability of my naturopathic doctor to treat my health concerns safely and effectively. As an informed patient, I have chosen to be treated by a naturopathic doctor utilizing natural therapies and substances to ensure optimal health. I'd like some assurances that my choice to see a naturopathic doctor will not be negatively affected by Bill C-51.

I have the following questions: Will Bill C-51 exclude my naturopathic doctor from having access to all the products that they need to treat all my health concerns? Will Bill C-51 result in fewer natural health products being available in the Canadian marketplace? Will inspectors have the ability to enter premises under the search and seizure provisions without a warrant or a judge's approval?

I support the need for regulation that ensures that the products recommended by my naturopathic doctor are safe and effective, but I do not support legislation that treats natural health products in the same manner as pharmaceutical products.

Now would be an excellent time for the government to implement a third strategy for natural health products as was recommended by the Standing Committee on Health in 1998".

I have one other letter. This is from a person who signs it F.P. Jr. It says:

"I'm writing to express my disapproval and disagreement with Bill C-51. It's something to make every democratic person's blood run cold. The bill proposes significant changes to the current Food and Drugs Act that will have wide-ranging negative implications for Canadians.

I'm a paraplegic and with what Bill C-51 entails it would totally eradicate my essential needs of natural products due to my debilitating condition.

• (1820)

Further on it states, "I intensely disagree with Bill C-51 and its aim to remove parliamentary decision making and oversight from national legislation. Bill C-51 is intended to replace democratic representative government with unelected closed door decision making which will bind all citizens".

There is real concern about the wording which would lump natural products and all kinds of alternative health remedies in with pharmaceutical drugs. There is also concern about the process that would take place for the approval of these remedies. There are estimates that up to 70% of natural health products would fail to meet the more stringent testing requirements that are in place for pharmaceuticals.

One writer stated, "There is concern that Health Canada inspectors would create an equivalent of a police state in terms of their powers to search private property for illegal natural health products. It makes

me want to lock up the vitamin C I take in the morning. It is very troubling for people who believe that this is the best thing for their health".

There is also concern that Bill C-51 describes a practitioner as someone who is authorized under the law of a province to prescribe or dispense prescription therapeutic drugs. Since naturopathic doctors do not have prescribing rights, they would be prevented from making recommendations to their patients.

These are some of the major concerns I have been contacted about. It seems that if there were a third category created and if there were regulations for these natural products, that would go some way to alleviating the concerns that people have. However, these are not the only concerns about this bill.

Certainly there is concern about direct to consumer advertising. Under the current law there is a very clearcut, straightforward ban on advertising for health products and pharmaceuticals. This bill would allow that ban to be bypassed at the cabinet table. That the cabinet could be subject to phenomenal pressure by lobbyists from the pharmaceutical industry, I believe, is not in the best interests of Canadians. Therefore, I am also very concerned about the weakening of the ban on advertising. Already there are loopholes in the ban and companies are advertising. We see tongue in cheek, cheeky ads on television, where it is hide and seek about the product that is being advertised. This is a loophole and, in fact, that loophole should be closed, not opened up, which it well could be by this legislation.

• (1825)

There is concern about the role of the pharmaceutical industry in influencing this legislation. There are many people who choose natural products because they have a mistrust of the role of the pharmaceutical industry, sometimes justified. We have seen cases such as Vioxx and others that have created terrible problems for people. There are some perhaps that are not justified, where the pharmaceuticals that are available to us have been of great assistance to people. What is of concern is the power the pharmaceutical industry has in terms of influencing legislators in terms of public policy.

As the industry critic for my party, I was very concerned about the proposed changes to the drug patent laws that will allow the pharmaceutical industry to continue to evergreen or extend the patent protection for certain drugs and to deny generic drug manufacturers the opportunity to offer their products in the marketplace. There will be a huge cost to the public. This will cost public health plans, private health plans and individuals hundreds of millions of dollars. It is a huge change. The proposed changes were put out without prior notification, without consultation, except to the pharmaceutical industry. There are real concerns about what this continued evergreening and continued patent protection will mean.

There are real concerns about the role of the pharmaceutical industry. There are many people who choose another path, that of naturopathic medicine and naturopathic doctors. We need to reassure them that they will be able to continue to use the products that they believe are assisting with their health and that they know are essential to their well-being.

I just want to say with all the clarity I can that I oppose Bill C-51 as it now stands. Not only could it open the door to direct consumer advertising, with which I strongly disagree, but it gives too much discretion to the minister. It is a thinly veiled attempt to bring in natural health products under the rubric of pharmaceuticals.

Natural health products are a vital component to our health care system. They should be a separate category with separate regulations. We should be operating not on a risk management approach but on a do no harm approach. This bill does not achieve that.

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): When we next return to the study of Bill C-51, there will be eight minutes left for the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

* * *

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2008

The House resumed from June 6 consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget, be read the third time and passed, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the previous question at third reading stage of Bill C-50.

Call in the members.

• (1845)

Before the taking of the vote:

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, there has been consultation between all parties and I think you will find unanimous consent that this motion be deemed carried on division.

The Speaker: Is there agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: The next question is on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Government Orders

• (1855)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 142)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Albrecht
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Baird
Benoit	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Boucher	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Comuzzi
Cummins	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Doyle
Dykstra	Emerson
Epp	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Manning	Mark
Mayes	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Paradis	Petit
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Rajotte
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Scheer
Schellenberger	Shipley
Skelton	Solberg
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Yelich — 120

NAYS

Members

André	Angus
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bains
Barbot	Bélangier
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bellavance
Bevilacqua	Bevington

Adjournment Proceedings

Bigras	Black
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brunelle	Cardin
Carrier	Casey
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Comartin
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Dewar
Dhalliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Duceppe
Folco	Freeman
Gagnon	Gaudet
Godin	Guarnieri
Guimond	Julian
Karygiannis	Laforest
Laframboise	Lavallée
Layton	Lee
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Lussier
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
McDonough	McTeague
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Minna	Mourani
Mulcair	Nadeau
Nash	Paquette
Perron	Picard
Plamondon	Priddy
Roy	Savoie
Siksay	St-Cyr
Stoffer	Telegdi
Thi Lac	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Vincent	Volpe
Wasylycia-Leis	Wilson — 90

PAIRED

Members

Ablonczy	Batters
Bernier	Faille
Gravel	Guay
Lalonde	Ouellet
Pallister	Smith
St-Hilaire	Williams — 12

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

OMAR KHADR

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for centuries the concept of abiding by the rule of law has been fundamental to the development of civilized and responsible societies. This concept has broadened to include interstate conduct as enshrined in the principles of international law. It is a basic pillar upon which the foundation of responsible state behaviour is undertaken. It is for this reason that the circumstances surrounding the imprisonment of Canadian citizen Omar Khadr in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba are so distressing.

International and domestic law clearly demonstrate that Omar Khadr ought to be dealt with in a manner which is completely different from what he has experienced since his detention

commenced in July 2002. Omar Khadr was taken into custody by American forces in Afghanistan when he was just 15 years of age. Clearly, by any reasonable definition, he should have been recognized as a child soldier.

The extrajudicial nature of the tribunal set up under the United States Military Commissions Act, passed by the United States Congress, demonstrably violates the most basic tenets of due process under law and the concept of fair treatment before the law.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is clear on the issue of child soldiers. This convention was signed by the United States, Canada and Afghanistan, although not ratified by the United States. The optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been signed and ratified by all three states. Essentially there is recognition in these conventions and protocols, as well as in domestic law, that states are obligated to protect child soldiers, and rather than imprison them or treat them inhumanely, these states are responsible to assist in their rehabilitation and recovery.

Recently, a document produced in 2003 by United States military doctors specifically addressed the issue of child soldiers and the notion of enemy combatants. These doctors recommended against detaining anyone under 18 years of age at the Guantanamo Bay facility. They wrote of “minimizing psychological, emotional and physical harm”. This document was prepared at a time when Omar Khadr was undergoing interrogation at Guantanamo Bay and was in fact being treated very much as an adult would be managed.

While the United States government has maintained that the Geneva Conventions do not apply to its “lawful or unlawful enemy combatants” in detention, the United States supreme court declared that notwithstanding this determination, article 3 of the conventions does indeed apply. Article 3 has several provisions, including addressing “the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court...”

It is quite apparent to all parties, including the United States government, that the military commission the U.S. has created does not represent a regularly constituted court. Many groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have expressed their concern about the treatment of Omar Khadr, and with good cause.

Indeed, our own Supreme Court in a unanimous decision has now ruled that the Government of Canada must release all documents in Canada's possession relating to Omar Khadr in order to support his right to a fair trial. In its ruling, it specifically made mention of the United States supreme court decision declaring as unconstitutional the validity of the process now being used in that country.

The issue at present is not so much whether Omar Khadr has liability for his alleged actions, but that any disposition of his case should be undertaken before a regular court of law with standard judicial protection and rules of procedure, including recognition of his youth—

• (1900)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we know well by now, Omar Khadr was captured by U.S. forces in July 2002 following hostilities in which he allegedly killed a U.S. medic with a grenade. He is also alleged to have been laying improvised explosive devices, IEDs, on roads known to be used by coalition forces. I note that Mr. Khadr was captured during hostilities in Afghanistan, a country where Canadian troops are risking their lives every day.

I also note that Mr. Khadr was transferred to Guantanamo Bay in October 2002. I was not present in Parliament at the time, nor was the Conservative Party in government. Perhaps the member's colleagues in the Liberal Party could provide some insight into the developments at that time.

We must recognize that Mr. Khadr faces serious charges as a result of these actions. We must also acknowledge that he is alleged to have been an active member of al-Qaeda.

As a result of his alleged activities in Afghanistan, he is charged before a U.S. military commission with murder in violation of the law of war, attempted murder in violation of the law of war, conspiracy, providing material support for terrorism, and spying.

The Government of Canada takes seriously its responsibilities for the safety and security of its citizens abroad. When Canadian citizens find themselves in difficult situations in a foreign country, it is the mandate of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to ensure that they are treated fairly and that they are afforded due process under the applicable local laws.

However, the judicial process for a Canadian who is arrested outside of Canada is governed by the laws and regulations of another country and not by Canadian law. If a Canadian citizen breaks the laws of another country, he or she is subject to the judicial system of that country. In this regard, the choice of systems put in place to try detainees in Guantanamo Bay is a matter for the relevant U.S. authorities to decide.

In light of the fact that Mr. Khadr was a minor at the time of his alleged offences, we have continuously demanded that the U.S. government take his age into account in all aspects of his detention, treatment, prosecution and potential sentencing, in particular, demanding that he not be subject to the death penalty.

Due to these efforts, the Canadian government has received unequivocal assurances from U.S. authorities that Mr. Khadr will not be subject to the death penalty.

The government has received assurances that Mr. Khadr is being treated humanely and has repeatedly inquired into his well-being when allegations were made of mistreatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay.

Officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs have carried out regular welfare visits with Mr. Khadr and will continue to do so. Their interventions have resulted, for example, in Mr. Khadr's move from a maximum security facility to a communal minimum security facility within Guantanamo Bay, in approved medical treatment, as well as in phone calls with his family.

In addition to the ongoing process before a U.S. military commission, Mr. Khadr's case is subject to multiple and complex litigation both in Canada and the U.S. As such, it would not be appropriate to speculate on the potential outcome of cases currently before the court. I will note that former minister Graham said these very things previously.

That being said, Canada strongly believes that the fight against terrorism must be carried out in compliance with international law, including established standards of human rights and due process.

We will continue to monitor this matter as it develops.

● (1905)

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, organizations like Amnesty International state that if individuals such as Omar Khadr are to face prosecution, they should at least be charged with recognizable offences and tried before an independent and impartial tribunal such as the U.S. federal court. Like them, I also urge that such be the case, along with respect for the age of the defendant at the time of the alleged offence.

The reality is that the process dealing with Omar Khadr has been extrajudicial from the beginning. The rules of international law offer set procedures to follow for the treatment of prisoners of war and in particular, child soldiers.

The Canadian government has an obligation to insist on proper treatment for Omar Khadr. It is already now required by our own Supreme Court to release all documents in its possession.

Hilary Homes of Amnesty International stated before our human rights committee "Canada has been a champion of these rights far too long to create an exception out of one of its own citizens". Does the government disagree with this statement and, if not, what is it doing that is tangible to release Omar Khadr?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague talked about the necessity of being charged with recognizable offences. Murder in violation of the law of war, attempted murder in violation of the law of war, conspiracy, providing material support for terrorism, and spying; I would call those recognizable offences.

The fact of the matter is Omar Khadr faces serious charges. The Government of Canada has sought and received assurances that Mr. Khadr is being treated humanely. Departmental officials have carried out several welfare visits with Mr. Khadr and will continue to do so.

Any questions regarding whether Canada plans to ask for the release of Omar Khadr from Guantanamo Bay are premature and speculative, as the legal process and appeals are still under way.

[*Translation*]

TIBET

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I must go back to a question I asked on April 1 about the crisis in Tibet and the Dalai Lama's call for dialogue, which should be unanimously encouraged by the international community in order to be heard by China.

In my opinion, the Conservative government should have exerted real pressure to encourage meaningful and immediate talks between the Chinese and Tibetan authorities.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Conservative government regularly presents us with a vision that I would describe as piecemeal, if not simplistic, a weak vision of Canada's role in international relations and especially in the area of human rights.

The human rights situation in Tibet and the crisis the whole world witnessed this spring are examples of the direction this government has taken on this issue—or I should say the lack of direction and leadership.

When it came to inviting the Dalai Lama and receiving him with all due honours, the government was there, but when it came time to encourage the parties to discuss a resolution to the crisis in Tibet, in order to put an end to the violence, the government did not choose a convincing diplomatic approach.

Welcoming the Dalai Lama is one thing; defending human rights in the most effective way possible is another. In Quebec, we are all too familiar with the fact that this government knows how to make symbolic gestures. More often than not, these gestures are intended to turn attention away from the government's failure to take action.

In the case of Tibet, Canada's responsibility was to respectfully and persistently urge China to resolve its differences through negotiations. Canada's insipid and timid appeal for restraint and dialogue certainly did not push the Chinese government to reflect or to take action.

Nevertheless, the issue of negotiating was and continues to be important. It is important for Tibetans and also for the people of Darfur and for Africa, where China plays a crucial role, as we know.

The Conservative government has a responsibility to ensure that Quebeckers and Canadians are heard as they join with many other nations who do not accept the massacres, the wrongful arrests or the violations of fundamental human rights.

Does the new Minister of Foreign Affairs intend to engage in serious dialogue with China in this regard? What is his government's view of the issues raised?

Successive governments in Ottawa continue to boast about the fact that Canada is a G-7 or G-8 member and that, historically, it has enjoyed a good reputation internationally.

This Conservative government is no exception to that rule even though it embarrassed Quebeckers and Canadians in Bali over Kyoto, at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization over the world food crisis, and at the UN by voting against the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

When will this government stop its moralizing and truly begin to demand the respect for human rights, with all that entails—whether for aboriginals, Afghans, Iranians, Guantanamo detainees, people of Darfur or Tibetans—on behalf of all Quebeckers and Canadians who want a more just world, a world where the respect for human rights is truly a priority for the Government of Canada.

• (1910)

[English]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, human rights have always been among the foremost priorities of this government. As we have

made clear, this government is committed to our values of freedom, democracy, human rights and rule of law, and this is what we have done.

China is no exception. We have concerns about China's human rights and we have made these concerns known. As we have always done, we will continue to work with China toward improvements.

This government has been very active on human rights issues facing Tibetans. We have advocated on their behalf both publicly and privately in conversations with the Chinese government.

The unrest in and around Tibet in March and April of this year was very serious. Peaceful protests and freedom of expression are constitutionally protected rights in Canada. They are also internationally recognized universal human rights.

China's response to the protests, including use of force and detentions, was troubling. Throughout the unrest, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued three statements expressing Canada's grave concerns. The Prime Minister also issued a statement. Canada made a joint statement with Australia at the United Nations Human Rights Council. We therefore expressed our concerns clearly and publicly on several occasions.

Canada has also made its concerns well known to the Chinese government. In Ottawa, Canadian officials made representations to the Chinese ambassador. In Beijing, Canadian embassy officials called on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A Canadian embassy official joined a diplomatic visit to Lhasa and expressed concerns directly to local officials.

Our priority remains the peaceful resolution of differences between China and the Dalai Lama through dialogue. In fact, Canada has pushed for this for a long time, including during the recent unrest, but also since initial talks between the two sides began in 2002. When the Chinese government eventually agreed to engage in contacts with the Dalai Lama's representatives on April 25, the Minister of Foreign Affairs immediately issued a statement welcoming the talks, which took place on May 4.

At this point, we are encouraging both sides to engage in sustained, substantive dialogue in which real progress toward the resolution of differences can be achieved. We are also continuing to press for three key things.

The first is that China permit unrestricted access by media, diplomats and the United Nations to the entire affected area. This means affected regions beyond Lhasa and Tibet. Transparency is essential to verify what actually happened as details remain unclear, particularly given that areas affected by the unrest were also recently affected by the devastating May 12 earthquake. Accurate information and reporting are key to ensuring that human rights are being protected and to help lay the groundwork for a peaceful resolution.

Second, China should release all those detained for protesting peacefully. They should not face repercussions for exercising their basic human rights.

Finally, China must improve its treatment of Tibetans. Their rights to freedom of movement, expression, association and spiritual belief must be respected. China must also protect their right to protest peacefully.

This summer, China hosts the Olympics. Human rights improvements before, during and after the Olympics would send positive signals to the international community. We hope that the opportunities to send such a message will not be lost.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, we need more than conversations and public statements made by diplomats. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence just said, to ensure that opportunities will not be lost, can he tell the House what the government is prepared to do about human rights?

For example, can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence tell us if Chinese authorities were told, respectfully and non-threateningly, that if certain improvements do not happen, we might consider sanctions and ways to exert due pressure? This is a very serious subject, and I know the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence knows that. This is about something fundamental to society. This is about individual rights, human rights.

So, instead of rhetoric—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

[*English*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is right. We do take it seriously, just as she does. That is why Canada has been exerting pressure on the Chinese government and on Chinese officials at all levels in Ottawa and in Beijing. We have been working with Tibetan officials and the Dalai Lama to bring those two sides together.

It is ultimately up to the Chinese people and the Tibetan people to work this out and come to a logical, peaceful resolution based on basic human rights. Canada continues to push for that.

We do not always push for things out in public. Sometimes things are happening behind the scenes. That is the way international diplomacy works.

Canada is taking a strong stand on this. We are working with all sides on the issue and we will do our very best to help them reach a peaceful resolution.

● (1915)

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 14 I raised the issue of the 1,000 extra troops that were needed with regard to our mission in Afghanistan.

First of all, I want to salute all our troops in Afghanistan, particularly Captain Mark Davidson of Richmond Hill, whom I met

when I was there recently, and I want to say that they are all making a difference for Afghan society.

On April 14 I raised the issue of the 1,000 extra troops. As the House knows, the CDS had indicated at the foreign affairs committee that we needed that and knew that two years ago. The government announced it only after the Manley report in January of this year. Obviously we are concerned about transparency and accountability in terms of the government not coming forward and being honest with Canadians.

On March 13 of this year, with the support of my party, the House passed a motion on the continuation of the mission. However, the mission would change. It would not simply be military. It also would be about the training of the Afghan national police and the Afghan national army.

My question has been answered in part by the fact that I know about the additional troops now. I know about the French and the Americans. What we do not know about are the helicopters and the medium lift. I would like to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence about that. What is the current status, besides the Polish lending a few helicopters? Where are we on that?

I also want to know from the government when it is going to announce that our mission in Kandahar will end in 2011. That is what I want to know from the government. When is it going to notify NATO that our mission in fact will end in 2011?

Again, the track record of the government has not been particularly good in notifying NATO, as we know. This is important. We know that the emphasis now needs to be on development and diplomacy, particularly in the FATA region of Pakistan.

The parliamentary secretary and I were in Afghanistan a few weeks ago, as I mentioned, and we saw the provincial reconstruction teams. We saw that things are happening. However, in terms of an Afghan solution, ultimately this is an Afghan situation. We need to train the police and the army in order for them to take the brunt of their own security. We certainly expressed that to President Karzai at the time and to the defence minister.

I am asking the parliamentary secretary to give us an update, essentially on the helicopter situation, on the medium lift and the drones, and also to indicate when the government is going to notify NATO that we will be leaving Kandahar. That notification was part of the resolution of March 13.

Again, our troops are doing an outstanding job, but it is a NATO mission. We have a lot of caveats. We have the Bulgarians who basically can only man the watchtowers. They cannot fight. We have the Germans, who do not go out at night.

Canadians are taking the brunt of this fighting, along with the British and the Americans. We need to put more diplomatic pressure on not only Afghanistan's neighbours, but also on our NATO allies, to ensure that they are in fact stepping up to the plate. Without that, we are going to continue to see the unfortunate loss of life that we have seen.

Adjournment Proceedings

Every Canadian is affected by the death of another Canadian who is on the front line over there doing his or her best, not only for Afghanistan, but indeed for this country.

The issue is not about the troops. It is about when the government is going to notify NATO and where we are on the medium lift, which all of us in the House agree is badly needed. Our troops are the best equipped on the ground and certainly I discovered that in April 2006 when I was there. I know the parliamentary secretary would agree.

That was really the thrust of this question back in April. Obviously we want to have those benchmarks. Certainly the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan will be looking at those benchmarks as well.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is in Afghanistan as part of the UN-sanctioned mission, as was mentioned, at the request of the democratically elected Afghan government and in company with our NATO allies.

Members of the House approved the current military commitment to the mission in Afghanistan and again voted their strong support in favour of its extension to 2011. We are in constant consultation with our allies in NATO and outside NATO on that issue.

NATO and its allies, including Canada, are constantly assessing the needs and requirements of the ISAF mission. We are all working toward the same goal, enduring stability and security in Afghanistan.

Canada is committed to achieving development and reconstruction results in Afghanistan and we have been doing that from the start. However, because security and developments are irrevocably linked, this could only happen with the support of our men and women in uniform who continue to work alongside the Afghanistan National Security Forces to build a stable security environment.

As the record shows, we have consistently requested additional troops and I can tell members that we are very pleased with recent developments on this front. The Dutch government has agreed to extend its military commitment in the south of Afghanistan by two years. It should also be noted that in 2007, the UK also expanded its commitment to ISAF and a number of NATO allies, including Australia, Denmark and France enhanced their ISAF presence.

Most recently, over 2,000 U.S. marines were deployed to the south of Afghanistan, and are expected to be in place until November 2008. In addition, the U.S. announced at the Bucharest summit that it would commit an additional 1,000 troops to southern Afghanistan for the longer term.

These commitments represent an important contribution to our ongoing security and training efforts in the south of Afghanistan. Clearly the commitments made by our allies at the NATO summit in Bucharest are good news for Canada and good news for NATO. More important though, the additional troops are good news for the people of Afghanistan who are working hard to rebuild their lives.

An additional battle group in Kandahar will expand NATO's presence and allow Canadian troops to consolidate and expand stability and security in the province, which will further allow our development and governance efforts to take root.

Having a second battle group working alongside our troops post-2009 meets the conditions set forth by both the Manley panel report and the motion carried in the House, and is fully consistent with what NATO has been calling for in Kandahar province.

In the absence of a second battle group in Kandahar, our military has conducted their operations within available resources in light of the realities on the ground. The Canadian Forces, along with our Afghan and NATO allies, have conducted and will continue to conduct a focused and strategic campaign at Kandahar to secure key districts.

Of course, this is a complex and challenging operation, but when we consider the progress that has been made in a short period of time, our success is quite remarkable.

The Canadian Forces have supported the disarmament and demobilization of 63,000 former combatants. In doing so, we have helped collect and secure 85,000 light weapons and 16,000 heavy weapons. Over 650 Afghan National Police have received training through the Kandahar provincial reconstruction team.

Canada has helped to build 11 Afghan National Police checkpoints and six substations, allowing the Afghan police to establish presence and conduct operations in and around Kandahar city.

Consider that in less than five years, the Canadian Forces have helped train over 35,000 new Afghan soldiers and our mentoring efforts continue to provide excellent results. We are now seeing competent Afghan National Army battalions deployed in Kandahar province. In addition, we are seeing better recruitment and retention of new Afghan soldiers, which is a very good sign that our efforts are working.

It should be highlighted that Canadian Forces, with the assistance of our allies and the Afghanistan National Security Forces, have kept key districts in Kandahar province secure. Without a doubt, these accomplishments are contributing to positive change in Afghanistan.

The helicopters and UAVs are on the way. We are working consistently with our NATO allies every day, both in the field in Afghanistan and back in places like Brussels, to ensure everybody is on the same page and everybody knows the progress we are making and the fact that we are going to get the job done.

● (1920)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, I heard the parliamentary secretary address a couple of the issues. The one issue he has not addressed to notify NATO that by July of 2011, Canada will begin to leave the Kandahar region, that there will be a redeployment and that what will happen is the Afghans will in fact, by the end of 2011, take control in terms of their own security. It is very important that the House and the Canadian public know now that this notification to NATO will take place and that it will be formally submitted.

We have the NATO meetings coming up in Brussels next Thursday and Friday. It will be an opportunity for the Minister of Defence to do so at that time. That again is consistent with the resolution.

Adjournment Proceedings

There is no question the Afghans are getting better in terms of the kind of training that is going on, but they have a long way to go, given 30 years of being ravaged by war, in terms of the types of techniques, et cetera, that are needed.

However, again, the fundamental question now is to deal with the notification.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague knows well that a lot of things are going on at NATO. As he said, we were in Afghanistan a couple of weeks ago. Our position was put very clearly in the resolution before the House, and we support that resolution. We support the Manley report.

What was really encouraging, a couple of weeks ago in Afghanistan, was seeing the whole of government approach actually mature to the point where the Canadian Forces could be spending more time now doing more of the development, governance, mentoring and so on. That has been going on since day one of the mission.

People have the impression that everything changed as of the last resolution, that everything changed as of the Manley report. That is

just not true. That kind of work has been going on from the start. It has been the Canadian Forces primarily leading it, but it has also been development, reconstruction and governance. The whole of government approach is starting to take much better effect and we are getting more support from the civilian side of the operation. That will only continue and accelerate the progress.

I do not know where we will be in 2011 with respect to the Afghanistan National Security Forces, but they are our exit plan, to get them up and running.

• (1925)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

[*Translation*]

Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:25 p.m.)

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