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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, June 10, 2008

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 10, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

NISGA'A FINAL AGREEMENT

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, copies of the 2005-06 annual report of the Nisga'a Final Agreement.

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WESTBANK FIRST NATIONS SELF-GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, copies of the 2005-06 annual report of the Westbank First Nations Self-government Agreement.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to Bill C-469, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (use of phosphorus), requesting an extension.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(3)(a), a motion to concur in the report is deemed moved, the question deemed put, and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred until Wednesday, June 11, 2008, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

* * *

[English]

CANADA PENSION PLAN AND OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-560, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act (biweekly payment of benefits).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this issue has been raised by constituents and some of the challenges that pensioners face as they move from a working life, being paid every second week, to a pension life that really allocates their pension once a month and after the fact.

I am pleased to bring this before the House. Hopefully, it will get some support and we will be able to help pensioners as they deal with the rising costs, and it will allow them to enjoy their new life.

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

* * *

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-561, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (occupational disease registry).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this enactment would require employers to report information about all accidents, occupational disease, and other hazardous occurrences known to the employer to the Minister of Labour. It would also require the minister to maintain a registry containing all of that information and to make the information available to employees and potential employees for examination.

This would be very important going forward for workers who have contracted a disease that started perhaps a few years ago. It would be important for workers looking at a workplace to know what might be there that they should be concerned about.

I am very happy that I am able to table this on behalf of, particularly, the steelworkers of Local 2251 in Sault Ste. Marie, along with my colleague, the member for Winnipeg Centre.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.) moved that the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food presented on Wednesday, May 7, be concurred in.

He said: Mr. Speaker, a motion was passed by the agriculture and agri-food committee on May 1. Specifically, the motion passed reads as follows:

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food calls on the Federal Government to immediately implement an exit strategy for tobacco producers consistent with the most recent proposal they have submitted and that it be reported to the House.

After the motion was passed on May 1, I asked a question in the House related to this issue and based upon his answer to me, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has made it crystal clear that the government will not accede to the expressed majority wish of the members of the committee. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, in fact, referred to the past motion as a political stunt.

As the government has made it clear that it does not intend to abide by the clear wish of the all party committee, I am bringing this concurrence motion before the House of Commons and requesting that the motion as passed by the agriculture and agri-food committee be concurred in by the majority of members of the House.

Tobacco producers have been facing very difficult times for a lengthy period and, truly, they have experienced the proverbial perfect storm. So desperate has the situation been for many producers that some have, most regrettably, taken their own lives. Family members of those farmers who completely gave up hope are obviously reeling from their loss. Other tobacco farmers are barely hanging on and a very difficult situation confronts all tobacco producers, that is, those who are yet left in Canada.

Communities are coping with the severe economic downturn which has been experienced by tobacco farmers and, by extension, entire communities. I am referring in particular to communities in southwestern Ontario, which have for some decades relied upon a healthy economy generated by the production and sale of tobacco.

Currently, there are approximately 650 tobacco farmers in Canada, the vast majority of those being in Ontario, specifically southwestern Ontario. It is my understanding that there remains a single tobacco farmer on Prince Edward Island and that a handful yet grow tobacco in Quebec. As I have said, the overwhelming majority are in southwestern Ontario. There are about 1,500 quota owners and they too are facing tremendous economic uncertainty.

The fair question to be asked is what makes tobacco farmers unique. Obviously, many farmers, manufacturers and Canadians at large are facing economic challenges triggered by the high Canadian dollar relative to the U.S. dollar: competition, for instance, from manufacturing entities in countries such as China, India, Mexico and Brazil, which have become industrialized very quickly; high energy costs; and other factors.

Tobacco farmers are facing all of those challenges with tobacco being grown in other countries and imported into Canada by manufacturing entities, which are more and more purchasing imported product from other countries and no longer using domestic tobacco as they once did. Again, it is a fair question to ask: What makes the situation facing tobacco farmers unique to the point that they merit an exit strategy?

When I mention an exit strategy, tobacco producers are not seeking an extravagant payout or buyout from the federal government's general revenue. They well understand that the appropriate mechanism with which to implement an exit strategy is assistance over a period of time, ideally from the taxes generated by the sale of tobacco products. If that were to be the case, then smokers themselves would essentially be assisting tobacco farmers in leaving the industry.

Simply put, it is not an immediate buyout which tobacco farmers are requesting, though obviously that would not be turned down. Rather, tobacco producers are seeking an exit strategy which will provide them with funds for the next three to five years which will allow them to essentially retire their very heavy debt load.

Mr. Speaker, you will be aware that the federal government, through the Minister of Public Safety, has recently announced an intention to implement an enforcement strategy which will deal with the issue of illicit or contraband tobacco.

● (1010)

In correspondence received from the Minister of Public Safety, he wrote to me that:

—the illicit trade in tobacco products presents a serious threat to public safety and health in Canada.

The minister is absolutely correct in his observation. He has also appropriately commented that:

In addition to undermining the Government of Canada's ambitious health objectives, and resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars in federal and provincial revenue losses, the contraband tobacco trade damages legitimate business by creating an environment of unfair competition.

There is no other agricultural sector which faces such competition from any legal competitor. It is estimated that in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec close to 40% of tobacco consumed is contraband or illicit tobacco. This is, as that figure reflects, significant competition faced by tobacco producers; that is, they are facing competition from an illegal competitor which has grabbed almost 40% of the market share.

No other producers face this level of illegal competition. For instance, although hard working grape growers in Niagara face stiff competition from California, New Zealand and other countries, such competition is legal, as all grapes consumed in Canada to the best of my knowledge have been produced by a grower, domestic or otherwise, who is playing by the rules, who is producing and selling legally a product on which all appropriate taxes have been paid.

This is in direct contrast with tobacco producers who once again are dealing with very stiff competition from illegal sources.

Routine Proceedings

Without intending to sound pessimistic and as appropriate as it is for the Minister of Public Safety to begin a study of how to deal with the issue of contraband tobacco, the reality is that such measures, if and when implemented, will not assist tobacco producers for some few years to come.

Their situation is dire now and needs immediate attention. It is absolutely no answer for the government to say to tobacco producers something like, "Just be patient. We will soon be eliminating contraband tobacco and all will be well again. So just please be patient".

That would be naive in the extreme and I cannot imagine a responsible government in the face of the very negative circumstances facing tobacco producers providing that type of response.

In and of itself the very stiff competition being faced by tobacco farmers from an illegal competitor would be sufficient, even abundant justification for the federal government intervening to implement an exit strategy.

I should indicate that the province of Ontario for instance is prepared to assist tobacco producers in Ontario and it is prepared to assist to the extent of 40% of the cost of any exit strategy ultimately announced by the federal government. The Government of Ontario well understands the unique and very dire circumstances in which tobacco producers find themselves.

As I have said, even though the issue of contraband tobacco would be sufficient justification for intervention by the federal government, there is at least one other factor which makes tobacco producers unique; that is, the tremendous revenue generated by so-called sin taxes on the sale of tobacco.

Although I am stating the obvious and indicating that contraband tobacco escapes such taxes, as the sale of contraband is really all about evading taxes, there are still tremendous moneys realized by the federal government on the sale of tobacco. Some 60% of tobacco consumed in Ontario is still sold legally and about \$2 billion is realized annually by the federal government on the sale of tobacco products.

There is no other commodity which generates such so-called sin taxes for the federal government. The federal government and, by extension, all taxpayers are the beneficiaries of well over \$2 billion per year. Simply put, the federal government continues to profit and profit quite handsomely on the sale of tobacco products. Tobacco companies continue to realize significant profits from the sale of tobacco products.

Those persons involved in the sale of contraband tobacco are presumably realizing very significant profits. So it is not an exaggeration or an overstatement to say that the only sector which is not yielding a profit, significant or otherwise, and is in fact dealing with crushing, devastating financial losses is the sector involving legitimate tobacco growers in Canada.

• (1015)

The fact that contraband tobacco now has almost 40% of the market share makes the situation of tobacco farmers unique. The further fact that the federal government receives \$2 billion in taxes

on an annual basis from the sale of tobacco products also makes the situation of tobacco farmers unique.

In addition, only a few years ago, tobacco farmers were advised to reinvest in new machinery in order to meet what was anticipated to be a continuing demand for their domestic product. This is exactly what many farmers did and their average debt load is approaching \$500,000. The machinery in which they invested, and invested heavily, is not able to be utilized for other commodities, and there is no market for used equipment which is designed for the production of tobacco.

Canada sits alone in many respects on this issue. Australia and the United States, for instance, have seen fit to implement an exit strategy for their tobacco producers. It is disappointing, to say the least, that the Conservative government has not seen fit to implement a similar exit strategy.

All that the federal government has done to this point is to suggest to tobacco producers that they try to access existing agricultural programs to help themselves. The current programs are not appropriate for tobacco farmers and I have been advised by tobacco producers and others that the suggestion by the federal government that tobacco farmers access existing programs is completely unhelpful.

I wish to advise members as to the position of the provincial government. Many months ago, the then minister of agriculture for Ontario, Leona Dombrowsky, stated:

I have written to [the minister]... Given the challenges facing the sector, I have encouraged the federal government to give serious consideration to the Tobacco Board's proposal for exit assistance.

Clearly, the Ontario government is prepared to participate in a plan this government endorses.

As I have indicated, entire communities have been crushed by the significant downturn in the tobacco industry. As the vice-chair of the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board, Richard VanMaele, said to the committee some months ago:

The local communities have based their economies around tobacco and the farmers have supported those communities. The unfortunate part now is that the farmer doesn't have the ability to support the community. The farmer is now in what you'd call survival mode, doing whatever he can to survive to the best of his ability. Unfortunately, it's the local community that's paying the ultimate price, whether stores or charitable organizations, even. You just don't have the dollars to put forward to help benefit your local people.

The council of the County of Brant, in which county several tobacco farmers reside, unanimously approved a resolution at its January 23, 2007 meeting. This was one year to the day after the current government was elected. The salient portions of the resolution are as follows:

Whereas the communities within the tobacco-growing regions of southwestern Ontario have now collectively felt the impact of the deterioration of this once strong rural economy;

And whereas this same deterioration continues to impact our infrastructure, our ability to supply increasing demands on our social system and most importantly, on the local individuals, services and commercial entities that service our population;...

And whereas the Ontario Flue-cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board has developed, in consultation with and support from the growers that they represent, an "exit strategy" that proposes a responsible, dignified and absolute support mechanism for the individuals and families who have invested their livelihoods in the tobacco industry, and to the communities that their social and economic contributions have historically benefited;

Routine Proceedings

Therefore be it resolved that, by support of this resolution, the Federal... Government... commit to and implement a full and complete "exit strategy", similar in principle and objectives to the program introduced by the Ontario Flue-cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board....

The concern for tobacco producers goes back many months, to the point in time when there was a minister prior to the current minister.

An identical resolution was endorsed unanimously by the mayors and wardens of communities in Norfolk County, Oxford County, Elgin County and, as I have indicated, Brant County. The resolution was presented to Norfolk County council and was unanimously endorsed.

● (1020)

Brian Edwards, very involved with a group known as Tobacco Farmers in Crisis, appeared before the committee months ago and very eloquently and succinctly summarized the problem when he stated:

There is no requirement right now for a Canadian content, a percentage in the cigarette. Under the tobacco advisory committee, for a number of years there was a working relationship between the companies and the farmers and the government. Now that doesn't work.

We have an underground economy that has stolen market share from the legal producers, and these companies are reacting to this. If we're not going to get contraband back under control, these companies are going to leave Canada and they're going to leave us, as farmers, abandoned.

As the chair of the agriculture committee said at a time before he was promoted to his current position as Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food:

We've just seen in the news today that Australia has settled. They've done it. Other countries have done it around the world....

There is a clear recognition and understanding on the part of this minister and this government that other countries have seen fit to implement an exit strategy for their tobacco growers.

Some Conservative politicians actually understand that something needs to be done on an immediate basis. For instance, Toby Barrett, the member of provincial Parliament representing the riding of Haldimand—Norfolk, said as far back as May 4, 2006, the following:

The last remaining farmers and their communities in Norfolk, Oxford, Elgin and Brant do need federal and provincial government help to make the transition to a post-tobacco economy. Previously, the federal and provincial governments put up \$120 million in tobacco relief, buying out quotas, encouraging new businesses and crops, but now more help is needed as the industry disappears.

Member of provincial Parliament Toby Barrett went on to say:

The solution is a full exit plan, as in Australia and the United States. There is no turning back.

Mr. Barrett said that a little over two years ago.

A well-regarded reporter with the *Expositor*, a daily newspaper published in Brantford, has been writing a steady stream of articles about this issue. I would like to quote from an article which Michael-Allan Marion wrote on April 22, 2006:

Ontario tobacco board officials are breathing a sigh of relief at news that Ottawa is ready to start formal talks on a complete exit strategy for growers.

Fred Neukamm, chairman of the...Board, said he received a phone call directly from [the] Agriculture Minister...on Wednesday, confirming the department is ready to set up talks.

Here we are more than two years later and nothing has been done by this government, except to suggest to tobacco producers that they access existing programs.

At that same time, April 2006, the current Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the member of Parliament for Haldimand—Norfolk, said:

The federal government is willing to consider a two-pronged approach. One of these prongs is going forward with a process. That's as far as things have got. That in itself is major progress, especially in this short a time. I'm pleased with the progress so far.

That is what the minister, the member for Haldimand—Norfolk, said in April 2006. Pleased she might have been with the progress as of April 2006, such as it was, nothing has happened for over two years.

All of the non-action by the federal government is in direct contrast to its statements, including statements from the current Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. The minister was asked at committee earlier this year what he intended to do for tobacco producers. The minister indicated that he would do something sooner rather than later and that we should all stay tuned.

Since then, we have stayed tuned. The minister has indicated, unfortunately, that there will be no exit strategy for tobacco producers and, once again, that they should look to existing programs.

During the last election campaign, various Conservative members of Parliament or candidates made it a priority to develop an exit strategy for tobacco farmers. For instance, the member for Haldimand—Norfolk proclaimed the Liberal Party's 2005 tobacco assistance program to be "paltry by international standards". Presumably, the member was referring to the fact that Canada had not yet implemented a strategy for tobacco farmers commensurate with what had taken place in Australia and the United States.

It is regrettable that the Conservative government has not, 27 months later, implemented a program that would be commensurate with the programs provided by the governments of Australia and the United States.

● (1025)

Lastly, I would like to quote one tobacco farmer who wrote to me:

We are writing today to explain our desperate situation...We are now unable to grow tobacco because of the current quota situation and the presence of contraband tobacco. We have absolutely no way of servicing that amount of debt.

I will close there.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I come from a riding that is a tobacco riding, as does the member for Brant.

This is an issue that has gone on for many, many years. Could the member for Brant please tell us what the previous government did with respect to contraband, which, equally, has been a problem for a long time?

As well, I wonder if he could enlighten the House as to what his friends in the Ontario legislature have offered to do for the tobacco farmers.

Routine Proceedings

Would he also please tell this House and Canadians who are watching who controls the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board and the regulations that it operates under? Which level of government is it?

He has done a pretty good job of complaining about the lack of action in the last few months, but he has not really talked about the lack of action in the preceding years. Could he please tell the House what he and his party have done on all of those issues previous to this government being formed?

• (1030)

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite, whom I respect, but periodically, of course, and it has happened again this morning, he lapses into that habit of forgetting, I guess, that he is now in government, along with his Conservative colleagues.

It is some 27 months now that the Conservatives have been in government here in Ottawa and tobacco farmers and producers are yet awaiting an answer from them on the situation, which has gone on for some time.

With respect to the issue of contraband tobacco, it was a significant problem in 1994 and 1995. The then Liberal government took aggressive steps. Not so many months after those aggressive steps were taken by the then Liberal government, the issue of contraband tobacco certainly left the front burner and was only very peripherally a factor.

In terms of the Ontario government's position, as I have indicated, the Ontario government is prepared to assist tobacco farmers, prompted by their own members. In fact, even Conservative members of the provincial legislature understand that something needs to be done. The Ontario government has committed to 40% of any exit strategy being funded by the Ontario government, with 60% funding to come from the federal government.

Again, I want to reiterate that it is not an immediate cash grab, so to speak, that tobacco farmers are requesting or clamouring for. They want a transitional funding program, which will allow them to exit the industry with dignity and with at least much of their debt retired. Many are in the situation that they will have debt with them to the end of their lives. We are asking by way of this motion, and the members of the agriculture committee get it well, for the federal government to actually do something now to help out these farmers.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Brant for his excellent presentation on the plight of the tobacco farmers. It seems that unless the issue involves help for big oil, the government does not seem to care very much.

The member for Brant mentioned the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, who is in a neighbouring riding. I guess she is the minister who really should be pushing politically. Could the member please tell us what the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has done to help with the plight of these people?

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Mr. Speaker, in short, I am not exactly certain what the minister has done. I do know that earlier this year the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food indicated that something would be done sooner rather than later, that we should stay tuned,

and that, in so many words, relief for tobacco farmers was on its way. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has not implemented anything by way of an exit strategy.

In response to my colleague's question as to what the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration may have done or may be doing, truly, I cannot responsibly comment on that because she has not spoken lately about this issue.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's speech. I also listened to his answer to the first question he was asked by my hon. colleague. Quite frankly, he did not answer the question.

People talk about the military going through a decade of darkness under the former Liberal government. Agriculture went through a decade of darkness with the Liberal government as well. Tobacco growers went through a decade of darkness.

I want to ask the member directly, once and for all, what did the member's government do for 13 years while tobacco farmers were in terrible trouble? I would like a direct answer, blow by blow. What did the Liberal government do for those people who suffered for 13 long years?

• (1035)

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Mr. Speaker, I have a message for the member opposite. In case he has forgotten, today is June 10, 2008. You have been in government since January 23, 2006, which is approximately 28 months. The question is, what is going to be done for tobacco producers now?

If you want to go back to the past, as your party typically wants to do, then let us replay the past. The Liberal government in Ottawa had, in fact, initiated a tobacco assistance program which some tobacco farmers or producers took advantage of. They exited the growing of tobacco with assistance from the federal government. Some parlayed their experience into ginseng and other commodities.

Simply put, were tobacco farmers assisted by the then Liberal government? Absolutely. It is regrettable they are now not being assisted in any way, shape or form by the current Conservative government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I would just remind the hon. member for Brant to address his comments through the chair and not directly at members.

Are there further questions and comments? Resuming debate. The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to join the debate. Many of the tobacco producers whom we are talking about today are my friends, my family, my neighbours. This is an important subject. I am pleased to stand and talk about our government's commitment to ensuring the long term success and prosperity for Canadian farmers, including the farmers in this country's tobacco sector.

Routine Proceedings

Since taking office just over two years ago, this government has been putting farmers first in every action we take on agriculture. We know when farmers succeed, the whole value chain from the gate to the plate prospers.

We understand the hardships facing the flue-cured tobacco sector today. I understand them personally. I have many tobacco farmers in my riding.

On March 31 the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Ontario minister for agriculture, food and rural affairs met with the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board. The goal was to talk about the future of the industry in Ontario. The minister has also met with area mayors to discuss support for communities struggling with tobacco issues.

I am pleased to point out that I am currently chairing an economic development task force in the five county area of southern Ontario that is addressing the economic needs of that region. Tobacco has been the main industry there for generations. It is waning. It is not as strong as it once was, certainly from what the previous member said from a tobacco grower point of view, but it is not just that. The businesses in communities surrounding this area, the barber shops, the implement dealers, the restaurants are also hurting.

We have immediately put in place a task force to look at the economic development of the area. There is great support from the mayors and county officials, the economic development officers and all of the chambers of commerce. We have had meetings in fairly rapid succession to put together plans for the economic development of that area.

Other agriculture sectors in Canada are also suffering difficulties. With this in mind it is only fair that any solution for tobacco producers take into account the needs of the broader agriculture sector.

The Government of Canada is committed to delivering stable, bankable programs that work for farmers. This includes assistance to Ontario's tobacco growers. Since this government has taken office, existing agriculture programs have delivered almost \$20 million in support for the tobacco sector.

While both provincial and federal governments have been very clear that no new exit program is available to tobacco growers, I would like to outline the hard work under way to help tobacco farmers access existing programs. These programs include ones that provide farmers with financial stability and access to tools, such as business planning, that can help to diversify and identify new opportunities and programs that support community development.

With the economic development task force that I am currently chairing I have met with many groups on the ground in the five county area of southern Ontario where tobacco has been grown. I am going to be a bit of a cheerleader about the entrepreneur situation we have. We have known for years that Canadian farmers are some of the most entrepreneurial people in the world. Some of the ideas that have come out of that sector from an alternative crop point of view and an alternative business point of view have been phenomenal. We are moving them forward.

The Minister of Agriculture is also looking at ways to make programs work better to respond to the needs of tobacco farmers in transition. Tobacco producers have benefited from programs, which include \$400 million to help farmers address cost of production issues, and \$600 million to kickstart new farmer accounts through AgriInvest. Tobacco producers continue to benefit from AgriStability, the margin based program which has changed to become more responsive when farmers face income declines.

Furthermore, the AAFC is taking a fresh look at how the programs we have right now can help tobacco farmers. I was at a meeting this morning with people from the ministry who talked about the new rural initiatives and different programs that we can use to help the tobacco area with economic development.

Prime Minister Harper recently announced that the province of Ontario will receive—

● (1040)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I hate to interrupt the hon. member, but I would ask him to use the member's riding or title, please.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister recently announced that the province of Ontario will receive \$358 million through the community development trust. Programs supported by these funds will support: improved productivity and competitiveness; technology development; and training for workers and communities facing challenges in industries such as agriculture, forestry and manufacturing.

That is exactly what we are talking about here. The community development trust certainly fits across the country in different areas, whether it is forestry or manufacturing. In my area of southern Ontario, it certainly seems that the community development trust fits well into the tobacco area. It is an area with a single industry that is declining. The community development trust could certainly help in that area.

We are not sitting still when it comes to delivering assistance to Canadian farmers. We will continue to work at identifying practical ways to help tobacco farmers transition to new opportunities to grow their farm businesses. We are working with the provinces and territories on a new plan to make the Canadian agriculture sector not just viable but vibrant.

Growing forward is a collaborative vision of the sector that is focused on the future. It is a vision for a profitable and innovative sector. It is important that our agriculture be that. It is a vision for a sector that seizes opportunities. It is important that we do that in this case. It is a vision for a sector that responds to market demands and contributes to the health and well-being of Canadians.

This agreement builds on the best of the agriculture policy framework. It brings our producers the bankable business risk management programs, including the ones I outlined earlier. It builds on the ideas put forward by producers and others who work in the sector.

The bottom line is that there is tremendous opportunity in agriculture in this country. Certainly, there are areas that have more concerns than others. We will continue to work closely with the Ontario tobacco marketing board, the province of Ontario and manufacturers to address the situation facing our tobacco growers. Our goal is to help build a better future for all Canadian farm families, including those friends and neighbours of mine in Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That this debate do now adjourn.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Call in the members.

• (1125)

And the bells having rung

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

(Division No. 143)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Albrecht
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Arthur
Baird	Benoit
Bezan	Blackburn
Blaney	Boucher
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooog	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Carrie
Casson	Chong
Clarke	Comuzzi
Cummins	Davidson
Del Mastro	Devolin
Doyle	Dykstra
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Goldring	Goodyear
Grewal	Guergis
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Khan	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)

Routine Proceedings

Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKenzie	Manning
Mark	Mayes
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Paradis
Petit	Poilievre
Preston	Rajotte
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Schellenberger
Shipley	Skelton
Solberg	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Trost
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Yelich — 102

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Barnes
Bélanger	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bellavance	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Bevington
Bigras	Black
Blais	Bonin
Bonsant	Boshcoff
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brisson	Brown (Oakville)
Brunelle	Byrne
Cardin	Carrier
Casey	Charlton
Christopherson	Crête
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe
Easter	Eyking
Faillie	Folco
Fry	Gagnon
Gaudet	Godfrey
Godin	Goodale
Gravel	Guarnieri
Guimond	Hall Findlay
Holland	Hubbard
Ignatieff	Jennings
Julian	Kadis
Keeper	Laforest
Laframboise	Lavallée
Layton	Lee
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Lussier
MacAulay	Malhi
Malo	Maloney
Marleau	Marston
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Matthews	McCallum
McGuinty	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Minna	Mulcair
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Nadeau	Nash
Neville	Pacetti
Paquette	Patry
Pearson	Perron

Routine Proceedings

Picard	Plamondon
Proulx	Rae
Redman	Regan
Rodriguez	Rota
Roy	Russell
Savage	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sgro	Siksay
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Cyr
St. Amand	St. Denis
Steckle	Stoffer
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thi Lac
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Tonks	Turner
Valley	Vincent
Volpe	Wasylcia-Leis
Wilfert	Wilson
Wrzesnewskyj	Zed- — 146

PAIRED

Members

Batters	Bernier
Guay	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Komarnicki	Lalonde
Ouellet	St-Hilaire- — 8

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I declare the motion lost.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, on Wednesday, June 11, 2008, the House shall meet at 3:00 p.m. and proceed to Statements by Ministers pursuant to Standing Order 33 to allow the Prime Minister to make a statement of apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools; during this statement, Phil Fontaine, Mary Simon, Clem Chartier, Beverley Jacobs, Pat Brazeau, Mary Moonias, Marguerite Wabano, Sandra Linklater, Crystal Merasty, Peter Irmig, Don Favel and Mike Cachagee shall be permitted on the floor of the House; any scheduled votes on Wednesday, June 11, 2008 shall be deferred to Thursday, June 12, 2008 at 10:00 a.m.; after Statements by Ministers on Wednesday, June 11, 2008, the House shall adjourn to the next sitting day; and from 3:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, June 11, 2008, no committees shall meet.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. government House leader have unanimous consent to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

POINTS OF ORDER

DIVISIONS

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. With respect to the vote that was just taken prior to the point of order, I wonder whether the member for Calgary Northeast would want to reconsider his vote in light of the fact that it appeared to me that he took his seat literally two seconds before the roll call vote reached him. He could not have been here for the reading of the motion.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I did walk in just as the call was being taken. I would like it noted that I would vote in favour of the motion that my party has supported. I was late in arriving.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The Chair has taken note of the fact that the hon. member entered the chamber late.

M. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NPD): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I do not want the member to be recorded as voting because members cannot vote if they are late. I would like to hear the position of the Chair.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The rules are clear. The Table will reflect the fact that the member entered the chamber late.

Resuming debate on questions and comments. The hon. member for Mississauga South.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the motion before the House is in the sixth report of the agriculture committee. It raises a very important point about transitioning for the tobacco industry. It would appear that there has been substantial discussion within the committee with regard to this important issue. The member is very involved in committee.

I am a little concerned that there is no concurrence by the government with regard to the importance of providing a transition strategy, which would appear to be consistent with good governance as has been shown on matters like this. It might be a matter of regional economic development or it may be a strategic initiative where there is an economic impact.

I wonder if the member would care to clarify the relative importance of dealing with this particular industry at a time of transition.

● (1130)

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has hit one of the nails on the head. The answer is not only about any one piece. There are several pieces to the puzzle and one of them certainly is the economic development of an area that has been strongly hit because its main product is no longer selling as well as it once did.

The task force that I am chairing on the economic development for the area will be looking at that piece and the growers in the area. The minister has put forward what he is doing for them.

Routine Proceedings

The answer is not only about the growers. The answer is about the economic development of the area. Barbershop owners, restaurants and implement dealers are all in the same straits.

The motion put forward continues to repeat over and over again the same solution, that being that only the federal government has it. The minister has been pretty clear. At a meeting with his counterpart, the Ontario minister of agriculture, the minister stated that it is not only about the government fixing this problem but it is also about manufacturers being involved. It is about the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board marketing tobacco and helping sell more of the product.

On top of that, in the discussion today, we have already talked about two or three of the other problems, one of them being the economic development of the area, or at this moment, what the government is doing to decrease the contraband sale of cigarettes and illegal tobacco products in Canada in order for legal producers and sellers to do what they still do. Tobacco is still a legal product.

We can take the pressure off on the contraband side. We can do our best on the economic development side. As the minister has clearly stated, we will work hard toward a solution for the producers.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is very involved on this topic. He has been working on a task force in his area, trying to address the needs of the tobacco industry. There is no question it has gone through some really difficult times, and we have looked at a number of different ways of transitioning.

For 13 long years, the Liberals, when they were in government, did absolutely nothing for the tobacco industry other than ignore it. Now it is about looking at what the future really holds. I know the member has been very involved and has some ideas.

Does he feel it was fair that the former Liberal government pitted farmer against farmer rather than resolve the entire issue?

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, of course not. The answer is never found in conflict, or in pitting one person against the other. The answer is found in working together. That is apparently what the minister and the government have attempted to do. They have tried to put the right people together to make the solution happen. It is not about demanding a solution; it is about working together until we find one. We will never get there by putting one side of this issue against the other.

I recognize what the member says is true. For a number of years the Liberal government exacerbated the problem by allowing contraband to grow to such an extent that the legal sales of tobacco were lost to the tobacco producers in southern Ontario and that the manufacturers were forced to take other ways to deal with their problems, such as making cigarettes in Mexico instead of in Canada and not buying from our producers.

These problems can only be solved by us working together, but it is not only about producers. It is about the neighbourhoods in which they live. It is about the economy of all southern Ontario where tobacco is grown.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the previous questioner, let us set the record straight. When the previous government was in place, it announced a reduction strategy. It

committed itself to that reduction strategy and followed through on it, according to what the tobacco industry requested. However, things changed and the situation for tobacco producers became worse. They realized they needed an exit strategy, given the contraband with which the current government has not dealt. Although Conservatives talk law and order, they have not really dealt with the contraband issue.

The member chairs the committee. He talks about the whole area, and, yes, that is important. There has to be regional development strategy for that whole area, and we support movement in that way. Specifically, there has to also be an exit strategy for the tobacco industry. It is in this specific area that the government has violated its word. The current Minister of Citizenship and Immigration committed to an exit strategy during the election and the government failed to follow through on that.

I met with those tobacco producers. Suicides are happening. The life work of people has gone down the drain. Even the lending community made a commitment to come forward this year based on what it thought the government would do.

Will the government at least keep its word on that specific area related to tobacco producers and commit to the exit strategy, which was about \$275 million? Will it do that?

• (1135)

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that we are talking about some serious issues. There have been, as the member mentioned, some serious troubles in the tobacco area, and it is nice that he has gone to talk to the producers. These people are my friends and my neighbours. I do not only go and talk to them, I live with them. In my whole political career, I have spent time talking to tobacco farmers, looking for an answer to this.

The member mentioned the lending institutions. On a daily basis, I have talked to the bankers on behalf of producers. This is not about us against them. It is not about finding conflict. This is about working together to solve a problem for my friends and my neighbours, which is serious. No one asked for this to happen. We are working very hard. The minister has put together as much of a multi-faceted approach as we can to look at the economic development in the area, the contraband situation to reduce illegal sales, and a strategy for the producers. We continue to look at it from all sides, and we will find the answer for this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate proposed by the member for Brant. I congratulate him for making sure we had a debate on tobacco. The member for Brant sits on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food, and I know that he truly cares about this issue. This is no doubt why he decided to request a three-hour debate on the subject today.

Routine Proceedings

I must say that this is not the first time the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food has taken a close look at this topic. It has already held a number of meetings, and recently completely two major reports on input prices and on the labelling of food products in Canada. We will use our remaining committee meetings to work on several issues, including the difficulties facing honey producers. There is also another meeting planned on the crisis tobacco producers are facing. So I think it is worth talking about it here in the House.

As I was saying, it is very important that we debate the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food on an exit strategy for tobacco producers. In its report, the committee is calling on the federal government to immediately implement an exit strategy for tobacco producers consistent with the most recent proposal they have submitted.

We know—members have talked about it here in the House during this debate—that certain countries have implemented highly effective exit strategies, notably Australia and the United States, which is a close neighbour. The government would do well to look at what other countries are doing in order to follow their examples and improve on them, if need be, since nothing is perfect.

Australia and the United States have implemented exit strategies. Here, the government is telling tobacco farmers to take advantage of programs offered by the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food. As with many things, when farmers are referred to existing programs, they come up against a brick wall. Why? Because programs have standards; there are criteria and, in many cases, farmers cannot apply these programs to their specific situation. The programs are not 100% appropriate for these problems, and that is the case for tobacco farmers.

If existing programs did the trick, farmers would certainly not be asking the federal government for assistance, and we would not be spending our time here demanding an exit strategy for them and demanding that they be given assistance, since the programs would suffice. But there is no denying the fact that existing programs do not work for tobacco farmers.

We have been asking the government for some kind of exit strategy. We have not been asking the government to give money to tobacco farmers so they can keep producing. Nowadays, we all know that tobacco products are bad for people's health. That is not news to anyone. Governments are putting increasing emphasis, and rightly so, on smoking cessation and, therefore, on ceasing tobacco production. For now though, it is still a legal product. For now, tobacco is still being produced around the world in places like China, which has become a huge tobacco producer. One thing is clear though, and that is that fortunately, there are fewer and fewer smokers, particularly in Quebec and Canada, and we hope that trend continues.

So for tobacco farmers, this is not about continuing to produce and sell tobacco. This is about finding something else to do. From the time farmers decide to stop producing tobacco—they really have no choice—to the time they figure out what else to grow to support their families and their communities, the government has to help them through the transition. Tobacco farmers are asking for help finding an alternative.

These people invested considerable sums of money a few years ago, and they cannot just start growing something else from one day to the next. As I said, we have to help them make this transition.

To put a finer point on the issue, I dug out some of the testimony given to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food during the one or two meetings that dealt with problems facing tobacco producers. That was in November 2006. At the time, the committee heard from a person I have met a number of times.

• (1140)

As the Bloc Québécois agriculture critic, I meet not only with people from Quebec, but with people from other provinces who want to make us aware of the problems they are facing. Brian Edwards, president of Tobacco Farmers in Crisis, testified before the committee and had this to say, which gives a clear picture of the situation. I quote:

Why are Canadian tobacco farmers in crisis?

Tobacco farmers are victims of conflicting government policies on tobacco and a gap in tobacco control policy has put them into debt and economic devastation. Since 2002, tobacco farmers and their families have been in a state of turmoil, brought on by dramatically declining crop sizes, costly mandatory infrastructure investments, rising contraband and an increase in cheaper imported tobacco.

Despite a still-existing and legal market, they find themselves unable to meet their obligations and are at great risk of losing their farms and their homes.

At an average age of 58, with average debt loads of \$400,000, the significant devaluation of tobacco farming assets, and little or no real employment opportunities elsewhere, many Canadian tobacco farmers risk losing everything they and their families have honestly invested in and worked for over four or five generations.

Mr. Edwards went on to say this:

What factors have forced us as tobacco farmers into debt?

In 2002, the tobacco companies demanded that we do burner conversions to eliminate nitrosamines. This was mandated. We will not buy Canadian tobacco unless you do this. We as tobacco farmers invested over \$65 million into burner conversions.

I am not talking about the 1990s or the 1980s. As recently as the early 2000s, not that long ago, these tobacco producers believed that their industry would survive in the long term or, at least, in the medium term, based on calculations they had done with the blessing of the government at the time. They had been told that if they invested, they could continue growing tobacco and doing good business. We can see the result today, though. The farmers' investments are completely useless and are no longer paying off because nearly all the producers have had to give up growing tobacco. I say nearly all because there are still some producers, of course.

Other important testimony at that same committee meeting came from Christian Boisjoly, a director of the Office des producteurs de tabac jaune du Québec, which is now known as the Association des producteurs de tabac jaune du Québec. Mr. Boisjoly had this to say:

Routine Proceedings

We would like to give you a little background on the crisis in the tobacco industry. This crop, which supported three generations of farmers in the Lanaudière, Mauricie and even Outaouais regions and allowed them to amass wealth for themselves, their families and their regions, suffered a dramatic blow in March 2003 when one of the major companies, RBH, in other words, Rothmans, Benson & Hedges, suddenly decided to stop buying its tobacco in Quebec. A shock wave hit all tobacco farmers, because two years earlier, RBH, as well as Imperial Tobacco and JTI-MacDonald, had all required the complete conversion of tobacco-drying units. There were 725 units in Quebec—

This brings us back to the same problem. These major investments were made at the request of the tobacco companies, which, a short time later, simply decided to stop buying tobacco from Quebec. Ontario managed to survive a little longer, but as I said at the beginning of my speech, China came onto the scene, as in many sectors, and made a mint by selling its tobacco to companies. No one can say whether the tobacco is necessarily of the same quality as Canadian and Quebec tobacco, but it was cheaper for the tobacco companies. It was therefore worth it for them to do business with China, even though they had just asked our tobacco farmers here to make major investments, telling them they would have contracts for them. Unfortunately, the companies did not keep their word.

Mr. Boisjoly concluded part of his testimony with the following:

As a result of these discussions, the TAAP, Tobacco Adjustment Assistance Program, was introduced. The announcement was made on May 4, 2004 [under the previous government]. The general idea was to offer a lump sum of \$67 million dollars, first to Ontario farmers who wanted to get out of tobacco. The federal government purchased their quotas at a reverse auction in the spring of 2005. The objective of the program was chiefly to rationalize the supply for Ontario farmers.

• (1145)

Then Mr. Boisjoly speaking on behalf of Quebec farmers, explained the following.

There were two major problems for Quebec farmers. The first was that we had no say, in other words, we were the victims of an undemocratic, unfair decision. The second was that in our case, there was no talk of rationalizing tobacco production, but rather stopping it altogether.

That was in 2006 and I can say that Ontario tobacco producers are going through exactly the same thing today, that is they are asking for assistance to stop production. No one here believes that there is a future in tobacco farming.

In Quebec, the few remaining tobacco producers—there are less than half a dozen—are concentrated mainly in the Lanaudière region. Tobacco is grown primarily for cigarette manufacturers on aboriginal reserves. There are very few other tobacco producers in Quebec these days.

Naturally, Quebec tobacco farmers support their Ontario counterparts. If this has not been mentioned in this House, then I must do so. I have met these farmers' representatives on many occasions and they have always said that they support Ontario farmers and also those in other provinces, although there are not many and they are mostly concentrated in the same area. However, it is important to note that they want fair compensation if the government were ever to put in place a real exit strategy.

That has always been the Bloc's focus here, in the House, in committee or at meetings with the minister or the department's representatives. One thing has always been very clear to us: even though tobacco farmers are no longer growing this crop, if the government did end up taking action in this matter and putting in place an exit strategy, we would have to ensure that Quebec

producers are not ignored and that they, too, would receive fair compensation.

I had these meetings particularly when I worked for the hon. member for Joliette, who has done extraordinary work on this file. When I was his assistant here on Parliament Hill, he and I arranged meetings with the producers from Quebec and departmental representatives. We invited the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to a meeting in the riding of Joliette to discuss this specific matter with tobacco producers and other stakeholders. A great deal of work was done to get the government to implement a few measures. Nonetheless, both the producers and the parliamentarians made it quite clear that these programs implemented by the Liberal government did not go far enough. These programs missed the mark, but they did provide some relief.

We have been working with the tobacco growers of Quebec for years now and we are not going to abandon them.

Their association changed its name to become the Office des producteurs de tabac jaune du Québec. It is headed up by Gaétan Beaulieu, who works very hard on this issue and I wish to commend him for that. Mr. Beaulieu was co-chair of the round table on tobacco organized by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in 2003-04. He has followed all negotiations very closely. This round table presented an opportunity to express the level of crisis Quebec and Ontario farmers had reached. The producers from Quebec were asking for a long-term program to solve the tobacco crisis. That was in 2003, and today in 2008, five years later, we are still making the same appeals on their behalf.

I mentioned the former programs, such as TAAP, the tobacco adjustment assistance program. This program fell short of the expectations expressed by Quebec producers at the round table. Ontario's mechanism for setting the quota price did not take into account the fundamental difference between the quota systems in Quebec and Ontario.

In July 2004, AGECO presented a very interesting portrait of Quebec tobacco growing operations as well as an evaluation of farmers' financial losses after flue-cured tobacco production was abandoned in Quebec. I have some interesting statistics that I would like to share with the House. And the end of AGECO's report, on page 30, it is mentioned that Quebec farmers have seen the value of their pre-quota assets drop by \$17 million, or \$1.48 per quota pound.

• (1150)

The loss in quota value has been calculated at between \$19 million and \$31 million. The Association des Producteurs de Tabac Jaune du Québec estimates that they have lost about \$25 million in quota value, which is \$2.17 per pound.

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The producers have proposed an exit strategy to end this crisis once and for all. It is vital that the federal government implement such a strategy. I said earlier that there are examples in countries such as Australia and the United States. The tobacco producers have specifically asked that all quotas be bought out, that all Canadian tobacco farmers active since 2002 cease production, and that all quotas be retired.

Tobacco producers have said why they want to see such a strategy put in place. As a signatory to the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the Government of Canada has promised to put an end to the use of tobacco products in Canada. In fact, 80% of all producers will have practically ceased operations this year. Because they are so deeply in debt, they will not be able to do anything else unless a buyout package is introduced. Only then will producers be able to assess viable options for their future and the future of their community. That is one of the reasons such a package should be provided.

The package would cover tobacco growers in Ontario, where the largest producers in the country are. I am using the present tense, but I should say that Ontario had the largest producers in the country. Out of Canada's 1,100 tobacco producers, 90% are in Ontario. That is why the Conservative member for Brant, who is closely involved in this issue, is speaking today, along with a number of members from Ontario's tobacco-growing region.

There are also producers in Quebec, as I have said many times. There are also some in Prince Edward Island. Farmers in Quebec and Prince Edward Island should also receive subsidies as part of a tobacco exit strategy.

Tobacco producers have come to the conclusion that this is the only option for them. Anything other than a full exit strategy would just be a temporary solution that would cause new problems. It is a comprehensive program for governments, farmers, communities and manufacturers, and it also takes into account the requirements of the health, environment, human resources and agriculture departments.

This exit strategy will enable farmers and our communities to move on to something else when an opportunity arises. This program will give hope to farmers, their families and their communities. This program will reimburse farmers only for what they have invested. This program will enable Canada to fulfill its obligations to farmers under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. The producers themselves presented such a plan quite a while ago now. Meetings, round tables and committees have been set up.

Now, what do we need to do? The solutions are on the table. What are the criteria of such a strategy? What will this exit strategy look like, exactly? How much money will be invested? More discussions are needed. But one thing is no longer in doubt: we need an exit strategy, perhaps based on what is done elsewhere, but especially based on the demands of the tobacco farmers who have shown, for a long time, that they need this assistance. Without it, they experience family problems, which we heard about earlier. People are deciding to end not only their careers, but also their lives. That is very serious. It has gone that far because they have no other options. But one option the government can give them is an exit strategy.

•(1155)

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has a concern for the tobacco farmers, as all of us do. He raised some interesting points. The real issue is that this motion does not cut it. It only deals with one aspect of the situation, and he touched on that.

One thing that is important is that when members of the board talked to us, members from the Conservative Party especially, it was not just about the tobacco producers themselves. They also had concerns about their communities. They also had a huge concern about the contraband. The member for Brant said that problem was fixed in 1994-95, but obviously that did not cut it because now it is the worst it has been in history.

What we wanted was a complete package, as laid out by the board, that looked at contraband, the municipalities and the communities, and obviously, nobody is talking about the manufacturers. They are the big players in this, or should be. Obviously it is still called the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board and there is the province as well.

I wonder if the member would comment on the exit strategy that was brought about by the previous Liberal government, better known as the tobacco adjustment assistance program, TAAP. Also, because it is the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board that regulates and legislates the quota and distribution, does he have any comments of where it should fit into the solution?

•(1200)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member that the contraband issue is far from being resolved. We see it in the news every now and then. We hear reports every month, if not every week, about how that type of criminal activity is, unfortunately, flourishing. The price of a pack of contraband cigarettes is so low that even smugglers are competing among themselves. They are fighting among themselves because prices have dropped so low. This is exactly the opposite of what is happening with oil. We do not yet have contraband oil, but we certainly have lots of contraband cigarettes.

The member talked about previous programs that were set up. That is exactly what I was saying in my speech. An effort was made, and programs were suggested to tobacco producers. But I also quoted Gaétan Beaulieu of the Quebec tobacco growers, who said, basically, that the programs were inadequate and did not fix the problem.

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That is why, today, we are appealing to the government once again. The government did sit down with them. Many meetings, round tables and committees were set up. I know that people are working on it, but we need a solution as soon as possible. Of course, I do not know what that solution might be. There are many stakeholders involved.

The member talked about tobacco manufacturers. He was quite right in saying that they should be involved in this kind of decision. They are still making many billions of dollars in profits. These people should therefore be responsible for getting involved in these kinds of programs. It should not be up to the government alone.

The manufacturers have plenty of money. They are the ones who asked farmers to make major investments not that long ago, so they should play a part in this discussion. The government, especially the Conservative government, should wake up to what is going on and do something to help these farmers.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech. If there is anything else he wants to say, I will give him a chance to do that.

I just wanted to rise to commend the member for Brant on bringing forward this very important motion. We heard about the tragedies in those families mentioned by our party's agriculture critic. It is very devastating. I certainly am glad that we are having this debate. Does the member want to add anything?

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I also congratulated the hon. member for Brant on his work. In committee, he is often the one who tells us about the problems facing tobacco farmers. For that, I commend his determination and the hard work he does in committee, not only regarding tobacco farmers, but concerning all agricultural issues.

I must point out, however, that we are here today, on this June 10, 2008, to discuss a report that was tabled on November 28, 2006. This demonstrates—and I am repeating this, as I said this earlier—that the work has been done, the meetings have been held, the committees have been struck, the discussions have taken place, and the issues and the problems are well known. Today, on June 10, we are having a three hour debate on this issue, although, really, we have probably discussed all the problems, and the solutions have even been found.

Indeed, the solution is a real exit strategy for these farmers. As I was saying, what criteria will be involved? How much money will be invested in this file? I know the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is particularly affected by this situation in her riding. She made some campaign promises on this.

It is now 2008 and it is time to implement those solutions. There are solutions available and the government knows what those solutions are. I have said this and I will say it again: it is time to do something to help those farmers, as called for not only by the hon. member for Brant, but by all members who obviously know that these people need immediate assistance.

● (1205)

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the work he has done on the file and for the conversations he has had with many of the same people we have spoken with.

He mentioned that TAAP did not respond to Quebec's tobacco issues. I agree with him. I do not believe it did. It just responded to Ontario's tobacco issues. It certainly has not brought us to a solution. At that time, it pitted farmer against farmer in a reverse auction strategy. It certainly did not get the job done.

In his speech, the member mentioned the manufacturers and talked about how they compelled the producers to convert their kilns, their burners, in order to maintain sales. He talked about how the manufacturers at this moment continually are lowering the price offered to Canadian producers and have lowered the amount of tobacco that they now purchase in Canada. We talked about the Canadian manufacturers now buying in other places.

He also mentioned the American situation and how the American strategy unfolded, but I would remind him that there the manufacturers were also a big part of the solution. The manufacturers were the ones who went to the producers and offered them a solution.

Today's motion does not even mention the manufacturers being part of the solution. I consider them to be one of the largest parts of the problem, so why are we not asking them to be part of the solution? Why are we pushing for something that is led by just the federal government? The member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex mentioned the provinces too. The province of Ontario has to play a role in this. We cannot do it single-handedly here. We must work together for the solution. I ask the member to help us with that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, we cannot disagree because previously, in questions and comments, I told my colleague that, in effect, cigarette manufacturers and tobacco companies have always had a responsibility not only in terms of the health of tobacco users—who were lead to believe, at some point, that cigarettes were not all that harmful—but also with respect to farmers who were asked to invest large amounts of money in order to upgrade. The farmers did this on the manufacturers' recommendation.

Today the growers find themselves back at square one, with cigarette manufacturers washing their hands of them and, as my colleague pointed out, now buying from somewhere else. They no longer have a problem except that they have abandoned the people with whom they did business for years and years and who had been led to believe, until just recently, that they might continue to do business with them. These people definitely have a responsibility.

Routine Proceedings

It is a shared responsibility. The provinces must also be part of the solution. What we are asking the federal government today is to do more than just say that it is a shared responsibility. I stated that we have already sat down with these people, we have already had major discussions, round tables, but today, June 10, 2008, we are having a three-hour debate on this subject because the situation has not been resolved. A very simple solution has been suggested by the tobacco farmers and that is an exit strategy.

[English]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised and saddened that nothing has been done on this issue to date. Tobacco farmers have been in crisis for a long time, at least since I have been on the job as critic for agriculture.

We have talked about this in committee and there have been meetings, yet there does not seem to be the political will to solve this problem. These folks are not asking for handouts. They are asking for a strategy to assist them to get out of this industry so they can get on with their lives and contribute, whether it is to the agriculture sector or another sector.

We must remember, and this was pointed out earlier, that it is not just government that is involved in this. There is industry. There are other stakeholders. However, the lead has to be the federal government's.

[Translation]

There needs to be some political will. This process is not complicated. It is up to the government to involve industry people and producers in finding a solution.

●(1210)

[English]

Before I move on, I would like to say that as early as March of last year I wrote a letter to the minister on behalf of Tobacco Farmers in Crisis. I have been trying to keep the ministers of agriculture informed. Others from various parties have been working hard on this. My colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London spoke to a group of farmers quite some time ago. I hope he will not mind if I quote from this press release, in which he stated:

"I cannot promise a date for this exit program, but I can tell you that we are working hard to ensure that a strategy will be forthcoming. We understand the plight of tobacco farmers, and all farmers across Canada. This is a government that is made up of Members from predominantly rural ridings [and] if we can't get this done for you, then no one can..."

"This government recognizes [that] the problem facing the tobacco industry is one that will have to be managed through collaborative efforts of industry, the province of Ontario and various federal departments".

I thank my colleague for his statement and I understand that he represents the needs of people in his riding, but in spite of what he and many others would like to see happen, there does not seem to be a movement from the upper echelons of the government to come to a resolution. That is my concern today.

I am critical of what is happening because I do not think it is right. We see the government moving quickly in other areas where maybe it should not be moving so quickly. I will provide an example.

One example is the introduction of kernel visual distinguishability, KVD, with the Grain Commission. Industry and others in the field are saying to back off and hold on until at least 2010, until we get something to replace the current way of identifying high quality wheat. Yet the current minister is moving ahead. If he had his way, this probably would have been done yesterday.

I also have seen this in the whole issue of the Canadian Wheat Board. There is the idea that we can dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board by introducing gag orders. There is the spin campaign that says our farmers are getting less.

I would like to quote a letter by the chair of the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors, Mr. Larry Hill, who talks about that very contentious question of who is getting more for wheat, the American farmers or Canadian farmers.

Because we know there is a gag order on our Canadian Wheat Board and there cannot be a publicity campaign to explain what is happening, it has to resort to letters to the editor from the chairman of the board. In answer to somebody else's letter, the chairman talks about pool returns and states:

For starters, the current Pool Return Outlook (PRO) speaks for itself; the CWB has been capturing premium prices on sales around the world. For the March 2007-08 PRO, that translates to \$8.97 per bushel for No. 1 CWRS 12.5, and \$13.09 per bushel for No. 1 CWAD 12.5.

He went on to say:

—most U.S. producers sold early, before prices rose dramatically. That means that when spot prices were peaking, North Dakota producers were unable to capitalize on the opportunity. In fact, prices peaked in the U.S. precisely because no grain could be found.

U.S. agriculture officials have been quoted for months as saying the average U.S. producer sold most of their wheat and durum early. North Dakota officials have said that the average producer there received about \$7 per bushel for durum. It's a fact that the average western Canadian producer is receiving significantly more.

This is not a debate on the Canadian Wheat Board, but I thought I would bring it up to show that when the minister and the government want to move quickly, they make every effort to do so. We have seen this work positively for the pork and cattle producers. There are some initiatives that we all work together on with the government.

●(1215)

However, on this particular issue there seems to be a reluctance, a standstill. As late as April 2, 2008 a press release stated:

Following a meeting with tobacco growers, provincial officials and tobacco manufacturers on Monday, [the] Federal Agriculture Minister...stated that while his government would help tobacco growers to access programs, "no new exit programs will be available."

The reaction was:

"We are extremely angry and disgusted," stated Tom McElhone, chairman of the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers Marketing Board in a news release.... The news release noted that both levels of government "clearly stated that they had no money or spending authority to put an exit program in place for tobacco farmers at this time."

Routine Proceedings

I would once again emphasize that around this place political will is what is necessary to move things along. We often get spin when we talk about food security issues. For example, after the agriculture committee went right across the country last year, it made a number of recommendations dealing with food security that would enhance the Canadian agriculture industry, the buy local campaigns. We were told to back off, that the government had to look at Canada's trade obligations, which seem to trump any initiatives we take here.

I have before me a motion that was passed in the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, which called upon the federal government to immediately implement an exit strategy for tobacco producers consistent with the most recent proposal they had submitted and that it be reported to the House. What is interesting is that the motion passed, but the members of the government voted against it. I cannot quite understand it. Members of the governing party are in agreement with most people and they are saying that some kind of an exit strategy is needed, yet when it comes to a vote in the committee, some kind of directions are received that they have to vote against it. That does not make sense to me.

I have a letter written by a gentleman by the name of Errol Povah, president of Airspace Action on Smoking and Health, addressed to the Conservative member of Parliament for Delta—Richmond East, in which he asks the government to do what is right for tobacco farmers. Copies of this letter were sent to 305 MPs.

Once the industry is not viable and people have invested in it, we have an obligation not only financially, but morally to ensure that these folks have some kind of an exit strategy. I must emphasize once again that we are not saying that they need *X* number of dollars from government and we have to help them out. What I and others are saying is we need a lead on this from the federal government.

In the past when there has been a crisis situation, such as in Saskatchewan a year and a half or two years ago with regard to flooding in Porcupine Plain, the federal and provincial governments throw the ball back and forth saying that the other government should start with the assistance. Canadians expect the federal government to take the lead and work with its provincial colleagues to come up with, in this case, an exit strategy for tobacco producers.

There is the whole issue of contraband. I would like to quote from a letter written to me by Mr. Brian Edwards, president of Tobacco Farmers in Crisis. It is very significant. I and my staff have met with Mr. Edwards and others in his organization on a number of occasions. I have written a number of letters to the Minister of Agriculture following up on my conversations with the folks from Tobacco Farmers in Crisis telling the minister what they are requesting and that I would like to work with the minister to help them out.

• (1220)

In this letter he touches upon a letter dated February 11. I should quote that letter in its entirety since I do have a bit of time. He states:

Thank you for seeing me while I was in Ottawa. As we discussed in our meeting, tobacco contraband is a thorny issue to get a handle on. I would think at this time a new innovative approach is needed from a native viewpoint for success. I am sending you a proposal that has been drafted here in Ontario, by a Native named Troy Montour, and Mark Bannister, and presented to Chief Bill Montour of Six Nations Reserve. It is written from a Native perspective about tobacco control. Chief Montour worked with Grand Chief Phil Fontaine, as his Chief of Staff at the Assembly of First

Nations and is a newly elected Chief here at Six Nations. He sees potential and suggested that Mr. Montour present this Draft to the Confederacy Chiefs. This has been done. The Chiefs are in the initial discussions about the approach outlined in the Draft. While in Ottawa, I met with Neil Collishaw of Physicians For A Smoke Free Canada, and learned that a similar discussion has been started at Akwesasne. I am giving all Federal Parties this proposal as a Heads Up. If Native representatives buy in to this idea, we could get contraband back under control. Taxation agreements are already in place out in the Western Provinces where Native Bands collect taxes themselves and decide what they will do with the funds. It is a new approach from a Native perspective on tobacco and they will need our encouragement and advice on how to help themselves and solve contraband issues.

We continue to press for tobacco transition/exit program for tobacco farmers with few results to date. The financial institutions are acting on tobacco farmers and demanding their money. The 2008 crop size of 21 million pounds at .30 cents per pound less than last year, only amounts to 8% of the owned quota base. It simply won't cash flow for those who don't have debts either. If you need more information about this proposal, please do not hesitate to contact me. Please feel free to discuss and share this with your fellow MPs.

[*Translation*]

This letter sums up the problem tobacco producers are facing. It is hard for them to make ends meet and they need an exit strategy. In my opinion, as I have already said a number of times, it is up to the federal government to take the initiative.

[*English*]

I have said this in other places and on other areas, but I think it has relevance here, that we are talking about an exit strategy for tobacco farmers. However, we are seeing a hands off approach by the senior government. We are seeing this philosophy, which I know permeates our government in British Columbia and it certainly seems to govern the course of action here, of letting the market decide, privatizing, deregulating. It is a philosophy of hands off, let the market decide and everything will be okay.

Everything is not okay. It is not right just to let the market decide in the case of tobacco farmers. The government has taken initiatives to help other producers. It has taken the initiative that it is the government's responsibility. It is not right to say that it will not do this or that it will let the province of Ontario or industry do it. It is up to us, the elected officials and the government, which is there to govern, to take the lead on this issue, so that people are not left to the mercy of the open market. We have a responsibility to these farmers to have a transition policy in place.

Routine Proceedings

I will end by becoming a little philosophical as I pursue this whole issue of hands off or how much government control there is. I submit for the record that our challenge in the 21st century is between those of us who are elected right across this nation, regardless at which level of government, to govern as opposed to being governed by the big multinational corporations, the ones who make those decisions in the boardrooms, the ones who are driving the agenda of British Columbia where slowly day by day we are losing control of our resources, whether it is water or oil and gas. Those corporations that are setting the agenda for the security and prosperity partnership are saying that we as a people do not have a right to debate any of these issues. This hands off approach and letting those corporations get away with that is a crime. We have to take control.

We can debate the differences in policy between the Conservative Party, the New Democratic Party, the Bloc Québécois, the Liberal Party and the Green Party, but ultimately we cannot let any party or any one of us take control away from the people. Government has a responsibility to decide. It is not good enough, as I alluded to before, for the government to say that trade obligations do not allow the government to do anything. The Americans do not really care about trade obligations. If something is hurting their farmers, they stand up for them and they look after their interests.

In closing, I would like to leave some food for thought. That is an interesting phrase. I am starting a tour across Canada next week dealing with this. It is an initiative that our party has undertaken, which I am quite excited about. We are going to be listening to people right across Canada about their concerns with regard to our industry, the control of our food supply and hope to give some direction to the government with regard to a national food policy. We announced that in a press conference a little while ago.

With that I will close. I am really proud and honoured to have had this opportunity to say a few words on behalf of our tobacco producers.

• (1225)

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for British Columbia Southern Interior cares about this issue and he has worked on it. He and I have had conversations about tobacco farmers and producers and the area of the country that grows tobacco. He quoted some of my words in his debate. I still agree that those are my words and thoughts.

The member for Haldimand—Norfolk, myself and other members who represent the tobacco growing areas have to watch if we make promises. In the statement the hon. member read, he said that I promised. If we ever use the words “I promise” as politicians, we will hear those words again some time. Someone will read them back to us, as the member did today.

I stand behind those words. I promised that I would work hard for the tobacco farmers for a solution to this crisis, as did the member for Haldimand—Norfolk. We continue to do so.

In his statement the member asked for the same thing, that we work hard to find a solution for tobacco farmers. The reason I am on my feet is the motion before us today asks for only one part of the solution to be put forward, and that is the government solve the problem.

The member said in his statement that he wanted all the stakeholders, the province and the Tobacco Marketing Board to be involved. He mentioned a good friend, Brian Edwards, from the Tobacco Farmers in Crisis. We need to be involved. The communities, in an economic way, need to be involved. He mentioned at the end, and I agree with him, that the manufacturers needed to be involved. Some of these large corporations have caused a great deal of the problem and they need to be involved in the solution.

Will the member help us in working together with all those entities to solve this problem, rather than the narrow focused motion that pits one against the other and causes division and does not help solve the problem?

• (1230)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his support and for taking the initiative in this. I know he feels very passionately about this and is doing his very best.

When I quoted from the press release, it was not a criticism, and I wanted to get back to him on this. I wanted to show that people from across the political spectrum cared about this issue, especially those members of Parliament whose ridings contained tobacco farming.

I believe we need to get all stakeholders involved. The motion does not say that. However, the motion has given us a chance to debate the issue once again and to bring it forward. The key is that we are not letting this go. Soon we will have a recess. Hopefully, as a result of this discussion, the government will start providing some direction.

It is not only up to the federal government. However, and I will repeat this, it is up to our senior government to provide direction, show some leadership and make some tough decisions. If industry says that it does not want to get involved, it is up to our government to tell it, in no uncertain terms, that it has a role in this, as do other governments, and to take the lead.

I ask the government to work together with all of us, to take the lead and ensure that we finally get a solution to this crisis.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question before us is a motion on a report from the committee, specifically the agriculture and agri-food committee, and it has to do with the representations of the tobacco producers who came before committee. They made a request that the committee support their view that there should be an exit strategy for tobacco producers consistent with the proposal.

There was a motion to report to the House that resolution, and the full Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food passed it to send it here. Therefore, I am a little confused, even though it is true that for every complex problem, there is a simple solution, and it is wrong, we need to have a comprehensive solution for complex problems.

In regard to the report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, the motion was passed by the committee. The members are saying that the motion does not include all of the possible solutions. The government members, who are speaking against this, voted against this.

Routine Proceedings

Does the member believe, and I think he does from his speech, that what we wanted to do, in the matter of this concurrence motion, was to send a message to the government to show the mood of the House was that an exit strategy for tobacco producers was part of a comprehensive solution? We wanted to bring it to the government's attention to ensure the proposal of the producers was seriously considered by the government.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I think we are all on the same page. I was in committee when we voted on the motion. It was passed, and as I mentioned earlier on, but unfortunately the government's side voted against it. Yet we know some members from the government's side feel passionately about this.

I believe it should involve a comprehensive solution, but the government should take a lead on this. It should bring all the players together so we finally get a solution to this and we do not push it back for more discussions, getting back together in September, having these folks appear again before committee, then writing another letter and having another press conference and another debate.

Let us show some teeth, some political will and let us solve this problem once and for all.

• (1235)

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will ask a very brief question, but before I do that, I would like to mention to the House that the month of June is a month that the Portuguese community in Canada celebrates. Particularly today, June 10, is considered Dia de Camoes, a day in which it celebrates the writings of a poet in the Portuguese community. I thought I would mention that first because is very important, since my riding has the largest Portuguese community in Canada.

However, outside the parameters of the motion we are currently debating, can the member think of any other solutions that maybe could have been included in the motion, which would have in fact help our tobacco farmers?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, the motion states:

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food calls on the Federal Government to immediately implement an exit strategy for tobacco producers consistent with the most recent proposal they have submitted and that it be reported to the House.

If I remember correctly, it talked about other stakeholders and about bringing in other people. Once again, the motion gives us a chance to bring this issue forward once again and hopefully come to a final solution.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a comment, as the chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, about the motion. I am a little concerned that sometimes we pass these motions without properly hearing from all the players. We have the motion on the floor today, but the committee will not hear from tobacco growers and all stakeholders in the industry until Thursday. Therefore, we are getting ahead of ourselves without looking at the entire aspect of what is happening.

I wish members would be a little more responsible in dealing with motions at committee.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I am not really sure what the question was, but he has a point. However, we often deal with

items in committee and then a report is done. By the time that happens, had we not had this debate, we would not have had a chance to bring this issue forward before Parliament finished. After having heard the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the ordinary proceedings of the House were interrupted during motions in which members have an opportunity to move what is called a concurrence motion in a committee report, and indeed, the member for Brant did move concurrence in the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

I am on duty today. I had come here prepared to debate Bill C-51 on the naturopathic health products, which is a bill that I have a lot of problems with and I hope to get an opportunity debate it later today.

However, as the member on duty, one of my responsibilities is to participate in debate if I have something to offer. I want to suggest to members and just offer to them that the first issue I ever dealt with as a parliamentarian was when I became a member of the health committee back in 1994 and tobacco labelling was the study we were dealing with. Following that, there was a significant project on aboriginal issues, not only aboriginal health but other aboriginal activities, and of course this whole issue of contraband came up. So, these issues about tobacco cessation, about the implications to the community, et cetera, have been with us for 15 years, as far as I can see.

The motion, in fact, is that the committee considered an exit strategy for tobacco producers and agreed to report the following, and what it reported was that the committee calls on the federal government to immediately implement an exit strategy for tobacco producers consistent with the most recent proposal they have submitted. This came from its 29th meeting, which was held in May.

The testimony actually came back from, I understand, as far back as November 2006. It does not surprise me because this continues to be a challenge not only for the federal government but the provincial government, municipalities, the policing authorities, and the health authorities. It permeates virtually every jurisdiction and probably every aspect of Canadian society. So, it is a pretty important issue.

I was a little distracted by the argument that the motion the committee had passed and had reported to the House was being criticized because it was not comprehensive.

As I said earlier in a question, that for every complex problem there is a simple solution, and it is wrong. If we have a complex problem, we do have to have a comprehensive strategy. Quite frankly, it may involve social as well as economic solutions. Sometimes we have factors which influence the things that are going on within our communities, within our agriculture community, our business, no matter what it is, urban, rural or whatever. There are a blend of social and economic factors involved here. It depends on what one's value system is.

Routine Proceedings

The motion here happens to be a representation on behalf of the tobacco producers. The motion on behalf of the tobacco producers is one that we hope the government understands that without a proper exit strategy for tobacco producers, there could be very significant implications, not only to them but to their communities, municipalities, the province, et cetera, and I will get into that a little bit.

The concurrence motion in itself is very clear, and that is what we are debating, and I think it is important. It is also relevant that the members would raise that notwithstanding what the producers want, we have to balance that with the other needs, and that is what government is all about. It is about making decisions, and often they are tough decisions. The members know we have had a number of difficulties.

On Friday, a private member's bill was debated in this place which had to do with providing tax credits to recent graduates who could go into certain designated regions of the country.

● (1240)

From a value standpoint, where there is a stress in terms of regional economic development, for example, a financial condition or economic health, we have on many occasions looked to some sort of assistance, whether it be subsidies, grants, or other inducements to facilitate good things to happen. For example, a tax credit would be given to a graduate to allow him or her to go to a community where there was a good job and where they could develop their skills because the employer perhaps could not compete with the salaries of a large urban centre.

If the proper skill sets are not attracted to some of the communities that are facing a financial crisis or economic duress, those businesses will go down and that will have a ripple effect throughout the community.

Chances are communities are going to experience things like population decline or higher unemployment. People will start losing their investments because the community will no longer be vibrant and it will not be able to meet all the needs of today's families.

There is a ripple effect to everything we do. It is almost like a Newton's law in government. For every action there could very well be an equal or opposite reaction. It could be much like the children's game of pick up sticks. Not often, but periodically, if we touch something we move everything and everything in between. We have to take this into account.

In listening to the debate on this issue, there seems to be one position suggesting that all we need is an exit strategy for tobacco producers and the problem will be solved. That is not the case.

The motion before us was passed by the agriculture and agri-food committee. The consensus of the committee was that it was important to bring the motion to the House to remind the government of this particular crisis. It is a regional crisis and it has to do with the kinds of things that we would talk about when we talk about regional economic development.

It is important that we respond and that we be sensitive to the ebbs and flows when we consider what is happening nationally. Resource rich provinces are doing extremely well in the Canadian economy, whereas those provinces with a large manufacturing sector are

hurting terribly. This means that Newfoundland has become a have province and Ontario is getting close to being a have not province. This is a very significant change.

This means that a lot of people are moving to the oil producing provinces like Saskatchewan, Alberta and Newfoundland, which are doing extremely well. Their economies are vibrant. If we take that on a smaller scale and look at the communities with tobacco industries, we will find that there is a crisis there. Tobacco producers are feeling the impact. There is not enough work and they are going to have to get out of the business.

I understand the average age of a tobacco producer right now is something like 58 years, which is fairly deep into one's vibrant working career. It may be difficult for these individuals to find other gainful employment in their community simply because of the nature of the work.

I also understand that the average debt load of tobacco producers is somewhere around \$400,000. When we consider this and the unlikelihood of producers getting another job, it means they may lose their farm. Even worse, they may lose their home. That is the reality of the situation. A lot of investment was made not only in the basic farm equipment but within the industry specific requirements of manufacturers in terms of the burner equipment.

This is a real crisis situation. I do not believe the committee would have reported it to the House nor would it have been brought forward for debate today for up to three hours if it did not affect people in a number of regions across Canada. To Quebec, this is certainly an important issue as it is in Ontario.

● (1245)

As things move on, I have a feeling that there should be a comprehensive strategy. Concurrence motions are not binding on the government. They are to indicate the mood of the House and a sense of the importance of the issue. Members will have a chance to vote on this motion.

It will tell the stakeholders that the standing committee reported on it. It will tell stakeholders that their intervention was heard, discussed in Parliament, and there was a position taken by one party that was different from another. It tells them where we are on this thing. It gives the government an opportunity to respond. The government may very well respond and maybe we will look to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to make some commentary on the crisis we face.

An example that has been debated a bit here and an area that I spend a fair bit of time on not only on the health committee but on the finance committee is the issue of contraband, tobacco smuggling and its implications. It is a serious problem and has been going on for a very long period of time. I remember debating the price elasticity and whether, by increasing the price of cigarettes, we could move the problem away. All that would do is cause tobacco to be sold more cheaply through the contraband distribution channels. It would get out there.

Routine Proceedings

I remember visiting the Micmac reserve. It has a beautiful recreation and social building. Committee members had a tour of that when we were travelling on aboriginal health issues. I was really surprised to go downstairs and see a big lineup of persons in front of someone with a cash box in an enormous room in the basement that was filled with cartons of tobacco in large cardboard boxes.

The people were there to buy big boxes of cigarettes for distribution. It was pretty clear that this was contraband material. This is probably a way of life, but it is causing difficulty in getting a resolution on some of the issues that the agriculture and agri-food committee have raised.

I hear members say, "We don't totally disagree. In fact, what we will say is that the motion is kind of silly because it only deals with part of the problem". That motion was passed by a standing committee and brought to the House. At least the consensus of the committee thought it was important enough to report to the House. As a consequence, that is why we are here.

This is an important aspect, notwithstanding as I had indicated earlier, that the scheduled business of the day was to continue debate on Bill C-51, the naturopathic health products bill. The surprising revelation yesterday, as a matter of fact, was that the health minister has written to the chair of the health committee to outline seven substantive amendments to that bill even though we are in the middle of second reading. I do not know how that will go. I have a feeling that is a problem to be dealt with.

In the health committee meetings, when we dealt with the plain packaging of tobacco and putting warning labels on the tobacco products, one of the witnesses was a provincial minister who came before the committee on behalf of his community, I believe it was the area of Smiths Falls. This shows an example of a ripple effect of doing something to change or deal with a health objective and there being a consequence that we were not aware of.

• (1250)

This consequence was that in his community there was a major print shop that provided a significant number of jobs in the community. If the recommendations of Health Canada and the Standing Committee on Health were adopted, the printing on tobacco packages would have to be done by a very specialized type of printing called rotogravure, which is a very high end printing process. It requires much different machinery than one would typically be aware of because it has to produce in certain colours and all the range for all of these cigarette packages, et cetera.

That former provincial minister in Ontario came to fight on behalf of his community. He said he did not really have a problem with the tobacco requirements, but he did not want the requirement for specialized printing because it would have negative consequences for his community.

We can see, then, that we have to look at the producers. I am not so sure that I am very concerned about what the manufacturers are concerned about. Most of the manufacturers are multinational conglomerates that are in broad-based businesses. I think it would be very difficult to see the implications for them if a region of farmers had to convert their products or get out of the business. They are

going to find it somewhere. There is always someone. For that matter, it could be China.

There are other things that I have not heard yet. We were discussing the tobacco producing side and the alternative crops that could come in. That was also a very important part.

I know that at the time canola was one of the big ones that was coming forward, because in fact it takes less acreage to produce canola than it does a comparable product. That is one of which I am aware. I am not sure on the science and how things have moved since then, but I know that canola is a very important agricultural crop for Canada. It has a wide variety of uses.

As the previous speaker said, I think the members have at least a consensus that this is a complex problem. I think they believe that we have to keep our eye on the implications, but not only for the producers, who may have significant debt and who may be of an age where they may not be able to find alternative employment if they lose their farms. We also have to look at the implications for the rest of the community and the municipality.

What is the municipal impact? What is the economic impact if we lose farms and workers? What are the conditions there? What are the criteria? How do we determine whether there is a significant economic impact? How do we determine whether the principles of regional economic development should kick in? How do we determine what the filter is through which we can determine who can get assistance? What are the criteria for application?

How do we make sure that all of the stakeholders have a part to play, not just the federal government and not just the provincial government, but the municipalities as well? They have a vested interest in seeing a good outcome.

I think that is what this debate is about. I think that is the message the government should get, notwithstanding that the motion in itself only deals with the producers. That is why this concurrence motion and debate for a little under three hours are so important. We have these often. We have these debates on very important issues. They are not important to every riding across the country, and we know that, but there are parallels.

I do not have tobacco producers in my riding. I live in the suburban area of Mississauga, but when I come here, I learn from my committee work, from debate on bills and from my exposure to the debate in the House when the motion comes up. I then see the parallels. I see that these are problems that we need to approach in a consistent fashion, so that all of the stakeholders, no matter what their positions are, will fully understand and accept the wisdom of parliamentarians and how to approach a matter for which it is probably in the best interests of all Canadians to find an appropriate resolution.

• (1255)

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous speaker stated that it is a complex problem chasing a simple solution or a simple problem chasing a complex solution.

Routine Proceedings

It is all of the above. I attended committee on the day that this was debated. Normally I am not on that committee, but because of my friends and constituents who grow tobacco, I chose to be there. I thought I made a very passionate plea to amend the motion to include some of the complexities that I am talking about now.

I asked for some of them to be included in the motion. The opposition majority on that committee voted them down and then voted to make the motion read exactly as it is. It is a very simple motion that pits farmers against farmers and solution against solution.

The member stated some fairly simple solutions for the problem. I agree that there are sometimes very simple solutions to problems. However, he mentioned canola as an alternative crop. We do need some alternative crops, but in the tobacco belt of southern Ontario it is mostly blow sand. It is very sandy soil, so any crop grown there needs to be irrigated.

Thus, there is the cost of irrigation for those producers. As for growing a crop that someone else down the street can grow from rainfall, the cost of production is way too high.

While I am on that, I should mention from an agriculture point of view how even the thought of a carbon tax for agriculture producers has them shaking. For agriculture and rural Canada, the extra costs of production from a carbon tax are going to be just horrendous.

However, let us go back to tobacco instead of talking about what could be wrong with a solution that includes a carbon tax.

It is a complex problem. That was the history of the motion. The motion does need to be addressed, but there is more to it than that. We have tried to add more to it than this. The opposition has simplified it to how the government will solve all problems of all people. We are saying that this is not case. We are saying that the manufacturers need to be a piece of this, the province needs to be piece of this and the tobacco board needs to be a piece of this. I ask for the member's support on that.

• (1300)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, if we consider that if there were a carbon tax over four years of some 4¢, that would have an impact, I am sure, but when the Conservative government took office the price of gasoline was 65¢ a litre. It is now \$1.35 under the government's watch, so there we go. A government has to be responsible for what happens under its watch.

On the member's question, the concurrence motion is with regard to a resolution that was passed by the committee and came here. I do not think members are opposed to an exit strategy for tobacco producers, but they also are in favour of building the comprehensive solution by other matters. We can raise that. I do not think we have to amend this because this is not binding on the government.

However, right now this is an opportunity for all members of Parliament to assess whether or not they believe that the tobacco producers, given the facts related to their economic and demographic situation, should be considered for an exit strategy that would be supported by the federal government in conjunction with other jurisdictions as appropriate. If we cannot agree on that, I would be very disappointed.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's words and as usual he had some interesting and very wise comments about the issue. I would tend to agree with him that it is not just an issue of an exit strategy for tobacco farmers.

He raised a point that is of particular concern to me and that I think is important for all regions of Canada. That is the point about developing, with regions and provinces, comprehensive economic development strategies so that we are not always in a position of crisis and can plan ahead. This is precisely, it seems to me, what the Conservative government is not doing and what the former government perhaps has done on the cheap.

For example, in western Canada, western economic diversification is now funded on only a by project basis, rather than through working with regions and municipalities and looking at how to best develop their assets in order to look forward and really respond to the needs of the communities.

Would the member comment on that? What does he think government could do to strengthen that regional economic diversification and development component?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, if we were talking about 1,000 jobs lost at an Oshawa auto manufacturing plant, the member can understand how a regional economic development program could have a better level of success by transitioning the skill set, because it is an area in which skills are transferable.

In the case of tobacco producers, we are dealing with a very extraordinary situation. For reasons that have been coming down the pike for a long time, and we are still fighting it, it certainly has given the signals to people that we should be transitioning out. I am sure there are going to be people who will ask why they are still growing tobacco when they know there is no future in tobacco.

However, the reality is that some people cannot get out of it because they have such a high level of debt. As well, with their average age of over 58 years, they do not have a lot of choices. Perhaps it really gets down to whether the criteria are fine tuned enough. There probably is going to be a large number of tobacco producers who do not have a lot of options. They may lose their farms. They may lose their homes. I am not sure that this is the way we want to govern our country.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the presenter from Mississauga is always eloquent and articulate. I have a quick question for him. He mentioned that he was a former member of the health committee and the finance committee.

Routine Proceedings

It is not as if tobacco farmers have developed a problem overnight and now we see the agriculture committee addressing it. I understand that I do not have much time, but in terms of the exit strategy, why does it happen at the last minute with the government? Suddenly the government realizes that there is a problem with tobacco farmers, just like we have a problem with the environment and a problem with aboriginals. It takes months and months before there is communication between one department and another.

Should there not have been a solution presented prior to this situation arising in such a fashion that tobacco farmers actually have to lose their farms or lose their production?

• (1305)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the point is well taken. This has not come up at the last minute. As a matter of fact, in the last Parliament, there was a national exit strategy with proposed funding of some \$275 million.

Members will know that governments come and go, but the bureaucracy, particularly the departments, stays the same. The departments are still committed to it, but we would have to study this and find out. It is still there that there should be an exit strategy, but what is clear, since the government voted against this motion at committee and is speaking against it here in debate, is that the government has no interest whatsoever in introducing a tobacco exit strategy for these producers. It has no interest whatsoever.

It means that the producers should be concerned, because the money is not going to be there, the priority is not there, and the government has not started on it. Even when we raise it for a brief period of some three hours, the government has made it very clear that tobacco producers are on their own. Municipalities with tobacco producers are on their own. Provinces need not worry because the federal government is not going to come to them for any sharing of money. They are on their own.

I am not sure that Canadians will feel comfortable with a government which feels that people should just keep their money and take care of themselves, a government that does not care if they have a problem.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I were a producer sitting out there I can tell members that I would be pretty confused about the message coming from the other side.

The member just said the whole solution has to be comprehensive with regard to the municipalities, the manufacturers and the tobacco board, yet at committee, the committee members voted against that. That is why the motion is irrelevant. It focuses on only one point.

It does not bring in the part about what we are sitting with right now, with my colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London, who is setting the task force that will bring in what the board asked for, which was that the municipalities, the communities and the manufacturers deal with contraband and deal with the federal and provincial governments.

I am wondering why the member has changed his tune and has not read what actually has happened through the committee.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, we know that the manufacturers are a big part of the problem. We know that municipalities will be affected. We know that communities will be affected. We know that some of these tobacco producers have serious hardships.

It is not a matter of what this motion says. It is a matter of whether or not the government needs to be reminded, but even on this small point about being part of a comprehensive solution, the government has said no.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put the question necessary to dispose of the motion 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 nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The vote stands deferred until 3 p.m. this day.

* * *

• (1310)

[*English*]

PETITIONS

UNITED STATES 9/11 COMMISSION REPORT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to present three petitions.

The first petition is signed by approximately 500 people from across Canada. The petition points out that scientific and eyewitness evidence shows that the 9/11 commission report is a fraudulent document and that elements within the U.S. government were complicit in the murder of thousands of people on September 11, 2001. The petition points out that this brought Canada into the so-called war on terror that has changed the domestic and foreign policies for the worse and that will have negative consequences for Canada.

Routine Proceedings

NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from people who are very concerned about what is going to happen with regulations concerning natural health products.

The petitioners believe that these products are essential to the health and well-being of Canadians and that they not only contribute to the treatment of illness, but also the prevention of illness. Therefore, the petitioners call on the Government of Canada to abandon the proposed cost recovery program of Health Canada that would limit the choices for Canadians.

ANIMAL TRANSPORT REGULATIONS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my third petition concerns the transportation of animals and points out that the current regulations are outdated and in need of revision.

The petitioners call on the House of Commons to amend the animal transport regulations under Canada's Health of Animals Act to be consistent with the findings of the European Union scientific committee on animal health and welfare.

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to present another income trust broken promise petition on behalf of a large number of constituents of Mississauga South.

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts, but he did break that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax on income trusts which permanently wiped out \$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly of 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 was clearly demonstrated at the finance committee hearings; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and third, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition signed by Canadians from Quebec and Ontario, all of whom are concerned about the provisions of Bill C-10 with regard to the film and video tax credit.

The petitioners demand protection for freedom of expression in Canada and call on the government to take measures to promote and not limit artistic freedom. They note their strong opposition to measures of censorship and their belief that the provisions of Bill C-10 are just that and should be rescinded.

The petitioners are also concerned that Bill C-10 gives the Minister of Canadian Heritage discretionary power to impose her own subjective judgments concerning artistic content.

Finally, the petitioners call for objective and transparent program guidelines that support film and video production.

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of many Canadians who are asking that the government rescind a provision of Bill C-10 that allows the government to censor film or video productions under some ill-

defined, vague criteria. We have all heard of the impact these provisions will have on the film industry, and there are already laws that contain provisions regarding pornography, child pornography, hate propaganda and violent crime.

These Canadians are asking the government to put in place objective and transparent guidelines that respect freedom of expression when delivering any program intended to support film and video production in Canada.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present a petition once again from thousands and thousands of Canadians.

They make the point that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known, and yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world. They point out that Canada actually spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and even blocks international efforts to curb its use.

Therefore, these many petitioners call upon Parliament to ban asbestos in all of its forms, to institute a just transition program for asbestos workers and their communities, to end all government subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and abroad, and to stop blocking other countries that are trying to save their citizens from being exposed to asbestos, and to stop blocking international conventions, such as the Rotterdam Convention, designed to protect workers from exposure to Canadian asbestos.

* * *

● (1315)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: Question No. 209.

[Text]

Question No. 209—**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:**

With regard to funding for the North American Future 2025 Project: (a) has the government provided any direct or indirect funding for the North American Future 2025 Project being conducted under the joint stewardship of the Conference Board of Canada, the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the "Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática"; and (b) has the government received any report, from any or all of these parties, following the research they have conducted or consultations they have held, individually or jointly, in connection with the project?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to a) The Government of Canada has not provided direct or indirect funding for the North American Future 2025 Project being conducted under the joint stewardship of the Conference Board of Canada, the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the "Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática".

In response to b) There are no records in the systems which track correspondence for the Privy Council Office, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Industry Canada or Environment Canada that indicate any reports on the North American Future 2025 Project were received by the government.

[English]

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

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

The House resumed from June 9 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. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-51. This bill has caused great concern among my constituents and other Canadians. Many of them are seniors and ailing citizens.

For several months I have been receiving letter after letter from my constituents regarding their concerns about this bill. They are ordinary Canadians who are worried that they will not be able to get the natural health products that they have been using successfully for years. They are worried that Health Canada will be given police state powers. I have had the opportunity to meet with many of them as well. The bill is alarming people who are not political. A constituent of mine, Johan Ghazali, wrote:

While I don't also get involved in politics, I am concerned about a new Bill that will affect many Canadians including myself. The Bill in question is Bill C-51 that is being ramped through Parliament without much debate.

On the surface, C-51 appears to be about protecting the public health, but has many profound and perturbing implications.

Yesterday we learned in a regular government member's speech that this bill is incomplete. The government will be proposing major amendments to the bill. This proves that the concerns of my constituents are justified.

I am greatly concerned about the issues raised by my constituents. I am committed to improving the safety and health of Canadians. I support measures which will strengthen the regulatory process to ensure that Canadians are able to access the safest and most effective therapeutic products.

I firmly believe that Canadians have a fundamental right to have access and choice in treatment options regarding their health. Time after time, the government's policy has been to bring the message from Ottawa to Canadians. The Conservatives are tight-lipped about the information, never saying anything but the Prime Minister's talking points.

Government Orders

That is not my way of doing things. That is not what my constituents want me to do. My constituents elected me to bring their message to Ottawa. That is what I am doing and it is what I will keep doing.

We should ensure that this legislation does not further restrict the use, sale and distribution of safe natural health products. We need to balance the controls with the danger. My constituents are telling me that the drugs on the market are not a great risk to the health of Canadians.

One of my constituents, Ms. Eموke Szijarto, wrote:

—I have been using “natural remedies” since my childhood instead of taking harmful chemicals. My father who is a doctor has prescribed us natural remedies when we were sick and he is a great advocate of using natural things in healing. I learnt from him, and wish to follow it.

Many more of my constituents use natural health products to improve their well-being, as do many other Canadians. Last Friday I met with a couple in their seventies, Adella and Richard Matthew, who are in good health. They say their vitality comes from the use of these products for the past 30 years, but they are worried. They are worried that they will not be able to get those products anymore. They are worried that they will need prescriptions which would involve a doctor's appointment which is hard to get. They are worried that they will be punished for recommending products to their friends. They are not alone.

● (1320)

My constituents Randy and Terri Pope wrote that this bill:

—goes against everything that the average Canadian citizen believes in, such as freedom of choice and freedom of speech. My mother and father were born and raised in this great Country, and I'm sure my mother would roll over in her grave in disgust if she heard of this outrageous proposal. How dare this Government try to control how I decide to care for my health.

There are many legitimate reasons to use these products. Some of my constituents want to lower the costs of their medication. Others want to avoid unpleasant side effects. Some believe that alternative therapies are simply more effective.

Another one of my constituents wrote:

I am a 31 year old male suffering from sever Sudden Onset Arthritis. At it's worst this disease has totally handicapped my mobility. Not satisfied with the solutions offered to me by mainstream North American medication I turned to the recently provincially acknowledged Traditional Chinese Medicine profession and have been receiving treatment...for the past two years. The success of the treatments has been phenomenal in that I am now mobile again...The TCM treatments I have been involved with have none where as the Mainstream solution had many side effects that I was unwilling to live with.

I support the right to meet these needs with natural drug products.

There is a great concern that the bill will lump natural health products into the same regulatory regime as drugs and be subject to a higher burden of regulation. It would move them and several others into the same heading and not differentiate between drugs and natural health products.

Government Orders

I support the rights of consumers to fair and accurate product information. The claims about health benefits made on the packages and in the marketing of these products must be truthful and honest. They must not mislead Canadians. I support efforts to improve enforcement of these principles.

The government says that it has no intention to permit direct-to-consumer advertising, yet the bill leaves a loophole that could allow pharmaceutical companies to directly advertise drugs to consumers through television, radio and print, as they do in the neighbouring United States of America. This could drive up the health care costs and influence which drugs people take. It would take advertising out of the hands of Parliament. That is a serious concern.

Finally, my constituents are concerned that tighter regulations would benefit drug companies. Natural health products are one of the few competitors to that large, well-financed industry. Undermining them would benefit their bottom line.

My constituent, W.R. Blair, is very concerned about these changes. He wrote:

The language of the Bill is a true reflection of slippery and slimy corporate tactics which should be viewed as criminal conspiracy in my view....

This dirty stinking backroom deal furthers my belief that corporations have bought and paid for legislative compliance...

The government needs to assure Canadians that big pharma is not the driving force behind the bill.

There is work to be done on the existing act. Recent incidents of unsafe food, health and consumer products have underscored the need to modernize the Food and Drugs Act. It was introduced back in the 1950s. I support modernizing the regulatory system. We need to improve the surveillance of these products throughout their life cycle.

● (1325)

Yesterday we learned that the government would propose three major amendments in committee to address these serious concerns. To the best of my knowledge, the Conservatives intend to separate natural health products into their own legislative category, make it clear that the regulation of natural health products is separate, clarify the powers of inspectors and set up an advisory committee.

These are significant amendments, which will dramatically change the treatment of natural health products. This means Health Canada does not have the confidence of any of the government members.

The government is proposing major changes that are outlined in nothing but a speech. It reminds me of the documentation-free unveiling of its defence strategy all over again.

It is my understanding that some of the Conservative MPs wrote a letter to the health committee chair outlining the changes. Yet no members from my party have it. This is shocking. All members were elected to represent the interest of their constituents in Parliament. Does the government think some MPs are more equal than others? That is no way to govern in a minority Parliament situation.

How am I supposed to comment on these improvements when they have not even been drafted yet? We should be debating the real bill. I agree with the member for Mississauga South. If the government is serious, the bill can be withdrawn now, amendments

can made and re-submitted to the House so Canadians can have the real bill and we can all have a real debate. I welcome the direction of these amendments and look forward to studying them when they are finished.

I see some of the members on the Conservative bench laughing about this. In fact, it is a laughing stock. The Minister of Health has written a letter to the health committee and it is not available to all 308 members in the House who have equal representation. It is very important from that perspective.

Again, I still welcome the direction of these amendments and look forward to studying them when they are finished, or are made public.

Judy LeBeau, one of my constituents, would welcome them as well. She writes:

The debate surrounding C-51 is an excellent opportunity for the Government to make good on previous commitments to create a third category for natural health products, which are low risk and have demonstrated benefits for the health and wellbeing of Canadians.

From the beginning, the government has failed to reach out to the grassroots. It has been clear for months that ordinary Canadians care about the bill. Yet the government ignored their concerns and refused to have a dialogue with regular people. When the government finally put out answers their questions, it did not make it easy to access that information. Even the elderly couple I met with last week could not find it. Even if people find it, these major amendments, which the minister will propose to the committee, will change the intent of the bill and change all the questions and answers on that website. This failure has worsened confusion in the public and scared ailing and wonderful Canadians.

● (1330)

I support the right of my constituents to have choice in health treatments. Part of that choice is having access to honest and safe natural products.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess I want to congratulate the hon. member, but I would like to ask him a question. The reason I guess I would like to do that is I was very confused by his speech.

On one hand, he complained that the government did not go out and speak to people, which we did. That is where the amendments and suggested amendments have come from, because we listened to Canadians and stakeholders. He is wrong, even on some of the things he has said himself.

Why would the member come to the House of Commons with a speech like that and mislead Canadians? I spoke with the member yesterday. We talked about all the amendments. He now pretends they did not exist and the bill is a bad bill, yet he knows full well that we are at second reading. This is what we do in the House of Commons. This is where we have debate with members participating. This is where we come up with ideas to make the bills better.

I do not understand the logic that it is somehow wrong to amend a bill. We have proposed certain amendments that will alleviate all the concerns the member has raised in his speech. The member knew that before presenting his speech. I am curious why the member would stand in the House and mislead Canadians in such a fashion.

Government Orders

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, the question of the member for Cambridge is exactly where I wanted to go. I asked the member for a copy of the letter so I could see the amendments. In response he told me that he did not have the letter from the minister to the health committee.

How do we know whether those amendments even exist? We have to assume it. This is exactly the problem with the government. It is very tight-lipped. If it were so open and so honest, then it should share those amendments right here.

The right thing to do is to withdraw the bill and then bring forward the amendments. We should bring the real bill into the House so members can have a real debate on it. It is not only us. My constituents should be able to look at the amendments and make comments on them.

The exact policy of the government is that it does not want to share the information with the grassroots.

• (1335)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have three short questions and comments.

First, for the experts on the bill who are watching, as I said in my previous speech, it is very important for one of my constituents that Empowerplus continues to be legally available. I hope they would confirm to me by email or some other means that it is the case.

Second, the member for Cambridge, with whom I mostly agree on this bill, has to understand that the reason the members have asked to consider the bill before second reading is there are so many amendments both by the government and others. The experience we have had in the past is when we get to second reading, we cannot change things that much.

We had an example in one committee where something was changed in a clause from year to two years and the Conservative chair of the committee ruled it out of order, it was too much change. Therefore, we can understand people's hesitancy and why they would prefer the bill to go to committee before second reading.

A question I have for the member is from one of my constituents, Drew. It is very short, but it reflects a concern about which other constituents have also written. He says:

I would not be writing this letter if this bill had no "teeth", but unfortunately (under section 23) it gives government agents unprecedented power to search, confiscate and prosecute people...

Does the member have any comments on the regulatory and enforcement mechanisms in the bill?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Yukon for his work on this bill, for his speech in the House yesterday, and for his commitment to his constituents.

When it comes to enforcement, many of my constituents are fearful that inspectors will be able to go into their bedrooms and kitchens to find these drugs. They will be put in jail and face a big fine.

We are looking for a third category where we can have legislation instead of regulation, so it is clearly defined by Parliament. Inspectors need to have clear direction from Parliament. This is a

concern of constituents in Yukon and also a concern of my constituents in Newton—North Delta.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has always been my understanding, as a member of Parliament, that when one votes in favour of a bill at second reading, one is voting on the principles of that bill. We expect that the bill will be sent to committee where committee members can work on the details, and work on minor adjustments to the bill to make those principles work. If the amendments are substantive, then the principles are being changed.

In this case the minister has stated both inside and outside the House and at committee that natural health products were not at play in the bill. He said that nothing in this legislation would change the rules for natural health products: the availability, the choice. But I understand from members opposite that the minister now wants to put forward some amendments that would deal specifically with natural health products where they are not involved in the bill now. That is changing the principles of the bill.

I believe that it would be respectful of the House if the minister withdrew the bill, made the relevant amendments, and put the bill forward, so that all members could do an adequate study, receive advice from the Library of Parliament, receive advice from interest groups and professionals prior to our debate at second reading, and well in advance of it going to committee where we would make those moderate modifications.

Does the member not find this to be contemptuous of Parliament? Does he not find it to be disrespectful that members would abuse their privileges in this way?

• (1340)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I have had many discussions with the member for West Nova. He was very kind every time I spoke to him about my constituents' concerns. We had a very open discussion.

The question that he raises is exactly what I meant in my speech. The member for Cambridge had explicit information that we did not have and our constituents did not have. Those amendments would change the intent of the bill.

The member for West Nova said the same thing. It would be better for the minister to withdraw the bill, put the amendments into the bill, and let the bill come back to the House, so that Canadians and parliamentarians could have a real look at it. Parliamentarians could then have an open and transparent debate on the bill to bring out the truth—

Mr. Gary Goodyear: You would not understand it, if I wrote it for you.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, the member for Cambridge can grumble about whatever he wants. He has admitted that he has explicit information that other members do not have. What is wrong with us?

I would suggest that the government should withdraw the bill and note rush it through this Parliament.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. The debate on Bill C-51 has now lasted for more than five hours. Accordingly, the speeches that will follow will be limited to 10 minutes.

[*Translation*]

I will give the floor first to the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes for a 10-minute speech.

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise as a member of the Standing Committee on Health, and also as a consumer, to speak to Bill C-51.

The Bloc Québécois has been saying for a long time that there is a lack of surveillance over foods from countries other than Canada. We ask that importers of such products meet standards similar to the ones we have here for products manufactured in Quebec and Canada. The Bloc Québécois also wonders whether these importers should not also be subject to a number of criteria to ensure that public health is not threatened by products manufactured elsewhere.

Of course, Bill C-51 would introduce innovations such as a tracing system, a register of adverse effects especially for drugs, a recall management system, a new measure to eliminate damaging effects on public health. However, the bill also contains slightly vaguer measures that, according to the bill, would be clarified by regulations.

It is because of this vagueness that we must meet in committee with the Minister of Health, in order to find out why the bill leaves so much room for regulations. It is also important that the committee hear experts from various associations and even members of the public. Once the committee has done its work on Bill C-51, we expect the minister to be extremely open to amendments that will improve the bill.

At this point, I would like to mention a few vague provisions that will require clarification when the bill is studied in greater detail in committee. We know that Bill C-51 makes changes regarding drug advertising. Subclause 15.1(2) of the bill prohibits advertising of prescription therapeutic products. I quote:

No person shall advertise a prescription therapeutic product to a person other than a practitioner unless they are authorized by the regulations to do so.

Here, once again, the bill mentions regulations yet to come.

Nonetheless, this regulation would allow prescription drugs to be advertised. It is possible to do so under paragraph 30(1)(h).

The Governor in Council may make regulations for carrying the purposes and provisions of this Act into effect, including regulations... respecting: (i) the labelling, packaging or advertising—or the offering or exposing for sale—of foods, therapeutic products or cosmetics.

Current legislation at least bans the advertising of prescription drugs. However, as we know, it is possible to get around the legislation. There are two choices for advertising drugs: the product can be named but not described and the ad can show people enjoying themselves living a better life, or the problem can be described but not the treatment and people can be told to consult their physician.

We know that the bill appears to be going in precisely the same direction. Consumer associations in Quebec and Canada have asked the government a number of times to plug this loophole.

• (1345)

Perhaps this should be cleared up in committee.

There is also the marketing and approval of drugs. Currently Health Canada is assessing the possibility of setting up a new type of drug licensing called progressive licensing. Bill C-51 includes some of the concepts involved in this progressive licensing approach. It would allow information to be collected and analyzed on an ongoing basis after the drug is marketed. It is only after the drug is marketed that a greater number of people will be exposed to it and that other important data on the drug could be established.

It is good to look at the entire life cycle of a drug to see whether it works. Quite often when clinical trials are done, the number of guinea pigs, as they could be called, is relatively limited, which sometimes prevents us from seeing in detail the possible interaction a drug may have with other drugs the patient is already taking. What is more, as Professor Carleton from British Columbia told us in committee, genetics can also come into play when assessing drugs.

However, considering this approach, we need to ask questions. Will the process be rushed? Will drugs end up on the market before they have been carefully examined? Another question we should ask is whether drugs will be put on the market before they are fully ready to be put on store shelves and in pharmacies.

Subclause 18.7(1) of the bill seems to open the door to that possibility. It states:

Subject to the regulations, the Minister may, on application, issue a market authorization to a person in respect of a therapeutic product other than a designated therapeutic product if the Minister is of the opinion that the person has established that the benefits that are associated with the therapeutic product outweigh the risks.

(2) The market authorization is deemed to be subject to the terms and conditions that are prescribed from time to time.

(3) The Minister may issue the market authorization subject to the additional terms and conditions that he or she considers appropriate.

We would like to speak to the minister to find out, for example, what are the criteria he will use to evaluate and make that decision in accordance with proposed subclause 18.7.

The bill also states that the minister will establish a register where information on adverse effects will be available. Subclause 20.8 of the bill says:

The Minister is to establish and maintain a publicly accessible register in which is to be kept the prescribed information about therapeutic products.

However, we also read in the bill that the information in the register will come only from health care institutions. No register will be set up to gather complaints from consumers or patient associations, for example. Only health care institutions will be able to contribute. What is the reason for this? It would be interesting to hear the minister's response to this as well.

Government Orders

This register raises another question. We currently have the MedEffect register. What will happen to it? Does this mean that this register is ineffective? Once again, it would be interesting to come back to these questions in committee.

The bill also talks about inspectors. This is important. Currently, there are many inspectors who work within the Quebec Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agri-Food performing the same duties as this bill proposes. These people play an important role in food inspection. We wonder how Bill C-51 would affect these people and if the federal government would be interfering in Quebec's jurisdiction with this bill.

• (1350)

There is also the question of natural health, which—

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

We shall now proceed to questions and comments. The hon. member for West Nova.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member on his remarks. He is a diligent member of the health committee, and I cannot help but notice his impressive new haircut. I understand he shaved his head to raise funds in support of people with cancer. What a commendable thing to do.

I am sure he has followed this bill's progress, as have I. All the witnesses who appeared before the committee, not specifically for this bill, but to examine some of the drugs on the market and the drug approval process, generally spoke in favour of progressive licensing for drugs, which this bill specifies.

The member realizes, as I do, that many Canadians were afraid that this bill would make it more difficult to access natural health products. The minister indicated that this bill was in no way meant to target those products or change access to them in any way. It is not meant to make access any easier or any more difficult. It is not meant to change the licences to sell such products or any such matters. He said that was a completely separate issue.

Now we are told the minister intends to make a number of changes to the bill, changes that will affect these products. I think this will change the principles of this bill and I would like to ask the hon. member if he agrees with me.

We were asked to support the principles of this bill at second reading and to study it thoroughly in committee. Now, those principles are being changed. When we go back to committee, it will be with a bill that is different from the one we have been studying so far, the one we have been discussing with experts, the one on which the research branch of the Library of Parliament has been advising us. I would like to hear the hon. member's comments on this.

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to thank my colleague from West Nova who noted my new haircut and also that it was not a moment of madness that led me to shave off all my locks, but a heartfelt gesture in support of children suffering from cancer. Together with 7,300 other participants who shaved their heads, we managed to raise \$3,800,000, which will give hope to these children.

With regard to his question on natural health products, at present, there is a great deal of confusion. People are wondering whether the new regulations will contradict the Natural Health Products Regulations. It will be very important for the minister to be clear about this when the bill is studied in more detail in committee. We must allow Canadians to address the committee and we must work together to shed light on the matter and to ensure that all legislation is respected and that people are safely able to use the products they currently turn to.

• (1355)

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by the member and also congratulate him on his support for children with cancer.

He went through many of the problems with the bill and mentioned many of the reasons why I, personally, do not support the legislation and why the NDP caucus is not supporting it either.

I want to raise particularly the question about natural health products and Chinese traditional medicine, which is very important to people in my riding. It is a long and distinguished tradition, maybe even longer than western medicine, yet it seems to be compromised by this legislation.

I wonder if the hon. member could comment as well on that issue and the fact that even the Conservatives now seem to realize that there are very serious flaws with this legislation, necessitating amendments at this particular stage in the process.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I must inform the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes that he has 30 seconds to comment.

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, I will try to wrap it up in under 30 seconds. I already touched on this subject in answer to the question from the hon. member for West Nova.

The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas is quite right. We must ensure that natural health products are governed by a code, a law, but we must also ensure that the bill before us does not interfere with the law in place and that all citizens will be able to use those products that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to at least begin to address the issue of Bill C-51, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act.

There are very important issues raised in this legislation. It is not the first time a government in Canada in recent years has tried to change this legislation. In fact, this is about the fifth time in recent years and there has never been great success in overhauling this legislation.

Statements by Members

It appears that the current government is facing the same kinds of problems. We now hear that even the Conservatives are proposing major amendments to their own legislation given the public outcry about it.

There are many serious problems with this legislation, things like the provision for direct to consumer advertising of pharmaceuticals. We have seen that this bill may open that door. We also know the American experience that many of us have some exposure to. We are concerned that that might increase costs to consumers. How will this affect the appropriate proscribing of drugs in Canada and how will it really contribute to the skyrocketing cost of drugs in Canada in our medical system?

There is also concern about progressive licensing and changes to the drug approval process. We have seen this aspect of our drug safety measures chipped away at over the years. In fact, the disappearance almost 10 years ago of the only drug lab that did the necessary kinds of testing, and post-market testing and surveillance is important to any drug and therapeutic product regime. That is another problem.

While we are concerned in this corner that the changes in this legislation may open the door to the kind of harmonization that is taking place under the security and prosperity partnership agenda, we are also concerned that there is too much ministerial discretion and too much regulatory discretion provided for in this legislation. We do not see that as appropriate either.

Like most members, I have heard from many—

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. I regret that I must interrupt the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas. When we return to the study of Bill C-51, there will be eight minutes left.

We will now have statements by members under Standing Order 31. The hon. member for Lethbridge has the floor.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, June 2 marked 11 years since the election of myself and the rest of the class of '97. Reflecting on those years, I realize how fortunate I have been to represent the great people of southern Alberta and the tremendous opportunities I have had while performing those duties.

None of these opportunities can compare to have been able to associate with our men and women serving in the Canadian Forces. Two weeks ago, as chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence, I and ten of my colleagues had the opportunity to visit Afghanistan for the second time.

It was truly an inspiration to witness the courage and dedication of our men and women as they carry out the mission that has been assigned to them. I witnessed the focused determination of personnel, both civilian and military, as they continue to do what

needs to be done in a country ravaged by war. The progress they have made in the 16 months since our last visit is remarkable.

Though it will take time to sort out the complex problems that still exist in Afghanistan, those proudly wearing the maple leaf on their shoulders and carrying it in their hearts continue to be leaders in rebuilding Afghanistan.

* * *

PORTUGUESE CANADIANS

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, June 10, is Portugal Day, a day we celebrate the great poet, Luis Vaz de Camoes, and also when we honour the contributions made by Portuguese Canadians in Canada and a relationship that dates back centuries.

Among the notables in this history are Gaspar Corte Real, who in the 15th century discovered Conception Bay, or Pedro da Silva, who in 1705 was commissioned as the “first courier” in New France.

We also honour those on Canada's west coast like Portuguese pioneer, Jose Silva, also known as Joe Silvey, who braved enormous challenges in the late 1800s to become the first British Canadian citizen of Portuguese origin, and the first known European to marry an aboriginal. He also introduced net fishing along the west coast and opened Vancouver's first bistro known as “The Hole in the Wall”.

In 2003 Portuguese Canadians celebrated the 50th anniversary of official immigration to Canada when vibrant neighbourhoods developed in places like Portugal Village in Toronto.

Today, we recognize people like Bill Moniz, who works tirelessly to document Portuguese history in Canada or groups like ACAPO, who organize Portugal Day parades in Toronto each year that draw over 300,000 people.

As the first Portuguese Canadian member of Parliament, it is my honour to ask that all members of the House join with me in honouring Luis Vaz de Camoes and in celebrating Portugal Day.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this Thursday, members of the House of Commons will have an opportunity to vote on Bill C-207 at report stage from the Standing Committee on Finance. I introduced this bill in 2006.

Since then, a number of individuals and organizations have expressed their approval for a tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions. Some 60 municipalities, RCMs, youth forums, educational institutions, youth employment centres and chambers of commerce have decided to support Bill C-207.

New graduates working in Haute-Mauricie, Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, the upper Laurentians, the North Shore, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and northern Quebec would be entitled to a maximum tax credit of \$8,000.

Statements by Members

We need measures to stop youth out-migration and promote the retention of skilled workers in economically depressed regions. Bill C-207 meets that need.

* * *

[English]

PHONE COMPANIES

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are owed hundreds of millions of dollars by land line phone companies as a result of overcharges and the money has been placed in so-called deferral accounts. But Canadians have yet to have their money refunded due to the actions of the former monopoly Bell Canada.

The CRTC has ordered that the funds be returned to those who it rightfully belongs, namely, consumers. Instead, the phone companies took the CRTC to court and lost. But instead of complying with the Federal Appeals Court decision, Bell Canada, in an attempt to fleece its own customers, has decided to appeal to the Supreme Court delaying the rebate for possibly two years.

What is truly outrageous is that Bell Canada is claiming in its appeal that the deferral accounts do not exist and the CRTC does not have the power to order the refund.

A monumental hijacking of Canadian consumers must be put to an end. Bell Canada should withdraw its appeal to the Supreme Court immediately and issue the refunds to its customers now. What have the Conservatives done during this time? They have cut Bell's corporate taxes and rewarded it. Shame.

* * *

MYRA CANYON

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in September 2003 the Okanagan Mountain Park wildfires entered the Myra Canyon and destroyed 12 wooden trestles and damaged two steel trestles on the historic Kettle Valley Railway, part of the Trans-Canada Trail.

It gives me great pleasure to inform the House that, as a result of the cooperation of all levels of government and the help of many fine citizens, the trestles over Myra Canyon have risen from the ashes and have been rebuilt to historical specifications using British Columbia wood and labour.

On June 22, the Myra Canyon trestles will officially open to the public who will once again have a chance to step back in time and view the valley from a truly historic vantage point.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite all Canadians to come to the Okanagan this summer, visit our orchards and vineyards, travel over Canada's only floating bridge, the new William R. Bennett Bridge, but most of all, walk or cycle the trestles and breath in the history of this memorable Canadian heritage site located right above Kelowna, British Columbia.

● (1405)

IMMIGRATION

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, until yesterday, the government said that it needed Bill C-50 to secure skilled workers for our country.

Will it now start by addressing the issue of undocumented workers? They number over 200,000, many of them Portuguese. They possess proven and needed skills. Most of them have been here for more than three years. They are already integrated, the certification of their credentials already verified by their employers. An architecture for providing them with permanent residency was already put in place by the previous government, along with the money to get it done.

The current government has squandered two and a half years of opportunity, doing nothing. Meanwhile workers, crucial to our economic development, are prevented from making a contribution and getting on with their lives. They languish in uncertainty.

The government has the money and now it has the legislative authority. Does it have the political will to do the right thing and land these undocumented workers now?

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Canadians had another opportunity to peer behind the weasel words and political trickery being used by the Liberals to conceal their planned permanent new carbon tax.

Appearing on national television, two senior Liberal MPs could not even keep their stories straight over the course of a single half hour. At 5:02 p.m. the member for Halton, the Liberal leader's senior communications adviser, called the secret plan a carbon tax and confessed to the fact that the plan was a tax after all.

Less than 20 minutes later, the member for Richmond Hill anxiously performed damage control, saying "there is no carbon tax" at all.

Tax, no tax, a kind of tax, a hidden tax, tax shifts, carbon tax, green shifts, every day there is a different label, a different excuse, a different trick.

When Canadians hear politicians weaseling about the wording of a tax, they better hold on to their wallets. The Liberal leader is hoping to pull the wool over the eyes of Canadians, but they will not be tricked.

* * *

[Translation]

MICHELLE BACHELET

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to highlight the visit of Michelle Bachelet, the Chilean president, to Quebec City. It is a huge honour for all Quebecers to host the first woman to be elected a president in Latin America.

Statements by Members

She is also the first head of state of a foreign country to visit Quebec as part of the 400th anniversary celebrations of Quebec City, the birthplace of the Quebec nation.

During her visit, she will meet with the Premier of Quebec and the Speaker of the National Assembly, before giving a speech in the Legislative Council Chamber. She will also unveil a commemorative text at the equestrian statue of Bernardo O'Higgins in the Parc de l'Amérique-Latine.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Ms. Bachelet. I hope she enjoys her time in Quebec.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as more details are being leaked about the Leader of the Opposition's proposed carbon tax and the great lengths the Liberals are using weasel words to conceal the real nature of this tax from the public, it is clear the party is trying to trick Canadians into paying a permanent new tax.

As I have stated before on the floor of the House of Commons, citizens of my riding in Kitchener—Conestoga depend on driving for their livelihood. Whether it is the farmer operating a tractor, the long haul truck driver, the small business owner or the daily commuter, without question, this proposed tax will eat away at their standard of living.

Canadians are not naive. They will not be fooled by Liberal word games and phony green packaging. The public has caught on to the Leader of the Opposition's real tax shifting plans. This permanent new punitive tax will destroy jobs and drive up the cost of gas, electricity and everything else Canadians buy.

This is a tax the Leader of the Opposition previously said was bad policy and would oppose. Now he is flip-flopping. With this new Liberal tax trick, Canadians can be certain that their taxes will shift in one direction only: way up.

* * *

[Translation]

M. EVENCHICK JEWELLERY INC.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, another piece of Hull's history will disappear very soon. In a few weeks M. Evenchick Jewellery Inc. will be closing its doors for the last time.

The business was founded more than 80 years ago by the current owner's grandfather. In 1922, Meyer Evenchick came to Ottawa and founded a costume jewellery production business. The business moved to Hull in 1958.

[English]

Under his son Abbey, the company had over 80 employees. It was the first company to import cultured pearls from Japan. At the time, it sold its products to over 300 stores, including Eaton's, The Bay and Birks.

Globalization has had a huge impact on the company. Since it is cheaper to produce handmade jewellery in Asia than in Canada, grandsons Brian, Mark and Lawrence could no longer compete. The badges the Government of Canada orders for DND must be 80% Canadian, but...

Our thanks to the Evenchick family, proud builders of the community of Hull.

* * *

● (1410)

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not once but for the 28th time, incredibly, the Liberals failed to stand up and represent their constituents on important votes. Last night only 60 Liberal MPs voted, despite the Liberal leader's empty claims that his party was against the budget.

It is nothing new. The Liberal leader has continuously spread meaningless election threats, right after his first statement as a leader in December 2006 and just eight days ago when he declared a summer election was in the cards.

When it comes time to putting his money where his mouth is, he backs down and tells his caucus to sit on their hands or not even bother showing up.

With the details emerging about the Liberal plan to gouge Canadians with a carbon tax and a Liberal caucus that is obviously deeply divided and very worried about defending its tax trick during an election, it is no wonder the Liberal leader is backing down.

Leadership is not about sitting on one's hands in the House. Leadership is about standing up in the House for one's constituents and voting.

* * *

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today in opposition to Bill C-51 because it fails to address the fundamental health concerns of Canadians.

I have received overwhelming amounts of correspondence from constituents, including health practitioners, who are deeply opposed to the dangerous loopholes and ministerial power grab, which will impact the production and availability of about 60% of the natural health products, which most Canadians use to stay healthier.

As currently drafted, Bill C-51 would limit access to many health products and allow the fast-tracking of new drugs that have not been proven safe. Bill C-51 blends in with the SPP agenda, which is about harmonizing regulations across the board with the United States, resulting in lower standards. For example, the drugs Vioxx and Avandia were accelerated irresponsibly into the American market, causing the deaths of thousands.

These examples show the dangerous effects of fast-tracking drug approvals. I call on all Canadians to join us in this fight against Bill C-51, to maintain the highest standards of health, safety and accessibility.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to all the people who were taken away from their families and sent away to residential schools. This I can relate to from personal experience.

Residential school survivors have experienced many things from being torn away from their families at a very young age and being sent to school so far away that they were lucky to see their parents once a year. Many did not go home for years. Imagine the culture shock of being immersed in another language and culture, with different foods and clothing and with some losing their language.

No matter how deeply scarred they are, many Inuit residential school survivors say they that want to be mentioned and acknowledged as Inuit residential school survivors. A generic apology is not enough, as each person suffered uniquely. Inuit should be recognized as such.

Foremost, the apology must be sincere and unconditional for the many injustices, for ruined lives and for the children who never returned home. Then true healing and reconciliation may begin for many.

* * *

[Translation]

LAVAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Société de Transport de Laval will be reducing its bus fares from \$2.50 to \$1 on all smog days starting this week until Labour Day. This transit authority will be the first public transit system in Quebec to support the fight for better air quality in such a tangible way. Urban smog is caused mainly by two air pollutants: ozone and small particulate matter. It is the small particulate matter that produces the yellowish haze hanging in the sky and obscuring the sun during bad air quality days.

Recently, Dr. Jocelyne Sauvé presented a health report linking 9% of deaths and 3% of hospitalizations to bad air quality in Montérégie. Offering public transit for \$1 will give Laval's citizens a chance to save by reducing their gas consumption and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause smog, therefore also improving air quality.

* * *

•(1415)

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the federal government will apologize to residential school survivors. I believe that such an apology is a key step in the healing and reconciliation process with Canada's aboriginal peoples. I look forward to hearing the apology and hope it achieves its intended purpose.

Statements by Members

I also hope this apology and the reconciliation process will inform all Canadians about some of the tragedies that have been inflicted upon our aboriginal people. I believe the relationship between aboriginal Canadians and non-aboriginal Canadians can be strengthened with better dialogue and an increased understanding by all Canadians of aboriginal history.

For this purpose, I have introduced Bill C-496 to promote the teaching of aboriginal history and culture in Canada's mainstream primary and secondary schools. I believe such a measure will encourage an environment of understanding that will better help our country move forward. Over the long past, the teaching of aboriginal history has been deficient in Canada's schools and this needs to be addressed.

I urge all hon. members to support initiatives that promote better understanding and appreciation of the important role in Canada of aboriginal Canadians past, present and future.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the weasel words of and political tricks, Canadians are seeing the real agenda behind the Liberal leader's new massive national carbon tax. The Liberals can label it with fancy names and they can try to wrap it in green packaging, but a tax is a tax and the Liberal leader wants to impose the mother of all taxes on all Canadians.

Liberals MPs are now admitting their plan is a carbon tax. The member for Halton, the Liberal leader's communication adviser, says that he has seen the details and it is a carbon tax. Liberals such as the members for Oakville and Scarborough—Agincourt, star Liberal candidate Justin Trudeau and Liberal strategist David Herle have been calling it a carbon tax.

Even the Liberal leader himself today admitted his plan was a tax on "fossil fuels, home heating fuels and electricity". Canadians too see the carbon tax for what it is, a tax on everything: gas, heating, electricity, groceries. It will affect everyone, especially seniors and Canadians with fixed incomes and families.

The Liberal leader needs to tell Canadians the truth. Why does he want to hurt individual Canadians and families?

* * *

PATRICIA ANN BONAME

Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize and honour the life accomplishments of Patricia Ann Boname of West Vancouver, British Columbia, who recently passed away after a courageous battle with cancer.

Patricia Boname served as an elected representative in West Vancouver for over 15 years, a dedication to her community that also included the position of mayor.

Oral Questions

Patricia's lifetime commitment included countless volunteer activities, such as her involvement with the West Vancouver Community Arts Council, the North Shore Disability Resource Centre, the Lions Gate Hospital board and the Liberal Party of Canada.

Most recently, she was instrumental as a founding member of the Minerva Foundation which inspires B.C. women and empowers them to reach their full potential through programs and opportunities.

Through her early career with the CBC Canadian news magazine *Close-Up*, Patricia always led by example, with integrity, trust and a bright smile.

Patricia Boname was a role model in her community and a citizen that devoted her life to assisting others through government and not for profit organizations. She is survived by her family and her husband, Phil Boname, an avid community member.

Patricia's legacy of strong community involvement with West Vancouver will always be remembered.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow's apology to the victims of Indian residential schools will be important, and equally important will be a response from those victims. The comments of the leaders of Canada's political parties will be recorded and preserved for all time in the official *Hansard* of the House of Commons for June 11, 2008.

Will the government change its decision so that aboriginal representatives who will be with us in this chamber tomorrow can respond directly to the apology, on the record in this House?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has received a number of suggestions and recommendations on the process for tomorrow. We have looked at all of these. We have considered them in the context of our traditions and obviously precedents that have been established in similar solemn occasions.

Aboriginal Canadians have been waiting for a very long time to hear an apology from the Parliament of Canada. I would urge all parties not to play politics with this, to simply get behind a sincere apology to be offered on behalf of all parties to the aboriginal communities in this country.

• (1420)

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for many aboriginal people the apology tomorrow will be one of the most emotional moments of their lives, but they must not be voiceless. They will listen carefully to the four national politicians who will speak on Wednesday. Surely the House owes survivors the courtesy of listening to them in return right here, and recorded in the official *Hansard*.

Will the government commit to doing that?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been many consultations with many survivor groups, former students, church representatives, and national and regional organizations. We have been in contact with many of them over the last while. Their input has helped us to craft what I think is going to be an excellent apology, very complete, very thorough and very meaningful.

We look forward to giving that apology here on the floor of the House of Commons tomorrow in an unprecedented historic event. I invite all parties to participate. I want to thank them for their support for the motion earlier today which set the terms of how we will conduct ourselves tomorrow. We look forward to that with our aboriginal partners.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has not been ample consultation, but there is ample precedent for people other than members of Parliament to make remarks in the House of Commons. It does not detract from the dignity of the occasion; it adds to it. It is about the history of this country. It is an integral part of the official record, the apology and the response together.

In the interests of reconciliation, surely the House can afford the extra half hour tomorrow to hear a response from aboriginal representatives.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first nations, aboriginal and Métis people have been waiting for a long time for this apology and I am delighted that this is going to take place tomorrow.

I invite the hon. member to participate in this. I know she is a member of the aboriginal affairs committee. Important ceremonies are going to follow this with first nations and aboriginal and Métis people. We look forward to that as well.

The member is equating this with when the Olympians came on the floor and responded, and of course that never did happen. She should keep this a solemn occasion, as we all should, and give it the gravitas it deserves.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that everyone here knows that the member for Churchill is right. Now we want to know why the government is refusing, and we want the Prime Minister to change his mind. The only reason he gave for refusing to allow aboriginal leaders to address the House was tradition. Canada has made plenty of mistakes in the name of tradition.

Aboriginals have waited 95 years. Why will the Prime Minister not give them 30 minutes in the House?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we received numerous suggestions and recommendations from various individuals and organizations. We have chosen a process that respects precedents. The House of Commons has agreed to the terms of the apology. I hope that the Liberal Party, which has not yet apologized, will apologize tomorrow alongside the government.

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we certainly will reiterate our apology, as the world hopefully will, but the issue here is to be sure that tomorrow's ceremony will be respectful and the answer by the Prime Minister is not appropriate.

There is a problem. Why will the Prime Minister not make sure that the aboriginal leaders receive today the text of the apology to allow them the time to prepare their responses? Their responses will be key in the future of our relationship with the aboriginal peoples.

Out of respect, will the Prime Minister provide the aboriginal leaders with the text today?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I spoke with Chief Fontaine about this subject last week.

The apology will be delivered tomorrow. I hope the apology will be shared by all parties of this House. I think we all have a responsibility to unite and to make this message clear.

In terms of the acceptance, there are thousands of hearts and minds that will be at different stages of acceptance, but I hope we will begin the process of healing and reconciliation.

* * *

[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while gasoline prices set new records day after day, the oil companies continue to rake in huge profits. Meanwhile, the government feeds us its usual line—we have to rely on market forces—while handing out \$1.2 billion in tax breaks to oil companies.

Why does the Prime Minister prefer to help his friends, the oil companies, rather than encouraging a reduction in our oil dependency as every government should?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc knows that gasoline prices are determined by international market forces, and also affected by taxes imposed by certain governments in Canada, and not by subsidies to the oil industry. This government eliminated those subsidies in the 2007 budget and the Bloc Leader supported those measures.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the budget contains \$1.2 billion in tax breaks, and they are there in black and white. He has the means to take action to help our citizens reduce their dependency on oil. For example, rather than using the entire surplus to pay down the debt, he could have immediately paid up to 5¢ per litre of the excise tax to municipalities. They in turn could have used this money to reduce the cost of public transit, as Laval has done.

Why is the Prime Minister not taking action when he has the means to do so?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I mentioned that market forces, together with taxes imposed

by certain governments, determine prices. It is up to the Competition Bureau to ensure that the rules of the market are respected.

I must also mention that it was the government that reduced the GST to lower the price of gasoline and all goods and services. Unfortunately, the Bloc Québécois voted with the Liberals against these reductions and in favour of the Liberals' tax and environmental policies.

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REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, Quebec's Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Export Trade, the mayor of Quebec City and the president of PÔLE Québec Chaudière-Appalaches are holding a press conference to condemn the decision by the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec to stop funding non-profit organizations such as PÔLE. Yet this organization has an impressive track record: tight management, 12 major structuring projects and 10,000 specialized jobs.

Will the minister be humble enough to admit he made a mistake and restore funding for these organizations, which are vital to regional development in Quebec?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this same party was opposed to the creation of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. This same party said that it was a waste of time and energy for the federal government to contribute to regional economic development in Quebec. We beg to differ. That is why those members are always in opposition and will never achieve anything.

That said, where are we at? Economic organizations approached the department to pay their operating costs forever. Those days are over. We are going to support one-off projects.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this minister is forever telling us that he has a budget of only \$200 million. What he is not saying is that his budget was \$394 million last year. It is shrinking.

Is it not true that the real reason he has cut funding is that since he is unable to defend his budget in cabinet, he is reduced to diverting funds earmarked for regional development to projects chosen because they will benefit the Conservatives come election time?

● (1430)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member knew what to make of the numbers and knew how the economic development department works, he would know that much of the money is allocated to firms and that our department manages that money for others.

We have an envelope of \$200 million this year, which is largely the same as in previous years.

Oral Questions

We are going to continue to support the economic development of all regions of Quebec. Thanks to the decisions we are making, we will be able to free up funds for a whole host of projects in many regions of Quebec.

* * *

GASOLINE PRICES

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the price of gas has gone up to \$1.50, and people are very angry about indecent prices and indecent profits. When gas was 50¢ per litre, Petro-Canada was making \$100 million in profits.

[*English*]

At 73¢ a litre, Husky Oil made \$546 million in a year.

With gas at well over \$1 a litre now and climbing, Imperial Oil has just reported \$681 million in profit in a single quarter.

With Congress and Senator Obama going after big oil, why is the Prime Minister, with the help of the so-called opposition, giving them tax cuts?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, obviously with the exception of taxes imposed by various governments, it is world markets that actually set oil prices. The fact of the matter is, of course, that the Competition Bureau is in place to make sure the rules of the marketplace are respected.

I have to point out that this government has given no special tax break to the oil companies. We have in fact cut taxes for all Canadian businesses and all Canadian families.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Yes, Mr. Speaker, and the biggest profiteers get the most from that tax cut that just went through.

It is not just Congress and Senator Obama that are taking on big oil and its unprecedented profits. Both the United Kingdom and Italy are doing the same. With many oil companies operating both in the U.S. and in Canada, some kind of coordinated approach would seem to make some sense here, so that we can get at the question of transforming our energy system and invest in green solutions. That is what Canadians want to see.

If the Prime Minister does not have the intestinal fortitude to take on big oil, will he at least stop sending subsidies to the tar sands?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the NDP well knows, those subsidies were phased out at the beginning of budget 2007, except that he actually voted to keep them.

The reality, of course, is that in the United States as well as in Canada oil prices are set in international markets. They are not set by governments, with the exception of the taxes that governments do impose.

I would just point out that the NDP and others have to stop contradicting themselves. They cannot demand cheap oil and at the same time demand that we get off oil. Our government is making sure that we put in place policies to make the transition to a non-oil economy in the future.

[*Translation*]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is renegeing on its federal obligation to support regional economic development in Quebec.

Why is he cutting funding to not-for-profit organizations that have contributed so much to Quebec's 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, if the Liberal Party had managed economic development funds properly when it was in power, we would not be in this position today. That party allowed organizations to keep coming back to our department, thinking that all they had to do was ask the government, and they would receive.

We will continue to support the same organizations, but we will be supporting one-time projects with a beginning, a middle and an end. We will not be funding organizations indefinitely.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is so typical of a government that never accepts responsibility and always tries to offload it onto the previous government. That is not acceptable.

The Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec was at the helm when half his budget was cut. Is that not the real reason the Conservative cabinet cut economic partnerships that had proven their worth?

● (1435)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. I have about the same level of funding as I had last year to support economic development in the regions of Quebec.

What kind of projects do we plan to support in the future? We plan to support Refuge Pageau, in Abitibi—Témiscamingue, a specific project with a beginning, a middle and an end; the Véloroute des Bleuets in Saguenay; the Trois-Rivières airport; the Alma airport; the Baie-Comeau transshipment facility; and the acquisition of a submarine in Rimouski, which will attract tourists to the region. These are all specific projects that will create jobs and continue to support economic activity in the regions.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is fine with the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec if his budget is cut in half. As long as he can continue to hand out goodies in his own riding, nothing bothers him—and he sure does hand out a lot of goodies.

He has already spent 20% of his budget in his own riding even though it represents just 4% of all Quebecers. He has cut funding to Montreal International, PÔLE Québec Chaudière-Appalaches and others. Why? Is it simply to pay for more roads in his riding?

Oral Questions

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 wonder if those watching think it is reasonable for this department to cover the costs of economic organizations forever, when our mission is to support the economic development of the regions. These economic organizations have taken all the room to manoeuvre out of our department.

I am freeing up money that will stay in the same regions but will support one-off projects, whether for small to medium sized businesses or for economic organizations. It will support one-off projects.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we ask him about these stupid ideological cuts, the minister tells us that it is not just him, but cabinet that made the decision. He caved. And where was the so-called political lieutenant for Quebec when the economic development of Quebec stopped being a priority for cabinet? Where was the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages when the interests of Quebec were being ignored?

And if the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec does not make any decisions in his own department, if he bends to the will of his colleagues and does not defend the regions, then what exactly are we paying him for?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, we gave \$1.25 million to the Montreal Grand Prix for a one-off project to help set up a state of the art press centre meeting today's needs.

Our department will continue to support the economic development of the regions of Quebec. We will help small- and medium-sized businesses buy equipment and so forth and create jobs in the regions. We will also provide organizations—I am still talking about economic organizations here—with support for one-off projects, projects that have a start, a middle and an end.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we just learned this morning that Julie Couillard spared no effort to get access to Conservative ministers. In just a few short days, she managed to meet two. Experts have told us that this is how criminal organizations infiltrate political circles.

Considering Julie Couillard's shady past, and also considering the fact that she was known to the RCMP, was there not a blatant disregard for public safety?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that members opposite have been back to the hairdresser to get new material.

The minister received no representations from Madam Couillard on behalf of Kevlar. However, I am sure that will not stop the other parties from continuing their exercise at the legislative committee.

We have chosen a different approach. We are having a responsible review of this matter. It will be dealt with by Foreign Affairs, which will be reporting back to us on its findings.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Julie Couillard attended a very private fundraising cocktail for the Conservative association in the riding of Châteauguay—Saint-Constant. In order to gain access, she turned to André Turcot, the president of the association, who knew her very well. Her name had been floating around in September as a potential Conservative candidate.

How does the Prime Minister expect us to believe that although the RCMP, a local Conservative Party organizer and the former minister of foreign affairs knew about this woman's shady past, he knew nothing?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, I am sure that at the legislative committee those members will spend a lot of time on the interesting backgrounds of individuals and their private lives. We are focused on the public policy issues. That is why the Department of Foreign Affairs will be dealing with any issues arising from this in its review.

* * *

• (1440)

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, directors of organizations that work with young offenders oppose the federal law undermining the rehabilitation of young offenders. Daniel Côté, from Centre jeunesse de Québec, says that the law does not take into account young people's personal needs and particular circumstances. Linda Keating, from another youth centre, criticizes the changes in the law's criteria that will not allow the right action at the right time.

With the rate of youth crime now lower in Quebec than in the rest of Canada, does the Minister of Justice realize that the current law is undermining the rehabilitation of young offenders?

[English]

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice has kicked off a Youth Criminal Justice Act review by meeting with his provincial and territorial counterparts. Their experience in the administration of the Youth Criminal Justice Act is invaluable. We will be working with all stakeholders to improve the act.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court has struck down a provision of the Youth Criminal Justice Act and reiterated the importance of a justice system created specifically for young offenders. Yet the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice are simply ignoring the Supreme Court's reminder and wish to continue with the Conservative agenda of law and order.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his Bush-based approach of incarcerating youth who could have been rehabilitated will not have any better results here than in the United States?

[English]

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can say that our government, unlike the opposition, is committed to responding to the problem of youth crime using fair and appropriate measures to hold young people accountable when they break the law.

That is why we have introduced legislative proposals to amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act and to include deterrence and denunciation as principles of sentencing. I would urge all members to consider what they are hearing in their ridings about the need to improve our youth criminal justice system.

* * *

[Translation]

OMAR KHADR

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a fundamental principle of Canadian justice is that an accused has a right to know all the evidence against him or her. This principle has clearly been violated by American martial law in the case of Omar Khadr.

I would like to ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs another question. Why does the Canadian government prefer the martial law of the American justice system over the laws of the Canadian justice system?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, Mr. Khadr faces very serious charges in relation to his capture in Afghanistan. Any questions regarding whether Canada plans to ask for the release of Mr. Omar Khadr are premature and speculative, as the legal process is ongoing.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the judge in the case was fired, Omar Khadr was 15 years old at the time that he was charged and arrested, and the interrogators have destroyed any records of the notes that were held.

The member has to tell us why this government, the Republican farm team, prefers American martial law to the Canadian system of justice under the Bill of Rights and the Supreme Court of Canada? Why does it prefer that?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should be asking

that question of his leader, because it was under his government, the official opposition leader's government, that Mr. Khadr was sent to Guantanamo Bay. The member should perhaps be asking that question of his leader, the leader of the official opposition.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are three possible scenarios in the firing of the foreign affairs minister.

First, the RCMP did not look into Ms. Couillard's background even though it had her home under surveillance a decade ago. Second, the RCMP looked into Ms. Couillard's background and found security concerns but did not pass them on to the government. Third, the RCMP looked into Ms. Couillard's background, found security concerns and reported them to the government, but the government turned a blind eye.

I would ask the government, which is it?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I choose door number four, actually, which is that Madam Couillard had nothing to do with the matter.

The issue on which the resignation was tendered was an issue of documents that were left in an unsecured location. What that unsecured location was did not matter. It could have been any unsecured location.

The minister of foreign affairs at the time offered his resignation. He took responsibility for the breach of the rules that he engaged in. As a result, his resignation was accepted.

● (1445)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader can try all he likes to repeat the scripted lines, but the fact is that this is a matter of a serious national security breach. It is unacceptable that the government continues to read those scripted lines about personal lives and other issues and does not address the issue at hand. Not addressing the issue shows total disregard for the national security of this country.

I have a question for the public safety minister. Did the RCMP or CSIS at any time talk to the government about concerns about Ms. Couillard?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe it was a member of the Liberal Party who stood up in the House and authoritatively said, reading from one of those scripts, that a meeting had taken place with the Prime Minister.

We made it quite clear that no such briefing ever took place with the Prime Minister, yet Liberals continue to persist in asking these questions just a little bit differently since every time they get up and make accusations they tend to be wrong.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals cannot seem to get their stories straight on their massive new carbon tax. Yesterday the member for Halton confessed that the Liberal plan was—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I can hardly hear the hon. member despite his proximity to the Chair. There is too much noise. The hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George has the floor.

Mr. Richard Harris: Mr. Speaker, those members are touchy about this one.

The member for Halton confessed yesterday that, yes, there is a carbon tax, and yet minutes later the member for Richmond Hill said no, there is no carbon tax here. We know how bad it is when even the Liberal environment critic's own brother, the premier of Ontario, will not buy into that massive tax. Can the government—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. secretary of state.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. It is only Tuesday. We will have a little order, please. The hon. secretary of state has the floor. There is too much noise.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, because we first heard from the leader of the Liberal Party that he was opposed to a carbon tax. Now he is in favour of a carbon tax. Some members of his caucus say there will be no tax. Others say there is a carbon tax. Some call it a green shift. Others call it a carbon shift. Some claim it will be revenue neutral, like we never heard that fat one before.

Canadians will not be fooled with all those political weasel words. When they hear Liberals talking about new taxes they know it is time to hold onto their wallets because the Liberals intend to tax them more.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has proven yet again that there is no problem in procuring equipment for the war in Afghanistan, but it is a totally different story for the needs here in Canada: frigate replacement program, stalled; Sea King replacements, stalled; Buffalo search and rescue, stalled; navy support ships, stalled; and second-hand submarines that do not even work, stalled.

Why is the minister building a Kandahar first military program rather than a Canada first defence strategy?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): NDP support on anything other than the military, Mr. Speaker, stalled.

With respect to the procurements that are taking place in this country, this government has embarked on an unprecedented effort to give the men and women of the armed forces the necessary equipment they need to do the important work in Afghanistan that allows us to do reconstruction and development.

We are not going to get pulled into the way of the previous government, which rusted out and hollowed out the Canadian Forces. We are behind the forces 100% and we are getting the job done.

• (1450)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really would like to believe the minister, but I find it very difficult. Countless ministers of defence have told countless numbers of the Canadian military that the newest equipment is right around the corner. This procurement is around the corner malarkey has to stop.

Will the minister admit that DND's procurement system is out of date, is open to manipulation and is wasting billions in unnecessary tenders, unfinished work and incomplete offers? The Canadian Forces has world class training and world class soldiers. Why not world class procurement?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are all good questions, which begs the real question: why does the NDP not support our military?

We are going full bore ahead with procurement of ships and important land craft and aircraft. While the previous government starved our armed forces of necessary procurement, we are going full bore to get the forces this gear.

When it comes to supporting our military procurement and our men and women in uniform and their families, the NDP consistently has voted against every step this government has taken to get that important support for our men and women.

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ETHICS

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the bizarre press conference the parliamentary secretary for public works held last week on the Cadman tape has been mercilessly mocked by the media.

One fact has not gotten the attention it deserves. Dona Cadman has now sworn an affidavit that two Conservative operatives made a financial offer to her husband on May 17, 2005, but the parliamentary secretary will not even admit that a meeting took place at all. Now, with a sworn affidavit, is the parliamentary secretary suggesting that Dona Cadman committed perjury?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would give my colleague a bit of advice on her supplementary, which is to slow down her tape a little. She is a little quick.

Oral Questions

My colleague may want to ignore the facts in this case, but in fact the Liberals wrote to the RCMP and asked the RCMP to look into this matter. RCMP Chief Superintendent Theriault wrote back and said there is “no evidence to support a charge under the Criminal Code or under the Parliament of Canada Act”.

There is no evidence of wrongdoing because no wrongdoing took place. The Liberals will recognize that when we see them in court.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Tom Zytaruk is adamant that the tape is unedited. He said he would swear an oath to that effect. The parliamentary secretary continues to deny that the Prime Minister's own words discuss financial considerations to Chuck Cadman even though Dona Cadman has sworn there was an offer.

Will the parliamentary secretary tell us who were the two operatives cited by Dona Cadman who made the offer on May 17 or has he even bothered to ask what really happened that day?

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 we have said a number of times, there was one offer that was made on May 19 by Doug Finley and Tom Flanagan. We have been clear about that from the very beginning.

If the Liberals do not want to accept the truth, that is their problem. When we get to court, they will recognize the truth, which is that nothing inappropriate happened here. These false smears against the Prime Minister of this country, falsely saying that he committed a crime, are absolutely out of line in Canadian politics. We will see them in court and they will pay.

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JUSTICE

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a big judicial appointment coming to Manitoba this summer. Manitobans are not impressed by the idea of appointing the President of the Treasury Board as a judge in order to solve the Prime Minister's political problem.

When he was a justice minister, the future judge said that “the rule of law requires a robust and independent judiciary”. Given this statement, will the current justice minister respect his colleague's position and not appoint him to the bench against his will?

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member brought up this issue, because over the next month the Minister of Justice will be seeking input from the attorneys general in four Atlantic provinces on the appointment of our next Supreme Court of Canada justice. We are all very excited about that very important appointment that is coming up.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, surely the Minister of Justice recognizes the conflict of interest here.

The President of the Treasury Board named the judicial appointments committee that would be responsible for vetting his candidacy. He is the regional minister for Manitoba and would be making the recommendation to cabinet on his own appointment, and he is a member of the cabinet who would make the ultimate decision on that appointment.

Can the Conservative government not see that this is clearly unacceptable?

• (1455)

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has always been guided by the principles of merit and legal excellence in the selection and appointments of judges to Canada's superior and federal courts. Each and every one of our 165 judicial appointments have reflected those principles and the next 165 we make will be exactly the same.

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[Translation]

TRADE

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government announced that it has concluded a free trade agreement with Colombia. Yet that country has one of the worst records in terms of labour laws and human rights. No conditions in this regard appear in the agreement itself as a prerequisite to its signing and nothing seems to have been imposed on Colombia.

How can the Conservative government justify such an agreement knowing that Colombia does not honour its international obligations on these issues and that the Standing Committee on International Trade, which is currently holding hearings on the matter, has not tabled any reports?

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 you know, we recently signed a free trade agreement and a parallel agreement with respect to workers' rights with Peru. Over the weekend, we also concluded an agreement with the Government of Colombia.

I would remind the House that Canada has never entered into an agreement that does so much to protect workers' rights in those two countries. We have a new generation of agreements that are much stronger than before and that include penalties if the government fails to honour its signature on the agreements reached. I think this is a very positive step for workers' rights in both countries.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, when I asked the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration a question, she asked me to provide specific instances where visas had been denied. Here is one. The International Eucharistic Congress of Quebec, which starts on June 15, sent out 1,300 invitations to people throughout the world. The delegates are clergy, members of religious orders and lay persons who were recommended by the bishop in their diocese.

Will the minister admit that her department acted zealously when we consider that more than 300 of the delegates will not be able to come to Quebec City because their visas were denied? The bishops—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said last week, we want to help people organize conferences and make them successful. However, anyone who wants to enter Canada must follow the legal application process. I offered my assistance to the hon. member if he could provide me with details of particular cases. I am still waiting.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not enough that every independent group concluded that the Conservatives cannot live up to their climate change promises. Now, Environment Canada agrees. Its report shows that the Minister of Finance, through his tax deductible transit pass gimmick, is charging taxpayers \$36,000 a year to take a single car off the road.

Given that the Minister of Finance is legally responsible for pricing carbon, can he explain how \$7,200 a tonne for carbon is good value for money? Or will he tell us again that it is simply a “scientific question”?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker,—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The Minister of the Environment now has the floor and the member for Ottawa South at least wants to hear the answer.

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, the one thing that has become increasingly clear in this House of Commons is that the Liberal Party of Canada, its leader, and its environment critic are completely against tax cuts for middle class families in this country.

That is something those of us on this side of the House support. We want to support commuters to make the shift from cars to public transit and this is just one way we are helping to get the job done.

* * *

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the House will vote on private member's Bill C-207 introduced by the Bloc. The bill was rejected by the majority of members of the Standing Committee on Finance because the financial implications were too great, it would not obtain the desired results and it did not constitute a long-term solution.

Canadians want real solutions like our targeted initiatives for regional economic development—for example, the \$1 billion national community development trust—and not Bloc proposals that are riddled with serious shortcomings.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance explain to the House the ramifications of passing such a bill?

● (1500)

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members know, the finance committee has studied Bill C-207 and the Liberal members, along with the Conservative majority, recognize the many flaws in the bill.

It would be unfortunate, but should it pass, it would cost the federal government \$600 million in foregone revenues, with no evidence that this would help regional economic development. I would encourage all members of the House to act responsibly and oppose this private member's legislation.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Pacific salmon are important to the history, economy and culture of British Columbia, especially for first nations communities. A once abundant chinook, sockeye and coho fishery has been nearly decimated. If any one salmon species is deemed endangered, the effect would be devastating for the entire west coast fishery.

Commercial fishing: gone. Sport and recreation fishing: gone. Report after report points the finger to lack of leadership from DFO on protecting fish habitat.

Why does a self-monitored industry go unchecked while habitat is irrevocably damaged?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me first assure the member that it is certainly not a lack of concern or action by the government since we came into power.

In fact, a tremendous amount of time and effort, and personnel have been put in to improve the habitat and to see what is happening. The hon. member is right. We have major concerns over salmon stocks, not only on the west coast but on the east coast.

Whether it is temperatures, environmental conditions in the ocean, or whether it is predation, we have concerns, but we are all working together to do the best we can.

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives must invest more in desperately needed ocean research on issues such as predation, food sources, and other changes that are affecting salmon stocks. This research would help mould policies to counteract the destruction that is affecting the oceans, rivers, streams and estuaries.

Government Orders

It is time for the minister to act to ensure we do not end up in the same position as the United States or the east coast cod fishery.

When will the government show real leadership and get serious about research to ensure the sustainability of our west coast fishery?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me say that I fully appreciate what the member is saying. She is not exaggerating.

Let me also say that nowhere in the country, perhaps nowhere in the world, are the partners working more closely than they are on the west coast of this country in British Columbia to address the concerns in our fishery.

Every agency that is involved is around the table, trying to find ways to offset what seems to be a very, very serious situation. If there is a resolution for this, we will find it. There will be no stone left unturned until we correct the wrongs that have been done.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, both the Ministers of Fisheries and Oceans and National Defence know a young fisherman from the Tignish area in Prince Edward Island, Danny Ellsworth, who lost his life while returning to port from the crab grounds early Sunday morning.

The search for his body by the Canadian Coast Guard was called off the same day. This is totally unsatisfactory to both the grieving family and the community that the Coast Guard serves. The family is deeply disappointed and wants the search for Danny renewed.

Will the minister immediately order the Canadian Coast Guard back in the water to continue the search for Danny Ellsworth?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me say on behalf of, I am sure, everybody here that our thoughts and prayers are with the family involved.

The accident happened in a clearly identified area. An intensive search occurred in that area. That is why it was called off at the time. I have had several similar requests today. We are looking at anything we can do to help alleviate the concerns of the family, and we will do that.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Liberals are getting lazy in the dog days of summer and their lethargic ways are hurting my farmers. My farmers are demanding barley marketing freedom. In my province alone, three-quarters of farmers want marketing choice and make that 90% in the riding of Wild Rose.

Can the minister update the House on where the barley marketing freedom legislation is today?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Wild Rose for his work for the producers in his area.

However, the member for Wascana certainly is not working for his producers. Yesterday, he helped stop Bill C-46 from going directly to committee because he claimed he wanted to debate it some more in the House. Then, because he did not feel like working, he refused to extend hours for these very debates.

The Liberals sent bills to committee, directly, 57 times when they were in government. Yet, now they refuse to help western barley producers through this action.

Given that the survey by Liberal insider David Herle again underscores farmers' demand for barley marketing choice, why will the member for Wascana get out of the way?

* * *

EQUALIZATION PAYMENTS

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Finance for arriving just in time for my question.

Last year, when the Minister of Finance broke the Atlantic accord, he came up with a two tier replacement arrangement that created a second equalization formula offered to only two provinces. The second equalization formula includes a 3.5% escalator clause for these two provinces.

At the same time the minister stated that the government would resolve Nova Scotia's crown share claim and announce that settlement on March 15.

I respectfully ask the minister to tell the House what year Nova Scotia might first get a benefit from the 3.5% escalator clause equalization formula, and does he have any idea when we can expect the March 15 announcement of the crown share settlement?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the crown share panel has been working diligently preparing its report. We look forward to its release to the government of Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada. That should not be before too long. This is a complex issue and the committee has been working hard to accomplish the goal of delivering the report to the governments as requested.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from June 9 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 Speaker: It being 3:07 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions on the motions at report stage of Bill C-29.

Call in the members.

● (1515)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 144)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Albrecht
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Angus
Arthur	Atamanenko
Baird	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Benoit	Bevington
Bezan	Black
Blackburn	Blaney
Boucher	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinoooge	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casey
Casson	Charlton
Chong	Christopherson
Clarke	Clement
Comuzzi	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cummins
Davidson	Davies
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dewar	Doyle
Dykstra	Emerson
Epp	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Godin	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guergis
Hanger	Harper
Harris	Harvey
Hawn	Hearn
Hiebert	Hill
Hinton	Jaffer
Jean	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Khan	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Layton
Lebel	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Manning	Mark
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Mayes
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nash
Mulcair	O'Connor
Norlock	Oda
Obhrai	Petit
Paradis	Prentice
Poilievre	Priddy
Preston	Reid
Rajotte	Ritz
Richardson	Scheer
Savoie	Shipley
Schellenberger	Skelton
Siksay	Sorenson
Solberg	Stoffer
Stanton	Strahl
Storseth	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Sweet	Tilson
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Trost
Toews	Van Kesteren
Tweed	Vellacott
Van Loan	

Verner
Warawa
Wasylycia-Leis
Yelich — 145

Government Orders

Wallace
Warkentin
Watson

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	André
Asselin	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Barnes
Bellavance	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Bigras
Blais	Bonin
Bonsant	Boshcoff
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brison	Brown (Oakville)
Brunelle	Byrne
Cardin	Carrier
Crête	Cuzner
D'Amours	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Dosanji
Dryden	Duceppe
Easter	Eyking
Faillie	Folco
Freeman	Fry
Gagnon	Gaudet
Godfrey	Goodale
Gravel	Guarnieri
Guimond	Hall Findlay
Holland	Hubbard
Ignatieff	Jennings
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Keeper	Laforest
Laframboise	Lavallée
Lee	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Lussier	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Matthews
McCallum	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Minna
Mourani	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Nadeau
Neville	Pacetti
Paquette	Patry
Pearson	Perron
Picard	Plamondon
Proulx	Rae
Redman	Regan
Rodriguez	Rota
Roy	Russell
Savage	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sgro
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Cyr
St. Amand	St. Denis
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thi Lac
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	Turner
Tonks	Vincent
Valley	Wilson
Wilfert	Zed — 124
Wrzesnewskyj	

PAIRED

Members

Ablonczy	Batters
Bernier	Guay
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Lalonde
Ouellet	St-Hilaire — 8

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 1 carried.

Government Orders

The next question is on Motion No. 2.

The hon. Chief Government Whip on a point of order.

[*English*]

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, if you were to seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent of the members present to apply the results on vote just taken to the motion now before the House, with Conservative members present voting yes.

The Speaker: Is there agreement to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting no.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the members of the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of this motion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the NDP is voting yes on this motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I will be voting against the motion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I am voting in favour of this motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, I vote in favour of the motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to vote when you give me the opportunity. I am voting for this motion.

(The House divided on Motion No. 2, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 145)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Albrecht
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	André
Angus	Arthur
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Baird
Barbot	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bellavance	Benoit
Bevington	Bezan
Bigras	Black
Blackburn	Blais
Blaney	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boucher
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Brunelle
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin
Carrie	Carrier
Casey	Casson
Charlton	Chong
Christopherson	Clarke
Clement	Comuzzi
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cummins
Davidson	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Del Mastro

Demers	Deschamps
Devolin	Dewar
Doyle	Duceppe
Dykstra	Emerson
Epp	Failla
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Freeman
Gagnon	Galipeau
Gallant	Gaudet
Godin	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Gravel	Grewal
Guergis	Guimond
Hanger	Harper
Harris	Harvey
Hawn	Hearn
Hiebert	Hill
Hinton	Jaffer
Jean	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Khan	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laforest
Laframboise	Lake
Lauzon	Lavallée
Layton	Lebel
Lemay	Lemieux
Lessard	Lévesque
Lukiwski	Lunney
Lussier	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malo
Manning	Mark
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Mayes
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Mourani	Mulcair
Nadeau	Nash
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Paquette	Paradis
Perron	Petit
Picard	Plamondon
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Priddy
Rajotte	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Roy	Savoie
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shipley	Siksay
Skelton	Solberg
Sorenson	St-Cyr
Stanton	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thi Lac
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Vincent
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Wasylcia-Leis
Watson	Yelich— 190

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	Bagnell
Bains	Barnes
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Bonin	Boshcoff
Brisson	Brown (Oakville)
Byrne	Cuzner
D'Amours	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dion
Dosanjh	Dryden
Easter	Eyking

Government Orders

Folco
 Godfrey
 Guarnieri
 Holland
 Ignatieff
 Kadis
 Keeper
 MacAulay
 Maloney
 Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
 McCallum
 McGuire
 McTeague
 Murphy (Charlottetown)
 Neville
 Patry
 Proulx
 Redman
 Rodriguez
 Russell
 Scarpaleggia
 Sgro
 Simard
 St. Amand
 Szabo
 Temelkovski
 Tonks
 Valley
 Wilson
 Zed— 79

Fry
 Goodale
 Hall Findlay
 Hubbard
 Jennings
 Karetak-Lindell
 Lee
 Malhi
 Marleau
 Matthews
 McGuinty
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Minna
 Murray
 Pacetti
 Pearson
 Rae
 Regan
 Rota
 Savage
 Scott
 Silva
 Simms
 St. Denis
 Telegdi
 Thibault (West Nova)
 Turner
 Wilfert
 Wrzesnewskyj

Boucher
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Bruinooge
 Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
 Carrie
 Casson
 Chong
 Clarke
 Crowder
 Cummins
 Davies
 Devolin
 Doyle
 Emerson
 Fast
 Fitzpatrick
 Fletcher
 Gallant
 Goldring
 Gourde
 Guergis
 Harper
 Harvey
 Hearn
 Hill
 Jaffer
 Julian
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Layton
 Lemieux
 Lunney
 MacKenzie
 Mark
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
 Masse
 Mayes
 Merrifield
 Mills
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Nash
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Petit
 Prentice
 Priddy
 Reid
 Ritz
 Scheer
 Shipley
 Skelton
 Sorenson
 Stoffer
 Strahl
 Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
 Tilson
 Trost
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Watson

Breitkreuz
 Brown (Barrie)
 Calkins
 Cannon (Pontiac)
 Casey
 Charlton
 Christopherson
 Clement
 Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
 Davidson
 Del Mastro
 Dewar
 Dykstra
 Epp
 Finley
 Flaherty
 Galipeau
 Godin
 Goodyear
 Grewal
 Hanger
 Harris
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Hinton
 Jean
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Khan
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lauzon
 Lebel
 Lukiwski
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Manning
 Marston
 Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
 Mathysen
 Menzies
 Miller
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Mulcair
 Norlock
 Obhrai
 Paradis
 Poilievre
 Preston
 Rajotte
 Richardson
 Savoie
 Schellenberger
 Siksay
 Solberg
 Stanton
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Thompson (Wild Rose)
 Toews
 Tweed
 Van Loan
 Verner
 Warawa
 Wasylycia-Leis
 Yelich— 144

PAIRED

Members

Ablonczy
 Bernier
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Ouellet

Batters
 Guay
 Lalonde
 St-Hilaire— 8

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 2 carried.

The next question is on Motion No. 3.

The hon. Chief Government Whip.

[*English*]

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, if you were to seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of the vote taken on Motion No. 1 to the motion now before the House.

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

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member from Thunder Bay has left the chamber.

The Speaker: With that one change, is it agreed that we apply the vote on Motion No. 1 to Motion No. 3?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

● (1520)

(The House divided on Motion No. 3, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 146*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
 Allen
 Ambrose
 Anderson
 Arthur
 Baird
 Benoit
 Bezan
 Blackburn

Albrecht
 Allison
 Anders
 Angus
 Atamanenko
 Bell (Vancouver Island North)
 Bevington
 Black
 Blaney

Alghabra
 Asselin
 Bagnell
 Barbot
 Bellavance
 Bevilacqua
 Blais
 Bonsant
 Bouchard
 Brison
 Brunelle
 Cardin
 Crête
 D'Amours
 Demers
 Dhaliwal

NAYS

Members

André
 Bachand
 Bains
 Barnes
 Bennett
 Bigras
 Bonin
 Boshcoff
 Bourgeois
 Brown (Oakville)
 Byrne
 Carrier
 Cuzner
 DeBellefeuille
 Deschamps
 Dhalla

Government Orders

Dion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe
Easter	Eyking
Faille	Folco
Freeman	Fry
Gagnon	Gaudet
Godfrey	Goodale
Gravel	Guarnieri
Guimond	Hall Findlay
Holland	Hubbard
Ignatieff	Jennings
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Keeper	Laforest
Laframboise	Lavallée
Lee	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Lussier	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Matthews
McCallum	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Minna
Mourani	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Nadeau
Neville	Pacetti
Paquette	Patry
Pearson	Perron
Picard	Plamondon
Proulx	Rae
Redman	Regan
Rodriguez	Rota
Roy	Russell
Savage	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sgro
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Cyr
St. Amand	St. Denis
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thi Lac
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Tonks	Turner
Valley	Vincent
Wilfert	Wilson
Wrzesniewski	Zed- — 124

PAIRED

Members

Ablonczy	Batters
Bernier	Guay
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Lalonde
Ouellet	St-Hilaire- — 8

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 3 carried.

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

Mr. Speaker, if you were to seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of vote just taken to the motion now before the House, with Conservative members present voting in favour.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting against the motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the members of the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of this motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the NDP is voting yes on the motion.

Mr. Blair Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I will be voting against the motion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I am voting in favour of this motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I am voting in favour of this motion.

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

(*Division No. 147*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Albrecht
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	André
Angus	Arthur
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Baird
Barbot	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bellavance	Benoit
Bevington	Bezan
Bigras	Black
Blackburn	Blais
Blaney	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boucher
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinoooge	Brunelle
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin
Carrie	Carrier
Casey	Casson
Charlton	Chong
Christopherson	Clarke
Clement	Crête
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cummins	Davidson
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Del Mastro	Demers
Deschamps	Devolin
Dewar	Doyle
Duceppe	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Faille	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Freeman	Gagnon
Galipeau	Gallant
Gaudet	Godin
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Gravel
Grewal	Guergis
Guimond	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laforest	Laframboise
Lake	Lauson

Lavallée
Lebel
Lemieux
Lévesque
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malo
Mark
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Mayes
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Mulcair
Nash
O'Connor
Oda
Paradis
Petit
Plamondon
Prentice
Priddy
Reid
Ritz
Savoie
Schellenberger
Siksay
Solberg
St-Cyr
Stoffer
Strahl
Thi Lac
Basques)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Vincent
Warawa
Wasylcia-Leis
Yelich — 189

Layton
Lemay
Lessard
Lukiwski
Lussier
MacKenzie
Manning
Marston
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Mourani
Nadeau
Norlock
Obhrai
Paquette
Perron
Picard
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Richardson
Roy
Scheer
ShIPLEY
Skelton
Sorenson
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Warkentin
Watson

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Bains
Bennett
Bonin
Brisson
Byrne
D'Amours
Dhalla
Dosanjh
Easter
Folco
Godfrey
Guarnieri
Holland
Ignatieff
Kadis
Keeper
MacAulay
Maloney
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McCallum
McGuire
McTeague
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Patry
Proulx
Redman
Rodriguez
Russell
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Simard
St. Amand
Szabo

Bagnell
Barnes
Bevilacqua
Boshcoff
Brown (Oakville)
Cuzner
Dhaliwal
Dion
Dryden
Eyking
Fry
Goodale
Hall Findlay
Hubbard
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Lee
Malhi
Marleau
Matthews
McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Minna
Murray
Pacetti
Pearson
Rae
Regan
Rota
Savage
Scott
Silva
Simms
St. Denis
Telegdi

Routine proceedings

Temelkovski
Tonks
Valley
Wilson
Zed — 79

Thibault (West Nova)
Turner
Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj

PAIRED

Members

Ablonczy
Bernier
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Ouellet

Batters
Guay
Lalonde
St-Hilaire — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion for concurrence in the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

● (1525)

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

(Division No. 148)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra
Angus
Atamanenko
Bagnell
Barbot
Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bennett
Bevington
Black
Bonin
Boshcoff
Bourgeois
Brown (Oakville)
Byrne
Carrier
Charlton
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
D'Amours
DeBellefeuille
Deschamps
Dhaliwal
Dion
Dryden
Easter
Faille
Freeman
Gagnon
Godfrey
Goodale
Guarnieri
Hall Findlay
Hubbard
Jennings
Kadis
Keeper
Laframboise
Layton

André
Asselin
Bachand
Bains
Barnes
Bellavance
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Blais
Bonsant
Bouchard
Brisson
Brunelle
Cardin
Casey
Christopherson
Crowder
Cuzner
Davies
Demers
Dewar
Dhalla
Dosanjh
Duceppe
Eyking
Folco
Fry
Gaudet
Godin
Gravel
Guimond
Holland
Ignatieff
Julian
Karetak-Lindell
Laforest
Lavallée
Lee

Routine proceedings

Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Lussier
MacAulay	Malhi
Malo	Maloney
Marleau	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Matthews
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Minna	Mourani
Mulcair	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Nadeau
Nash	Neville
Pacetti	Paquette
Patry	Pearson
Perron	Picard
Plamondon	Priddy
Proulx	Rae
Redman	Regan
Rodriguez	Rota
Roy	Russell
Savage	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sgro	Siksay
Silva	Simard
Simms	St-Cyr
St. Amand	St. Denis
Stoffer	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Thi Lac	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	Tonks
Turner	Valley
Vincent	Wasylycia-Leis
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NAYS

Members

Abbott	Albrecht
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Arthur
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
Cummins	Davidson
Del Mastro	Devolin
Doyle	Dykstra
Epp	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hanger
Harris	Harvey
Hawn	Hearn
Hiebert	Hill
Hinton	Jaffer
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
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)	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai
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
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PAIRED

Members

Ablonczy	Batters
Bernier	Guay
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Lalonde
Ouellet	St-Hilaire— 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a report entitled “Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan, Setting a Course to 2011”.

* * *

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

ROYAL RECOMMENDATION—BILL C-474, BILL C-499 AND BILL C-550

The Speaker: The Chair has a statement to make regarding the management of private members' business.

[Translation]

After a replenishment of the Order of Precedence, the Chair has developed the practice of reviewing these new items so that the House can be alerted to bills which, at first glance, appear to impinge on the financial prerogative of the Crown. The aim of this practice is to allow members the opportunity to intervene in a timely fashion to present their views about the need for those bills to be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

● (1530)

[English]

Accordingly, following the June 4 replenishment of the order of precedence with 15 new items, I wish to inform the House that Bill C-499, An Act to establish the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Region of Northern Ontario, standing in the name of the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming, as well as Bill C-550, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act (family leave), standing in the name of the member for Compton—Stanstead, give the Chair some concern as to the spending provisions they contemplate.

[Translation]

I would encourage hon. members who would like to make arguments regarding the need for a royal recommendation in these cases, that is Bill C-499 and Bill C-550, or in the case of any of the other bills now on the Order of Precedence, to do so at an early opportunity.

[English]

Also, I would like to take this opportunity to make a brief statement regarding Bill C-474, An Act to require the development and implementation of a National Sustainable Development Strategy, the reporting of progress against a standard set of environmental indicators and the appointment of an independent Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development accountable to Parliament, and to adopt specific goals with respect to sustainable development in Canada, and to make consequential amendments to another Act, standing in the name of the hon. member for Don Valley West, which was already on the order of precedence.

The Chair would like to remind members of a ruling made on February 11, 2008. In that ruling I stated that the bill in its form at that time needed to be accompanied by a royal recommendation. The Chair notes that the hon. member for Don Valley West had expressed the desire to work with the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development to overcome this difficulty.

On June 5, 2008 the committee reported the bill with amendments. The Chair has carefully examined these amendments and confirms that the bill, as amended, no longer requires a royal recommendation. Consequently, debate may proceed and, when appropriate, all necessary questions to dispose of the bill will be put.

[Translation]

I thank hon. members for their attention.

[English]

I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, government orders will be extended by 21 minutes.

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.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have just a few remarks to address in this debate. They take the form of certain questions which I would be grateful if the Minister of Health would take the opportunity to address before this debate comes to an end.

Bill C-51 amends the Food and Drugs Act to modernize the regulatory system for foods and therapeutic products, such as contact lenses, breast implants, pharmaceuticals, and so forth. The bill seeks to improve the surveillance of benefits and risks of therapeutic products through their life cycle. It is intended to improve the compliance and enforcement measures by corporations to encourage

Government Orders

them to report adverse reactions or potential health threats associated with market products. To this end, the bill proposes to give very substantial regulatory powers to the minister. That is the type, broadly, of legislation we are dealing with in Bill C-51.

We in the Liberal Party obviously are committed, as we always have been, to improving the health and safety of Canadians and to making sure that we have an appropriate legislative framework to that end. We obviously support measures which strengthen the regulatory process to ensure that Canadians are able to have access to the safest and most effective food and therapeutic products.

However, members will have noticed as this debate has gone on that a number of problems have been brought to the attention of the House which need to be addressed. I would like to highlight a couple of those and ask the government for its considered response.

I am sure that all members of Parliament have received letters from a variety of people across the country with respect to the professional services of naturopathic doctors. The statement has been made by those who defend this legislation that the bill actually has nothing to do with that broad category of activity.

I would like to read briefly into the record one of these letters that I have received from a constituent in Regina. I would ask the minister or the parliamentary secretary to be kind enough to provide responses to the questions that this individual has raised. I will read portions of the letter as follows:

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 (ND) 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 would like some assurances that my choice to see a naturopathic doctor...will not be negatively impacted by Bill C-51.

I have the following questions:

1. Will Bill C-51 exclude my ND [naturopathic doctor] from having access to all the products that he/she needs to treat all my health concerns?
2. Will Bill C-51 result in fewer natural health products being available in the Canadian marketplace?
3. Will inspectors have the ability to enter premises under the search and seizure provisions without a warrant or a judge's approval?

That is the end of the bulk of the letter. I am sure the tone of that letter is familiar to many members in the House who would have received similar letters. It is important for the government to put on the record the official response to those concerns so that Canadians who have those kinds of concerns can be reassured about the impact of this legislation.

Finally, I have a suggestion to offer to the Minister of Health. It has been said in parliamentary circles in the last several days that when this bill gets to the committee stage, the government intends to bring forward what are considered to be significant amendments. We do not know if that is in fact the case, but the rumour that seems to be circulating in the Standing Committee on Health is that when Bill C-51 arrives in the committee officially, there will be significant amendments to the bill brought forward by the government itself.

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●(1535)

That presents a problem for the House. We are now coming near the end, I suspect, of the debate at second reading and very shortly we will be called upon to vote on approval in principle of this legislation before it goes to the Standing Committee on Health for detailed consideration clause by clause. I would suggest that before the House is asked to vote at second reading on approval in principle of the bill, the House needs to know what amendments the minister has in mind. Are there amendments that are likely to be forthcoming at the committee stage? Are they significant amendments as they have been portrayed? If they are significant amendments, they may well affect the principle of the bill.

Second reading, as we all know, is approval in principle. Once we vote on approval in principle at second reading, a lot of water has gone under the bridge. It is important for the House to know exactly on what it is voting.

How can the House approve in principle Bill C-51 now if we are not told specifically what that principle is? Will that principle change? Are these amendments that the minister proposes to introduce in the committee so fundamental that they might take this bill in a new or different direction that is not contemplated by the scheme of the bill that is presently before the House?

There are two alternatives. First, before this debate comes to an end, it would be very helpful if the Minister of Health or the parliamentary secretary or someone on behalf of the government would simply inform the House now of the type of amendments the government may have in mind when the bill gets to the committee stage. They have been portrayed generally as significant, but we have not yet been told the detail.

If we are to vote on approval in principle of this bill which at a later stage is going to be amended, we are being asked now to buy a pig in a poke. I would simply ask the parliamentary secretary or the minister to tell us what the amendments are so we can make a considered judgment about Bill C-51 when we are asked to vote on it in principle at second reading.

The other alternative is if the government is not in a position to publish its amendments now or to inform the House about what those amendments might be eventually, the government could choose to simply suspend the debate at second reading. Instead of forcing the House now to vote in principle on something that may change at a subsequent date, the government could change its tactic and adopt the procedure that is set out in Standing Order 73(1), which is to send Bill C-51 to the Standing Committee on Health before the vote at second reading.

If that course of action were adopted, it would then be possible for members of Parliament to consider all dimensions of what is contained in Bill C-51, both the substance of the bill as it now exists and any proposed amendments the government might have in mind, without first having to vote on a principle, the substance of which we are not sure because it might change when it gets to the committee.

Either give us the amendments now so that we can know what the government has in mind or send the bill to committee before second reading so that members of Parliament will have more scope to change the bill if the principles contained in the amendments the

government has in mind are not consistent with what the House would prefer.

Those are the points, briefly, that I wish to make on Bill C-51. They are offered in a spirit of trying to be constructive in this debate and bringing forward the concerns that people in my constituency, at least some of them, have expressed. I would ask the government if not now then at some other time in the debate to make an effort to respond to those points in the constructive spirit in which they are offered.

●(1540)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answers to the three questions of the member for Wascana are no, no and no. The bill will in no way hamper individual access to natural health products. It will in no way hamper naturopaths from doing what they do well. There will be no ability to go into someone's home without a warrant, as some have suggested.

There has been a lot of fearmongering on the bill. I want to assure the member that the government has paid very close attention to the comments that have been made by many people on the bill.

To accommodate or alleviate some of the concerns, I look forward to some amendments, but the member very well knows that parliamentary procedure is such that we have to go to second reading first before we can present the exact wording of the amendments.

The member may also know that we have had very good discussions with the health critic. We have, in general terms, agreed that this is an important bill, that some tweaking may be needed to alleviate some of the concerns.

I am pleased the health minister has listened to the people who have concerns about the bill, and we will address these concerns at committee. However, we need the cooperation of all parties, particularly the official opposition, to move forward so we can protect Canadians. The bill is about that. Only a small part of it actually deals with natural health products. The bill deals with much broader issues than just natural health products.

Has the member talked with his health critic and will he work together with the government to ensure that the safety of Canadians is protected, while people have maximum choice when it comes to natural health products?

●(1545)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, what the parliamentary secretary mentioned in his last sentence is what I am sure all members of Parliament would desire to achieve. However, we all know this old principle that the devil is in the details. Parliament is here to examine that detail to ensure we do not get stuck with the devil.

Accordingly I would ask the parliamentary secretary two further points.

He expressed great confidence about the impact, or not, of this legislation with respect to naturopathic doctors and the various remedies to which they wish to have access. The parliamentary secretary's view is there is nothing in the legislation that in any way detracts from that.

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Since he is aware that a number of members of Parliament have received rather extensive representations from this sector, and I suspect the parliamentary secretary has received many himself, would he be good enough to provide to the House the written responses of the Minister of Health or the Department of Health and to put in writing the specific assurances he has given here? Those assurances are important.

For people who have questions and wonder how this legislation affects them or may have some negative impact on them, it would be of considerable reassurance if the Department of Health would be forthcoming to give a written response to Canadians who have expressed their worries in this regard, in a number of letters to members of Parliament.

Second—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member. We are now resuming debate. If the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca wants to take his seat, I will recognize him. Otherwise, my glasses will get very foggy.

If the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain ready, she has the floor.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today and participate in the debate on Bill C-51, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

At the outset, that I will be voting against the bill at second reading. I am taking this position for a number of reasons, including the view that it may open the door to direct-to-consumer advertising for pharmaceuticals, that it gives an inordinate discretion to the minister on a number of fronts and that it may be a thinly veiled attempt to bring natural health products under the rubric of drugs.

It is particularly the latter concern that I want to focus on in the limited time I have in the debate today.

No bill in this sitting of Parliament has generated as much public interest in my riding as Bill C-51. Both producers and consumers of natural health products have expressed serious misgivings about the bill. It is no wonder that Canadians are expressing a healthy dose of skepticism about the government's agenda in bringing the bill forward.

This is the fifth attempt in just a decade by successive Liberal and Conservative governments to overhaul the Food and Drugs Act. The Liberals made four of these attempts and each time they failed. Why? They failed because each time the community spoke up.

Producers and consumers both demanded more accountability from government and wanted much clearer answers with respect to the new regulatory authority that government was assigning to itself. This time some of the same misgivings persist. Will the bill maintain regulation that is distinct from that of pharmaceuticals? Is the enforcement appropriate, with checks and balances against abuse? Is the process free from the minister's arbitrary intervention? These concerns are legitimate and must be addressed by the government.

The NDP has always believed that natural health products are a fundamental element in disease prevention and treatment. They are an element with distinct characteristics that distinguish it from both

food and drugs, a distinction that merits a separate regulatory framework in ensuring its safety and efficacy. This is the position that I continue to advocate as we scrutinize Bill C-51.

My constituents in Mountain have said loud and clear that the bill, as it stands now, is unacceptable. Significant and necessary changes cannot and will not be made before the second reading. Therefore, the bill will not have my vote or I believe the votes of any of my NDP colleagues at second reading. Furthermore, I cannot accept a bill that undermines Canadians access to safe, reliable natural health products and one that favours multinational corporate drug interests.

To be fair to the government, there is a misperception that Bill C-51 would require consumers to get a prescription to access natural health products. I have studied the bill closely and I do not believe that is the case. Bill C-51 would not affect prescribing requirements.

The public's concern about this aspect speaks volumes about the unease that this legislation is creating about the government's true intent with respect to natural health products and it speaks volumes about the need for the government to clarify its intentions so there is no room for doubt with respect to any of the sections that apply to natural health products.

Proper consultations may have been able to alleviate some of those concerns, but those consultations did not happen. That is why there is such a huge disconnect between the government's rhetoric on the purported intent of the bill and the community's understanding of what is really at stake.

At a cursory level, the provisions of the bill purport to enhance consumer and product safety protections, a goal which we all share. In fact, as hundreds of emails and letters from people in my riding of Hamilton Mountain made clear, they simply want to ensure and I quote "that natural health products are treated fairly".

In fact, allow me to share with members of the House a lengthier quote from correspondence that I have received from one of my constituents, whose sentiment is shared by literally dozens of others. The constituent writes:

I am writing you to express my growing concern about the impact of Bill C-51.

This proposed new law has major ramifications for the natural health products I depend on. I am very worried about potential impact this bill could have on the future of natural health products. Bill C-51 restricts the choices Canadian people have when it comes to their health.

As my Member of Parliament, I need your help in ensuring that natural health products are treated fairly. What is needed is a legislative framework that treats natural health products as a third category for Health Canada. This is something promised by previous Ministers of Health but never delivered.

Please review Bill C-51 and fight to make sure natural health products are not eliminated as a viable consumer choice in Canada. Did you know that more than 70% of the Canadian population uses natural health products? This bill opposes the desires of most Canadians and restricts our freedom of choice.

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•(1550)

Members will have noticed that the concerns expressed by these constituents are entirely reasonable. My constituents are simply asking that natural health products be treated fairly. Their concerns are measured, balanced and they deserve to be resolved, but the only way to have them resolved is through dialogue and meaningful consultations. However, here we are in the last few days of the session before the House rises for the summer and the government is trying to rush the bill through to a vote. Why not slow things down?

This chamber is supposed to deliberate on legislation that is brought here by the government. Deliberation suggests thoughtful debate, with give and take in shaping the final product. That means that we need to have enough time to hear the concerns of our constituents, reflect on them and give voice to them in the House. That is what representation is all about. Yet with the government's rushed timetable, I am one of the few MPs who will get an opportunity to represent my constituents here.

Thankfully, natural health product consumers in my riding are well informed and know that they can get in touch with me any time if they have concerns about what happens in the House of Commons. And they have. However, thousands of other Canadians share their concerns and their members of Parliament either cannot or will not represent them in this chamber. That is a bitter pill to swallow.

If the government is so certain that Bill C-51 is benign, why would it not allow all interested parties to participate in the careful scrutiny of this bill? The mere fact that the government is unwilling to engage in this kind of dialogue just serves to increase further the concerns in the community.

I have already said that not all provisions of the bill are flawed. It deals with a broad range of issues, aside from natural health products. In many respects, the government has moved a significant distance from the days of the Liberals. However, that does not change the fact that the bill still has many problems.

Greater consultation might have been able to resolve these problems and allay community fears, but because that input was not sought and because of the potentially dangerous ramifications and provisions of the bill, I now have no choice but to oppose the legislation as tabled. Yes, I am voting that way because of the concerns around natural health products. I am also doing it because I have serious concerns about advertising, adverse reactions and life cycle licensing. Above all, I am concerned that the bill, as a whole, is premised on the Conservatives' risk management approach to safety rather than the do no harm principle.

For all of those reasons, I will be voting against Bill C-51 in the upcoming vote. I am happy to do so on behalf of my constituents of Hamilton Mountain. Their concerns will be represented in the House. I just hope the members of the other parties will do the same so, together, we can go back to the drawing board.

The government has already signalled that it will need to introduce numerous amendments to fix the bill. In other words, it agrees that the current bill, as drafted, is flawed. Therefore, let us do the right thing. Let us vote it down at second reading, allow the health committee to do full public consultations and then introduce a

new bill that addresses the concerns of hard-working Canadians. Our constituents deserve nothing less.

•(1555)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's statement intently and many points are not accurate.

First, the government has consulted widely before the drafting of the bill and during the drafting of the bill. Since the bill has been introduced, consultations have taken place right across the country from coast to coast to coast, and there continues to be consultation on the bill.

The member said that the bill should be defeated and not brought to the health committee. The whole point of having a second reading is to go to the health committee so we can hear from stakeholders from coast to coast to coast. That is the parliamentary procedure. That is the process and it has suited our country, by and large, very well.

I ask the member to reconsider her position, given the new information, which she is apparently unaware, that there has been very broad consultation. The minister has been listening. There is an opportunity, after second reading, to bring amendments forward. I also point out that natural health products are not considered drugs under the current legislation, and it will be made crystal clear after the amendment.

Therefore, with that information, will the member please be reasonable and help the government to ensure maximum access to natural health products and to ensure health and safety of Canadians?

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I have never been accused in the House of being anything other than reasonable, and I certainly want to continue that tradition now.

I have no doubt that the government consulted on this legislation. I just doubt the breadth of that consultation, because I have had the privilege of sitting in the health committee and I know that most of the presentations that I have heard about, albeit second hand, were consultations with big pharma. That is not who I am talking about needing to consult.

We need to talk to the consumers of natural health products in our communities. Those are the people who are flooding our offices with mail each and every day suggesting that they actually do not feel that they have been adequately heard. Yes, by all means, let us do the consultations, but let us do them right and let us not be selective in terms of whom we listen to.

The parliamentary secretary suggested that this bill does not need to be defeated because the government is going to bring in a ton of amendments that will allay all my fears. In typical government fashion, the member is suggesting that I should just trust him on that. If the government already knows that it needs to bring in substantial and substantive amendments to the bill to allay fears, then the government itself is admitting that the bill as it is currently before us is flawed. The vote at second reading is a vote on the principle of this bill. You are asking me to support the principles of a bill that the government says is flawed. I for one am not prepared to do that.

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Indeed, the member said the serious concern that natural health products consumers have about those products not being considered drugs would be dealt with in the amendments to this bill. I am not willing to take the government at its word. I am willing to accept that the government has now seen that its current legislation before us is flawed, so I would be happy if it withdrew the bill, introduced one with all of the amendments already in place so we could then have a vote on second reading of a bill that is in the form the government wants to see it. We could then make a considered decision on second reading.

•(1600)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain will be happy to know that I do not want to tell her how to vote either way.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak to Bill C-51. All of us in the House have received a lot of correspondence from very concerned Canadians. They believe that the bill will impede their access to substances that they have freely bought over the counter for many years, products that are used by naturopaths and herbalists across our country and products that are used by first nations healers in Canada. Those groups are concerned.

The government has done a very poor job of describing what the bill is about. That the government will be putting forth amendments which it is not willing to share with us speaks to the fact that it is proceeding in a way that is less than organized with respect to the bill. The government is hearing about it from Canadians and from members of the House of Commons.

The crux of the concerns of most Canadians is whether the bill impedes a person's ability to access those products. The bill touches on a lot of things that are very important. It covers many substances. It covers pharmaceutical products and medical equipment. It enables the minister to more rapidly assess whether a product is good or bad for the public. It enables him to remove products more quickly.

Right now product removal is voluntary in nature and it is up to the private sector companies to remove them. The bill would give Health Canada the ability to better monitor products that come on the market and to remove them if there are problems that are identified. In fact, the Food and Drugs Act, which this bill amends, has not to my knowledge been significantly amended since 1953. Obviously we need to do a better job of that.

Penelope Marrett, president of the Toronto based Canadian Health Food Association, said:

People need to remember that we're an already regulated industry....Herbalists and naturopaths will still be able to provide the products and the compounds that they do under the current situation.

I hope that allays some concerns. However, the proof of the pudding is in the bill. We want to make sure that the bill goes to committee, which is the next stage after this one, and that members on the health committee have ample time to dissect the bill from stem to stern. Members of the naturopathic groups in Canada, the aboriginal groups and other groups that are concerned will be able to appear as witnesses in front of the health committee. We are hoping this will happen in a very public fashion. I hope that the government

sees fit to televise the hearings of this investigation. It is very important for all Canadians to witness the people who come in front of the committee so that all sides can be heard. I know that the concerns of Canadians about the bill will be expressed in that committee and will be heard and understood.

If the bill compromises the ability of Canadians to access the naturopathic products that are safe and to which they have traditionally had access, then we will not support the bill. We will not compromise people's ability to access these products, but we are obviously in favour of ensuring that whatever products come down the line are safe for Canadians.

I would ask why on earth the government has not taken it upon itself to deal with what is arguably one of the two most important issues affecting Canadians, and that is health care in Canada. The government has been missing in action. Why have we not seen a plan to deal with the health care human resources catastrophe that we will be facing in the coming years? Physicians, specialists and general practitioners, nurses, technicians and other health care workers, there is a huge aging out of the population taking place. The average age of many physicians and specialist groups is in the fifties and for nurses it is in the low forties. This is a problem that cannot be rectified overnight. The government has not done anything about this. It has to work with the provinces.

Here is one easy solution. There are some 1,800 Canadian students who could not get into medical school in Canada who are studying abroad in places like Australia. Those Canadians would dearly love to come back to this country, but it is exceedingly difficult for Canadians working abroad to come back. They even have to write a test to determine whether or not they can speak English or French. Can anyone believe that?

•(1605)

The system makes it very difficult for Canadians abroad to come back. Why do we not make it easier? Why do we not enable Canadians to be quickly assessed and to either have extra training or be allowed to practice in Canada if they are Canadians who are studying abroad? That would potentially introduce 1,800 doctors into Canada in a very short period of time at a very low cost.

Where is the government on other issues? Where is it on home care? This is a serious issue given our aging population. Where is it on a national mental health care strategy? The government is moving slowly in that direction. It is a positive direction and we continue to encourage that. Where is it on modernizing the Canada Health Act? There is silence from the government.

Where is it on information technology? This is something that could radically and dramatically improve our ability to care for our patients. Where is it on the head start program for children? That was passed in the House in 1998. It would be the simplest, least expensive and most effective preventive measure we could possibly have in our country.

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Where is the government on research and development? Where is the government on its science and technology strategy? I can say where it is. The government's science and technology strategy is to fire the science adviser to the Prime Minister and eliminate his office. Firing Dr. Arthur Carty, one of Canada's finest scientists, and eliminating the post of science adviser to the Prime Minister is the government's science and technology strategy. What kind of strategy is that?

What is the government doing to facilitate the connection between bench discoveries and putting them into clinical practice? Where is its ability to move forward on the scientific discoveries that we have and commercialize them? Why is it not connecting up groups like the MaRS centre in Toronto and the 27 science and technology parks from coast to coast in our country? Why is it not working with them to connect them and maximize their possibilities. That is the future economic ability of our country to compete.

China and India are building dozens and dozens of these parks. They know that the future does not lie in petrodollars. The future does not lie in resource extraction. The future lies in our ability to maximize technological advances in science and research and to commercialize an operationalize them.

Our fine scientists are some of the best in the world, but they are being left to drift by the government. There is no plan whatsoever from the government. Why? Because in part everything is controlled by the Prime Minister's office and it chooses to deal with only a few things.

I would strongly advise the government that there are members in the Liberal Party who would very much like to work with the government to advance ideas and solutions to enable Canadians, particularly those who are sick, to access the care they require.

Most Canadians would be fascinated to know that with respect to modernizing our health care system in Canada, it is not a binary question. It is not our system or the U.S. system. What about all those systems in Europe where for a lower price and less cost there are better health care outcomes? There are no, or small, waiting lines. There is better access to new technologies.

Canadians would be interested to know that we fall somewhere in the lower third of OECD countries in our ability to access modern technologies. Technologies and medicine are out there. Can Canadians get them? No. Why is the government not working with the provinces to look at best practices in Europe and bring them here to Canada?

Why do we not have a centre for best health care practices in our country? This is something for which I have been calling for a few years. The government could organize a centre for best health care practices, take the best ideas from around the world, bring them here to Canada and push those out.

One particular area that is important to my riding of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, as it is to the country, is the health care of our Canadian Forces members and their families. They are suffering in silence, in part because of the situation in Afghanistan. We could set up a centre of excellence for health care for our Canadian Forces members and their families. In doing so, we would be more effective in addressing PTSD, preventing PTSD, dealing with the anxiety

issues and psychological problems and other physical problems they have.

We look forward to having a strong debate in committee regarding Bill C-51.

• (1610)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): We will now have questions and comments.

I have noted in this cycle that the questions are very long. When the question takes more than half the time of the question and comment period, then the answer does not have equal time. So, we will try to at least respect that.

I recognize the hon. Parliamentary Secretary for Health.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in this circumstance, the question is sometimes more important than the answer.

I am a little disappointed that the member did not use his full time to talk about the issue at hand, which is Bill C-51. The member talked about the doctor shortage, and I will just address that for a moment.

The doctor shortage is due to cutbacks in the mid-1990s, when the brain trusts of the governing party, the Liberal Party at the time, thought it would be a good idea to reduce the number of family doctors graduating from medical schools. So, we now have, 10 years later, not surprisingly, a doctor shortage.

We have an immigration bill that will allow the fast-tracking of medical professionals, which the opposition party railed against, but yet let pass, very hypocritically. It will address the medical crisis that the Liberal Party initiated and now we, as Conservatives, have to do what we always do; that is, clean up after the Liberals.

With regard to Bill C-51, the member, I think, being a doctor, understands the importance of natural health products. I am pleased to see that he is willing to let it go to committee where the appropriate amendments can be brought forward and so on.

I wonder if the member would agree with the government that the health and safety of Canadians needs to be balanced with the ability of Canadians to have the freedom of choice in dealing with their care needs?

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I will just correct my hon. friend, the hon. parliamentary, on a couple of points. I do not want to use up all my time on that, but I was speaking about a national health care workforce strategy, yes, for physicians, but also for nurses and technicians, and other health care professionals. There is an age-out occurring in all of those areas.

When we were in government, my colleague, the member for Vancouver East, put forth with the then prime minister a plan to bring in a \$50-million plan to facilitate many new physicians who were here into the workforce, which was accomplished.

Government Orders

We are asking for governments to work with other health care professional groups to deal with a national workforce health care plan.

On the issue of the right to access and the public good, governments have a right and an obligation to ensure that products that are on the market are not going to be harmful.

There is an interesting thought that just because something is “natural”, it is in fact safe. The reality is that many of the drugs that we receive as prescriptions have natural products as their root. Digoxin, digitalis, which is a cardiac drug, comes from a plant. The narcotic family, which is codeine and other more powerful narcotics, also comes from plant products. There are many other products that come from plant products.

The job of Health Canada is to act as a guardian in the public interest. But there is a balance. That is what we want to make sure, that when this bill goes to committee that that balance will be struck and that Canadians will have access to safe products, there will be proper oversight on the part of the Food and Drug Administration and Health Canada, and also that the government will have the power to remove those substances that are injurious to the public.

• (1615)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to get something on the record quickly. I want to ensure that Empowerplus is still available after this bill goes through and the supplements that help bipolar disease. There also has to be sufficient consultation with first nations to ensure that a protection exists in their land claim or self-government agreements to deal with natural medicines.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I will put another challenge forward. What would be very opportune for the government is to work with scientists to investigate the medicinal properties of naturopathic substances, do the tests on them to determine what works and what does not work for the particular health care problems they are supposed to be utilized for.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to follow my colleague from Winnipeg North on Bill C-51. She has been very eloquent on this bill and has been, I think, by far the best speaker thus far in terms of exposing what really seems to be at work here regarding the agenda that the government has put forward. I am pleased to speak in opposition to Bill C-51.

As with a number of other initiatives from this Conservative government, what it says it is trying to do is quite different from what it actually tries to do when it is seen in legislation. We have seen this time and time again, that essentially what the Conservatives try to use is a smokescreen, political spin. It takes scrutiny, particularly from the NDP corner of the House, to scrutinize very carefully the actual legislation to find out what indeed is the intent of the Conservative government.

Here again is a case where the Conservatives announced, with a great deal of political spin and marketing, that somehow they were trying to add to safety in our health care system with health care products and pharmaceutical drugs.

But the devil is in the details. When we carefully read through this bill, as our health critic the member for Winnipeg North has done and other members of the NDP caucus, we find the intent is quite different than the actual wording of the bill itself.

I would like to touch on two of the most egregious aspects of what is contained within Bill C-51, which essentially, in a very bizarre way, is an attempt to push a very strict regime around natural health products and at the same time, there appears to be an attempt to lessen any sort of regulatory oversight around pharmaceutical drugs.

On natural health products, we have seen over the past few years a growing waiting list for approval of natural health products in Canada. A little bit like the immigration system and a little bit like our health care system, that is the result of both successive Liberal and Conservative governments essentially giving away the public management and the public trust that Canadians have entrusted to Parliament.

What we have seen over the past 20 years is very much a right wing agenda that puts the emphasis on corporate tax cuts above all other things. The result of that is underfunding of our health care system. The result of that is underfunding of our immigration system and the result of that as well is underfunding of the approval process to actually ensure that natural health products are not subject to these long wait lists.

The solution the Conservatives offer up is to simply lump in pharmaceutical drugs with natural health products. I have received far more letters and emails from my constituents in Burnaby—New Westminster on this issue than I have on practically any other. I am going to read into the record a few of the comments that my constituents in Burnaby—New Westminster have written to me on this particular issue.

Mr. Thuot writes: “We all recognize that the pharmaceutical industry has been waging a relentless war internationally on vitamin and alternative natural health supplements for quite some time”.

We have Dr. Chan from Burnaby who writes: “I definitely 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 category for natural health products as was recommended by the Standing Committee on Health in 1998”.

We have Mr. Johrden in New Westminster who writes: “I am opposed to Bill C-51 which has been set in motion to amend the Food and Drugs Act, a bill with worrisome implications for the natural health products industry and consumers”.

We have Ms. Balabanov who writes: “Vitamins and minerals are very important for health and prevention. They cause no deaths as opposed to pharmaceutical drugs that do cause many deaths”.

We have Ms. Lum from Burnaby who writes: “I dare say the only industry being helped will be the pharmaceutical industry who can rake in even more profits once all health foods have been banned or made into prescription drugs”.

Government Orders

We have Mr. Hollenstein from New Westminster who says: "I do not wish this manipulation of the term therapeutic drugs to be an umbrella for all pharmaceutical drugs, to include vitamins and herbal remedies and food in general".

We have Mr. Robertson who writes, referring to me as his member of Parliament. He said: "I ask you to take a strong stand on this and I for one would like to state that I am vehemently opposed to the passing of such a bill".

Ms. Bredburn from Burnaby writes: "I am a woman who has greatly benefited by natural health products after years and years of unsuccessful mainstream doctor prescribed drugs".

The constituents in Burnaby and New Westminster have written time and time again about this foolhardy notion that the solution to the waiting list, that has been caused by government underfunding, will actually ensure that the system works effectively and that new natural food products that are brought on the market will be subject to the appropriate scrutiny and then brought on to the market.

• (1620)

Instead of providing the adequate funding, in a bizarre world that only Picasso could have imagined, we have the Conservatives making the situation worse. However, there is another element to Bill C-51 that I would like to address.

As the government seems to be putting the thumbs to the natural food products industry and most Canadians who rely on herbal remedies and natural food products to maintain their health and well-being, we are seeing, at the same time, an American style approach to the approval of pharmaceutical drugs. What sense is that when in the United States we have seen huge problems with its fast tracking of approval of pharmaceutical drugs?

Progressive licensing simply ensures that drugs are brought onto the market without appropriate scrutiny. We have seen this from other Conservative initiatives in transportation, where it wants to hand over safety management to the airlines themselves. It did not work for railways, as we saw an escalating accident rate, but the government wants to try it for airlines. This type of approach simply does not make sense.

We have seen in the United States drug after drug after drug that has provoked deaths because it was fast tracked. We know that the Conservatives, like the Liberals before them, in these behind closed doors negotiations, the so-called security and prosperity partnership, are trying to harmonize all of our regulations, standards and safety protections that we put into place to lower American standards.

We saw that with transportation safety. We have seen it with the attempt by the Conservative government to raise the pesticide residue permitted in Canadian food. We see this through the SPP process that essentially copying what has not worked in the United States is not in the interests of Canadians.

I would like to read a couple of excerpts from news articles that came out last year around this issue of progressive licensing and how it worked in the United States. I will read a couple of paragraphs from the *Washington Post*:

Three drugs—Vioxx, Ketek and Avandia—are casting long shadows over the congressional debate on how to update and revise the 15-year-old system that has

dramatically sped up the process of bringing prescription medicines to American consumers. All three ran into problems after the Food and Drug Administration approved them for use. The problems ranged from thousands of heart attacks partly attributable to the painkiller Vioxx to a few cases of liver failure caused by the antibiotic Ketek. And the hazards of the diabetes drug Avandia are only now emerging.

The New England Journal of Medicine did a study around cases of these fast tracked drugs, such as the Conservatives are proposing, and these are the comments that came out of that study:

It is incredible that the Agency charged with protecting the public health has such a poor record when it comes to post market drug safety. Regrettably it is incidents like this that demand legislative changes in the way FDA deals with drug safety.

That particular study indicated that 56,000 Americans died as a result of drugs being fast tracked onto the market. This is the danger with this kind of foolhardy Conservative initiative that may mesh with its right wing ideology that government and safety is bad, let us do away with all of that, and let the company CEOs decide what degree of safety or risk Canadians should have.

Very clearly, all the emails and letters that have come from my constituents say the contrary. Canadians believe the government should ensure a higher standard of safety, a more secure process of approving pharmaceutical drugs.

Bill C-51, the thin edge of the wedge, does exactly the opposite, moving toward a kind of progressive licensing, the fast tracking of drugs that did not work in the United States. That is why in this corner of the House we are saying no to Bill C-51.

• (1625)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. 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 Kenora, Aboriginal Affairs; the hon. member for Labrador, National Defence; the hon. member for Windsor West, Infrastructure.

Questions and comments. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary for Health.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard stories about the loony left and what we have seen and heard here is an example of seeing shadows where there are not any. The fact is the government is looking to bring forward regulations to protect Canadians. I thought NDP members would be in favour of that but they are not. They feel that there is some sort of conspiracy with big pharmaceutical companies and that somehow this legislation will fast track pharmaceuticals, which is absolutely false.

This legislation deals with the life cycle approach of products. I wonder if the member understands what he is talking about. Can he explain his understanding of the life cycle approach to Parliament?

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I think the member is betraying the Conservative approach on health care. Rather than addressing any of the concerns that have been raised by the thousands of Canadians who have written to his office, as they have to every other member of Parliament here, he denigrates them. He attacks them, he insults them and he calls them names. That is exactly the Conservative approach. It is a kind of thuggish approach on health care.

To put it quite simply, the Conservatives have not made the case for Bill C-51. Quite simply, when we look at the American style of approach that they are attempting to use through Bill C-51, the evidence is there in the United States from *The New England Journal of Medicine*, which he is calling loony leftist. *The New England Journal of Medicine* has a lot more credibility than the hon. member does when it comes to health care issues.

When *The New England Journal of Medicine* says that 56,000 person-years were “lost to the harmful effects of drugs approved but later withdrawn for safety reasons” because of fast-tracking of pharmaceutical drugs in the United States, one would expect that the Conservatives, in the public interest, would actually say, “Hold on, let us take a step back on this. We have put together this legislation. Obviously there are some negative impacts on this legislation so we are going to have to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I must interrupt the hon. member. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Yukon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for putting input from his constituents on the record. I want to do the same.

I want to ensure that the supplements for people with bipolar syndrome are still available for them. I have some constituents who need them.

Also, in this process, there has to be consultation with first nations, especially those who have in their land claims and self-governance agreements the right to distribute these products.

Finally, this last comment is from a retailer, who says:

Many Canadians rely on 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 the licence applications have failed. These have been the “easy” applications. Expectations are that 70-75% of applications will fail. For the [Natural Health Products] Community this means that 75% of [natural health products] we rely upon for our health will become illegal.

● (1630)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I am going to finish my answer to the parliamentary secretary. The government itself is acknowledging the fact that it screwed up on this bill because it is now bringing in amendments to its own bill.

As for what the parliamentary secretary said in a very denigrating way about Canadians generally who have concerns about this bill and about leftist publications like *The New England Journal of Medicine*, my goodness, if that is a leftist publication, then I think we

are dealing with a completely different planet that the Conservatives live on.

These concerns are legitimate. The government has acknowledged that by bringing in amendments in a desperate attempt to try to correct the mistakes it has made in this bill.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to speak on Bill C-51, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

First and foremost, as vice-chair of the health committee, I would like to say that we have looked at some of these issues and it is a pleasure to see the parliamentary secretary here to support this bill and to debate it.

First, the bill looks at modernizing the regulatory system. What does that mean? It means that because the act was introduced in 1953 and is a little bit older than I am, we can see that it needs some improvement, just as I do on a regular basis.

Second, it looks to improve the surveillance of benefits and risks of therapeutic products throughout their life cycles. At the committee, we have been looking at licensing or surveillance of medication.

At this time, what happens with medication is that some pre-market tests are done, but we all understand that pre-market tests cannot be done on young children or on elderly people, pregnant women and so on. At the same time, when products are introduced into the market, they are taken by those people as well, so we have been doing a study on post-market surveillance to see what can be done and how to improve the system of post-market surveillance.

The post-market surveillance assessment will be done soon and I believe the report should be hitting the House either this week or next week, hopefully before we rise. The report will have some recommendations about which I am not at liberty to speak at this time.

The other issue this bill looks at is improved compliance in reporting adverse reactions. As for adverse reactions when someone takes a medication, the medication is either reported back to their doctor or not reported at all. So far, our information tells us that only 10% of adverse reactions are reported.

We have been wondering about that. We have been consulting with stakeholders from across the country, the people who really do this work, such as the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian pharmaceutical associations, the Canadian Nurses Association and so on. We will be coming up with some recommendations on those issues before the House rises, but what is important is that the issue of human resources for health professionals is not being dealt with.

Government Orders

When the Minister of Health appeared in front of the committee, we asked if he was aware of how many Canadians did not have a doctor, a health professional. At that time, which was about three months ago, he was not aware. Further, when we asked if he was aware of what the doctor shortages were in Canada, he was unaware. The third question was the clincher and that was about whether he had a plan. He obviously had a plan, but having a plan for improving the situation of health care professionals in Canada and not being aware of the first two questions begs the question of how he could be fixing a problem without being aware that it exists.

The minister came up very short in front of the committee. I was very surprised when he did not know that three million to five million Canadians do not have a doctor and that in Canada there is a doctor shortage of about 26,000 physicians. They were needed yesterday, not tomorrow, not next year, not 10 years from now, but yesterday.

● (1635)

Because the minister said he had a plan, we asked him what his plans were in the health department to fix the human resources situation. He told us that residency spots in Ontario were available. When we asked how many, he said they had been increased by roughly 100.

I was born in a very small village and my math may not be so good, but when three to five million Canadians do not have a physician and we are told that 24,000 to 26,000 physicians are needed to make sure that Canadians are looked after, it does not take a genius to figure out that we need an aggressive plan for human resources in the health care system. The minister's aggressive plan was to increase the number of residency spots in Ontario by 100.

Twenty-six thousand doctors are needed, yet we are increasing that number by only 100. It will take a zillion years, let me note for the parliamentary secretary, to solve this huge problem. It is a problem in the beautiful riding of Oak Ridges—Markham, the largest riding in Canada when it comes to eligible voters. We need more health care professionals in our riding.

I would like to go back to Bill C-51 and put on the record a number of emails that I have received from people in my riding.

Linda wrote to me and said:

If I prepare apple cider vinegar steeped with a few herbs like sage and lemon balm in my garden for a general winter tonic to ward off flu or colds, or to give in case of sore throat, I could find myself in jail if I give this to my children or husband or give a jar to my neighbour or a friend. Or if I make some skin cream for my son's eczema from beeswax from some herbs growing in my garden I could be thrown in jail....

She went on to say:

I don't trust Health Canada to keep my family safe. I don't trust the health minister to keep my family safe...

If this bill does pass, and I pray it does not, I will be contacting you and your colleagues....

Another email is from Angela, who says:

I wanted to write to you to see if there is anything you can do to help out with Bill C-51, which the government is trying to pass as law. If passed, Bill C-51 will ban our access to all vitamins, herbs and alternative therapies.

I would like to read a couple more, with the House's indulgence. The next email is from Rosie, who says:

You might remember chatting with Jeff and myself...a few weeks ago...I am writing to protest the passing of Bill C-51 in its current version.

She says that we should take it out of here, pass it on to the committee and have a look at it at committee. That is a great idea. That is what our party is suggesting.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I will finish with an email from Marjorie, one of the many that we have received. She says:

By now, many people in the Natural Health Product (NHP) community are pulling their hair out over Bill C-51, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act.

I end my speech with that.

● (1640)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is very able in his capacity as vice-chair of the committee. I look forward to working with him in committee on Bill C-51.

With respect to the issue of the physicians, I would like to remind the member that it was under the previous government that positions were cut and \$25 billion was removed from the transfers to the provinces. We are dealing with it now and we are dealing with it well. The minister has done a remarkable job in attracting new professionals through working with colleges.

As well, just last night we passed an immigration bill that will fast track health care professionals such as doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and the like. We are making substantial progress.

On the issue of Bill C-51, we have heard from the NDP accusations that are not correct. I wonder if the member, as vice-chair of the committee, could explain how the committee process works. The fact is that once we go through second reading the committee will have the opportunity to amend the legislation, listen to witnesses and so on. It also gives the government the opportunity to incorporate into the bill suggestions that it has heard from across the country, because of course the government is listening to Canadians. Can the member explain the process a little?

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Mr. Speaker, I will comment on the process, but I will mention a couple of things with regard to the doctor shortages.

The immigration bill has passed, without our support. If the parliamentary secretary is thinking the bill will solve the problems he has as the parliamentary secretary, and Canadians endure, he is dreaming in Technicolor.

Government Orders

In terms of the process, it is such that we will now move the bill to the committee and the committee will do an intensive study. We will hear from the brightest minds and most of the shareholders who are involved with the bill. We have looked at our agenda and we will bring Bill C-51 to the committee's agenda upon our return in the fall. At that time, we will discuss and hear witnesses from across the country. If people are watching and would like to be witnesses, they should get in touch with our clerk and she will ensure they are added to the list of witnesses. We like to hear from everyone.

This morning my assistant opened over 100 envelopes with the same message inside. The names of different people were added on to the letter of request or comments that people had made. Therefore, I believe there is a movement, in terms of Bill C-51, looking to stop the bill dead in its tracks right now.

However, we will send it committee, work on it and come up, hopefully, with an improved plan than the one with which the parliamentary secretary gave us to work, which is not enough.

• (1645)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-51. We know the overhaul of the Food and Drugs Act in Canada has been years in the making and successive governments have attempted and failed. Canadians rely on their government to ensure safety standards are in place to protect their food, drugs and the natural health products they might want to take.

Over many years, we have seen far too many scares. There have been some serious consequences. Drugs and other products have ended up on the market and the health of Canadians has suffered. We certainly can point to Thalidomide as one of those drugs, as is Vioxx. Silicone gel breast implants had consequences that people did not anticipate.

It is very important that a legislative and regulatory process be in place to protect the health and welfare of Canadians. However, we do not see Bill C-51 as being that legislation. Although some aspects of the bill have merit, other aspects of the bill warrant additional attention. Because I only have 10 minutes to talk about this, I will talk only about a couple of aspects of it.

Before I get into this, governments in the past have made the lives of scientists very difficult. We only have to turn to the BSE crisis. Scientists were fired under the previous Liberal government for highlighting the problems with BSE. The case went on for years for those scientists who dared stand up and talk about the fact that some of the products in Canada simply were not safe. We also want to ensure there is adequate protection for employees who dare to blow the whistle on current government practice that affect the health and welfare of Canadians.

The couple of pieces I want to touch on are progressive licensing and direct-to-consumer advertising in the natural health products. I also want to highlight the fact that first nations traditional healers are not protected under the bill. Many of the first nations traditional healers have sacred medicines, which they have used for centuries. However, because they are sacred, they also are not in the public domain in the way that other products are. There needs to be a way to ensure first nations traditional healers are not impacted by the bill as well.

Under the progressive licensing aspect of it, one of the things the bill talks about is setting up an ongoing life cycle approach to drug safety. However, it does not have the needed improvements for pre-market testing and there will be heavy reliance on industry-led post-market follow-up. One of the things we want to see is improved pre-market safety. Any post-market oversight must be done independently. If we turn it strictly over to industry, it is like the fox in the henhouse. Any oversight must be done at arm's length so industry is held accountable both for its pre-market and post-market testing.

In the past we have called for a system to record adverse reactions. I know there has been some movement on recording adverse reactions, but more work needs to be done in this area as well. Largely one of the ways post-market problems show up is in adverse reaction. There needs to be much more work done on ensuring there is a national system in place to look at adverse reaction.

I want to touch on direct-to-consumer advertising. This is a very small piece in the bill, but it opens the doors to look at banning the current act's straightforward ban on direct-to-consumer advertising for health conditions, as outlined in a schedule in the act. The way the new legislation is written this prohibition could be exempted through regulation. This would allow pharmaceutical companies, with an order in cabinet, to bypass the regulations that are in place.

I want to turn to an article that was written by Barbara Mintzes called "Disease Mongering in Drug Promotion: Do Governments Have a Regulatory Role?". It is an extensive article, so I will not have time to read the whole thing, but I want to touch on two pieces. She starts the article by saying:

Ray Moynihan and colleagues describe disease mongering as, "widening the boundaries of treatable illness in order to expand markets for those who sell and deliver treatments". In this article, I examine one aspect of disease mongering: activities financed by drug companies to promote sales by expanding the pool of patients potentially treated by their products, when no benefit in terms of reduced morbidity is likely.

• (1650)

Then she goes on and talks about the fact that often these are very emotional responses and cites a couple of ads from pharmaceutical companies that say if people do not take their produce, they will end up dead. That is kind of the short form on it. That kind of fearmongering to encourage patients to use a particular pharmaceutical company's product is not the most reasonable way to make decisions on particular treatments.

In her conclusion, she says "Is a More Robust Regulatory Response Needed?"

She says:

The rationale for regulation of drug promotion is health protection, encouragement of appropriate medicine use, and prevention of deceptive advertising.

She goes on to say:

Canada's Food and Drugs Act prohibits advertising a drug that is "false, misleading or deceptive or is likely to create an erroneous impression regarding its character, value, quantity, merit or safety".

Government Orders

I think many Canadians would be very uncomfortable with anything that would allow pharmaceutical companies to do more direct-to-consumer advertising than they already do. There is a way they can circumvent the regulations currently, and many Canadians are very uncomfortable with that. We are strongly opposed to anything that would open up the door to allow that to happen. We are opposed to that one aspect of the bill.

I know other members in the House have talked about the hundreds of letters they have received from their constituents, and certainly Nanaimo—Cowichan is no different, around the concerns about how this may impact on their ability to use natural health products. People in Nanaimo—Cowichan like the option of being able to access natural health products without facing some of the same costs involved with pharmaceuticals. They like to have that access through their local health food store. Many are raising concerns around whether this will impact on their access.

The Canadian Health Food Association has written a letter to the Minister of Health, on June 9, outlining many of its concerns around the natural health products aspects of the bill. I will touch on a few of them, but the association has quite accurately outlines.

The association talks about the fact that in the preamble to the bill there is no identification of the importance of health promotion or disease prevention. We know health promotion and disease prevention are very important aspects. If we want to talk about impact on our health care dollars being spent, we know health promotion and disease prevention need far more emphasis than they current get.

The association talks about categories, that the proposed amendments to the act include a new term called “therapeutic product” under which NHPs, as a subset of drugs, fall. It says, “The term “NHPs” does not appear anywhere in C-51 until page 40 when transition provisions are discussed.

It talks about authorization and licensing, that the applicant is required to establish that the risks of the product are outweighed by the benefits. Its comment on that is:

There is nothing in the Bill that indicates in what manner the applicant is to satisfy the risk-benefit ratio. No parameters or definitions have been included, that recognize the inherent differences between NHPs and pharmaceuticals, in particular new drugs.

It goes on, as well, to talk about the fact that, in many cases, the minister would have far more powers through the regulatory process and that it would not be an open and transparent process.

The association's brief to the minister talks about the fact that there needs to be accountability, openness and transparency around how decisions are made, that we do not need a regulatory process. In fact, we know that most regulations do not need to come to the House of Commons for approval.

We have heard the Conservatives say, “trust us”, that the regulatory will be in place to ensure that everything will lineup the way the bill says it will, but that is not true. The regulatory process happens outside the House of Commons, outside the legislation, so there is not that openness and transparency.

I encourage members of the House to take a look at the very concerns that have been raised by constituents in our ridings and

across the country and ensure that natural health products and the safety of consumers is protected by the bill.

• (1655)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of working with the member on the health committee in the past and I always appreciate her comments.

My question deals with the beginning of the member's speech where there was a demand for increased free market surveillance. This bill, in the case of natural health products, looks at the risk profile of a natural health product. A product that has been used for thousands of years or is of low risk would be approved very quickly. This is very important to those who have natural health products because everyone in this industry is aware that there is a huge backlog in natural health products.

If we actually do what the member is insisting on doing, that will make it more difficult for natural health products to enter the market and therefore will deny people the opportunity to have the maximum choice of natural health products.

I wonder if the member would reconsider that position and accept the life cycle approach where products are viewed on a risk profile and low risk products are approved quickly and high risk products receive lots of scrutiny and are monitored for the entire time the product is in the market after being released into the market.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, in fact I was talking about pre-market work around pharmaceuticals, not natural health products.

When I was talking about natural health products, again I want to point to the concerns that were raised by the Canadian Health Food Association when it talked about the fact that the bill does not indicate any parameters and definitions, particularly around natural health products.

Part of what we have talked about in other contexts, aboriginal for example, is that if there is sufficient consultation done prior to a bill coming before the House, the passage of the bill is much smoother. In the area of natural health products, it would be very important to do appropriate consultation with not only people who manufacture the product but the users and many of our constituents who have a lot of knowledge about these products.

I would suggest that before we take a look at the risk benefit analysis for natural health products, we need to talk to the people involved in the industry in a much more thorough way.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan and certainly some of the concerns that she has raised.

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Through the course of this debate, I too have received a significant number of interventions, emails, letters and phone calls on the topic as have, I am sure, all members of the House. There is a certain consistency that runs through them. I want to share one and then pose a question. The Van Zutphens from Port Hood are great citizens and are very good at sharing their opinions on particular issues. Mrs. Van Zutphen wrote, “We support the need for regulation that ensures that the products recommended by our naturopathic doctors are safe and effective but we do not support legislation that treats natural health products in the same manner as pharmaceutical products. We encourage the government to implement a third category for natural health products as was recommended by the Standing Committee on Health in 1998”.

I apologize for not knowing the position of the NDP on this particular issue, so I will ask the member where they do stand on the creation of that third category of products.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the NDP has supported the creation of that third category.

I know that in a previous Parliament there was a private member's bill before the health committee and I was pleased to sit on the health committee where there was extensive discussion and witnesses from across the country.

Generally what we have heard, and it is fairly conclusive, is that people do not want to see natural health products treated as a drug nor as a food, and that third category seems to be the most reasonable way to go.

● (1700)

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-51.

There are many Canadians who have an intense interest in issues related to prescription drugs and natural health products. Their use has skyrocketed over the last number of years. I think Canadians can rest assured that when the bill is sent to committee, the committee is going to give due diligence in a very professional and consultative way. I am convinced of that.

My colleague from Oak Ridges—Markham is the vice-chair of the committee. On behalf of the committee and the chair he invites those who have a wide interest to make their concerns known to the committee. To use a clinical analogy, after the kind of analysis that will go into this legislation the prognosis for action is going to come to grips with some of the more modern issues that have evolved over the last three or four decades.

It is amazing to me that the Food and Drugs Act has not been updated since 1953. When we think of it, traditionally the debate centred around generic and brand name pharmaceutical companies. At one time the brand name pharmaceutical companies did most of the research and the generic companies picked up some of their patents after they had expired and brought cheap drugs to Canadians. The debate was always about achieving the right balance between the pharmaceutical companies in terms of serving the best and higher interests of Canadians. The debate has evolved far past that now, not that that debate is not still going on.

Natural health products are being used now by a large spectrum of Canadians. These products are supported by research and

development by many companies that are Canadian and that are part of the health care system.

I would like to add one element that has not been touched on by any of the members that I am aware of to this point. Not too long ago in *Macleans* magazine it was indicated that in fact megadoses of vitamins and nutrients taken in combination with certain prescribed drugs could have a deleterious effect with respect to the very objectives of the regime that had been entered into either on the advice of a physician or in a haphazard way by the consumer. Sometimes people will take megadoses because they have concluded they could not be harmful. Taken on their own the publication indicates that they probably are not, but taken in combination without appropriate advice, they can have a very disastrous effect.

I do not intend to pass any judgment on those conclusions because I am not qualified to do so, but those particular conclusions were picked up by several research based publications in the medical field. They in turn have said that this is a very important health risk, that the legislative regime should start to come to grips with.

For example, selenium taken on its own has certain advantages, but taken with warfarin, which is a blood thinner, the medical research documents and *Macleans* magazine indicate it could have a very bad effect. I just use that as an illustration.

What is our responsibility with respect to the legislation that would take all of that into consideration?

● (1705)

The government has said that there should be elements of what is called a life cycle risk management system. In other words, the onus is not on the companies that all of a sudden see something in terms of research to say to Mr. and Mrs. Consumer that they had better not take that product in combination with the prescription they are taking, and the company will withdraw that from the market.

The onus is voluntary on the producer of the particular vitamin or whatever it may be, and it could be a prescription drug. We have had examples of that before. The life cycle risk management places the onus on the sector, be it pharmaceutical or natural health products. When they have, on the basis of the best available research, even an inclination that there is a problem, they have the responsibility to come forward. That is as it should be. I do not think anyone on this side or the government side should be arguing about those components to give the minister more authority, either through an injunctive mechanism or whatever it may be, to react in keeping with the seriousness of the medical implications of pharmaceutical drugs or naturopathic or natural health products. That is something we do in terms of serving the higher interest of consumers. As representatives of Canadians, we have a responsibility to make sure that the regime that is in place will do that.

It is interesting to note from the documentation I have read that for the first time the generic and non-generic pharmaceutical companies are in agreement with respect to consumer advertising. There are some consumer groups that take exception, but the generics and non-generics have said that they think there is a higher interest to be served by allowing consumers to see the full picture of a pharmaceutical product before them.

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I have seen those truncated ads on television that do not give any background. They give a name but they say that people should go to their doctor. That is fine, but people should go to their doctor anyway. If it is on the basis of a little more information to talk to a doctor, why should we be saying to consumers that they should not have that information?

The generics and the non-generics in fact are agreeing with those provisions of the proposed legislation that really attempt to give more information.

I am not going to come down on either side of that issue, other than to say to my colleagues that I have been impressed with their understanding of these issues. When the bill comes to the committee those issues will be well debated. The committee will be hearing from a broad spectrum of interests and I am convinced that the public interest will be considered.

I have concentrated mainly on the implications with respect to the therapeutic category. I do believe that the natural products portion of the bill needs to receive more intense consideration. The reason is that Canadians generally see that as an opportunity for them to participate in their health care. The more we can help them to do that, the more we will be invigorating our health care system and bringing Canadians into the health care equation as active and informed participants.

If this legislation does those things, it will serve Canadians well. I am convinced, having listened to this debate, that in submitting this bill to committee, the broad spectrum of interests will be considered in a balanced and fair-minded way.

• (1710)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his thoughtful comments and note his grasp of the issue. He has demonstrated that he has given this issue some consideration.

The hon. member struck on one of the key elements of the bill, and that is the life cycle approach. I would like to give the member an opportunity to explain why the life cycle approach is beneficial for the consumer.

Mr. Alan Tonks: Mr. Speaker, the largest criticism, both for research based pharmaceuticals and in fact for natural nutrients and products, has been that in the existing regime there is the capacity to back up in terms of applied research and getting the product onto the market.

I think this in fact reverses that. A life cycle risk management is in fact a more dynamic process that places the onus on the full spectrum of medical jurisdictions, so to speak, and in fact will get those products out more quickly and in a safer manner. Surely that is the end result we all want to achieve. I think the legislation, properly worded and implemented, would do that.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this has been an excellent debate today. Some very strong points have been brought up throughout its course.

One of the common themes from the members on this side has been the concern around whether this legislation will handcuff naturopathic doctors. We are being asked by the Minister of Health to place some blind faith in him. He had said at first that it would in

no way have an impact on natural health products, but now he is saying that he is going to bring forward some amendments when this legislation reaches committee. He is asking us to support moving it through committee.

I have a question for my colleague and I would like to get my colleague's position on record. If he sees that this bill would in fact be disabling naturopathic doctors or in some way would handcuff them from conducting their trade or having access to the full range of various products, will he be voting against this when it comes back to the House?

Mr. Alan Tonks: Mr. Speaker, the end objective is to protect Canadians and ensure their safety. All instruments and regulatory mechanisms are or should be designed to achieve that end, first and foremost. There is not a member in the House who would sacrifice that objective and principle on a wing and a prayer. I think that is why the legislation has been brought forward.

There are some gaps in the Food and Drugs Act, going back to 1953, that need to be updated. At the end of the day when the bill comes out of committee, and I am sure that all members in the House would agree, if Canadians cannot be assured that their safety has been protected and is characterized in the legislation, then we would be placing Canadians at serious risk and would have to oppose that legislation.

As I said and will say to my colleague, I am very optimistic, having heard the quality of this debate, that what comes out of committee will satisfy the broad spectrum of Canadians and the broad spectrum of interests within the natural products area.

• (1715)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to speak on Bill C-51, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act.

When we lay the grounds for legislation, it is important that we have confidence in the regulatory process and the ability to ensure that we are going to have accountability with this change to the act.

There has been a lot of discussion today about Bill C-51 and a good debate about its consequences. There is one thing I want to remind the House about, which creates the insecurity I wrestle with. I certainly am not going to be supporting this bill any further. I believe that the arguments have been well laid out as to why we cannot continue to move this forward. The legislation needs some fundamental changes.

I do not have any confidence that the drug industry is going to be subdued in this process. Let us look, for example, at the direct marketing that is going to happen with this bill. It goes back to an experience that I had here on the Hill in 2004 when we started looking at what I believe was Bill C-9 at that time, the Jean Chrétien Pledge to Africa Act, to provide help for AIDS in Africa. It was the precursor bill of Canada's Access to Medicines Regime.

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The bill's purpose was to provide drugs to those developing countries that might be facing issues related to HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other types of diseases that were affecting civil society. The contemplation of the bill came through an international treaty that allowed the generic production of different types of medicines to proceed, medicines that may have already had a patent restriction on them, if the actual pharmaceutical company would not provide them at a low cost to those nations.

We went through a whole series of processes and lobbying at that time. There was a very powerful lobby by big pharma to stop that bill dead in its tracks. There was some political support to try to move it forward. What ended up happening is that big pharma got a provision in the bill that was not even part of the internationally signed agreement with the TRIPS and the Doha.

Where we actually could have provided any available drug to go forward, we created this artificial list of what drugs would be available to be sent overseas and which ones would not be. The danger behind this was that it allowed for lobbying to keep certain drugs off the market.

Many people said not to worry. They said that would not happen, that it would not be ethical and that the companies would not do this. We were told that the companies would behave themselves.

To make sure this would not happen, there was a provision in the legislation to make sure big pharma would not be doing it. Lo and behold, even as we were doing that, big pharma was caught lobbying, including by me. It was exposed. It made headline news that the pharmaceutical companies were already lobbying to keep some of the drugs off the market. This plan fell flat on its face.

This is what I am concerned about with regard to this bill and how we go forward. I am concerned about the active lobbying and also the prescriptive behaviour that can take place with drugs. This could actually affect everything from safety to health care costs. Also, we kind of have a self-prescriptive society. The commercials have hit the Canadian airwaves already. They are very clever. They have been done very well. Probably they should win awards, because everyone knows what is happening but they get around the technicalities.

At the same time, these commercials lead people to go to their doctors. The doctor may prescribe some type of medication or may want to provide some type of generic alternative. Then the patients perhaps insist that they know the actual effects better. It can create longer wait times, make people potentially consider changing doctors, or other types of behaviour.

This concerns us, because I certainly would hate to see the cost of drugs rise, some of which have already skyrocketed, based on marketing and advertising campaigns and influence from the drug companies. That is important to note, because we already know that women generally suffer the consequences from prescription errors. This problem actually could expand. We believe what the experts have said. They have noted this vulnerability in the system that is being proposed.

• (1720)

One of the other things that we have identified as very important with regard to this case is the issue related to the lack of parliamentary oversight. The fact of the matter is that this bill is

going to give more provisions for the government to be able to override the parliamentary process and for the minister to have expanded powers.

That is a concern because what we have seen with this administration is very much a centralized ideology. That has been its choice of how it wants to govern and that is fine, but at the same time, it opens up the probabilities for greater control. And it may not even be necessarily this administration that does it in the future.

I am suggesting that in the future we could once again have these types of control elements that really change the nature of how we actually have drugs administered in our society. This is another reason that New Democrats are saying at this point that we do not want to change the law right now.

Another thing I wanted to connect to right now is that we seem to be moving to a less regulatory society in some respects. Some of that is of great concern. I can tell members about it based on my background in the transportation sector. For example, in rail and air when we have been moving to safety management systems and letting the industry police itself, and there is going to be more of that with this type of bill, we have seen what is really very much a falling out of safety in many respects.

For example, there is the transportation sector. We just did a complete study. There was a panel. We talked about a culture of fear and intimidation that prevents the actual workplace from operating the SMS properly. What we have actually seen is a step back in rail safety over the last number of years as we have had increased problems.

We are really worried about having the regulatory body become more involved with regard to policing itself. What we would say is that we need to have a stronger involvement by Health Canada.

We have seen these actual situations in the past in our society. It is not just Canada that has this problem. It is in the United States as well, where active lobbying has put drugs on the market that do not necessarily meet the tests of the day and have to be recalled. That includes everything from a series of drugs related to heart medications to others such as breast implants. There are the tragic circumstances with thalidomide. These have had consequences. I think we are going to witness greater problems there.

There is a legitimate problem that we have in this country with regard to getting some of the drugs and medications to market. The hope for this bill is that it will expand those opportunities, but it is very much based upon a risk management cycle. Once again, that risk management, left in the hands of the industry for the most part, is something that gives us some trouble because of the influence.

I have witnessed it myself, as I mentioned, with Bayer doing the actual lobbying to keep some of its drugs off Canada's Access to Medicines Regime. That was even at a time when there was heightened awareness and there were actual hearings going on in Ottawa. There was discussion about that bill. There were a lot of politics around it and active lobbying on behalf of NGOs, the generics and the pharmaceutical companies. The spotlight of the nation was on this and they broke the rules at that particular time with no hesitation. They were not apologetic about it.

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So when we move into this type of system, we have a lot of concerns, because it will not just be the attention that is being provided right now. It will also be later on, as the politics about the bill wind down, where the regulatory regime and the oversight are so necessary, because then what we will probably be faced with, unfortunately, is a clawing back of decisions that caused problems for Canadian consumers and their health.

With regard to health products, I know that the Natural Health Product Protection Association has been very adamant about changing the way the system is being done here. Unfortunately, this is a regressive step. I have seen a lot of emails and letters and have had phone calls come in, not only just to my office but also in the Windsor and Essex County region. They are from people expressing disappointment with the government for not adequately fixing their situation. This bill is going to compound their situation so they certainly are not supporting this.

Therefore, with the way this is right now, what we are calling for is to make sure that we actually have a new bill. I know that the government is intending to table some amendments and it is positive that the government is actually looking at some of the weaknesses of the bill, but we believe the bill is far too weak in many respects. We should be re-entering a debate and forming a bill that is going to work.

• (1725)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am afraid many aspects of the member's argument are incorrect. For example, the way that pharmaceuticals are dealt with would not change under the bill. What would change is that products like natural health products, which will be dealt with separately from drugs or food, would be evaluated on a risk profile. That means if a natural health product is of low risk, it will be able to enter the market much quicker than at present and this will allow people to have access to that natural health product much faster.

The bill would also allow us to deal with product safety like lead in toys, for example. Many Canadians would be surprised to know that the Government of Canada does not have the power to take products off the shelf. We have to rely on voluntary compliance.

I would like the member to reflect on the impact his party's position will have on people accessing natural health products. How does the member explain that he essentially has a position that will delay natural health products into the marketplace?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, we have a disagreement with regard to natural health products. We would like a separate category and that will be the best for the long term. The process that we have right now does not have adequate resources.

I agree with the parliamentary secretary that there are elements in the bill that are very positive, children's toys, for example. I am willing to bet that pulling products off the shelves could move ahead immediately, even without this type of legislation.

As the transport critic, I can tell the House that there are other ways we can protect Canadians and that is by tracking some of the cargo that comes into this country. Right now Canada checks less than 5% of the actual cargo that comes off transports that come by

sea, and that is deplorable. There could be an increase there. The United States has the same problem.

The government has tabled another customs bill that would provide new powers. We have not seen that come forward in the House for debate yet. We are looking forward to working with the government on that measure and hopefully we will have a bill that is successful.

There are many different facets on how to protect Canadian consumers with regard to faulty products, especially children's toys. We actually have private member's legislation put forward by the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley on some of these measures, so we are very sensitive to that. We have encouraged the government to support our ban on pesticides. That would have been something progressive that the government could have done today.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member mention that he would agree with some areas of the bill. I think it is the same on this side of the House. That is why we are moving forward to refer it to committee, so it can have a look at it and have amendments from a variety of stakeholders from across the country and see what we can do to improve the bill. We know it is imperfect and I think the member would agree with me on that. Why not move it to the next step? Why stop it here?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, that is a legitimate question. We believe that the time has come to send this bill back to Canadians, to do it properly. The bill has too many flaws that are going to create problems later on. That is the reason why we have said it is time to back this up. There are some things that could be done in the interim to protect the safety of Canadians, not only through the health department but also through other departments.

If we send the bill to committee, the fear that we have is that there will not be enough of a bill left over to actually have something progressive and supportable at the end of the day. We would prefer to see a re-engagement on this so we can get it right. We have had to go through this many times.

This is the fifth or sixth time we have cycled through the bill. Unfortunately, it has always been flawed by the influence of big pharma. We need to pull that out and do it properly. We would support that process.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues, I of course take an interest in the health of my constituents and indeed of all my fellow citizens.

I consider it very important that drugs, foods and authorized therapeutic products be safe, that the effects of these products that are available over the counter or by prescription be studied and known, and that labelling of these products be accurate and honest.

By the way, I still do not understand why this government refused to respond to the very legitimate public demand as expressed in a bill introduced by a colleague calling for labelling of food products containing GMOs so that consumers can know exactly what they are buying.

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I will return to the matter under debate. On one hand, the government does not want the public to have information on these GMOs, but it continues to trust pharmaceutical companies to test their own products. On the other hand, through this bill, the Conservative government is imposing severe sanctions on producers, vendors and importers of natural products and drugs that do not comply with Health Canada standards and is placing natural products in the same category as drugs under the heading of “therapeutic products.”

I understand that we do not want to put people’s health at risk, and I agree. Obviously, we must not approve a product that is dangerous to health. However, neither should we approve a system of labelling that would be incorrect in terms of dosage or the composition of a drug or natural product used for therapeutic purposes.

In that respect, and only in that respect, drugs and natural products are similar when they are used in the hope of bringing about a cure. We must have very strong tools to protect the public from fraud—which regrettably does exist—or from truly dangerous products. We know that the wrong information can have harmful and tragic consequences.

It seems to me that, above all, we must make available the necessary resources to inspect products thoroughly, to deal with inquiries properly and to ensure necessary monitoring. Unfortunately, that is not what the government is doing. Instead, it puts before us a bill with tremendous ramifications without providing the means for the agency responsible to properly deal with natural products and drugs.

Some aspects of this bill alarm people who properly like to use natural products. They prefer such products because they feel they are more in keeping with their culture, their lifestyle or, quite simply, their health. Traditionally, there has been a certain tension between those who believe in the practices of western medicine and promoters of alternative medicine, which, of course, includes the use of natural foods.

As my colleague from Quebec reminded us during this debate, between 33,000 and 40,000 natural health products are now waiting for approval. It may appear to some people that the delays that have built up are related to the new licensing requirement provided in this bill.

Many people will ask, quite properly, how a new product would be approved by Health Canada.

Increased powers for inspectors and much heavier penalties for those who break the law—they go up to \$5 million and a three-year prison sentence—obviously make some people worry that the bill could create a de facto prohibition on the introduction of any new natural health product.

• (1735)

In my view, these concerns and perceptions deserve to be taken into account. Moreover, the doubts that arise from reading this bill are both numerous and varied. It is quite normal and legitimate to raise questions about the bill.

For example, is the prohibition on direct advertising maintained? What is the purpose of creating a licence for interprovincial exports? Is a product not inspected when it enters Canada? Third, the requirement for hospitals to report adverse reactions to a product to Health Canada could be rejected by the provinces because it deals with the administration of the health system, which is not under federal jurisdiction.

Therefore, I can only come to the conclusion that this bill is, to say the least, poorly constructed. When I say that, I am not blaming the drafters of the legislation but rather the intentions of the Conservative government. I humbly suggest that the faults are so numerous that I doubt that a committee really could amend this bill without changing the scope of the bill, which we know would make the amendments unacceptable.

As a result, it would be a loss of valuable time to send this bill to committee. Instead, we should send this bill back to the minister and his department to start over and make all the necessary corrections, especially since we learned during the debate that the minister wanted his government to introduce several amendments. Other members have referred to the infamous letter that the minister sent to the chair of the committee, and asked to see it. I am not a member of that committee, but I am just as interested in it as my colleagues.

In my view, if we are serious about this bill, it should be sent back to the minister and his department. They should be told to go back to work and when it is properly done, bring it back to the House. Then we will discuss a bill that will not raise so many questions. I have been here all day and I listened to the debate from the beginning. If the bill raises so many questions, it is probably because there are significant flaws in many places.

As the member for Wascana remarked, in a constructive spirit, if we are to produce something that is of benefit to our fellow citizens, the Conservative government should go back to work and introduce a new bill that will do a much better job.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if the member could provide for the public watching a technical outline of the new enforcement regime in this bill.

I will read a couple of concerns that I have received. Martin states: “I am opposed to the police state powers in Bill C-51.” Anne asks: “Why do bureaucrats want seizure warrants without judge approval? With fines being increased a 1000 times, and seizing authority without a warrant, is Bill C-51 meant to bankrupt and silence its target audience?”

I thought the member made a good point about trying to make all these amendments at second reading. There was a bill in the justice committee and some members wanted to add a year to the penalty in the bill and the Conservative chair ruled it out of order as it was beyond the scope of the bill.

The amendments the Conservatives are proposing are good amendments, but they are far more drastic than that particular change, so I can understand why opposition members are a bit skeptical about being able to make these changes at second reading.

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• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to answer the member's question in only a few minutes. I thank him for the question. I think that the most important aspect of his question is precisely that there are so many concerns about the operational framework for managing all this. There are so many concerns—I referred to them earlier—about the potential fines. When the citizens who we legitimately represent begin to be more afraid of how the bill will harm them rather than seeing how it will benefit them, that is reason enough to question it. That is when we have to work together to truly improve the bill so that it is worthy of the people we represent.

[*English*]

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the fines, right now the maximum fine under the legislation is \$5,000. If a company or organization puts a product on the shelf or a product was tampered with or any number of scenarios, the maximum fine for that company is \$5,000. Yes, the bill would increase it manyfold, to \$5 million.

Does that not make sense? Of course there would be a scale, depending on the severity of the injustice, but there needs to be consequences that matter if a product ends up harming or killing someone.

I will make a comment for the member for Yukon. For people to suggest that somehow the bill on product safety is equated to a police state is a real disservice to the integrity of everyone in the chamber and the people who live under those type of terrible conditions—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I will have to cut off the hon. parliamentary secretary to allow the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques to respond.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I am old enough to remember the disaster caused by thalidomide, for example. Our colleagues referred to that. In addition, we spoke a great deal about other drugs with adverse effects.

This is my answer to the parliamentary secretary: we cannot put a price on protecting our citizens. However, we have work to do when a bill is worded in such a way that it causes citizens to fear that certain substances—primarily natural products—would be more heavily penalized and would involve greater risks than drugs.

It is not our role to instill fear in our citizens; we are here to reassure, help and, of course, protect them. I would never want to help one group at the expense of another.

In my mind, one question remains: how can Health Canada allow pharmaceutical companies to be self-regulating to the point that they verify their own drugs? I believe that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The member for Vancouver East.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-51. I have

received a ton of emails both in my riding in east Vancouver and here in Ottawa. I have hear from constituents every day because the word is out in the community about the impact of the bill. I hope either we can defeat the bill, or if it does go to committee, that we can get it significantly changed so we can respond to the overwhelming concerns put forward by the public about the impact on the availability, accessibility and licensing of natural health products.

First, I thank my colleague, our health critic, the member for Winnipeg North. She has very valiantly stayed on this file and kept our caucus updated as to the progress of the bill. I know she will be very active at the committee, if it goes to committee, working with community interests and practitioners to ensure it does not become a big stone wall that denies access for people. Therefore, I thank her for the work she has done and the work she probably will do in the future. There will be a lot of interest in the bill, and a lot of people will follow it.

Very briefly I want to go back to 1997, when I first ran for the NDP in Vancouver East as a member of Parliament. I remember at that time there must have been a proposal in the House, under the Liberal government, to try to regulate natural health products. During the election campaign in May 1997, all hell broke loose in the community because of that. The government was completely caught off guard. It had no idea that it would get the reaction it did. It tried to do what the government today has tried to do, and that is to put natural health products in a box with drugs and to give the nod to the big pharmaceutical companies.

People in communities across the country cottoned on to what was going on and a massive campaign took place. It was a fairly quiet federal election campaign in 1997, but this issue kept on coming to the surface. It was a grassroots issue because people were so outraged, particularly in a place in east Vancouver. The heart and soul of Vancouver is Chinatown, the very origins of our city. A lot of the Chinese traditional medicine practitioners were very concerned about how it would impact them. Therefore, it became very much a cross cultural campaign as well.

After the federal election, the federal government of the day had to back off on what it wanted to do. As we know, since then we have had various machinations in terms of attempts for a regulatory approach. Suffice it to say, all credit goes to well-informed citizens who pay attention to legislation that sometimes creeps in, and they get the word out there about it. As a result, we get all these emails from people who are alerted to what the government has tried to do.

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

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

I am very thankful our caucus, with our health critic, the member for Winnipeg North, has monitored the bill very closely. We cannot support it in its present form. We are very concerned that it will lump natural health products in with drugs under a category called “therapeutic products”, which reverses a long-standing practice and position of a separate regulatory framework.

When I read some of the concerns listed in the emails I receive, one of them is the change of the categorization of natural health products. To treat these products the same as drugs is very inappropriate and is much too rigorous.

There are other concerns as well. We know right now there is a huge backlog of applications for the marketing approval of natural health products. How will that be dealt with under the bill? How will we ensure that the backlog is dealt with?

● (1745)

We are very concerned that the fines and penalties within the bill are incredibly excessive. It will mean that practitioners, producers and people who retail or market these products will hang on with their fingernails for their livelihood, and that is a very serious concern.

Why would there be such excessive fines and penalties for these products? In fact, the enforcement provisions are very heavy. They even allow inspectors to enter private property without a warrant. What is going on here?

We are very concerned that in the bill, as we have seen in other bills, so much discretion is left in the hands of the minister and the fact that regulatory requirements can be overridden within the department. Why would that be allowed to happen? This sets off alarm bells for people, especially when they go through the fine print and look at what is taking place.

I am very thankful we have had so much response on the bill. I have had more response on this bill than any bill for a very long time. I gather that other members of the House are getting the same kind of response.

I will read some of the responses I received. Jennifer, from east Vancouver, said:

Bill C-51 undermines the civil rights of Canadians to take control of our own health and well being. It goes against all logic and intuitive common sense and in no way serves the interests of your electorate....

Millions of alternative health practitioners that are certified through Canadian educational institutions who have dedicated their life to studying the healing effects of herbs would not be able to stay in practice.

I have another email from Anne, who lives in east Vancouver. She says:

—categorizing Natural Health Products as therapeutic products, together with drugs, medical devices, cells, tissues, organs, and veterinary drugs, Bill C-51 is viewing these exclusively to the lens of pharmaceutical drugs.

● (1750)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I hate to interrupt the hon. member at this point, but she will have three minutes remaining in her time for her speech.

It being 5:51 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

The House resumed from April 15 consideration of the motion that Bill C-520, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (Home Buyers' Plan), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-520, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act, which would amend the federal government's home buyers' plan.

I would like to thank the member for Delta—Richmond East for introducing this bill. I would also like to highlight the excellent work my colleague, the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, has done on this issue.

The bill we are examining today would increase the ceiling on RRSP contributions that an individual could use to purchase a new home from \$20,000 to \$25,000.

This bill could be very interesting to young couples. It would enable them to purchase their first home, but contributing to an RRSP from a young age also enables them to develop good savings habits. With this bill, the ceiling on contributions would go from \$40,000 to \$50,000 for a couple with enough money in their RRSP.

Obviously, the Bloc Québécois supports this measure, because it will make it easier for many young Quebec families to purchase homes.

Furthermore, during pre-budget consultations, the Standing Committee on Finance indicated in its report that the government should quickly adopt this measure. It is not expensive, it would help support the construction industry, and, as I said, it would help young couples purchase homes.

In its supplementary opinion on pre-budget consultations, the Bloc Québécois said it supported the recommendation to increase the amounts available under the home buyers' plan in order to make home ownership more accessible. The government did not include this, and many other recommendations, in its recent budget. Let us hope that this bill will help move things along as quickly as possible in the interest of the people we represent.

The federal government's home buyers' plan currently allows an individual to withdraw up to \$20,000—\$40,000 for a couple—from their registered retirement savings plan to purchase or build their first home. This program works and it is time to increase the amounts involved, given the increase in the cost of housing.

As I just said, the purpose of this plan is to help young families buy their first home. It encourages buyers to save money to put a down payment on a house. By putting the emphasis on the down payment, this plan helps the buyer reduce their debt load over the years by significantly reducing their mortgage payments.

Private Members' Business

Since its creation in 1992, this plan has clearly been effective. Since that time, roughly 2 million people have used this plan with the goal of buying their first home.

To a certain extent, this type of program has helped Canadians and Quebecers avoid the difficulties that a number of borrowers in the United States have experienced lately. We are all aware of the crisis that climbing mortgage costs have caused.

As I was saying earlier, Bill C-520 proposes to increase the ceiling to \$25,000 for an individual and \$50,000 for a couple.

• (1755)

Obviously, this amendment was created to respond to the significant increase in the price of houses that we have been seeing in recent years. In the riding I have the honour of representing, the price of houses has risen considerably. Whether in the Trois-Rivières-Ouest area or in Lavaltrie, Lanoraie or Berthier, house prices have risen steadily for a number of years now. It is becoming increasingly difficult for some people to buy their first home.

Improving the program as Bill C-520 seeks to do will help matters somewhat. In addition, I believe that this program will encourage economic development and social cohesion in our regions. More and more young families may choose to move to the regions and contribute to the strengthening of local communities.

As well, adopting this bill is a positive and necessary measure in increasingly uncertain economic times. With the price of gas going up, although the Conservatives prefer to ignore the effects on our communities, it is obvious that the prices of many essential consumer goods, such as food, transportation and of course houses, will unfortunately continue to rise.

In Quebec today, *La Presse* published an article about how the cost of fuel is causing families' transportation costs to go up. For example, a person living in Lavaltrie who commutes to Montreal every day is now spending \$50 to \$60 more per week. These costs are significant. We have to lower the interest rates that these young people, and many not-so-young people have to pay to buy their first homes, a purchase that can, in many cases, improve their lives and their living conditions. That is why it is so important to provide our fellow citizens with programs that can help them somewhat.

As legislators, we want to help families buy their first homes, and at the same time, we want to encourage them to save. I think that the committee will have to make some amendments to improve certain aspects of this bill. For example, there is the matter of indexing amounts. This measure is important because it will ensure that in 10 years, for example, the amount set out will still be enough and will still be relevant with respect to changing costs of buying a house. We should not have to come up with a new bill every time.

I will conclude by saying that the Bloc Québécois will support this bill for families because it is in the interest of all Quebecers and therefore of all Canadians.

As a responsible party, we are prepared to work with the other members to improve the socio-economic status of the people we represent. But I should point out that there are other pressing housing needs. We must not forget that there is still a critical need for social housing. Recently, we have seen that social housing is also a

problem in regions such as Rouyn-Noranda and Rimouski. Investment in social housing is also needed.

In conclusion, we need to help low-income individuals and families and the middle class obtain adequate, affordable housing. The federal government needs to step up to the plate on this issue, especially since it can afford to, with its surplus. This money should be used to improve the living conditions of all those who are in need and who need our support to improve their quality of life.

• (1800)

[English]

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise to support the bill brought forward by my colleague, the member for Delta—Richmond East. He is to be commended for not only identifying a situation that could be improved, but he has also offered to the House the means to provide that improvement.

Bill C-520 is an act to amend the Income Tax Act with respect to the home buyers' plan. It is a simple bill with a clear intent to make housing more affordable for Canadians by increasing the maximum amount that can be withdrawn from a registered retirement savings plan to be used under the home buyer's plan.

Home ownership is a dream and a goal that is just about universal. When young Canadians finish their education and head out into the workplace for the first time, they need a place to live. For most, this is the first time they are truly living independently from the parents and it is a challenging experience.

With the first job, frequently comes the first apartment, most likely to be shared, to be affordable, but still it is a rented space that is a place to live, not really a place to be considered a long term home. It is a way station in life, not intended to be permanent. The permanency comes with home ownership, a place that can be truly called their own.

Owning a home is something to which most Canadians aspire and purchasing a home is usually the biggest financial transaction most of us will make in our lives. With the passage of this bill, that dream and goal of owning a home would become a little more possible for many Canadians.

Private Members' Business

The home buyers' plan was first introduced in February 1992 by the Conservative government. The wisdom of the program is self-evident and the subsequent government kept it in operation. The idea was and is to encourage and reward thrift by allowing individuals to withdraw money from their registered retirement savings plans, tax-free, as long as the money is used for a down payment on a first home and is re-deposited to the RRSP over a period of 15 years. The maximum amount that can be withdrawn for an individual is \$20,000.

The repayment plan is within the means of most Canadians. The participants have 15 years in which to repay the amount they borrowed from their RRSP or face paying taxes on the money as income. That is certainly manageable with careful budgeting, especially given that the participants have already shown that they know how to save since they managed to save the money in the first place.

However, since the introduction of the home buyers' plan, about 1.5 million Canadians have taken part in the program, borrowing more than \$15 billion from their RRSPs to be used as a down payment on that first home.

This is an example of a government program that works the way it should. There has been no need for extensive advertising to convince people that this is a good idea. Right from the beginning, Canadians embraced the home buyers' plan. Canadians understand the need to plan for the future and the importance of owning their own home is part of that plan.

The existence of the home buyers' plan has encouraged young Canadians to start planning for the future at perhaps an earlier age than they would have otherwise, opening RRSPs with the intent of using that money as down payment for their first home under the home buyer's plan.

Saving for the future is not as common as it once was. Statistics Canada tells us Canadians are not as thrifty as they were a generation ago. A personal savings rate is a fraction of what it once was, which makes the savings that come from an investment in a home even more important. Any decline in savings is a matter of some concern and it is good to encourage Canadians to prepare for their futures.

Programs like the registered retirement savings plan and the home buyers' plan encourage thrift, which should help provide for more pleasant golden years for our senior citizens, not to mention the joys of home ownership when that first home is purchased.

The hon. member for Delta—Richmond East is to be commended for the bill which will further encourage Canadians to plan for the future. I know he is well aware of the success of the home buyer's plan and is equally aware of how housing prices have soared in the country since the plan was first introduced in 1992.

In 1992, when the home buyers' plan was started, the average price of a house in Canada was \$149,000, but by the year 2006 that number had risen to \$276,000, and that is more than an 85% increase.

● (1805)

In Edmonton the average sale price of a house was \$109,000 in 1992, considerably below the national average. By 2006, in just over a decade, that average cost had risen to \$250,000, a 228% increase.

However, the maximum amount allowed to be withdrawn from an RRSP under the home buyers' plan remains unchanged since 1992 at \$20,000. It seems to me that given the increase in housing prices in the past 16 years, that an increase in the maximum is in order, and the hon. member for Delta—Richmond East has proposed in the bill a very reasonable increase to \$25,000.

Buying a house today means spending more money than when the home buyers' plan was first introduced in 1992. By supporting the bill, the House is acknowledging that reality and doing its part to encourage Canadians to be thrifty.

We all are aware of the economic difficulties that have plagued the housing industry in the United States in the past couple of years. Thousands of first time home buyers have lost their homes, in many cases literally abandoning properties they could not afford to keep.

The economic fallout from the situation of subprime mortgages and asset-backed commercial paper has had a ripple effect throughout the entire American economy and indeed around the world.

Perhaps, if the United States had a different model for home ownership, and perhaps, if it had a home buyers' plan such as Canada, its housing picture would not be as bleak.

The home buyers' plan encourages potential homeowners to save for their purchase. By making a substantial down payment they not only reduce their monthly mortgage payments but immediately will have built up some equity in their property, equity that can be used as collateral if their circumstances change.

In the United States, those who are abandoning their homes frequently bought their homes with the minimum or no down payment and were unable to build up any equity in those homes before interest rates rose and housing prices dropped. They were unable to meet the payments and could not sell the homes for what they owed. It is small wonder that they walked away from their purchase. They really had nothing invested in it.

I have noted with concern that some lenders in Canada have adopted similar measures to make housing more affordable for first time buyers. The traditional 25-year mortgage can now be stretched to 40 years, and the down payment that used to be 25%, then 10%, can now be 5% or even 0%. While that may make purchasing a home easier, it does not always make keeping that home easier.

The home buyers' plan does make keeping that first home easier. It encourages thrift and responsibility, two notable Canadian values.

Private Members' Business

Certainly, there is support for the bill from across the country. It makes sense that a good idea such as this one is being endorsed by real estate industry groups and financial organizations, as well as Canadians in general.

As a nation we have encouraged our citizens to prepare for their retirement. This marriage of real estate and the registered retirement saving plan is a logical one. Real estate generally appreciates in value and certainly in the long term it is usually cheaper to own than to be paying rent for the rest of one's life. When the mortgage is paid off, hopefully before individuals retire and their income drops, their monthly expenses go down.

It seems wise for the House, therefore, to adopt the idea of the hon. member for Delta—Richmond East and increase the limit that can be applied to the home buyers' plan.

For the participants, this is a matter of short term pain for long term gain. In fact, one can argue there really is no short term pain involved here. Assuming the home buyer follows through with the 15-year repayment schedule, what is lost is the interest the money would have accrued over that 15-year period. But that is counter-balanced by the savings involved in being able to make a larger down payment on a residence than would otherwise be possible. As I see it, both the home buyer and the country comes out ahead.

To summarize, it is my honour and privilege to support the bill brought forward by the hon. member for Delta—Richmond East. I commend him for his forethought and urge the House to consider it favourably.

● (1810)

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the bill because originally 15 months ago I was asked to present the bill and in fact had already had it drafted by the clerk. Things were going very smoothly until I realized that my buy Canada motion for public transit was pretty much a priority for myself and my riding. I am really glad to see this surface again in this way.

In particular, my sister-in-law, who is a very highly respected broker, will appreciate this as will John Litt who is an Ontario Real Estate Association representative and had been a real champion of this issue. Mr. Litt and his team deserve full marks for encouraging this.

Just as an aside, the City of Thunder Bay has the highest rate of home ownership in Canada and I am proud to announce that. It also has the second highest rate of home ownership for people with recreational properties. Some call it cottages, others cabins, and in our neck of the woods it is called camp.

As mayor, I met frequently with the Thunder Bay Real Estate Board and as MP I am regularly briefed by its representatives.

When this came forward, it seemed to me like a very natural type of bill that should be proceed in a very regular way. The purpose of the bill is to raise the limits from \$20,000 to \$25,000 per plan holder with future indexing. Let us face it, we really do not want to come here every 16 years to do this. To bring it to the rate of inflation would bring the plan closer to its value.

Let us look at the stats when it was introduced in 1992. Since that time average residential home prices have risen 66%. The consumer price index is now up 27 points over the same period. If we use that \$20,000 under the plan adjusted for inflation, it would now come to \$25,400. Therefore, the bill itself is very reasonable and very fair in terms of what it intends to do as compared to the original base.

Just as an aside, of course, in November 2005 gasoline was 79¢ and now it is twice as much at \$1.48, so I will ask members to research their governments to find out what gasoline prices were under which government.

When we make a case for raising the limits, it is the fundamental argument as the case for the plan itself. Canadians can save for retirement and save for a home simultaneously. Previously, one had to make that decision: retirement, home, or in many ways diluting both of those ambitions.

The Canadian Real Estate Association has been successful in making the pitch that home ownership is the cornerstone of retirement for the vast majority of Canadians and they really should not be placed in a situation where they have to choose. This plan has allowed Canadians to save for retirement and leaving the option to borrow against RRSPs at a later date to access ownership.

The fact that we have come to the realization that it should be indexed means that we do not have to play catch-up. Members of the Canadian Real Estate Association will realize that this will be good legislation that makes a lot of sense to a lot of people. Because it does not divert retirement funds from the goal of retirement security, we know that the bill has further merit.

I would like to quote from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. It said: "The plan is a means of promoting home-ownership and homeownership is good public policy. The reasons are strongly embedded in the fabric of Canadian society. Surveys show that owning a home is an aspiration of the majority of Canadians. Homeownership makes better citizenship, it represents an important national asset, and it provides a sense of being part of free enterprise. There are major economic and employment spin-off effects from housing, directly and indirectly".

● (1815)

We have been under the impression that home ownership has increased four points, from 62% to 66%, over a 10-year period, from 1991 to 2001, and the plan can take a considerable amount of that credit. We also know that mortgage insurance flexibility and its expansion along with the dropping of interest rates have also been positive contributors to that.

We must do everything we can to encourage people to save. Certainly, research by the Vanier Institute of the Family shows that the overall increase in home ownership has been driven entirely by those aged 55 and over. Their ownership rate increased by 68%. The question is: How can we get younger people to save and realize the dream of owning their own homes?

Private Members' Business

The Vanier Institute reports that, on the surface, the increasing proportion of Canadians who own their homes looks like good news, indicating that home ownership is a realistic goal for all. That goal has proved to be attainable for older Canadians, but it remains to be seen whether or not, over time, the same proportion of younger Canadians will be able to make the dream of home ownership a reality.

This is another step we can take to make it easier for younger people to own their own homes. Clearly, the program has been working, is working, and this bill would make it work even better.

Members of Parliament, over the past year or 15 months, have all generally been supportive of the proposal to raise the limits. The fact that it exists comes from two parties. Former minister Don Mazankowski initially introduced it and the current hon. member for LaSalle—Émard and former prime minister made permanent this legislation. Therefore, we owe a great deal to two parties for what we have today. If people really wanted to argue against them, they would be talking about pre-tax dollars, but I would think that argument would ignore the fact that an effective mechanism is in place to protect the integrity of retirement savings.

There are at least three points that I would like to make. First, the borrowed savings are invested in a principal residence, which of course is the pillar of security. Second, the plan would require the borrower to repay the plan over 15 years. Third, as an incentive to repayment, funds not repaid are fully taxable. That should get a healthy rate of repayment and statistics show that it has been well accepted and repayment rates are very positive.

We really do not want to get into a situation, such as is becoming the trend with our friends to the south, where mortgages of 35, 40 or 50 years are now commonplace. It probably means that people will never own their own homes. We have already discussed the value, pride, investment, and basically the value system that home ownership provides.

The home buyers' plan is unique among support plans. It encourages savings and maximizes down payments. These are important. Heaven knows that Canadians want to avoid the disastrous subprime situation.

Let us face it, this is a very modest request. We are all going to support and endorse it, I hope. Paying off a mortgage is key to fighting inflation. There are 90,000 members of the Canadian Real Estate Association encouraging us to do this. We have a national housing policy. With all of these things combined, including the good work of the Canadian Real Estate Association, the local brokerages, and all regional real estate associations that are all asking us to do this, the least we could do, in an all party way, is unanimously endorse this bill.

• (1820)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak very briefly to this bill. Private member's Bill C-520 brought forward by my colleague from Delta—Richmond East allows first time home buyers to take up to \$25,000 from their RRSPs, rather than the \$20,000 limit that is in place right now. It is an update of what has been accepted and available in Canada for some time now.

This is an excellent measure. I am confident the bill will be passed by the House. We can tell that from what members have said.

The other thing that our government did in the last budget was to put in place a tax-free savings plan which allows wage earners to put aside up to \$5,000 per year and the interest earned on that \$5,000 accumulates tax free. This plan will commence in the 2009 tax year.

These plans, along with some other changes to the tax law that have been brought about by this government over the last two and a half years will make it much easier for first time homeowners to accumulate the money required for a down payment on a house.

Other members have mentioned the problems caused by having no down payment or a very small down payment. We have seen the mess that has been created in the United States and which has spread around much of the world. This measure is a very good step toward allowing an amount, in this case up to \$25,000, to be taken from registered retirement savings plans accumulated over whatever period of time and put toward the purchase of a new home. Of course that money over a 15 year period would be put back into the registered retirement savings plan. Therefore, the integrity of registered retirement savings plans and the purpose of RRSPs, which is to save for retirement, would be maintained as well.

I want to commend the member for Delta—Richmond East for bringing this bill forward. The bill certainly demonstrates the incredibly beneficial measures that can be brought forward through a private member's bill. I commend him for that as well.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member for Delta—Richmond East on bringing forward this bill. It is a very positive initiative which is sorely needed in today's housing market. I congratulate him on that, and the member for Edmonton East for congratulating him for that. I also want to congratulate the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River for initially contemplating this initiative and for all the work he has done on this and the eloquent way in which he described the need for this bill.

The main reason I wanted to speak is to say that I hope that the Conservative members in particular during their caucus meetings tomorrow morning will pass on to others in government this spirit of goodwill and the need for housing that they have outlined in speaking to this bill. I hope that they will encourage the government to move on some other fronts in the same spirit. It would be contradictory to take one step forward with this bill in addressing a very serious need and then to take another step backward on a different issue.

The member for Delta—Richmond East has disagreed with his government and the Prime Minister and has voted against them before. He could do it on some of these areas, too, if the need arose.

The point is there are people who are really in need of housing. There is huge housing crunch. We have some programs that have been successful in helping to deal with that. Certainly not all of the problems have been dealt with and more has to be done, but I am not asking for that at the moment. All I am asking is that those successful programs be allowed to continue while other initiatives are contemplated, or that these initiatives be expanded.

Private Members' Business

I am talking about three programs. One is the national homelessness partnering strategy. It has been hugely successful. The government extended it a year. The second one is the residential rehabilitation assistance program which helps people, many of whom could not otherwise afford it, including seniors, fix up their homes. This program is absolutely critical. Now that gas prices have gone up so much, they are going to need every bit of help they can get to survive. Making their houses more energy efficient would be helpful. The third program is the affordable housing initiative which provides people who otherwise would not have the ability the possibility to own a home.

These three programs still have a chance. That is why I am encouraging the Conservative members to bring this to their caucus meeting tomorrow. These three programs are still producing results, but they will expire at the end of March 2009.

For any program, there is a huge machinery of government. There are local committees in place that do excellent work to help implement these programs. Decisions are made months in advance of their implementation. We are getting close to the time when they are going to need to know. They are going to have to make decisions. Huge amounts of money are not needed, and in fact, the amounts are very small in the large scheme of things, to complement this excellent bill and to help some people into housing. I would encourage the Conservative members, when they go to their caucus meeting tomorrow, to urge the finance minister to simply announce that he will extend these programs at least at the existing level of financing until other successful initiatives are added.

These programs have proven to be successful. They are helping alleviate the housing crisis in Canada. The Conservatives have not cancelled them, which is good. They may not have done anything wrong, but I am just bringing this forward because there is an advanced timeline in the machinery of government. Unfortunately, there are so many rules that people have to follow that they have to know in advance whether these good programs will continue so that there is not a break in them. For instance, there is one shelter in our area which is funded by one of the programs. If that shelter had to close, imagine what would happen to the people who would have no place to go in a climate where there are many consecutive days at -40°.

● (1825)

Again, I compliment the member for Delta—Richmond East on the fine way in which he has brought forward this initiative. I hope he gets unanimous support.

However, I encourage him to encourage the government to build on the three programs that are really helping people who otherwise would have no chance of having a shelter over their heads and who continue to have some hope through the assistance that those programs are providing to some of them.

● (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate. There being no further debate, I will go now to the hon. member for Delta—Richmond East for the five minute right of reply.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank those members of Parliament who

spoke in support of Bill C-520 today and on April 15. I would like to highlight some of their comments briefly.

Bill C-520, as has been said, will increase from \$20,000 to \$25,000 the amount of money first time homebuyers can borrow from the savings they have accumulated in their RRSPs. That, of course, would increase the amount a couple could utilize from \$40,000 to \$50,000.

This will be the first adjustment in the borrowing limits since the homebuyers plan was created in 1992. Of course, much has changed since 1992 and it is time to bring the plan up to date so it can be of even greater use to first time homebuyers.

Canadians like the homebuyers plan today and they have liked it from the moment it was brought forward by a former finance minister, Don Mazankowski, and was enacted by Parliament.

Canadians have used the homebuyers plan more than 1.8 million times since 1992 and have borrowed more than \$18 billion from their own savings, using the plan to make down payments on their first homes.

The homebuyers plan of Bill C-520 will help Canadians realize one of their most fundamental desires: the desire to own a home of their own.

This bill has received strong support from members of all parties represented in the House: the Bloc, the NDP, the Liberals and the Conservatives. Their support is a testament to the support the bill has throughout the country.

I have received hundreds of letters of support from members of the Canadian Real Estate Association and their local chapters and associations across the country. Their hard work in support of Bill C-520 is much appreciated. They are on the front lines and know just how helpful the bill will be to young Canadians hoping to own their first home.

The Canadian Real Estate Association and its provincial associations were at the forefront of the creation of the homebuyers plan and have been working to renew the homebuyers plan for the future. They deserve special thanks for all their hard work on behalf of all homebuyers.

In conclusion, I would like to ask that all members of the House lend their support to Bill C-520. First time buyers are relying on us to get on with the business of amending the homebuyers plan so they can make greater use of their own savings to put together that all important down payment on the purchase of their first home.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake on a point of order.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan: I rise to ask that the House see the clock at 6:51 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to raise the question of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug in the House. Early in April, I had the opportunity to raise this question. It is quite unique that on the eve of the apology, I get another opportunity to bring this up.

What brought us to the point of taking the entire leadership of the community of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, English name of Big Trout, and the short form name of KI, to jail: Chief Donnie Morris, Deputy Chief Jack McKay, head Councillor Cecilia Begg, Councillors Sam McKay and Darryl Sainnawap, and band member Bruce Sakakeep?

These people were all standing up for their communities. They are elected members of the communities and they have the confidence of the communities. They are leaders of long-standing. These individuals have done very well in the community and they are very respected. Another aspect of this is they are also leaders in northern Ontario. They are leaders in the area where there are large fly-in communities.

Chief Morris has been elected many times. He has given strong leadership. He has been the political chief for many organizations, including SLAAMB, Sioux Lookout Area Aboriginal Management Board.

Many residents in northern Ontario want answers and they want leadership. They do not want these things to be put off to the province.

Grand Chief Stan Beardy and all the Nishnawbe Aski Nation wanted to know what the federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development would do to resolve this dispute. More than two months after the fact, we know what he did. He did nothing. Blaming other jurisdictions does not build confidence.

It has been more than two months, with no elected leadership in the community, no leadership from the minister and no leadership from the government, and no answers in the House. Regardless that

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this is a provincial issue, it is the federal government that signed the treaties. We look to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for support and resources.

How did Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug peoples do during this time? I am happy to say that, with the strength of the elders and community members, they did quite well. They are a very proud community, living in a very challenging environment. It is a fly-in community with no access by road and only ice roads which are temperamental at best. However, they looked after each other as they always do in the north.

Donnie Morris and the rest of the leadership are back home now. The judge was satisfied with time served, but first nations communities are not. They have questions. Will the federal government support their fight for treaty rights and traditional land uses? Will it show leadership by meeting with KI and the community? Will it support the community, which has fought a long legal battle and is really out of money? Will it support the community by informing everyone about the situation in KI?

The community has requested a delegation from the United Nations to visit their community and their traditional lands. We are told from the chief, as late as yesterday, that this permission has to come from the federal government. Some 80 delegates or politicians want the opportunity to visit KI. They want to help the world and the United Nations understand the challenges faced by Canada's aboriginal peoples. KI has been told by the bureaucracy that the government has to give permission.

When will the government give its permission? When will the government allow the world to come and visit northwestern Ontario and try to understand the challenges faced by the aboriginal people of Canada? There is a lot of opportunity to actually participate. There is a lot of opportunity for the minister to come to the community.

People in northern Ontario, people in Nishnawbe Aski Nation all want answers and they want to know they have the support of the government. Again, will the government allow permission for the United Nations to visit Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug in northern Ontario?

● (1835)

Mr. Rod Bruinoog (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can rest assured that our government continues to work with the tribal council and first nations throughout Ontario to ensure that they can deliver the services their members need.

However, I must stress that the substantive issue in relation to this community of permitting and right of refusal on traditional lands not designated on reserve falls under the jurisdiction of the province of Ontario. I must stress that the Ontario Mining Act is provincial legislation. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has encouraged the province to update that legislation. The minister has also written to the provincial minister on this particular issue. With all this said, we encourage the parties to seek a mutually acceptable resolution of this situation.

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Also, it is simply good business for companies to work with and engage aboriginal groups in the development of projects which may affect them. Issues are clearly going to arise between mining companies seeking resources and first nations. It is beneficial to all parties to consult on land issues and we encourage them to do so whenever possible.

Our government is taking action to address this issue through our action plan for consultation and accommodation. The plan will help all federal departments and agencies live up to their legal obligations to properly consult with first nations, Métis and Inuit groups when Crown conduct may affect established or potential aboriginal treaty rights.

By this, we look to provide more predictability, certainty and transparency on when and how to consult and possibly accommodate aboriginal groups, resulting in better coordination of Canada's consultation approaches with related provincial, territorial and industry activities.

The fact that the lands at issue are under provincial jurisdiction can account for why a federal duty to consult was not triggered with regard to the activities in question. We recognize that the community of Big Trout Lake is in a financial crisis due to the legal fees resulting from this action. However, we do not have the authority to provide funding to cover such fees.

It is important to note that the first nation continues to conduct its daily business for the overall good of its community. Also, our relations with this first nation remain quite strong. We continue to be committed to ensuring that the appropriate services to its members are provided.

• (1840)

Mr. Roger Valley: Mr. Speaker, first, he has mentioned to me, in the discussions we have shared, that he plans on travelling to my riding. I would like to extend an invitation for him to ensure he has time to get to Kitchenukmaykoosib Inninuwug. This is an opportunity that not many people have, to get onto the land and take a look at it. When he is there, the people will tell him of the challenges they have had to deal with in fighting this long, protracted legal battle. They will tell him of the challenges when the leadership was gone and how they survived.

However, I will go back to my original question. They want some involvement with the United Nations and a delegation to share some information. Could my hon. colleague look into this issue, get back to the leadership of Kitchenukmaykoosib Inninuwug and help them with this opportunity?

As he mentioned, they are well aware of the challenges of the legal fees, the huge costs that this community undertook to protect its traditional land. I would ask my colleague to look into those two issues, specifically to find out about the delegation from the United Nations.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Mr. Speaker, I should remind the hon. member of our strong commitment to this community and others in his region. I look forward to travelling throughout his riding this summer.

We are working to ensure that our efforts to promote economic development are channeled toward collaboration instead of litiga-

tion. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Minister of Justice, who led the implementation of the plan, will work with all departments and agencies to ensure we fulfill our commitments.

With regard to large development projects, we recently announced the launch of the Major Projects Management Office. One of the important services the office provides is the integration of Crown consultation requirements with aboriginal groups at the beginning of the process, further demonstrating our government's commitment to consulting with and listening to Canadians, particularly those who would be most directly affected by resource development projects.

Finally, I would like to remind the member for Kenora again of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's dedication to northern Ontario and the fact that he has written and encouraged the province of Ontario to update its legislation in this regard.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 18, I asked the defence minister about his broken promises to 5 Wing Goose Bay. I cannot say that I took any comfort from the parliamentary secretary's answer.

Goose Bay is supposedly a priority, and I wish I could believe that. Instead we have seen time and again the Conservatives try to forget the promises that they have made.

We heard a senior officer tell the defence committee there really had not been specific action taken on the Goose Bay initiative by the government. We have been told that Indian Affairs, not DND, is the lead department on the Goose Bay file.

Earlier this year, I asked the minister what steps had been taken toward the promised rapid reaction battalion and unmanned aerial vehicle squadrons. His response that the government was examining options, but not options for a rapid reaction battalion. It is exploring a role for UAVs without saying where those aircraft will be stationed, or if the forces will use UAVs at all, or if are, how they will be integrated into the overall force's capability.

I also note that the minister, replying to a written question from the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, says that since 2006 the number of personnel, albeit small, has increased at Bagotville, Comox and Trenton, but not at Goose Bay.

I have even heard that the current Minister of National Defence has washed his hands of his government's Goose Bay promises. He, or his office, now say that it was not the minister who made those promises in the first place, putting the blame on his predecessor.

It is a nice try, but Happy Valley Goose Bay residents, myself included, remember that the current Prime Minister, his leader, made those promises in the 2005 Labrador byelection and then again in the general election of 2006. We also remember the current Minister of National Defence promising not just a rapid reaction battalion, not just a UAV squadron, but promising to increase military flight training at 5 Wing Goose Bay.

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For the minister's information, that was in his press release of May 23, 2005. He should have kept a copy. We did.

We were told to wait for the Canada first defence plan. We waited. We were patient. It was announced and yet again, Goose Bay was nowhere to be found. In fact, one can barely find the plan itself. According to the Conservatives, it is all in the Prime Minister's head. It is probably out of order to ask the government to table his head, but it should consider tabling the defence plan. So much for transparency.

The government is not keeping its promises. All the evidence points to the fact it had no intention of doing so. It is not getting the job done. Goose Bay and Labrador deserve real answers, not evasion.

Could the parliamentary secretary say anything concrete about what is being done for 5 Wing Goose Bay?

• (1845)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member is very committed to his riding and Goose Bay and Labrador. This government has made a long term commitment to rebuild the Canadian Forces into a modern, multi-force, combat-capable military that will defend Canada and Canadian interests well into the future.

We will ensure that we maintain core capabilities while expanding and modernizing the Canadian Forces. We have already made some significant progress with the delivery of four C-17s and the upcoming requisition of Hercules aircraft, Chinook helicopters, tanks, and Arctic offshore patrol ships.

We are allocating significant resources to meet this commitment. In addition to the \$5.3 billion over five years provided in budget 2006, the government committed through budget 2008 to raising the annual funding increase for the defence department from 1.5% to 2% starting in 2011-12.

This predictable long term funding is expected to provide National Defence with an additional \$12 billion over the next 20 years, raising the defence budget to approximately \$30 billion by 2027-28.

Of course, much work remains to be done to implement the Canada First defence strategy, but I can assure the member that defending Canada and Canadians remains the Canadian Forces' first priority.

I would say that 5 Wing Goose Bay is important in this regard, as it plays a key role in protecting the sovereignty of Canada and the air defence of North America. In fact, the Department of National Defence recently invested in resurfacing the runway at Goose Bay. This revitalized 11,000 foot runway is one of the largest in Canada, if not all of North America. This new runway enhances the marketability of Goose Bay to a wider range of commercial aviation and is essential to maintaining this world class facility.

Goose Bay has one of the largest flying training areas in the world, making it an ideal venue for a range of operational training scenarios. We know that 5 Wing staff are actively working to enhance the training opportunities at Goose Bay and market the facilities to national and international clients.

Recent activities at 5 Wing provide useful examples to demonstrate the facility's continued relevance as a first class training area. In early 2007, Goose Bay played host to a contingent of approximately 80 German Airborne Rangers who selected Goose Bay as the site for their basic and advanced Arctic survival training. That was the first time Goose Bay offered this kind of customized training package and everyone was very pleased with the results.

In October 2007, Goose Bay also hosted a national search and rescue exercise, during which Canadian Air Force squadrons tested their skills in a wide range of simulated search and rescue situations. This exercise allowed military and civilian personnel from across Canada to train together. This will go a long way toward enhancing their ability to find and save those in peril.

I can assure the member that officials from the Canadian Forces and the Department of National Defence will continue to work with Goose Bay officials to look into future options for these types of activities.

With respect to the establishment of rapid reaction battalions, the government is still examining options to ensure that both regular and reserve force personnel continue to be properly trained and equipped to respond quickly to contingencies at home and abroad.

The government also remains committed to expanding the role of unmanned aerial vehicles for domestic surveillance. However, we have not yet reached any formal conclusions on when and how this capability would be used.

We have set clear priorities for the future of the Canadian Forces and are moving ahead with the projects that make sense at this time.

This government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The hon. member for Labrador.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, I think the parliamentary secretary's answer says it all. It was evasive, but it is much along the lines of the responses that we have been getting from the government for the last year or so.

I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for congratulating the Liberal government of the day in announcing and putting in the money for the runway. That was an initiative we carried out. The other initiatives that he talks about in Goose Bay are not new.

There was nothing concrete. There were no timelines. There has been no planning whatsoever on the UAV squadron and the rapid reaction battalion. Can the parliamentary secretary tell us what work is being carried out in the next days, weeks, months and years to make sure that these promises are fulfilled?

Right now, the parliamentary secretary is telling me that they are not going to do anything with regard to the specific commitments made to 5 Wing Goose Bay. Can he tell me something concrete? Can he tell me something specific instead of the same lines that we have had day in and day out for the last year?

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• (1850)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, as I said, last month the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence unveiled the Canada First defence strategy. This is a comprehensive plan to ensure that the Canadian Forces has the people, equipment and support it needs to meet our country's long term domestic and international security requirements.

The evolution of the Canadian Forces under the Canada First defence strategy is built on four solid pillars: expansion of the regular forces to 70,000 and reservists to 30,000; improvement of key Canadian Forces infrastructure, such as the resurfacing of the Goose Bay runway, which we just talked about; increasing the overall readiness of the Canadian Forces; and proceeding with major combat fleet replacements on surface combat ships, maritime patrol craft, fixed wing search and rescue aircraft, fighter aircraft, and land combat systems.

This government is delivering on its promise to ensure that the Canadian Forces has the equipment, the training and the money to become a first class—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Windsor West.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to talk about the Windsor-Detroit gateway again. In April of this year, I had a chance to ask the Minister of Transport a question about the Windsor-Detroit gateway.

For those who are not aware, there has been a new border crossing proposal and process under way. It is coming into its final hours. There is a concern in my area with regard to the current proposals on the table.

There are three potential plazas and three crossings being proposed right now. One in particular is very egregious to the community of Sandwich Towne, which is the oldest European settlement west of Montreal. It is very historic. It has a history that is very important to this country. In fact, the Battle of Windsor was fought there. It is part of the history of the War of 1812. There was also the underground railroad. It was also part of the rum-runner age. Many historic events have happened there. That community also has a school. It is a very tight-knit community.

One of the plazas and one of the border crossings is very close to Sandwich Towne. There is a very serious concern emerging. Sterling Marine Fuels is located there as well.

The government is now studying these three areas.

The Sterling depot area is one of the most important fueling depots in the Great Lakes system. It fuels around 600 ships per year and is growing. It has been adding more fueling facilities and storage tanks.

In the last few weeks, I had an opportunity to tour the site. The concern is quite literally that one of the border crossing proposals put forward by the government goes over top of the Sterling site. That is unacceptable. That is a significant risk, not only in terms of an accident but also in terms of an act of terror. This border crossing

was to provide some increased capacity because we certainly have to meet that challenge for the modern economy.

My question for the government is this. Why is it still continuing with this site? Why is this still in the running? We should be focusing west of that. There is support from the community for the western crossing and the western plaza. I know that work has been done out there.

As this proposal comes forward, we would like to rule out the Sterling fuels site location. Once again, that is because of an issue of national security. This proposal is also going to pinch into Sandwich Towne. It is next to General Brock school, which is also a police station and a library, and next to homes and businesses. All of these things make it a bad site location. It is also going to require a much more expensive road leading into it.

The community is asking the government to put one of the plazas and the crossing west of Sandwich Towne in the Brighton Beach area so the crossing would go into the United States. A certain site location has been identified in the United States. There obviously has to be a place for the bridge to begin and end, and there are two locations in the United States.

Interestingly enough, if the government chooses to go with the area that is in Sandwich Towne on the Sterling fuels site, it leads to the United States, where fueling depots are located as well. We would have this cocktail that is very dangerous and would undermine the principle of having a safe and secure border.

I had the opportunity to be at the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group's AGM two weeks ago. We passed a resolution calling for the border to be safe and secure and to have economic trade with the highest standards possible.

Therefore, I am calling on the government to put the crossing west of Sandwich Towne, away from the Sterling fuels site, to make sure it is going to meet the principles that have been laid out and that are so important for our economic commerce, trade and security.

• (1855)

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed, we appreciated the member's comments and his input, and I can assure him that due consideration will be given to those.

Transport Canada, in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, the United States Federal Highway Administration and the Michigan Department of Transportation is conducting the environmental assessment for the Detroit River International Crossing project.

This project is actually made up of five components: a bridge, two border inspection plazas, and two highway connections.

As the member for Windsor West is well aware, the study team narrowed down the crossing location to three options in March 2006 with three corresponding plaza options as he has identified. Since that time, the study team has conducted exhaustive technical studies including a thorough geotechnical foundations investigation.

In March 2008, the study team released its geotechnical findings. Indeed, this analysis concluded that the crossing option located closest to the community of Sandwich would have an approach alignment that passes over a historic solution mining area that might affect bedrock stability, so this is important.

Two other crossing locations located further to the south and away from Sandwich, however, have no such geotechnical concerns.

In addition to exhaustive geotechnical investigations, the study team has examined the potential effects of the project on wildlife, biological diversity, and extensively modelled air quality and noise impacts, so there has been an exhaustive amount of work going into this.

The study team has also been fully committed to working with the public, communities and interested groups in the Windsor-Essex County area and, of course, we are interested in working with the member for Windsor West as well to develop a solution in consultation with our United States partners which best meets future transportation needs, while minimizing the impacts on communities.

I am very pleased to say that to date the Canadian study team has participated in over 250 consultation events. In the coming weeks, the Canadian study team, together with our United States partners, will announce the preferred alternative for the plazas and bridge, so good news is coming soon.

This location, I want to assure the member, will strike a balance between minimizing the impacts on the community and natural environment while at the same time meeting the combined goals of increased border capacity, improving the safe and efficient movement of people and goods through the Windsor-Detroit trade corridor, and improving connections to local and North American transportation systems. This is a very important border crossing.

This Conservative government cares deeply for the quality of life of all of our communities and that is reflected in our investments, the largest in history, in infrastructure across the country as we strive for a stronger economy, a cleaner environment, and better communities.

I want to reassure the House and all Canadians that this government will continue to make a real difference in the everyday lives of all Canadians from coast to coast.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the parliamentary secretary's comments.

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It has been a long time on this file. It has been 10 years for myself. To see it coming down to the last moments, I am still very much concerned that we actually make the right decision.

I hope the parliamentary secretary and the department really examine the challenges of actually keeping this proposal on the table and work toward what the community wants. The community is embracing a down river solution. There is support for it.

I hope that what is going to happen is that there is going to be the right announcement. If it is not and if we actually engage in this other project, the community is going to reject it. It is going to create another obstacle because we will fight to have the proper location selection.

We believe the merit is there and the scientific evidence, the social evidence, as well as the traffic management and security evidence to make sure that the crossing is at the Brighton Beach area where once again, even for land principle policies, it would be very beneficial. By moving it to Sandwich, we lose—

• (1900)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, we are very excited as a government to be in power two years and to have initiated this great investment for the people of Windsor and the people of Canada. There is \$400 million in this investment.

As the member knows there are 25,000 jobs over the next seven years in the area, 12,000 of those for the construction of the access roads late in 2009. We actually believe that this will pump \$2.5 billion into the economy.

This is great news and this is great for Canada. This is the most important border crossing in Canada because of the amount of trade that goes through there. We can assure the member that this government will act in the best interests to enhance the quality of life for the people of Windsor-Essex County and all Canadians because this is a very important project to us, and we will get the job done right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 3 p.m. pursuant to an order made earlier today.

(The House adjourned at 7:01 p.m.)

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