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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, June 18, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, June 18, 2008

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[*English*]

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

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

MEMBER FOR ROBERVAL—LAC-SAINT-JEAN

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am coming to the end of my first session here in this honourable chamber.

The welcome I have received from my colleagues has made me feel part of a vibrant and evolving community whose members, despite differences in opinions and ideologies, are all working for the betterment of the country.

Individuals and groups made different choices to protect the interests of their constituents. As part of the Conservative Party and under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and with the help of my colleagues—ministers, parliamentary secretaries and MPs—I kept a promise to advance the Quebec nation within a strong and united Canada.

Unlike my Bloc Québécois colleagues, who mistakenly claim to be the only members representing Quebec, I can say that, thanks to us, Quebec is becoming stronger within the Canadian federation.

I am reassured by how our government operates. Its approach to the nation's business does not include shell games, such as the Liberal Party's carbon tax, or the Monopoly money budgets we see every day from the Bloc.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, soon, the Liberal leader and his team will

unveil a new way to look at pollution and climate change. Unlike the Conservatives and the New Democrats, the Liberals are inviting Canadians to engage in an important dialogue on the future of energy use in Canada.

[*English*]

False reports by the Conservatives about a green tax shift underline their own lack of action and desperation.

They know, we know and Canadians know that something has to be done. Neither Canada nor the world can wait any longer.

Our plan will be comprehensive and it will be revenue neutral. Low income and middle income Canadians in particular will benefit from our green tax shift.

[*Translation*]

Canada cannot allow itself to lag behind in the green industrial revolution.

[*English*]

As one important aboriginal teaching says, “Our vision must be for seven generations”.

[*Translation*]

We know that Canadians want this debate and are aware of the consequences of inaction. It is sad that the Conservatives and the New Democrats do not have confidence in Canadians.

* * *

LOUISE ARBOUR

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Louise Arbour will soon step down as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. This brave, determined Quebecker has been one of our most illustrious representatives abroad.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, said that Louise Arbour never hesitated to incur the criticism of states or other parties by highlighting the victims of abuses or pointing out the inadequacies of national legal systems, and she consistently represented the highest ideals of the organization.

She criticized the United States for the treatment of detainees in Guantanamo, condemned human rights violations during the most recent war in Lebanon and stated that Israel had an obligation to protect everyone under its territorial responsibility.

Statements by Members

Louise Arbour has done a tremendous amount of work to advance human rights, no matter what the Conservatives think. She is a model for us all.

Congratulations, Ms. Arbour.

* * *

• (1405)

[English]

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this National Aboriginal Day will see the start of an incredible journey from Vancouver to Ottawa. Gladys Radek will lead hundreds of people on the walk4justice.

Ms. Radek wants all Canadians to recognize that violence against aboriginal women is ongoing and that more women are missing than reported by the media. She wants to highlight the need for safeguards against violence against women and the need for more mechanisms of transparency and accountability for authorities.

Ms. Radek's own niece, Tamara Chipman, went missing on the "highway of tears" in March 2005. That personal connection is what prompted Ms. Radek to start this walk4justice. Tamara's son was left behind when she went missing, and Ms. Radek thinks all Canadians need to realize that a missing woman is often a mother, leaving behind children who will always wonder, "Where did my mother go?"

The walk4justice will arrive in Ottawa on September 15, only a few days after Parliament resumes sitting. I urge all members of this House to meet with Gladys Radek and the other walkers when they arrive in Ottawa.

More importantly, I urge everyone to take action now to stop violence against aboriginal women here and in our home communities.

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CARBON TAX PROPOSAL

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a carbon tax is a tax on poor, rural, working class people. Even an elitist such as the Premier of Ontario understands that it is nothing more than a yuppie fad.

The Liberal carbon tax plan is to impose punishing new regulations and taxes, a fact recognized by Dalton McGuinty. He has made it clear that he rejects a massive carbon tax grab. He has gone so far as to warn that imposing a new carbon tax on fuels and other products is a foolish way to combat climate change and will lead to massive unemployment in Ontario's manufacturing and forestry sectors.

Rural dwellers in my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke have no choice about transportation. The Liberal carbon tax will force them to give up other things, such as buying food and educating their children.

This past weekend, the Liberal environment critic was attempting to convince Ontarians and all Canadians that a punitive Liberal

carbon tax plan was a good thing, something even his own brother rejects.

Rural Canadians, seniors and those living on fixed incomes will not be tricked into swallowing a new, permanent, Liberal carbon tax.

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HOUSING

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the city of Winnipeg has a rental housing shortage and a 1% rental vacancy rate. Families are struggling to find safe housing in stable neighbourhoods, yet in my riding approximately 126 military houses stand empty at the former Kapyong military barracks.

Despite representations by coalitions of community and church groups, the houses remain empty and have been empty for years. The houses are victim to bureaucratic and legal gymnastics, as they are the property of the defence department and awaiting transfer to the Canada Lands Company.

Inflexible government regulations prevent the community from having access to these potential homes. At last inquiry, the cost to the taxpayer of maintaining the empty houses is over \$225,000 annually.

Repeated requests to the government members in Winnipeg have come up empty. Discussions with the Department of National Defence have drawn a blank.

A short term solution for the use of these houses is urgent. Winnipeg families in need of housing deserve no less.

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CARBON TAX PROPOSAL

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberals across Canada are terrified of how Canadians will react to their leader's plan to impose a new carbon tax. The tax would jack up the price of gas, electricity and everything else.

Yesterday, three Liberal MPs distanced themselves from their leader when they supported a Conservative motion to protect Canadian farmers against a punitive carbon tax. These three MPs are the latest examples of senior Liberals breaking ranks with their leader over his tax trick.

Senior Liberal pollster Michael Marzolini has reportedly warned his party that "a carbon tax is a risky way to go".

Liberal strategist Warren Kinsella has warned other Liberals that a carbon tax "is unfair to people on fixed incomes (like the elderly) and the poor".

Yesterday, the former Liberal prime minister took great pains to avoid endorsing a carbon tax during a live television interview.

Not only is the Liberal leader failing to trick Canadians, he cannot even trick members of his own Liberal Party.

[Translation]

**LA GUERRE RIVER BASIN SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE COUNCIL**

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I congratulate the Club agroenvironnemental du bassin La Guerre, an organization dedicated to the promotion and development of sustainable agriculture in Saint-Anicet, in the riding of Beauharnois—Salaberry. It has just been awarded the Canadian Geographic 2008 Canadian Environment Award in the Environmental Learning category.

Together with the Institut de recherche et de développement en agroenvironnement and four other partners, the council helped farmers implement practices to reduce agricultural run-off towards the La Guerre River and Saint-François Lake.

The practices adopted by these farmers resulted in a significant decrease in the flow of sediment into the watershed. Mobilization and education by the council as well as the implementation of sustainable solutions by our farmers are a source of inspiration for Quebec.

I am proud of this prestigious environmental award and congratulate all those involved.

* * *

• (1410)

[English]

CARBON TAX PROPOSAL

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, senior Liberals are hinting that we are just one day away from the unveiling of the latest round of Liberal tax tricks.

As the big day draws near, Canadians can look forward to a non-stop barrage of excuses, half-hearted promises and phony green packaging as the Liberal leader tries yet again to fool Canadians into paying more so he can spend more.

Liberal MPs, senior Liberal strategists, commentators, members of the media, truckers, small business owners, provincial premiers, environmentalists, and working families have condemned the carbon tax as an ineffective and disastrous policy.

Prior to this massive flip-flop, the Liberal leader himself said a carbon tax was “bad policy”. Just yesterday, three Liberal MPs voted with our government in favour of protecting our farmers from a carbon tax.

Unfortunately for the Liberal leader, Canadians see right through his scheme. It is no wonder that so many Liberals are running scared about going public with the Liberal tax trick. Canadians will not be fooled this time around.

* * *

GEORGE MACKIE LIBRARY

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last weekend my community celebrated the 25th anniversary of the George Mackie Library with Mr. Mackie's son John and three

Statements by Members

generations of their family. Mr. Mackie was a respected pioneer and leader.

Far from being just a storeroom of books and magazines, the George Mackie Library has been a meeting place for everyone from young to old and a hub for the entire neighbourhood.

Thousands of children have taken part in its activities over the years, including its highly successful summer reading program.

I congratulate the Delta library staff and volunteers for 25 great years and encourage everyone to visit the George Mackie Library this summer.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the pleasure of making several visits to P.E.I. to meet with farmers from all across the Island.

Island farmers told me how frustrated they were with the member for Malpeque. Instead of talking about the issues important to his constituents, all the member seems to want to talk about is the Canadian Wheat Board.

Farmers in P.E.I. talked to me about potatoes, livestock and our government's strong support for supply management. Not one farmer asked me about the Canadian Wheat Board, which only exists in western Canada.

I promised these farmers that since their member of Parliament was absent on the issues important to them, I would raise the issues directly with the minister.

The people of P.E.I. need their representatives to work tirelessly in bringing their concerns to Ottawa. The residents of Malpeque deserve better. They deserve an MP who understands their priorities and brings their interests to Ottawa. In the next election, they will demand better. They will demand a Conservative member of Parliament.

* * *

STANLEY KNOWLES

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to one of the greatest and best loved parliamentarians in Canadian history, the former member of Parliament for Winnipeg North Centre, the Hon. Stanley Knowles, who would have been 100 years old today.

First elected in 1942 in a byelection caused by the death of J.S. Woodsworth, Stanley Knowles became a fixture and then a legend in Canadian politics, serving until 1984 when a stroke made it impossible to continue.

As a token of affection and esteem and in recognition of his extraordinary expertise, former Prime Minister Trudeau made him an honorary table officer of Parliament, giving him the extraordinary privilege of sitting at the clerks table in the House of Commons for the rest of his life.

Statements by Members

Stanley Knowles loved this place and cherished and revered the parliamentary system. We would all do well to reflect on the dignity, integrity and common decency with which he conducted himself in his long, illustrious career.

Every day that I take my seat in the House of Commons, I am acutely aware of the honour that is mine to follow in the footsteps of that great parliamentarian and to represent the good people in the riding that he served. His name still comes up—

• (1415)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's record on veterans affairs can be summarized as frothy promises mixed with flat results.

The government broke its promise to give VIP services to all widows and, in the last two years, only added 5,000 survivors to the program. In the last two years of the Liberal government, we added 20,000 without fanfare.

The government excluded allied veterans from the VIP in three budgets while criticizing a decade-old decision to do the same thing. It announced a Veterans Bill of Rights that had no bill, no legislation and absolutely no new rights.

On agent orange, after two years of delay, about 3% of those it promised to compensate will see any money.

However, the government followed through on the New Veterans Charter passed in 2005 and opened new OSI clinics in Calgary and Fredericton, also announced that year.

I feel that veterans deserve a government that exceeds expectations the way veterans did for their government.

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[Translation]

QUEBEC NATIONAL HOLIDAY

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on June 24 Quebeckers will celebrate their national holiday with a “four centuries” theme: four centuries since the founding of Quebec City, birthplace of the Quebec nation, and four centuries of francophone presence in North America.

This historical thread will be enhanced by a variety of events throughout Quebec featuring the songs and poetry that define us. As the spokesperson for the national holiday, Chloé Sainte-Marie et Jacques Lacoursière, said, “Let's use this celebration to commemorate the great moments of our collective past. From that past emerged a nation with common values and its own identity and culture.”

Chantale Trottier, president of the Mouvement national des Québécoises et Québécois, invites us to raise our flag in honour of those who forged the distinctive French culture within North America.

Happy national holiday.

* * *

[English]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as MPs return to their ridings this summer, Conservatives have a lot of questions to answer.

On the Couillard affair, why did the government say that it was not putting security at risk during an ongoing security breach? Why do Conservatives treat questions of national security as gossip?

On the Cadman affair, why did they try to take advantage of a dying man's love for his family by offering him a bribe in exchange for his vote?

On Mulrone-Schreiber, why did the Conservatives go out of their way to protect their political idol and favourite lobbyist, Brian Mulroney?

On the in and out scandal, why did they cheat taxpayers with their advertising money laundering scheme? How could Elections Canada, the government body that certified that Conservatives won the last election, be biased against them?

On Omar Khadr, why does Canada's government want its citizens to continue to be abused by the internationally discredited American military justice system?

The Conservatives attack anyone who asks questions in this House of Commons. Let them try that at home with their constituents this summer.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): A lot of questions will be asked this summer, Mr. Speaker, but they will be for the Liberal Party to answer. I will explain.

There is an old saying that it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness, but if the Leader of the Opposition formed government and he imposed a carbon tax, our country would face a wall of darkness.

Canadians would be lighting candles, turning on light switches and cursing the Liberals. If the Liberals were to pass their permanent tax on everything, Canadians would be paying more every time they turned on the lights, and they would know exactly who to thank.

However, there is good news. The Liberals are not government. There is still one party that has always said no to higher taxes for Canadians. There is still one party that will not make seniors and Canadians on fixed incomes pay more for their heat and hydro. That is this party and this government, and that is what leadership is all about.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATIONAL SECURITY

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP testified that Julie Couillard was known to it and that it would alert the PCO if a minister was involved with someone with ties to organized crime.

The PCO testified that a background review was done for the member just this past April. The PCO also testified that the RCMP did not raise red flags about the ex-minister and Ms. Couillard. This just does not add up.

Is the government at all concerned about our national security or is it just happy to cover up the facts?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately for the member for Vancouver South and the entire Liberal Party, the facts are actually clear, which is no security flags were raised in this particular matter.

We know the reason the former minister of foreign affairs offered me his resignation was because of his own actions. He left classified documents in an inappropriate and unsecured location. He offered to resign and I accepted his resignation.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP could not say whether it had alerted the PCO about security concerns because it could jeopardize current, past or future investigations. However, the PCO went right ahead and issued a press release stating that the RCMP had not raised any concerns. It said that it did this to clear up media speculation.

Does clearing up media speculation matter more to the government than actually looking after the national security of this country?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party wanted to know if in fact any security flags were raised. The answer it got was no.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is an alarming answer. It is actually alarming that the government continues to ignore questions about national security. It is equally alarming that it did not even occur to the PCO, which takes its orders from the Prime Minister, that it should examine the possibility of organized crime infiltrating the government.

Will the government stop the cover-up, call a public inquiry to get to the bottom of these national security concerns and do so now?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only alarm are these alarming questions with ridiculous and unfounded speculation.

The fact is that when the former minister of foreign affairs brought this to my attention, I accepted his resignation and I have obviously required officials to conduct an independent and professional investigation into the facts surrounding this so we know what the facts are, and those facts will be made very clear in due course.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives can try to run away from their responsibilities, but they will not be able to hide forever. People need not worry—just because we are heading into the summer break does not mean that the Couillard affair will be forgotten. Far from it.

Despite attempts at infiltration and allegations of influence peddling, the Prime Minister and his cabinet, with the blessing of his Quebec lieutenant and in the presence of the former minister—if you please—appointed Julie Couillard's mother to chair the Saint-Jérôme board of referees. That is what we call a “conflict of interest”.

It turns out that the Prime Minister was party to the member for Beauce's schemes. Why?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ms. Bellemare was appointed to the Board of Referees after having made an application. The eligibility criteria for the appointment of chairpersons reads:

(a) be available for two sessions a month;

(b) advise the Clerk of the Board in advance of any intended absence...;

(c) be able to communicate both orally and in writing in either of the official languages...;

(d) have lived or worked in the area serviced by the Board Centre for approximately one year, and be familiar with the labour market conditions prevalent in the area;

Ms. Bellemare went through the process and was ultimately recommended by Human Resources officials.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): That is pathetic, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

The government sees no evil to the possible infiltration by organized crime, biker gangs, access to secret documents and now a patronage appointment for the mother of the ex-minister's girlfriend.

What were the Prime Minister and his Quebec lieutenant thinking when they appointed Diane Bellemare as chairperson to the EI Board of Referees?

Mad Max has made mom Couillard very happy. Enough cover-up.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, in order to be appointed, one has to undergo rigorous security checks, which was the case with Madame Bellemare.

Oral Questions

The member is happy to stand there, as he has for many months on many files, and throw across unfounded allegations. If he has any, there is a process under the Employment Insurance Act regulations, section 78, section 4, where he can draw to the attention of people any of the concerns he has. If he has concerns with Madame Bellemare, they could be dealt with under that section.

I do not believe he has done that.

* * *

• (1425)

[Translation]

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Mrs. Bloodworth, a security advisor in the Privy Council Office, gave some ridiculous testimony in committee. According to her, neither the RCMP nor CSIS advised the Privy Council of Julie Couillard's shady past. She even candidly admitted that the hon. member for Beauce went through a second series of security checks without any scrutiny of his ex-girlfriend. When Ms. Couillard's past made the headlines, the Privy Council did not feel the need to investigate further.

Is the Prime Minister not concerned to see how lax the Privy Council's security service is? Or is this is a massive cover-up?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Mrs. Bloodworth said, security checks are done for ministers and not for others because it is the ministers who are responsible. The Prime Minister does not investigate private citizens.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Canada will be the laughingstock of every democracy. A person with ties to the mafia and Hells Angels dines at 24 Sussex Avenue and that does not bother the Prime Minister and there is no investigation. That is incredible.

I wonder whether the Privy Council security service, which sees nothing, hears nothing and knows nothing, advised the Prime Minister to use the private life excuse, unless it was the Prime Minister who asked the Privy Council to talk about private life to better cover up the affair.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, security checks are done for ministers. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs went through a series of checks.

In the meantime, the minister has admitted that he broke the rules on classified documents. That is why he stepped down.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, Margaret Bloodworth, admitted that if a person with close ties to criminal organizations had access to secret documents, that would represent a danger. However, even after Julie Couillard's past was revealed, the RCMP was never asked to investigate. Is this a cover-up to hide incompetence, or incompetence that is causing a cover-up?

How can the Prime Minister explain the fact that the Privy Council did nothing, even after Julie Couillard's shady past became public?

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

Speaker, on the contrary, the government has taken action. We have launched an investigation within the Department of Foreign Affairs to determine the facts and make recommendations. It can ask for assistance from other government agencies. We are awaiting the results of that investigation.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the member understood the previous question, but I will risk asking another one anyway.

I asked a very simple question yesterday in this House and I did not get an answer. The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons seems to be in league with the hon. member for Beauce, who has found himself in a very serious conflict of interest, since, according to the media, he remained present at the meeting concerning the appointment of Julie Couillard's mother. Just one more cover-up.

I would like to ask the same question and I hope to get a clear answer. In one word, a simple yes or no, did the hon. member for Beauce remain present when that appointment was made?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. The recommendation of Madame Bellemare did not come from the member for Beauce. The individual, Madame Bellemare, made application through the process. It was reviewed by human resources staff. That recommendation is ultimately made to cabinet by the human resources minister.

That was the case for Madame Bellemare, following the application process, which she passed and demonstrated that she satisfied the criteria, to which I earlier was speaking. Cabinet made the decision to appoint her as she did have the qualifications it was seeking.

* * *

[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICES

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the price of gas keeps going up, and 33% of families have been forced to change their vacation plans. Air Canada keeps bumping up fuel surcharges, and now it has cut flights and plans to lay off 2,000 people. Our whole economy is feeling the pinch because the government is unwilling to take action against oil company greed.

When will the Prime Minister do something about this?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, gasoline prices are determined by international markets. We understand that families are having a hard time dealing with this. That is why we reduced the GST, despite lack of support from opposition parties.

We also understand that there have been job losses, but at the same time, the economy is creating new jobs to ensure that those families will have other opportunities for the future.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is incredible to hear the Prime Minister dismiss 2,000 jobs with a wave of the hand. A rapid increase of gas prices is happening and it is affecting families in the short, medium and long term. Airlines have fuel surcharges now of up to \$220 on a one-way trip. Toronto cabs, like cabs elsewhere, have had to increase their fees. VIA Rail raised its ticket prices by 5% to offset fuel costs. BC Ferries has added a surcharge of up to 20%. Transit systems across the whole country are struggling.

When is the Prime Minister going to take his head out of the tar sands and start listening to working families?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, this government will not pretend that it can control the price of fuels and gasoline. We can do something to relieve families from the pressure they are under. That is why we have had a 2% reduction, for example, in the GST. What we will not do and what will clearly hurt Canadian families is go around imposing carbon taxes at this time on all kinds of fuel.

The Leader of the Opposition told his own party during the leadership race that he would never impose a carbon tax, that it was bad policy. It is not surprising that all those leadership rivals have left the country this week.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when pressed about the retrieval of the missing secret documents left unsecured by the ex-minister, the Prime Minister's National Security Advisor seemed to have no idea about the paper trail.

Does the government expect us to actually believe that the National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister does not have those details, or that she was too busy, or did the Prime Minister's Office direct Ms. Bloodworth not to look into this matter?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the matter is being reviewed. I thought the hon. member had heard me say, even in this question period today, that the Department of Foreign Affairs was conducting a review and would determine what the course of actions were with the classified documents that were left in an unsecured place. It will make recommendations. It has the ability to draw on whatever resources in the government it needs and whatever other agencies in order to do that job fully and completely.

I am sure the hon. member would be satisfied that this is the appropriate way to deal with this.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): I am not satisfied, Mr. Speaker. I would really like to hear from the minister responsible for national security, not the House leader.

It is obvious that a cover up is taking place here. The ex-minister said that he informed the Prime Minister immediately when he found out about the missing documents, on Sunday, May 25. However, the Prime Minister said that he only learned about the documents missing on Monday, May 26.

Now which version is true? Is this contradiction why the Prime Minister will not let the member for Beauce testify before our standing committee?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for a year now we have had the opposition members state things as fact that are simply false. They apparently have not quit that habit, even though we are coming to the end of this session. We have made clear very many times that the Prime Minister learned of this matter on the Monday afternoon. I will say it one more time slowly so it can sink in: on the Monday afternoon.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps he should tell that to the member for Beauce.

We now have two dates on which the government was informed of this security breach. The former minister claims that he found out about it on Sunday, May 25, and informed the Prime Minister immediately. The Prime Minister, his cabinet and his Leader of the Government in the House of Commons claim that they found out about it on Monday, May 26.

Does "immediately" mean "the next day"? The Conservatives are not taking any of these issues seriously—

● (1435)

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have already answered the question several times. The Prime Minister found out about it on Monday afternoon. Once more: Monday afternoon. One more time for the hon. member: Monday afternoon. That should not be too hard to understand.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this whole sad story looks like an attempted cover-up involving Foreign Affairs, Public Works, Public Safety, Transport, the Privy Council, the Prime Minister's Office, CSIS and the RCMP. Why such a cover-up? To hide the Prime Minister's lack of judgment.

The Prime Minister is at the heart of this scandal, and now it is affecting his entire government. How many times did the Prime Minister himself personally meet with Julie Couillard, and under what circumstances?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are lengthy lists of departments, a lengthy list of federal responsibilities, a lengthy list of ministers of whom the Liberals have not asked any policy questions at all in the past year. They really only have one theme, which has nothing to do with good governance in our country.

Oral Questions

We are a government that has spent the past year delivering results for Canadians on the things that matter to them, things like lowering their taxes to help them make ends meet, things like getting tough on crime, not things like destroying our economy with carbon taxes and making false and scurrilous accusations for a year because they do not have any other good ideas.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, two Canadian army chaplains have confirmed that Canadian soldiers were ordered to turn a blind eye to sexual assaults committed by the Afghan army against the public. Yet, yesterday, the Minister of National Defence, in response to my question, angrily shouted that this was absolutely untrue. In response to another question, however, he said that he had asked the chief of staff to, and I quote, “do a complete forensic examination of all evidence, to look into all these allegations and get to the bottom of it”. Talk about a contradiction.

Can the Minister of National Defence explain this contradiction?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that individual is a walking contradiction. He stands in the House and pretends to care about the well-being of Canadian forces instead of suggesting that we should look at these situations very seriously.

I have had a sit down with the Chief of the Defence Staff, the incoming chief of the defence staff and the Chief of the Land Staff to ensure there is absolutely no misunderstanding whatsoever. Any allegations, any suggestion that a Canadian soldier would see a misdeed, a sexual assault or otherwise, is to be immediately recorded in to the chain of command. That is in place now and it works.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, instead of saying one thing and then the opposite, the government should be taking the allegations before it seriously and trying to find out the truth in this whole affair.

We have another suggestion for the minister. To truly shed some light on this matter, is the government ready to support a motion, which I will move before the Standing Committee on National Defence, to invite the chaplains and the officers who saw these abuses to appear before the committee?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the greatest respect, I have a little more faith in the leadership of the Canadian Forces than the member opposite.

We have every intention of following up on these allegations. Let us not forget that these are allegations, serious as they are. We are looking into this matter. We have every intention of following up with the chaplains and those individuals who have brought this information forward.

The Canadian Forces and this government could not take this matter more seriously.

* * *

[Translation]

OMAR KHADR

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Canada, defines a “child” as “every human being below the age of eighteen years”.

Omar Khadr was imprisoned at the age of 15. By not bringing him back to Canada, the government is complicit with the United States, a country that does not respect the spirit or the letter of the Optional Protocol on Child Soldiers, which Canada has also ratified.

Does the government realize that by refusing to repatriate Omar Khadr, a Canadian citizen, it is renouncing Canada's signature—

• (1440)

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[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 many times, Mr. Khadr faces very serious charges in relation to his capture in Afghanistan. However, if the member is not willing to listen to me, maybe she would listen to the former Liberal critic who said to Mike Duffy that the charges against Omar Khadr are very serious. Therefore, any questions regarding whether Canada plans to ask for the release of Omar Khadr are premature and speculative at this time.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the question was for the related minister, and I would like him to have the courage to rise in this House to defend his actions.

Although a majority report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development called for his repatriation, the Conservatives, in their dissenting opinion, claimed that he could represent a danger to Canada, but acknowledged that it was not very likely he would be convicted here.

Is the only reason for the Conservative government's inconsistency in the Omar Khadr case that it does not want to offend its friend, George W. Bush?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have said it before and I will keep repeating it, Mr. Khadr faces very serious charges. Any questions regarding whether Canada plans to ask for Mr. Khadr's release are premature and speculative at this time, as the appeal and legal process is still ongoing.

ETHICS

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, audio experts have stated that those are the Prime Minister's unaltered words on the tape where he talks about offering financial considerations to Chuck Cadman in exchange for his vote.

Stevan Pausak, one of Canada's leading audio experts, says that he was hired a long time ago to analyze the tape in question, but his report was never released.

We know it takes 67 Conservative candidates to launder over \$1 million in advertising costs, but how many audio experts did they need to cover up this Conservative Cadman scandal?

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, the two audio experts we hired, Messrs. Owen and Gough, both tabled their expert opinions before the Ontario Superior Court. Here is what they said in their conclusion:

The tape has been edited and doctored and does not represent the entire conversation that took place.

They are audio experts. They say the tapes have been doctored. But the Liberals have ignored the facts from the very beginning. They ignored Chuck Cadman when Chuck Cadman said there was no inappropriate offer. They are ignoring the audio experts. They ignored the RCMP when the RCMP said there is no evidence of any wrongdoing.

They can ignore the facts all they want, but they will not be ignoring the date that we see them in court.

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we cannot ignore the sworn affidavit that the Conservatives have distributed from Dona Cadman, who is the Conservative candidate in Surrey North. In the affidavit, she states that Conservative Party officials offered her husband a \$1 million insurance policy on May 17, 2005. The Conservatives do not want to talk about the May 17 meeting; they only want to talk about May 19.

Why are the Conservatives trying to cover up the May 17 meeting that Dona Cadman is so anxious to talk about?

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, again, as I have said time and again in the House of Commons, there was the one meeting between Doug Finley, Tom Flanagan and Chuck Cadman that happened on May 19. May 19 was the one and only meeting. But, again, the Liberals can ignore the facts all they want. They can put them aside all they want. The facts will be seen in a court of law and the Liberals will again be proven wrong.

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CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to blame the bureaucracy for NAFTA-gate, saying that there were too many emails on the distribution list for the leaked memo. It sounds easy, but where is the motive?

Oral Questions

It was the Conservative Party and its Republican masters that had the most to gain from this leak.

The NAFTA-gate investigation cost taxpayers \$140,000, but was, "unable to determine who leaked the report, to whom it was leaked or whether there was only one leak".

Could the Prime Minister tell us why this investigation failed to achieve its objective?

• (1445)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier in this session, when we were oddly not hearing any questions about policy from the Liberals, and we continued to have no policy from them for the past year, I quoted from a play, *Little Women*, where the lead actress said that the problem with doing nothing is that one is never really sure when one is finished. We see that from the Liberal Party right now.

The Liberals continue to come up with these imaginary scandals. In the case of the false accusations they made in the NAFTA leak, of course, this is one of many cases where the investigation determined that the government was clear. The Clerk of the Privy Council found no wrongful disclosure by the Prime Minister's Office. It is one of a long list of similar situations.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is still a leak in the government, one that has hurt our international reputation.

On February 27, two PMO officials, identified in the report only as official one and two, were given the memo, a day before Ian Brodie had access to it. Oddly enough, these officials are not identified by either their names or titles, unlike the others in the report.

Who were these officials and why did the report go to such lengths to conceal their identities? Why the cover up?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is none, but there is a long record of Liberals inventing imaginary scandals, only to smear the government and smear the reputations of very good people. However, all they are doing is demonstrating their own vacancy and tarnishing their own reputations.

We have this NAFTA case where the Clerk of the Privy Council cleared the Prime Minister's chief of staff, and it was another false Liberal accusation.

We had the false Liberal accusation of intruding into a mayoralty campaign cleared by the OPP. It found no wrongdoing.

Following that, we had the false Liberal accusations that there was actual interference in the police investigation. That too was cleared by the OPP Complaints Commissioner.

We had the false Liberal accusations of interference—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brandon—Souris.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no matter what we call it, a carbon tax is a trick.

It will raise the price of everything, including food, electricity, home heating, and gas at the pumps. It will devastate young families, seniors and people on fixed incomes. Jobs will be destroyed and Canada's traditional industries will be impacted.

Despite warnings from premiers, industry members, and climate change experts about the perils of this massive carbon tax on everything, the Liberal leader will supposedly unveil the details of his plan tomorrow.

Can the minister tell the House how punitive a carbon—

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Liberal slogan for its carbon tax will be: shift happens.

I suppose that means that Air Canada workers who just lost their jobs because of high fuel prices, the Liberal message to them is: shift happens.

If auto workers have lost their jobs because people are not buying SUVs and trucks, the Liberal message is: shift happens.

If rural Canadians heat their home with oil, the Liberal message is: shift happens.

If the Liberals succeed with their carbon tax trick, Canadians will be: shift out of luck.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last summer, Canadians were shocked to learn that, in the context of the Shiprider program, armed U.S. officers were arresting Canadians on Canadian soil. We now learn that not only is this government abandoning Canadian sovereignty in matters of public safety, but the RCMP wants to expand the Shiprider program and make it permanent.

Why do the Conservatives allow American officers to enforce the law on Canadian soil? Why are they abandoning Canadian sovereignty?

[English]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member, who has raised the question, had been paying any attention at all, which he has not been, over the last two years the Shiprider project has been extremely successful.

We have officers from both sides of the border who cooperate together under very clear protocols in terms of who is in whose jurisdiction and who has command.

The particular Shiprider projects have been very successful in interdicting drug transports across the border, illegal arms, and a variety number of activities.

It is a very successful program. We plan to continue it and expand it.

• (1450)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, paying attention is why we know that the RCMP and the U.S. coast guard want to permanently implement Shiprider, and they are negotiating now.

This is following other agreements to deploy American troops on Canadian soil in the context of deep integration as part of the SPP agenda.

Internal documents, dated June 4 of this year, show that the RCMP is seeking to allow more armed U.S. coast guard agents to patrol Canadian territory.

Why are the Conservatives allowing more armed American agents in Canada, and why are they contracting out Canadian public safety to the U.S. coast guard?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, only the NDP, and at times the Liberals, can take a very successful program that is protecting Canadians and see it come to something ridiculous like the hon. member is talking about.

Picture this, Mr. Speaker. We have officers in pursuit of drug dealers. They come to the actual border, let us say on a river crossing, and they have to come screeching to a stop and let those criminals escape. When we have joint border teams, working together under clear protocols, the pursuit can continue, sovereignty is maintained in each country, and criminals are apprehended.

It is a successful program. The NDP just does not get it.

* * *

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the Cadman scandal, the Conservative cover-up involved frivolous lawsuits and paid opinions to hide the Prime Minister's own words.

In the in and out scandal, the cover-up was nine months of dirty tricks at committee and stonewalling Elections Canada.

In the O'Brien scandal, the cover-up was a refusal to examine OPP allegations against Conservative operatives and the Minister of the Environment.

When will the cover-ups end?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the real question is, when will the false Liberal accusations end?

Oral Questions

There were false Liberal accusations in the mayoralty campaign. We were cleared. There were false allegations with regard to the police investigation. We were cleared. In fact, it was the Liberal member who was accused by the OPP of having engaged in political interference. There were false accusations with regard to contracts that, once again, were cleared by the Ethics Commissioner. There were false Liberal accusations on NAFTA. Once again, we were cleared. There were false allegations in the affair he mentioned at the very start. Once again, we were cleared by the RCMP.

Will the Liberals once, just once, acknowledge when they have made a mistake and made false accusations?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is the mother-in-law of all cover-ups, NAFTA-gate.

[*Translation*]

It is an fake report that does not follow the trail that leads directly to the Prime Minister's cabinet.

The Mulroney-Schreiber affair: swept under the rug thanks to the inquiry's restrictive mission statement.

The treatment of detainees: swept under the rug.

The national security breach by the former foreign affairs minister: swept under the rug.

When will the government stop sweeping everything under the rug and start being accountable?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are important economic issues that matter to this country. There is a very grave threat of a carbon tax. The Liberals are still not talking about it.

The fact is that we have done good things for Canada. The fact is that we have people who want to see a crack down on crime. They do not want to talk about that. In fact, the only things they want to talk about are false accusations. We have been cleared in every case.

On those ones they have taken their chance. They have tried to have inquiries at hearings. They had their legislative inquiry in the Mulroney matter. Did that help? No.

We are doing it in a proper, professional way as we do. Guess what? Every time the government gets cleared.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are watching and they see a clear case of cover-up and conflict of interest here. They are concerned about the 166 judicial appointments the government is about to make.

The Treasury Board President is such a political mess for the Prime Minister that he has no other choice but to give him a cushy job with a huge salary just to get rid of him.

Will the justice minister do the right thing, put the brakes on this ridiculous appointment, and save himself a huge embarrassment?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals described judicial appointments as cushy jobs. These are individuals prepared to serve their country, for which they should all receive the respect of the House and our thanks.

The President of the Treasury Board was mentioned. I know he has been a distinguished prosecutor. He has been attorney general of Manitoba and he certainly gave me some good advice when I became justice minister. He said, when it comes to fighting crime in this country, do not ever count on the Liberal Party. That was great advice and I thank him publicly for that.

• (1455)

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in question period this week, the Prime Minister clearly stated that talk of the Treasury Board President being appointed to the bench in Manitoba was complete nonsense.

We hope the Prime Minister realizes that this would be the straw that broke the camel's back on his government's accountability scam.

Will the Prime Minister confirm clearly, once and for all, that Canadians will be spared and this appointment will not take place?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess when the Liberal Party is not accusing the police, audio experts, senior bureaucrats, and everybody else of being involved in a cover-up, it is attacking contracts that nobody has ever signed and attacking appointments that nobody has ever made.

This really illustrates what is wrong with the Liberal Party, a party that has no agenda. That is why it passes the government's agenda for the last two and a half years. When actually pressed to do something, the only thing it can come up with is to impose a carbon tax on every single Canadian.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, despite the promise made by the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, there was nothing in the budget for the construction of a year-round maritime link for the Magdalen Islands, although amounts have been allocated for the Newfoundland and Labrador link. The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is good at making promises but does not keep them.

Can the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities guarantee that the Magdalen Islands will finally, by next winter, have the permanent maritime service called for by the entire population of the Magdalen Islands?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have told the Bloc and the members many times but, as usual, they do not listen. I spoke directly with those affected, the inhabitants of the Magdalen Islands. I clearly told them that, next winter, there will be a pilot program leading to other measures to be announced later.

However, I wish to vigorously denounce the Bloc Québécois' support for the idea of reducing Quebec's dependence on carbon by 50%, just as the Liberals—

The Speaker: The member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the International Joint Commission prepares to change how the waters of the St. Lawrence River are managed, a number of regional municipalities, including Bas-Richelieu, will table resolutions this evening in Sorel-Tracy calling for the status quo to be maintained.

Does the government promise to oppose the commission's new management plan and do everything in its power to preserve Lac Saint-Pierre, which UNESCO has recognized as a world biosphere reserve?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the International Joint Commission is in the process of going through consultations. We have not received a plan. It is my impression that it does not have a plan yet. It is looking at a number of options. When we receive the advice of the IJC we will make a decision.

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[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, everyone is criticizing the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. The reasons are simple: instead of helping economic development, he is putting a stop to it; instead of creating projects, he is cancelling them; instead of reassuring our regions, he is keeping them in uncertainty; instead of reaching out to the Government of Quebec, he is attacking it.

Does the minister, who loves to talk about a beginning, a middle and an end, know that we watched as he took office in the beginning, we suffered and put up with him in the middle, and we cannot wait until his term of office comes to an end?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Bloc Québécois was going on about the fiscal imbalance and calling on the government to correct it in Quebec, what did the Liberal Party do? It did nothing. It did not even recognize that there was a fiscal imbalance.

One prime minister in this House has shown leadership, and that is this Prime Minister. By correcting the fiscal imbalance, we have given an additional \$242 million to the Department of Economic Development, Innovation and Export Trade in Quebec City. We have taken that money out of Ottawa and given it to Quebec City.

If Quebec City wants to provide recurring funding for organizations, it has everything it needs to do so.

* * *

• (1500)

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear how a Liberal government would treat aboriginal people and Canadians living in the north. Their bright idea is to increase the high costs northerners are already paying by saddling them with a regressive carbon tax that would affect the price of everything. This is not what northerners and aboriginal people want. They want clear and concrete action with real results and not more Liberal press releases and empty words.

Could the Minister of Indian Affairs update this House with what this government is doing to address the real needs of aboriginals in Canada?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is the reality. While the Liberals' carbon tax would increase the cost of living for northerners, the Conservatives actually increased the northern allowance to help northerners pay the bills.

Last week the PM gave a sincere and meaningful apology for residential schools. Now the specific claims bill has passed the Senate, something first nations have been asking for for 60 years.

Yesterday Bill C-21 passed the Senate. That means for the first time in 30 years, or the first time ever really, first nations living on reserve will have the same rights as every other Canadian. Imagine that, the same rights as every other Canadian.

While the Liberals are busy thinking about how to increase costs for first nations, we are getting the job done by helping aboriginal Canadians today.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a public utility in the State of Washington is in the preliminary stages of applying to build a hydro dam on the Similkameen River at Shanker's Bend, the proposed height of which could be as high as 260 feet. A dam of this magnitude would necessitate the flooding of Canadian territory.

The Regional District of South Okanagan and the Okanagan Nation Alliance have both passed resolutions opposing a 260-foot dam.

Royal Assent

Before this goes any further, will the government take immediate action to make it perfectly clear to the U.S. authorities that any flooding north of the 49th parallel is not acceptable?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for British Columbia Southern Interior. This is an issue with which all Canadians should be concerned. Obviously it has terrific impacts on his own constituency and in southern British Columbia.

Any dam that would result in mass flooding in southern British Columbia would obviously require the approval of this government, the Government of Canada, or the International Joint Commission.

I want to commit to the member that we will work with him and we will work with his community to ensure that the vested environmental interests and the quality of life for residents in his community are protected.

* * *

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand that to mean a commitment that there will be no flooding in Canada.

I will move on to another subject. With food riots and food rationing on the rise around the world, and a growing concern about the quality and safety of food right here in Canada, there is a desperate need for Canada to take a leadership role when it comes to food security.

We have the world-class talent. We have world-class facilities such as the Ontario Agricultural College at the University of Guelph. However, the band-aid solutions offered by the government have not been nearly enough.

Where is the government's plan for food security both here and abroad?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are obviously very concerned about floods in southern British Columbia, but we will work to ensure that requirements of the International Boundary Waters Treaty Act are maintained.

However, I have a warning for the member for British Columbia Southern Interior. There is a flood coming to his constituency, like every constituency across this country, and it is disguised as a green tax shift. It is a massive tax grab to pay for a spree of wasted wild spending that the Liberal Party wants to go on. Please go back to your riding and warn Canadians about this coming disaster.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question on Mulroney-Schreiber.

[*Translation*]

The mandate of the commission of inquiry into the Mulroney-Schreiber theft is so limited that many questions will remain unanswered. Yet the government has the duty to shed light on this affair.

Why is the Prime Minister protecting Brian Mulroney? Why is he hiding the truth?

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the government House leader has said on many occasions here, unfortunately the Liberal opposition members can only concentrate on imaginary scandals. I can understand this because in just a few days they will have to go home for the summer and start explaining to their constituents why they would want to impose a carbon tax on every single Canadian rather than deal with policy issues of substance. They will have to go home and tell their constituents why they missed 20 confidence votes.

The Liberals will have a lot of explaining to do, but after all, sometimes shift happens.

* * *

● (1505)

[*Translation*]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mont Tremblant is a first class tourist destination and the future of the Laurentians is very promising. The Mont Tremblant airport plays a key role in the economic development of that region. Since the Bloc Québécois always comes up empty-handed and cannot do anything to encourage industry in the region, the airport's representatives have recently asked the Canadian government to help them provide services to clear passengers and their luggage through customs.

Could my colleague, the hon. Minister of Public Safety, tell us what the Conservative government is doing to support the tourism industry in Mont Tremblant?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I announced that an agreement has been reached with the Mont Tremblant airport. This agreement will allow the airport to be more competitive and welcome more international flights.

This shows once again that when there are problems in Quebec, the Bloc members are mere spectators while the Conservative members are on the ice scoring points.

ROYAL ASSENT

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Government House
Ottawa

June 18, 2008

Mr. Speaker:

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, will proceed to the Senate Chamber today, the 18th day of June, 2008, at 3:00 p.m., for the purpose of giving Royal Assent to certain bills of law.

Royal Assent

Yours sincerely,

Sheila-Marie Cook

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed certain bills.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS*[English]***GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS**

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

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CANADA HEALTH INFOWAY INC.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the 2006-07 annual report and the 2007-08 corporate business plan for Canada Health Infoway Inc.

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PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), in both official languages, the Chief Public Health Officer's "Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2008".

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PATENTED MEDICINE PRICES REVIEW BOARD

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), in both official languages, the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board annual report for 2007.

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ASSISTED HUMAN REPRODUCTION AGENCY OF CANADA

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I am happy to table, in both official languages, the Assisted Human Reproduction Agency of Canada's reports on the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act for 2007-08.

* * *

CANADIAN INSTITUTES OF HEALTH RESEARCH

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary for Health, CPC): Finally, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the Canadian Institutes of

Health Research 2007-08 annual reports on the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

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 and 2006-07 annual reports on the state of Inuit culture and society in the Nunavut settlement area.

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● (1510)

JAMES BAY AND NORTHERN QUEBEC AGREEMENT AND NORTHEASTERN QUEBEC 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 2003-04 and 2004-05 annual reports of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and the Northeastern Quebec Agreement.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation for the Canadian Section of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas respecting its participation in the mission to the 38th regular session of the general assembly of the Organization of American States held in Medellin, Colombia from June 1 to 3, 2008.

ROYAL ASSENT

● (1525)

[English]

A message was delivered by the Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Mr. Speaker, her Excellency the Governor General desires the immediate attendance of this honourable House in the chamber of the honourable the Senate.

Accordingly the Speaker with the House went up to the Senate chamber.

And being returned:

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that when the House went up to the Senate chamber the Governor General was pleased to give, in Her Majesty's name, the royal assent to the following bills:

Bill S-207, An Act to repeal legislation that has not come into force within ten years of receiving royal assent—Chapter 20

Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Marine Act, the Canada Transportation Act, the Pilotage Act and other Acts in consequence—Chapter 21

Bill C-30, An Act to establish the Specific Claims Tribunal and to make consequential amendments to other Acts—Chapter 22

Bill C-292, An Act to implement the Kelowna Accord—Chapter 23

Bill C-58, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the financial year ending March 31, 2009—Chapter 24

Bill C-59, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the financial year ending March 31, 2009—Chapter 25

Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Judges Act—Chapter 26

Bill C-287, An Act respecting a National Peacekeepers' Day—Chapter 27

Bill C-50, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 26, 2008 and to enact provisions to preserve the fiscal plan set out in that budget—Chapter 28

Bill C-60, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (court martial) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act—Chapter 29

Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act—Chapter 30

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the chair of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan I have the honour to table, in both official languages, our first report.

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage on the dismantling of the CBC Radio Orchestra, CBC/Radio-Canada's commitment to classical music and the changes to CBC Radio 2.

* * *

[English]

DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ACT

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-569, An Act to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and proud to introduce this legislation entitled, "An Act to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples". This declaration was passed at the United Nations General Assembly on September 13, 2007, by an overwhelming majority of 144 to 4, with 11 abstentions.

Canadians join human rights supporters from across the globe in their disappointment that, for the first time ever, Canada has sought exemption from a human rights standard adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

Routine Proceedings

Canada's national aboriginal and political leaders, including President Mary Simon of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, National Chief Phil Fontaine and President Clem Chartier of the Métis National Council, have joined in their support. President Chartier said:

By ignoring Indigenous rights to self-determination, Canada is sending a negative message to the world. Despite this, by standing united Aboriginal peoples are clearly determined to secure our right to self-determination as defined in international law....

It is, however, never too late for Canada to embrace the rights of indigenous peoples at home and around the world and support the UN declaration.

With this in mind, I encourage all parliamentarians to join me in this battle to help return Canada as a human rights champion and ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wonder if you could ask for the unanimous consent of the House to return to presenting reports from committees as I would like to present a report from a committee.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert to presenting reports from committees?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

EXCISE TAX ACT

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-570, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (no GST on bicycles).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table in the House today my private member's bill that would remove GST from bicycles. I thank the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra for agreeing to second my bill, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act, no GST on bicycles.

Through this bill, the Government of Canada could provide support for Canadians looking to reduce their impact on the environment and the health care system.

By promoting bike use, communities can be strengthened through increased physical activity, reduced vehicle congestion and low emission levels. By biking, an individual in Canada can save 28.2 kilograms of carbon for every 100 kilometres travelled.

This bill is a small but important step for the government to support the health of Canadians and our environment.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

• (1530)

CANADA SHIPPING ACT, 2001

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-571, An Act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 (prohibition against oil tankers in Dixon Entrance, Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound).

She said: Mr. Speaker, people on the north coast of British Columbia have recognized that Dixon Entrance, Hecate Strait and the Queen Charlotte Sound is a very narrow channel. There are very dangerous currents in that area and it is also a very culturally significant area abundant with fish and shellfish, for now, and we do not want to see that habitat destroyed by any kind of an oil spill if that were to happen.

There was an informal moratorium 35 years ago on banning oil tanker traffic in the inside passage known as Dixon Entrance, Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound. By introducing this bill today I would hope to formalize that moratorium by continuing the ban on oil tanker traffic in this area and ensure that our bays and inlets, as well as all the sea life, the birds, the fish and the shellfish in that area are protected for generations to come.

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

The Speaker: Do we now have consent to revert to presenting committee reports?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in relation to the study of conductive energy weapon tasers.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion: That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) call on General Motors to maintain production at the Oshawa truck plant throughout the term of the 2008-11 collective agreement with the Canadian auto workers; (b) insist that multinational auto manufacturers respect the principle of the Auto Pact requiring one vehicle to be manufactured in Canada for each vehicle they sell in Canada; and (c) adopt a green car strategy that would require auto makers to additionally allocate a proportional share of environmentally advanced vehicles and components to the Canadian production facilities.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move that the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Status of Women presented on Wednesday, April 16, be concurred in.

I am very proud today to have the real honour of moving this motion for the appointment of an equality commissioner. This is a motion that I put forward in the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. As some members of the House know, the report on gender based analysis, or gender budgeting analysis, as tabled in this House by the standing committee, makes the same recommendation for an equality commissioner.

This has not happened at just the last minute. We have been discussing it for some time. Some people have asked why we are doing it now and not later. The reality is that we have been doing research and consultations and we have been discussing it for some time now.

In fact, in the fall of 2005, the previous Liberal government appointed an expert panel, which came back recommending a commissioner's position, with legislation attached, and it talked about how that would happen. Canada would not be the only jurisdiction to do this. In fact, the U.K. and South Africa have similar positions. This is a very important step for Canada. It is important because it deals with fundamental rights. Specifically, it deals with women's equality.

Many people say that women already have equality in the law. They say that the Charter of Rights and other pieces of legislation give women equality. That may be true, but if the legal document does not become real in everyday life and is not practised in everyday life, affecting all policies, then it really means nothing, and it does not help women.

We are talking about substantive equality, which is defined as women having the conditions for realizing their full human rights and their potential to contribute to national, political, economic, social and cultural development and benefiting from the results of these. We are talking about substantive and real rights that women can actually experience and benefit from.

An independent commissioner of equality is needed to report to Parliament. It is very important that he or she be an independent commissioner who reports to Parliament to ensure that governments are meeting their goals on equality, regardless of which government is in power and regardless of which policies governments are developing. It is very important that the commissioner be an officer of Parliament and therefore not subject to any government's change of decisions.

Again, the independent commissioner would be looking out for women in this country. This is very important. The commissioner would monitor discrimination in all government policies, including all legislation, budgets presented in the House, and all government policies practised and put forward by government.

As well, the commissioner would review all policies to see how government spends its money and who benefits. If the policies do not benefit women equally or actually hinder or are a detriment to women, they need to be addressed.

Women need this advocate because in many cases government policies to date have not benefited women. In fact, they have done the opposite. Therefore, it is very important that this happen.

In addition, the current government has put forward budgets that have actually silenced women in this country even more. Under the Status of Women Canada, we used to have funding for research and advocacy groups. That traditionally brought necessary research forward to the governments, research that governments relied on, or at least it brought forward analyses of where women were winning or losing in any way. This has been eliminated.

Funding for research and advocacy is no longer allowed at the national level, so women have lost a further voice. Again, this is all the more reason why we need an equality commissioner.

For those reasons, we need a separate entity to oversee the gender based analysis practices of the government. This would be an independent body. The commissioner would work not just within his or her own department but in the development of policies and on the impact of those policies across Canada.

The commissioner would be responsible for evaluating how the government is succeeding or not succeeding in doing proper gender based analysis from the time the policies are developed to the time the policies are actually implemented; that is, are all policies in government, including budgets, informed by gender analysis or not?

• (1535)

Many policies put forward by the current government and previous governments do not stand the test of a proper gender based analysis. Time and again, women are brushed aside in this country. Based on its commitment to and action on women's equality, Canada has dropped internationally in ranking, from first place in the mid-1980s to 18th place in 2006.

This is not something that we can be proud of in this country. We have dropped from number one in the mid-1980s to number eighteen in the world. That is pretty sad and is largely due to how we address women's issues in this country.

Canada's ranking has dropped because of a number of factors. I will go through some of those examples because they show where the commissioner in fact could be of great assistance and could have a major impact. Let us look at these examples, which show why women in this country actually have dropped back since the mid-1990s and are actually dropping further as we go.

Changes to the income tax system that were brought in by former Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney in 1987 made women more vulnerable and economically insecure. For example, at that time, the lowest bracket for taxes paid was 6%, which was increased to 17%. Sixty per cent who lost in that—

• (1540)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. It is with regret that I interrupt the hon. member. The hon. member for Avalon is rising on a point of order.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the hon. member opposite, but there is a time sensitive issue that I would like to raise. I appreciate her cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations between all whips and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in relation to its study on the seal harvest, seven members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans be authorized to travel to Brussels, Belgium, in September/October 2008 and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): 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)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I declare the motion carried.

The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

STATUS OF WOMEN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Speaker, let me recap just a little. As I was saying, in 1987 when former prime minister Mulroney changed the tax structure, the lowest tax bracket at that time was paying 6% of taxes, which was increased to 17%. In the lowest tax bracket, we find about 60% of women. Individuals were paying 34% at the higher end, which was decreased to 29%. That is where we will find about 77% of men who are paying taxes.

In other words, the lower end increased considerably and the upper end dropped. The majority of men saw their tax rates drop as a result of this, while the majority of women saw their tax rates increase, so 60% of women paid a lot more taxes as a result of that change.

In fact, in regard to the first budget the Conservative government brought in, we had lowered the lower bracket from 17% to 15%, but the first action of the government was to put it up from 15% to 15.5%. The subsequent budget lowered it to 15% again and the Conservatives called it a tax cut.

However, the reality is that women have lost tremendous spending power in this exchange. This means that the single mom who is struggling to pay rent and feed and clothe her children is now paying a lot more in taxes than the men at the top who are earning a lot more. Those men are paying a lot less in taxes.

Also, the Conservative budgets in the last couple of years have used the tax system to deliver social programs at the expense of women's economic security. Let me give members some examples of that, because generally the policies benefit single earner families, which are usually led by males.

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One example is the government's tax-free savings account, which was introduced in the last budget. In this case, the higher earner could place \$5,000 in his or her own tax-free account, \$5,000 in his or her spouse's account, and \$5,000 in the accounts of any adult children, leading to possibly tens of thousands of dollars in tax shelters for wealthy families. This is a great boon for people who have a lot of money and earn enough.

The reality, though, is that this type of tax measure does not at all benefit women, who tend to be in the lower income bracket. In fact, 68% of women in our country earn under \$40,000.

Let me give members another example. On pension splitting, again part of the Conservative government's plan, the greatest benefit goes to those with private pensions of \$80,000 or more whose spouses have no incomes, whose spouses actually do not work. In this category, men predominate among the higher earners. In cases where both spouses work, splitting that income would provide little or no benefit. In other words, if both spouses have worked all their lives, they really do not benefit from that too much. They benefit only if one of the couple is a single earner with a very high income.

Thus, there is no help for middle income families in this particular plan. There is no help for single Canadians. In fact, for single seniors in our society, or single women in particular, who are the majority of the seniors in our society, there is nobody to split with.

In fact, this program benefits only about 12% of wealthy Canadians. It is male seniors who benefit most from this measure. Again, this is another tax measure that does not benefit women.

The tax measures that are used tend to benefit higher income Canadians, not middle income or low income Canadians. This does not work for women, especially those who are in the lower bracket.

If a proper gender based analysis had been done and if there had been a commissioner who could actually have advocated for women and pointed this out, these kinds of inequities would not have crept into our policy development.

Another example of this is the universal child care benefit, which of course is not a child care program at all. In this case, while it is supposed to be \$1,200 a year or \$100 per month, it actually works out to approximately \$48 per month. For parents who are spending \$1,300 to \$2,000 per month in child care, if they can find a space, that is, obviously this does not help them in any way whatsoever. I believe the lowest child care costs that can be found are at \$800 a month in some cities.

• (1545)

Women often have to leave the workforce in this case because they cannot find child care. There are no spaces. Single women with no option but to work often use their entire paycheque for child care. Women have come to my office and told me that they have quit their jobs because they have been unable to find child care spaces. The money does not do it. It does not create any spaces; it creates no choice.

Therefore, what is the point of the tax policy structure when it really does not help in terms of providing a real social program for families, specifically middle to low income families?

We are talking about very substantive economic and social issues. Governments develop plans to deliver social and economic benefits to sectors of our society through the tax system. Most often, if not always, those structures do not benefit women because they do not earn enough money to take advantage of those things. This is where a gender equality commissioner is really important, to point out where these problems exist, because they exist constantly, and possibly to advocate for women.

It is quite clear then that the gender based analysis conducted by governments currently are not very effective. Some analyses are being done. Work was introduced in 1995, by the previous Liberal government, and a lot of work has been done. However, it is not enough.

At the standing committee, we received a report from the deputy minister of finance who conducted a gender based analysis on the government's most recent budget. What was tabled with the committee was not adequate. The committee brought in its own experts who talked about the items that finance had identified as being gender neutral, affecting men and women equally that is. The finance department said that the budget did not impact negatively on either gender, that it benefited them equally. However, according to the experts, it was actually detrimental. They also showed that 94% of tax measures introduced in the 2006 and 2007 budgets harmed women.

Again, this is a trend of delivering social and economic programs that do not benefit women. We said that an analysis should be done on budgets. The analysis that the deputy minister of finance presented to our standing committee indicated that the last two budgets were gender neutral when, in fact, they were very detrimental to women.

Again, a gender equality commissioner in this case would certainly be able to do his or her own analysis and speak out on behalf of women to ensure we did the right thing for them.

It is important to understand that 40% of women do not make enough money to pay income tax and most cannot take advantage of the tax credits. It is also important to remember that the average income for women in Canada is \$37,000. What is the best way to help women in our country? Sometimes we talk about various policies, tax cuts and so on. Most of the current government's programs have come through the tax system, through tax credits, tax cuts and so on. These do not help women.

All our research shows that the best way to impact on women and children, the best way to cut poverty and to assist middle and low income families is to invest not through the tax system, but in social programs. Programs delivered through the tax system do not work. We need to have investment in housing, child care and post-secondary education in our communities. This is the best way to make a big difference for low and middle income Canadians and, in particular, women in our society.

As I said, 40% of women do not make enough money to even pay taxes. Instead of using money for tax credits, which go primarily to those who have lots of money and no one else, they would benefit far more from the government investing in our society.

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●(1550)

The whole point of a gender based analysis and a gender equality officer is for the government to look at society and say that it has so much money in the pot this year and it wants to invest in Canadian society, for good social objectives like good housing, good education and child care. Then it has to see who benefits. The analysis lifts the veil to see who benefits from these programs. If we find that women do not benefit, then we have to change the programs.

As I said, 80% of unpaid caregiving is done by women and they do not benefit from any of this. Therefore, gender budgeting is needed in all government departments to change the discrimination. Policy development must be conducted in such a way that it is gender aware, from the hypothetical to the policy to its implementation.

Gender based analysis legislation is needed to enforce this analysis in every department. An independent gender based commissioner is needed to monitor government policies to ensure a gender based analysis is done and to act as an advocate, defending women and their rights to full, substantive equality. Accountability is necessary if we want to see real progress for women's equality in our country.

How do we move forward? Through the appointment of an independent commissioner, with accompanying legislation based on the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and implementation of real gender based analysis and gender responsive budgeting. It is not enough to deal with women by inserting a paragraph committing to an action plan. We need to do more than that. We must lift the veil on government policy and identify who really benefits.

Women have lost out because of gender based analysis not being done properly. It is time that we actually do it right.

Our party has made a commitment. Our leader made a commitment to reduce poverty in Canada with a 30/50 plan. One way of doing it, with respect to families and women, is to do a proper gender analysis to ensure that all government policies and all government actions benefit all society and, in particular, those families that need it the most.

The political will is necessary in order for women's equality to happen. I am pleased to move concurrence in this motion and I do hope I have the support of the House on this matter.

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following public bill to which the concurrence of the House is desired:

[*Translation*]

Bill S-209, An Act to amend the Criminal code (protection of children).

[*English*]**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

STATUS OF WOMEN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My private member's bill, Bill S-204, is scheduled for consideration later this day. However, it cannot be considered, as the report from the subcommittee on private members' business has not yet been tabled by procedure and House affairs.

Therefore, I seek unanimous consent for the following: "That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, Bill S-204, An Act respecting a National Philanthropy Day, be designated as votable and be allowed to proceed later this day".

●(1555)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): There is no consent.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after listening to our colleague, I must ask a question.

If I am not mistaken, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women did an analysis and found that women's established rights—judicial rights or de facto rights—have suffered. De facto rights have taken a huge step backwards, especially in the past two years. I would like to hear her thoughts on this.

I am going to digress for a moment. My colleague brought up the problem of poverty. At the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, we are undertaking a study of poverty. One thing that jumps out at us concerning the status of women—particularly single mothers, but also working women—is that they do not receive the same treatment as men. What is worse, we see that government policies are putting them at a disadvantage economically. I find it interesting that the motion takes that into consideration as well.

I would like to hear my colleagues thoughts on this. Did I understand correctly that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women arrived at the same conclusion? And what are the underlying reasons?

[*English*]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a good question from our colleague. It is true that women have taken a step backward in the last number of years. In the mid-nineties women were earning 72¢ to the dollar of what men were earning. Now they are earning 70.5¢ to what men, earn even with a university education, so women are taking a step back.

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In addition to that, the Conservative government has also hurt women by eliminating the ability for research and advocacy on behalf of women. That is another step backward. When we talk about legislation and about women's equality, the equality provision is quite empty. It is a word without any real force behind it to deliver that equality and make it real in the everyday life of women.

The hon. member talks about poverty. The committee is studying this. It is true, for instance, that it is important pay equity legislation happen because women do not receive equal pay for equal value. Again, our party has committed to bring forward proactive pay equity legislation. The government again has refused to do that. This was one of the recommendations from the standing committee, along with previous recommendations to that effect. This would go a long way in assisting women to receive their due pay.

Also, government policies have to be analyzed. Previous and future tax measures have to be analyzed in terms of how they treat women. I gave some examples earlier. The committee has put forward some very strong recommendations, asking government to do a gender based analysis on previous and current tax measures. Also with all future budgets tabled in the House, it should also table a gender based analysis so we can see how much of the billions of dollars that the country spends on social and other programs goes to women and children. The reason there is high poverty rates is because obviously very little does.

As the hon. member will see from his work that he does at committee, most often tax measures are not the best way to invest in social programs or our society. Investing directly in housing, education, child care, especially these three areas, impact on women, women in poverty and their children.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Bloc member brought up the poverty study, I would like to mention that yesterday a witness from the United Kingdom talked about fuel poverty and how the costs of fuel made it very difficult for low income people, seniors and single parents as well.

When the member from the Bloc gets up to speak again, perhaps he would like to suggest to the Liberal Party that its carbon tax could be very difficult on the poorest. Yesterday the witness from the United Kingdom specifically said that it was part of its poverty strategy to somehow address the fuel and costs of fuel for heating. People there live in a cold country.

We live in a large and a cold country. Any type of carbon tax would indeed be difficult. The witness particularly talked about single and elderly people. Did the member ever do an analysis of how some of her ideas would hurt women in the rural communities? The \$100 universal child care benefit has been very welcomed in rural communities. It has also been welcomed among immigrants when they first arrive in our country with small children. The member does not speak for all women when she says that universal child care benefit is of no value. It is of value and it has helped parents who stay at home with their children.

Many women work and it does not take long for them to be in an income tax bracket where tax cuts have helped them, such as the \$2,000 child tax credit. I am sorry a lot of these ideas have not been

supported by the women from the Liberal Party because they must realize there are women who have benefited from our programs.

• (1600)

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Speaker, I find it quite ironic that the hon. member is talking about poverty and universal child care. There is nothing universal about that child care. It would be universal if there were spaces available.

I have spoken with rural women and they tell me that they have huge problems accessing government services. There are no services nearby. Now that the government has shut down most of the offices of Status of Women Canada, they cannot access those either.

By the time they pay taxes on the \$100 a month, it actually comes down to about \$48 to \$50. Without spaces there is no child care. The women in rural Canada have told me that they need access to government services. They need child care and they need access to training and education so they can get decent jobs. These are the things that they are talking about.

If we are going to talk about immigrant women, and I spent 30 years working with immigrant women in this country, they are coming to my constituency office all the time saying that child care is what they are looking for. They need spaces. Many of them who are here are struggling to establish their lives in this country, looking for work, getting their credentials recognized, and upgrading their ability to speak the language or upgrading their skills so they can find decent jobs. They need child care and there are no spaces. There is no money to pay for infrastructure to establish spaces. This is an empty promise. We can call it what we like, but it does not deliver.

The hon. member goes on talking about all kinds of things that in essence mean nothing. What the government has done, essentially, is impoverished women.

The Liberal government introduced the child benefit plan, which was real income support for low income Canadians in this country. It went a long way to reducing child poverty. We are committed to increase that. The Conservative's \$100, which is not at all child care but actually an income supplement, is also taxed, so it is a poor supplement for income. It is absolutely not a child care program at all.

With all due respect, I think the hon. member should take a look at the analysis done by the experts when we did the gender based analysis and talk to her own colleagues, who in fact as a result of that training that we did had to acknowledge that the \$100 is not a child care program and does absolutely nothing for women in this country, especially low and middle income Canadians

Routine Proceedings

•(1605)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to participate in this debate on the eighth report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women concerning the following motion:

That the government appoint an independent commissioner for gender budgeting analysis immediately to conduct a gender based analysis of governmental policies, including budget policies.

The standing committee, over the last several months, has undertaken extensive studies on gender budgeting. This has involved hours of meetings, hearing from witnesses from as far away as South Africa to non-governmental organizations and representatives from federal government departments and central agencies.

As I have already said, the committee has heard from a wide range of experts on this subject.

The Auditor General, Sheila Fraser, an agent of Parliament, when she appeared before the standing committee, said that her office could look and see if the government is actually doing gender based analysis and the quality around that analysis. The Auditor General also went on to give some caution to the committee when looking at broad-based cross-department policy initiatives. Ms. Fraser said:

Too often we see broad-based initiatives across government, but nobody is really accountable for the success of that project. It could be a central agency, it could be a department, but somebody who clearly has the responsibility and the accountability to make sure the program is implemented.

I would certainly want to hear and believe that we would all profit from the views of the standing committee on this as well.

This side of the House believes we need to take a more comprehensive approach to advance equality for women and their full participation in all aspects of Canadian life. Our government is indeed committed to the work we have already undertaken to advance opportunities for women and men, and we have more plans for the future.

In the 2008 budget we announced that over the next year our government will develop an action plan for women. This action plan will advance the equality of women across Canada through the improvement of their economic and social conditions, and their participation in democratic life.

The government wants to look at all the recommendations together and devise a thorough and complete strategy to move the agenda of equality forward for women. This would include consultations across all sectors of society.

Experience has shown that an action plan accompanied with indicators against which outcomes for equality for women and men can be measured is the most effective approach. This is the course that we are taking.

Since the 1995 fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, where governments committed to gender based analysis in the Beijing *Platform for Action*, considerable progress has been made.

In Canada, some federal departments have taken initiatives to create their own training packages and infrastructure. Such efforts include: departmental statements on gender based analysis; integra-

tion of gender based analysis in strategic and operational plans; and establishment of departmental focal points or networks of gender specialists.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada, for example, became the first department to have accountability for gender based analysis entrenched in law. This law requires the department to report annually to Parliament.

The Canadian International Development Agency has a comprehensive non-legislative approach to gender based analysis; one it uses with success in its development work around the globe.

Finance Canada has undertaken gender based analysis on its tax measures in budgeting and has now committed that future budgets will undergo gender based analysis.

The Treasury Board Secretariat requires that gender based analysis be undertaken uniformly as part of the submission process that departments go through to receive financial authorities, and others are working to integrate gender based analysis into their work.

Our government is creating opportunities and working hard to achieve concrete results for women by introducing the universal child care benefit, increasing the pension income credit, and changing the guaranteed income supplement, thus putting more money in the hands of older women.

•(1610)

We are addressing matrimonial real property on reserves, modernizing the federal labour standards, expanding business opportunities for women, taking action to ensure pay equity is achieved, creating special initiatives for women entrepreneurs, and increasing crime prevention, justice and security measures to protect children from sexual exploitation.

Over the last year 181 projects received funding under the women's community fund and the women's partnership fund for a total value of \$33,000,993 over three years.

Impacting over 1.5 million women and girls through the projects funded, organizations are carrying out work in educating women on violence prevention, building women's financial literacy, encouraging networking, promoting women's economic security, prosperity, health and safety, and ending all forms of discrimination against women.

This year's theme of financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women at the 52nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women heard over and over again the value of putting in place plans of action and indicators to measure progress. This is the course action we are on.

Just as a business would not leave a new product half developed, the Government of Canada will not do only half a job. In the same way, we want to ensure that we have the best plan possible, an action plan that takes into account all Canadians, women and men alike.

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Equality for women and their full participation in the life of our country are important not only for women, their families and their communities but also for Canada. We want to use the action plan to improve Canada's prosperity by enhancing women's active participation in the economy as well as in the overall social and democratic life of our country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will take this opportunity to ask a question. Before I do that, I would like to set the record straight and correct information that I do not believe is accurate.

When she spoke, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development stated that witnesses from the United Kingdom speaking by videoconference yesterday to the issue of poverty were talking about fuel poverty. In the United Kingdom, those who spend more than 10% of their income on energy are considered fuel poor. That is one thing.

Members of the Conservative Party asked the witnesses from the United Kingdom if it would be a good idea to impose a carbon tax in Canada. That is something altogether different. The Conservatives were introducing their fixations and biases to the United Kingdom, which surprised us.

However, someone from Bristol University, in the United Kingdom, answered the question but not in the way indicated by our colleague. They indicated that a carbon tax could be good or bad and that would depend on how it is implemented and how it is used. That was the answer given by the individual, who went on to give some examples.

We should not take things at face value. Our colleague would have liked that individual to have given a different answer; however, that is what they said. The answer provided by our colleague in this House, today, is the answer she would have liked to have heard. That is the first point to be corrected.

Now, I would like to ask the following question of our Conservative colleague who just spoke: with regard to her concerns about helping women overcome the barriers that prevent them from escaping poverty, is her party prepared to examine, with regard to energy, the factors that contribute to family poverty, particularly the poverty of single-parent families?

• (1615)

[*English*]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, the one thing that has not been said here today and that needs to be said is that there was a great deal of cooperation on the committee when we were studying this issue of gender based analysis and gender based budgeting.

The report was adopted unanimously, with two footnotes put forth by the Conservative government. One of those footnotes addressed the issue of a commissioner, which is what the motion is today and which is what I would like to address.

We heard from a lot of people that there are a lot of different issues out there. We heard from many witnesses that finally we are starting to see some movement on improvements in the gender based budgeting issue.

It has taken a long time. Governments have worked on this in the past but have not been successful. Members of the committee need to be commended for the way they worked together, which is one of the reasons that we are starting to see some movement on this issue.

The footnotes were put in place on behalf of the Conservative government because it is a premature issue. We do have an avenue whereby we can examine what is being done with the gender based budgeting in this government and we can do that without putting a commissioner in place.

A commissioner of gender based budgeting would create a new bureaucracy that we feel is premature at this time. Other avenues can be explored. The Auditor General said that she and her department would be quite willing to do an audit on the gender based analysis that is being done. We feel that we should be waiting for that report to come back before we go to the extent of appointing another officer of Parliament. It would come at tremendous cost, which, I might add, has never been investigated fully, and it would come with a great deal of bureaucracy.

We would rather see the dollars in our programming go toward helping women, which is what the department is for and which is the initiative that we are trying to promote. We are trying not to promote bureaucracy in a cumbersome system. We are trying to get the dollars directly to the women who need them, which is why we, as the Conservative government, would like to wait to see what the Auditor General's report indicates.

The Auditor General has indicated that we will not be waiting for two to three years for the report. This report will be done in the near future.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in her speech and in her reply, the hon. member talked about an action plan that the government would put together, which is wonderful, but then she mentioned that Citizenship and Immigration has a law that actually forces that department to do a proper gender based analysis. However, even at that, there are some difficulties.

An action plan is great but that does not guarantee anything for women, which is evidenced by the fact that Finance Canada has known for some time that it has to do gender based analysis and yet it came forward with a gender analysis that was totally useless when it came to the standing committee.

The fact is that if the Conservatives were interested in programs that benefited women, they would never have brought forward the universal child care program that they are so proud of.

There is no question that there are problems and that women in this country need to have someone who will stand up for them and say openly to any government, Liberal, Conservative or what have you, that the policies being implemented are detrimental to women, do not benefit women and do not move women forward. This kind of oversight is needed badly.

The bureaucracy is not an issue here. What we need to look at is women's advancement. I hope the hon. member can tell us exactly what her concern is with respect to a gender equality commissioner who actually would stand up for women, because, quite frankly, up to now we have not done that.

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•(1620)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has been a valuable member of the status of women committee. She has worked tirelessly for years in trying to better women's place in this country. I understand her frustration.

She talked about how she had worked for 30 years or more with immigrant women. She has worked a long time on gender based analysis and on gender budgeting. It is probably that length of time that she has worked on all of these issues that is causing the frustration that we are not moving fast enough.

However, the member must remember that the witnesses told us that it has only been within the last couple of years that we have seen any progress on this. We are starting to see progress but we need to see this progress unfold.

The motion we are debating today asks that a commissioner to be appointed immediately. However, in our estimation that would create undue bureaucracy. There are other avenues that we can follow in the meantime, other avenues that can lead to a better environment for women and better gender based analysis, which is the reason that we are taking the route that we are.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber, Immigration; the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Access to Information.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their enthusiasm.

I am obviously very pleased to speak about this topic raised by the member about the appointment of an independent commissioner to conduct a gender-based analysis of the government's measures and policies in order to ensure that women are properly treated.

We know that this is nothing new. When the Standing Committee on Status of Women decided that this measure should be put forward, it was not without considerable thought. The committee members made this decision after carrying out an extensive and serious study and after consulting international experts. We learned about other countries where commissioners had already been appointed, and where they had had some success after these appointments were made.

It is also nothing new that the government is supposed to be doing something to promote gender equality. In 1981, the government undertook to promote gender equality in a CEDAW document, because we thought that the United Nations was the best place to ensure that men and women would one day be equals in law and in fact.

Furthermore, in 1995, at the conference in Beijing, the government at the time reiterated that commitment. It increased the budgets of Status of Women Canada to promote the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. It was a comprehensive action plan if there ever was one, and should have been fully implemented. Unfortunately, as with many other things in the government, things get lost and very few things happen.

We will also not forget the current Prime Minister's commitment. When I say "commitment", I am choosing my words carefully. During the election campaign in January, he did not say he would ensure equality among men and women. He did not say he was promising that men and women would be equal under his government. He said he was committed to it. Commitment is a strong word. It is a word that the Prime Minister should have had the wisdom to respect. If there is one thing that he has not done over the past two and a half years, it is to honour the promise he made to the women of Quebec and Canada.

In the various policies and measures put forward by this government, this commitment has been completely ignored. The government began by cutting Status of Women Canada funding. It continued by eliminating grants to women's advocacy groups and telling women that they could no longer defend their rights. It then eliminated the court challenges program, which had allowed women to take their demands and their struggles to the highest authorities.

It also slashed funding for women who wanted to do research to ensure they were always on the leading edge in the defence of women's rights. It cut grants to women lobbyists and women's lobby groups. If women cannot lobby to assert their rights, how can they possibly do so? As we all know, there are only so many ways of going about this. Yet the oil companies that lobby here are very successful. The companies and big businesses that lobby here have a great deal of success. The reason they do not receive funding for their lobbying activities is because they are quite capable of using their own money to lobby.

Respecting commitments should be a prime minister's first priority. In the budget and the throne speech, the government indicated that it would produce a plan to ensure equality for women.

•(1625)

It is now June, the end of the session, and we have not heard or seen anything. There has been no talk of a plan. In fact, it is just a virtual plan that has been put on paper, but so far there is just a title, "A plan for women's equality". There is no need to reinvent the wheel to come up with such a plan. Just take what is already being done quite well and has been validated by women's groups here and throughout the world. These groups have said that this plan would ensure that all women, throughout the world, are equal to men, can combat violence, have a roof over their head and achieve equality.

We asked the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to appoint a commissioner because we realized that despite the efforts by Status of Women Canada to educate, inform and train the various departments on gender based issues and gender specific budgets, these departments did not really understand what that meant. That was our impression.

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The only analysis done was done after the fact. It was not done before the policy and measure were in put in place, but well afterward and it was wrong. Since the analysis was wrong even though it was done after the measure was implemented, we are entitled to wonder about the quality of the information received or interpreted. I believe that the problem stems not from the quality of information provided, but from how the information was interpreted by the people who received it.

Equity advocate positions were established in various departments, but the women who occupied those positions were replaced one after the other over a period of a few months by others who had fresh experience and expertise. They had to start over from what the others had done without getting any extra support. And when those women started to master the job, they disappeared and were transferred elsewhere. Some departments did not even replace the equity champions after they left.

This makes us wonder whether the government truly wants this equality to become a reality because we are not seeing that in any of its actions, policies or measures.

If the government had really wanted its policies to advance women's equality, we would not be debating Bill C-484. If the government had really wanted women to be equal, it would not have given them a child care allowance of \$100 a month. Instead, it would have created a program that allowed women to choose to send their children to a specialized day care centre with specialized teachers and caregivers. Quebec is fortunate enough to have such a system. If the government had really wanted women to be equal, it would not have chosen to leave pay equity measures and programs at the point where they are now, unfortunately.

We know that pay equity measures are not worth it. In fact, some companies and their employees have been in court for more than 20 years over pay equity for women. These women come under the aegis of the federal government. It is terrible.

The government says it wants equality for women, but it is not doing anything to make that happen. All we are getting from this government is fine words and empty promises.

Different tax measures have also been mentioned.

• (1630)

For example, the government has introduced the tax-free savings account or TFSA. This is great for people who have money, but women, who still today earn only 70% of what men do, do not fall into that category.

When the government says that these measures were put in place for women and will benefit women as much as men, I wonder who thought about that. Was it men? Because if it was women, I am sure they would have seen the problem with that sort of thinking and I am sure they would have realized that it did not make sense.

A tax-free savings account is an attractive idea, but it will not benefit 80-year-old women. If the government had really wanted to introduce measures that would benefit 80-year-old women, it would have increased the guaranteed income supplement and made sure people who were entitled to it received full retroactivity.

For years the Bloc Québécois has been fighting for real people, real equity measures and real policies, whether in connection with employment insurance, seniors, women or children. No matter what anyone says, the Bloc Québécois is fighting real battles for real people. That is what we have always done and what we will continue to do.

When we talk about equality, we must also talk about social housing. There is no equality for single mothers if there are no special social housing measures for them.

Miloon Kothari, the United Nations special rapporteur, came to Canada to study what is being done in terms of social housing here in a supposedly civilized and advanced country. He learned of the existence of a tent city in Edmonton where people who work 40 hours a week do not have enough money to pay rent. Women, families and children live in tents in the middle of downtown Edmonton. He realized that many people did not have comfortable and adequate social housing in which to raise their children responsibly and decently.

He also realized that Canada had taken a step backward. He found out that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has astronomical surpluses in excess of \$12 billion. It is shameful that this government has not given a portion of that money to provinces that have social housing programs to ensure adequate housing everywhere for people who need it.

The concept of equality and equity encompasses all of these programs. Unfortunately, I believe that unless an independent commissioner is appointed—as my colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville was saying—that will never happen. We will never see the day when women can finally breathe easy and say that they have the same working conditions, living conditions and benefits as their male colleagues, and that they can finally look forward to and work together toward a better future.

Only then will we be able to say that we have succeeded. I do not think that a government like this one, which is always trying to crush low income earners, such as those in the manufacturing and forestry sectors, will give us the measures we need to ensure equality between men and women.

• (1635)

I can guarantee that we will study the action plan that the government says it will put forward very thoroughly. We will take a very serious look at it. But I do not think we will have a chance to do that before next year. It seems to me that the plan is all in the minister's head and is not about to come out anytime soon. She has too many things on her mind.

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It is true that nowadays, Conservative Party members are having a hard time remembering their responsibilities to the voters. We see evidence of that every day. We have been hearing all kinds of nonsense about all kinds of issues here in the house, despite the fact that we have serious questions about issues that are important to all Quebecers and Canadians. The only thing the Conservative Party ever does is get one or two people to give utterly vague answers that are completely unrelated to the questions we ask.

Given this party's track record, we do not imagine that it has time to think about action plans for women's equality. It does not have time for that; it thinks about the strategy of the moment to try to confuse people a little more. And that is what we are seeing.

Unfortunately, the only way to achieve equality between men and women is to ensure that the government appoints an independent commissioner for gender budgeting analysis and that these recommendations are carried out.

In recommendation No. 20 of the report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we are asking that when the Department of Finance brings down its budget, and with all subsequent budgets, it publish its gender-based analysis of the measures included therein. Mr. Speaker, do you think I believe this will be done? It is a very good report. It is not a rosy report as they said it was at last week's press conference. It is an excellent report. Unfortunately, I do not believe that this government has the will to implement it.

In coming here to the House of Commons to represent the citizens of Laval, I thought I would be surrounded by people who all wanted the same thing: to represent those who elected them in a responsible and respectful manner. Women live in the ridings where Conservatives were elected. We know that most women do not want to elect Conservatives—we can understand why—but they do live in those ridings. In my opinion, once elected, we represent everyone, not just those who voted for us.

The government should think twice about shelving this report. This report was prepared with a great deal of conviction, hard work and cooperation. All the hon. members who worked on preparing this report have spoken to one another. It deserves to be studied by the government and for the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages to take into account and carry out our recommendations. There are a number of them, but if she carried them all out, we would finally achieve equality between men and women.

• (1640)

[English]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to go back to the fuel poverty strategy that was mentioned yesterday during the poverty study in the human resources committee because it would play a huge role if any taxes are implemented.

The member has a colleague who was at the poverty study who said that he did not understand Professor David Gordon, who spoke. He said that they were not talking about carbon taxes going one way or the other. The professor did note that there would be bad

distributional effects. He is studying carbon limits. He said it would have more of an impact on the poor than on the rich and that one must look carefully at who would be the winners and losers before pursuing such policies.

One of the Quebec members even asked whether fuel poverty should be part of the poverty study. The response of one of the academics, Mr. Peter Kenway, was that certainly it should be part of it. Professor David Gordon said it should be an integral part of the anti-poverty study, that it would be amiss if it was not part of the study.

Yesterday I understand the committee passed a motion to study the carbon tax and what difficulties it would impose especially upon the poor. I am wondering if the member would have considered that being that she speaks so passionately about helping the poor, specifically women in single parent homes. This was said in committee because part of the poverty strategy talks about what other countries can inform us about how we can implement different strategies and examine other poverty strategies. It was a huge issue yesterday.

Would the member support a motion to examine how a carbon tax could impact the poor, especially women? The Liberals would probably push very hard for that motion because they believe in a carbon tax.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The member for Laval may be interested to know that the comments made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development took two-and-a-half minutes.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I will respond to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development by simply saying that if there really was a strategy to decrease poverty in Quebec and Canada, the Conservative government would have voted in favour of Bill C-207 to keep young people in the regions. The Conservative government would have voted in favour of Bill C-269 to give women and youth access to employment insurance. The Conservative government would have voted in favour of Bill C-490 to give seniors the right to an increased and retroactive guaranteed income supplement. And the Conservative government would have voted against Bill C-484 to ensure that women will always have access to legal and free abortion.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, I do not need two-and-a-half minutes to respond to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development because I think I have summarized the situation.

• (1645)

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's presentation was very effective and very well done. She is a very strong advocate of women's issues.

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When we talk about the need the equality commissioner, we have to look at what the government has actually done. The very first thing the Conservative government did was to eliminate the court challenges program, a program which helped women. The government eliminated advocacy and research. In fact the equality provision which it put in really is hollow because it does not have any real advocacy or research money behind it. The Conservatives eliminated the national child care program which had been negotiated with every province in this country. They cut the literacy program which affects women and the poorest people tremendously. They have cut housing. I could go down the list of cuts. They are going to be developing an action plan for women, but the action plan quite frankly is what we have seen in the House. That is the action plan. Action plans should have action, not just talk.

At committee we talked a great deal about this. We met with the Auditor General who said very clearly that her role is not conducive to the work of a commissioner. She can only look at value for money, not at policy and she cannot do any advocacy. Again, the equality commissioner is extremely important.

I want to ask the hon. member who has given us a very passionate presentation this afternoon how she reacts to the comments from the government that the commissioner is actually a waste of money because it establishes another bureaucracy which in effect will do nothing; money is being wasted by establishing a bureaucracy when that money could be spent directly on women when in fact, by the way, that has not been done.

There is a much broader issue here that is being ignored. The hon. member probably would enlighten us on her reaction to that particular commitment.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with my hon. colleague.

It is true that a great deal of money is spent on and invested in various programs, but I would remind the House that, unfortunately, the biggest investments are in weapons and military programs. While I agree that some money must be invested in those programs, since our soldiers need all the necessary support, money could also be allocated to women's programs, which are also very important.

This government also promised to improve services for veterans and their widows, but it has not kept that promise.

What angers me even more about this government is the attitude of its members from Quebec. They know that Quebec has social programs that are much more advanced than in the rest of Canada. We will not talk about employment insurance, but Quebec has a child care network, parental leave and support programs. The Government of Quebec has even introduced a support program for older workers, something that this government has failed to do adequately. Yet when the time comes to grant other Canadians access to quality social programs like the programs we have in Quebec because we care about creating a fairer, more equitable society, these Conservative members from Quebec rise and vote against measures that could help others. That is what angers me the most.

Additionally, Quebec has pay equity. It is a done deal. All women in Quebec enjoy pay equity, except those who work for the federal

government. Those poor women do not yet have that benefit. It is up to this government to make it happen.

I therefore completely agree with my colleague. She is quite right. We must invest money in appointing an independent commissioner to look into gender-based issues. That is what is needed to see some progress, whether under this government or any other future governments. Yesterday, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages was looking ahead to the next government. Well, the next government will also have to comply.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am most pleased to participate in the debate.

I would like to thank my colleague from Laval for her passion. She very clearly is a member who feels very strongly about how important it is to look out for the reality of women in this country, because in taking care of women, women can take care of their families, our communities are strengthened, and our nation is strengthened.

Canada's 1995 federal action plan for gender equality and the subsequent 2000 agenda for gender based equality in regard to the Beijing Declaration have had very little effect on advancing women's equality in Canada. In fact, the advancement of women's equality has been stalled for almost three decades.

I taught in the public school system for a number of years. I would make the point every year with my senior students to ask whether or not women and men had achieved equality in Canada. The answer invariably, strangely enough from female students, was yes, women have done very well; they can go to school and they have opportunities.

The reality is that the struggle for equality is most certainly not over. No matter what the government may say, women are still behind. The wage gap between men and women has remained at 30% for over 30 years. In 2008 women still earn only 70% of what men earn.

Our current tax policy as it is structured over and over again by government after government is basically to raise money. Very little analysis has ever been done in regard to the impact that tax policy has on women.

Women are still underrepresented in politics and in the life of this nation. They comprise only 6.7% of the corporate elite. Even though women outnumber their male counterparts in our universities—we have recently seen an increase in terms of the number of women participating—when they graduate, these educated young women still earn 20% less than men, and as they age, the gap grows.

There are some interesting statistics from Statistics Canada—

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[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I would like to have the attention of the House for a moment. The hon. member for London—Fanshawe is at the end of the House rather far from the Speaker's chair. I am trying to listen to what she is saying, but that is difficult when I hear a lot of noise in another corner of the House. If members wish to speak to each other, they should move to the lobbies.

[*English*]

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe has the floor and also my full attention.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker, because I have what I think are some important things to say.

As I was indicating, more young women are participating at the post-secondary level and are graduating, but still they are earning 20% less than their male counterparts. As they age, that gap grows.

Statistics Canada provided us with some interesting information. It showed that up to about age 25, after they graduated, women were doing reasonably well in terms of their male counterparts. However, as they grew older, the gap increased exponentially after 25.

Of course, there is an answer for this, which is that this is the point in time when many young women marry and assume the responsibilities of child care and, in some cases, elder care. For these women, the gap was horrific in terms of their ability to have economic security.

Another piece of what we heard in committee had to do with violence against women, which continues at an alarming rate, especially against first nations, Inuit and Métis women.

Quite frankly, Canada is underperforming when compared to other countries. The 2007 gender gap report by the World Economic Forum ranks Canada 18th, behind countries such as Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and of course most European countries. We tend to think of ourselves as advanced, modern and well ahead of a lot of developing countries, but that is not the case.

Policy makers in Canada simply are not asking the right questions when they look at policy, especially when formulating tax cuts, tax expenditures and social spending. That is the reason I believe it is essential for Canada to change its approach. That is the reason for this report.

Countries all over the world are engaging in gender responsive budgeting initiatives, enabling policy makers to identify who is and who is not benefiting from social spending, tax expenditures, tax cuts and the social policy in place.

Our committee heard many times that tax cuts are not beneficial to women. Tax cuts simply do not benefit women, primarily because women's incomes on average are lower than the incomes of men. A woman in Canada earns about \$26,900 a year while the average man earns \$43,700. Almost 40% of women in Canada do not even earn enough money to pay taxes.

The 60% of women working outside the home and in a financial position to pay taxes contribute \$42 billion to our tax revenues. These women, and in fact all women, deserve to take their rightful

place in the life of this nation. Sadly, most do not benefit from the tax cuts that we have seen in budgets that go back ad nauseam, and certainly not in the most recent budgets.

Women benefit from investments in child care, affordable housing, health care and post-secondary education. Unfortunately for these women, federal social spending as a share of gross domestic product is currently at the lowest level in 50 years. That is despite the fact that governments have enjoyed incredible surpluses over the last 10 years. Tragically, these are surpluses that have gone to the oil and gas sector, to big banks and to profitable corporations for the exploitation of our resources. These are tax cuts that have not benefited women at all.

The tax cut agenda of the current and previous governments is causing money that should be available to invest in our communities to dwindle. We have seen tax policies that have stripped the cupboard bare. This money should be invested in programs to help women. That is part of the policy that we need to talk about when we talk about gender based analysis.

That is the reason for our report. It is the reason why it makes immediate, positive action on our report all the more imperative. We need action today. Now that we have had a chance to debate this report in the House, it is time for immediate action to be taken to implement the report in all its parts.

Gender responsive budgeting will help to create a more effective, efficient, transparent and accountable budget process and it will advance women's equality. However, gender responsive budgets are not the entire solution.

● (1655)

We need leadership. As I said before, this Parliament must act. We need leadership from the highest level. The Prime Minister and the cabinet ministers need to ensure that women's equality is part of their agenda.

Any implementation of policy needs to be backed up with political will from the governing party and others in the House. It is essential that the Prime Minister include in his next Speech from the Throne his commitment to gender equality.

The report we are discussing today is in fact the culmination of eight months of hard work by my colleagues and the committee staff and lengthy consultations with national and international experts. I am hopeful that the government will take into consideration the recommendations of this groundbreaking report.

I am also pleased that the committee did indeed work cooperatively on these important issues, as has been noted, and that we were able to produce a unanimous report. I think that speaks to the dedication of our committee to the cause of women, their children and our communities, and to the need that we recognized when we heard from witnesses in terms of building this nation, community by community, family by family.

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In light of the historic apology offered last week to first nations, Métis and Inuit people of Canada, I also feel that it is essential to talk about the absolute need to address the reality of the inequities faced by aboriginal women in Canada.

Our sisters have endured discrimination. They have been trafficked into sexual slavery, under-housed and cut off from educational opportunities. They have endured violence of an unspeakable nature and are five times more likely to be murdered than women in the general population. These are our sisters, our mothers, our daughters and ourselves.

We have learned that we must never forget our obligation to seek truth and reconciliation. We must never abandon that which is essential to any hope that we have to secure the future for the people of our nation.

In terms of gender budgeting, there has been a great deal of work done on it, not just by our committee but by others. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has worked very hard on gender budgeting initiatives and has expressed over and over again to government after government why they matter and what impact they will have in Canada.

As has already been stated, Canada has been a signatory to a number of UN commitments to gender equality and more inclusive economic development over the last few decades, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW, the Beijing "Platform for Action" that I alluded to, and, more recently, the millennium development goals. Despite all of these stated commitments, both here at home and abroad, there remain significant gender inequalities in life experiences and in distribution of opportunities among women and men in Canada.

Government budgets, which are policy statements and policy instruments that reflect the social and economic priorities of government, are one area of public action that has been identified as an important tool for redressing underlying inequalities and tackling these through the allocation of public resources.

In particular, gender budget analysis is increasingly recognized as an important way to hold governments accountable for their commitments to human rights and gender equality, as it connects these commitments to the distribution, use and generation of public resources.

Indeed, the current Minister of Finance has made a public commitment to undertaking gender budget analysis in Canada. Unfortunately, to date, very little has happened with regard to gender budget analysis and policy making that would make a difference for women. Despite the fact that Canadian funding agencies are expected to undertake gender impact assessments of all projects in developing countries, we have not seen this at home.

It is time to bring home a new way of thinking about government finances that examines the real situation of women's and men's lives and includes a majority of citizens, especially women, who are often at the periphery of the economic debate. In decisions that shape policies, set priorities and meet the social and economic needs of all Canadians, these debates must happen.

● (1700)

Pressure on public spending, as I have already said and as the House well knows, has depleted Canada's ability for the fiscal manoeuvrability with which we ultimately will make policies that comply with social needs. We have seen the cupboard. We have seen the available resources dwindle.

As for a key goal of gender equality and alternative budget initiatives over the last two decades, it has been shown that in this fiscal context, the impacts of public expenditures, revenues and deficit reduction strategies are seldom, if ever, gender or class neutral. Indeed and instead, fiscal, monetary, trade and financial sector policies all impact on women's economic situation in very direct ways.

In the status of women committee meetings, we heard from the finance department that budgets 2006, 2007 and 2008 all underwent gender budget analysis. Yet when we asked groups such as FAFIA and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, with analysts Armine Yalnizyan and Professor Kathleen Lahey, to look at these same budgets and undertake their own analysis of the GBA, they showed very clearly that a real GBA had not been done and that the explanation from the government was skewed and unreliable, all at the expense of women.

This is not new. Women have suffered quite significantly in terms of policies and the economic and social impacts of those policies for quite a number of years. As far back as 1995, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, which conducted research on a wide range of issues that affect women, had its funds cut and was closed by the government.

The Canadian Labour Force Development Board, which had given organizations of women, people of colour and people with disabilities a small voice in training policy, was eliminated.

In 1997 we saw the announcement of the elimination of program funding for women's organizations, starting in the 1998-99 fiscal year. Money from Status of Women Canada was from that point onward delivered on a project by project basis, which is hardly a positive way to enforce that women had a voice and a future.

Other program cuts included \$25 billion from transfers for health, education and social assistance, beginning in 1996.

The 1995 budget eliminated the Canada assistance plan and changed employment insurance to base eligibility on hours worked rather than weeks worked. The impact of this was disproportionately felt by women. It hurt women.

Of course, in 1996 we saw the end of social housing.

All of this impacted very much on women in terms of social policy and economic policy, yet no gender budget analysis was done, and certainly no one in government at that time acted to avert the disaster that has culminated in the reality we face now.

We have heard over and over again from our witnesses that tax cuts were of no benefit to women. I would like to turn briefly to a couple of the recommendations in the report that we are discussing today.

Recommendation 3 states:

The Committee recommends that Status of Women Canada establish, by January 2009, an advisory panel of experts from civil society organizations and academia; that this panel provide advice to Status of Women Canada on the implementation of gender-based analysis and gender responsive budgeting in the federal government; and, that the Government of Canada provide adequate resources for this initiative.

That was augmented by recommendation 4 from the committee:

—that Status of Women Canada, as the lead on the working group on gender indicators, immediately involve civil society organizations and academics in the development of the Gender Equality Indicators Project.

This is in sharp contrast to the reality of what has actually happened to Status of Women Canada.

• (1705)

The current Conservative government changed the mandate of SWC, cancelled the court challenges program, closed 12 regional offices and removed lobbying, advocacy and research from the initiatives that Status of Women Canada was able to fund and undertake.

Contrary to what the experts were telling us, women's organizations were cutoff from providing the advice that we need. We know that Status of Women Canada does not have sufficient resources to produce the research that is needed on women's issues.

The committee therefore recommended that these resources be made available, that we could bring in civil society and ensure that women would have a voice in terms of gender budget analysis.

I have a number of solutions that I was going to offer, but clearly I have run out of time. I want to simply conclude with the words of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It says:

—the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields...

That will not happen, that cannot happen in our country until we have the kind of equality that women need to take their place.

The recommendations of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women that we move toward gender responsive budgeting underscores that absolute need for the equality of women and their participation. I hope this Parliament will support and adopt these recommendations.

• (1710)

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a comment and then ask the hon. member a question.

The hon. member talked a great deal, and rightly so, about the standing committee's work and its report. Many of the witnesses to whom the standing committee listened, which then led to many of the recommendations, were from abroad. They told the committee that without an independent body to hold Parliament accountable, it would not happen.

Routine Proceedings

In fact, some of the recommendations in our report go as far as to say that all members of the House and those standing committees of the House should be trained in gender budget analysis prior to a new session of the House beginning. This is important to sensitize and help people understand the importance of gender budget analysis. It goes right to the core of women being able to have a decent life, to have the ability to pay rent, to get out of living in poverty and to feed, clothe and look after their children.

By having a commissioner, this would restore the research capability. The research could be done by the commissioner as well as advocacy on behalf of women. It would then be able to monitor the government and hold it accountable. The commission would be enshrined in legislation that would enable this to be done. The legislation would then have to be lived up to and respected by Parliament and any government that came to power.

One of the things stated by the current government in opposing this recommendation, both in committee and in the House today, was the fact that this plan would cause more bureaucracy. Could the member comment on the importance of that?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, the member raises a very important issue that we heard about, at length, from both domestic and international experts. It is based on the reality that we have had this gender budget analysis initiative around for a very long time.

In fact, Status of Women Canada has produced quite a good guide for policy-making in regard to that. It provided a reference guide that illustrated how departments were supposed to go through the process and was kind enough to provide gender budget analysis training. We discovered there was a great deal in place in terms of what I will call the platform, the ability to move ahead on this.

Unfortunately, it felt at times like departments were going through these guidelines as if they were a checklist, without really giving it thought or thinking about impact and how it had to be implemented. It was just a checklist. The end result is that we have not seen the kinds of advancements with GBA that one would have hoped after all this time.

I quite agree that we need a commissioner. It was recommended by a number of people who came before the committee. Having the accountability mechanism to assess how governments have made progress is going to take us the next step in terms of achieving the goals at which we are looking.

I quite agree with setting that in legislation. I believe all the important policies that we treasure as Canadians and would like to see in place as Canadians should be secured in legislation. Our health care system is protected by the Canada Health Act. I would like to see environmental protection, a national child care act and a national housing policy enshrined in legislation, so there is indeed accountability, the kind a commissioner would provide.

Routine Proceedings

• (1715)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member a question about tax cuts. We know the Council of Chief Executives, chambers of commerce and many other organizations have been calling for tax cuts over many years. It is not surprising, given that corporate tax cuts save profitable corporations millions of dollars in taxes. The oil and gas sector is profiting a great deal from that, as are banks and others. We know wealthy people benefit substantially from tax cuts.

If I heard the hon. member correctly in her excellent presentation earlier, she said that not only did women disproportionately not benefit from tax cuts because their incomes were so much lower and many lived in poverty, but there was a reduced fiscal capacity, less money, in the country to invest in needed programs, such as housing, education, child care, health care, and that often women ended up picking up the slack by caring for seniors and children trying to make ends meet.

Would the hon. member comment on the issue of fiscal capacity and the impact of tax cuts made by the current government, and, I dare say, the previous government, that have been a gift to those who already have so much and have taken from those who already have far too little?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. I did speak generally about the impact of tax cuts and the fact that they did not benefit women. In fact, 68% of women will not benefit at all from the 2008 budget. We have heard that over and over again. It is largely because they do not make enough income to pay income taxes and cannot collect on those non-refundable tax credits.

Also, in so many cases the tax regime is based on the family unit as opposed to the individual. The \$5,000 tax-free savings account is a good example of that. It does very few women any good at all. First, they cannot scrape up \$5,000. Second, the non-taxable benefits tend to accrue to those who can, and those tend to be men. Other examples of these family tax cuts that do not advantage women are income splitting. It is an absolutely disaster. Even pension splitting does not help women who are single and alone.

In terms of the revenue, if we are giving away \$14.5 billion to oil and gas, there is nothing left for the women and the kids.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, briefly, this is about gender equality, so presumably it is about both genders, men and women.

Would the hon. member and her party support the implementation of the solutions in the Cools-Galloway report, which would go a long way to implementing fairness in the way that non-custodial parents are treated by our courts, which is in an appalling way?

• (1720)

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I am a little lost to understand exactly the full connection here. Basically, I understand that when a divorce happens, when families are split apart, there is pain and suffering on both sides of the equation. However, over and over again we found in our committee that, by and large, women had not benefited from the court systems, or tax policy or social expenditures.

In the 2006 budget, once again, women were denied access to the courts. We saw support for women, in terms of their access to the courts, reduced by the loss of the court challenges program. We also saw reductions in spending for support for women who needed—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by quoting from Barbara Yaffe, who is a journalist for the *Vancouver Sun*, who commented on the policy, which the leader of the opposition is encouraging. The *StarPhoenix* referred to it as “Gender czar idea deserves a pink slip”. The article written by Barbara Yaffe specifically cites the Liberal leader, the opposition leader. It says:

[The opposition leader] put forward a clunker of an idea this week in a bid to further enhance his party's appeal among the fairer set. He announced that, should Liberals form government, he'd create a commissioner of gender equality to scrutinize and publicly report on “gender equality practices in all government departments”.

It further states, “The post would create a—

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The Bloc Québécois whip on a point of order.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for interrupting my colleague, but it seems as though the whole house did not hear “resuming debate”, which would explain why my colleague did not rise. Here, we really did not hear “resuming debate”. I would ask you to please call it again.

I think the Liberal member had the floor.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I apologize to the House.

[Translation]

My list shows that it is now the turn of a Conservative Party member. However, my list is incorrect. Resuming debate, the member for London North Centre.

[English]

I apologize to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources, but we will go first to the hon. member for London North Centre and then we will go back to her to maintain the integrity of the lists that have been agreed upon

The hon. member for London North Centre.

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I apologize for any confusion.

I am part of the Status of Women committee. I asked to be on it when I first became a member of Parliament a year and a half ago and it has been a tremendous experience for me to work with the committee and its members who sought to unanimously produce this report. It is a highly significant report and I appreciate it very much.

I am also hoping to share my time with the member for Québec, so I will make a few comments first.

As many people know, I have worked a lot overseas in various aspects and I have always found it incredible that through our CIDA programing and development funding we spent so much time in emphasizing that there has to be gender equality in those things we are attempting to do in expressing our image overseas. I am surprised that so far in Canada we have not been able to develop that kind of program here. That is why I really believe that the creation of a gender commissioner would help to lead us in that direction.

Successive governments have tried to move us in this direction and we have been trying, but it has been very difficult. It is a bit ironic if we maintain a position in which we ask people overseas who are seeking Canadian funding to implement programs in places like Africa and other places to consider gender equality in what they are doing and gender assessments and then we do not properly do that here.

It is wonderful that this committee has brought this forward unanimously. I congratulate all members of that committee.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is an important debate about a real strategy for the advancement of women in Quebec and Canada.

The question I would like to ask my Liberal friend is this: is there anyone in the Conservative government who is in charge when it comes to the status of women? Where are the Conservatives going with their visionless, piecemeal strategies that do not even have specific goals?

I was the status of women critic in Beijing, and I remember that the women unanimously called for real government policies and measures and for continuous monitoring of government policies and all the measures governments take over the years to determine whether they promoted women's advancement.

Since this new government came to power, there has been no one at the controls. There is no minister responsible for the status of women. The government has cut numerous measures that benefited women and has taken away their right to challenge the government in court.

I would like to know what my friend has to say about this. I would like to know whether he sees things the same way I do. He sits on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Pearson: Mr. Speaker, we have heard from so many witnesses over the course of months on this committee about how we have been failing women in Canada at various levels. As far as anyone being asleep at the switch on the government side, that was not the purpose of our committee.

Private Members' Business

The purpose of our committee was to ensure we put something in place that would guarantee that this could not be done without somebody giving a proper audit of it. The thing that matters is that the committee has sought to put in place someone would audit this kind of thing properly to ensure that what happens among women and especially with gender equality does not take place in a vacuum but is being watched, monitored and enhanced.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to know if the opposition has ever done an analysis on the importance of our tackling crime bill.

Many people were happy with the government for taking impaired drivers off the road. Canadians have long complained about drunk driving laws that had too many loopholes.

We improved the legislation on identity theft. Many vulnerable Canadians, including seniors, have been victimized by credit card theft. We improved the legislation on car theft operations and youth crimes.

I wonder if members opposite did a gender analysis when they voted against our tackling crime bill. If they do not like us that much, why do they keep us in power.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Unfortunately, it is 5:30 p.m. and it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings on the motion at this time.

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Speaker, I would ask for unanimous consent to concur in the motion before the House today.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Accordingly, the debate on the motion will be rescheduled for another sitting.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

The House resumed from June 12 consideration of the motion that Bill C-513, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (foreign military mission) be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-513 under private members' business.

Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

Private Members' Business

● (1755)

[English]

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

(Division No. 158)

YEAS

Members

André	Angus
Asselin	Bachand
Barbot	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bellavance	Bevington
Bigras	Black
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brunelle	Cardin
Carrier	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Crête
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Dewar	Duceppe
Faille	Freeman
Gagnon	Gravel
Guimond	Julian
Laforest	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lavallée
Layton	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Malo	Marston
Mathysen	McDonough
Ménard (Hochelega)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Mourani	Mulcair
Nadeau	Nash
Ouellet	Paquette
Perron	Picard
Plamondon	Priddy
Roy	Siksay
St-Cyr	Thi Lac
Vincent — 65	

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Alghabra
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Bélanger	Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett	Benoit
Bevilacqua	Bezan
Blaney	Boshcoff
Boucher	Breitkreuz
Brison	Brown (Oakville)
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Byrne
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casey	Casson
Chan	Chong
Clarke	Coderre
Comuzzi	Cuzner
Davidson	Day
Del Mastro	Dhaliwal
Dosanjh	Doyle
Dryden	Dykstra
Easter	Emerson
Epp	Eyking
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Fry
Galipeau	Gallant
Godfrey	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal

Guarnieri
Hall Findlay
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Hubbard
Jean
Kadis
Karetak-Lindell
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lee
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Marleau
Mayes
McGuinty
Menzies
Miller
Minna
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Norlock
Obhrai
Paradis
Pearson
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Ritz
Rota
Savage
Schellenberger
Sgro
Silva
Skelton
Solberg
St. Amand
Stanton
Sweet
Telegdi
Basques)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tonks
Turner
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Wilson

Guergis
Hanger
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Jaffer
Jennings
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
LeBlanc
Lemieux
Lunn
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Manning
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Patry
Petit
Prentice
Proulx
Redman
Richardson
Rodriguez
Russell
Scarpaleggia
Scott
ShIPLEY
Simard
Smith
Sorenson
St. Denis
Strahl
Szabo
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Toews
Trost
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Watson
Yelich — 174

PAIRED

Members

Batters	Gaudet
Guay	Lussier
St-Hilaire	Storseth
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Warkentin — 8

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

* * *

CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT

The House resumed from June 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-505, An Act to amend the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (non-application in Quebec), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-505 under private members' business.

•(1805)

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

(Division No. 159)

YEAS

Members

André	Asselin
Bachand	Barbot
Bellavance	Bigras
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brunelle	Cardin
Carrier	Crête
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Duceppe
Faille	Freeman
Gagnon	Gravel
Guimond	Laforest
Laframboise	Lalonde
Lavallée	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Malo	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Mourani
Nadeau	Ouellet
Paquette	Perron
Picard	Plamondon
Roy	St-Cyr
Thi Lac	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Vincent— 45	

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Alghabra
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Angus
Bagnell	Bains
Baird	Bélangier
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett	Benoit
Bevilacqua	Bevington
Bezan	Black
Blackburn	Blaney
Boshcoff	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brison
Brown (Oakville)	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Byrne	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casey
Casson	Chan
Charlton	Chong
Chow	Christopherson
Clarke	Coderre
Comartin	Comuzzi
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cuzner	Davidson
Davies	Day
Del Mastro	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dosanjh
Doyle	Dryden
Dykstra	Easter
Emerson	Epp
Eyking	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Fry	Galipeau
Gallant	Godfrey
Goldring	Goodale
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guarnieri
Guergis	Hall Findlay
Hanger	Harvey
Hawn	Hearn

Routine Proceedings

Hiebert	Hill
Hinton	Hubbard
Jaffer	Jean
Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karetak-Lindell	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Layton	Lebel
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemieux	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malhi
Manning	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Mathysen	Mayes
McCallum	McDonough
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Minna	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Mulcair
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Nash
Neville	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Paradis	Patry
Pearson	Petit
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Priddy
Proulx	Rajotte
Redman	Regan
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Rodriguez
Rota	Russell
Savage	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Scott
Sgro	Shiple
Siksay	Silva
Simard	Skelton
Smith	Solberg
Sorenson	St. Amand
St. Denis	Stanton
Strahl	Sweet
Szabo	Telegdi
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Turner	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Watson
Wilson	Yelich— 196

PAIRED

Members

Batters	Gaudet
Guay	Lussier
St-Hilaire	Storseth
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Warkentin— 8

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

The House resumed from June 17 consideration of the motion.

Routine Proceedings

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

• (1810)

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

(Division No. 160)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Alghabra
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	André
Angus	Asselin
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Barbot	Bélanger
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bell (North Vancouver)
Bellavance	Bennett
Benoit	Bevilacqua
Bevington	Bezan
Bigras	Black
Blackburn	Blais
Blaney	Bonsant
Boshcoff	Bouchard
Boucher	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Brison
Brown (Oakville)	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinoooge
Brunelle	Byrne
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin
Carrie	Carrier
Casey	Casson
Chan	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clarke
Coderre	Comartin
Comuzzi	Crête
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cuzner	Davidson
Davies	Day
DeBellefeuille	Del Mastro
Demers	Deschamps
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dosanjh	Doyle
Dryden	Duceppe
Dykstra	Easter
Emerson	Epp
Eyking	Faille
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Freeman
Fry	Gagnon
Galipeau	Gallant
Godfrey	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gourde	Gravel
Grewal	Guarnieri
Guergis	Guimond
Hall Findlay	Hanger
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Hubbard	Jaffer
Jean	Jennings
Julian	Kadis
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karetak-Lindell
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Khan	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laforest
Laframboise	Lake
Lalonde	Lauzon
Lavallée	Layton

Lebel	LeBlanc
Lee	Lemay
Lemieux	Lessard
Lévesque	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malhi
Malo	Manning
Marleau	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Mathysen
Mayes	McCallum
McDonough	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Minna
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Mourani	Mulcair
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Nadeau
Nash	Neville
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Ouellet
Paquette	Paradis
Patry	Pearson
Perron	Petit
Picard	Plamondon
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Priddy
Proulx	Rajotte
Redman	Regan
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Rodriguez
Rota	Roy
Russell	Savage
Scarpaleggia	Schellenberger
Scott	Sgro
Shipley	Siksay
Silva	Simard
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
St-Cyr	St. Amand
St. Denis	Stanton
Strahl	Sweet
Szabo	Telegdi
Thi Lac	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Turner	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Vincent
Wallace	Warawa
Watson	Wilson
Yelich— 241	

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Batters	Gaudet
Guay	Lussier
St-Hilaire	Storseth
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Warkentin— 8

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

* * *

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Pursuant to Standing Order 92, a private members' item may only be considered by the House after a final decision on the votable status of the item has been made.

Although Bill S-204, An Act respecting a National Philanthropy Day, is scheduled for debate in the House today, no report on the votable status of the bill has been presented and concurred in as is required before the bill can be debated.

I am therefore directing the Table Officers to drop this item of business to the bottom of the order of precedence. Accordingly, private members' business hour is suspended today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, as there are no items to be debated under private members' business, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 6:30 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.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak on this issue today. Some time ago, I asked the minister why in many cases the same immigration officer who analyzes an application for permanent residence on humanitarian grounds also conducts the pre-removal risk assessment or PRRA.

At the time, I was told that this was normal procedure. I do not feel that this is normal at all. It should not happen, because it reduces the likelihood of a fair and equitable decision. It would be like appearing before a judge who ruled against us, then appealing and having the appeal heard by the same judge. Even though the provisions of the act that apply are not the same, the fact remains that the same person will rule on the same case twice. The Bloc Québécois believes—and this opinion is widely shared—that the same officer should not analyze both cases.

First, I would like the minister to tell us whether it is an official, documented policy of the government that the same officer conducts the PRRA and analyzes the application for permanent residence on humanitarian grounds. I wanted this information, but I did not get it.

I would also like to know something else. Since this measure eliminates the possibility of an appeal and there is still no refugee appeal division, does the government plan to put pressure on the unelected Conservative senators who are stalling Bill C-280 in the Senate?

The Liberal and Conservative senators have reached an agreement on the refugee appeal division so that the bill will not take effect until one year after it receives royal assent. This is all well and good, but if an agreement is reached, it should be referred to the House as quickly as possible so that we can make a decision. The Conservatives are stalling this bill in the Senate. They are so critical

Adjournment Proceedings

of the unelected Liberal senators who block, delay or amend Conservative bills. Now, what is happening? The Conservatives themselves are using the Senate to delay a bill that was duly passed in this House by a large majority of members.

I would like to know why the government is doing this. This is important because the refugee appeal division is critical. It would ensure that nobody's fate is determined at the whim of the member responsible for reviewing his or her case.

Take, for example, the case of Abdelkader Belaoui in my riding. His case was assessed by Laurier Thibault, a member who, at the time, rejected 98% of the applications he evaluated. If any other person had to appear before a judge who was known to convict 98% of the people he or she tried, that person would not feel that justice had been served. That is why the refugee appeals division is so important, and that is why the government should not let it drag in the Senate. The government should respect the democratic will of the elected members of this House and the agreement that the Conservatives and Liberals reached in the Senate. When an agreement is negotiated in good faith, the parties to it must fulfill the terms of that agreement.

When will the Senate's amendments to Bill C-280 be considered in this House?

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would ask this member to pay attention and he will hear what the government's position is on this matter. One person can make a decision on two separate issues that are different from each other.

I certainly appreciate this opportunity to respond.

The Government of Canada is fully committed to a well managed and efficient immigration system, one that helps those who are legitimately in need of protection, because Canadians expect their refugee system to help and protect legitimate refugees.

Amendments to the former immigration regulations in 1993 created a safety net for failed refugee claimants who could face serious risk of harm if sent back to their country of origin.

While laudable, these amendments created a lengthier and more complex process and did nothing to quash allegations that failed refugee claimants were being denied meaningful opportunities to present their cases fully and fairly.

In response, Citizenship and Immigration Canada created a model called the "single decision-maker". Under this model, officers with particular expertise in the assessment of risks were given responsibility for assessing humanitarian and compassionate applications that raised questions of hardship based on those risks.

These officers, now called pre-removal risk assessment officers, use their expertise to examine these applications rather than having them assessed by generalist officers of CIC.

In addition to making a humanitarian and compassionate application, those who feel they would be at risk can apply for a pre-removal risk assessment, or PRRA, before they are removed.

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This pre-removal risk assessment allows for new evidence to be brought forward beyond what is heard initially at the Immigration and Refugee Board. The applicants have the right to remain in Canada during these proceedings.

The pre-removal risk assessment officer examines the pre-removal risk assessment application and considers, separately and completely, all factors that are raised in applications made on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, including hardship in the country of origin.

In assessing both applications simultaneously, single decision-makers examine all aspects of the alleged risks from both perspectives. The factors assessed in a humanitarian and compassionate application are much broader than the risk element considered under the pre-removal risk assessment, and the legal tests are different.

The government is committed to the principle of evaluating each case on its own merits and each individual's circumstances.

The single decision-maker model was put in place to ensure more efficiency in the process and to improve the quality of humanitarian and compassionate decision making. The pre-removal risk assessment officers are trained for both applications and are well aware of the differences between each of them.

As to the question of the appearance of bias, a 2006 Federal Court of Appeal case judge ruled:

—there is nothing in the record to suggest that the officer could not be neutral or that a reasonable person, fully informed about the facts and circumstances of the decision regarding the appellants, would fear that the officer in question lacked objectivity.

In another 2004 landmark case challenging negative decisions, the judge concluded that the applicant failed to produce any specific evidence of bias or conflict of interest and found the process involved in the pre-removal risk assessment and the humanitarian and compassionate applications to be sufficient.

There is no question that on two different issues the same person can make decisions on an objective basis. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. It has nothing to do with the Refugee Appeal Division that the member refers to, which was not part of his question to the minister. Not only are these positions held by this government, but they are approved by the Federal Court as well.

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised that the parliamentary secretary, who is so well prepared, does not have an answer to such a simple question about the refugee appeals division.

He forgot to mention that applying for permanent residence on humanitarian grounds is a process often used by refugees whose first application for permanent residence has been denied. As such, it has everything to do with Bill C-280, which is dragging in the Senate.

In the absence of a refugee appeals division, people are looking for another option for victims of bad decisions. That option is applying for permanent residence on humanitarian grounds. The current process is questionable indeed.

Let us return to the first question I would like him to answer. What are we waiting for to ask the senators to send back the amendments they made to Bill C-280? It is not that complicated; we do not need—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, I understand that Bill C-280 passed in the Senate about 30 minutes ago.

However, that said, the government is committed to the principle of evaluating each case on its own merits and each individual's circumstances.

Before removals or deportations from Canada begin, individuals can ask for the pre-removal risk assessment to examine the risk they might face in returning to their home country, based on evidence that may not have been available at the Immigration and Refugee Board hearing.

During the time that the PRRA is going on, the removal order is stayed and that individual can remain in Canada, but if the assessment fails, removal procedures will resume. Under the single decision-maker model, the pre-removal risk assessment officer is an expert in matters of risk.

However, single decision-makers assess not only risk but also other—

● (1825)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

[*Translation*]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government wants to control everything, from which movies we watch to which brochures we read. And now, since the first of April, they have stopped updating the coordination of access to information request system, an important tool in obtaining information on how this government operates.

For the benefit of the people watching at home, I want to explain that the coordination of access to information request system lists, in one place on the Internet, all the access to information requests that are in progress at a given time. This tool enables the government to coordinate requests and, for example, ensure that the same request has not been made two or three different times. It is an important management tool. In processing these requests, it is important to have a list of all the requests that have been received.

This tool was accessible to the public, which meant that anyone could view it. It was obviously very useful for journalists, who used it regularly. It was also very useful for all the members in this House and their staff and assistants, but also to the general public.

It was an administrative tool, but also an important information tool that contributed to this government's transparency. The Liberals put this system in place. I do not say this to be unkind; I am simply clarifying for the sake of discussion.

If it is not in order to govern away from prying eyes, why then did this Conservative government kill this wonderful tool of democracy? Is this the transparency promised by the Conservatives during the election campaign?

In response to the question I asked on May 5, the Minister of Justice quoted a so-called specialist, whom he did not name, who said:

No other country maintains a government-wide database like CAIRS. CAIRS is the product of a political system in which centralized control is an obsession.

I do not know who said that. In fact, the Minister of Justice did not name the person, luckily, because I do not understand the correlation. I believe that the obsessive centralized control became even tighter when it was decided to kill such a tool. In fact, the Conservative government wants to centralize everything, control everything, and does not want to share this information.

There is nothing wrong with keeping lists of requests received. What is bad in and of itself for democracy is if this list is not shared with the individuals who want to consult it.

Control is not the issue here, but rather access to information. The more information is taken away and access to information denied, the more the government seems non-transparent and secretive. That is what we are currently seeing with the system for coordination of access to information requests having been killed by this government.

I will repeat my question: when will this government reinstate this wonderful tool?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, many facts in the member's statement leading up to her question are clearly wrong. This proves that the Bloc is useless and has done nothing all the years it has been in Ottawa.

[English]

I welcome this opportunity to stand in my place and speak on the record of the government on access to information.

Access to government information allows Canadians to better understand the actions their government takes and to hold their elected officials accountable for those decisions. Accountability depends on knowing the information and options available to the government decision makers.

The government was elected to restore accountability and rebuild trust. That is why we introduced the Federal Accountability Act, which of course is the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history. The act strengthened access to information. It addressed the need to make government more transparent after years of Liberal corruption and backroom hijinks.

We expanded the Access to Information Act to include agents of Parliament, five foundations created under the federal statute, seven additional parent corporations and all subsidiary corporations. That is over 70 institutions in total and includes other organizations like the Wheat Board, the CBC and the agents of Parliament; 70 new organizations that were previously not covered by access to information but now are. We brought in only one new exclusion

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that was not previously in place and that was one that was asked for by the Auditor General on draft audits.

This is the biggest expansion of access to information rights for the Canadian people in a generation. Our record stands for itself. We are committed to promoting openness and transparency.

Let me turn to the coordination of access to information requests system, CAIRS. CAIRS is an internal database that was used by the previous government to contravene the very principles of openness and transparency for which this government stands. CAIRS was designed as an internal government tool to facilitate coordination of access requests made to government institutions. It is a database containing information on the requests, including the category of the requester and the text of the request.

The truth is that CAIRS was used by the previous government to control the flow of information. That is not my opinion; that is the opinion of leading experts on access to information. One leading expert said, "CAIRS is the product of a political system in which centralized control is an obsession".

CAIRS was not designed as a tool to inform the public. In fact, Canadians had to specifically request information through ATI in order to get it when CAIRS was in place. That is probably why so few made the effort to use this tool. In fact, only 13 Canadians in total requested the information on a regular basis.

Furthermore, reporting was inconsistent and the information unreliable. Not only was the system not open to the public, when Canadians accessed information through ATIA requests, they could not even have confidence in the information they received and its accuracy.

My case speaks for itself.

• (1830)

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, the member for Nepean—Carleton has it all wrong.

First and foremost, with regard to the usefulness of the Bloc, we are here to defend the interests of Quebec. We demonstrated this again a few minutes ago when this House adopted by a majority the motion of my Bloc colleague for Laurentides—Labelle, which recognizes Mont Tremblant airport as an airport of entry into Canada. This is a major victory for the Bloc Québécois

The Bloc Québécois won another battle for youth from the regions when my colleague had us vote on a bill that would reduce taxes for youth who return to the regions. The Bloc truly helps Quebecers and they acknowledge this fact by voting for us time and again.

This member really has it all wrong. Last week, he had to apologize for comments that he admitted were not right. He still has it all wrong when he speaks of this government's transparency. Perhaps his government, in Bill C-2 on the accountability—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board.

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Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can say, if she wants, that our party did not go far enough in the Accountability Act to broaden the scope of the Access to Information Act. Nonetheless, during discussions in committee on this matter, her party did not suggest any other federal institution to add to the Access to Information Act. Our party was prepared to go further than all the opposition parties were.

I find this quite ironic because we are the government and normally governments are not prepared to expand access to

information. Our government did just that. We kept our promise. We have added—

● (1835)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:35 p.m.)

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